

Love Trumps Hate

A Two Part Message

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Text: Matthew 5:13 - 16 (MSG); 1 Peter 3:9-10, 13-16

Thesis: We want to talk about how we can present ourselves in our culture in a way that communicates respect, understanding, and love. In our polarized culture, we have an opportunity to change the conversations and to reflect the unconditional love of Jesus... that kind of authentic love that always trumps hate.

1. **Introduction**

- a. Our last political cycle was intense, wasn't it? The division and polarization in our culture was on full display on social media, in the news, and in the election process. The polarization was, and it still is, in our face every day.
- b. **We live in a broken world.** We are very polarized as a nation. People on the far left and far right are using inflammatory rhetoric, using judgmental and condemning language, mocking and making light of what others say that they think, feel, believe, or need.
- c. Sometimes, neighbors or family members can't see eye to eye on issues and as a result, relationships are strained and damaged.
- d. Even Christians are dividing and fragmenting over differences of opinions and beliefs around a myriad of issues.
- e. **Not only do we live in a broken world, but we live on a battle field.** We think that our enemy is flesh and blood, when the Scripture teaches us differently. (See Ephesians 6:10-18). Listen to this excerpt from the CS Lewis classic, *The Screwtape Letters*.
 - i. The plot and characters of *The Screwtape Letters* are used to address Christian issues, primarily those to do with temptation and resistance to it. The story takes the form of a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood, a junior tempter. The uncle's mentorship pertains to the nephew's responsibility in securing the eternal doom of a British man known only as "the Patient."
 - ii. *My dear wormwood, Be sure that the patient remains completely fixated on politics. Arguments, political gossip, and obsessing on the faults of people they have never met serves as an excellent distraction from advancing in personal virtue, character, and the things the patient can control. Make sure to keep the patient in a constant state of angst, frustration, and general disdain towards the rest of the human race in order to avoid any kind of charity or inner peace from further developing. Ensure the patient continues to believe that the problem is out there in the "broken system" rather than recognizing there is a problem with himself. Keep up*

the good work, Uncle Screwtape. Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis. 1942.

- iii. I posted that quote from *The Screwtape Letters* on Facebook on 1/25/17. Then, I posted the following comment:
 - (1) In the midst of a troubled, polarized, judgmental, and fearful culture, I am working on showing up as my best self. With the Lord helping me, I want to show up as a person who listens well, who connects deeply, who labors faithfully for good, and who loves unconditionally. I have a long way to go, and am learning a lot about myself and others. And, I believe the Lord has called us to live in the midst of this culture as shining examples of the king and his kingdom in our values, actions, attitudes, affections, and practices. I have a lot of work to do and a lot more personal transformation to experience, but the Lord is worth it... and so are you.

- f. Yes, we live in a broken culture that is polarized and divided. Yes, we live on a battle field where an enemy seeks to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). We often are blinded to our real enemy and to the reality of the battle.

- g. **And, there is good news: I believe that there is a better way to live— the way of love as revealed in Jesus. In this two part message, we want to talk about some ways to show up well and differently in a polarized culture.**

- h. We want to talk about how we can present ourselves in a way that communicates respect, understanding, and love. In our polarized culture, we have an opportunity to change the conversations and reflect the unconditional love of Jesus... that kind of authentic love that always trumps hate.

- 2. Let's consider some ways this week and next week to show up well and differently in a polarized culture.

- 3. **And, I want to emphasize that we grow in our capacity to respect, understand, and love unconditionally. It is a process. We are learning and growing in our capacities to show up differently. None of us have arrived. None of us are perfect. And, we all have the chance to learn, to grow, to mess up, and to try again.**

How does love triumph over hate?

I want to look at two passages that inform the way I want to show up. By the way, I can't change how others present themselves, how they interact, or how they respond. I simply focus on my part, show up as best I can, and trust the Holy Spirit to use our interaction as he sees fit.

1. **Get a vision of how to show up in this world like Jesus.**
 - a. *Matthew 5:13 “Let me tell you why you are here. You’re here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You’ve lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage. 14 “Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. 15 If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. 16 Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16 MSG).*
 - b. We show up as salt and light in this world to bring out the God-flavors and the God-colors around us.
 - i. **God-flavors:** We live in a beautifully diverse world full of so many different cultures, ethnic groups, languages, and people. There are so many different tastes, sights, and sounds. We get to bring out the diversity which the Lord has made. Don’t disdain our differences and diversities. Seek to understand and to celebrate our differences and diversities.
 - ii. **God-colors:** We live in magical world, with beauty all around us and inside us. We get to highlight the colors. We get to point out the radiant glories of God all around us and in each other. We get to see the glories the Lord has deposited in each person, in each people group, and in every place; and, we get to highlight those brilliant colors for others. When people connect with beauty, they connect with God. Yes, we are all vandalized pieces of art. And, the Lord is in the restoration business.
 - c. Salt preserves. Salt seasons food and brings out the flavors of food. Light gives illumination and highlights. Light chases away the darkness.
 - d. To function as salt and light in our culture, we need to be present and on display. **Influence requires proximity.** When we distance from people or cut off from them, we lose the ability to influence their life for good.
 - e. Jesus hung out with people who were fundamentally and radically different than himself. Jesus chose to hang out with people who saw things differently.
 - i. In Jesus’ day, there were several political groups with different responses to the Romans and with different views of government: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, and Essenes. Jesus hung out with people representing totally divergent views.
 - ii. Even the disciples whom Jesus called saw things differently. Simon was a Zealot. He was a part of a political party that sought to incite violence and rebellion against the Roman Empire, to expel

them from Israel by military might. Then, there was Matthew, a tax-collector. Tax-collectors were seen as traitors to their nation, on the opposite end of the political spectrum from Zealots. They accommodated to the Roman Empire and sought to profit from it.

- iii. So, I believe it is possible to spend time intentionally with people who think and believe differently than we do, to love unconditionally, and to stay connected, like Jesus.

2. **When interacting with others, be prepared to share what you think, feel, and believe with gentleness and respect.**

a. *Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:8-9).*

- i. **Be agreeable:** live in harmony
 - (1) You can live contentiously and seek to foster disagreement and hostility, or you can work to promote harmony and understanding.
 - (2) Unity doesn't mean that we are the same, but that we stay connected.
- ii. **Be sympathetic**
 - (1) Sympathy: the act or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings or interests of another
- iii. **Be loving**
 - (1) Choose to accept others and stay connected, even when others are broken.
 - (2) Love is laying down your life, your preferences, and your demands for the sake of others
- iv. **Be compassionate**
 - (1) Compassion is feeling what someone is feeling and looking for ways to alleviate their distress.
 - (2) Jesus was moved with compassion; that motivated him to heal, save, deliver, encourage, redeem, restore, and renew.
- v. **Be humble**
 - (1) Not proud; not thinking of yourself or your opinions, beliefs, or preferences as better than other people
 - (2) Humility means valuing love more highly than being right.
- vi. **Choose to bless**
 - (1) *Your job [is] to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing (1 Peter 3:9 MSG).*

b. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. **Do not fear [their***

intimidation]; *do not be frightened [by what they fear nor fear what they call conspiracy].*" [See Isaiah 8:12.]

- i. *If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? 14 Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought (1 Peter 3:13-14 MSG).*

- c. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16).*
 - i. **Be ready to share what you believe and why you do what you do, and share how it flows from your relationship with Jesus as Lord of your life.**
 - (1) For instance, someone asks you a question, "Why do you volunteer at the prison or at the school?"
 - (2) Don't say: "Oh, I just like helping people." That is true, but that isn't the whole story.
 - (3) Say, "I love volunteering because Jesus loves you, and I love you. I want to help others because Jesus has helped me so much."
 - (4) Do you see the difference? I think that is one way to set apart Christ as Lord in your heart.

 - ii. **Be gentle when you share.**
 - (1) Sometimes, we share in a condescending way, or we share in a judgmental way.
 - (2) Remember: a soft word turns away wrath.
 - (3) Gentleness shares and then lets the person think what they think, feel what they feel, and decide what they believe.

 - iii. **Be respectful when you share.**
 - (1) Where has common courtesy and civility gone in our culture? Courtesy and civility are no longer common, are they? We yell at one another. We argue. We attack. Yikes.
 - (2) There is a better way. Treat others with respect, the way you want to be treated.

3. **Summary:**
 - a. We have an awesome opportunity to show up differently in culture today. Christians are called to be salt and light in this culture. We are to exemplify faith, hope, and love. People need to see our faith in the Lord on display. They need to hear our hope in the Lord. And, they need to see and experience the love of the Lord through our lives.

 - b. In our polarized culture, we have an opportunity to change the conversations and reflect the unconditional love of Jesus... that kind of authentic love that always trumps hate.

- c. Next week, we want to talk about ways to grow in our capacity and skills so that we can present ourselves in a way that communicates respect, understanding, and love.

4. **Ministry Time**

Love Trumps Hate

Part 2, 4/30/17

Text: John 1:14

Intro: We are talking about how we can present ourselves in our culture in a way that communicates respect, understanding, and love. In our polarized culture, we have an opportunity to change the conversations and to reflect the unconditional love of Jesus... that kind of authentic love that always trumps hate.

Last week we talked about the fact that we live in a polarized and divided culture. We saw that polarization on full display in our last political cycle. And, deep divisions continue to fester and manifest today.

We live in a **broken culture** that is polarized and divided. We live on a **battle field** where an enemy seeks to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). We often are blinded to our real enemy and to the reality of the battle.

And, there is **good news**. I believe that there is a better way to live– the way of love as revealed in Jesus. In this two part message, we are talking about some ways to show up well and differently in a polarized culture.

Last week, we looked at two passages of Scripture that help us understand how we are to show up in culture.

1. Matthew 5:13 - 16 (MSG). We show up as salt and light in this world to bring out the God-flavors and the God-colors around us.
2. 1 Peter 3:9-10, 13-16. When interacting with others, be prepared to share what you think, feel, and believe with gentleness and respect.

Today, let's start with John 1:14. Then, we will consider some other principles and ways to show up as our best selves, like Jesus.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

1. **In this life of following Jesus, we are called to live in creative tensions.**
 - a. God is one and Trinity.
 - b. God is merciful and judge.
 - c. God is sovereign and God has given people free will.
 - d. God is in control and he tells us to pray for his will to be done.
 - e. Jesus is fully God and fully man.
 - f. Jesus came full of grace and truth.

2. Francis Frangipane says, “If you have only heard the truth, then you have heard only half of the story.”
3. The road to heaven is straight and narrow, and there are ditches on both sides.
 - a. **If you try to get rid of the tension, you fall into a ditch.**
 - b. Yes, Jesus is truth. Yes, the Lord gives us his word which is true. Yes, Jesus sees and discerns truly. In truth, the Lord tells how life works and how it doesn’t work. Because he is truth, the Lord tells us when we sin and go astray.
 - c. And, Jesus is full of grace. In his grace, the Lord forgives, redeems, and restores. By his grace, he separates our sin from us as far as the east is from the west. By his grace, he loves us unconditionally and invites us to experience his help and restoration. In his grace, he lets us choose to follow him or not.
4. **When you deal with people, deal with them like Jesus deals with you– full of grace and truth.**
 - a. Some people weaponize the Bible and use it to hurt people. We have a saying that some people “beat others over the head with the Bible.” It shouldn’t be that way.
 - b. Yes, people need to know the truth. And, the Lord tells us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
 - c. You can speak truth in unloving ways:
 - i. To bully others (trying to force them to agree with you)
 - ii. To shame others (you should know better or know this)
 - iii. To condemn others (use the truth to put others down or to judge)
 - iv. To slander others (you can misrepresent the truth or pull what someone says out of context and hurt them)
 - d. **Remember this: correction without relationship often causes rebellion.**
 - i. Learn how to love and connect with others.
 - ii. Seek to build genuinely loving relationships with others.
 - iii. **Avoid confronting and correcting people without the context of a loving relationship.**
 - iv. **When the time is right and the Lord opens the door, you can speak the truth in love and full of grace.**
5. **I believe that we need to remember to communicate grace when we want to share truth.**
 - a. *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).*
 - i. Don’t communicate in a prideful or judgmental way when you seek to help someone understand truth.
 - ii. Be gentle. Be aware of your own shortcomings and failures.

- iii. Remember: the goal is restoration, not condemnation.
 - iv. That is being full of grace and truth.
- b. *When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, 42 saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. 43 "For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, 44 and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).*
- i. Some people gloat in confronting others. Some people take pride in pointing out the faults and failures of others.
 - ii. But, Jesus wept when he saw the condition of his people and the visitation they missed.
 - iii. Be compassionate and full of grace when trying to help others see the truth.
- c. *And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-25).*
- i. Some people are just quarrelsome; they are looking for an argument. They want to fight. They want to correct everyone and fix others.
 - ii. The Lord has a better way. We must be kind to everyone, trying to teach gently and avoiding treating them with resentment because they don't think like us or believe like us.
 - iii. When someone disagrees, we must instruct gently. In other words, we don't come on like an attack dog.
 - iv. We have conversations hoping for reconciliation, restoration, and repentance, but not forcing people. We ask the Lord to show them the truth in his grace.

Here are some other principles and ways to show up as our best selves, the way Jesus wants us to show up.

- 1. **Stay in the process of becoming and knowing who you are in the Lord.**
 - a. All of us are in the process of being changed by the Lord. Jesus isn't finished with any of us yet (Philippians 1:6).
 - b. As we are changed, we develop new skills and new capacities. And, we learn to live and walk in the powers and realities of the age to come, to show up as sons and daughters of God. The world longs for you to show up as the person God is making of you (Romans 8:19-21).

- c. You and I are joining the Lord on his mission to renew, restore, redeem, and reconcile all things to Jesus. What a high calling! And, we get to start right now.
 - d. It is hard work. It does take intentionality. But it is so worth it-- to stay in the process of becoming who you were made to be in Jesus.
2. **Practice showing up as curious and as a learner.**
- a. Jesus asked questions. Jesus grew in favor and stature with God and men. Jesus connected deeply with people. Jesus interacted profoundly with others because he saw deeply and discerned rightly (Mary at Simon's house, woman caught in adultery, Zacchaeus, etc.).
 - b. We live in an anxious or fearful culture. Curiosity is one way to sow up in a way that is different than being anxious.
 - c. And, we don't know what we don't know. **When we show up as a learner, we validate that the Lord has created people in his image.** Each person has a story and a history that has formed their thoughts, values, and beliefs. Let's choose to show up curious and as a learner.
3. **Choose to love unconditionally.**
- a. Jesus said, "I didn't come to condemn or judge." And, neither should you!
 - b. So, make a decision to love people not matter what they say or think. That is the way the Lord loves you.
 - c. You don't have to agree with someone to love them.
 - d. Someone doesn't have to change the way that they think, the way they express themselves to you, or they way they talk to you for you to love them well.
 - e. Love doesn't demand its own way, doesn't have to be in control, and doesn't judge others for seeing things differently or believing things differently.
4. **Work to listen deeply.**
- a. People feel what they feel, think what they think, and believe what they believe; and, we need to work at listening for where they are coming from.
 - b. Seek to connect with people, not to correct them.
 - c. You can learn and grow from seeking to understand what others have experienced or how they see things.
5. **Grow in your capacity to dialogue well.**
- a. **Listening well has two parts:**
 - i. **Active reflection:** This is what I hear you saying....

- ii. **Inquiry:** ask questions for understanding. “I wonder what experiences inform your understanding or beliefs.”
 - b. Seek first to understand, then you can seek to be understood.
 - c. Avoid arguing, trying to defend yourself, or attacking the other person’s position.
 - d. Avoid debating, using right / wrong thinking, or trying to win (so someone has to lose).
 - e. Simply share how you see things or what you believe. In dialogue, help people to hear your perspective.
 - i. Avoid saying, “This is right. This is the only way. This is what that Scripture means. There is no other way to see it.”
 - ii. Rather, say: “This is what I believe. This is what I think. This is what I feel. This is my understanding. I see that differently. This is what I believe that Scripture means.”
6. **Learn how to be defined and yet connected.**
- a. When you have heard what others have to say, ask them if you can share how you see things.
 - b. Practice saying what you believe, think, or feel; and, do so in love, gentleness, and respect.
 - c. Avoid being defensive, accusatory, or judgmental.
 - d. Then, make a choice to stay connected.
 - e. **By the way, when you are in a group of people who are pontificating and looking for an argument, how do you know if it is going to be helpful to share your opinion or not?**
 - i. I just learned this from a friend recently.
 - ii. **Test the waters by saying, “I see that differently.”**
 - iii. If they really want to have a conversation, they will ask you.
 - iv. If they just want to tell you how it is, they won’t ask you how you see things or why you see things differently.
 - v. **Remember: you don’t have to show up for every argument to which you are invited.**
7. **Avoid making or posting inflammatory comments or posts on social media**
- a. Choose your words wisely.
 - b. Don’t generalize.
 - c. And, avoid posting everything you think or feel about difficult subjects on social media. **Some people say things in social media that they would never say so rudely face to face.** You want to invite people into real dialogue, so avoid pontificating and conflicting.

- d. And, don't get baited into showing up for every fight on social media.
8. **Develop guiding principles**
- a. Come up with guiding principles to help you show up as your best self, as the person you want to be.
- b. **Rather than being reactive, we seek to be reflective and thoughtful.** Decide how you want to show up in a relationship, a conversation, or a situation. When you feel your anxiety rising, get access to your guiding principle. Remember how you want to show up. Then, ask the Lord for courage and seek to stay connected in the midst of your anxious thoughts.
- c. **We define guiding principles as the deeply held beliefs, convictions, or values that help us make decisions in our day-to-day life.** Write your guiding principles in language that is powerful and that moves you into action.
- d. Illustration: When it comes time for me to have a difficult conversation, I reflect on how I want to show up. "I want to show up curious and as a learner (listener), and I choose not to be defensive."
9. **Summary: Let's show up differently.**
- a. Be salt and light, bringing out the God-colors and God-flavors around you
- b. Be gracious, courteous, and respectful (1 Peter 3:15)
- c. Be kind
- d. Be forgiving
- e. Be merciful
- f. Be patient
- g. Be positive
- h. Be gentle
- i. Be helpful
- j. Be sensitive (remember: people see things differently from you and have different experiences)
- k. Be full of grace and truth, like Jesus