

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

March 23, 2025. What do you want to know? How do I love...everyone?

I Intro.

We're well into 2025, and in the season of Lent. Moving towards Easter. And warmer weather.. We're glad you've chosen to join us as we move into 2025. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. So, make sure you stay connected to keep informed. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

This was the fourth Sunday in our ***"What Do You Want to Know?"*** series. Because we all struggle with our faith at times, and want to ask God some big questions, we're asking this question; **Do we have the freedom to press for understanding about things that just don't make sense?** We believe we have a patient, loving God, who is willing to walk with us through our struggle to understand. We can learn to step out in faith in starting this conversation that God is approachable and cares. All through scripture we see stories of people who were committed to God and yet struggled with BIG questions. They voiced their struggles as prayers. *"How long oh Lord?" "Why is this happening?" "Where are you God?"* Their stories show God welcomes honest dialogue. Even in times of doubt, suffering or struggle. So we know we have a God who encourages us to come to him in prayer with our concerns...our big questions. So, we're embracing this gift from God that allows us to go to him, when things just don't make sense to us. The first week we found God gives us permission to ask the tough questions. The second week we saw where real questions can lead us...a deep personal faith. Last week we started asking specific questions. What is the bible and why does it matter? Today we ask a tough question in our divided world. **How do I love everyone?**

III Sunday.

We started the message by showing pics of 16 somewhat to very controversial people. The purpose was to show us that we place people in boxes based on our worldview. And when we categorize people like this, and see people who aren't like us, we can be triggered to have an unloving response to that person. We do this because it's our lizard-survival brain. Deciding who are safe people and who are unsafe. The box, container, we place them in creates an internal reaction before we can actually give each one some thought. Because we tend to automatically categorize others, people who we have a hard time loving will always have control over us. We know we're supposed to love others but we often don't know the 'how to do this. So, this message will be about HOW, not just WHY, to love everyone. Learning to love others means we have to manage our internal and external responses to people. When we put others in some kind of sorting system, we also have to ask;

“What label am I putting on that box?” We are not here to change those people...but to just love them. Learning to love everyone makes the world better, and gives us control over our lives.

This conversation in our **“What do I need to know?”** series is not to beat you up for not loving everyone or even knowing how to love everyone. This is really difficult, and will be a lifetime battle. We hope to help give you some useful tools. If you put them into your daily life, regularly practice them, CAN grow the ability to love everyone. This world desperately needs people to love everyone. Not accept everything...this is not *“anything goes”*. We need to be, for our mental, spiritual health to be a person who loves everyone. If you don’t, then you, yourself, personally, will be missing out on the life God has called us, and Jesus came, for us to live.

Here are some scriptures about loving everyone. There’s an endless number of these.

Luke 6:35 – *“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.”*

Ephesians 4:2 – *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”*

Ephesians 5:1-2 – *“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Colossians 3:12-14 – *“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience... And over all these virtues put on love.”*

John 15:13- *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

Matthew 5:43-48 - *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

What jumped out to you from all of these passages?

What did it say to you about how we are to love?

This was probably unnecessary, but an important part of this message. It reminded us, what our life was supposed to be about. Learning to love everyone is not an emotion. It is work. You cannot ‘will’ yourself to love hard to love people. You can’t be guilted or shamed into loving everyone. Need to put yourself in their world, experience what they experience. And do some good internal work to see why it’s difficult to love everyone. To begin to identify the boxes and containers we tend to put people in.

Asking:

Why do we put people into boxes? How can we learn to not do that, what does that look like?

I’m going to use a most unlikely passage to show us how to begin the internal work of **HOW** to love everyone. But once we read it, and we unpack it, you’ll begin to see both why we all have a difficult time loving everyone. This is the beginning process, work, to grow the ability to love everyone.

Matthew 7:1-6.

“Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others.

The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye. “Don’t waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don’t throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What elements did you see that may speak to the difficulty of loving everyone?

Super classic passage. We all know this. So, how can the truths in this passage begin a good work within us to be able to truly love everyone?

1. We struggle to love everyone because we often live in and from a place of felt moral superiority. First hard truth. We live in denial that we don’t deserve the same judgment in which we judge others. Notice the word ‘felt’ moral superiority. There’s no basis for our feeling morally superior. *“For ALL have sinned and fallen short...”* We all have created a hierarchy of sins and shortcomings, (really bad ones and the not so bad ones). And ours are always less bad than the things others do. First step is to recognize, admit, we create artificial classifications of who are the ‘good’ people and who are the ‘bad’ people. This passage does NOT say the specific things you judge others for. That’s how we justify our judgement. *“At least I don’t do that!”*

This passage talks about the degree in which we judge others. How harsh, condemning we are towards others, no matter what it is, will be the same degree of accountability (the measure) we will be held to. The conversation is we will be judged for HOW not WHAT we judge others. Beginning of this passage tells us that we tend to go through life laying an ‘augmented reality’ of morality over everyone. In order to love everyone we have to admit that we do this.

2. We struggle to love everyone because we overly focus on other’s “specks”. Let me introduce two bad habits we all have, that cause us to overly focus on other people’s “specks” more than our own “logs”. Two ways we become overly focused on other people’s “specks”.

Confirmation Bias- is the tendency to search for, interpret, favor and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one’s prior beliefs or values. This is us, living in our own information, social, bubble where we only hear, see, read, experience things that already support how we see the world. Things like; 24-hour news, podcasts, reading material, friends and social groups. Because we’re only exposed to people, sources of information that support and agree with what we already believe. Everything in our life, the circle we enclose ourselves in, confirms we’re right. We usually build this insular bubble intentionally. And it begins to ‘deform’ us into only seeing ‘specks’ in others, and we literally become blind to our own ‘logs’. We need to work to see the log in our own eyes about things we believe. And grow our ability to be more open towards people different from us.

Attribution Error- is a cognitive bias that causes people to overemphasize personality traits and underestimate situational factors when explaining someone else’s behavior. It’s also known as the fundamental attribution error. In simpler language. *“I do bad things because of the unfortunate situation I was in. Other people do bad things because they’re just bad people.”* We compare our best to other’s worst. *“I may have a log in my eye, but I’m still better than THOSE people!”* This was the issue in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax collector. I’m good BECAUSE you obviously can see all the bad in the other person. Look at the speck in the other person’s eyes ...

because they're just not good people. And the world we build around ourselves, immersing ourselves in, will be the manner in which we see other's 'specks', and our 'logs' are just normal. I spend my energy trying to fix or correct others because that's the worldview I build around myself. And both of these hurt our ability to 'love everyone'.

3. We struggle to love everyone because we aren't aware of our log. The 'log' or 'plank' is an interesting idea. It's a multifaceted picture of our own tendency to missee other people.

The log is our structure/system of judging. We all have belief systems, worldviews, internal structures that give preference to how the world should work, what we see others through. This again comes from the narrow world we surround ourselves with that convinces us everything we believe and claim to know is all real truth. I live in a world of my own construction that changes how people actually are. We've built our own worldview, system of boxes and containers, we put others in. And when we put others in specific boxes that our log says they belong in, we then assign all of these other qualities to them that we believe come with that box. Because you're a Trump supporter, you voted for Harris, you're white, black, male, female, immigrated to this country, grew up in the country, live in the country, big city. I see you as only that. It affects our ability to love everyone.

The log is our blind spot. Our log is often something we just don't know about ourselves, and can't see. We ALL have beliefs, prejudices, beliefs, habits, quirks, and more that we can't see, but other people experience. It not only blinds us to our own issues, blinds us to our own shortcomings. It affects how we see others, how others see us, and our ability to love everyone.

4. We struggle to love everyone because we won't love them until they change who they are.

Verse 6: ***"Don't waste what is holy on people who are unholy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs! They will trample the pearls, then turn and attack you.*** Basically says; we have a difficult time stopping ourselves from trying to fix people we have problems with or are different than we are. **What are you expecting the other person to do before you can love them?** We will constantly throw our pearls (our worldview of how the world is, should be, our truths, beliefs, values, and how others should live) at others, and then get frustrated with them when they don't believe what we told them, or do what they say. This is our entire online experience. We're all throwing what we believe are pearls before others, and then get mad at them when it doesn't change their mind. In order to love everyone, we have to stop trying to fix them first.

IV Challenge.

So...how fun was all that? Now we can start to really see why we find it hard to love everyone. Because we get in our own way of loving others. The bottom line truth; Jesus has to be our model for loving everyone. **Matthew 9:36** says; ***"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*** The ability to love everyone is the intentional choice to actively decide to design a life that moves us into places and environments that challenge us to see people like Jesus did. We have to be aware of what's keeping us in our own little self-contained insular bubbles. This is why Jesus moved around different circles like he did. When we isolate ourselves, only surround ourselves with people like us, it clouds our eyes, judgment, and we're not able to see the giant 'log' in our own eyes. Because the world we've constructed only points out the 'specks' in other people's eyes.

So, how do you love everyone? Just two things.

1. Look deeply for the things within you that are keeping you from loving everyone. This is what Ash Wednesday was about. Testing ourselves...continually, to see what is lurking around in us. Where there is felt moral superiority, the logs in our own eyes we can't see. The tendency to throw our beliefs all over others, that's holding us back from loving everyone.

2. Move towards the places where you can be stretched and challenged to love those people you find it difficult to love. This is stepping out of our self-made, insular bubbles of sameness. Intentionally stepping into other places, with people different from us. So that will move us to be with people who are different, and discovering they are worthy of love. Love will primarily grow out of action, moving towards others. Our heart will follow what we focus on.

I'm going to say this again. This world desperately needs people to love everyone. Not accept everything...not try to fix everyone. But to simply and as lavishly as we can in that moment, love everyone. YOU need to be, for your own mental, spiritual health to be a person who loves everyone. If you don't, then you, yourself, personally, will be missing out on the life God has called us, and Jesus came, for us to live. And creating a world, bringing heaven to earth, that God called us to.