

Why is Loving Others Often So Difficult

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Loving others can be extremely difficult at times. A common phrase to refer to those people that we consistently find ourselves challenged to love is “extra grace required” people. But even people we generally like can sometimes be difficult to love. The main reason we run into difficulties in loving others is sin, both ours and that of those we try to love. Humans are fallen creatures. Apart from God and His power, we are selfish, and loving ourselves comes much more naturally than loving others. But love is not selfish; it seeks the best for others (**1 Corinthians 13:5; Philippians 2:3**). Battling both our own selfishness and sin tendencies and dealing with the selfishness and sin tendencies of others can make love a chore.

Another reason it can be difficult for us to love others is that we sometimes misunderstand what true love is. We tend to think of love as primarily an emotional response. The problem is that we cannot always control our emotions. We can certainly control what we do because of the emotions, but too often the emotions themselves just happen. But the kind of love God calls us to have for others is the same kind that He has for us. It is agape love, the essence of which is sacrifice. God’s love for us is a sacrificial love, the kind that sent Him to the cross for our sins. He didn’t save us because we were lovable; He saved us because His love caused Him to sacrifice Himself for us. Do we love others enough to sacrifice for them, even when they are not lovable? Loving others is a matter of the will and the volition, not the emotions.

God died for us at our worst, in the midst of our sin, when we were totally unlovable (**Romans 5:8; John 15:13**). When we make sacrifices in order to love someone, we get a glimpse of the depth of God’s love for us, and we also reflect Him to the world. Jesus told His disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (**John 13:34–35**). Notice He didn’t say, “Feel loving toward one another.” He said, “Love one another.” He commanded an action, not a feeling.

Part of the difficulty of loving others is that we often try to do it on our own, whipping up feelings of love where none exist. This can lead to hypocrisy and “play acting” the part of the loving person, when our hearts are really cold toward him or her. We must understand that we cannot love apart from God. It is when we remain in Jesus (**John 15**) and the Holy Spirit remains in us that we are able to bear the fruit of love (**Galatians 5:22–23**). We are told that God is love and that our love for one another is both enabled by God and a response to His love in us (**1 John 4:7–12**). It can be difficult for us to rely on God and to give ourselves to Him, but He also allows this difficulty so that His glory can be seen all the more. When we love difficult people or choose to love even when we do not feel like it, we demonstrate our reliance on God and allow His power to be displayed in and through us.

Loving others is difficult because they are human and we are human. But in this difficulty, we come to better appreciate the quality of God’s love for us. And when we love others in spite of their lack of lovability, God’s Spirit shines through, He is glorified, others are edified, and the world sees Christ in us.