

Love Math

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." — Mark 10:29-30 ESV

Much of what we can do in our daily lives is controlled by scarcity. Limitations on time in a day force us to filter activities and prioritize, moment by moment, what we will do next. When we get tired and our energy is scarce, we must make compromises as to which activity we will perform next (Mow the lawn? Cook dinner? Phone a friend?). Gold is a valuable commodity precisely because it is not the pavement under our feet and is not found in every dirt pile. In physics (you knew I would get there somehow, right?) we have mathematical descriptions of strict “conservation laws” that limit what is ultimately possible according to natural law. Energy, momentum, angular momentum, charge, spin, etc. are all available in various forms but each is a limited resource, and these limitations dictate how particles in the universe can behave. The mathematics of scarcity is unrelenting and unforgiving. The entire natural universe is a zero-sum game; one particle’s energy “win” is another particle’s energy “loss.” There is no free lunch.

However, I was moved by a recent discussion at our small group in the realization that God’s mathematics is different. The discussion centered on the genuine (and common) concern of a young mother who, with one child, considered the imminent birth of her second. How could it be possible for a mother to give her heart fully to loving her first child and then to be expected, upon the arrival of the second, to fully love the second child? Should she not have to split her love in two? It seems only *natural* that love, like the rest of the universe, is a zero-sum game. In a zero-sum love game, love for child one would be exclusive of love for child two. Thankfully, this accounting is fundamentally wrong in God’s *supernatural* economy of love! The counsel given our sister by her pastor was that “a mother’s love does not divide, it multiplies.” What wisdom this is! Love for a child does not “use up” some resource in the heart of a parent. A parent’s heart is fully extended to both children and, in fact, with the addition of the new child the love for both is larger than even just the sum of each individually.

Jesus’ words in Mark 10:29-30, quoted above, seem to unfold under this “love math” by giving us a taste of the love multiplier to which we have access in the Christian life. If love were a zero-sum game, by joining with Christ and truly loving our Christian brothers and sisters we would have only a small amount of love to give each person. However, Jesus is clearly saying that the math of Christian love is not a zero-sum game. Instead of dividing our heart among our brethren, each of our brothers brings out a unique aspect of God in all the others that can only be seen in relationship to one another, and, properly executed, this love multiplies to the point of easily being a hundredfold larger than any “unmultiplied” relationship lost when becoming a Christian.

C.S. Lewis describes this sense of multiplicity of love found in Christian friendships as exhibiting “a glorious ‘nearness by resemblance’ to Heaven itself where the very multitude *of* the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each has *of* God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. ... The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall all have.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*).

What beautiful **love math**.

“May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.” (Jude 1:2),

Pastor Aaron