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The One Another Druthers: Bear with One Another Ephesians 4:1-6

On Tuesday mornings, after I work out, I meet with some of my Life Group guys in a coffee shop to discuss the upcoming Sunday's sermon text. The other day when we were done I walked out to my car and saw a truck parked next to me...and this sitting in the front seat. [Picture] His name is Parker and poor Parker was the goofiest looking thing I had seen in a long time. Parker had his ears clipped. The cone around his neck kept him from scratching his ears and the **cone head** held his freshly cropped ears in place. Parker looked like a cross between a Shriner and a Whirling Dervish.

I called one of my friends over: "You've got to see this." We laughed and pointed and whipped out our camera phones and clicked away. I know a sermon illustration when I see one! And all the while, poor Parker was just sitting there, putting up with the ridicule. But I'm sure that somewhere inside his little cone head he was thinking, "Keep it up, Camera Boy; someday I'm going to grow up and I am going to find you!"

Was it funny? Yes it was funny. Was I annoying? Yes, I was annoying. Did it make it into a sermon? Yes...it did. As Parker sat there enduring his humiliation, he was providing me with a wonderful illustration of this morning's "one another." See if you can find it as we read the text together.

We are studying the "one anothers" in the Bible. We can treat our brothers and sisters in Christ any way that we want to...but God would druther we treat each other in certain ways. Do you remember how many "one anothers" there are in the New Testament? 36. One really precious "one-another" is found in Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens." Isn't that a wonderful image of our life together? Whenever you see a brother or sister carrying a load of pain or worry or sorrow, pick up one end. Help them carry that load. "Bear one another's burdens."

Well...this verse doesn't say that. How does this one go? "Bear **with** one another." The word here means, "Put up with; endure; tolerate." Wow...that doesn't sound very fun. Love one another...greet one another with a holy kiss...encourage one another, spur one another on to love and good deeds...those sound honorable, don't they? Even "submit to one another" has a certain kind of nobility to it, doesn't it?

But "endure one another?" "Tolerate one another?" "Put up with one another?" Really? That's the best we can do? Just put up with one another? Come on, Pastor Mark; you must be exaggerating. Is that **really** what the word means? Well...you be the judge.

In Matthew, after Jesus came down from the Mt. of Transfiguration, this is what happened next:

¹⁴When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. ¹⁵“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. ¹⁶I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

¹⁷“O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied (**speaking to his disciples**), “how long shall I stay with you? **How long shall I put up with you?** Bring the boy here to me.”

¹⁸Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

Do you see the sentence, “How long shall I put up with you?” It’s the exact same word as in our text today. “Bear with one another.” And this wasn’t the only time the Lord Jesus reached a point of frustration with the disciples. “How long shall I put up with you? How long must I endure you?”

So let me ask this: what kind of people do you have to “put up with?” Annoying people, right? Is there anyone in this church body that you find annoying? Why don’t you take a moment and look around right now. Make eye contact with that annoying person, point at them and say, “You...you annoy me! You’re the one I have to put up with.”

Tell the truth, now...if this was your club...if this was your religious fraternity and you got to say who made it past the membership committee...would you have chosen everyone in this room? There are probably some folks in here who you wouldn’t want to hang out with on a regular basis. Folks whom you find annoying sometimes. And maybe some folks that you find annoying all the time. The way they act, the things they say, their irritating behavior, their quirkiness. Or maybe there are folks who are so needy that every time you see them coming, you feel the life force draining out of you. Or maybe the staunch Democrat and you are a member of the Tea Party. This is not about someone who has offended or sinned against you. They just irk you. You aren’t sure who the security guy is on the outside door, but clearly he was asleep when this one walked in.

The church is full of annoying people. It always has been. A few are universally annoying; just about everyone would agree that they fall into that category. But even more complicating is this: most of us are annoying to someone. So...what does Paul say to do with annoying Christians? Bear with one another. Endure them! Put up with them. Tolerate them. Deal with it.

But how? How do we put up with annoying people in our church family? Actually, Paul gives us three hints that will make us better “endurers.” Did you see them? First, **humility**. The ability to put up with annoying people begins with humility. Actually, so much begins with humility. I wonder if, after love, it isn’t the most noble of the virtues? And Paul doesn’t just say, “Be humble...” What does he say? “Be completely humble.” The Greek word for “completely” means, literally, “every bit of it.” Don’t be a little humble; don’t be adequately humble; don’t be mostly humble. Be completely humble...every bit of you.

Why is humility the starting point for enduring annoying people? Because... genuine humility isn’t just the clever ability to hide how wonderful you are. Complete humility is the deep awareness of how annoying you can be...to others, and especially, to God! Pastor Jeremy said something in the James Project that really struck me. In recent months, he has been praying the same thing over and over: “God, help me to see the truth of my own sin!” If we really see what a grip sin has on us...on our thoughts and behaviors...if we really see how annoying we are to God...it will be easier to be completely humble before others.

Be completely humble **and gentle**. That's the second thing that will make us better endurers of each other. Gentleness is soft-heartedness. When we see how annoying **we** can be, it softens our hearts. We aren't so quick to take offense; so quick to see what is wrong and irritating and annoying about others. We find ourselves trying to understand what is going on behind that annoying behavior.

The theme of last week's women's retreat was, "If you really knew me, you would know that..." When you see someone who is loud-mouthed or opinionated or irritating in some way, could it be that what they are saying is, "If you really knew me...you would know that I don't have any self-confidence so I try to make up for it by being cocky...if you really knew me you would know that I've failed at one relationship after another and I don't think I'll ever figure out how to love and be loved by someone...if you really knew me you would know that my teenage body is changing and I am embarrassed by the way I look and the way I feel, so I try to distract you from looking at me...if you really knew me you would know that I feel like a failure at everything I put my hand to and the only way I know how to cope is by self-medicating."

Be completely humble and gentle and **patient**. After you see how annoying you are...after you learn to control your harsh, critical, quick -to-judgment attitude and develop a softer heart...then, you are able to settle in for the long haul. The word patient means, literally, "long-suffering." Are you rooting for their comeback? Rooting for that annoying person to change? Pulling for them? That takes patience. And sometimes annoying people stay annoying. Sometimes they never get any better; any less irritating. Like puppies wetting all over the floor, there are some people who just leave puddles everywhere they go. You will never fix them; they will never get housebroken; you will never help them to see the light of day no matter how wise and clever you are. They just are who they are. And you will learn, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to breathe deeply ...and just deal with it. Just deal with it!

Communion is probably the weirdest meal in the world. There's not much to it. A pinch of bread, a sip of juice, and we're done. And even weirder, we eat it with some folks that we would probably never invite over for Thanksgiving dinner. But here's the deal: it's not our meal; it's the Lord's. It's not our table; it's the Lord's. It's not our house; it's the Lord's. It's not our invitation; it's the Lord's. But it IS our family...because the Lord called all of us and saved all of us and made us his brothers and sisters...which means that we are brothers and sisters to each other...even the annoying ones.

And if you think that some Chapel Hill folks are weird to be with at the Lord's Table, this is a good Sunday to recall that across the world today, and for 2,000 years, the people at His Table are likely to seem way weirder to us than even we do to ourselves. Some speak other languages and some speak in tongues, some have priests and some refuse to have any clergy at all, some have painted images of the saints called icons and some venerate Mary in ways that seem like idolatry to some Protestants. The theology of some is pretty unrecognizable to us, and if it were up to us, they wouldn't be at Jesus' Table—but there they are because he brought them there.

The fact is... we are all annoying to God. We turn our backs on him. We ignore him. We keep doing the things that irritate him. We say we are sorry...and then we repeat the same offensive behavior. There are all kinds of things I do that annoy the Almighty. **But his love is greater than his annoyance.** This meal is a reminder of that...and a reminder of how much He was willing to endure in order that he might welcome us into his forever family/

This week someone told me, "I'm so glad you are preaching on this. There are two Chapel Hill families who are in a feud right now. They can't stand each other." So which two is it? Does that describe you? Is there someone in your church family who is so annoying, you can hardly stand them? **Deal with it.** Endure it. Put up with it. If Jesus can put up with us...even when we put HIM up on a cross... you can put up with whatever it is that you find so annoying. Be humble, be gentle, be patient...and **bear with one another** as you come to the Lord 's Table.

SERMON DISCUSSION & QUESTIONS

Read the passage out loud.

Reflect & Apply Individually: each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church - write down some applications.

Reflect & Apply Together: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

Pray together: tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.

Dig deeper

1. What does "bear with one another" imply about your feelings for the other person? See Matthew 17:17; "put up with" in this verse is the same word. When were you this annoyed with a person in the church?
2. How do the first three adjectives in verse 2 prepare you to bear with annoying people? Are they progressive in nature?
3. What clues do you have that unity matters to Paul and the Lord? What is unity? What is it not?
4. Think of an annoying Christian with whom you have frequent contact. What one thing could you do to obey Paul's command?