

How to Love People You Don't Like

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Day One

Are there people in your life you really don't like? We run into these people on our jobs quite often. I'm examining how to love the people you don't like.

Yes, even Christians are allowed to have people in their lives they do not like. I know of no scriptural directive that commands us to like everyone. But I know many verses that tell us to love other people. Here are just two of many:

And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister (1 John 4:21).

Jesus said:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them (Luke 6:32).

It's clear as Christians we are to love people—all people, yes, even the people we work with. But what about those unlikable people? Since we cannot like them, we usually conclude we cannot love them either. Don't we have to like people before we can love them? How can we love someone we don't like?

Part of the problem is we misunderstand the word love. The kind of love you need to love people you don't like is God's kind of love. Now, this love is not necessarily a feeling. Though you may experience nice feelings, agape love does not depend on how you feel.

Agape love, God's kind of love, is an action. The Bible tells us we know God loves us because he sent his Son into the world to redeem us. We know Jesus loves us because he gave his life. And God says he will know we love him if we keep his commandments. God's kind of love is an action, not a feeling.

Now, that really is good news, because it tells me I can love people toward whom I do not necessarily have good feelings. I can love people toward whom I have no feelings at all. Think: Who are the people you will be dealing with today or tomorrow whom you really don't like? Will you ask God to help you understand how to love them, even though you don't like them?

Day Two

Aren't you glad God's love for us is not based on how he feels about us? He may be, and I'm sure often is, very displeased with us as individuals, yet his love and goodness toward us are constant. That encourages me, because it means God does not require me to have good feelings toward everyone, and like you, I've discovered there are people I just don't like.

You don't have to like someone to love them. Webster defines like as to "feel an attraction, tenderness or affection for" someone. We say "I like you because..." and then list the things we like about the person.

But agape love says, "I love you in spite of..."—in spite of the things about you I may not like. We don't have to feel guilty about not liking everyone. It's okay! But we are commanded to love others.

Write it on a piece of paper and tape it to your mirror, your desk, over your sink, on your screen saver—wherever you will see it often: Love is not a feeling, love is an action!

I'm sure there were people Jesus did not like. Ever read what he said to the religious hypocrites of his day? Pretty direct. I don't think he liked them very much at all. But I know he loved them, because he died for them. Love is not a feeling; love is an action. This is our responsibility—to love others, whether we like them or not.

Paul said in his letter to the Romans the Holy Spirit, who was given to us, has poured out the love of God within our hearts (Romans 5:5). Think about God's love for you. John wrote: *To us, the greatest demonstration of God's love for us has been his sending his only Son into the world to give us life through him. We see real love, not in the fact that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to make personal atonement for our sins.*

And remember, God loves those people you don't like just as much as he loves you. Let God's love pour all over you and fill you. Remember how he loves you, even when you're not very lovable. That's the beginning of learning how to love other people, even the ones you don't like so much.

Day Three

Do you have any people in your life right now you just don't like very much? Chances are you do. Yes, even Christians have to admit we run into people who just rub us the wrong way. The question I'm addressing is: how can I love the people I don't like?

God hasn't told us to like everyone. There are people we simply cannot admire or enjoy. But Scripture gives us many directives to love others. We've seen God's kind of love—agape love—is not dependent on our feelings. Love is an action, not a feeling.

Well, if love is an action, what actions then are love actions? First Corinthians 13 is a good place to look for a list of love actions. They include:

Patience: When you act with patience toward someone, you are loving him or her. Keep in mind love is not a feeling, so we don't have to feel patient. Can you remember acting with patience even when you did not feel patient? That is agape love.

Kindness: When you feel like saying something sarcastic or cutting or angry, but instead you say something kind, that is a love action.

Not Jealous: When you refuse to behave jealously or possessively, you are showing love.

Has Good Manners: Just plain courtesy is a love action. How often we forget good manners, like not interrupting others when they're talking, letting others go ahead of us, etc. Those are love actions.

Unselfish: Agape love acts in an unselfish manner, without pursuing selfish advantage or trampling over others in trying to get where you want to get. Remember, don't wait to feel unselfish; show your love by acting unselfishly.

Endurance: When other people have given up and left, agape love will still be there, hanging in with someone. It will endure all things. It will keep listening to someone, even when you think you cannot listen to another word.

These are just a few of the many love actions available to us. And we can demonstrate these attitudes and actions toward people, whether we like them or not, by God's grace. Ask God to help you today to show love through your actions, even to that person you don't really like very much. Don't feel guilty about not liking them, just act toward them in loving ways, and watch what happens.

Day Four

I'm examining loving people we don't really like so much. And we've seen God's kind of love—agape love—is not based on feelings, but it is an action. Our job is to learn to act in loving ways toward people, even the ones we don't like.

A prerequisite to developing love actions toward unlikable people is to pray for them. Sincerely, regularly pray for their welfare. Ask God to show you what love actions to take toward them. And pray for them. . . a lot! Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies, and those who spitefully use us.

Then, as you think about a certain person you don't like, decide which love actions would be appropriate for that person. Maybe it's a lot of patience? Or compassion or endurance? Then set your will to act with those love actions toward that person.

A good friend shared how God put her in a job with people she just didn't like very much. She applied for a promotion, looking forward to moving away from those people. The selection process narrowed down to her and one other person, but she didn't get the job. And at first, she was angry at not being selected, until she realized God had left her in that job to learn how to love those people she didn't like.

She began what she called Project Love, and she looked for ways to develop relationships with those unlikable people. Her method was to invite them to have lunch with her, one per week. And she began to build bridges to these people and develop relationships with them. Of course, in doing that, she discovered they had burdens and problems, and they discovered she was a caring person. A few months later, she got that promotion she wanted, but she continues to keep in touch with those unlikable people she has now learned to love—and indeed to like, too. Several of them have turned to her for help in troubled times.

What a good idea—Project Love. Maybe you could start to find ways to reach out to those unlikable people with the love of Jesus Christ that is within you. What miracles we could see in our relationships if we'd do this more and more.

Day Five

Instead of feeling guilty because you don't like certain people, acknowledge they are not likable to you, but agree with God that you are willing to love them. Love them with his kind of love—agape love—which is an action, not necessarily a feeling.

It always helps to remember we're often unlikable to God, yet he never stops loving us. And it is that kind of love that should overflow from our lives to others. When that happens—when others can see we can love people who are not likable—we will have one of the strongest witnesses of God's grace we can ever have. You know if you can learn to love people you don't like, it has to be a miracle right from God. And that miracle in your life can cause others to be thirsty for the eternal water Jesus offers, which they see demonstrated in your life.

Here's my suggestion: Make a plan to love those people you don't like. Make a list of the people you find it difficult to like. Include what it is about them that makes them unlikable to you. Then, choose one unlikable person per week to focus on. Pray for that specific person each day of that week. Pray for the things you see in their lives that make them so unlikable. Pray God will help you to see and understand

them the way he does. Pray for God's love to overflow from you to that person in some specific way sometime during the week.

If you will focus on one person per week and keep going through that list, what you'll discover is God can even change your feelings toward them. But regardless, you will be showing love to those unlikable people, and the changes you will see in yourself will astound you.

When you start learning to love them, they no longer can get to you like they used to. Oh, they may still have irritating habits and personalities, but they just will not bug you like before. It's amazing how that happens. You realize, "Wow, I'm free from that awful dread of seeing them coming or having to deal with them, because even though I don't really like them, I really do love them the way Jesus does."