

Day 5: Love

Definition: An intense feeling of deep affection.

Read: Luke 6:27, 1 John 4:19, 2 Timothy 3:16

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My biological father left our family when I was a baby. I wasn't old enough to remember him going, so it didn't have a massive effect on me at the time. A couple of years later my mom got remarried to the best man I know. My stepfather stepped into the role of being my dad when he didn't have to be. As a result of my mom and dad's divorce, I got to see my dad every other weekend. We didn't do much when we were together, but I knew he still loved me.

I never knew why my mom and dad split up; my mom never told me when I was living at home. I suppose she had her reasons, but I wanted to know. One day when I was in college, I made a trip home to ask her. She told me that my dad cheated on her repeatedly. My heart broke, and then I was enveloped with a wave of undeniable anger. I immediately got in my car, drove over to my dad's house, and asked him how in the world he could do that to her. That's the first time I ever saw my dad cry, but at the time, I didn't care.

I held on to that anger toward him. I didn't speak to my father for a long time. However, one Sunday morning, I was sitting in church, and the pastor was talking about forgiveness. He said that if we don't forgive our enemies, all of the anger we have turns into bitterness toward that person and causes our hearts to be hardened. He was right; after spending some time in prayer, I knew I needed to forgive my dad—not just for him, but for my spiritual well-being. So I went to him and offered my forgiveness. It was one of the most liberating things I have ever done. That was the first time I realized what it meant to love my enemy.

I would be lying if I didn't admit that loving your enemies is a tough thing to do. It's probably one of the hardest. However, loving your enemies is what Scripture calls us to do.

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus says: *"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 people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Take a few moments to answer the following questions. Remember, these questions are designed to challenge you and will do so only if you are completely honest with yourself.

Reflection

1. Why do you think Jesus tells us to love our enemies?
2. Are there people in your life that you have a difficult time loving? If so, who are they?
3. What would it take for you to love your enemies? How do you feel like this can be accomplished?

God knows love because He *is* love. He desires you to love others the same way Christ did. Jesus' love for you was so powerful, He died for your sins, and it wasn't a happy death, but one of the most ridiculing and agonizing deaths imaginable. Like me, you may often overlook the simple truth that Jesus died for everyone: the lost, the found, the sinners and the saints. He died for the very people who put Him on the cross. Jesus loved His enemies, and He calls you to do the same.

The Challenge

Do an act of love towards someone you have a difficult time loving.

I know that his challenge is especially difficult, but it is extremely revealing and rewarding. There are many ways to do an act of love. However, this one is up to you. Only you know how you can love this particular individual.

End of Day Reflection

1. How did this challenge make you shine?
2. What was the most difficult part of this challenge for you?
3. What was the most rewarding part of this challenge for you?
3. How do you feel this challenge grew your relationship with Jesus?
4. How can you use what you learned through this challenge to shine daily?