



Walking the Way of Jesus

Dear Friends, **Part 2 - Jesus' Way of Long-Suffering Love**

Jesus' way was more than a way of sacrificial love. It was also a way of long-suffering love. This was a love that could take the blows that life deals us; a love that does not return insult for insult; a love that suffers but makes no threats; a love that blesses those who curse and cause it harm. Jesus outlined this way for us in the Sermon on the Mount. Having declared He had come to fulfil the Law (Matthew 5:17), Jesus was the first and only one to live out the Sermon on the Mount perfectly. "Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." (Matthew 5:39) Jesus did not quarrel with the Samaritans unwilling to receive Him; He did not call fire down from heaven, though He had the power to do so. Instead, He endured their behaviour and continued to love them until He finally laid down His life on the cross for everyone, including the Samaritans.

When treated disrespectfully at the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus did not leave indignantly. Despite His host's neglect, He humbly took His place at the table in the presence of those who made no effort to hide their disdain. "Gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29) is how Jesus characterised Himself, and so He was.

From this position of humility, He could then challenge Simon with authority (Luke 7). Again and again, Jesus endured the conniving Pharisees, who watched Him day and night, spreading lies and trying to trap Him. He did not restrain them, though a word from Him and they would have been struck down by illness or death, and their efforts stopped for good. When Jesus did speak out, as for instance in the lamentations He pronounced over the Pharisees, His words of divine judgment came from a heart of humble love. This was the same love He demonstrated in dealing with all His enemies, a love that had authority when carrying out judgment.

Jesus radiated love in all His encounters, including with the crowd decrying Him at the Feast of Tabernacles. "You are demon-possessed." (John 7:20) How did He respond to their malice? He did not turn away from His slanderers, nor did He give them over to the devil. Instead, He appealed to the crowd with a long-suffering, forgiving love. "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink" (John 7:37) When Jesus revealed His shepherd heart for His people, many treated His words dismissively, even derisively. "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" (John 10:20) There at the Feast of Tabernacles He continued to speak with a shepherd's love, an enduring love that nothing could embitter. What was the reaction? "The Jewish leaders picked up stones again to throw at Jesus so that they could kill him." (John 10:31 EASY)

What an amazing love Jesus showed for His critics and enemies. He did not mind what would happen to Him. He did not care what people thought of Him. Filled with compassion for their souls in bondage to the evil one, He loved them continuously, attempting to reach their hearts. He did not abandon them or give them up for hopeless.

Instead, He engaged with them. After the latest incident, He didn't say: Enough is enough. He did not refuse to have anything more to do with them, despite their attacks against Him. But one thing He did do. Love them without end, without limit. He continued to wrestle for their souls regardless of how they treated Him. He was mocked and rejected. He was bound, scourged and nailed to the cross. Yet His one response was love, love and more love. From the cross He pronounced words of forgiveness on His enemies. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34 KJV) O Love Divine, all praise and glory be to You now and in eternity!

Particularly in His dealings with His disciples Jesus was the very epitome of long-suffering, enduring love. We sense His pain when they failed through lack of faith. "How long shall I put up with you?" (Matthew 17:17) And yet He loved and bore with them to the end, Judas included, the man who betrayed Him. Love is not embittered. Love bears all things, endures all things. Jesus endured it when His created beings laid hands on Him, arrested Him, spat on Him, dragged Him from judge to judge, subjecting Him to abuse and insults at four trials. He endured it when they threw Him down, stretched His limbs and nailed Him to the cross. All this He endured for love of His tormentors. In His long-suffering love He was like a lamb, silent before its shearers. He suffered quietly as He stood before His judges, allowing them to accuse Him.

When He did speak, it was only out of love for people's souls. Hence His response to Pilate, "You say rightly that I am a king" (John 18:37 NKJV), and to the servant who struck Him, "If I said something wrong ... testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" (John 18:23). When coming under attack, Jesus never spoke to defend Himself. Humble of heart, He never felt the need to. He accepted their treatment as if He really were a criminal and deserved it.

Jesus is calling us to walk this way of long-suffering, non-retaliatory love, as He outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. Do we pride ourselves on our giftings and achievements in Christian service? God's Word tells us that even if we were to let ourselves to be burned as a martyr, it is of no benefit to us if enduring love is missing (1 Corinthians 13). In other words, long-suffering love is a fruit of the Spirit, not to be confused with justification by works. It is an attribute, an attitude (Galatians 5:23). Walking the way of enduring love means dying to self. It means deliberately putting to death our old sinful self and any tendency to brag. This path is best summed up as, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). By our own strength we are incapable of walking this way. Yet with it comes wonderful promises of blessing. "If we endure, we will also reign with him." (2 Timothy 2:12) "If we share His sufferings, we know that we will ultimately share in His glory." (Romans 8:17 VOICE) The way of the Lamb is the way of victory. Those who go this way of long-suffering, non-retaliatory love are overcomers. They are privileged to enter the City of God, where they will be heirs of the heavenly glory.

Because Jesus in His love wants to share with us the glory that is His inheritance, He invites us to walk His way of enduring love. Nothing and no one can ever embitter this love.

This is the love that endures everything life throws at them: injustice, public shame and humiliation. It blesses its enemies, showing them love and forbearance. Jesus modelled for us the way of long-suffering love. He spelt it out so clearly in the Sermon on the Mount, which He ends on a compelling note of challenge: Only those who truly do His will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Satan, however, will pull out all the stops to keep us from walking this way. His argument will be all too familiar. Sadly, many Christians fall for it. *You can't take everything lying down. That way you only strengthen others in their distorted belief system. It's giving free scope to the devil and his influence. You must maintain self-respect. You can't let others get away with walking over you. Don't let them take advantage of you. You have a responsibility towards them. You can teach them a thing or two.* Sounds reasonable. At least from a human perspective. But it doesn't tally with the divine principles in the Sermon on the Mount. Nor does it do us or anyone else any good. Such conduct is soul-killing. Satan is aware that Jesus' way of priestly, long-suffering, non-retaliatory love is the way of salvation. It is the way to ultimate spiritual authority. So Satan does his best to portray such a pathway as hopelessly unrealistic. It's only for wimps, cowards and weaklings with no self-respect. Does it bother us that anti-Christian ideologies promote the very same argument?

If we but knew it, there is great power in going the way of enduring love: power over Satan, power over evil. Satan hates long-suffering love and will do everything to stop us embracing it. Choosing blessing over retaliation empowers believers spiritually (1 Peter 3:9). Certainly, it is not a path for the weak-willed, the feeble, the cowardly, the flighty and ungrounded.

On this path Jesus suffered, died and won as the Lion of Judah and Prince of Victory. This is a path only for the strongest and bravest. It is not for those who fight for their rights. It is not for those with no control over their emotions, those who, driven by indignation and anger, lash out in retaliation. So, who can go this way? The naturally heroic and magnanimous? Being kind to others and blessing them show true greatness of character. Responding this way will be far more effective than telling off those who harm us. Of course, there is a place for addressing poor behaviour, especially if we are in a position of authority.

This is a responsibility we all share. When people act badly, it negatively impacts themselves, those around them, and the wider community to which they belong. The key is that whenever we confront others, we should do so in humble, long-suffering love.

Don't deceive yourself. Our arrogant self is usually the problem. It's about entitlement. We complain: Where is the respect that is my due? Real love can take a lot. But this is precisely what we appear to lack: long-suffering, patient love. Self argues: I can't take it lying down. Giving in to others does them no good: it only makes them worse. I must give as good as I get. My self-respect demands it. Our first concern should be to die to our rebellious nature. Then the negativity in others will also die: otherwise never. When we dare to go the way of long-suffering love, we will see God liberate even those deep in bondage. It is impossible to say how many have been won over by believers reflecting the merciful, long-suffering love of Christ.

Remember the story of Francis of Assisi and the three robbers. Won over by his love, they became disciples of Jesus and faithful Franciscan brothers.

Then there was Madame Guyon. She was constantly harassed and wronged by her mother-in-law, who took advantage of her. Madame Guyon responded to this treatment with the love of Jesus, a long-suffering love that bears everything, a love that is never embittered but blesses its enemies, showing them kindness. Eventually, after ten years, the mother-in-law was won over: she was completely transformed.

Immense spiritual authority lies hidden in the way of long-suffering love because it calls for the greatest sacrifices. To go this way means giving up yourself, your rights, in a spirit of love. This is only possible in union with Jesus, who calls us to walk in His footsteps. Do we believe in Jesus?

Do we believe in the Lamb of God, the epitome of long-suffering love? Going the way of the Lamb, the way of non-retaliation, proves we do. By walking with Him who suffered in silence and blessed His enemies, we show that we truly believe in the Lamb of God and belong to Him.



The more
you focus on
your struggles,
the more they will
pull you down.
Focus instead on
JESUS.
Walk in His freedom
and light.

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