

Bearing With One Another

Romans 15:1-6

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March 27-28, 2021

Several weeks ago, Edgewood hosted a simulcast event from Voice of the Martyrs called, “Imprisoned for Christ,” featuring three men who were jailed for Jesus. We were urged to pray for persecuted believers to remain firm and faithful. During this event, I learned of a brand-new book by Todd Nettleton called, “When Faith is Forbidden: 40 Days on the Frontlines with Persecuted Christians.” I immediately ordered a copy. There is a link on Sermon Extras if you’d like to do the same.

Listen to an excerpt from chapter two called, “I Used to Beat Him.”

The nickname “Haji” is a term of respect in the Muslim world, bestowed on those who have completed their haji pilgrimage to Mecca, one of Islam’s five pillars. It’s not commonly combined with the title pastor!

We met “Pastor Haji” at his grass-roofed house in the southern part of Ethiopia, an area where a rising tide of radical Islam was threatening the church and Christian believers. Outside the house, there was a burn mark on the wall. One-week prior, radical Muslims tried to set fire to Haji’s house.

As we sit, drinking orange sodas Haji graciously offered us, we can look up to see sunlight streaming through holes in the tightly packed grass roof. The holes are the result of neighborhood Muslims throwing stones onto the house, trying to pressure Haji and his family to leave the area or return to Islam.

Haji understands the hatred of radical Muslims. He used to be one of them! He was so devout; he was sent to Saudi Arabia for special training.

As we stood outside the hut, Haji had his arm around the evangelist that brought us to meet him. Nodding his head toward the evangelist, he said five words I will never forget.

“I used to beat him.”

Haji went on to tell us that he was the leader of a radical Islamic group of young men, and part of their holy duty to their Prophet was attacking and harassing Christians. One of those they attacked was this very evangelist, the man now smiling with Haji's arm draped loosely across his shoulders.

In spite of beatings, the evangelist refused hatred for his attackers. Instead, he showed them love and offered them blessings and good news. Haji had no explanation for such a response. How could a man you were beating show love to you? How could he not grow angry and fight back?

Eventually, Haji's heart was won by the gospel message and the love of the Christian man he was attacking. He left the vitriol and violence of Islam for peace beyond his understanding.

This follower of Christ was able to forgive a Muslim for beating him. It makes me wonder why I struggle to bear with someone who simply bugs me.

In this final installment of our “One Another” series our focus is on the biblical imperative to bear with one another. This week, I learned something new about the 59 “one-another” statements.

- One third of them deal with unity in the church.
- Another third instructs us to love one another.

Edgewood will be united to the extent we love one another. I've been pondering one pastor's perspective: “*The primary activity of the church was one-anothering one another.*”

As we've been learning, and many of us have experienced first-hand, every relationship we have can rupture easily. If we don't work at it, our idiosyncrasies will become irritants and our unity will unravel. That's why we must follow the exhortation in Ephesians 4:3 for us to be: **“Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”**

While going through some old files, I came across an online search I did 18 years ago on “annoying people.” 1.1 million sites came up in the search results! This week, I did the same search, the number of results increased from 1.1 million in 2003 to *170 million today!* I don't know if that means there are that many more irritating people or if our tolerance for those who aggravate us has tanked.

My guess is there are some annoying people in your life. Do you have any corrosive Christians eating away at your insides? Anyone getting on your nerves? Do you have some sandpaper saints rubbing you the wrong way?

In a book called “*People I Could Do Without*,” Donald Smith says our pent-up exasperation with people can send us into one of two modes: a “reactionary rampage” or a “silent seethe.” It’s no surprise the Bible has quite a bit to say about bearing with one another.

The phrase, “*bear with*,” means, “*to endure patiently, to put up with, to be indulgent, to suffer.*” It has the idea of longsuffering and being slow to be angry. We don’t do much bearing with other believers today. We sound off, run off, or run somebody else off. Sometimes we square off and want to knock someone off, but seldom do we put up with people.

The phrase “***bear with***” occurs 17 times in the New Testament. I like how the NASB captures what Jesus said to the disciples in Matthew 17:17: “***You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?***”

Ephesians 4:2 gives us four ways to cut others some slack: “***With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.***”

1. We must deal with our pride, always thinking we’re right and everyone else is wrong. When we’re humble, we’ll put up with people because we know we’re not all that easy to be around ourselves.
2. We’re to be gentle with believers who behave differently than we do, recognizing how the God of grace deals gently with us.
3. When we’re patient with others, we can see they’re in process, just like we are. God isn’t finished with me and He’s not done with you either.
4. When we bear with others, we’re to do so in an attitude of love, not indifference or hatred.

Turn to Colossians 3:12-13: “***Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.***” Instead of being harsh with others, we’re called to be holy and humble. We’re to bear with those who bug us and if someone has wronged us, we’re to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us – even those who persecute us. Before you can bear with someone,

you may first need to forgive them for whatever they've done to you. Forbearing and forgiveness often go hand in hand.

This leads to our main idea: *Because Jesus bears with us, we can bear with one another.*

We're called to put up with different personalities, different preferences and different perspectives.

Several weeks ago, we briefly referenced Romans 15:1-6 when we were exhorted to accept one another. I want to go back to this text and take a closer look. As we do, we'll discover six ways to bear with those who bug us.

- 1. Put up (1)**
- 2. Build up (2)**
- 3. Look up (3)**
- 4. Grow up (4)**
- 5. Stand up (5)**
- 6. Speak up (6)**

Paul is writing to two distinct groups of people in the church at Rome: the weak and the strong. And each group grated on the other.

The “strong” saints had no problem eating meat sacrificed to idols, while others felt by eating meat, a person could become spiritually contaminated. This group followed a strict diet and felt some days were more spiritual than others. These “weaker” believers bothered the “stronger” saints who felt they could indulge in ribeyes and worship on any day they wanted.

One group hadn't fully grasped the extent of their freedom in Christ while the other group exercised their freedom in Christ with a clear conscience but didn't bear with other believers who disagreed.

We can easily fall into thinking the way we do things, or our perspective, is proper and right, and those who differ from us must somehow be wrong. Some of us go out of our way to try to control how other believers believe and behave, secretly judging them according to our own spiritual standards. In fact, most of us would categorize ourselves as “strong” as we wonder why so many people are “weaker” than we are.

Matt Smethurst frames it this way: “*An immature Christian is someone who has a PhD in others’ sins and a junior-high diploma in their own.*”

Let me be clear. We are not asked to tolerate someone’s trespasses. Instead, we’re called to give grace to those who are wired differently than we are. These differences are sometimes expressed in lifestyle choices or they may just be annoying habits. We’re called to bear with someone who is a bore or someone who snores. Maybe it’s someone who sneezes or wheezes. Perhaps it’s someone who’s nosey or rosy (guess I’m a poet and don’t know it).

Here’s the rub. The person who rubs me the wrong way may not be sinning against me, but I can very easily sin against him or her with my attitude and actions.

1. Put up (1). The first thing we’re called to do is to put up with people. Look at verse 1: “***We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.***” The stronger believers are to bear with believers who mess up. When Paul uses the word “***obligation,***” he’s saying we’re bound by Christ to bear with others.

In an age of cancel culture and hyper-critical Christianity, we’re called to endure the frustrations of living closely with others, as we tolerate disputable matters we disagree with, or as we simply put up with personality quirks and preferences. We’re challenged to restrain our natural reaction towards odd or difficult people by just letting them be themselves, without thinking they need to become just like us.

The key is found in the last part of the verse: “***and not to please ourselves.***” This goes back to what we learned last week. While our tendency is to strive for first place, we’re to lunge for last place as we follow the example of the One who died in our place. Paul had this figured out according to 1 Corinthians 9:12: “***...but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.***”

It’s always been easy for saints to get sideways with one another. In the late 1800s there were two deacons in a small Baptist church in Mayfield, Kentucky. They didn’t get along and always opposed each other in any decision the church made. On one particular Sunday, one deacon put up a small wooden peg on the back wall, for the preacher to hang his hat on. When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged and left the church. The church split and a new church was formed called the “Anti-Peg Baptist Church.”

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2. Build up (2). Not only are we to put up with people, but we're also called to build up one another. Look at verse 2: "***Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.***" When we bear with one another, we allow God to use us to help construct Christians. When we blast away at people, we willingly or unwillingly participate in the process of tearing them down. We're not to just endure those around us, but instead we're to encourage them. Our aim is to be a disciple-making church where everyone who has been discipled is discipling other disciples.

God is committed to building people up and is greatly grieved when we demolish what He has designed. Isaiah 57:14: "***Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from my people's way.***" Are you a hindrance or are you a helper? God doesn't want obstacles to stand in the way of someone's growth. He longs for builders in the body of Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "***Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.***"

Part of building others up is recognizing how we might irritate others. Is there anything you're doing right now which annoys those around you? One of my bad habits is not answering Beth when she calls my name looking for me in our house. I know it bugs her, but for some reason I keep doing it. That's something I can change (if I want to).

If you know you're rubbing people the wrong way with something you're doing, then maybe you should change.

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3. Look up (3). We'll only put up and build up if we're looking up. Notice verse 3: "***For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.'***" As we fix our eyes on Jesus, we'll be reminded He did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Paul quotes Psalm 69:9 to show how Jesus embraced the insults of irritating people. He didn't please Himself and He took on reproaches which were not His to bear, so good could come to others.

If you find yourself getting irritated and annoyed all the time, it's probably because you're not looking up enough. Matthew 17:8 tells us what three of the disciples did when they saw Jesus transfigured: "***And when they lifted up their eyes, they***

saw no one but Jesus only." Look up at Jesus and remember He puts up with you and He bears with the person who is bugging you. When you lift your eyes and only see Jesus, you'll be less prone to see the problems in other people.

Greg Laurie tweeted some advice this week: "*Before you get caught in the crazy cycle of hurt and forgiveness, try shifting your glance away from the one who hurt you and setting your eyes on the One who saved you.*"

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4. Grow up (4). If we're ever going to bear with the porcupine people in our lives, we must also take responsibility to grow up in our faith. We grow by daily spending time in Scripture and joining a discipleship group or growth group.

Look at verse 4: "***For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.***" The phrase "*former days*" refers to the Old Testament and the giving of instructions like the 10 Commandments, which will be our next sermon series called, "Written in Stone."

The word "endurance" relates to how we deal with life's problems and people's weaknesses. The Bible encourages us so we can be filled with hope – hope that others will change, and more importantly, that we will change.

Are you reading your Bible on a regular basis? Let me state this both simply and strongly: *It is impossible to grow as a Christian if you are not allowing God's Word to enter your life.* 1 Peter 2:2 links our growth to our spiritual diet: "***Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.***" We begin to change when we soak ourselves in Scripture. If you're looking for a place to start, our April Bible reading plan will cover the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

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5. Stand up (5). Since God bears with us, we must be willing to stand up with those who have fallen down or are just different from us. Look at verse 5: "***May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.***"

God's heart is for the church to be united and to stand together according to Acts 4:32: "***Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul...***"

I've made the mistake of allowing my first impressions of people to keep me from being one in heart and mind with them. When Beth and I were involved in a ministry together at a previous church, we met someone who rubbed us the wrong way. She seemed arrogant and stuck up and we wanted nothing to do with her. When we learned more about her, we discovered she had survived a tough family situation. Our attitudes changed almost immediately. Sometimes we simply need to get to know people before we conclude they irritate us.

Let's cut people some slack and recognize we seldom have the whole story. God's heart for unity is also revealed in Zephaniah 3:9. He knows we're sinners, so He purifies us. When we're cleansed, we can stand up and serve side-by-side: "***For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord.***"

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6. Speak up (6). The ultimate goal, or the reason *why* we are to bear with one another, is so we can bring glory to God. Look at verse 6: "***That together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.***" The phrase "***one voice***" means "*with one accord*" and is only possible when there is no contention or strife. When we allow other believers to bug us, then our worship will be short-circuited, and our service will be splintered.

What do people hear from the church when we're griping about each other? How can they learn about God's glory if we are not speaking up with one voice in order to make Him look good to others? When we stand up, we're to speak up in praise to the Lord according to Nehemiah 9:5: "***Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting.***"

Do you want to learn to bear with others? If so, then put up, build up, look up, grow up, stand up, and speak up.

Action Steps

- 1. Make a list of the people who bug you.** After you finish, look through the names and find the common denominator. Are there some traits or attitudes which annoy you? Ask God to help you see people from His perspective.
- 2. Pray for the list of problem people for two weeks.** Your relationship with people who irritate you will radically change if you pray for them by name for the next 14 days!
- 3. Ask God to change you.** As hard as I might try, very seldom can I change someone else. The problem is not other people, the problem is more personal – it's me...and I can ask God to do something about me.
- 4. Let go of grudges and forgive faults.** Release your grip on a grudge or it will strangle you. The longer you hold on to it, the more it will get hold of you. Is there someone you haven't forgiven? It's time to let go of your grudges.
- 5. Restore a broken relationship.** What one positive step can you take this week to mend a fractured friendship? Do you need to make a call or send someone a note?
- 6. Perform an act of service.** Loving feelings tend to follow loving actions. If you wait for the feeling, you may be waiting a long time. I've been helped in this regard by a quote from C.S. Lewis, "*Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.*"

As the robins reappear this spring, I remembered an article I wrote several years ago entitled, "Rockin' Robin."

Thunk. Splatt. Kapow. Thwack. No, these are not crazy captions from a Batman fight scene. Our family first heard these sounds coming from one of our bedrooms when we lived in central Illinois. The noise was both eerie and irritating. Upon investigation we discovered that it wasn't Batman, but his sidekick Robin. Well, actually it was just a robin smashing into the window that I had just windexed.

This went on for days and I didn't think he'd ever stop attacking our window. He began early in the morning and continued until sundown. Wanting to make sure this robin wasn't trying to get my attention like Edgar Allan Poe's

“Raven,” I decided to think through some life-lessons from the behavior of this red-bellied beast.

But first I did what I often do when I don’t understand something – I “googled” the phrase “robin attack” and discovered some interesting facts. A robin is very territorial and when he notices his reflection in a window, he gets agitated, raises the feathers on his head, and assumes a dominant position. Normally that’s all it takes for other robins to fly away. Instead of leaving the territory, the reflected robin seems to get equally agitated and assumes the attack position. The first time this happens the real robin goes to his favorite song perch and starts singing. When he doesn’t hear a responding song, he’s more certain that he really is in his own territory.

However, when the robin sees the reflection again, he goes ballistic—and so does the reflection. As the real robin flies toward the window the reflected robin seems to attack as well and then the robin hits the glass. No matter how aggressive the robin gets, the reflection never goes away. And the robin won’t let up either, thus explaining the incessant dysfunctional cycle of our bent-beaked feathered friend.

I see four lessons we can apply to our lives.

1. Some of us are fighting imaginary battles as we invest our energy in aggressive outbursts against people, who are not really our enemies anyway. We often attack in others what we don’t like in ourselves. I wonder how many times we get upset with people precisely because they exhibit the same tendencies we have. Kapow.

2. When we unload on others, we get distracted from our purpose in life. When a robin makes war on a window, he forgets to work on important tasks like making a nest, finding food, and singing songs. Likewise, when you and I enter into combative conflict with those around us, we stop singing and we disengage from what we’ve been designed to do. Thunk.

3. Fighting people not only hurts others, it hurts us as well. Perhaps you have a sour spirit as a result of what someone has done or said to you. Or maybe you’re resentful at God for what’s happened in your life. Proverbs 14:10 says, “**Each heart knows its own bitterness.**”

Are you blinded by bitterness in your life today? Do you have any unresolved anger toward your spouse, kids, parents, boss, a church member, or a friend? When bitterness is allowed to breed, it will always lead to an offspring of antagonism which hurts those around you while destroying yourself in the process. It's like swallowing a bottle of poison and waiting for the other person to die. When you and I allow bitterness over the hurts, slights, and pains of life to control us, we begin to die a slow death. Thwack.

4. Some of us are caught in a cycle of self-destruction. If our rockin' robin didn't surrender soon, he'd eventually harm himself. Do you ever feel like you're caught in a cycle of sin and unholy habits? If you continue in this course, the consequences could have eternal implications. Splatt.

*Brothers and sisters, there's a way out. Jesus can break your bondage and set you free from your sins. He put it this way in John 8:36: “**So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**” Don't allow your hurts to turn into hate. You can become bitter, or you can get better. The choice is yours. Put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior and determine to follow Him as your King.*

*I didn't know how much longer our renegade robin would attack our window, but I hoped he'd eventually go back to helping around the nest and singing to Mrs. Robin. What about you? Are you ready to do what you're designed to do? Instead of smacking into your own reflection, with God's help you can soar above the irritations of life as promised in Isaiah 40:31: “**But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.**”*

Invitation Prayer

Aren't you glad Jesus bears with you? Actually, He did even more – He went to the cross as your sin-bearer. Will you repent of your sins and receive His gift of salvation right now?

Jesus, thank you for bearing with all my unbearable attitudes and actions. More than that, thank You for bearing my sins when You died in my place on the cross. Thank You for rising from the dead to show your power over sin, death and the devil. I believe You did this for me and now I receive You into my life. Make me born again and forgive me for my sins. Come into my life and give me the tenacity

to fully follow You as Your disciple. Give me grace to bear with others. In Jesus name, I pray. Amen.”

New Member 9am – **Jason James**