

Daily Devotional, June 12, 2020 Loving Without Fear

If we were asked what the opposite of love is it would seem to be a no-brainer wouldn't it? Most everyone would automatically reply, "hate", wouldn't we? If you were to Google the word "hate" and ask for love's antonym, hate would pop up as the #1 answer. Hate is definitely worlds apart from love.

There are a few people who might argue for indifference. They might say, "If I love my children, then I'm not indifferent to them playing in a busy street. For them indifference may be worse for them, or at least equal to hate. Or what about fear? Fear may not be the exact opposite of love, but it definitely is averse to love. Scripture tells us that perfect love casts out fear. (1John 4:18) We are also told that "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13) Having love like that leaves no room for fear, for fear and love can't live side by side.

27-30 *"To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.*

31-34 *"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that's charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.*

35-36 *"I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind. Luke 6:27-36 (MSG)*

This passage is known as the *Sermon on the Plain*. It is Luke's version of the Gospel of Matthew's the *Sermon on the Mount*, as translated in *The Message*. This sermon is not a moral code for us. It is not Jesus' list of 10 ways to a better life. This is about the nature of God. It is how God lives, and how we should do our best to follow.

How do we follow God when we interact with our enemies? We love. We must not live in fear of our enemies, but battle our fear of our enemies through love.

For some of us our enemy is the culture around us. Our battle is with culture – whatever that culture may be. Our culture demands that we fear. Fear government. Fear ISIS. Fear politics. Fear law enforcement. Fear music. Fear public school. Fear Christian school. Fear money. Fear poverty. Fear failure. Fear success. Fear men. Fear women. Fear the church. Fear the secular. Fear the unknown. Fear the known. I don't care who you are, or where you are from; there is something out there to fear.

In this message, Jesus doesn't tell us to fear. He tells us to love. I know that it is not always easy. I have struggles of my own with fear. I have two adult children who live in cultures that are often strange to me. It's not always easy to answer questions like, "Where is the line between love and acceptance?" I don't have easy answers, but I know the answers don't lie in fear.

The author Oswald Chambers once wrote: *"It is inbred in us that we have to do exceptional things for God: but we have not. We have to be exceptional in the ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, and this is not learned in five minutes."*

This week practice love. Love your enemies. Love those you fear. Love our culture—even those ways you do not understand. It may be new to you. It won't be learned in five minutes, but soon you'll be exceptional at it. Pick up your phone. Call those you have had grave indifferences with. Pray for them. Don't fear. Love.

Prayer: Jesus, Prince of peace, you have asked us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We pray for our enemies and those who oppose us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, may all people learn to work together for that justice which brings true and lasting peace. To you be glory and honor for ever and ever. Amen.