

**Sunday, Nov. 25:** UM Student Sunday, Baptism

Message #4: "Breaking Point"

Scripture: Nov. 25. Conversations 4. UM Student Day.

Message: Breaking Point

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-18 (How to correct a brother)

Memory Verse: "Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." -Proverbs 19:20

Blurb: The call to love others means to go the extra mile to show respect to those with whom you disagree. Yet, the Bible also cautions against abusing your own health and welfare, and how love can, at times, call you to stop enabling error. This Sunday we'll explore the times when "tough love" compels us to correct others, and even sever our relationships. Part of loving means healthy boundaries!

**Opening Song:** *Restoration* -Sanctify

**Welcome:** -Pastor David

**Memory Verse:**

"Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." -Proverbs 19:20

**Worship Music Set:** - Sanctify

*Our God Saves*

*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

*Oceans (Where My Feet May Fail)*

Worship Prayer - Andrew

**Serve Moment:** UM Student Day Offering

Video: UM Student Day

**Offering:** *The Things that Bring Peace*

**Skit:** Stress in the Family 3

**Love Moment:** Baptism Harper Emilia Tsubaki

**Prayers:** -David

Individual prayers in the front of the sanctuary after worship.

## Message Bumper

**PP#1:** Difficult Conversations: How to LOVE someone when you don't agree.

Breaking Point

"Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." -Proverbs 19:20

Difficult Conversations: How to LOVE someone when you don't agree. Breaking Point. Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise."

**PP#2:** The bulk of the Christian life is stopping my selfishness and allowing the Holy Spirit to make me better.

The bulk of the Christian life is stopping my selfishness and allowing the Holy Spirit to make me better. Now, this is not from the Bible. This is from my life experience. When I choose Jesus, I make Him my Lord. That means I agree to do things His way, not mine. But this puts me in a constant struggle: between my selfish way, and Jesus' selfless way. So, my daily struggle is to kill my selfishness to allow the Holy Spirit to make me better. It's a battle of wills, and it's every day.

Outside of church, we normally call this, "doing the right thing." Notice, it's not "knowing the right thing to do." For, our real struggle is not knowing what to do. It's actually doing it.

**PP#3:** *Image of people disagreeing around a table (Thanksgiving meal?)*

We've been talking all month about doing the right thing when we are with people we don't agree with, don't see eye to eye. It's hard. And we don't see good models out in our culture, I'm afraid. So, we go to the Bible to see what our Lord says we are to do. We see Him saying that the right thing to do is to love them, regardless of their point of view. And for us, loving them means treating them with respect.

Now, my guess is that some of you got to practice doing this this past holiday. I doubt everyone around the table shared your views. And, after a bit, the conversation begins to hit those sensitive issues. Think back: how did you do on the love-respect response? Were you pleased with how you behaved? Would Jesus be pleased with how you handled things?

It starts with you. Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." When you do, you will also model this way of abundant life and help your conversation partner do it, too. Loving them means to not trying to correct or fix them first thing. It means listening, trying to understand, and remembering that if they are Christians, that they are authentic followers of Jesus, even when you disagree on points of faith. It's extending grace, and accepting them, even though you believe that what they may hold is wrong. Notice, I didn't say accept the wrong things they believe. Love doesn't always mean saying "you're right." Love can mean saying "your wrong," if you still treat them with love-respect.

**PP#4:** *Image for biblical calling of separation, or avoiding, or staying away*

But the Bible doesn't say that you always have to remain friends, or even spend time with them. Sometimes difficult conversations mean expressing your love by withdrawing from the relationship, or remaining distant. Today we're going to take a closer biblical look at those times when the relationship can't stay close.

Now, don't forget, we have the daily struggle between our selfishness and Jesus's calling to selflessness. So, the ground rule, biblically, is that we must not respond to people when we are in difficult conversations, out of our own selfish feelings or rationalizations. Never forget your amazing capacity to turn everything so you look right and he looks wrong, so you look like the good guy and she looks like the bad guy.

So, let's take a look at some passages and see if we can't find a helpful biblical guide for how to handle people when we need to keep our distance.

**PP#5: Titus 3:9-11 (CEB)**

9 Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, and fights about the Law, because they are useless and worthless. 10 After a first and second warning, have nothing more to do with a person who causes conflict, 11 because you know that someone like this is twisted and sinful—so they condemn themselves.

The first passage is Titus 3. Here Paul is teaching Titus the biblical path. Verse 9, "Avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, and fights about the Law, because they are useless and worthless. 10 After a first and second warning, have nothing more to do with a person who causes conflict, 11 because you know that someone like this is twisted and sinful—so they condemn themselves."

So, here's a helpful guide: when the person with whom you disagree is trying to cause conflict, trying to stir up controversy, then you need to avoid them. This person is not open to listening to reason. Their purpose in talking is to cause irritation, or, their sole goal is to show you how wrong you are. So, you can see the uselessness of trying to help them seeing their errors. Genealogies, here, among Jews means who is more important or has a more authoritative position. Fights about the Law mean the form of religion: how you practice your faith.

**PP#6: Difficult Conversations: Breaking Point**

1. Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict

But look at the respect here. You're not responding out of your own anger, irritation, or offence. It's for their sake. Not once, but twice, stop them in their tracks, and tell them that you don't want to be discussing such things. You say that you want to get along, and keep it friendly. You're not going to spar with them, or try to defend your beliefs. You tell them that they are welcome to their views, but that you don't want to get into arguments or conflict with them.

Then, you model the behavior by changing the subject, or walking away...but not in anger, as that is justifying your own feelings. You walk away in a amiable way. You talk to them when you see them again, and steer the conversation onto safe topics. But, if a second time they go after you, again, interrupt them and say that you want to talk about other things. If they will not let it go, or continue to bring up conflict, then you need to excuse yourself and walk away. You are modeling tough love here. You are not acting out of your feelings. You're keeping them in check.

Now, if they are family, or someone you cannot avoid, then you need to remain consistent in this behavior. Over and over again, you interrupt them, ask them to change the conversation, and if they refuse, then you withdraw. But your withdraw must not be huffy or irritated. It's not about you, you see. It's about them. Loving them means you do what they need, not what you feel like. And you love them, not their behavior. So, don't make this a personal attack or a judgement value on them as a person. You are always willing to talk when they aren't seeking to cause problems.

Side note, I have a sibling like this. After 40+ years, I still need to practice this whenever I'm around that person. It is tiring and frustrating. But, it's not about me. Love endures all things, right?

**PP#7: Romans 16:17-19 (CEB)**

17 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to watch out for people who create divisions and problems against the teaching that you learned. Keep away from them. 18 People like that aren't serving the Lord. They are serving their own feelings. They deceive the hearts of innocent people with smooth talk and flattery. 19 The news of your obedience has reached everybody, so I'm happy for you. But I want you to be wise about what's good, and innocent about what's evil.

Next, let's go to Romans 16. Here Paul is talking about Christians who specifically target your Christian beliefs, and tell you how wrong you are. Romans 16, starting with verse 17: "Brothers and sisters, I urge you to watch out for people who create divisions and problems against the teaching that you learned. Keep away from them. 18 People like that aren't serving the Lord. They are serving their own feelings. They deceive the hearts of innocent people with smooth talk and flattery. 19 The news of your obedience has reached everybody, so I'm happy for you. But I want you to be wise about what's good, and innocent about what's evil."

Some believers believe so strongly that they are right, and that it is their job to go around and correct everyone else. Notice, this is not against those who honestly want to help you understand better, and try to talk in a helpful way. It's the self-righteous people who make you feel bad about yourself, that you are offending God. They are more concerned about you seeing it their way, than they are concerned about helping you. They may say "it's for your own good," or "because I care about you," but you quickly get that feeling that it's really about their rightness. They are serving their own feelings! Love, remember, doesn't serve our feelings. It serves others.

**PP#8: Difficult Conversations: Breaking Point**

1. Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict
2. Avoid self-righteous believers

Don't go to them for counsel. Avoid them. Now, this may not mean never talk to them. It means keep the conversation on safe topics. Again and again steer the conversation out of those dangerous rocks of the rightness of beliefs. Leave for the moment, if you need.

2 John 1:10 says you should not receive or welcome Christians like this into your home, Christians who deny Jesus was fully human and fully God. This is a core Christian belief, one you cannot compromise on. But not receiving or welcoming them into your home doesn't mean never talk to them. It means don't invite them into your close circle of friends, ones that help guide you and shape your beliefs and practices, the ones you hang with. Yes, you can receive them, but don't let them shape you. You can invite them into your home, but don't have them as an influencer of your life.

Your faith is anchored in the Bible, the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, and the counsel of your trusted Christian friends. Don't be fooled by eloquent arguments. Instead, your obedient behavior vindicates your beliefs. You keep doing what you need to do, regardless of what they say.

**PP#9: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 (CEB)**

6 Brothers and sisters, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to stay away from every brother or sister who lives an undisciplined life that is not in line with the traditions that you received from us. ... 13 Brothers and sisters, don't get discouraged in doing what is right. 14 Take note of anyone who doesn't obey what we have said in this letter. Don't associate with them so they will be ashamed of themselves. 15 Don't treat them like enemies, but warn them like you would do for a brother or sister.

Now we turn to 2 Thessalonians 3. Paul here is talking to Christians within a church. He has written this letter to them all. But some are lazy and won't do their work. We start in verse 6, and then skip to verse 13. "6 Brothers and sisters, we command you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to stay away from every brother or sister who lives an undisciplined life that is not in line with the traditions that you received from us. ... 13 Brothers and sisters, don't get discouraged in doing what is right. 14 Take note of anyone who doesn't obey what we have said in this letter. Don't associate with them so they will be ashamed of themselves. 15 Don't treat them like enemies, but warn them like you would do for a brother or sister.

**PP#10: Difficult Conversations: Breaking Point**

1. Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict
2. Avoid self-righteous believers
3. Avoid following those who don't live right

Avoid Christians who take the easy way out: who talk about their love for Jesus, but yet don't live that way. Why? Because you can get sucked into doing that, too. It's always easier to join the person sitting down than the person who is working, right? But don't grow weary in doing right! Model yourselves after those who live well. Hang around those you see helping and serving. When those who behave selfishly notice everyone following the helpers, perhaps they will join in, too.

The point is not about how you feel about them, that you want to avoid them because you're mad at them, or fed up with them. The point is that you love them enough to have them see in you and others how they should live, and that they will feel motivated to join in, too.

**PP#11: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (CEB)**

14 Don't be tied up as equal partners with people who don't believe. ... What relationship does light have with darkness? 15 ... What does a believer have in common with someone who doesn't believe? 16 What agreement can there be between God's temple and idols? ... Just as God said, I live with them, and I will move among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 17 Therefore, come out from among them and be separated, says the Lord. Don't touch what is unclean. Then I will welcome you. 18 I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.

Okay, so now, 2 Corinthians 6. Paul is now talking to believers about marriage. Don't marry someone who is not a believer. Verse 14, "Don't be tied up as equal partners with people who don't believe. ... What relationship does light have with darkness? 15 ... What does a believer have in common with someone who doesn't believe? 16 What agreement can there be between God's temple and idols? ... Just as God said, I live with them, and I will move among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 17 Therefore, come out from among them and be separated, says the

Lord. Don't touch what is unclean. Then I will welcome you. 18 I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

**PP#12: Difficult Conversations: Breaking Point**

1. Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict
2. Avoid self-righteous believers
3. Avoid following those who don't live right
4. Avoid marrying a nonbeliever

This is pretty heavy stuff, I admit. This is hard. Our culture says if you fall in love, then you can get married. Love conquers all. All differences can be worked out. Or, as I hear over and over again, "I thought I could change him."

But I stand by this principle. I tell my kids: one of the greatest joys of marriage to share the thing that is most important to you: your faith. Why would I want to share my life with someone who doesn't share my Jesus? It's just not wise, or easy!

Now, please hear me: I'm not saying a marriage between a believer and a nonbeliever can't work. Marriage, after all, is a vow, a commitment. Nor am I saying that Christians fail when they marry a nonbeliever. No, what I'm saying is that they have a harder life to live. God's intention is for you and your spouse to be close and intimate, and share the deepest parts of who you are.

I tell teens straight up: It's not wise to seek a life partner with someone who isn't a Jesus-follower. Say what you will, but those paired up with non-Christians tell me of the pain they share for not having that same core in their lives shared by their life partner.

**PP#13: Matthew 18:15-17 (CEB)**

15 "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. 16 But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. 17 But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector.

Okay, one more. This time it's Jesus, teaching about how to treat someone who wrongs you. This is when conversations go abusive, or hurtful. This is when it is unhealthy for you to continue to be in relationship with someone. What do you do then? Does love mean you keep going back?

Matthew 18:15, "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. 16 But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. 17 But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector."

Notice the steps. This works with people who have wronged you verbally, or any other way. Well, except in dangerous abusive situations. Then you must not go to them alone. You get out first, and get some help. But, if you are safe from bodily harm, here are the steps. You go talk to them in private, first. Tell them how they have offended you, and how what they say is hurtful. The next step is to take one or two others to go with you and talk things over. This offers objectivity and perspective. They can help you stay fair and balanced, too. But this is when you can clearly lay out what healthy conversation looks like, and that you expect it from the person who wronged you. If

that doesn't work, it's fairly serious. Then, you go to your church leaders. They have wisdom and mediation skills and gifts. If everything you've tried doesn't work, then you avoid them. You're not a punching bag. You need to love them enough to show them what respecting others means.

You need to know that our church has officially adopted this pattern from Matthew 18 as the way that we have covenanted to resolve our conflicts. We call it the "Rule of Christ." And we expect it from everyone here, starting with me.

**PP#14: Difficult Conversations: Breaking Point**

1. Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict
2. Avoid self-righteous believers
3. Avoid following those who don't live right
4. Avoid marrying a nonbeliever
5. Avoid those who won't be corrected

Difficult conversations, you see, require that you act out of love. You must not act from your own feelings, anger, or offence. It's not about you. You must fight the daily fight of making it about you. You break down healthy conversations when you behave out of your reactions, out of your pain, out of your self-justification.

It's about you loving well. In reality, however, it is true that difficult conversations only work if both sides act out of respect. You can make that far more likely to happen when you model that behavior. Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." Do this, and not only is it good for you, it models for others the path of abundant life.

But many times it isn't reciprocated. Other people aren't behaving well. There does come a point when love calls you to avoid. But that's a hard place! Beware! If your feelings are that you want to, then it is most likely based on your offense or self-justification. Avoiding is a last resort, one that you never prefer, but are called to because of love.

Beware your feelings. Don't act on your anger. Keep your commitment to love! The Bible says to forgive over and over again, even so, but it doesn't say just take abuse or follow those who will lead you down a bad path. Real love is not placating. Real love is tough. But always, it is for the sake of the other. Even in abuse—you must get out and get away—but this is not just self-preservation. It is a form of love, to help that abuser see the value of your life, and the importance of boundaries.

Avoid those who seek to stir up conflict. Don't enable their addiction to conflict. Avoid self-righteous believers. Don't validate their need to be right. Avoid those who live lazily. Don't reinforce their self-justification. Avoid marrying a non-believer. They need to see your witness, before marriage, that your faith in Jesus is so important that it is a deal breaker for you. Avoid those who won't be corrected. Try your best. Follow Jesus' rule. But if they remain stubborn, then treat them as you would a Gentile or tax collector.

**PP#15: *Jesus at the table of Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus really happy***

By the way...how do you treat a Gentile or tax collector. We watched Jesus do this last Sunday, didn't we? We think avoiding means cut them out of your life! This is not the biblical model. Jesus says Gentiles and tax collectors are the focus of your witness, so that they might come to believe. It means doing whatever it takes to help them take that next step closer to Jesus. You don't make them your role model or accept them as a friend who shapes your life. But does mean you see them as God's beloved child and treat them that way.

When you make Jesus your Lord, you choose to live His way. That means not following your justified rightness when you are wronged. It means asking what do they need most from you...and then doing that. It's about doing the right thing, even when your selfishness is screaming foul, and your vindication wants you to punish them. And sometimes, doing the right thing means taking a break from them. That's love, too, after all.

"Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise."

Amen.

**Closing Song:** *King of Glory* - Sanctify

**Memory Verse:**

"Listen to advice and accept correction, and in the end you will be wise." -Proverbs 19:20

**Announcements:** -Pastor David

Support Youth Group Mission Trip - take an envelope off the back window

**Benediction:** -Pastor David