

BELOVED BE LOVED BE L♥VE

Growing Further Discussion Guide

Be Love

Part 4: Real Love

Pastor Rick Long

*Love is . . . not rude. Love does not demand its own way.
Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.*

1 Corinthians 13:5

Admit it . . . some people are especially hard to love. We all know who they are. They're the difficult people who drive you crazy by being irresponsible, rude, or socially deficient. Or they're the demanding ones—pushy, obsessive, and stubborn. Perhaps someone has disappointed you, let you down, proven to be unreliable or even disloyal. And then there are the destructive people who intentionally hurt others with their deadly behavior, leaving a trail of broken lives in their wake. God says we are to love these people too. But how? How can we possibly love these people as Christ loves? That's the topic of our discussion this week.

Pastor Rick defined 4 types of people who are hard to love but everyone's struggle is different. Identify which type is hardest for you and why?

- Difficult people** – Everything about them is challenging.
- Demanding people** – They make their agenda your agenda.
- Disappointing people** – They hurt you or make you feel guilty, usually not on purpose.
- Destructive people** – They look to harm you with words, actions, or inactions.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF REAL LOVE

LOVE IS NOT RUDE, So . . .

1. I MUST BE TACTFUL, NOT JUST TRUTHFUL.

Name the negative action mentioned in Proverbs 18:13.

- What does this type of behavior say about the person doing it?

We see it everywhere today—especially on television. What does Paul tell us in Ephesians 4:31–32 to stop doing, and why?

- How does experiencing the forgiveness of Christ enable us to let go of anger and bitterness toward those who are rude to us?
- Give one or two ways we can be kind to people who are rude or unkind to us?

Read Proverbs 16:21. What kinds of words characterize a wise and persuasive person?

- We are never persuasive when we are abrasive. Give an example of a time when someone said something abrasive to you. How did their abrasiveness affect your ability to really hear the person? How could they have said it differently?
- The way we say something affects the way it is received. What body language and tone of voice communicate tact? What else can we do to make sure we are speaking truth with tact and with love?
- Today there is a portion of teens and young adults who have little respect and don't care how they are viewed with their tone and body language. How is this our fault and how can we lovingly correct and guide them?

Discipleship—It takes effort, practice, and time to grow in our ability to be tactful. How can we learn the “fine art” of diplomacy over bluntness? Share a few ideas about how to stop interrupting others or worse, taking out our frustrations on them.

LOVE DOES NOT DEMAND ITS OWN WAY, So . . .

2. I MUST BE UNDERSTANDING, NOT DEMANDING.

According to Philippians 2:5–7, whose attitude should characterize our lives as believers? Describe that attitude.

- If anybody had a right to demand people's respect, it was God on earth, Jesus. Why did he not demand honor from those around him?
- When Jesus came to earth, he was not what the Jews expected. Instead of a conquering king coming to save them from the Romans, they had a humble servant-leader speaking of love. Take a moment to discuss the difference between a peaceful message and one sent to intimidate.

How should our spoken language distinguish us as believers? Read Titus 3:2.

- How do kind words demonstrate we are believers in Jesus?
- Discuss how kind and gentle words can lead people to faith in Jesus.

Describe the general rule, often called the Golden Rule, for relational behavior as written in Luke 6:31.

- Share examples of people in your personal life or in history who embody this behavior in your life.
- Take a few moments to discuss why this simply-worded commandment is so difficult to live out.

Ministry—Even in ministry, it is easy to place unreasonable demands upon the service of others. When we choose to be understanding rather than demanding, how is the message of Christ furthered within the body? Give some examples of being flexible instead of being demanding.

LOVE IS NOT IRRITABLE, So . . .

3. I MUST BE GENTLE, NOT JUDGMENTAL.

In Galatians 6:1, we are instructed to go to the person who has done something wrong and help them make it right. What warning is issued in this verse? Why do you think Paul added it?

- How can we help to pick someone up after a failure or mistake?
- We are not perfect; neither are those around us. When we expect the people around us to meet all our needs, we are setting them up for failure. How can we be more realistic in our expectations of others?

Why does Romans 14:12–13 advise us to stop passing judgment on others?

- We are told not to judge others. This does not mean that we can not have an opinion or speak the truth to another person. What is the difference between judgment, opinion, and truth?
- If we are to win others to Christ, how can we learn to look past behavior we know is not biblical and love them anyhow?

Observe the contrast between gentle words and those that are deceitful in Proverbs 15:4.

- The difference between those gentle and deceitful words is love. How do we speak the truth or express our opinions in love?

How does Ecclesiastes 10:4 advise us to respond when someone in authority is angry with us?

- In situations where we are not in charge and we feel something is wrong, what can we do to show God's love?
- The NLT translates this verse, "If your boss is angry with you, don't quit! A quiet spirit can overcome great mistakes." Why are we tempted to quit in these situations and how could a decision to stay where you are, coupled with a quiet spirit, make a difference?

Fellowship—All of us are tempted to do wrong from time to time. How can we help one another flee temptation? If one of us should fall, how can the bond of fellowship help restore us rather than make us feel excluded? Share a story of a time when you have either been turned off from the church by judgmentalism or restored by God's love as shown by others.

LOVE KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS, So . . .

4. I MUST DELETE IT AND NOT REPEAT IT!

Why do you think God asks us to forgive and forget offenses in Mark 11:25?

- What is it in us that makes this choice so difficult?
- Who needs the forgiveness most—the forgiver or the forgiven? Explain your answer.

How does Proverbs 10:12 describe the power of love?

- Share a time you witnessed or were affected by the quarrels, division, or strife stirred up by hatred.
- More than one translation of Proverbs 10:12 uses the phrase “love covers” wrongs or offenses. What do you think is meant by the word “covers”?

What does Proverbs 19:11 say about ignoring a wrong?

- What is the value of ignoring a wrong? Why is this a difficult thing to do?
- We fail to overlook wrongs when we gossip about them or bring them up again. What happens when we do that?

According to Job 18:4, who does anger hurt?

- Discuss the way you feel after you’ve been angry for a long while.
- Share a few examples of historical or modern situations where anger only hurts the one who’s angry.

Mission—A choice to forget an offense done to us by another—whether a fellow believer or a non-believer—can have a great impact on our message to those who don’t yet know Christ. Share an experience when a decision to forgive and forget made a difference for someone else, possibly even winning them to Christ.

Take a moment to review any assignments/challenges made during the personal application and commitment section of your previous meeting. Seeing God at work in the lives of those who commit to him is essential for growth.

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

At the end of the day, the only way to love difficult people is by forgiving them. In fact, forgiveness is the only decision that can help us live in the present and set us free from the past. So when we choose to be tactful and not just truthful, we are instantly forgiving the rude behavior of the difficult person. When we choose to understand rather than demand, we are forgiving the insistent “my way or the highway” conduct of another. Deciding to be gentle when everything in us wants to be judgmental can release us from the pain of disappointment. Hardest of all is choosing to delete an offense rather than harbor it, nurse it, and keep bringing it up again and again. Whatever it is we resent, that is what, in time, we begin to resemble. We need to see that there is no future in the past. The choice to love is liberating.

Who do you need to love this week? Share with your group the difficult relationship in which you need to see God’s power—not necessarily by name, but simply by facing the fact that there is someone you need to forgive. What step will you take? Ask your group to pray for you as you commit to taking that step. Remember that it doesn’t take strength to let go—it takes faith.

Growing Further Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Goals for this Week's Study

- Briefly share one or two of your pet peeves concerning rude behavior.
- Learn how to deal with difficult, demanding, disappointing, and destructive people in our lives.
- Each of you pick one person in your life who is one of the "d's" above and focus on loving them this week.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.

✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60–90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.

At **GRACE** we use our name for the 5 purposes:

Glorify God

Relate to everyone

Act like Jesus

Care for other

Express God's love

✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Growing Further Discussion Guide

- ⇒ This Growing Further Discussion Guide is only a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. For most groups there are too many questions to answer in one session together. After considering the needs of your group you may choose one of the following options:
 - One section of questions
 - One or two questions from each section
- ⇒ Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, add Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.

- ⇒ The questions relating to the five purposes are helpful to develop balance and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can bring your group to an awareness of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- ⇒ Personal application is key to everyone's growth and should be included in every discussion. When asked how he or she intends to apply a certain principle a group member may say, "I need to spend more time in the Bible and in prayer." It is important for you to help group members make applications that are more specific and commit to a specific plan of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 30 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- ⇒ As the leader your goal is to help bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their need for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.