

“STAND IN LOVE”
REMOVE THE OBSTACLES SERIES #1
John 13:31-35, February 24, 2021

In his book, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, Lenard Sweet recounts a letter a physician wrote to a church-related magazine: “Today I visited an eight-year-old girl dying of cancer. Her body was disfigured by her disease and its treatment. She was in almost constant pain. As I entered her room, I was overcome immediately by her suffering--so unjust, unfair, unreasonable. Even more overpowering, however, was the presence of her grandmother lying in bed beside her with her huge body embracing this precious, inhuman suffering.

“I stood in awe, for I knew I was on holy ground. . . . The suffering of innocent children is horrifying beyond words. I will never forget the great, gentle arms and body of this grandmother. She never spoke while I was there. She was holding and participating in suffering that she could not relieve, and somehow her silent presence was relieving it. No words could express the magnitude of her love.”¹

In the obstacles of life, there is often great pain and suffering. And in the middle of that pain and suffering, there is often anger or criticism or even hostility at another, many times unintended, but still expressed, nonetheless. When we don’t feel good, we often take it out on those who are the closest to us, those we love the most: a husband toward his wife; a child toward her parents; a parent toward their child. As we suffer pain and trial, we want to get rid of it, and often we think we can do that by expressing our displeasure or annoyance toward someone else. Or our general disposition just exudes that discontentment and unhappiness.

And many times, the longer we are in that condition of pain and suffering, the easier it is for us to get stuck in expressing our irritation at others, and soon our whole life seems dominated by anger, hostility and discontent. That begins to transform our lives to the point where we look at the world from a negative perspective, always finding the bad in things before anything good can be found, if at all.

You see, when we are surrounded by pain and suffering, it is very hard to see the good things in

¹ PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003] pg. 48-49)

life. It is difficult to find any hope for what is good and right and beautiful. Pain and suffering consumes our minds to the point that we cannot think of anything else, except trying to get relief from that pain or suffering.

Many times the pain and suffering drives us to take short-cuts as we search for remedies for that situation we are in. Some turn to alcohol use and abuse, while others turn to recreational drugs, or even misuse of prescription drugs. This leads to all sorts of addictive behavior. Others seek to distract themselves with illicit sexual exploitations. Some turn to gambling, and others turn toward self-mutilation or cutting. Anything that alleviates or distracts the pain within the life of the person.

But most prominently found in the lives of those who are in pain or those suffering is the condition called DRA – a “dirty, rotten attitude.” Their pain has caused them to respond only one way to life and all that is around them – with contempt. And this causes the person to often become caustic against those around them. Regular criticism, derogatory remarks, overly correcting, verbally abusive, and generally negative attitudes are symptoms that reveal deep hurt or pain in the life of a person.

And unfortunately for those around the person, this condition is typically highly contagious. One bad attitude rubs off on another and creates a wake of unhappiness, or unrest, or discontent among those around the individual. And the DRA (dirty, rotten attitude) multiplies quickly unless decisive action is taken to reign it back in to a controllable level. Unchecked, the DRA consumes large populations creating large pockets of unhappy, discontent, and angry people. This can easily lead to riots, pandemonium, and outright disorder in our society. And this contributes to division among the people, and even outright violence. Remind you of anything? Sounds a lot like our world today.

However, there is a treatment to the condition of DRA – it is DDL (Determined, Deliberate Love). Determined, deliberate love is the conscious, unwavering decision to love another regardless of the pain and suffering they are going through. Determined, deliberate love is the mindset of one who understands that those suffering hurt and pain most often treat others with less respect because they are seeking to find release from their pain in any way possible. It may be verbal, or physical, or emotional

expressions, leading to the DRA conditions. But these folks understand that, and are willing to give of themselves to alleviate the dirty, rotten attitude.

Determined, deliberate love is found in the person who knows the depths of pain and suffering, and who would not wish that on anyone, not even an enemy. They know that the destructive habits that we turn to for release of that pain do not work, and that they only lead us further into deeper levels of the DRA. These people have lived through the darkness of their pain and suffering, and have found that love is the only way to combat that pain.

The grandmother in our opening story surrounded her granddaughter physically and emotionally with great love, and it made a difference in that child – as well as everyone who came into that room. Determined, deliberate love gives of oneself in the effort to relieve the pain experienced by another. No matter what the other is saying, or doing, this person showing determined, deliberate love will never let the other one go, and they will hang on for dear life so that the dirty, rotten attitude is contained and controlled.

“Baseball ironman Cal Ripken, Jr. said it like this: ‘Growing up, "I love you" wasn't spread around too much in our household. Not that it wasn't meant. I could tell every time my dad told me he loved me without saying it. It's just the way things were then.

“That part is different in my family. I want my kids to hear it. I tell them, "I love you no matter what," which means, "Whether you're good or bad, happy or sad. It doesn't matter whatever you are. I love you. Unconditionally. Always." It all goes back to security and telling them you'll always be there for them. Maybe you run the risk of telling them you love them so often that it loses meaning. I'll risk it.”²

Sadly, the world has not heard “I love you” enough! Especially when pain and suffering are taking place all around us. Determined, deliberate love is what can bring about a change in the life of people, but there needs to be those who will live DDL out before others so that they can see and

² (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003] pg. 97)

experience it for themselves. Then, as they see and experience it, they can become surrounded by the positive things of life that will help them to change how they relate to others.

That's what Jesus wanted for His disciples. When He was in the upper room with the 11 just before he was arrested, Jesus gave them instructions in how to defeat the DRAs of the world. He says, *"And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples"* (Jn. 13:34-35)

So what kind of love is Jesus calling us to live by? He's talking about Determined, Deliberate Love (DDL) that touches the lives of those around us, even if they are out to arrest us, convict us and even crucify us. It is that tough love that a parent gives to a child, bringing encouragement, discipline and guidance, even in the painful situations. It is the showing respect and dignity to those who disagree with us, who may be under deeply painful situations, even if they do not return that dignity or respect. It is taking a person by the hand and talking with them, even when they are on the opposite side of the political spectrum. It is reaching out and touching the hurting with encouragement, help and life-giving support, even if they are counted as the enemy.

Determined, deliberate love (DDL) demonstrates that we belong to Jesus, and that we are following in His example. It is loving another for their best interest at heart, even if it may be contrary to what they are practicing at the moment. And it is helping them to see that there is a better way to life beyond the pain and suffering that causes the dirty, rotten attitudes.

No matter what the cost, determined, deliberate love seeks to change even our own way of seeing another person. Instead of seeing color, race, gender, age or any other dividing feature, we are to look at one another and see a brother or sister through the eyes of Christ Jesus. He didn't give Himself as a sacrifice for the penalty of sin just for one group of people. No, Jesus showed the greatest expression of love for all of us, no matter what we look like, or talk like, or live like, so that we might see His great love and we might follow His love and commandments. Only then can we begin to live like Him and

demonstrate to the world the difference that He can make in our lives as we trust in His love and sacrifice.

Determined, deliberate love can change the attitudes of those around us, it can impact the life of our communities, and it can change the painful suffering conditions that plague so many people in our world today. The question always comes to us, however, “Will we determine to love one another? Will we be deliberate to love even the unlovable? Will we desperately live for Jesus by loving those around us in such a way that they see Jesus?”

Only by standing in determined, deliberate love with one another can we ever hope to see peace on the face of the earth today.

Let’s pray. Father, it is so easy for us to allow the dirty, rotten attitudes of this world dictate how we treat those around us. Yet, it is so destructive to all our relationships. Help us remove the obstacle of dirty, rotten attitudes by showing determined, deliberate love toward one another so that we may genuinely have peace with one another. This we pray in Jesus’ precious and holy Name. Amen.