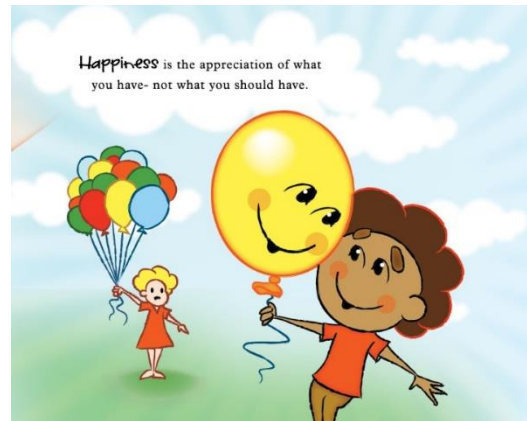




John 15:12-27

I have a love hate relationship with many things in life. Working out is one of them. I know it's good for me and it feels good, but it's also painful and often boring. I love it and I hate it. I like yard work because a clean and green yard looks nice, but I don't like all of the time that it takes. I love it and I hate it. So much of life is like this, am I right? I'm sure among us we could create a long list for which we have a similar love hate relationship.

There's one guy who seems to have solved this problem. He writes, "When you achieve higher consciousness, you are beyond the love hate relationship and only exist in bliss." (Debasish Mridha) This is the same guy who this book—Verses of Happiness where the tagline is "the only book you need to be happy." That's quite a promise, isn't it? If it were true, it would have sold ten trillion copies by now. Here's one page from his book with decent advice. "Happiness is an appreciation of what you have—not what you should have." I can't argue with this advice since gratitude is a core Biblical truth. But I've always wondered who atheists thank for their blessings. You can't be grateful to the big bang or blind luck. Who do they thank?



This book is probably harmless, but his foundational truth is not. "When you achieve higher consciousness, you are beyond the love hate relationship and only exist in bliss." He is Indian, so this higher consciousness he holds out to us probably has some Hindu origins. Now compare this to what Jesus promised in John 15. *If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.* Persecution is not a cause for happiness. Or is it? The Good News Translation uses the word happy in the Sermon on the Mount. "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!"

I don't think the word "happy" is the best translation, but I can't say it's wrong. Jesus said we are blessed when we are persecuted. The world thinks that's crazy and so do most Christians? Do

you think it's crazy? This morning I want to help us see why it is not crazy and why it is a blessing.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another. 18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. 21 But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.' 26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

Love is always the supreme virtue in Scripture. The Israelites were soundly rebuked for offering correct sacrifices but having hearts far from the Lord. The Pharisees loved their power and influence but did not love the people. Paul said that all gifts are worthless without love. And Jesus said This is my commandment that you love one another. This leads to our first principle.

1. If you don't love one another, you don't love God.

Jesus said this in verse 14. *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* And what did Jesus command us? To love one another. It's not easy to do, but the concept is extremely simple. D.A. Carson says it this way. "By an unbreakable chain, love for God is tied to and verified by love for other believers."¹ In other words, if you don't love one another, you don't love God.

John, the author of the gospel we are reading, referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." That's the greatest self title ever, don't you think? To be so loved—and to know it—that you don't even call yourself by your own name. His complete identity was "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Amazing. I just stole his title and changed my twitter bio to "The guy whom Jesus loved." He was obviously completely transformed by Jesus and he describes this truth as well as any Biblical writer.

20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:20-21).

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷ But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

Since love for one another—and this is primarily love for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ—since love for one another is so vital, so foundational to our walk with Christ, I was absolutely delighted to get this email this past week.

"I was led to vertical and horizontal repentance that has taken a weight off my shoulders."

What this person means is that they had in some way offended another brother or sister in Christ and once the Spirit did His work, this person repented and sought forgiveness. It's a simple act but it has tremendous power. These simple apologies reverberate throughout the kingdom of God. Now I have no idea if this was just a small thing or more serious, but that's not the issue. The issue is that the offense was in some way, blocking the love between these two people. In some small or large way, they were not able to fully obey Jesus' chief command to love one another. But after the apology, all chains that held love hostage were broken. So when we talk about love for one another, we also have to be keenly aware of the things that block our love for one another.

2. We are friends of God, but God is not our friend.

Jesus shared an amazing truth here. *¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends... We are called a friend of God. Abraham and Moses were also called friends of God.*

Isaiah 41:8

But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend; (Isaiah 41:8)

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11).

This is an amazing truth, but we have to be careful here. Jesus said we are no longer servants. But is that true in an absolute sense? Not even close. Look at these verses.

Not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:6).

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Colossians 3:24).

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God (1 Peter 2:16).

We are without a doubt bondservants and slaves of Christ. And we cannot pit Jesus against Paul and some would do. Some would claim that Jesus is nicer than Paul and freed us from this backwards notion of being his bondservant. That's just nonsense. What Jesus is saying that he no longer calls us a servant and he explains exactly what he means. ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you*

Jesus has brought us into his confidence, he is not just ordering us around. He has brought us into his inner circle, if you will. He has told us all that he has heard from the Father. Now again, don't take that as an absolute. Of course he did not tell the disciples everything that he heard. But he did tell them everything that the Father wanted them to know.

Here's an illustration. You probably know the name Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon. Did you know that poor man earned \$40 billion just in the last seven months? His net worth now exceeds \$140B.² Let's say you were one of the half million Amazon employees. You are constantly told what to do, when and how to do it by middle managers in a vast sea of employees. Now let's say that Jeff invited you over to his house every week to discuss the retail business with you. Jeff—you call him Jeff now—would have pulled you into his inner circle. You wouldn't just be a grunt employee, you'd be his friend. That's a little taste of what this is about. Of course, being a friend of Jeff Bezos is nothing compared to being a friend of Jesus.

But it's really important to understand that even if we are God's friend, he is not our friend in the same way. As one commentator put it, "But mutual, reciprocal friendship of the modern variety is not in view, and cannot be without demeaning God."³

We have become too comfortable with God. We strip him of power and call it intimacy. We can see this in our Christian songs. Sometimes they are called Jesus is my boyfriend songs. Here's one example.

Oh, I love the way you hold me,
by my side you'll always be
You take each and every day,
make it special in some way

It sounds like a love poem, not a Christian song. Look at these lyrics and see if you can pick out the Christian songs from the secular ones.

1. All I need to do is just be me, being in love with you.
2. My world stops spinning round, without you.
3. I never want to leave; I want to stay in your warm embrace.
4. I'm lost in love.
5. Now and forever, together and all that I feel, here's my love for you.
6. You say you love me just as I am.

The first three are from a Christian band called Big Daddy Weave, the second half are from Air Supply.⁴ These songs play on Christian radio and some of them are sung in church. I'm quoting a lot from DA Carson today but this one is too good to not share with you.

"It is not uncommon to be told that 'worship leads us into the presence of God' or the like. There is a way of reading that statement sympathetically, but taken at face value it is simply untrue. Objectively, what brings us into the presence of God is the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus."⁵

We are God's friend, but he is not our friend. He is God. He is Master and Sovereign Ruler who is worthy of obedience and worship. We should enter into his comfort but not be too comfortable. We should strive for an intimacy with Jesus but not a casualness. Jesus is not your boyfriend. He is your Creator and your Savior. We need to treat him as such.

3. The world hates us because the world hates Jesus.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. What Jesus is saying is, "Don't take it personally. They hate you because of me." Jesus repeatedly promised persecution and the hatred began right away. Look how the church progressed in the first chapters of Acts.

Acts 1—Jesus leaves

Acts 2—Holy Spirit came and the church was born

Acts 3—church growth

Acts 4—persecution, threats

Acts 5—Apostles arrested and beaten

Acts 7—Stephen stoned to death

Acts 12—apostle James beheaded

Early Christians were hated because they were atheists. They did not believe in the Greek/Roman gods, so they were called atheists. Of course, the Jewish authorities also hated them. We are hated today because we are atheists; we do not believe in the god of relativism, the god of tolerance, the god of hedonism. We dare to say that Jesus is the only way. Jesus did not want his disciples to be surprised by persecution and hatred and the same is true for us today.

This week someone told me that they walked across the street to give their new neighbor some vegetables from their garden. He also tried to witness to their neighbor but the guy immediately got mad and told him to leave.

He holds to a form of Christianity and so did not want to hear about Jesus. This kind man who shared vegetables and the good news received a form of hatred from across the street.

Another example is what happened to Greg Laurie recently. In this advertisement for his latest



crusade, people objected because of what he held in his right hand. It isn't even marked as a Bible. They removed the Bible and the billboard was still rejected as being too controversial. I'm sure countless people in North Korea would love to have this be the worst persecution they experience. There are clearly much worse examples but it's this sort of thing that keeps growing.

Did you know that all of this hatred is merely a fulfillment of the law! In verse 25, Jesus quoted from Psalm 35:19. *But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'*

4. Don't think you are better than the world.

²¹ *But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.* Jesus is clear—we will be hated for the sake of his name. However, make sure they hate the Jesus in you and not your misrepresentation of Jesus. There's a lot done in the name of Christ that Jesus hates. And many people think they are experiencing a form of persecution when in reality, they're just being a jerk.

The world may hate Christians, but that does not mean we should allow that to make us adversarial to the world. Stand up for truth but do it with love in your heart. Once we think we are better than someone else, we lose all ability to love them. If you lack compassion for them, they will sniff that out like a bloodhound. That goes for enemies as well as friends.

I'll never forget one of the first spiritual conversations I ever had with someone after we moved to Viroqua. I was moving our office into the second story of the Landmark, so it was my first chance to witness to that crowd. After we were talking for a bit, I must have said something a little snarky because she stopped and said, "Are you being sarcastic?" Ouch. I was being sarcastic and I apologized to her, but that put an end to the conversation. I have no memory of what I actually said to her, but her response is forever burned in my heart. I shut down a good spiritual conversation because of a lack of love.

We have to remind ourselves that we are no better than the world. The only way we are different is that Jesus plucked us out from the pack of rebels. We were them, and in many ways, we have all of the same sin struggles as they do. Not all, but some of the world will inevitably hate us, but we cannot hate them back. Snarky attitudes, sarcastic comments and religious platitudes will only throw fuel on their fire of their hatred. That is true whether the conversation is in person or on social media. Social media and email tend to turn people into jerks.

But you can make all this hate stop. Do you want to know how to make the world stop hating you?

5. The more we love one another, the more the world hates us.

Loving one another is bound up with loving Jesus, which is also bound up with obedience to Jesus. Therefore, when I say that the more we love one another, the more the world hates us, it is the same thing as saying, the more we love Jesus, the more the world hates us. Do you see that? It's true because our love for one another is inseparable from our love for God. Therefore, do you see how to make the world hate you less? It's so simple, isn't it? Just love Jesus less.

Not willing to do that? How about loving Jesus more then? That translates as loving one another more. And that will take a lot more vertical and horizontal repentance. Many of us have serious block to loving one another that we have to deal with. But there's more good news. As we love Jesus more, some people will hate us, but some will be drawn to Jesus by our love.

Rich Maurer
August 12, 2018

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](#) (p. 521). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

² Comparisons

Walton family--\$175B

Bezos--\$140B

Gates—\$90B

Zuckerberg--\$80B

³ Carson, D. A. (1991). [*The Gospel according to John*](#) (p. 522). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

⁴ <http://lhim.org/blog/2008/09/23/jesus-is-my-boyfriend/>

⁵ DA Carson, *Worship by the Book*, Zondervan, © 2002, p. 50.