

Greater Than Everything
Take It to The Limit
November 21, 2021

Good morning, everyone.

I'm so glad you are here or watching online for the final installment in our series, *Greater Than Everything*, in which we've been talking about the power of love.

And that power is reflected in the claim I've made each week, which is that if you can learn to love *all* of the people around you ... including:

- The people who are *like* you ...
- As well as those who are *not* like you.
- And the people who *like* you ...
- As well as those who *don't* like you.

If you can learn to love *all* of those people, almost everything about your life (and, mostly likely, theirs) will be better because of it.

And, in the *first week* of this series, we discovered why that is true.

Then, in the *second week*, we raised the bar on the definition of love because most of us aim too low. Most of us think of love primarily as a feeling that you either have or you don't. Therefore, we expect too little of ourselves and others and we give up too quickly.

In *week three* we talked about the relationship between love and leadership (including the kind that happens without a formal "leadership position").

And we learned that Jesus had some things to say about that relationship which, if implemented, would have an incredibly positive

impact in your family, your workplace – anywhere you have influence (which is what leadership is).

Then, *last week* we looked at Jesus' crazy advice for dealing with the people you don't like and who don't like you.

... which was ...

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

... which is exactly the opposite of what most of us do, right?

Typically, for most of us ...

- We *hate* our enemies
- We do *bad* things to those who hate us –

not good things.

- We curse those who curse us.
- And we would never *pray* for those who mistreat us. Instead, we try to get even with them.

That's just how the world works, right?

... which is why what Jesus is saying sounds crazy and maybe even a little dangerous.

But last week we discovered that it might not be as crazy as it seems ...

... as well as how to actually go about *doing* it – how to actually love people who aren't like us and who don't like us instead of hating them.

And if you missed any of those messages, you can watch the video, listen to the audio, or read

the transcript which are all in the media section of the North Heartland app and website.

Not So Easy

Now, today we're going to close things out by talking about another group of people that all of us have in our lives at some level.

The people we talked about last week – people we'd classify as our *enemies* ...

No one in the world would ever *expect* us to love them and, other than trying to follow Jesus' crazy advice, we would never *choose* to love them.

But the group we're going to talk about today is just the opposite.

This group is made up of people we're *expected* to love and/or have *chosen* to love.

Think about that for a minute.

- Who, in your life, have you *chosen* to love?
- And who are you *expected* to love?

For most of us, the people we've *chosen* to love typically includes ...

- Our spouse or a “significant other”
- Our closest friends
- Someone who has been helpful and supportive to us like a teacher or mentor

And people we're *expected* to love includes ...

- Our parents
- Our children

- Our siblings
- In some cases, our extended family, especially if they live near us.

In addition, if you're a Christian – and I know that not everyone here or watching online *is* a believer in and follower of Jesus, so this part isn't for you ...

But, if you're a Christian, the people *you're* expected to love includes your brothers and sisters in Christ ...

- Meaning “other Christians” who you know and interact with on a regular basis ...
- Meaning “the people who are part of your circle of Christian fellowship” ...
- Meaning “the people who are part of your church with whom you volunteer or meet

with as part of a small group” ...

- Meaning “the pastors and leaders of your church” as well as – if you *are* a pastor or leader – “the people you lead.”

Jesus said – and we talked about this in the first week ...

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 (NIV)

“In fact,” He said, “this is what will mark you and identify you as my true followers.”

“By this,” Jesus said ...

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:35 (NIV)

So, if you're a Christian, the people you're *expected* to love (by Jesus) includes your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now, for the most part, this particular group of people – people you chose to love and are expected to love – is actually *relatively easy to love* – at least in comparison to people we consider to be our enemies.

That's because, in most cases, these are people who are *like* us. They're family, or they're believers in and followers of Jesus, so there's that pre-existing connection.

And these are people who *like* us – which is why we began a *friendship* with them or started *dating* them or *married* them.

So, when we read the definition of love like we did back in week two when we raised the bar ...

It's pretty easy to visualize their names and faces as the "target" (so to speak); as those who should be on the receiving end from us.

For example ...

Love is patient, Love is kind.

"That's exactly how I want to be towards my wife and kids."

*It does not envy, does not boast,
and it is not proud.*

"And that's exactly how I *don't* want to be."

*Love does not dishonor others. It
is not self-seeking (doesn't
always have to have it's own
way).*

"Yeah, I'm working on that."

*It is not easily angered. It keeps
no record of wrongs.*

“Working on that one, too.”

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV)

It's easy to hear that or read that and think, “that's what I want in my relationship with <fill-in-the-blank>.”

It's easy until ... until ... there's “bad blood” between you and them.

It's easy until ...

- They fail you ...
- Or hurt you ...

- Or let you down in some way.

When that happens – and especially if it *keeps on* happening – what was once easy becomes more and more difficult.

In fact, at some point, it can become even harder to love *them* than to love an *enemy* because you *expect your enemies to hurt you!*

But people you've *chosen* to love and are *expected* to love and therefore *try* to love? They're not supposed to do that!

So, it's hard.

- Hard not to be angered.
- Hard not to keep a record of wrongs.
- Hard to protect.

- Hard to trust.
- Hard to persevere.

So, what I want to talk about today is what love *does* to keep “bad blood” from developing ...

- And then damaging ...
- And then maybe even destroying ...

... the relationship between you and someone you’ve chosen to love or are expected to love.

What does love *do* to prevent and deal with bad blood?

High Stakes

And I want you to know that what I’m about to tell you is more than just me putting on my “pastor hat” and passing along some biblical

principles.

What you need to know is that I have a sense of great urgency about what I'm going to say over the next few minutes because so many times I have seen ...

... the relational carnage that happens because someone either ...

- Doesn't know what to do when things start to go south.
- Or simply *chooses not to do it* until it's too late.

And it's heartbreaking to me.

And it's frustrating because it didn't have to get to that point. The carnage could have been prevented, or at least greatly minimized.

But I'm not talking only about damaged and

destroyed relationships between spouses and family members and friends – although I’ve seen more than enough of that.

I’m also talking about ... and if you’re not a Christian this part isn’t for you.

I’m also talking about damaged and destroyed relationships ...

- Within the church ...
- Between people who supposedly love Jesus and follow Jesus.

Until my dying day, I will never understand how it can be that a supposedly “mature Christian” will not do what love does to keep bad blood from developing and destroying relationships between themselves and other believers.

I feel like my head is going to explode when that

happens.

In fact, it is so discouraging and so demoralizing to me that, whenever it happens, I sometimes think about quitting my job as a pastor.

I won't because the Lord won't allow me. But the thought crosses my mind.

Because here's the deal – and those of us who are pastors and teachers don't make this nearly as clear as we should because we want what we teach and preach to have the widest application possible.

In other words, when I give a message, I want as many people as possible – even people who aren't Christians – to say, “oh, I get what you're saying, and I see how I can use that in my life.”

I want that for you when I speak.

Unfortunately ... the downside of that ... and

what I often don't make as clear as I should is that ...

Nearly all of the relational teaching of Jesus and the Apostles is focused on relationships between Christians in the same congregation. <repeat>

Very little of it is specifically targeted towards marriage and family and other relationships.

Now, obviously, all if it can and should be applied to those relationships (and we'll do that in just a bit) ...

... but these things were spoken and written first and foremost to Christ-followers about relating to *other Christ-followers in the same congregation.*

For instance ...

Jesus didn't say, "by loving your spouses, everyone will know that you're my followers. By

loving your kids, everyone will know you're my followers."

Those are good things, and you should obviously do them if you're a Christian.

Instead, Jesus said, "by loving each other" ... and He was talking to a bunch of guys who were *not* family and *not* friends when he called them together.

"When you guys love each other," Jesus said, "*that's* what will make you stand out to the world. *That's* how non-believers will know you are legit."

And years later, when the Apostle Paul wrote in one of his letters to ...

Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

And ...

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:13-14 (NIV)

... he was writing to a bunch of Christians in the same congregation who sometimes ...

- Failed each other ...
- Hurt each other ...
- Let each other down in some way.

Things that happen all the time in every congregation including this one.

All that to say ... I sincerely hope that what I talk about in the next few minutes will help you with the people you're expected to love and the

people you chose to love – your spouse, your kids, your friends, the relatives you’ll see over the holidays.

And I believe it will.

But my *deepest* hope is that if you’re a Christian and this is your church ...

You will take these things seriously *and do them*, especially if there is bad blood beginning to develop or has already developed ...

- Between you and others in this congregation ...
- As well as between you and the leadership of this church, including me.

I don’t enjoy it when people come to me and say, “hey, there’s some bad blood developing between me and North Heartland over <>.”

But I enjoy it even less – frankly, it grieves me – when people (Christians, supposedly mature Christians) leave and say nothing.

Ok, end of pastoral admonishment.

What Love Does

So, what does love *do* to prevent and deal with bad blood with people you have chosen to love and are expected to love?

Four things.

And I think you'll see that these four things in and of themselves are not all that complex. In fact, they are fairly simple.

But when you put them together as a package deal, they are incredibly powerful at preventing and minimizing the damage that comes from

relating to the messed-up fallen sinners we love.

1. Love makes allowances for the weaknesses and failures of the beloved.

... as we read just a couple minutes ago.

By the way, there's a word for that in Christian theology. You may have heard of it.

It's *grace* ... which means treating people better than they deserve and better than they've earned.

What do people *deserve* when they fail us and hurt us and let us down?

They deserve an equal amount of pain. An "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" ... which always leads to bad blood between people.

But what love does to prevent that from happening is to offer grace. Love says, "I'm not

going to hold that against you because ...

- I know you didn't mean it.
- I know you've had a hard day.
- I know you don't feel well.
- I know you're outside of your comfort zone.
- I know there's a lot of pressure on you.

So, I'm going to let it go.”

Love looks for a reason to offer grace. It makes allowances for the weaknesses and failures of those we choose to love and are expected to love.

But sometimes, you get to a point where you just can't do that anymore ... and you *shouldn't*.

How do you know when you've reached that point?

- You *know* when you find yourself feeling *bitter* about having to make allowances, when you *grudgingly* offer grace.
- You *know* when you find yourself having imaginary conversations between you and the other person about what they're doing.

When you reach that point where you can no longer make allowances, what does love do then?

2. Love confronts before anger destroys.

Here's what that means.

Jesus once said ...

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall

not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.”

And in that statement, he’s referring to the Ten Commandments which included “You shall not murder and if you do, you yourself will be put to death.”

That’s the judgement.

“But,” Jesus continued:

“But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

“Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court.

“And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

Now, what Jesus is talking about in this is hard

for us to understand because we don't live in that culture.

So, when we read it, we think, "so you're going to be judged by God and wind up in hell if you get so angry that you call someone a name? Or call them a fool?"

In fact, if you read some of the interpretations by very smart biblical commentators, they go to great lengths to try and explain why that's true and why God is right to judge in that way.

... which is really difficult to reconcile with the fact that God saves us not because of what we've done but because of what Jesus has done and our faith in Him.

So, it's very confusing and strange to us ... but it would not have been to the people who heard Jesus say it.

And in their culture, "Raca" was like the N-word

is to us. It was used to show utter contempt for another person, to say that they're worthless, no better than your spit.

And when Jesus talked about “the fire of hell” they would not have heard what we hear. We hear “eternal punishment in the lake of fire reserved for the devil and his angels.”

They heard, “stinking, smoldering, garbage pit outside of Jerusalem” because the word that (unfortunately) gets translated “hell” is actually the word Gehenna.

And Gehenna was the place where awful things had happened during Israel's history, including the sacrifice of infants to the idol Molech.

And, so, at some point, someone decided, “this area is so horrible that no one should ever go here or live here ever again. Let's make it the city garbage dump.”

And they did.

And fires burned there continuously. And people would bring their trash there to be burned.

And by the time of Jesus, this had been going on for hundreds of years so there was a lot of garbage and a lot of “stink.”

So what Jesus was saying is, “if you literally kill someone, you’ll experience the judgement Moses commanded.”

“But if you are angry and you allow your anger to reach the point where you begin to destroy someone verbally, your relationship is going to stink like trash burning in those smoldering fires of Gehenna. It’s going to wind up in the garbage dump. And it’s going to die. You’ll have killed it.”

“And not just your relationship. Your heart – *you*

- will experience all of that as well. That's the judgement."

"And it's horrible and it's terrible for you and your brother or sister who you've chosen to love and/or are expected to love."

But it doesn't have to be that way because here's what love does when you've run out of grace, and you feel yourself starting to become bitter.

Therefore, Jesus said ...

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

*"First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:23-24
(NIV)*

Wow!

Do you realize what Jesus is saying here?

He's saying that addressing the bad blood in a relationship – confronting the situation, confronting the person – is more important than worship, more important than giving, more important than prayer, more important than becoming a Bible scholar!

And if you're a Christian, it's so easy to kid yourself about that; to get lost in those things (to hide in those things) and ignore the one thing that needs to be dealt with above all else: the bad blood.

So, love confronts before anger destroys.

And sometimes it works. Sometimes the person hears and says "I'm so sorry. I'll try not to do that again."

But sometimes it doesn't ...

... which is why the third thing love does to deal with bad blood (and not to prevent it because, at this point, it's already present) ...

The third thing love does about bad blood is that ...

3. Love forgives ... and then chooses not to remember.

Remember, Paul wrote that followers of Jesus are to ...

Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

The problem is – and I've lost track of the number of times I've explained this over the years, but I keep doing it because we need to be

reminded ...

The problem is that most of us don't understand what forgiveness really is.

First of all, forgiveness is not deciding to pretend that "everything is OK" because everything is *not* OK.

Forgiveness names the "sin" then releases the "sinner" from our judgement.

It says, "I will not demand from you the pound of flesh you owe me because of what you did. Your debt is paid in full. You are released."

Secondly, *forgiveness is not forgetting* what hurt us or caused us pain because some things are so terrible and painful you can't forget. They're always going to be in your memory banks.

And if you choose to, you can call them up anytime you want.

And you can replay and re-feel every terrible thing that happened and use those feelings to justify judgement against the one who hurt you.

But forgiveness says, “I’m not going to do that.”

Forgiveness says, “I can’t forget but I choose not to remember and replay your offense.”

And that’s so critical to understand.

And so critical to do if you’re going to keep bad blood from destroying relationships with the people you love.

And sometimes, grace and confrontation and forgiveness do the trick.

Sometimes those three things individually and collectively are enough to drain off the bad

blood and restore the relationship.

But sometimes they're not. Sometimes the damage is too great.

And in those times what love does ...

4. Is to draw the line because *our love* has limits.

Paul writes that love “always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, and never fails.”

And that's true.

But sometimes *we* are so beaten down and so weakened by what we've experienced with a person we've chosen to love or are expected to love that ...

- We no longer *can* trust.
- We're no longer *able* to hope

- We have no strength *remaining* with which to persevere

And our love has reached its limit.

And when that happens, what love – the love that we have left – what love does is to say to that person, “I can no longer love you in the way you need to be loved. I don’t have it within me.”

“And so, this is the new boundary between you and me. These are the things I’m going to stop doing and these are the things I’m going to start do from this point forward.”

“Not because I don’t love you but because my love isn’t enough to change you. It’s not enough to pull you up out of this pit.”

“And for me to continue to try to love you in the way you need is going to destroy me.”

And, friends, it's OK to say that and do that because "loving someone" to the point of self-destruction is not love. It's co-dependency.

But Rick, didn't Jesus give up his life for those He loved?

Yep. But He chose when to do it.

If you read the Gospels, you'll see that many times people tried to kill Jesus. Satan even tried to get Jesus to kill himself!

But Jesus would not allow that to happen. Instead, he drew the line and said, "It's not yet my time."

And you and I can do the same.

So, what does love *do* to prevent and deal with bad blood with people you have chosen to love

and are expected to love (including, if you're a Christian the people in your church with whom you are connected?)

Four things.

- It makes allowances for the weaknesses and failures
- It confronts before anger destroys.
- It forgives ... and then chooses not to remember.
- And sometimes it draws the line because our love has limits.

So, as you think about the people you've chosen to love and are expected to love are there any of those that you need to put into action today?
This week?

The Blessing

Ok, at long last, we've reached the end of this series.

And I hope it's been as helpful to you as it has been to me because I needed to think about these things again and apply them to my own life.

The ability to love other people really is Greater Than Everything. And it really will change almost everything for the better.

So, as we close out this series, I want to invite you to do something very personal and maybe even a little on the edge.

I want you to think about the three groups we've talked about these past two weeks.

- The people in your life you are expected to

love.

- The people you have chosen to love.
- The people who, for whatever reason, could best be described as your enemy –

... whether it's someone who was once in those first two groups ...

... or maybe someone (or “someones”) “out there” ... meaning people who have a different opinion than you on so many of the issue that divide us these days.

Then what I want you to do something kind of crazy.

We have this song we sing together from time to time which is actually called “the blessing.”

It comes from a part of the Old Testament book of Numbers where God speaks to

Moses and says:

“Tell Aaron and his sons, “This is how you are to bless the Israelites.”

“Say to them [The Israelites]:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

“So, they [Aaron and his sons, when they do that] will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” *Numbers*
6:23-27 (NIV)

And whenever we do this song – at least every time that I can recall – the way we think about it when we plan the service is that we are singing a blessing over you.

We’ve inviting God to bless you whether you’re

in the room or watching online.

But today I want you to sing it over the people you just thought of including your enemies, including those you love who have hurt you and let you down.

Why in the world would we do such a thing?

Because God is love and God has loved us.

As Paul once wrote ...

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

And because God has loved us, we *can* love one another. We *can* pray and speak and sing a blessing over the people around us.

So, please stand right now.

Lord Jesus, we give you these next few moments.

I ask that you give us the strength ...

- To bless the people we love who love us back ...
- As well as those who don't; those who are our enemies.

And I pray that this experience would create a softer heart in us to the people around us in the same way that your heart is soft towards us.

Amen.

One of the things we've been doing for the past several Decembers is a little thing called "Christmas at the Movies" ...

... which is a message series based on Christmas

movies.

And the reason we do it is because ...

- Using clips from a great movie is an exciting and fun way to present the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus.
- ... which means it's a great time to invite friends and families (and maybe even enemies) to come and hear that good news ...
- As well as check out North Heartland

So, without further ado, I present the selections for Christmas at the Movies 2021.

Endnotes