

HOW TO LOVE SOMEONE YOU HATE

A graphic of four red claw marks with white tips, positioned to the right of the title.

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**SMALL GROUP
DISCUSSION SERIES**

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1.

Personal Inventory

In most of the situations where people seek counseling, the basic problem is a troubled relationship: husband and wife, child and parent, other family relations, conflict between friends, co-workers, individuals and superiors, or people and some institution. Some folks are brain damaged, and paranoid to be sure, but most of the cases involve problems between people. They say that dogs are man's best friend, and this is probably so because they cannot talk, talk back, or gossip. People, on the other hand, have more sensitive feelings than dogs and they remember slights and sometimes imagine hurts where there are none and this causes problems.

If you are human, there is probably someone at sometime that you have had issues with, even hated. If you are reading this text, I suspect that the hurt you feel is still there; or the person(s) you cannot stand are still there; or both. This, therefore, is a "how to" course of study and in it you are going to learn the following:

- How to deal with the people you can't stand, for whatever reason, in your life
- How to deal with the negative feelings that these people may have caused

- How to react and think differently in the future when this happens
- How to share your burden with others

Personal Inventory (complete hand-out sheets)

1. Identify three people/groups (don't write out names, simply represent with numbers) that you cannot stand either now or in the past.
 1. Just put a #1 for the first name you have in mind and leave a space, #2, etc.
 2. Imagine who they are but do not write them down, just list and refer to them by their numbers.
2. Next to each number briefly note the main reason why you cannot stand #1, #2 and #3 (this list is private, you will not show, and must not show it to anyone else).
 1. Some of the numbers may just be people that annoy you or with whom you have had a one-time conflict. This is ok. Make sure, however, that you include the "biggie," that person who is your all time champ at hating and why.
3. Once you have finished, take a moment and together offer a silent prayer asking God to forgive you for

your lack of love, or failure to resolve the situation for whatever reason, and from this time forward help you learn how to love those you have listed.

Do not be surprised that we have begun in this way because the point of this course is not to enable the people we cannot stand to become more lovable. No, the purpose of this course is to help us love those people in our lives who seem to be unlovable.

Group Sharing

I mentioned that one way to achieve our goal, which is loving those we cannot stand, is to share our burden with others. Normally when we cannot stand someone our natural instinct is to talk badly about them or ignore them. This does not help because:

1. We fall into sin and hurt our own souls by doing this.
2. We aggravate the situation by distorting it.
3. We alienate the person even further.

The Bible says that we should share each other's burdens not gossip (Galatians 6:2) and we can do this by honestly sharing with another our hurts and concerns concerning our troubled relationships. This requires discretion, tenderness, understanding and openness with others.

In the following exercise I am going to ask all of you to show these qualities as you begin the process of sharing your burdens with one another. Here is how we will do this:

1. Break into groups of five.
 - a. No husbands/wives/family/buddies together in the same group.
2. Pick one of your three on the list and share, to the degree you are comfortable, the reason why you cannot stand the person on your list.
 - a. Can be your biggie or one of the lesser ones.
 - b. Take the time to allow each person in your group to share.
3. No advice or comments on how to fix things (not yet) from the others.
4. When all have completed, select someone to lead a prayer for the group.

Homework

Your assignment is to read Romans 12:14-21 once each day until the next session. Also, begin to pray each day for the people represented by the three numbers you have listed. No matter how hard this may seem, pray. The only ones not affected by prayer are the devil and the dead.

Discussion Questions

In this first session I only wanted to break the ice and show that everyone has someone or something that they cannot stand. We have also begun to develop a basic relationship of trust with our fellow group members. Let us keep our discussions about these things among ourselves in order to maintain a level of privacy.

2.

God's Strategy

In our last session I asked you to visualize three people or institutions that you could not stand. People who caused you anger, hurt, frustration. People you had a hard time forgiving (even people who were not accessible, i.e. dead, far away, etc.). Most of you listed the things or reasons why you could not stand these people and matched these to the numbers that represented their names. You also sat in groups sharing the various problems or issues that you had with these individuals.

In this session I want you again to visualize these people (especially your biggie) and once you have done that I want you to understand that these people are not the problem. Your enemy, or that person you cannot stand, is not the problem nor are your feelings the problem either. The core problem is explained by Paul in Ephesians 6:12.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

The problem we have is with the evil displayed in others, not necessarily the person themselves. Satan uses the evil in the world, the evil in other people's lives to attack us, to discourage us and to separate us from other people and keep us that way. So our problem, the thing we cannot stand is usually not the person, but the evil that the person does, especially as it affects us. Since the Bible says that, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), the potential for us to be annoyed, offended or hurt by others is rather great. And the chance that we also do this to others is just as great.

The question, therefore, is the following, "What do we do about the evil in other people that makes us hate them?" If our focus changes from the person to the evil that the person does, then we have taken a good first step. Our next challenge is what to do about this evil and how to lessen our dislike for that individual.

In the passage that Paul gives in Romans 12:14-21, the Apostle summarizes the issue by giving us the answer to this dilemma: "Do not be overcome by evil, overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Much of this course is based on this premise, that dealing with people we cannot stand requires us to overcome the evil in them that creates the animosity between us.

God's Strategy: Aggressive Good

Most counseling that one will receive when it comes to dealing with someone we cannot stand will help us use two strategies:

1. Fight: How to fight the person with tactics that will overpower, neutralize or punish them.
2. Flight: If we do not wish to fight them, we are taught how to run away, find shelter, purge the person and the hurt from our minds.

God offers us a third way and it is called aggressive good. We do not fight evil with evil, we do not run away from it, we overcome evil with good. To "overcome" means to win, God wants us to win over evil with good. This is the victory we seek. This strategy works better than fight or flight for two reasons:

1. Good is more powerful than evil

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.

- 1 John 4:4

Because we are enemies it is always tempting to return evil for evil; because we are weak it is tempting to run away from

evil. However, returning good for evil is superior because goodness is more powerful, has more ability to impact and change than evil. When you return good for evil you prove who is the stronger and better person.

2. Our objective is to destroy evil, not create more of it.

Doing evil puts you on the wrong side of God, joins you to the forces of Satan no matter what the provocation. Even if you lose the battle by returning good for evil, the war against evil is strengthened because by your sacrifice in one area with one person you are reducing the overall amount of evil in the world, and this is good.

Discussion Questions

1. What strategy do you normally use with those you cannot stand - fight or flight? Explain.
2. How is "overcoming evil with good" an aggressive action rather than a passive action? (Open discussion)
3. Describe a situation in the world or the church where overcoming evil with good could be applied to solve a conflict. (Open discussion)

4. Describe a situation in your life where this has been (or should be done) to resolve a conflict. (Each person reply)

3.

Blessing Not Cursing

In our previous lesson we learned the key idea and Scripture upon which this lesson is based.

1. Aggressive good overcomes the evil we cannot stand in others.
2. Romans 12:21

The idea of doing good to people we cannot stand seems impossible at times and that is why we need to start with small steps. In this session we'll examine how to begin this process.

Blessings and Not Cursing - Romans 12:14

It would be great to be able to ask God to simply make the conflict go away in our lives and "poof" everything would be rosy. It does not happen this way because the blood of Christ takes away the hostility between ourselves and God but not between ourselves and the people we cannot stand. For this to be removed we, ourselves, must be involved and doing so with the help of Christ.

Paul helps us understand the process of removing this hatred, this dislike from our hearts with his instructions in Romans 12:14.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

- Romans 12:14

Christians will be persecuted for a variety of reasons, it is a promise.

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

- II Timothy 3:12

Persecuted for our beliefs (Jesus vs. pagan), persecuted for our moral stand.

Sometimes we are persecuted because our conscience will not permit us to simply hate someone we dislike and leave it at that. The Spirit within us demands that we fight this weakness of the flesh. We cannot go through life without being wronged somehow by family, friends, the people in the church or the world, and when that happens we must overcome evil with good. But how? Paul says that we need to begin with our mouths. Do not curse, he says, instead bless your enemy when you are wronged.

Let us examine these two key words so we can understand what we are to avoid and what we are called on to do.

Cursing

This word originally meant to doom, to desire or call down punishment or destruction. We curse in four ways:

1. In popular usage, we use vulgar language.
2. In relationships, we say bad things to God about someone. David would sometimes do this to his enemies

Let death come deceitfully upon them;
Let them go down alive to Sheol,
For evil is in their dwelling, in their midst.
- Psalm 55:15

3. We talk badly about someone to other people. We are guilty of cursing when we have nothing good to say about a particular person or continually bring up the personal slight we have suffered by this person to others. We do this when complaining about people at work or even worse, brethren who have offended us or church leaders who are not functioning in a way we think they should.
4. We talk badly to the person themselves. Threats, angry words and giving them the silent treatment. These are all ways of cursing the person we cannot stand.

Blessing

The word blessing means to speak well of or to thank or invoke a prayer on behalf of someone else. We also bless in the following ways:

1. Say good things about that person to God.

It is hard to stay angry and hate the one you are praying for. For example, Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him (Luke 23:34). On Pentecost Sunday many of these same people were among the 3,000 who were forgiven when they believed in Jesus, repented of their sins and were baptized in His name (Acts 2:37-41). Stephen asked God to forgive those who had persecuted him and were stoning him (Acts 7:60). Not long after, one of these, Saul, was converted (Acts 22:16). Job 42:10 says that after Job prayed for his friends who had treated him badly, he received twice as much as he had before his suffering.

2. Say good things about your enemy to others.

The fastest way to cool the fires of division and hurt between you and another is to begin to say what you know is good about your enemy. The bad may still be there, but you choose to find and repeat only the good. Stop using the "but" word, (i.e. "He's a good guy, but...negative comment"). Neutralizing the acid of your own hatred takes away any reason for your enemy to hate you or others to continue fanning the flames that fuel your separation.

3. Say something good to the person you cannot stand.

You might not be able to settle or solve the problem with them in person, it is not always in your power to do so. However, you can choose to say what is good to them for their edification. Jesus says that we will be judged by the things that come out of our mouths (Matthew 12:37), even the things we say to those we cannot stand.

Summary

We may not have the solution, get the apology, receive the power to change the person we cannot stand or erase the hurt they have caused. We have to concentrate, therefore, on what we can do and what is within our power to do. One of these is to avoid the negative. Stop complaining to God, bad mouthing to others, or acting in an unchristian way towards the one we cannot stand. We need to begin finding good things to say about this person to God and others, and expressing good and positive things to them in their company. This is the beginning point of overcoming evil with good.

Discussion Questions

1. In what places have you most often been wronged or received persecutions? (Each discuss)
2. When you curse, which of the four ways does it usually manifest itself? (vulgarity, God, gossip, the person) - Open discussion
3. Why does "blessing" your enemy seem so foolish to the world? - Open discussion
4. What obstacles stop you from blessing the one you hate?

4.

Walk a Mile

Intro/Review Questions

1. What is God's strategy in overcoming the evil in other people?
 1. Aggressive good
2. Why does it work?
 1. More powerful than evil
 2. Feels better
3. What is the Scripture that this strategy is based on?
 1. Romans 12:21, "Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"
4. What is the first step in overcoming evil with good?
 1. Bless instead of curse enemies
5. What Scripture is this based on?
 1. Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not."
6. How are some of the ways you can bless those you hate?
 1. Pray for them
 2. Say good things about them

3. Say good things to them

We need to realize that it is easier and more comfortable to keep our dislike. For example, I tried to think of good things to say to God about my person and could only think of two things.

In this session we move on to the next step in learning to love (the whole point), not just tolerate the ones we hate.

Walk a Mile in My Shoes

I love to teach others in the congregation how to do devotionals, write articles or prepare and preach a sermon. I like it because it helps them grow spiritually, it blesses the church and it provides more workers for the kingdom. But I have to admit that I also enjoy seeing people come to the realization that what I do is not easy. The usual joke about pulpit preachers is that they only work Wednesdays and Sundays, and I have actually had people ask me what it is that I do the rest of the week. When brethren try to prepare a 10 minute devotional lesson (2-3 pages) or a 300 word essay for the bulletin or struggle for weeks to write a 30 minute sermon, they begin to understand how difficult it might be for the preacher to write 50-60 pages of new material every week in addition to other things that need to be taken care of as a minister. In other words, for a little while, they get to walk a mile in my shoes and in doing so they are able to experience a bit of what it is like to do my job. Hopefully the net result

will be that they will understand and appreciate what I do and perhaps be less critical in the future.

This, in essence, is what Paul says in Romans 12:15-16 as the second step in learning to love the one you hate: walk a mile in their shoes.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

- Romans 12:15-16

In these two verses Paul gives four commands and all of these are in connection with the people we do not like:

Rejoice with those who rejoice

Easy to do when it is people we love, but difficult when it's people we cannot stand. Their joy usually makes us angry and jealous (e.g. the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15).

Mourn with those who mourn

Again, it is easier with those we love. We usually rejoice when things go badly for those we hate (actually pleased and feel they deserve it).

Live in harmony with one another

We don't want to care about the people we hate because their presence or memory creates bad feelings and awkward moments. Paul says we should live in harmony (not just get along) but be of a similar mind. Understand what they think, where they are coming from, why they do what they do. Understanding their behavior does not justify it, but it does help you see the reasons for it and may create some sympathy or empathy. This leads to the willingness and emotional ability to forgive.

Do not be holier than thou

Ever notice that in every situation where you dislike someone it is usually you that is right, the victim or the innocent one, and the person you dislike who is guilty or unworthy? Much of the hurt is usually a result of the feeling that the other person is unworthy (by their words or actions) of our love, association, friendship, service, etc. Paul says that assuming the higher position will destroy any chance at reconciliation. We must get to the other person's position, whatever it is, if we are wanting to understand, relate and forgive. This requires giving up our assumed superiority.

So the first two steps in learning (what we are doing is learning how to do this) to love the people we cannot stand are these:

1. Manage your mouth: bless, do not curse.

2. Walk a mile in their shoes: try to understand their feelings, thoughts and position.

These two steps can be done without direct contact with the person you cannot stand. They must be done if you plan to have some kind of successful contact with this person.

Discussion Questions

1. When something goes wrong in your life, do you seek first to understand or be understood? Where is your focus? Give an example. (Open discussion)
2. Have you ever had an "opposite" emotion (i.e. the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son)? What caused it? (Open discussion)
3. How can you better understand where someone is coming from? (Open discussion)
4. Consider a person you cannot stand. What, in your opinion, are some of the emotions, thoughts and positions that may be causing their annoying or hurtful behavior? (Each discuss)

5.

Never Means Never

We are building a strategy that will enable us to love those we cannot stand.

- Step #1: Bless instead of curse
 - When I think of my enemy and am tempted to review their faults or what they have done to hurt me, I substitute prayer for them as my response to the temptation.
 - When tempted to speak badly I say nothing. This is difficult, sometimes you begin by saying less than you would like to and work your way down to zero.
- Step #2: Walk a mile in their shoes
 - Instead of concentrating on *what* they have done, try focusing on the *why*. Instead of relating in great detail to others why you do not like them, what they have done to you to make you dislike them; try relating why you think they act the way they do. Understanding brings sympathy and leads to forgiveness. Forgiving the other may not change them, but

it does change you and helps you live with them and with God in peace.

In this session we will review the third step in our strategy.

Never Take Revenge

In Romans 12:17a, 19, Paul says quite emphatically that we are not to take revenge.

¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

- Romans 12:17a, 19

Note that each of these verses begins with the word "never." There is no misunderstanding here, we are never to take revenge or justice into our own hands. This is a different concept for us in the West because so many of our movies and books are based on heroes who do this very thing. Cowboys hunting down killers, macho men/women who take the law into their own hands and "take care of business." We idolize movie stars who play these roles. But it is contrary to God's view and commands. The Bible says that we are never to take vengeance, never become the judge, jury and executioner (self-appointed).

This is not to say vengeance is bad:

1. Vengeance (the desire to see justice and punishment accomplished) is not bad, it is simply not our job. This task belongs exclusively to God. You can hope and pray for it and work to promote it, but you cannot appoint yourself as the enforcer. For example, it is one thing to march in order to protest abortion, this is acceptable behavior before God and the Law. However, actually bombing an abortion clinic is both forbidden by God and the Law of society.
2. Not taking vengeance does not mean passivity. Just because we do not punish or take revenge does not mean we do nothing. Aggressive good, prayer for justice, active forgiveness, these are our tasks. Not taking revenge is a way of expressing our faith. In doing this we are saying that we believe God's word and trust in Him to execute justice in His good time.

Just like the return of Jesus, justice seems slow in coming at times but it will be perfect and cause us to rejoice when it arrives.

Why Let God Judge?

All of this is easy to say, but so very hard to do when faced with someone who is getting away with offending or hurting us or the ones we love. We should never take revenge and leave the justice and punishment to the Lord. Why?

Vengeance is not in our jurisdiction

God could have given us this right just as He gave us the right to manage and exploit the creation, but He did not. He maintains this right for Himself alone.

The person may repent

Your judgment, your punishment might interfere with someone coming to the Lord. For example, Jeffrey Dahmer, the mass murderer, was murdered himself in jail by another prisoner according to the "prison code" where child molesters and the like are eliminated by other inmates. Thankfully a member of the church had sent him a Bible correspondence course which he took and eventually led him to repentance and baptism several months before someone else decided to take matters into their own hands. You do not know God's plans and should not interfere.

You will be judged yourself

The Bible says "never." So when you make an exception to this rule you break God's command. It is ironic that those who set themselves up as judge and executioner automatically bring down judgment on themselves.

The Old Testament story of David and Saul is a wonderful example of this refusal to take revenge into one's own hands. Time after time Saul attacked David, spoke against him, sought to execute him, but David responded with kindness, patience, even refused to harm the king when he had perfect

opportunities. David understood that in dealing with an enemy it was best to leave the matter of revenge in God's hands, no matter what the provocation. He knew that in doing this there would be perfect justice, he would receive no guilt for himself, and if there would be a chance for change, God would bring it about.

Discussion Questions

1. In your own personal conflicts, why do you want revenge? Open discussion.
2. Have you ever taken revenge? What happened? How did you feel? What results? Open discussion.
3. What are some ways that we take revenge in church? Open discussion.
4. Have you ever had a "Saul" in your life? If so, how could you have been more like David when attacked? Open discussion.

6.

Do Something Beautiful

If you have tried to follow the instructions given in this course so far you have probably not noticed much of a difference in the people you hate, but there is probably a difference in you. Most of what we have learned has had to do with what we think, especially what we think about our enemy, or the person that offends us.

1. **Bless and curse not:** Think and say good, or if you cannot think of anything good, then something neutral about this person. Even if you cannot think or say something good, you can always pray for good things for your enemy.
2. **Walk a mile in their shoes:** Try seeing things from the other person's perspective. Even if you cannot quite understand, the exercise of trying will help cool the fires of anger and frustration.
3. **Never take your own revenge:** It is tempting to get even, but if you do you interfere with God's justice. Justice belongs to the Lord and allowing God to punish is an act of faith that really costs you something, but at the same time really demonstrates the true quality of your faith.

We now move from how we should think about our enemies to what we should do in order to go from hating to loving them.

Plan Something Beautiful

Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

- Romans 12:17b

The word respect means "to be careful to do" or "perceiving beforehand." Another translation clarifies what Paul means here, "Plan ahead to do what is fine in the sight of all men" (Christian Counsellor's New Testament). This brings us to step number four in learning to love those we hate. Simply stated step #4 is this:

Plan ahead to do something beautiful for your enemy in the sight of all.

Instead of responding with your emotions (which are hurt and anger), plan ahead to what your response is going to be, this is the first part of this admonition.

When offended, feeling hatred and anger towards another, sit down and plan ahead what you are going to do. What good are you planning in order to overcome this evil? This is why James tells us to be slow to speak and slow to anger in James 1:19. Take time to plan a proper response.

Paul explains this idea in another letter when he says, "See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and all." (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Do not just seek to do the first thing that comes to mind (usually revenge of some kind), search to find just the right thing for this person. We continue the cycle if we do not take control of the situation by making a plan. It usually starts with passive things like not talking about them, etc. before getting to aggressive good.

Do something beautiful is the second part.

Do not do just any old thing, do something beautiful (another word for fine, right). Do not just settle for the right thing to do, go the second mile and do the beautiful thing, there is the right thing then there is the beautiful thing. This is a radical teaching because it is perfectly in line with the radical act of God in saving us through the cross of Jesus. We acted ugly towards God, He responded not just with the right/just thing, He came back with a beautiful and kind gesture by sending Jesus to die for us.

To do something beautiful for the one we hate is easy to preach, but hard, very hard to practice. We water down Jesus' admonition to love our enemies by saying that loving them only means not to wish them harm and praying for them. But is this all you do for the ones you love? Wish them no harm, pray for them? Jesus, and in this passage, Paul, get to radical Christianity when they tell us that healing relationships requires concrete, aggressive, demonstrable love.

Do it in the sight of all men is the third part of this admonition.

At first you might think this is just to humble you, to make you feel humiliation by doing something beautiful for someone who wronged you, and doing it publicly. On the contrary, the purpose is to demonstrate strength, to glorify God, to witness powerfully to our enemy that the love of Christ is stronger than the offense or the hurt we feel.

To do it in public causes others to take notice, but to take notice that your response is unlike any they have ever seen in a similar situation. If you are wronged and get a plan and come back with something beautiful others will say, "I cannot believe what he did" or "What a good person" or "Now that is real Christianity for you." (People know it when they see it, even if they themselves are not Christians.) The point is not to "win over" the other person (although this may happen) the point is to show the other person and everyone else watching that evil did not overcome good. Good is the winner.

Doing Something Beautiful - Example 1

October 2, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts, a milk truck delivery man, took a one room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, hostage. He then proceeded to shoot and kill five little girls between 6-13 before taking his own life. As a response to this tragedy the Amish community later tore down the old schoolhouse and built a new one and named it the New Hope School.

What was really amazing, however, was the response that the Amish community made towards the killer's family, who were not Amish. A Roberts Family spokesman said that only hours after the killing, the killer's family received visits from their Amish neighbors offering comfort and forgiveness. One Amish man held Roberts' sobbing father in his arms for an hour comforting him.

The Amish community then did several beautiful things in the sight of all:

1. They invited Roberts' widow to the funeral of the children he killed, and allowed her to write a letter of apology on behalf of the family.
2. People from the Amish community attended the killer's funeral and also set up a charitable fund for the family of the shooter, since he left behind a widow and 3 fatherless children.

This story makes our petty quarrels and responses quite small in comparison, does it not?

Doing Something Beautiful - Example 2

Amber Guyger, Dallas police officer, who shot and killed Botham Jean when she mistakenly entered his apartment thinking she was in her own apartment one floor down, and thought he was an intruder. She was convicted and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Then, in the middle of this sad and depressing situation, something beautiful happened. Brandt Jean, the murdered man's younger brother, stepped forward in the courtroom and hugged the convicted officer and told her that he forgave her and even encouraged her to believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness.

What the media did not report was that the deceased, his brother and family were all members of the Church of Christ.

Homework

Think up a strategy of something you could do for your enemy that could be beautiful. Do not do it, just think of what you could do if circumstances on your heart would permit it.

I do not check or correct the homework, this is for your own spiritual development.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe some of the changes in your thinking since the beginning of the course. Each discuss.
2. When you are wronged, how do you usually respond emotionally? Open discussion.
3. What is your typical reaction when you see the person next time? Open discussion.

4. What are some of the "beautiful things" that could be done for the person you are at odds with?

7.

Win the Peace

Explain, in your own words, the four steps we have talked about, that in a practical way will help you love someone you cannot stand.

1. Bless, do not curse
2. Walk a mile in their shoes
3. Never take revenge
4. Plan something beautiful in the sight of all

Let us now examine the fifth step in learning to love someone we cannot stand.

Win the Peace

When involved in a conflict, people are usually more interested in winning the war instead of winning the peace. They want to prove that they are right. They want to receive an apology. They want to show that they are the true victims. Then, when the issue is resolved, they are quite satisfied to simply be rid of the person that caused them problems and have nothing to do with them ever again. In contrast to this attitude Paul the Apostle says:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

- Romans 12:18

In this passage Paul gives the commandment upon which this fifth step is based and then provides two qualifiers to help us accept the final outcome.

Step #5 - Do not simply try to win the war, win the peace

Just because conflicts may be resolved does not mean you have reached your objective in loving your enemy. The objective in overcoming evil with good is not that our enemy is defeated, exposed or humbled in some way. Our ultimate goal is to defeat the evil, not the enemy.

The final victory is when we are able to have a loving relationship with our enemy (and there is no evil between us). If the evil is destroyed, overcome, neutralized, then there is a chance to have a relationship with the person who has been our enemy. This is basic teaching from Jesus: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9).

Conditions in Seeking Peace

Paul's admonition to strive for peace with your enemy has two conditions that he himself mentions.

A. If it is possible

Making peace the goal, trying to be at peace with your enemy, making the effort to create or renew a relationship, this is your responsibility as a Christian. However, you are not always dealing with people who are Christians, or Christians who act like Christians. Sometimes it is not possible because no matter how hard you try, the other person refuses to cooperate, listen or understand. For example, an unbeliever who refuses any attempt at peace and leaves the relationship (I Corinthians 7:15). Then there is the case where a believer refuses to have a relationship with you no matter what you say or do.

Sometimes it is impossible to have peace or to have a relationship because it would mean having to compromise what is right. For example, in the early years after I became a Christian, to have peace and a good relationship with my family would mean having to miss church services in order to participate in family functions which were consciously scheduled on Sundays. We strive for peace but it is not peace at all costs.

In loving your enemy you have to accept that winning the peace is not only dependent on you. There are, at times, circumstances out of your control that prevent this from happening.

... The second condition in seeking peace is...

B. As far as it depends on you

Your job in healing a relationship is to do good and seek peace whether the other person wants to or not. You cannot, however, force peace and a loving relationship on a person who does not want this. In the end you have to live with God and yourself. If you consciously seek peace with your enemy but your efforts are rebuffed, then you will be able to live with yourself and with the Lord in peace even if you cannot with your enemy.

Discussion Questions

1. Give an example in your own life where your goal was to win the war and not win the peace.
2. Why is it not always possible to win the peace with everyone? Provide personal examples if possible.
3. What kinds of things do you think may be blocking the peace you seek with the person you are at odds with?
4. Select a person to lead a prayer for God to remove the roadblocks to peace in your situation.

8.

Make Room for God

Review once again the action plan for learning to love those we cannot stand:

1. Bless, do not curse
2. Walk a mile in their shoes
3. Never take revenge
4. Plan something beautiful in the sight of all
5. Win the peace

In this session we move on to the second to last step of our plan.

Step #6

One of the feelings we have when we are crossways with someone for whatever reason is a sense of helplessness. The fact that you are not in control of a situation that is causing a lot of stress can be quite frustrating. The thought that you are making an effort to resolve the issue, lying awake at night thinking about the dispute and may even be taking a class at church to help you gain insight about the matter... and they are not, only makes matters worse!

As Christians it is natural for us to want resolution to personal conflict. We feel badly if we hate someone, we want peace and love, and find it difficult if the other person does not want to cooperate, or care, and may even be oblivious to us and our emotions. The helplessness and frustration we feel at this point brings us to the sixth step in the process of loving someone we can't stand:

Make room for God

– Romans 12:19

Much of our angst over these types of situations usually stems from the fact that we have tried to solve or deal with the problem our way or by ourselves. Paul says that in a negotiation for peace with our enemy we must "make room for God." In other words, we have to bring God to the bargaining table. Many times our failure to make things work out is simply a sign from God to move over and allow Him to work on our behalf. Or, if we have already asked God to help, then we must let Him do His work by obeying the part He wants us to do, whatever that may be.

There are several reasons why "making room for God" makes a difference:

1. **God Judges Perfectly:** Regardless of our best intentions, we never know the motives and details of a person's life to the degree that God does. For example, we do not know what level of punishment

our enemy deserves (we might judge too harshly or too softly) but God's judgment is true. We experience peace when we turn over the judging to God because we know that it will be sure and fair.

2. **God Cares Perfectly:** In as much as God cares for our enemy in providing a sure and fair judgment, God also cares for us. God cares that we are hurt, angry, frustrated and He wants to minister to us, if we allow Him to do so. God wants to be involved because He cares for us. The worst result of a conflict is that the hatred of our enemy can easily draw us away from God who cares for us.
3. **God Heals Perfectly:** God has many names and for this reason the people of the Old Testament referred to Him in multiple ways indicating the many facets of His character and power. One name used for Him in Exodus 15:25-26 was "Yahweh Rapma," the Lord who heals. God is the Lord who heals broken bodies, broken spirits and even broken relationships. Does it take any less faith to believe that He can as easily heal a broken relationship as heal a blind man?

The author of my resource book says that when a relationship is broken it is more than just a relationship that is broken, it is part of you that is broken as well. Before healing the relationship, God must first heal you, and He can. If you can be healed, there is a good chance that the

relationship can be healed as well. If the relationship does not respond to God's touch, then at least you, yourself, walk away as a whole person.

When you allow God into the relationship:

- He will judge rightly
- He will take the burden upon Himself
- He will heal you, and together with you, minister the good you are trying to offer to your enemy

The best case scenario is that there will be peace between God, yourself and your enemy. The worst case scenario will be that there will be peace between you and your Lord.

Once you have tamed your tongue, tried to understand, resisted revenge, planned to do good, aimed at peace, you need to bring the Lord into the battle of loving your enemy.

Discussion Questions

1. Summarize your feelings about your enemy in one word only, then elaborate on that one word. Each share in turn.
2. If you were permitted to judge your antagonist, what would the judgement and punishment be?
3. How has God dealt with a specific failure in your life? Open discussion.
4. What form will "making room for God" take in your situation? Open Discussion.

9.

Love Bombs

This class has been a "how to" type of class. Part of our discussion in loving the people we hate has been a change of thinking. As a way of getting the focus away from self and the feelings of self:

- Bless, do not curse
- Walk a mile
- Make room for God
- Never take revenge

Some have been concrete things to do, as a way of creating new and more positive and productive feelings:

- Plan something beautiful in the sight of all
- Win the peace
- Make room for God

In our last class we will discuss the final steps in learning to love our enemies, the step that requires the most doing. All these other steps have geared you up and prepared you for step #7 which usually is the one that brings you over the goal line.

Bomb Them With Love

In Romans 12:20 Paul says,

"But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

In other words, when you want to bring your enemy into submission, bomb him with love. This is difficult, requires a swallowing of pride and a step of faith all at the same time, but it is the key move in the battle to love your enemy.

Paul gives us three steps in bombing our enemies into submission with love:

1. **Find a Need:** He encourages us to give food or water depending on need and this is the first step, asking ourselves, "What does my enemy need?" Things, respect, space, to know they are right? Before you offer something, find out what it is they really need. Many times their actions are based on unfulfilled needs. Take the time to observe, ask if you have to. If you are not sure, pray and ask God to reveal to you what your enemy needs.
2. **Look at your Resources:** You may not have everything your enemy needs but maybe some of the things you have can fill some of their needs. When God looked at our needs and His resources, He gave

us what we needed and that was His Son. Sometimes our enemy needs what is most precious to us.

3. **Heap on the Good:** Paul says that the doing of good will heap burning coals onto the head of our enemies. You probably will not win over the person with one act, you will eventually have to heap on a big plate full of love to win them over. The idea of burning coals is that the good you do in return for evil produces the heat of shame on your enemy. When you are ugly and spiteful and the person comes right back at you with love and kindness, do you not feel embarrassed, red faced, hot and sweaty with guilt and shame? Paul says that the bomb of love will produce the heat of shame. What he does not say, but what is implied, is that hopefully that guilt and shame will lead to repentance and reconciliation.

Bombing with love is like a bombing raid, it takes a lot of bombs to soften up the target, so do not be discouraged if you do not win the peace with just one bomb.

Summary

This is the final class on this topic, but this is not your final effort at loving someone you hate. My final words as a resource person:

1. There will always be an enemy (some said they did not have any). If not this one, another who will come

after. Do not be surprised or discouraged, this is part of life. Success is variable and the process is messy.

2. These principles are for life. Everyone, whether they take the class or not, needs to learn and use these ideas. That you were here was a blessing, make sure you take advantage of them when you are gone.
 3. Sometimes you are the enemy. Try to be sensitive to the fact that there are people who struggle with you and you may not even realize it. This should make you a little less harsh and a little more eager to love your enemy when the time comes.
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Discussion Questions

1. What resources do you personally have to offer people who have wronged you? Open question.
2. Have you ever reached a point of forgiveness with an enemy? If you have, share that experience with your group.
3. On a scale of 1-10 how successful have you been in learning to love the person you came into the class hating? What is still needed for you to reach your goal?

4. What has been the most beneficial thing you have learned from this class? What would the first piece of advice that you would give someone who is struggling with this problem (trying to love someone they cannot stand)?