

Lessons on Unconditional Love from Vanna White

Pastor Kerry S. Doyal

We like Vanna White. Mrs. White, of Wheel of Fortune fame, has our acceptance. Why? Because she is a babe, a fox, a shapely "sweet thang" with a nice wiggle in her walk.

I'll give you a moment to recompose yourself.

With little argument, Vanna has our acceptance - and her job - because she meets our approval as a beautiful woman with a pleasant smile.

If Vanna White was - God forbid - in a disfiguring car wreck, or put on seventy-five pounds of non pregnancy extra weight, she would probably be out of a job. Make that most certainly. Vanna's career and our approval of her is anchored in her looks. If she loses the looks, they lose Vanna, replacing her with another fine-figured female that we no doubt will come to love as well.

Training Vanna's replacement would not be too difficult. Let's face it, hers is not too taxing of a task. Back "in the day", Vanna used to have to actually turn lighted-letters around. Now, thanks to computer technology, she simply has to respond to a bell, walk to a light (displaying that walk!) and touch an already lit monitor. Brief clever chatter with Pat is optional, knitting skills are a bonus, beauty is not.

Yes, we like and accept all manner of Vannas because they meet our approval. However, therein lies the rub.

Vanna is a symbol of what our acceptance of others is all too often based on. If others meet our approval - based on looks, talent, charm, brains, money, power, athletic skill, wit, popularity, a nice car, home and clothes or a dozen other things - we accept them. If we do not "like them", we do not accept them.

Performance-based love and acceptance makes and keeps us prisoners. If I think that if you knew "the real me" you might reject me, chances are you will never really get to know me. Having been hurt enough already by other's rejection, I put on the face and seek to win your approval, while you do the same towards me.

Vulnerability and honesty is too risky, much too painful. Need proof: Care to relive your middle school years? Not measuring up is tantamount to social death and can lead to physical death (suicide).

Remember poor Rudolph? One red nose and he was ridiculed and rejected. No

more reindeer games - other than social ones. Even his dad was ashamed of him. What would have happened if Rudolph could not have guided the sleigh for Santa? Our favorite freakish fawn was heralded only because he did something of worth. (Yes, I know it is "just a story." But is it?)

Want to kill a sense of community in a church or any other group? Make measuring up the basis of "being in." Want to drain the life and love out of a small group, a church, a friendship? Set standards that only a few can attain and shun - in a polite sort of way - those who are lessors (see James 2:1-13).

Intimacy is found between those who know that "even when I cannot meet your approval, I do not risk losing your acceptance." May I ask you to re read that until you thoroughly grasp it. In such rare relationships, openness is not a risk, faults are not fatal.

It is because I can never meet God's holy standards and be approved of that God sent Jesus to make a means of acceptance. Allow me to offer a paraphrase of Romans 5:8: "God is demonstrating His great love for us in this way: While we were hopelessly unapprovable, Christ died to make a way for God to offer us His unconditional acceptance."

Indeed, the ultimate expression of love in all of cosmic history was Jesus laying down His life for the likes of us! God knows us through and through, in and out - completely. In the face of the knowledge of who we are and are not, He sent Jesus to die for us! God did not send Jesus to rescue deserving victims. No, the holy Son of God gave His life in the place of those who hated Him and were hostile towards Him (see Eph. 2:1-10; Rom. 5:6-11).

Jesus' death for us was not that of a Fire Fighter going back into the Twin Towers to rescue helpless victims - as noble as that was (see John 15:13). Incredibly, a better parallel reads something like this. Imagine Osama Ben Laden being captured, tried, justly convicted and condemned to die. How would you describe your shock and the depth of love if President Bush or one of the victims' family members stepped forward to take Ben Laden's place in the gas chamber?

If God offers acceptance to us in the full light of our sin and failings, how can we do less for others. Note this carefully: offering acceptance is not to approve of their sins. Nor should they do that for me. Yet, a proper disapproval must not always lead to outright rejection of others.

I am content to let Jesus have the final word as found in John 13:34, 35 & 15:12, 13. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have

loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (NIV)

Kerry Doyal - Pastor