

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

158. How Are We Doing at "Love Your Neighbor"?

You are listening to episode 158 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast titled, How Are We Doing at "Love Your Neighbor"? Welcome to the podcast today! I've been mulling the subject of this episode around in my head for a few weeks. I guess it all began when I heard a prominent Christian figure say on a podcast, "We are not enemies. We are brothers and sisters." That hit me. It's something I know and it's something I believe, but hearing his words caused me pause. They also reminded me of a part of Scripture I haven't heard lately, and maybe it's a good time to bring it to the forefront of our minds. If you could use a dose of encouragement and hope when it comes to our relationships with others today, I invite you to hang out with me here for this next short while as we contemplate how we are doing at "love your neighbor." Let's get to it.

My kids grew up watching two lively vegetables--Bob, the tomato, and Larry, the cucumber--our VCR. If I remember correctly, we had an extensive collection of the Christian-based cartoon vegetable episodes from VeggieTales. Are you familiar with them? One of their favorites was "Are You My Neighbor?" which depicted in their own unique way the story of the "Good Samaritan" in the Bible (Luke 10:25-37), complete with poem and song. But God used that video episode to open the hearts of our young kids to the concept of "love your neighbor," and what that truly means.

I don't know about you, but I think we could use a big dose of this truth today.

Over the last number of years, we've seen our nation and the people who reside in it become increasingly divided. About all sorts of subject matter. Both in person and online. I know you see it too. And for some reason, because of this division, we can no longer accept opinions or beliefs of others if they are different than ours. At least it appears this way. It's disheartening, isn't it?

I know people who were once friends, but because of their differences in politics, they chose to end their friendship. That hurts my heart.

I also know next door neighbors who no longer speak to each other because of a sign one of them had in their yard during the last election. That's sad.

I've watched on social media how some have written words of anger, rage, and hate towards others because of their differing opinions. Would they have said those words to the faces of these people? I don't know, but I can't blame the many who have logged off social media for good because of all the hate spewing through their screens.

I've never witnessed more division, hate, and anger towards one another than right now.

Maybe that's why this person's words I heard on the podcast struck me so. "We are not enemies. We are brothers and sisters." Yet, somehow, we've become enemies. Maybe not you and me, but as a society,

we believe the worst about others, not the best. We believe more of what the media says than what God says. We don't treat others as we want to be treated. We've become increasingly self-centered and selfish, fulfilling our own desires instead of caring about those around us. And if anyone has a different opinion or believes something different than us, well then, they must be our enemy.

Now, I realize I'm generalizing here, but I'm truly in shock of how we treat each other, Christians and non-Christians alike. It's as if hate has become normal and we can no longer disagree peacefully in most circles. We've certainly strayed from what God told Moses to speak to the Israelites, recorded in the book of Leviticus.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18 NIV).

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus also spoke of this in Matthew 22 when He was asked which of God's commandments is the greatest?

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'" (Matthew 22:37-40 NIV).

Love God and love others. What a world it would be if we all lived by these two commands!

So, how are we doing? How are you and I following this command to "love your neighbor as yourself"? Are we giving in to the hate and division, or are we loving our neighbors well? Our "neighbor" isn't just someone who lives next door to us. Our neighbor can be anyone with whom we encounter, or anyone we email, or the stranger we meet in the grocery store or in the parking lot. It's much more than just the person in the house next to us. It's even the person we can't stand or the one who treats us awfully.

I think it's a good day to pause and ask ourselves some tough questions like this.

It's a good day to remind ourselves, "we are not enemies; we are brothers and sisters."

Friend, I realize it's not news to you that the world we live in is contrary to God's ways and will. And it appears our spiritual enemy is having a heyday in it. He's the one behind this division and hate. He's the one who is causing friendships to dissolve over issues that truly don't matter in eternity. This enemy is the one who is stealing, killing, and destroying much, including relationships. Jesus warned us of this enemy's tactics in John 10:10. "The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]" (AMP).

The thief, this enemy, will do all he can to destroy everything that's good and everything that's of God. He's influencing the minds and hearts of people to be at odds with each other and at odds with God. And it looks as if he is winning right now.

But we know the truth of God's Word. We know how it's going to end, right? We know God is victorious and so are those who believe in Him through Jesus.

What are we doing in the meantime, however? Are we giving in to the schemes of this evil one or are we willing to follow God's commands, including the one to love our neighbor? We do have a choice, and what we choose is vitally important. Not just for our lives, but for those around us and for this world.

The reality is, if we don't do something about this division now, it's only going to get worse.

This is not a political post, but you are just as aware as I am that in this election year, our country is extremely divided. Maybe more than ever. And the closer November comes, the more intense the division will likely be. I shudder to think of it. I'm concerned, friend. I'm concerned of how the hate might grow and magnify, and I wonder how it will affect us in the months to come. In the land of the free and the home of the brave. I'm sorry, but when we're living in such hate, we are not free. Hate is a bondage we are not meant to live in.

If I may be so bold to say, no matter who you vote for, you are not my enemy. No matter if you're on the blue side or the red side, you are not my enemy. Even if you don't believe in the same faith as I do, you are not my enemy. Even when we may not see eye to eye on policies and procedures and pandemic solutions, you are not my enemy. Yes, even if you hate me, call me names, or cancel me, you are not my enemy. I will never consider you my enemy, no matter how different we are.

We are not enemies. We are brothers and sisters.

Hebrews 13:1 (NCV) might state it best, "Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters."

Friend, will you join me and stand up against this hate and division?

Will you join me in choosing to love our neighbors, even if they act differently, believe differently, vote differently, raise their kids differently, and live differently than we do? Even if they are unkind, unloving, and hateful to us? And will you join me in spreading this message of love instead of hate?

We are not enemies. We are brothers and sisters.

It begins with us. We may not think we can do much, but a roaring fire begins with just a flicker of a flame, right? A book begins with one word. A song begins with a single note. One person can make a difference, and that person can be you. That person can be me. I encourage you to choose to love. Not in your own strength, but in God's. Ask Him every day to help you love others. Name the people specifically that you want to love with God's love. He will help you, just as He helps me.

And when we mess up (because we will), we can humble ourselves and apologize. Sometimes that humbling of ourselves is the most loving thing we can do, and it often softens the hearts of others.

Will you pray with me today?

Almighty God, we thank You and praise You for your unconditional love and grace. You are the ultimate source and example of love, so we turn to You in our quest to love You and others better. Your Word is clear about how you call us to love and show grace to one another, yet Lord, so often we don't do this well. Your Word also tells us that love covers a multitude of sins. So, we know love is the answer. We come to you asking for help. We can't love others well on our own. We've tried and we've proven we just

can't. But You can and You do. Please fill us with the desire to love and not hate. Please show us how we can do our part to eliminate this hatred and division that seems to be everywhere we turn. Use us, Lord. Help us to love others better. May we glorify You in every thought, word, attitude, and action. Thank You. We love You. Thank You for loving us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

If you are encouraged today through this episode, I invite you to share it with a friend who could use this encouragement, too. And if you have an extra minute today, would you please leave a rating and/or a review from wherever you're listening? This helps spread the message of this podcast. Subscribe if you haven't already to never miss an episode.

Love your neighbor. May that be our motto and our message in the days, weeks, and months to come. Thanks for tuning in today. I am praying for you. God bless you!

Links in this episode:

[Leviticus 19:18](#) NIV

[Matthew 22:37-40](#) NIV

[John 10:10](#) AMP

[Hebrews 13:1](#) NCV

[Access my free Resource Library](#) filled with tools to help you live an encouraged life!

Julie Lefebvre