

LOVE LETS IT GO

40 Days of Love - Part 4

Welcome to weekend number four in 40 Days of Love. I hope you're feeling more loving and more loved as we go through this journey together.

Life is all about learning to love. One of the ways that God builds your love is he tests it. He tests it by putting you around unlovely people. It's easy to love loving people. But for God to teach you real love he's going to put you around unlovely people.

This morning what I want us to look at is what I call special cases. These are people that I call **MDP – Most Draining People**. You're going to recognize every one of them when I mention them. There are four special cases. There are Difficult people. There are Demanding people. There are Disappointing people. There are Destructive people. You have all four of these in your life and you will throughout your life. God says I want you to learn to love these people too in the way that's best for them and in the way that I want you to do it.

The question is, how do you respond in love to each of these groups of people?

1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us the four ways that love deals with these four types of people. It says "Love is not rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and love keeps no record of when it has been wronged." When you understand these four and you begin to build them into your life you graduate from the Bachelor's degree level of love to the Master's degree level of love.

The first type of MDP that you're going to have to learn to deal with in life, and learn to love, are Difficult people.

Have you noticed there are a lot of them? They're all over. Maybe there's someone in your family, don't look at them now. But you find them everywhere – at work, in school, in stores, in public places, sometimes even in church.

I'd like to ask you to participate in a little survey with me right now. If I were to ask you what form of rudeness irritates you the most, would you think about that for a minute? Then I'm going to ask you to take about five seconds and share it with your neighbor. I'm going to give you the top ten rude behaviors according to a survey done by a Baltimore company. But before I give you the list I want you to turn to somebody and say, "One thing that really bugs me..." and don't say, "Pastors who ask me to participate in a survey and talk to someone about it." But turn to somebody and say, "One of the things that I find rude is..." Talk to somebody next to you. Don't give them your whole list. Just one thing!

Let me give the top ten rude behaviors according to a survey done by the Civility Initiative at the Johns Hopkins University:

1. Discrimination in an employment situation
2. Erratic or aggressive driving that endangers others
3. Taking credit for someone else's work
4. Treating service providers as inferiors
5. Jokes or remarks that mock another's race, gender, age, disability, sexual preference or religion
6. Children behaving aggressively or bullying others
7. Littering (including trash, spitting, pet waste)
8. Misuse of handicapped privileges
9. Smoking in non-smoking places or smoking in front of non-smokers without asking

10. Using cell phones or text messaging in mid-conversation or during an appointment or meeting.

And shall I add worship service?

Now, how do you respond in love to difficult people?

The Bible says “*Love is not rude.*” So **I must be tactful, not just truthful.**

Love is tactful. In other words you don’t return their rudeness. You overcome evil with good. You don’t respond in kind. When people are difficult, you don’t be difficult back.

Now, one rude behavior which should be there in the list is interrupting people. I mean, there are people who interrupts you in the middle of your sentence. It is rude to not listen. It is rude to not let somebody finish their sentence. Some of us have brain runs that run so fast and we think we know what people are going to say and we start to talk even when the other person is still talking. That’s dumb.

Look what the Bible says about this – Proverbs 18:13 “*Answering before listening is both stupid and rude.*”

Let me repeat that: answering before listening is stupid and rude. What’s the antidote? Be tactful. You see, people with tact have less to retract. You’re not going to have to eat your words if you listen first. Love listens and love is tactful.

Proverbs 16:21 “*A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.*” Circle “pleasant” and circle “persuasive” and draw a line between them. The more pleasant you are, the more persuasive you are. You might write down under this verse “I’m never persuasive when I’m abrasive.” When I’m abrasive with my wife, when I’m abrasive with my kids, when I’m abrasive with clerks, when I’m abrasive with anybody... I’m never persuasive. Nagging doesn’t work. Does it work on you? No. Doesn’t work on anybody.

I don't know if you've watched any of the political debates – the presidential or the vice-presidential debate. At the bottom of some of these channels they have these little graphs of whether people approved or disapproved of what they were saying at that second. I noticed that whenever either side went on the attack the approval rate went down. So, I'm never persuasive when I'm abrasive. You don't get your point across by being cross.

You know one thing? Tact and tone go together. You can say something very difficult but if you say it in the right tone it will be received much better. If you say, "Honey, you look awful in that dress", it will be received much better than "You look awful!" So, tone and tact go together.

The Bible says you want to have a master's degree in love, remember this, love is not rude. It means you're tactful not just truthful. When someone's rude to you, you don't retaliate. Masters in love don't retaliate.

I read a story about this little boy, Doug is his name, who is a member of a Little League team. His team had a Little League game where his team just got creamed by the opposite team. After it was over the opposite team member came up to him and said "Your team sucks!" Doug looked at him and said, "You pitched a great game." You know, the other kid went away wishing he hadn't said that. Because when you get even with somebody it puts you on the same level with them. But when you return good for evil it puts you above them.

Do you want to be below them? Attack them. Do you want to be even with them? Get even with them. Do you want to be above them? Say something nice back. It all depends on where you want to be. Love is tactful not just truthful.

The second kind of group you're going to have to deal with is Demanding people.

These are the people who always want their way. They've always got a right way and a wrong way to do it. And your way is always the wrong way.

You can never quite please them. This second type of people you have to deal with in life, they've got their standards and if you don't meet their standards they're going to let you know about it. How do you respond in love to demanding people?

The Bible says *"Love does not demand its own way"* so **I must be understanding, not demanding.**

Jesus is the best example of this. Philippians 2. *"Your attitude should be the same that Jesus Christ had. Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form."* He was God but he was understanding, not demanding. Circle *"did not demand and cling to his rights."*

Anytime you hear somebody at a restaurant or at a ticket counter saying, "I have my rights!" they're being demanding not understanding. One of the greatest tests of your character is how you treat the people who serve you. The waiters, the waitresses, the flight attendants, the people at fast food places, the mailman, gardeners, secretaries, employees, people who work with you. How do you treat the people who help you out? Do you even notice them? Do you know their names? Do you know the names of the people who clean your house if your house is cleaned? Do you know the names of people who serve you in different ways? It's treating people with respect and you be understanding, not demanding. So few people are actually respected. They do their job and nobody's even looking at them. Nobody's paying attention to them.

So here's my homework for you this week. I want you to practice being understanding, not demanding. If you go out to lunch this afternoon or you go to a store, be understanding not demanding. If the waiter or the salesperson seems so unfriendly realize that the person may have had a tough time. May have just gotten chewed out by their boss or whatever.

But practice being understanding not demanding. You know the best place to practice it? How about home? Sometimes we're more polite to strangers than we are to the people in our lives. I've said this before, that I don't know if it bothers you but it bothers me that sometimes I say the meanest things, the most unthoughtful things to the people I love the most. I don't know if that bothers you but it bothers me. It bothers me a lot that I could be nice to strangers and not nice in the same capacity to people I'm around all the time.

Titus 3:2 *"Believers shouldn't curse anyone or be quarrelsome, but they should be gentle and show courtesy to everyone."* Circle "courtesy." What is courtesy? Courtesy is showing love in little things. That's what it is. Showing love in the little things.

A lot of marriages die from a lack of courtesy. Because the things that you used to do for each other you don't do any more. The little niceties, the thoughtful things, the notes, the cards, the flowers, the calls, the courtesies – opening the door, the let-me-get-that-for-you, not get it yourself! A lot of marriages are buried from a lot of little digs. Just a lack of courtesy.

How do you be more understanding of people who are demanding in your life?

The Bible tells us that patience comes from perspective. That the more you understand about a person the more patient you're going to be with them. I'm impatient with people I don't understand. But when I know them, and I know them well, I'm going to know what I call the three B's – their background, their battles and their burdens. You need to think, before you get sharp and short with somebody, do I know their background? Do I know the battles they're going through right now? Do I know the burdens they're carrying? That's going to make you a lot more courteous to other people.

So I look at their background. I look at their burdens. What are the problems they're carrying? They may be sick. They may have a temperature.

They may have financial problems. The reason they may be a little irritable or demanding is they're not feeling good. Maybe they've got a back problem. There are all kinds of battles and burdens that people carry that you and I don't know about. Love is understanding not demanding.

"A man's wisdom gives him patience. It is his glory to overlook an offense."

Do you overlook offenses or are you easily offended? Are you so touchy and irritable that anybody looks at you crosswise or forgets to say something or walks past you and didn't see you, you get offended? The Bible says, it is a glory to a man's or woman's character to overlook an offense. Just blow it off. Love lets it go.

There's a third group that we have to deal with. That is Disappointing people. You're going to be disappointed in life. In fact, everybody in your life is going to disappoint you. Your friends are going to disappoint you, your family, your parents, your brothers, your sisters. I'm going to disappoint you as your pastor. Why? Because nobody's perfect.

So how do you deal with disappointing people? How does love respond when we're disappointed by people? The third thing the Bible says is *"Love is not irritable."* So I must **be gentle not judgmental.**

Let's see what the scriptures have to say about how we can be gentle and not judgmental. Galatians 6:1 says *"Brothers and sisters, if someone in your group does something wrong you who are spiritual should go to that person and gently help make him right again. But be careful, because you might be tempted to sin too."*

You might want to circle the word "gently." I love the fact that it says gently. How do you have tough conversations with people in a gentle way?

How do you confront people you love when you see they're doing something they shouldn't be doing. The Bible tells us you've got to do it gently, not harshly, not in a rude or mean way. But to do it with gentleness and respect.

Let me give you an equation: Right + Rude = Wrong.

It doesn't matter if you're right. If you're rude about it nobody's going to care what you have to say. They're immediately going to get defensive. So you do it in a gentle and a loving way. Not in a harsh or a cruel way.

Colossians 3:13. The Bible says "*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.* [Notice it says whatever grievances. You can't be selective about this.] *and forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

Then in Romans 14:12, the Bible says this "*Each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other.*"

It's important to understand the difference between using your judgment and being judgmental. I've talked to people who let all kinds of things go on in relationships and say, "I don't want to be judgmental." So instead they just become victims. There's a difference between using your judgment and being judgmental. You've got to use your judgment so you can see when something's going wrong. There's nothing wrong with doing that. You've got to be able to decide between wrong and right. To be able to know what the truth is. But the truth is not judgmental. It's only judgmental when you beat somebody over the head with it. That's when it becomes judgmental. When you start determining what their sentence is going to be.

The Bible says you've got to use your judgment. You've got to be smart about things. But you don't have to be judgmental with people. The Bible says this in Proverbs 15:4:

“Gentle words bring life and health. A deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.” I love the way it says this in the Message paraphrase. It says *“Kind words heal and help. But cutting words wound and maim.”*

So we always have a choice when we need to speak to somebody. Especially with our kids. Have you found how cutting words can just wound and maim a child? You can hurt them for years. But the Bible says that kind words are words that will heal and help. So when your kids mess up, you don't have to get on their case and tell them whatever you think they are at the moment. But give them a vision of how things could be. Speak words of life and health and hope into them. Not words of judgment and harshness. Be gentle. And as I was preparing this message, I was convicted, and I was telling myself, “Rolly, be gentle to EZ.”

It's the same way in our marriages. How many marriage problems could be strengthened if we had just waited a bit, just used words that were gentle and kind and not harsh or vindictive. There are really so few things that are worth fighting about. Even the things that we think are worth fighting about, most of them aren't worth fighting about either. They're just temporal. They're going to pass. We ought to learn to cut each other some slack and be kind and gentle in our relationships.

Then there's another verse we threw in just in case you're having some problems at work with your boss. Ecclesiastes 10:4 *“If your boss is angry with you, don't quit. A quiet spirit can overcome even great mistakes.”*

What that's saying is if you mess up at work just admit it. Don't blame it on somebody else. Don't get all defensive and start yelling back. Then, strive to improve. Do it well. Do it for the glory of God because you're much more likely to find mercy if you're humble about it than if you're grumpy about it. So love isn't rude and it's not demanding. And it's not judgmental.

The fourth aspect has to do with dealing with Destructive people. This is the hardest one of all. How do you love people who intentionally hurt you?

Who are mean. Who are hateful. Who are manipulative. When people hurt us we have two natural tendencies. Remember and retaliate.

First we remember it. I'm never forgetting that one. I'm not letting them get off the hook. We rehearse it over and over and over.

The second thing we do is we retaliate. We want to get even.

But that's not what the Bible says. Love takes a step up. The Bible says "*Love keeps no record of wrongs.*"

So what does that mean? How do I respond to the people who have hurt me in my life? How do I handle all of those wounds, those pains, those hurts that I've stockpiled back there in my memory?

Here's what you do. You **don't repeat it, you delete it**. Wipe it out of the memory bank. Let it go. Forgive it and get on with your life.

Don't repeat it. What do I mean by that? Typically when we get hurt we repeat it three ways. We repeat it emotionally in our minds. We repeat it relationally as a weapon. And we repeat it practically and verbally in telling other people.

First we repeat it in our mind by going over and over and over it in our mind. We rehearse it. You know, resentment never helps you. It only hurts you. When you hold on to a grudge, you are not hurting that person from your past. You're only hurting yourself. In fact you are allowing them to continue to hurt you in the present. Your past is past. It's over. It can't hurt you unless you choose to allow it. And the way you allow it to hurt you is by remembering it over and over.

Leviticus 19:17 "*Do not bear a grudge against others. But settle your differences with them so you will not commit a sin because of them.*"

The second way we repeat it is we repeat it in fights, in relationships. We use it as wedges, as weapons. You did this, you did that. Remember when you did that? You pile it all back up again.

Proverbs 17:9 *“Love forgets mistakes. Nagging about them parts the best of friends.”* It also parts marriages and everything else. Nagging doesn't work.

Let me take this one deeper. Some of you in your marriage have been hurt by a partner in a major way. An unfaithfulness, a disloyalty. Some kind of thing that really, really hurt you. But they came back and said, “I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?” And they've stayed with you and they've stuck with you and you've said “I forgive you but I'm not ever forgetting it.” Back there in the back of your mind you keep repeating it and no matter what they do good, it's never good enough. Because you've got this list against them of all the things they've disappointed you and all the ways they've been destructive in your life. No matter what they do good. In your mind you've got a scale between guilt and blame. To stay mentally stable every time you feel guilty you feel like you have to blame somebody else. The rest of their life no matter how much good they do it's not enough to balance the scale.

Now, the third way we repeat it is we repeat it to other people. We talk to others. That's called gossip. We tell everybody else. We don't talk to God. We don't talk to the person. We talk to everybody else about the pain. We want to try to line up people on our side so that we're better and they're bad and they're hated as much by other people as they're hated by us. *“Gossip is spread by wicked people. They stir up trouble and they break up friendships.”* The Bible says you're wicked if you gossip. It's a sin to gossip.

All three of those are destructive, damaging, and self-defeating. You're only hurting yourself by repeating it in your mind,

by repeating it over and over in conversations and using it as a wedge and by repeating it to other people. Don't repeat it. Delete it. *"Love keeps no record of wrongs."*

Proverbs 10:12 says this *"Hate stirs up trouble but love forgives all offenses."* Which of the "all" have you not let go? Which of the offenses in your life are you still holding on to?

The truth is some of you were hurt as kids. Maybe by a teacher, a relative, even by your parents. You have some unfinished business. If you're going to become the loving woman, the loving man that God wants you to be, that you want to be, that I want you to be – that's the whole reason we're doing 40 Days of Love is so you can become a more loving, love filled person – you're going to have to deal with these past issues now. You're going to have to do some business. Because the truth is you carried a bunch forward and you're venting on your husband or you're venting on your wife or venting on your kids and they're not even at fault. They're not even the ones who caused the pain. If you're still angry at a parent or for that matter anybody, you're still allowing them to control you. Don't.

As your friend, as your pastor I'm saying don't. Don't allow that any more. You've got to deal with the anger. You've got to face it before you can forgive it. And as I said, stop blaming and stop running.

Proverbs 19:11 says this *"When someone wrongs you it is a great virtue to ignore it."* Just ignore it. Let it go. But you can't ignore it until first you face it and forgive it. Then you can ignore it. And you let it go. Love lets it go.

1st Corinthians 13:5 this is our memory verse for this week *"Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs."* Keep that in mind. That means if you're going to be loving, do not keep a record of wrong.

I don't know who you need to forgive but I do know today's the day. As we close I want you to think of the people who've hurt you in your life and I want you to let them off the hook. Love lets it go. Love forgives. Because they deserve it? No. You don't deserve being forgiven either by God. But because it's the right thing to do and it's the only way to be free.