

## **When Love is Hard**

1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-11

Preached: 5/3/2020 – Video Message

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Good Day! Welcome to Germantown Church of God, located in Cascade, MD. I'm glad that you have tuned in today to watch this message. If you are not familiar with our Church I would like to direct your attention to some places where you can find out more about us. We have a Facebook Page for our Church – Germantown Church of God. You can find the previous messages that we have recorded during this season when our public gatherings are suspended. We also have a web site: [www.germantowncog.org](http://www.germantowncog.org). You can find more information there about our Church. We are privileged to serve our community here in Cascade and the surrounding areas.

Germantown Church is a Church that has a history of being engaged in ministry outside the walls of our Church. One of the ministries that we have been pleased to support is the Help Hotline Food bank, which serves individuals and families in need in our community. We encourage donations of food or money to be given to the Food Bank. In ordinary times the first Sunday of each month is designated **Food for the First** when members of our Church family bring non-perishable food items or money for the Food Bank. In this time when we are not able to gather together at our Church you can still donate to the ministry of Help Hotline. If you would like to contribute to Help Hotline, you can send or bring your gifts to our Church and we will pass it along to Help Hotline. (Make checks payable to Help Hotline). As we hear so often, ***We are all in this together.*** Help Hotline is a great way to help others. Thanks.

I would also like to mention that if you are someone who is accustomed to giving your tithes and offerings to our Church to support our ministry, you can mail your gifts to us here at the Church. We are grateful for those of you who continue to do that.

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:5-6

***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.”***

I believe that this is a good word for us as we continue to go through this time when we have been asked, to **Stay Home and Stay Safe**; when we have been asked to practice, **Social Distancing**; when we have been asked to **wear masks and wash our hands often.** Following these guidelines is important. We should do these things. But we also learn that we can trust God to protect us. As we trust Him, He will care for us.

## **Prayer**

**Isaiah 26:3**

**Scripture:** 1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-11

**Message:** **When Love is Hard**

A few weeks ago, I began this series of messages, talking about some of the characteristics of a Good Christian. I'm sure that many of you who are watching this, have at some time made a Faith Commitment to Jesus as your Savior and Lord. When we become followers of Jesus, or choose to become a Christian, there is an expectation that our lives are going to change, that we are going to become more like Jesus. In that process of change, we would expect to see certain characteristics develop in our daily living. We've been talking about some of those characteristics. We would expect

to be people of faith, who believe God. We believe that Christ followers will be characterized by Joy. We believe their lives will be characterized by Peace, and Hope. And we believe that the life of a Christ follower will be more and more characterized by Love. But we discover that the journey of our life is not always smooth and easy. There are bumps in the road. There are dark times. There are difficult times, like we are going through right now. And in those difficult times, we may find that Believing God is hard. Joy is hard. Peace is hard. Hope is hard, and Love can be hard. Today I want to talk about this idea that sometimes **Love is Hard**.

For some individuals and families, being in lockdown with friends or family members has turned out to be a blessing. Couples have had to re-connect, to “get to know each other again”. Parents and children have had to connect with each other. They have had to spend time together and find things to do. And they have discovered a new level of fun. They have discovered that they actually can like each other! They have come to love each other. As I follow the stories of some families on Facebook, I have enjoyed reading about the neat things families and couples are doing to re-connect.

But for some people this has been a difficult time. They have been “stir crazy”. Their nerves are on edge. Many people have had to worry about finances, or losing their jobs. Some families have struggled because they don’t have enough food. The stress and pressure have been too much. For some people, difficult times bring out the worst in us. In this difficult time some people have become aware that **Love has been Hard**. And it is not just during this season. For some people it goes beyond this period. Some people just have a hard time being Loving.

For anyone who is familiar with the Bible, we know that Love is a big deal for God’s people. Jesus taught the importance of Love:

**<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)**

So Jesus expected that His followers would be loving. He even goes so far as saying that the degree to which we practice love will impact others. They will KNOW that you are my disciples. Love is a big deal.

The apostle John, who was in the room with Jesus when he said that seems to have caught the message. He writes: **“We should love one another... we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers.”** John understood that for the one who follows Jesus, we must be people of love. And he tells us what love doesn’t look like and what it does look like. He refers to a story from the Old Testament as an example of what love does not look like. The story is found in Genesis 4 – the story of Cain and Abel. Cain and Able brought offerings to the Lord. The Lord communicated that Abel’s offering was acceptable but Cain’s was not. Cain was incensed. Filled with rage he killed his brother. John says that Cain was filled with evil. On the other hand, later in this passage, John tells us what love does look like. If anyone sees someone in need and has the resources to help that person, if they have the love of God in them, they will step up and have mercy on that person.

So we learn what Love looks like. Loving others is love that sacrifices the way Jesus did for us. It is love that puts the needs of others ahead of our own needs. It seeks good for others. It seeks to bless and encourage others. But for some people **loving others is too hard**. What makes love hard?

There may be many answers to that question, more than we have time to investigate today. Let me suggest a few thoughts:

**Fear.** I suspect that for some people it is hard for them to love because they are fearful that their needs will not be met. If I put myself out there, sacrifice for others, think about others before myself, who is going to take care of me? That person may need to learn to trust others. They may need to be surrounded by loving people and affirmed by others.

**Wounded in the Past.** Christian counselors know that when a person has experienced trauma and wounding – emotional or physical or sexual – in their past they will have a hard time expressing true love to others. Its too risky. That person needs to experience healing of that wound before it will be safe to love others. If you are someone who is controlled by fear, or you have been hurt by others in the past and that makes it difficult for you to love, I encourage you to seek help from a pastor or counselor.

**Sinful Nature.** While there may be emotional reasons why some people have a hard time loving, for many people it is a spiritual problem. In Galatians 5, Paul talks about 2 types of people. Paul presents an image of a person who is controlled by sin. He says, the sinful nature produces “**hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.**” Those are all characteristics of an Unloving person. An unloving person is more focused on themselves. On the other hand he says, when the Spirit of God controls our lives, the Spirit will produce: “**Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**” So if we want to become more loving, we must turn over control of our lives to the Spirit of God.

Let me conclude today as I share a final thought to share about becoming more loving. We become more loving when we discover that **we are Loved**. In the next chapter of his little book, John writes these words: “**Let us love one another for love comes from God.....Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another!**” The one Being who knows more about us than anyone else, who is aware of all of our faults and imperfections, loves us unconditionally. Who then are we to withhold a loving spirit and loving actions from others.

Maybe today you are seeing that you someone for whom Loving is Hard. This time of staying in and not being able to go about your normal activities has given you opportunity to reflect on your life. You have learned that you are not as loving as you would like to be. You have brought pain to yourself or to others. I believe that God can change your heart and make you a more loving person. He has not turned His back on You. He Loves you and longs to help you become more loving. Express your regret for past mistakes to the Lord through repentance – acknowledging your sin and turning from it. Ask the Lord to forgive you and change your heart. Ask the Lord to take over control of your life through His Spirit and make you a more loving person. God has loved you and can make you a loving person.

**Prayer**

**Blessing:**