

Lessons in Luke: Love for Enemies

Luke 6:27-36

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Today I want to talk about “Sandpaper People.” What are “Sandpaper People” you ask? Author Mary Southerland describes them in this way; she says, “Let’s be honest! Some people are more difficult to get along with than others; they rub us the wrong way! I call them ‘Sandpaper People.’” Well, that’s a great description, because sandpaper people come in all shapes, sizes and colors, and sometimes they are us! Sometimes we are the sandpaper people. But, when we come across sandpaper people in our lives, they just irritate us. We often want to ignore them, maybe run from them, and even take a stab at trying to fix them, so they won’t be so annoying. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gives us a way to deal with these people, these irritating, obnoxious people in our lives. He calls us to love them! Now, if you’re like me, loving them is the last thing we want to do! However, Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging. He gives us a way to deal with sandpaper people in our lives.

Today’s reading is from the Gospel of St. Luke, the 6th chapter, and there’s a lot going on in this chapter, as Jesus continues his ministry. There are healings going on, he calls his 12 disciples, and in our passage today, he’s teaching a huge crowd of people who have come from all over the region. So let’s listen in on some of what he shares with them. Today, our reading is from Luke 6:27-36:

²⁷ “But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. ²⁸ Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. ³⁰ Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. ³¹ Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

³² “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! ³³ And if you do good only to those who do good

to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! ³⁴ And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

³⁵ “Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. ³⁶ You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”

Jesus says “love your enemies.” Really he is saying “Love those who annoy you.” Those people who get under your skin? Ugh! That is so hard! I know how hard it is because I have sandpaper people in my life and their very presence sends me in a tailspin. It’s like the hairs on the back of my neck go up when I come in contact with them. So the last thing I want to do is love them. Yet Jesus calls us to love those annoying people in our lives. He’s calling us to do something that’s totally contrary to our human nature. But Jesus doesn’t leave us hanging out there on our own. He actually shows us a way, and then he leads us.

Jesus shows us a way to deal with the obnoxious people in our lives because he knows that when we are feeling such annoyance and such irritability inside of us, we are only hurting ourselves. These feelings can overwhelm us and even destroy us! Therefore, Jesus calls us to love the sandpaper people in our lives.

Now, it is important to note that those who have been abused or are in an abusive relationship, Jesus does not call you to stay in that relationship or accept it in any way. Any abuser needs to stop and get help.

But what about the sandpaper people in our lives... how do we go about loving them? Well, it isn’t just about trying to think nice thoughts about them. What we need to deal with them... is Jesus. We need Jesus to do a heart change, and it’s not with them, but it’s within us, to put the kind of heart within us that God has for us. The heart of God forgives a world, God forgives the most despicable people. You know the kind – the self-centered, the annoying, the obnoxious, the liars, the cheaters, the selfish, you know them as sandpaper people. Here is the thing about the sandpaper people; it includes us. Yep, like it or not, each one of us is probably a sandpaper person to somebody else. Well, I know that I am for sure! And yet, somehow, God loves me, and he loves you. God

loves all of us, each one of us, even when we're at our worst. It is in God's love for us that we are actually able to love others, even the ones that are hard to love, the ones that rub us the wrong way.

Jesus knows what it's like to have sandpaper people in his life. He totally gets it. So how does Jesus work in our hearts so that we can love those people we struggle with... the sandpaper people? Well, he has given us three things we can do to begin to love those who annoy us and rid ourselves of that negativity that actually hurts us.

DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO ANNOY YOU

One thing that we all have control over is how we respond. And if we make the choice to respond by doing good to those people, kindness and love truly changes people. And most importantly, it can change our hearts.

In practice, here's are some things that we could do: try mowing the lawn of that crabby neighbor; maybe volunteer to fill in for that mean-spirited co-worker who drives you crazy; or maybe you can be helpful and kind to an ex-spouse. It may even mean providing for a parent who was mean to you as you were growing up. If you try these things you may be surprised by the freedom you feel from not being tied down to the irritability that you've had towards those sandpaper people in your life. You may even be surprised by the impact you have on the life of the person that annoys you. Kindness and love changes people.

The second thing Jesus calls us to do is:

BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU

We've all heard the phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." I'm here to tell you today that is an absolute lie. There aren't too many things that carry more power in life than the words we use with one another.

The Bible tells us over and over again the great power that's in our speech. Unfortunately, it can be easier for us to use our speech in a negative way, when we're struggling with someone, rather than in a positive way. It's so much easier to lash out and talk about people than it is to use our speech to build them up.

However, when we choose to use our speech to lash out at those who harmed us or hurt our feelings, all we're doing is throwing gas on a fire. We're rubbing salt in a wound. And we all know what happens when you put salt in a cut! It stings! It hurts! It typically causes a bad reaction! That's one reason Jesus tells

us that one of the best ways to respond to those sandpaper people is by blessing them.

Kind words have a way of working as a salve to heal wounds in people's lives. Can you think of an example in your life when someone said something to you that brought encouragement to you; that brought hope to you?

Some of you may have experienced the wonderful joy of making a mistake that you knew would cause your spouse to be angry with you. But instead of responding in anger they came up to you and said, "I love you." Isn't it great when something like that happens? It totally changes your mood. It causes you to put down your defense mechanisms and live in peace!

As a matter of fact, a kind word, a word of encouragement can actually remove the anger a person has towards you. When we speak in a way that builds people up instead of tearing them down our hearts begin to change. Kind words soften their hearts and ours.

So, maybe you want to try this: next time you see a person who just automatically makes you mad, think of a kind word or deed to share with them. And do it because you want to be more like Jesus. And I think you'll be surprised at how good you feel for doing that and surprised by how that person reacts.

The first response is to do good to those who annoy you. The second response is to bless those who curse you. And the final response is to pray for those who have hurt you. Again, these are not easy things to come by.

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO HURT YOU

Have you ever noticed that those people who hurt you have a way of dominating your thoughts? It's hard to get our minds off of what they've done to us! Have you ever been there before? I can think of times when people have wronged me, hurt me, and instead of just moving on, I become obsessed with what they did to me and I play it over and over again, and it just totally consumes my thoughts. And then in all reality, I'm pretty miserable. It makes me miserable.

Well, Jesus has a solution to that problem. You know what it is? It's to pray for those who hurt us! He is telling us that we can pray for our hearts and their hearts to be changed. Praying that God will work in our hearts. Our prayers for sandpaper people can actually serve as a tool to keep us from being destroyed by bitterness and anger that we carry inside.

Communication with God can take the sting out of our relationships with sandpaper people. So praying for sandpaper people may not come naturally to you or me. When we are stuck, Jesus provides for us. As it says in Romans, "The Spirit intercedes for us with words that are hard to express." Hang on to that. Doing good, blessing and praying for those sandpaper people in our lives, it isn't easy. In fact, we can't even do it on our own with our own willpower. But Jesus can. Jesus walks with us and gives us his heart so that we can share our heart with others. We are not alone in this. Jesus is walking with us the entire time. He's given us the ability to do good, to bless, and to pray. Jesus promises to walk with us. We can get rid of that bitterness and anger, and change our hearts.

So today, let's allow the words of Jesus to begin to work in our hearts. You know we can rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us when we do good, bless and pray. May we be transformed as we run in to sandpaper people in our lives. Because we can't change them, but through the Holy Spirit we can be changed. We can be changed in the way we relate to them and how we feel inside.

So, at this time I ask you, Do you have someone in your life that you're struggling with right now? If you do, let's just take a moment to pray:

Jesus, it's difficult to deal with people in our lives that have hurt us and some that just totally annoy us. But you've been there, you lived on this earth. You've experienced everything we experience, and so we pray Lord, that we just grab onto your power, the power of the Spirit as we look at sandpaper people differently in our lives. We pray that our hearts may be changed, one step at a time. Because, Lord, we know that we come to You just as we are. Amen.