

The Challenge to Love GFC 5-10-2020

This is the final message in our series The Easter Challenge.

We've taken the challenge to examine the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We've taken the challenge to change – which is what resurrection power is all about.

We've taken the challenge to build our lives on the foundation of God's Word.

We've taken the challenge to get involved in the church community.

That sermon was all about the necessity of relationships.

We're going to go deeper into that today on Mother's Day.

That's because not only did God create us to be in relationship with each other – He also commanded us to love each other.

We see this in Matthew 22:37-40 when Jesus said:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

For most of us the second command is more difficult than the first. Maybe this is because God is always loving. People are often not.

By the way – let me say that you do not have to like everyone – but you do have to love everyone.

Remember – God's kind of love is more than a feeling.

It involves deliberate choice and sacrificial action.

Agape love is selfless and unconditional.

Love is deliberating choosing what is best for the other person, even if it means self-sacrifice and even if you don't feel it!

It's a challenge to love some people.

So – I'm speaking today on The Challenge to Love.

Relationships are very challenging these days.

Relationships seem to be falling apart everywhere we turn.

People are **leaving marriages, leaving churches, leaving friends.**

This is sad.

The **saddest part** is that most **people want** to make relationships work – they just **don't know how** to make them work.

No one wants to go through life from **relationship to relationship** – from **marriage to marriage** – but most people **don't have the skills** to make relationships work.

Most of us have not had **good role models** in relationships.

Most of us buy into the **Hollywood mentality** that if we are truly in love, relationships will just **work by themselves.**

So, as soon as the **relationship gets difficult** – people feel at a loss about **what to do** and they don't have the **commitment to see it through** or the **skills to make it work.**

Today I'm going to **challenge you** to love other people.

I'm especially going to challenge you to **love those who are challenging to love!**

You know what I mean?

Some people are hard to love.

Maybe their personality clashes with yours.

They annoy you, rub you the wrong way, get under your skin.

They always push your buttons.

Or maybe they hurt you in the past.

Or maybe they're selfish or arrogant.

The list goes on and on.

Difficult people have been around forever.

Moses had to deal with the complaining, never-happy Children of Israel.

David had to submit to the authority of a tyrant named King Saul.

Jesus had to deal with His disciples.

And God has to deal with us!!

So – **how do we love** the difficult people who are hard to love?

Our natural tendency is to **write them off** – but what does **God say?**

He says this in 2 Timothy 2:23-26

Don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights.

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be

able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.

God tells us to be **patient with and kind to** difficult people!

Patience and kindness are **fruits of the Spirit.**

They are **2 expressions of love.**

I know it's **very challenging** to do this.

So – I'm going to talk about **10 ways to love difficult people.**

1- Remember that God loves you when you are difficult!

Who, me? **Yes, you!**

We are all **hard to love** at times, yet God loves us **unconditionally.**

God does not love you **because you're so loveable!**

In fact, Romans 5:6-8 says:

At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God shows His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God loved you and Jesus died for you **when you were an ungodly sinner.**

Thank God for that – but also realize that **Jesus loves and died for the difficult people** in your life!

When it comes to that – we're **all in the same boat.** In fact -

2- Realize that you might be a difficult person to love to someone else.

You might not realize that you could be a **thorn in the flesh** for someone close to you!

We all expect others to **love us no matter what** – but we must **do the same.**

We usually judge other **people by their actions,** but we judge ourselves **by our intentions.**

As a result – we **show more grace** to ourselves than to others.

Realizing that people love you **when you're hard to love** will **motivate you** to do the same for others.

3- Show others the grace God has shown you.

What does that **look like?**

Colossians 3:12-14 tells us:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. We need to love and forgive as God has loved and forgiven us. How does He love? Fully, freely and forever!

But instead of showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience and forgiveness, we can be mean, rude, prideful, harsh and intolerant.

Someone hurts us and we write them off and shut them out. Then we avoid relationships because we don't want to get hurt.

But 1 Peter 4:8 says:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

If we have love - all the other virtues will flow from our love.

Every ounce of compassion, every act of kindness, every moment of humility, every gentle word spoken, every second of humility, every time we show patience, every ability to forgive... are all set in motion by love.

4- Find specific ways to bless difficult people.

That might mean picking up the phone when someone hasn't returned your texts or emails.

Buy them something that would bless them.

Speak words of encouragement to them.

That takes humility.

But the Bible teaches us to respond in the opposite spirit.

When we feel rejection, we choose to give acceptance.

When people say they hate us, we say, "I love you."

When someone shuts you out of their lives - you remain open to them.

When someone judges you - you don't judge them.

When someone curses you - you bless them.

That takes patience and forbearance.

This takes dying to self!

But keep in mind that **love never fails.**
 We must give up our **right to get back** at them.
 Exodus 23:4-5 says:

If you find your enemy's ox or donkey loose, take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you lying helpless under its load, don't walk off and leave it. Help it up.

For us that means if someone who is hard to love is **stranded in the parking lot** because their car won't start – **help them out.**

Don't just think – **"Great! They got what they deserved. I hope it takes them all night to get home! Instead...**

5- Give with no thought of return

This is **very challenging!**

When you're taking the **high road and offering love** when dealing with difficult people, **don't go into it expecting** the favor to be returned. Expecting something back just sets you up to **be disappointed.**

Think of it as **a gift**, with no strings attached.

And maybe you'll give several of these **gifts of kindness or love** and it seems like they **never even notice.**

But your persistence in **doing the right thing** may be quietly adding up to a **major change** in the other person's life that you **won't know about** until much later.

Keep doing the **right thing in faith** no matter what.
 The important thing is that **God sees!**

Even if they **don't respond**, remember what **Jesus said** in Luke 6:32-33
If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.
 I know it's **hard to do** this.

But to **resolve relational issues**, someone has to be the **bigger person.**
 That means **swallowing your pride** and reaching out to them.

Even if someone **hurts you.**

It hard to **get it right** when were hurt.

We naturally want to **pull away or hurt back.**

But if we **have Jesus** on the inside of us then we **have love.**

This is the **time to show it.**

In Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”

Don’t be **thrown off-course** by the idea of whether **someone deserves** your love or not.

Because we’re **all flawed** human beings and you could say that about **anyone at some point.**

But we do not love others **because they deserve it.**

We love them because our heavenly **Father “first loved us.”**

And thank God He **didn’t withhold** His grace and love until we earned it.

Grace by definition is **“unmerited favor.”**

So **throw out your scorecard** and decide to give **grace and love** based on **God’s plan** rather than the world’s.

6- Believe the Best About Them

First Corinthians 13:7 says that **...love is ever ready to believe the best of every person....**

When someone hurts our feelings or offends us, **we have a choice.**

We can think, **“You did this on purpose just to upset me!”**

Or we can choose to **believe the best** and think:

“They must be having a difficult day and probably didn’t even realize they were being rude to me.

Maybe they’re difficult **because something difficult** is going on in their life. It most likely has **nothing to do with me.”**

I know that I desire for **others to show me a lot of grace** of mercy and give me the **benefit of the doubt** when I’m having a bad day or hurt their feelings without realizing it.

No one is perfect, and we can all use a little **room to be human.**

I don’t believe **anyone gets up in the morning** and thinks, **“I just can’t wait to see how many people I can make miserable today.”**

There may be some that do that, but **more often** what is happening is that **hurting people hurt people.**

Most of the **pain we receive** from other people is a result of their **own pain**.

Keep in mind that **anger is usually rooted** in pain and hurt.

When someone is miserable, it inevitably **comes out somewhere**—and it usually **comes out on somebody**.

The truth is, we're **never going to be able to prevent people** from saying or doing things that **hurt us**.

We will always have **opportunities to get offended**.

But if we do things **God's way**, we can choose to **save ourselves** a lot of **misery and hardship**.

This doesn't mean we **allow people to abuse us**.

No, there is a time for **confronting people, dealing with situations** and **setting boundaries**.

However, the Bible **commands us to love our enemies** and **forgive** those who have wronged us.

7- Speak well of the difficult person.

Remember 1 Peter 4:8 says that **love covers a multitude of sins**.

What does this mean?

In practical terms, it means that we should **not expose people's faults to someone else**.

This can be difficult.

When we're hurting, we want to call everyone we know and start gossiping—“Well, you just wouldn't believe what they said to me!”

Yes, there are times when it's **healthy to talk** to someone about an issue. And there are obvious **cases like abuse** where it's important to let others know.

But for most offenses, the Lord asks us to **love and protect** people.

Since it's so **hard to love** difficult people -

8- Pray for yourself.

We tend to **want to pray for the difficult** person.

We want to pray prayers like, “Get ‘em, God! Make ‘em pay!”

That shows that we **first need to pray for ourselves** first.

Pray that God will reveal any **wrong heart attitudes** in you.

Ask God to **soften your heart** towards this person.

Ask God for **wisdom and discernment** in dealing with them.

Ask God to put a **guard on your lips** so you know when to speak and when to just listen.

9- Pray for the other person

Ask God to **work in their heart.**

Ask God to **bless them.**

I'm telling you – if you **pray for a difficult person every day** it will change your heart towards them!

10 – Ask God to love them through you.

Don't even think about **doing this on your own.**

We are **commanded to love everyone**, but some people are **hard to love!**

As hard as you try – you **can't work up love** for them.

You **pray hard** before you meet with them, but you **still lose it on them!**

Were you **wrong in asking** for love from God? NO.

But **you are wrong** when you ask for **love as if it is something** that God gives you **apart from Himself!**

What God wants to do is **love that person through you!**

God has given us **everything in Christ!**

He is our **wisdom**, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption.

And He is our **love, peace and joy!**

Those are not things we receive **apart from Him!**

Jesus is **all those things in us, for us and through us** to others!

We **can't work** those things up!

I'm telling you: you cannot do it in **your own strength.**

You will **fail every time.**

But if you **look to Jesus**, if you draw on His love that lives in you, if you **die to yourself** and let Jesus love through you...you can be the **instrument of healing** and restoration to others.

You see our **actions and our words** can either **heal or they can destroy.**

They are like **Nitroglycerin.**

Nitroglycerin is **used for two things.**

It can be taken when someone is having a **heart attack to save a life** or it can be used to **blow something up.**

The same compound can either **heal or kill.**

The same is true of our **words and our actions.**

What we say and do can either **heal or kill.**

We **may not like** what others do.

We may **not approve of their choices** or their lifestyle or their beliefs or politics or their attitude but we still have to love them.

You see it's **easy to love** when people **do what we want** them to do.

But what about **when they don't?**

Your response is like **Nitro Glycerin.**

You can either bring **healing or bring destruction** by how you react in times like this.

Our part is to admit our **lack of love** and ask the Holy Spirit to love others **through us.**

Romans 5:5 says **the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.**

If you're thinking you **can't love certain people** – you're right.

In and of yourself, **you cannot.**

But with God all things are **possible.**

Oh I know some people are **hard to love**, but we are commanded to love as Jesus loved.

If **Jesus loved Judas**, the very one who betrayed him – **no one is beyond us loving.**

It's hard to love someone who **betrays** you, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love someone who **denies** you, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love someone who **wrongs** you, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love someone who **abuses** you, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love someone who **kills** you, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love someone who **sins against you**, but Jesus did.

It's hard to love **difficult people** – but Jesus did and Jesus does!

We can do it to because **we can do all things** through Christ who strengthens us!