For decades Americans have been shouting at their television screens in a vain attempt to get average contestants up on a stage to guess the proper dollar amount of random household goods. Guess correctly and you win the loot and a shot at the showcase showdown. We all love the *Price is Right*. It’s fun to see how close you can guess the “actual retail price” of a toaster or jet-ski. But the *Price is Right* and other gameshows point out to us an undeniable reality of this world…everything has a price tag. And as we exist in this bustling marketplace of a world, a world in which everything has monetary value, it becomes easy to begin to value people and our relationships based upon the almighty dollar.

Today we are talking about love…the first fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5. What is love? Well musicians and poets have long quibbled about specific definition. Certainly, modern English only makes matters worse. How is it that I use the same word to describe both my relationship with my wife and pizza? Both are saucy I suppose… Love describes both my feelings about the contents of my garage as well as romantic intimacy. Love is the topic of the hit song on the radio, but it is also the very reason that our Savior died for us on the cross…

When Paul was writing his letters to churches, he made use of the Greek language which had at its disposal four different words that each expressed four specific aspects of love. Our language has done this word a disservice. We just use the same word, “love” to cover all the nuances and uses. SO that means we have to work a little harder to clarify and really get at the meaning of what Paul means when he talks about the Fruits of the Spirit. The list begins with love, or Paul’s word: agape. Agape is the highest form of love…it is the type of love attributed to God. It is a supernatural type of love, something that we don’t just come by or conjure up, but rather something that is cultivated in us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Love, any type of love, has an object. I love pizza…I love my wife…kids…certain TV shows…but the greatest love affair any man could ever have is with…himself. Me, I love me….and I know that you love you…because that is the state in which we find ourselves…a state of sin. Our love is naturally dis-ordered. We sin because we love ourselves above all else. It’s a problem. (Reveal mirror).

Agape love, God’s love, acts as the antidote to this problem. Agape love can be defined as other-directed. In fact, the whole bible is the story of God’s other-directed love playing out. From creation, to the cross, to the consummation. It considers the needs of the other first…it is a love that sacrifices everything for the good of someone else and even more to the point, a someone else who does not deserve it and could never repay it. Agape love.

But this love is hard to come by…as we already mentioned, everything has a price…When I go shopping, I want to get a good deal. No one wants to over-pay for an item or service. I give you money, you give me something that I deem worthy of that money. It is a fair exchange. If I think it’s unfair, well I’ll just take my money to the next store. Our relationship is nothing more than a give-and-take transaction; a business decision. But what about people who don’t seem to be worth the cost of doing business? They suck up too much of our time or energy. They don’t perform the way we think they should. They disappoint or distract. Dealing with some people just doesn’t seem fair. It just isn’t a good deal. So we back away from those relationships…we invest less and less so our time and our money (our love) and move onto to someone who can provide us a better return. Remember, we love ourselves. If another person can’t add value or benefit to my life, then it’s time to move on. It’s time to find a better deal.

Agape love cannot survive in such a market-driven economy…it will always be trounced by the allure of self-interest. But there is a solution! And the good news is, you are currently engaged in that solution…Worship! Worship kills self-love. Worship takes my focus off of me and puts it onto our worthy and almighty God. Worship is a window. And this is where agape love can begin to be cultivated in our market driven lives.

Our worship is simply an expression of gratitude to the God who is love, the God who is other-directed. (READ 1 John 4:7-11) And because he was willing to give up everything for the sake of people who don’t deserve it…we say thank you! And the beauty of worship is that we offer it as a gift. In reality it does God no good to hear that he is wonderful. He already knows that. Legions of angels in heaven sing it to him all day every day. Our praise to him has zero value, but he accepts it as a gift. Think of the little child who has colored a picture for his mom. It is nothing but colored wax scribbled on paper…it’s worthless, and yet the parent treasures it, because it is an expression of love. It is presented as an offering.

The more we offer this gift of worship, the more we will discover that indeed our eyes are not on ourselves in the mirror, they are looking out of the Agape window. Our eyes are now free to take a look around at other people around us. We can now afford to pay attention to others. We are no longer hunting around for the best deal or afraid that we might get ripped off because we have already found the best deal the world could ever find. It’s a deal in which we come to God with a handful of dirt and ash and sin and shame and he takes it all and give us new life, eternal life, clean conscience, a tender heart, a pure mind. It’s such a good deal that we are compelled to worship the One who give such a good deal. And we exchange our mirror for a window.

So how often do you ask yourself, “What’s in it for me?” It’s a question of self-interest isn’t it. Can you imagine if God were to live by this question? What’s in it for me? Let me tell you I hardly ever ask this question…out loud. But of course, we struggle because we want to weigh out whether we are going to come out on top or be soaked by striking a deal in the marketplace. We want to determine, is this worth it to me? Is the price right?

Try this, everyone has a mirror in their bathroom right…interestingly enough this is known as the vanity. Can you do this for me…take a note card or something…draw a rectangle with a cross inside and stick that to your mirror. SO before you get lost gazing into your beautiful face in the morning, you can catch a glimpse of the window. You can see the image of the cross. You can be reminded of God’s other-directed agape love. And you can say a short prayer asking God to give you eyes to see the needs of others. You can worship him right there in the bathroom…I know it seems kind of odd but naked we came into this world…sing to him in the shower…recite a memory verse…thank him for who he is…go to church right there in the bathroom. So let’s break this trend of market-style exchanges and establish a new way of interacting. Let’s put aside the gameshows and the price tags and let’s start cultivating love.

Paul writes elsewhere about love in 1 Corinthians 13…this might sound familiar (READ 1 Cor. 13:1-3). It’s not happenstance or coincidence that the Fruits of the Sprit begin with love. Love is the primary fruit and all the fruits that follow are derived from love. They cannot be separated from love. In fact, we could be professionals at producing all the other fruits, but if we do not have love…we are nothing. And so we cry out, “God, we need your Spirit to empower us with your love so we can worship you in this place, and in the car, and in our homes and yes, even in our bathrooms.”

Go now from this place knowing the love of God, empowered by his Spirit. May you look not into a mirror, but through the window of God’s agape love.