

**Living Life Upside Down**  
**“Experiencing Upside Down Relationships”**  
(Part 1)

**Intro:** When I started in ministry 25 years ago, I truly believed I was going to see people living radically different lives than the world. Once I went on staff, I thought I would be exposed to spiritual people who were living life God’s way. Unfortunately, what I discovered was just the opposite. I found a bunch of people trying to follow Jesus while they were living like the world. I saw deacons fighting with each other / staff at odds with each other (fight next door) / I saw manipulation – intimidation – gossip – slander – and then we’d put our facades on for Sunday and be spiritual. This was all in my first year of ministry!

- The sad thing about this is that it is not that uncommon. So often, we try to follow Jesus while we look more like the world than belonging to another Kingdom.
- Being a follower of Jesus is embracing a lifestyle that is radically different from the rest of the world. The values of Jesus’ Kingdom look upside down when compared to this earthly kingdom. But, the only way for the promises of God and His word to become a reality in our lives is for us to embrace these upside down values. There is no power without them...no presence...no transformation...no blessing...This is what we are going to explore for the next 4 weeks. (explain)
- One of the key upside values of the Kingdom of God has to do with our relationships. Relationships are treated radically different in God’s Kingdom. Look how Jesus contrasts the two relational values. Jesus wants us to have upside down relationship!

*Matt. 5:43-47 “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.” (NLT)*

- Here are 4 ways Jesus asks us to live upside down in our relationships

**I. Choose To Do The Loving Thing Towards Those That Dislike You**

*But I say, love your enemies*

1. WOW! Now that is upside down living! Love mean people? Haven’t you all seen that bumper sticker that says; “Mean people suck!” One of my favorite ones by the way! BUT, here is Jesus telling us to be nice to mean people...even love them?
2. We all have people who don’t like us. This is just the reality of living in a fallen world. There’s a lot of mean, unhappy people out there and sometimes, they aim that

unhappiness at you! The issue is...what will you do?

3. Please take note: Loving your enemies is NOT being a doormat / not letting people take advantage of you / not allowing yourself to be abused and mistreated / it doesn't mean you let people do whatever they want to you / doesn't mean you never confront.
4. Loving your enemy is choosing to have a loving response towards them despite their wrong actions / attitudes / motives towards you. Regardless what they do, you will choose a loving response! You choose to not live at their level.
5. In God's Kingdom, this is where the power really is! There are plenty of opportunities to practice this!
  - Story of driver flipping me off
  - Story of neighbor angry about his fence

*Prov. 15:1 "A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare." (NLT)*

6. God wants us to experience the truth that there really is more power in love than hate and resentment. You actually live a life of freedom when you choose to love those that hate you.
  - There are a few people in the community that just don't like me. BUT, I embrace one of my favorite upside down principals

*Prov. 25:21-22 "If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink. You will heap burning coals of shame on their heads, and the LORD will reward you." (NLT)* Do the loving thing! (explain seeing them in town and embracing them.

## **II. Choose To Pray For Those That Dislike You**

*Pray for those who persecute you*

1. Not only does Jesus ask us to choose a loving response, He asks us to pray for them as well. Have you noticed how hard it is to pray for people you don't like? He's not talking about praying for lightning bolts either.
2. In all honesty, I personally struggle with this one more than doing the loving thing. I just like the whole burning coal imagery! In some ways, you just get to see a more immediate response. Sometimes, loving people radically changes the relationship for good.
3. BUT, praying for those that have persecuted you allows God to heal and protect our hearts from bitterness. It's an upside down response to mean people. Sure this isn't easy...and no, it doesn't make a lot of sense to our emotions. BUT, it allows you to be free from these people.
  - Years ago I was voted out of a church. There was a particular couple that made it very clear they didn't like me. The problem was they were moving to Florida a few days before the vote. So they were allowed to vote before they left. (Explain)
4. I had some bitterness in my heart towards these people. They were too far away for me to pour any burning coals on. All I could do was pray for them. I started with one

simply phrase...”Lord, please bless them.” That’s it.

5. Every time those bitter feelings welled up inside me, I’d ask the Lord to bless them. Pretty soon...those feelings disappeared and I was eventually free. I discovered that I wasn’t praying for them because they deserve it, I was praying for them so that I would be free.
6. Some of you have been hurt by a number of people. And if you’re honest, you’re still controlled by them. If you want to be free, embrace an upside down response. Choose to pray for them.
7. Every time you feel those feelings of anger / bitterness well up inside you...choose to pray; “Lord, please bless them.”
8. 2 Things will happen. God may just use your prayers to radically change them. He will also use your prayers to radically change you. Who do you need to be praying for?

### **III. Choose To Act Like The One You Follow**

*In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike*

1. There are many ways God blesses people not because they deserve it or because they have earned it. God is a generous gracious God to everyone in a variety of ways.
2. Just think about all the things God has provided in this life for everyone to enjoy not just the righteous? Even though this world is fallen, mean people and nice people all get to enjoy many of the same things from the hand of God.
  - Sunsets (show a vacation slide)
  - Beaches lined with palm trees (slide eating coconut)
  - Fishing (slide)
3. The reason we choose a loving response / the reason we pray for those that are mean to us is because we choose to live in a way that reflects who we say we follow. If we’re followers of Jesus we should at least try to act like Him! This means we choose to be gracious / generous / with our love and responses towards people.
4. Some people are just emotionally stingy. They’re emotional porcupines. They’re not going to be nice to you unless you earn it. That’s the world’s values not Jesus’ values. Wrong kingdom!
5. I believe this is one of the greatest criticisms of the church today. We don’t act like Jesus! Even unchurched people know that Christians should love people like Jesus did.
6. The greatest evidence that we are followers of Christ are the relationships we experience. It’s not our church activity or the things we do or don’t do, BUT how we treat people that sets us apart...even the mean ones.
7. Jesus said that if all we do is simply love people who are nice to us, all we’re doing is acting like unbelievers. All we’re doing is acting in a way that the world acts. How does this set us apart?
8. Some of you have relationships and situations you’re in right now where you have a tremendous opportunity to respond differently. Work situation? Do you know how

often I hear people complaining about their co-workers? Has it ever dawned on you that Jesus may have you there to love mean people?

- Where do you need to choose an upside down response?
- If you choose it Jesus will empower you to do it. He rewards obedience.
- If you will choose to live upside down in your relationships, you're choosing a life that will be rewarded!

#### IV. Choose A Life That Produces Real Rewards

*If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that?*

1. I love what this verse implies by choosing this upside down relational value...REWARD! God doesn't say to live this way and nothing will happen. NO! He says to live this way and there is a reward for trusting Him!
2. Living life upside down is a rewarding lifestyle. Choosing to live God's way matters. There is blessing that follows obedience. You will notice all through Scripture that God has quite the incentive plan for following Him.
3. It's not easy choosing to live life upside down but it's the most rewarding way you could ever choose to live. You might be thinking what kind of rewards are we talking about?
4. There are internal rewards in your own life. Your life will change. God will heal your heart from past wounds. You'll be emotionally free from those that hurt you.
  - Your faith and trust will grow
  - God will become more real to you because you are embracing His values.
5. There are relational rewards in seeing relationships transformed and healed. As you choose God's relational values, some of these broken relationships God will do miracles in.
  - I'm not saying every relationship will be changed...but I guarantee you that some will.
6. There will be rewards in seeing God use your life as a testimony to others. As people watch how you respond to even mean people, you cannot help be noticed by others. This gives you an opportunity to explain your upside down lifestyle.
  - When Jesus talked about being "salt and light", He wasn't talking about going door to door inviting people to church. The greatest light we have in a dark world is how we treat people.
  - When we choose to love mean people, we go from a candle to a lighthouse! You cannot help but stand out.
7. There will be rewards in eternity for embracing the values of His Kingdom. Someday we will stand before Christ and give an account of our lives. Jesus promises that faithfulness in this life matters in eternity. Faithfulness is rewarded!

*II Cor. 5:10 "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body." (NLT)*

- This is not a judgment to determine our eternal location. That was decided in this life. This is a judgment to determine rewards for faithfulness in this life.
- What are they? I don't know. But I know they are legitimate otherwise, Jesus would have never promised them.

The way to live a life that is the most rewarded life is to choose to live it relationally upside down.

What values are you living? Do your relationships reflect the values of this world or God's Kingdom? Are there some people that God is asking you to love, even though they are not easy to love?

- Will you do the loving thing to those that dislike you?
- Will you pray for those that dislike you?
- Will you choose to act like the One you say you follow?
- Will you choose the most rewarded life possible?

Can we pray together and ask Jesus to help us do something that is humanly impossible.