



May 31, 2020

Discussion Guide

Face the Issue:

This week, Brian taught us that the key to getting through any situation is to live as a Christian. To live as a Christian means to love.

In the movie *Love Story*, a dying Ali McGraw whispers to Ryan O'Neal "Love means never having to say you're sorry." That is not Biblical, at all.

For the Christian, the opposite is true. Love means saying "I'm sorry" very often because, as followers of Christ, we realize just how far short of His standard we fall. We find ourselves apologizing to God and sometimes to the person we have failed to love.

Has there ever been a time when you found it especially hard to love someone. What made it tough to love. How did you feel about yourself when you realized your failure? Who was at fault?

Is it harder to love relatives, enemies, odd people at church, strangers? What makes it more difficult?

Into the Word

Read Romans 7:21–25.

One obstacle to love is our environment. We live in a war zone. Simply put, this is a fallen world, and everything in it fights against loving relationships.

One pastor described sin and its effects this way: Imagine that sin is blue. Now look about you. If sin is blue, then everything in the world is blue. Some of it may be dark blue and some light blue, but it's all blue because sin has tainted *everything*.

That includes us and our best efforts to love. We live in a fallen world where the norm is hate, or at best, apathy. In this world, love is hard work. If love happens, it's only because the power of God is at work in us and through us.

It is especially hard to love other people.

Do you remember this old song by country singer Tom T. Hall?

"I love little baby ducks, Old pick-up trucks, Slow-moving trains, And rain. I love, little country streams, Sleep without dreams, Sunday school in May, and hay. And I love you too."

Most of the things Tom T. loves are truly lovable. Who doesn't love fuzzy puppies? But notice what's missing from his list: babies who won't stop crying, stubborn co-workers, and meddling relatives; parents who divorce, spouses who are unfaithful, and business associates who rip you off.

Maybe he didn't include those on his list because they don't rhyme. Or maybe because it's just plain hard to do. But that's what God commands: Love your neighbor; love your enemies (Mark 12:31, Matt. 5:44).

The call to love is a call to obedience, to be like Christ when we'd rather act like the devil. Love, in this way, is difficult. It's an act of the will. To choose anything less is to invite the world to conform us to its image rather than to conform to the image of Christ and His sacrificial love.

Apply The Word

Recall a time when you found it hard to love. What were the factors involved? How could love have improved the relationship?

Sometimes people are unwilling to accept our love. Can you think of someone you must love from a distance? How will loving them, even when they are unaware of your love, change your attitude toward them? How will it change your prayer life?

Do you believe it's tougher to love than to be patient or gentle or put to use some of the other spiritual gifts?

How have you grown in love during your Christian walk?

Make a list of people you want to love better and begin praying for them. See how your feelings toward them change.