

LOVE'S JOURNEY "Love's Challenge"

The title of this message is "Love's Challenge." Previously, we've talked about Love's Motivation:

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us." NIV

Then we talked about Love's Walk:

1. The love of the brethren – Heb 13:1
2. Love to strangers, hospitality – Heb 13:2
3. Love to the persecuted, sympathy – Heb 13:3
4. Love to spouse, honor and purity – Heb 13:4

What is love's challenge? Love's challenge is to love as God loves. I like the way the Spanish NIV translates 2 Thess 3:5 [in English].

2 Thess 3:5

May the Lord lead you to love like God loves and to persevere like Christ perseveres.

How does God love?

Rom 5:8-10

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! NIV

*God loved us in spite of ourselves! This is not only a comforting thought, it is a challenging thought because we are to love as God loves. But it wasn't just that God loved us in spite of ourselves. We all have little idiosyncrasies that rub others the wrong way. There are people we have a natural tendency to like and a natural tendency to dislike. Love looks past those things. But love does something greater. Verse 10 says that we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, **when we were God's enemies!***

Col 1:20-22

20 It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him—all things in heaven and on earth—for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood.

21 This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies and hated him and were separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions, yet now he has brought you back as his friends.

22 He has done this through the death on the cross of his own human body, and now as a result Christ has brought you into the very presence of God, and you are standing there before him with nothing left against you-nothing left that he could even chide you for; TLB

We understand that we love God because He loved us. We generally don't have a hard time loving those we are in relationship with (family, friends, etc.). Showing hospitality to the traveler or stranger is a redemptive quality in many cultures. Sympathy to the hurting is a quality that resonates in most of mankind. Married people, believer and unbeliever alike, understand that they are supposed to love each other. But God goes one better. He seeks out and saves those who actively oppose Him, those who show their contempt and hatred of Him by their very thoughts and deeds. And He expects us to love in the very same way.

Matt 5:43-48

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I tell you: **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

47 And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. NIV

To walk as Christ walked we cannot simply love God. To love God is the response we have for His love and forgiveness. To walk as Christ walked, it is not enough to love the brethren. After all, brotherly love is expressed by many peoples of many faiths. To walk as Christ walked, it is not enough to deal kindly with those we don't know. All that needs to be overcome to reach out to the stranger is selfishness and shyness (fear of man). To walk as Christ walked, it is not enough to love our spouses. Many men have there been that were devoted to their wives, yet didn't know Christ. No, to fully exhibit the love of God and walk as Jesus walked, we must walk in redemptive forgiveness.

Many of us are familiar with Luke 6:38. It is a passage of Scripture often quoted just before the offering basket goes around. Let's read it together.

Luke 6:38 NIV

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

It's a great verse, isn't it? It reflects part of the law of the harvest: you reap what you sow. Have you ever looked at it in context?

Luke 6:27-28

27 "But I tell you who hear me: **Love your enemies**, do good to those who hate you,

28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Now here is a revolutionary thought. If someone hates us, we are to do good to them. If someone curses us, we are to say things like "I bind that curse in Jesus' name. May it return to him who pronounced it. May his house be rubble and his children be few!" No, no, no! If someone curses us, we are to pronounce God's blessings and favor over their lives. If someone does us wrong, the Lord said that we are to pray for them. Imagine that, a whole intercessory ministry for those who mistreat you.

No one is mistreating you, you say? Then you best examine your life.

Luke 6:26

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. NIV

2 Tim 3:12

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, NIV

The real enemy that inspires opposition to God and his people is the devil. If we have no enemies and no opposition in life, we should examine the saltiness of our life and the brilliance of our witness. Suffering is not something we may have to deal with. It is a promise to the godly.

So, we do good to those who are doing evil to us; we bless those who curse; pray for those who mistreat us or persecute us. Can we get a little more practical? Does the Lord give us some life situations as to how this might play out?

Luke 6:29-31

29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Not "Do to others as they have just done to you." We are to extend the grace to them we would have them treat us with.

Luke 6:32-38

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them.

33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that.

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full.

35 But **love your enemies**, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." NIV

As we walk in forgiveness and mercy, this same grace is poured out into our lives. This may be another part of love covering a multitude of sins (ours as well as others).

Where do we see the ultimate example of this love?

Luke 23:34

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. NIV

1 Peter 2:20-24

20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. NIV

Not only did he hang on the cross for our sin to gain our forgiveness, but he spoke forgiveness over those performing the deed. We are to follow his example.

Acts 7:55-60

55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. NIV

In this, the first post-Pentecost martyrdom, Stephen shows us what it is like to live and die in the Lord, with forgiveness on our lips.

Rom 12:20-21

20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. NIV

Love's challenge is to go the extra mile, to love those who actively oppose us and thus witness to them the redemptive and merciful nature of our God. Amen!