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SERIES: Christmas: Receiving And Giving Love

TITLE: Program 5 – Dealing With Difficult Relationships

FRIDAY

OPEN

When it comes to relationships, Christmas can be one of the most difficult times of the year because it's supposed to be a time of family. It's supposed to be a time of love. And yet, maybe it's your daughter, or maybe it's your son, or maybe it's the grandchildren and they refuse to come. And once again the wound is open and made even worse. And it's supposed to be a time of love, a time of giving, and a time of sharing. What can you do, Beloved, to make Christmas what it ought to be? We'll talk about it today.

PART ONE

When we think of Christmas, we think of a time of family. We think of the time of getting together and having meals and festivities. And all the commercials that we look at make Christmas look so wonderful and so magical. And yet Christmas can be a time when poor relationships, difficult relationships are just magnified and they can get all out of proportion. It's

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like a dark cloud comes into your life. It's like a blackness takes over or a depression comes. Why? Because all of a sudden you see yourself as somebody that is alone. You see yourself as somebody that is unloved. You remember broken relationships. You remember harsh words. You sit there and you've put out the invitation for the family to get together and yet you wonder if they're going to come. And if they come together, are they going to love one another? Or are they going to be kind to one another? Or are the siblings going to argue? Are they going to quarrel? Is it going to hurt the parent's heart? Or are the children and their spouses coming? And yet they're coming grumbling because they don't want to be with your mom, or they don't want to be with your dad, or they don't want to be attacked. It can be a time of year of great loneliness and great pain and great stress and great distress. So what are you going to do? Well if you can, remember that Christmas is all about receiving and giving the gift of love. If you can, think of Christmas and make it synonymous with the giving of gifts. If you can, make it synonymous with the giving and receiving of love. Then what you need to focus on is: How can I, at Christmas, give the gift of love, not just to those that are lovely and loveable, but to those that aren't lovely. To those that do not want to be loved or to those that are full of anger or those that are full of jealousy. Or, those that are full of slander and hatred and raising their voice so you think, "Oh no! Not another time this year." What can you do? Well I want us to go to Ephesians chapter 4. In Ephesians chapter 4 He's going to talk to you and me about walking in a manner worthy of the high calling that we have in Christ Jesus. It says "[I therefore,] **the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the** [same weight of the] **calling with which you have been called, with...humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance [to] one another in love,...**"(Ephesians 4:1-2) If you can make the decision that this Christmas, that you are not going to react towards others according to what they do to you, but you are going to be a responder; not a responder to what they do,

but a responder to God, a responder to [His command for you to love others even as Christ loved you.] (PARAPHRASE, John 15:12) Remember when Jesus Christ died, remember what He said about those that were mistreating Him, those that were calling for His crucifixion, those that were mocking Him on the cross: [“Ah, He saved others. You saved others, come down off the cross. Save Yourself and we’ll know. You say ‘God’s pleased with You.’ He hasn’t saved You. Look at where You are.”] (PARAPHRASE, Matthew 27:41-43) And you hear that railing. And yet what did Jesus do? Jesus said, **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)** Ephesians 4, Ephesians 5 and the first part of Ephesians 6 is all about your walk as a Christian, walking in a manner worthy of your high calling, walking as Christ walked. Not walking like the Gentiles who don’t know God. Not living like other families that have no concept of God, or the love of God, in their lives. But he tells us in Ephesians chapter 5, He says **“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love...” (Ephesians 5:1-2)** Walk in love. Your message today, Beloved, as we look at God’s precepts for life. As we look at them in connection with this Christmas season, which is all about [God so loving you that in the fullness of time He sent His Son, His Son who was born to die and pay for your sins and my sins, His Son who was sent to give us and grant us forgiveness of sins when we were without hope, when we were helpless, when we sinners, when we were enemies of God.] (PARAPHRASED, Romans 5:8) That’s what Christmas is all about. And so if this is what Christmas is all about then you and I need to **“walk in love just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us...” (Ephesians 5:2)** So he’s giving us the example. And when He’s talking about walking in love He’s talking about walking in a Calvary-kind of love. He’s talking about walking in a love that says “not my will but yours be done, not my way, but your way God.” It’s a love that is sacrificial. It’s a love that is willing to go to the cross. It’s a love that is willing to be railed at and yet to keep extending that

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love. This is what God wants for you and me this year. This is what He wants for you right now, Beloved. He wants us to love with the love that He has for us. And we're going to look at that love, but before we do I want to go to 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Because in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 we have a description of what love looks like. And this is what I would suggest that you do: that you take these Scriptures that I'm about to read to you and you can go into Christian bookstores and many times find this on a beautiful frame picture or a Scripture verse that you can hang up some place. But I'm suggesting that you either go to your computer and you print it out in beautiful Christmas script and colors, whatever that is to you, and put it on your refrigerator. Or, you sit down and you write it out. Or if you have children, you have the children each write one, and say "Our gift to one another this Christmas is going to be the gift of love. And we're going to take these principles, these precepts for life that God has put down in His Word and this is what we're going to live by and hold each other accountable to during this Christmas season." You know if you repeat something enough times then it becomes a habit. And so Christmas could become a gift that lasts all year. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and it's verse 4. And it's in the passage of **"If I speak with the tongues of men...angels, [and] I don't have love, I...become as a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal."** (1 Corinthians 13:1) And he goes on to say, if I can do this then I can do that, but I don't have love. Then it's nothing. It's absolutely nothing. No matter what great an act you do. No matter how much you give to the church. No matter how much you serve on the deacon's board or how you serve as an elder in that church or how you serve as a teacher or an usher, if you don't have love it's nothing. It's absolutely nothing. Why? Because Christmas, which is the birth of the Son of God who was born to die for you and me, Christmas, is all about love. Well he gives us that description in verse 4. **"Love is patient..."** and this is what you're going to put on a card or on the refrigerator. Or, you're going to find it and frame it and hang it

someplace. Hang it in the bathroom if you have to. Hang it right where they can see it so that they can focus on it. It says **“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous....” (1 Corinthians 13:4)** That means if you look at someone and they’re getting a better present, or their husband’s loving them more, or they have the whole family together and they have no conflict, you’re not going to be jealous. You’re going to rejoice with them and you’re going to rejoice for them, but you’re not going to be jealous. **“Love is patient, love is kind [it] is not jealous; love does not brag [or] is not arrogant.” (1 Corinthians 13:4)** You see this is what happens many times around the Christmas table or around the Christmas tree or whatever. All of a sudden you find somebody bragging. Or you find them being arrogant. I mean they’re just higher and mightier than you and, and down. So how are you going to do? You going to get arrogant back? You going to get rude back? No, because that’s not the way love, if it’s there, behaves. **“...Love does not brag [it’s] not arrogant....” (1 Corinthians 13:4)** Remember, it is patient. Remember, it is kind. Remember, if you’re going to [“walk in a manner worthy of the high calling” you’re to walk with humility. You’re going to walk with gentleness. You’re going to walk with patience] (PARAPHRASE, Ephesians 4:1-2) so you’re going to be patient toward this person. And as they’re sitting there and bragging and acting arrogant, you can sit there and you can pray. And you can ask God to speak to their hearts. And you can ask God to show you: why are they behaving this way? What is their need? What is not fulfilled? Well it goes on to say **“...[Love] does not act unbecomingly....” (1 Corinthians 13:5)** So if someone acts unbecomingly to you, you’re not going to turn around and take them down a notch or two. Says **“Does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, [it] is not provoked....” (1 Corinthians 13:5)** Now listen very carefully because this is what happens at Christmas many times. **“...[It] does not take into account a wrong [that is] suffered....” (1 Corinthians 13:5)** You see, so many times we come to the Christmas gathering wherever it is, even at a

Christmas party at work, and we're hurting. And we've got a burr in our saddle and somebody's done something to us. Or, they talked to us. Or they haven't met our expectations. And so when we get there, what do we do? We don't treat them properly because they wronged us. You see, if you're going to love, you're not going to keep an account of "you owe me this and that," because that is what's going to make Christmas a time of tension. Well there's more to look at and we'll do it in just a minute.

PART TWO

What do the gifts matter if they're not given in love? What does it matter what you receive if the person that is giving it to you is not loving you the way they ought to? I want you to remember that [Jesus commanded us to love one another even as He loved us.] (PARAPHRASE, John 15:12) So as we continue to look at God's description of love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, I want you to know it is possible for you and I to love this way if the God of love is in us. [God told us that He would come and dwell within us, and the Son would dwell within us, and that we could abide in His love.]

(PARAPHRASE, John 15:10) And if we can abide in His love and He commands us to love, then you and I have the ability to love the way we are about to see in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, and then in Ephesians chapter 4 and 5. So let's resume where we left off. In verse 6 it says this of 1 Corinthians 13 "[Love] **does not rejoice in unrighteousness....**" (1 Corinthians 13:6) What does that mean? That means that you see somebody else do something that is wrong and it makes you look good because you didn't do what was wrong. So you rejoice in their unrighteousness 'cause it makes you look better. Oh look! If you and I love another person then we want them to live the way that God wants them to live. We don't want them to live less than us so that we look better. Rather we want them to live according to God's standard. "[It] **does not rejoice in unrighteousness....**" (1 Corinthians 13:6) And it doesn't rejoice when it says "Boy, did you see me at the table?"

Did you see how I leveled my brother? Did you see what I—I told our mother, didn't I? I mean I really let her have it, didn't I? We got even with her." Oh no, Oh no, Beloved. I mean you can sit at a table and you can demean another family member or another person at that table and know that when you're demeaning them, there's others that want to say the same thing. And so they're going to rejoice in your demeaning that person, but that's not the way love behaves. And so you want to be very, very careful. It says **"...[It] rejoices [in] ...truth." (1 Corinthians 13:6)** You say but it is truth. It is absolute truth. But it's truth and it's reality, but it is not the highest good. Love rejoices with the truth and not with unrighteousness. And in Ephesians he tells us that we are to walk in truth in love. We are to truth it in love, "truthing" it in love. It says **"[Love] bears all things...." (1 Corinthians 13:7)** It bears all things. And see, if we would learn to realize that when Jesus hung on that cross He bore all things. He bore our sins in His body. He suffered for us, and He did it because He loved us and He loved us when we were not perfect. He loved us when we were His enemies. He loved us when we were ungodly. So, Precious One, remember this: that **"[love] bears all things, [love] believes all things...." (1 Corinthians 13:7)** In other words it has hope in you and it has belief in you and it doesn't say, "O you'll never amount to anything. You're never going to be good. I told you when you were a kid that you're never going to amount to anything. I told you you'd never be pretty. I told you you'd never be smart." No, no. Love **"...believes all things, [love] hopes all things, [love] endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:7)** So that means that you sit there and you endure. You endure because Christ endured. You persevere because Christ persevered. And you allow God in loving, when they're not loving you, to convict them and possibly to convert them. And then it says this: **"Love never fails...." (1 Corinthians 13:8)** In other words you're never going to turn around and say that's it, you've had it. I'm not going to love you any more. I did this to my first husband. I said, "That's it. You crossed the line."

And it ended up in divorce and eventually it ended up in suicide when this was a man that needed me. I did that before I came to know God. I did that before I ever celebrated my first Christmas and I didn't celebrate my first Christmas until I was 29 years of age. And then when I celebrated it, what I wanted to do was go back and make it right with my husband and that's when, in a sense, it was too late because he took his life before I could get to him. Oh Beloved, listen, **"Love never fails...." (1 Corinthians 13:8)** and you can know at this Christmas season, that God's love for you is never going to fail. And you need to give people the gift of that love. Well when we go to Ephesians, go back to Ephesians, and he tells us in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 31 it says, **"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put...from you...with all malice."** (Ephesians 4:31) So this Christmas if you're going to love, if you're going to be what you ought to be at every family gathering or every other relationship, you need to put these things away from you and you can put it away. You can put away bitterness. You can put away wrath. You can put away anger. You can put away clamor, yelling and screaming. You can put away malice. We are really going to get even with them. You can put it away by, **"[being] kind to one another....,"** now watch, **"...tender-hearted, forgiving [one another, even] as God in Christ...has forgiven you."** (Ephesians 4:32) What is Christmas all about? Christmas is all about forgiveness. And when you forgive, that brings healing. You say, "but if I forgive them they're going to go scot-free." Oh no. God is the judge. God will deal with them, but you're not the judge. You're not the totally, absolutely righteous one. You need to forgive. That's what Christmas is all about. And so if you want relationships to be everything they should be, you need to walk in love just as Christ walked in love, giving Himself up for you, granting you forgiveness. As I think about all this I think about a letter, a letter that was written by a father to a son that really shows us what Christmas is all about. Christmas is about loving when people don't love us as they should.

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Christmas is about receiving love and giving forgiveness. It says “Dear son, I spent most of my life looking back lamenting the disappointment I caused my parents while continuing to make the bad decisions for my life when the real fire I should have been fighting was being neglected. I’m not trying to escape responsibility when I say this, but even though I knew right from wrong, I was incredibly immature and naïve to the point of being incompetent. You have always shown respect to me, always.” This is a father that had more than three wives. “And I deserve very little. With all the accomplishments you received in your lifetime you could write a book. You have always been willing to share these accomplishments with me as though I was somehow instrumental in your success and I would gladly accept that role.” You see, this is love. It says “However we both know I contributed very little. In fact you did these things in spite of me, not because of me. I never received the condemnation I deserved from my mom years ago and I never got it from you either.” That’s unconditional love. “Son, I ask to be relieved of this burden of debt by asking for forgiveness, which I’ve already received, but never quite got around to asking you for it. One last thing, there never was a time that I didn’t love you.” These are the words we need to give to others. I forgive and I will love you no matter what. That’s what Christmas is all about Beloved.