

# Tough Love

*When love is especially difficult, it is especially necessary.*



GRACE FONTENOT'S MONTHLY UPDATE



DECEMBER 2017

Dear Friends and Family,

*"...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)* Throughout my life, I have constantly reminded myself of this verse, and especially in this past year and a half of full-time ministry. After all, isn't the unborn one of the "least of these"? And isn't the woman who is going through an unplanned pregnancy, also? What about the man who is hurting because his girlfriend had an abortion? Even if he supported her decision at the time, he may now be confused because he's experiencing loss and regret. Throughout my time with JFA it has been clear to me that all of these people are "least" ones that Jesus refers to in the passage above. But isn't there *someone else* who falls into this category?

Many people ask me, "How do you respond when someone is unkind to you, yells at you, or accuses you of hate, intolerance, or attempting to shame women?" The answer is always, as a dear friend and coworker of mine says, "Love." In Matthew 5:43-44, we read Jesus' words that shed light on this idea: *"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

We are called to love those who hurt us. The question now is: "What does this love that Jesus commands of us look like?" I would point us to the cross. As Christians, we spend much of our time focused on the end of Christ's earthly life: His death and resurrection. However, as the Christmas season approaches we refocus on the beginning of His earthly life, the birth of the Savior. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (John 1:14a)* By becoming flesh and dwelling among us while fully knowing that we would daily betray Him, deny him, and nail His precious hands and feet to the cross, Jesus taught us that this love He commands of us will hurt. He taught us that this love is not self-seeking. It does not only give when it is easy to give, nor does it feel good to give this kind of love.

Sometimes, love does not feel like "love" in the common vernacular. It does not always feel warm or good, there are usually no happy tears or hugs, and often hard truths are not received well. When Jesus called us to love "the least of these," He called us to go against our flesh. Our flesh desires comfort, but as Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has said, *"The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness."*

This is what the Lord has been revealing to me, my friends. He is teaching me in this season that the "least of these" he is calling me to love are those who demean me on campus. I'm willing to estimate that about 95% of the conversations I have on campus are, at the very least, cordial and productive—and at the most, are heart-changing, beautiful and encouraging. Each one is a testimony to the awesome power of our God. However, in recent months those conversations that fall into the 5% have left my heart reeling. I am used to being treated with kindness, and when given just a glimpse of the persecution my Savior experiences every moment, I fail to have the courage to rejoice in it. Yes, you heard me: *rejoice*. Why would we *not* rejoice at the opportunity to be persecuted when Jesus tells us, *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven..." (Matthew 5:11-12)*

With these words in mind, will you join me in praying this Christmas season for all those whom I've met and conversed with in 2017? I have created a photo collage that captures conversations with just a few of those people. Please pray especially for those who were hard to love, who rejected love, or who met love with venom; especially R—, Z—, R—, K—, G—, A—, B—, O—, A—, N—, and A—. I mention these names because behind each name is a person, a person who is desperately in need of the love of Christ. May we all remember that we can only love because He first loved us.

God Bless and Merry Christmas,



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