

WHO SAID LOVE WAS EASY...

"I give you a new commandment--Love one another as I have loved you." Jesus' directive to his friends as he neared the end of his life seems simple enough but as anyone can tell you—love is very hard work!



I remember cradling my newborn son, nuzzling his tiny head, exhilarating in his sweet baby smell and being filled with a love I had never known before. I was sure that nothing could ever diminish those feelings. Several sleepless nights, cries I didn't know how to respond to, smelly diapers, and mess upon mess in my house had me asking myself, "What have you gotten yourself into?" Suddenly my life was no longer my own. Things had changed dramatically and though it called on strengths I didn't know I possessed I somehow found myself growing and my heart expanding to embrace my new life. It's not to say that I was the happy perfect mom from that day forward. There were still many times when I got frustrated, angry, afraid, and felt overwhelmed and powerless, but I was in it for the long haul with its ups and downs and lots and lots of prayer for guidance and strength. Love is hard work.

Love is even hard for little people. My six-year-old twin grandsons are very close but after an argument one of them told me, "it takes a while for the love to fill back up,"--wise insight for one so young.

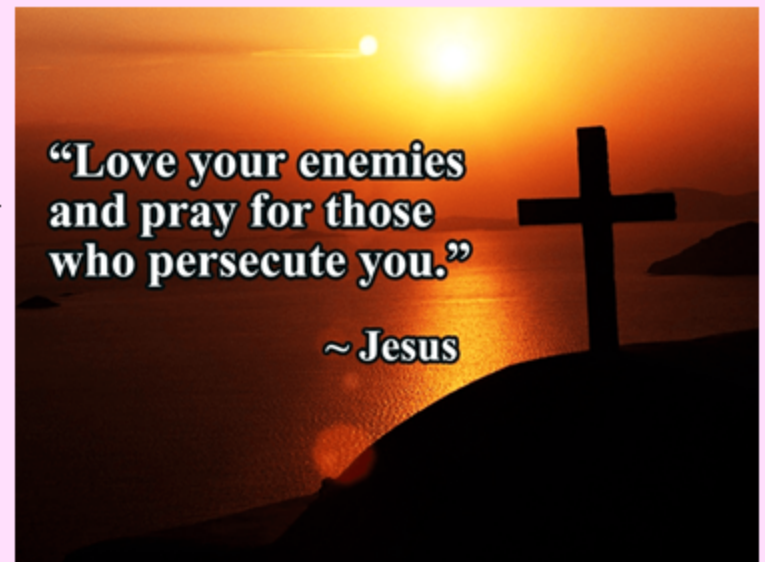
My seven-year-old grandson is a person with autism. Though he is verbal and intelligent he has had hard time learning in a traditional classroom and is uncomfortable with touch and many social interactions. He easily gets frustrated and sometimes acts out. I love him very much but I have to find new ways of interacting and expressing affection that work for him. Hugging for him means being next to him not arms around him. He's uncomfortable with kissing, and as any grandma, I like to smother my grandchildren with kisses. Loving him means being tuned into his needs and comfort. It's different from how I relate to my other grandchildren, but it's how he and I love each other. I know he appreciates it. When I was leaving after a recent visit he told me, "Grandma, I don't want you to leave. I love you." My heart melted. We really

were connecting!

When my husband was in his final bout with cancer much as I loved him life was very difficult and I often was frustrated and impatient, though that wasn't my intent. Disease, effects of radiation, and medication changed him from an energetic man with a quick sense of humor to someone growing ever more feeble with decreasing energy and an inability to taste and swallow food no matter how hard I tried to prepare something for him to eat. We both were upset.

I had chosen to stay home with him when he was sick—it was what I believed God wanted me to do—and seeing the one I loved decline and slip away was very difficult. There were occasional sparks of the old Jim, but too often I felt only the burden and the loss. I used to walk and pray each day and vent my frustrations with my situation to God. The message I heard was always the same: "Go home and love him." So I tried. As a result our final hours together were intimate, tender, and soaked in love. It wasn't what I had planned or hoped for but it was exactly what our love was meant to be.

"Love one another as I have loved you." It's hard enough with family and friends, but people that we don't like or that have hurt us—ones that we see as enemies. Surely God can't expect us to do that. And yet we are told: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you."



Loving one's enemies doesn't mean putting oneself back in a dangerous situation but it does mean letting go of the anger and resentment toward them that we often hold unspoken in our hearts. The Big Book of AA offers a suggestion that at first hearing sounds impossible: if you want to be free of resentment, pray for the person you resent. Pray not that God make them behave the way you want them to but instead that God give them every good thing you want for yourself. Do this every day for two weeks and you will find that your heart is softened—and both of you are free. It works. I know. I've done it.

The kind of love that Jesus modeled and calls us to is not lacy hearts, candy, flowers and fairy tale endings but fidelity and steadfastness, especially in the hard times. Not easy, but then nothing worthwhile ever is.

~ Angela Anno