Loving People Who Are Difficult

Dear Friends,

Out of all of creation the hardest ones to love are difficult people. It seems easier at times to love a dog, a cat, a bird, or even a pet rat, or a snake than it is to love some people. These individuals have often been hurt in the past, as a result it is a difficult time for them to accept love or give love.

Loving difficult people is impossible in and of it-self. People are imperfect, by nature unlovable and frequently irritating. It’s much easier to just drive some people out of our lives then try to love them. The problem is such action emotionally freezes us, and prevents us from fully loving other people who have similar attitudes or mannerisms in the future. That is why Jesus kept talking about the need to forgive, and be forgiven along with the importance of love.

In Mark 12:30,31 He said the most important commandment was to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with your entire mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these”.

I don’t know about you, but I have a hard time when it comes to loving certain people. They are unappreciative, resentful and irritating. The trouble is as I describe the characteristics of these other people; I am often describing characteristics in my own life. All this can be very frustrating, and that’s why preaching or hearing a teaching on loving people who are difficult may be something we would rather ignore. The fact is if you claim to be a Christian it is unavoidable. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

In order to get a better handle on loving people lets spell the word people out. The first letter P we see used is in 1st Cor.13 where Paul tells us in very practical ways how to love people. In verses 4 he says that love is Patient. My initial response is, “that all is well and good but when I try to be patient with unlovable people I usually fail.” The fact is no body likes failing. That why it is easier to give up and turn inward. The trouble is I really want to be a Christian and that involves loving people.
The key to loving people and being patient, involves being constantly plugged into God’s love. Jesus expressed that in Mark 12:30 when He told us that the first and greatest commandment involves, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Only then can we perform the second commandment, which is to love our neighbor as our self. Love that is patient is possible only when we exercise the P for plugged. By being plugged into God’s love constantly we are able to love other people and it is His love that flows through us.

As we spell out the word people the next letter we come in contact with is the letter E. E reminds us of the endurance necessary when it comes to loving people. Verse 7 of 1Cor.13:7 tell us that love, “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.” Endurance does not mean that we become enablers who keep it all inside until we explode. It involves speaking the truth in love because we do care about the other person and what their hostile unloving action are doing to them. It doesn’t take much endurance before we recognize how empty our own love tank is. Therefore, we are once again reminded that when it comes to loving people who are difficult we need to daily be letting God’s love flow into us and through us. “But God demonstrated His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8),

Now let us respond to God’s demonstration of love by loving Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. As 1John 4:19 says, “We love Him because He first loved us.”

The O in the word people stands for Observation. This involves observing our own lives and recognizing our own shortcomings so that when we observe others we won’t be so quick to jump on them. As I observe my own life I see that I am frequently impatient and as a result rude and unloving. I have a tendency to interrupt people when they are still talking and forget that I have two ears and one mouth.

How I thank God for the people who exercise the P of patience toward me and now I need God’s help to exercise such toward other people. Observing God’s patience, kindness and forgiveness towards me enables me to let His love flow in my life and through my life toward other people.

Loving people who are difficult also involves the implementation of the O in the word people when it comes to Obedience. Even when I don’t feel like it I am still required to love because Jesus told me in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give you: Love one another.” This means looking for God given opportunities to
express love to that one whom God has brought into my life that needs love in a very special way. Paul puts it this way, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ: (Phil.1:9,10).

This brings us to the second P in the word people which stands for Prayer. As we pray specifically for those God has brought into our lives to love we will see Him open up the opportunities for us to express such love. The expression of this love may seem to be too difficult when it comes to loving that teenage son or daughter, or a husband or wife, or co-worker.

Prayer is important not only when it relates to members of our immediate family but when it comes to loving people as a whole. When we pray we are to not only ask God to work on the other person but on us as well. We are told in Matt.7 not to judge but to ask, seek and knock when it comes to loving people. For example, there is someone on the job, or a neighbor who is really making life difficult for you. The feelings you have for that person is anything but love. You want them to get what you think is coming to them but there is Matt.7: 1,2 where it says, “Do not judge, are you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judge, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matt.7:1,2).

You don’t want to get judged so you try not to judge but this person is really getting to you. You know its not healthy to keep it all bottled up and be an enabler so what do you do? You try giving things to the unlovable, ungrateful person but it only back fires on you and the situation gets worst that ‘s why verse 6 says, “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and they in turn will tear you to pieces.”

Loving people who are difficult involves praying. Jesus tells you that judging and just giving in to bad behavior doesn’t work. You need to ask God for help, seek Him for a solution, and believe Him to knock on the doors of the hard hearts of unlovable people until those hearts are opened. This all involves prayer. “Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened “(Mattt.7:7,8).
If you would start praying more and judging less that unlovable person in your life, you would see the miraculous unfold. As a parent if you engaged in asking, seeking and knocking prayers for your children rather than trying to buy their love by giving them everything they want, you would see more love in the family.

When you pray you must believe God for the answer to your prayers. The answer may result in a change in the behavior of the person you are praying for, or it may be that God will show you the behavior He wants to change in you before He can work on the other person.

As we pray we must remember what James 1:5-8 says concerning receiving the wisdom to love difficult people. “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind. That man (this also includes women) should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

If we really are serious about loving people then we need to take a closer look at the L in the word people. The L stands for Love and that it flows from God which has a power beyond and description “One thing has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving” (Ps. 63:11,12). God’s love is so powerful and it has no limits. It is consistent when the love of other people fails.

The E in the word people stands for the Eternal life promised by Jesus Christ to those who let His eternal love flow in them and through them. This love can only flow through who let Jesus Christ cleanse them of their sins. “If we confess our sins, He (Jesus) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When one turns from a life of sinfulness, self-centeredness and loveless-ness to the source of life and love, Jesus Christ, they are born again. They are referred to as, “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).
This deliverance from the darkness of lovelessness into the light of love stirs up the emotions of praise and thanksgiving that results in a new enthusiasm for living. “Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that through they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us” (2 Peter 2:10).

It is impossible for anyone who has been born again into God’s love through Jesus Christ, to not let that love flow through them into the lives of difficult people. We realize we have been saved by grace and it is this grace we desire to let flow into the lives of others. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and that not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph.2:8-10).

As we strive to live out our God given purpose of loving difficult people, we will daily need to spell out the word people. Remember the first P is for the Patience that is often required when you are loving people who are difficult. The E is for the Endurance necessary which keeps you loving even when such love is not returned. Look upon those in your life who seem the most difficult to love as God’s gifts to teach you what it means to exercise unconditional love.

The O in the word people is to remind you to be Observant for opportunities to love unlovable people. The letter O also should remind you to be Obedient to Jesus’ command for you to love others. The second P in the word people is for Prayer. Pray for the difficult people God has brought into your life to love. Ask God to teach you to be stable during difficult circumstances so that you will be able to show stability to difficult people.

When you spell out the word people let the word L remind you of God’s unconditional Love which makes it possible for you to love all people. This includes those who are unappreciative, irritating and resentful. The E in the word people is a reminder of the gift of Eternal Life awaiting everyone who turns from their loveless lives to Jesus Christ the manifestation of God’s great love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosever believeth in Him shall not perish but should have everlasting life” (John3:16). Because of this love of God is working in us and through us we can love people who are difficult.
In conclusion as we think about loving people who are difficult let us take a look at a shoe. On the bottom of that shoe you have a heel. It isn’t long when we are moving through the journey of life we meet someone who acts like a real heel. To be honest all of us have acted like heels at one time or another in life. Thank God He still loved us when we were a real heel and He wants us to love the other heels he also brings into our lives.

Also, on the bottom of the shoe there is a sole. We must never forget that all people, even the difficult ones, have souls and we are to love them.

On top of the shoe there are eyes which are reminders that God has given us eyes to look for the good in those difficult people He has blessed us with.

The tongue in the shoe is an example of how we need to speak that which will hold the relationship together rather than tearing it apart.

Shoes come in all different sizes, shapes, and colors. They all walk down the same streets and paths of life. We also should walk side by side down the paths of life with those who may be different. Some shoes may be rough, like some people, others are shiny and highly polished, just like some people. No matter how we find the finish of the shoe or the people we meet, we must remember we are all God’s children, and we should all work to get along together.

Now “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers (and sisters). If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother (or sister) in need but has no pity on him (or her), how can the love of God be in them? Dear friends, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18).

As our shoe is put on our foot, we must never forget that it never walks alone. So, too, we never walk alone. Jesus walks with us. He promised to never leave us nor forsake us and He will help us to love people no matter how difficult they may be.

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice