

Fil-Am Community Church
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CHALLENGE OF RADICAL LOVE

Welcome once again to Fil-Am's New Testament Challenge. I'm glad you're still here this morning and ready to tackle this challenge. During this series, we are challenging everyone at Fil-Am to get plugged in and to learn more about the New Testament, to learn about Jesus, to learn more about maybe even your own faith than you have ever known before. And we have several components to this New Testament Challenge. Now, the first component is sort of the basic level, is just to be here on Sunday during the New Testament Challenge. Every Sunday during this series, we are going to be talking about one of the major themes of the New Testament, one of the major challenges that God issues to us in the New Testament. In fact, today we are going to be talking about the Challenge of Radical Love. That is going to be one of the challenges that we talk about today.

The second component of the New Testament Challenge is to be in one of Fil-Am's home groups as we read through the New Testament, the entire New Testament in 63 days. Tomorrow, we start the New Testament reading, and I hope your home group leaders have given you the reading plan already. You'll get it either by paper, or email, or Facebook. I want to challenge you to get involved in

one of these groups, to see if your faith doesn't grow as you read through the New Testament.

So be here on Sundays, be in a group, read through the New Testament with us, and then sort of the last component of this New Testament Challenge is everyone who is in a group will meet with your group every week or every other week, depending on how the schedule works for everyone, and during your meetings or I'd rather refer to them as fellowships, you will go through several questions and answer and discuss and reflect on those questions which will help you to grow spiritually.

Well, let's go ahead and pull out our messages notes or outline. If you will go ahead and do that, today we are looking at, as I said, one of the biggest challenges that is offered in the New Testament. And that's the challenge of radical love. Now, love is one of the biggest themes throughout the New Testament. If you think about the New Testament, it's always talking about love, the love God has for us, the love we are supposed to have for God, the love we are supposed to have for other people. But when you think about love, it is such a big topic, it's hard to break down. It's hard to talk about it. It's so hard, in fact, that ancient Greeks didn't have just one word for love, like we do, they had four different words for love that had four different connotations. In fact, if you will look at the top of your message notes, you will see some of the words that the

ancient Greeks used for love. We're looking at this because the New Testament was written in ancient Greek. The first one, you see on there, is the word "phileo". Phileo stands for "brotherly love". There's a city not far from here that is derived from this word. What is that city? Philadelphia. Phileo is a love that close friends would have for one another. But I want you to understand. Phileo is not the radical love that we are talking about today.

If you look at the second Greek word for love, it's the love "storgē". And the word storgē means "familial affection". In other words, that is the love that you would have for family members. Storgē love is instantaneous, and storgē love is very strong. But it's not radical love.

Then if you look at the third kind of love, the third Greek word, it's a word "eros". And I bet if you try hard enough, you could guess what kind of love eros refers to because it's the base word from where we get the English word "erotic". It's a romantic, sexual kind of love. Interestingly enough, it's the only one not found in the New Testament. Eros love is not the radical love that we are talking about today, because everyone experiences eros. It's very common because we all fall in love. It's strong, but it's not radical love.

The last type of love, the fourth Greek word, is the word "agape". Write that down. The word agape. This refers to unconditional, selfless, God-like love. It represents the kind of love that God has for us and the kind of love that we should

have for one another. And the Bible says, agape love is a radical kind of love.

Here's why. Agape love is loving when you have every reason not to love.

Loving when you are facing your enemy. Loving when the other person is being mean. Loving when you just had a nasty fight with your spouse. Loving when it's not convenient. Loving the unlovable. Loving when it doesn't make sense to love.

That is what we mean by radical love. Look at how the Bible describes God's love for us in Ephesians 5:2. It says, "*Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*" Note how Christ loved us. He gave himself up for us. That is sacrificial love and that is why it is radical. We also call this unconditional because we don't expect anything in return.

This is the radical love that we are talking about, sacrificial and unconditional. Just like the love of Jesus for us. And the apostle Paul says we should love the way Jesus loves. Folks, radical love is a choice that you make through the actions that you take. In fact, write that down. Radical love is a choice that you make through the actions you take. You see, agape love is a choice. It's not a feeling. It's choosing to love through your actions when your feelings might be telling you to do something else.

You see, it's not necessarily agape love if I say, "I love my wife." What is agape love? What is radical love? It's when I show love to my wife through my

actions when I am not feeling love for her. And we go through that sometimes guys, right?

Like when you're watching your favorite sports on TV and your wife says, "Can you please take out the garbage?" What is your instinctive reply? "Yes, dear, whatever you say because I love you and I want to please you." I don't think so. Either you ignore her or you say, "Wait till the game is over" or worse "Can't you do that yourself"? But radical love will make you do what pleases her because you care for her and you don't want that stinking garbage to bother her. The point is radical love is choosing to love when I have every reason not to love. Choosing to love even when it's inconvenient.

So today we are going to look at three radical choices to love like Jesus. We find these choices in the most famous message ever given in the history of the world. And it's the Sermon on the Mount that we find in Matthew 5-7, and it's Jesus teaching in this sermon. And it's here where we find instructions of how to love radically. Here's the first radical choice. Let's jump in. The first choice to love like Jesus is this:

1. Choose to respond peacefully. Choose to respond peacefully. When we decide to live a life of radical love, we have to decide to respond to those who hurt us or those who attack us peacefully. And this raises the bar in our life. You see, when we get hurt, our natural response is not love. What is our natural response?

It's to hurt the other person back. It's to get revenge. That's why responding peacefully is so radical. But let's be honest, we love revenge.

We love how it feels. It's that what Hollywood makes a fortune on, because we do love revenge. All of the movies in Hollywood have somebody getting beat up by a bad guy, and then at the end coming back and exacting vengeance, right, and we like that. I mean it wouldn't have worked in the Terminator, you know, where Arnold Schwarzenegger says, "I'll be back." It wouldn't have worked if he said, "I'll be back to clean up this mess. I really went overboard, guys. I'm sorry about that. I apologize." That wouldn't have had the same effect, right? We like to get vengeance. But I want you to look at what Jesus says in Matthew 5. He says, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."* Now, I don't know about you, that doesn't seem like love, that sounds like stupidity. If someone slapped me, I don't want them to slap me again. I want to be clear here, because I think many times this passage has been taken out of context. And I think that people have used this passage to justify accepting abuse. Jesus isn't saying that as a Christian you need to be a pushover. Jesus isn't saying that as a Christian you need to let people walk all over you. Now, Jesus did die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins, but that was a conscious decision that He made and He gave His life for us. If you look at His life and the

way He lived His life, He did not let people walk all over Him. He didn't let people push Him around. So Jesus isn't saying let people walk all over you here. What Jesus is saying is that when you live your life, you don't respond to evil with evil. You don't respond to hurt with hurt. You don't respond to insults with insults. You respond to those things with... love.

So who do you need to show radical love to today? Who do you need to forgive? So to love like Jesus, to have this radical love, you need to respond fully, you need to forgive freely. That's the first choice to love radically and to love like Jesus. And this leads us to the second choice.

2. Choose to forgive freely. Choose to forgive freely. This takes the standard that we have to live to reach radical love up to the next level. Because it's one thing to respond peacefully, it's another thing to actually forgive. A lot of times we will hold our tongues instead of saying something harsh, and we will walk away with a lot of bitterness and hurt in our life and we won't forgive. We won't let the other person off the hook. But radical love chooses to forgive even when it's undeserved. You see, radical love frees the other person, but it also frees us. You see, you ask psychologists, they will tell you the number one element in psychological, emotional and spiritual healing is the ability to forgive, the ability to let go. Because a lot of times we think—I'm going to hold onto this unforgiveness to hurt the other person. But we have to admit it. Most of the time, us having

unforgiveness doesn't hurt the other person. Most of the time, they don't even know that we haven't forgiven them.

All we are doing is hurting ourselves, by holding onto bitterness and holding onto hurt. In fact, when we hold onto unforgiveness in our life, we are giving the other person power over us, even though they are not there because they still are controlling our life. Not forgiving someone and dwelling on it, is sort of like drinking poison in order to get back at the other person. It only hurts ourselves. Choosing not to forgive and holding onto a grudge creates a barrier, it creates a barrier between you and the other person. But the Bible is pretty clear. Not only does it create a barrier between you and the other person, it creates a barrier between you and God as well. Look at what Jesus said in Matthew 6. In fact, I want us to read this passage out loud together. And let's read it with a lot of forgiveness in our heart. Ready? *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* Friend, God wants His love to be in your life, and He wants you to experience His forgiveness in your life. But every time you hold onto unforgiveness in your life, you build a wall and God's love and God's forgiveness cannot come into your life. You see, it's radical love to forgive someone who has wronged you. But when you do, it can heal a broken relationship, it can save a broken marriage, it can heal you emotionally, and it can

restore your relationship with God. Now, I'll admit, forgiveness is hard. But believe it or not, Jesus doesn't stop there. He even takes it to another level. Jesus goes on to say, "It's not enough just to forgive your friends, your family, your co-workers, but you also have to love your enemies." Look at what He said later on in Matthew 5. Jesus said this, *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* See, Jesus says it pretty clearly. Anyone can love their friends. Anyone can have phileo love. Anyone can love their family. Anyone can have storgē love. Anyone can have the eros kind of love. He says, only a person with God's love in their hearts can love an enemy, can love someone who has first hurt them. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said this, "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." Let me just say this, as I wrap up this point. Never mistake forgiveness and trust. Never mistake forgiveness and trust. Because there are a lot of people who think that if I forgive someone, that I need to go back in, if I forgive someone who abused me, I have to

go back into a relationship with them. Or if I forgive someone who took advantage of me, I need to trust that person again with whatever I have trusted them before.

No, that's completely not true. Forgiveness is something that happens instantaneously. For their good, for our good, and for our relationship with God, you ought to forgive them right away. But trust is something that has to be built up over time. You could forgive someone without trusting them. The Bible says to be wise about that. Forgive quickly, but take your time when your trust has been broken.

3. Love sacrificially. Write that down. Love sacrificially. One of the incredible things that Jesus did on the Sermon on the Mount was, He would take previously known laws, very good laws, and He would apply radical love to those laws and take them to the next level. And the way He would do this is, He would say—"You have heard it said this, but now, I am telling you this." And He did this a half dozen times in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "You have heard it said don't commit murder, but I am telling you, you shouldn't have unjust anger in your heart. You have heard it said don't commit adultery, but I'm telling you, you shouldn't lust at all." It's a much tougher level to live by.

In the ancient world, one of the most universal laws was from the ancient code of Hammurabi, and it said this: Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you. Which I think is a very good law, right? You know, if I don't want

to be punched in the face, I'm not going to punch you in the face. Right? I can live by that. It's a good law, but here's the thing. It's a negative command. It's a negative law. In other words, it is telling you not to do something. You live your life by not hurting people. What Jesus did is He took this law, this well-known ancient law, and He applied God's radical love to it, and He turned it from being a negative command, a negative law, into a positive command, a positive law. You see, previously it was a call to inaction, and Jesus turned it into a call for action by making it the Golden Rule. Jesus said this, "*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*"

Now, I know it's a simple phrase and we all know it— *do to others what you would have them do to you*. But for a moment, I want you to stop and imagine, imagine what our world would look like, imagine what our city, imagine what your family, imagine what your workplace would look like if we all lived our lives by the Golden Rule. What would it look like if in every instance, in every decision, with every person in our lives, we decided to treat them as we would want to be treated in that instance. Instead of responding with harsh words, we responded with kind words. Instead of giving judgment, we gave forgiveness. Instead of responding with hate or bitterness, we responded with love. You see, I think we would all be happier if we lived our lives by the Golden Rule. I think more of our

marriages would do more than just survive, they would thrive. I think we would have better friendships. I think we would enjoy work more.

I think there would be more peace in our lives and less worry, less anxiety, and less fighting. You see, today, we have been talking about radical love. Sometimes it is hard to picture in our minds what exactly radical love looks like. I have tried to give examples, and we have been trying to talk about it. But in reality, we don't have to guess at what radical love looks like. God didn't leave that up in the air.

God gave us a tangible, practical example of what ultimate, radical love looks like.

And He did that in His Son Jesus Christ. Because the Bible says that we were separated from God because of our sin. And by sin, I mean, we turned our back on God. God said, hey here's my best plan. And we say—no thank you, God, I'm living life my way. And we turned our back on God and in doing so, we hurt God, we turned our back on the one who gives us everything that we have, everything that we need and who has offered us all that love, we turned our back on Him.

And we didn't even know what real love was when we did it. But the Bible says that God, even though He had no reason to do so, even though there was no obligation, even though there was nothing in return that He would receive, He reached out to us in love, and He became a human being, He came into this world and He sacrificed Himself on the cross, so that our sins could be forgiven, our sins could be overcome and that we could have eternal life in a relationship with God.

You see, Jesus suffered so that if we believe in Him, and give our lives to Him, that we will be forgiven, and we can become children of God.

And it's a gift that is completely undeserved. God had every reason not to give it, but He loved us anyway. He loves us anyway with a radical love, with that agape love. And here's the truth. None of us, neither you nor me, none of us can show the kind of radical love to others in our lives until we first experience that radical love in our own life. You see, I know that there are some of you who are here today who have never experienced radical love in your life. You have never experienced the peace that God can give you. You have never experienced the complete and total acceptance, the complete forgiveness that God offers us in our life. And because of that, you don't know what radical love is and you have a hard time living it out in your life. If you are here today and you have never experienced God's radical love in your life, I want to encourage you, don't leave here today without praying a simple prayer and ask God to give that love to you in your heart.

At the height of his power, Napoleon Bonaparte controlled nearly all of Europe as the Emperor of France. And Napoleon was powerful and he was ruthless. But even Napoleon understood that the radical love of God was more powerful than all of his armies put together. In fact, he said this, he said, (and I quote) "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires, but on what

do we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love. And at this hour millions of men would die for Him.” (end of quote) How powerful is God’s radical love? It was powerful enough that if you open your life to receive it today, He can completely transform your life. It’s powerful enough that if we choose to live out this radical love in our own lives, that it can change the city and it can change the world. Look at our last verse. It’s on the back of your message notes. It’s our memory verse for this week. From John 3:16-17. Let’s read it out loud together. Ready? *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ”* Let’s bow our heads and pray together.