



TIME OF GRACE®

What Is Love? Show Tough or Tender Love?

Study Notes

Summary

One of the fiercest debates in this generation is the definition of the word *love*. Some define love as speaking the truth, no matter how hard it is to hear. Others define it as acceptance, approval, and applause. Therefore, what one side calls love, the other calls hate. And vice versa! So what is love? This message opens up to the most love-packed passage in Scripture and searches for God's definition of love.

- **I Corinthians 13:4-8a:** Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails.
- Love = _____.
- What does this mean for us?
 - Tough does not equate to _____.
 - Tend towards _____.
 - God is _____.
- **Exodus 20:5b:** I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,
- **Exodus 20:6:** but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Points to Ponder

1. Think back on the church services from the past month. How many tough moments were there? How many tender ones? How does that ratio compare to I Corinthians 13:4-8?

2. Think back on your friendships from the past month. How many tough moments were there? How many tender ones? How does your ratio compare to 1 Corinthians 13:4-8?
3. Read John 2 and look for evidence that Jesus was both tough and tender, yet he always did what was best.
4. Evaluate: The average church used to be too tough on people when it came to financial giving. The average church today is too tender with people when it comes to financial giving.
5. What is the tough news that our friends who don't believe in Jesus need to hear? What is the tender news that we must not forget to share with them?

Homework for Next Week

Read John 1:1-18.

Time of Grace Ministry
What Is Love? Show Tough or Tender Love?
I Corinthians 13:4-8; Exodus 20:5,6
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Just think back on your childhood for a second. Do you think your mom got that mixture right between tough and tender? You know, between discipline and rules, and you get what you get, and you do not throw a fit, and the compassion and the kindness and the bending over backwards to express her love to you? You really need to have both of those things to have a functional home, a great childhood, and really to grasp the very definition of love itself. If you are taking notes in your program today, here is why. I often tell people in premarital counseling that this is God's definition of love: Love is doing what is best. It might be tough, it might be tender, but love always is asking the question what is best for another person, and all you good moms out there, I think you get that.

I mean, if you are only tough, if there is no snuggling and cuddling, if there is no complimenting or expressing affection, you will probably raise a kid who is going to bust out and rebel against your rules the first chance that they can get out from under your roof. But if you have only tender and there is no tough, if it is all come here, it is going to be okay, and bulldozer, helicopter parenting, you know, let me get you a Band-Aid for that boo-boo even though you are 17 years old, like, you are raising a baby who will not be prepared for actual relationships, a real boss, and the real world. Right? The best mixture of love is both tough and tender because love does what is best. Now, what every good mother knows every good Christian does too. If God is love and if Jesus was love walking on two legs, if you are going to understand a good relationship with a father in heaven and if you and I are going to have good relationships filled with love on earth, then we have to recognize that same balance between tough and tender.

Some Christians think they are pretty loving, but they are just kind of tough. They love thumping their bible, quoting the commandment, telling people that they better turn or they are going to burn. But if you are just known for being tough, well, that is not exactly love. But if you are a Christian who is only tender, who expresses love and compassion, sympathy and empathy, who walks with people and says God loves you just as you are, but you never call them out, challenge them, or hold them to biblical standards, well, that is not what Jesus did, and therefore, that is not the best definition of love.

Every Christian has to think very carefully about how they balance those tough moments in conversation and those more tender ones. You know, the police in the community have a hard, hard job. They sacrifice so much of their time and energy and safety. But you also know that the police are not perfect, that there are too many stories that happen too many times, so what do you do and what do you post? Are you tough with the imperfections of our culture? Are you tender

with those who serve? And you could think of 100 more examples, right? Your niece comes out as bisexual. Are you tough? Are you tender? You do not like how your spouse is spending money. Are you tough? Are you tender? What do we do in those real-life situations where both are true and how do we balance them? Don't you wish that you could open the Bible and God would have an answer to that question? Like, God, I know that both are important. What do I do in this moment right now? Is there like some recipe in this book for how many cups of tough and how many cups of tender? And the answer is kind of.

And that is what I want to share with you today. Did you know in the bible's most famous paragraph on love in 1 Corinthians 13 God says a bunch of things that are pretty tough and he says a bunch of things that are pretty tender, and they are not equal. And today, that is the message that I want to share with you. Now, if you are taking notes, I would love for you to put your programs down and your pens down because you are going to have to vote with me 16 times. I am going to ask you over a dozen times do you think it is tough? All right? Like this, capital T, time out we have got to talk about this. Or is it tender? Is it softer? Is it gentler? Tough or tender. Sixteen points. Are you ready for this?

All right, let us do it. In 1 Corinthians 13 the Apostle Paul said this, and you can find the words on the screen. He says, "Love is... it is patient." Wasn't that agonizing, you modern Americans? Five seconds of silence. I am dying right here. "Love is patient." The Greek word for patient means it takes a long time to bubble up. Like a big pot of water on a hot stove it does not bubble up instantly. It takes a long time, and loving, patient people are willing to slow down, drive in the school zone, and do life at a pace that communicates love. When your two-year-old is taking about 15 minutes to tie his shoes to get ready for church, when your spouse is about three minutes late doing their hair and makeup before you want to get out the door, when you end up in aisle three with the trainee who does not know how to look up the price of cilantro, love does not twitch or itch or reach for the phone because love is patient. So, let us vote. Do you think that sounds pretty tough or pretty tender? Yeah, for sure. That is one vote for tender. All right.

Number two, "Love is kind." Love is thoughtful. It is caring. It is nice. A loving person is the one who comes during that stressful season at work and just gives that quiet compliment that means the world to someone. It is the person who puts the date in their phone six months after the funeral to follow up when a grieving widow is really in need. "Love is kind." So, tough or tender? Yeah. I think so too. Two to zero.

Number three, the Apostle Paul says, "Love does not envy." Love does not pout when other people get the praise. You might have tried out for the team, and she got the spot. You might have interviewed for the job, but she got it instead of you. You might have wanted the attention, but now everyone is laughing at him in the lunchroom. But Christian love does not win a monopoly on God's blessing. It wants you to be happy as much as it wants me to. And so, if you get the praise, praise God. Let us vote one more time. Tough? Tender? I think so too. Three to zero. All right.

Let us do four and five together. "Love does not boast," and number five, "Love is not proud." Love does not share the stats. It does not thump the chest. It does not humble brag. Instead, love

says things like this, "Yeah, it was a good report card, and I never would have gotten it without a great teacher." "Yeah, that was a pretty sweet goal, but what you did not see before the highlight clip was the assist and the coach and the parents who drove me to practice." "Yeah, I have been pretty successful in life, but if it was not for 1,000 people, it never would have happened." "Yeah, you know that is pretty impressive, but if it was not for God, I could not do a single thing." Love is not puffed up. It is not proud. What do you think? I give that two more votes for tender. It is a runaway so far.

How about number six? "Love does not dishonor others." Love does not want to embarrass anyone. It cares not just about what is right or my own rights. Love wants to make sure you feel right after this conversation is over. Love is cautious in the comment section because I honestly care about your reputation once today is said and done. Sound tough? I think pretty tender.

Seventh, "Love is not self-seeking." "Myself, I prefer this, and I would choose that, and I would go this way, but it is not about me. It is about you. So, honey, it means a lot to you when we text during the day, when we say little sweet things, when we put away the screens and close the laptops and just connect when we come home and talk about our days. Yeah, maybe that is not my thing, but it is not about me. It is about you." You are not big on physical touch, but you know he likes it when you hold his hand or rub the back of his neck or make love. It might not be the top on your list, but love is not self-seeking. It thinks about the other. And if I had to vote, I would say incredibly tender.

Number eight, "Love is not easily angered." Love has a keyboard and the caps lock does not work, which sounds pretty tender. Number nine, "Love keeps no records of wrongs." Love is the opposite of a cancel culture. When people sin and they are sorry, it opens their arms wide, and it does not bring it up again unless it essentially has to which to me does not sound very tough. It sounds pretty tender.

Ah, but then we read this, "Love does not delight in evil," number ten, "but it rejoices with the truth." Now, I would give a couple votes for tender if that passage says love rejoices with your truth. Like, whatever you think I support you. Whatever you want to do I am behind you. But that is not what Paul wrote, is it? He says, "Love does not delight in evil." If you are doing something that God calls evil or sinful, I cannot delight in you. Love does what is best and if you are doing what God says is not best, I cannot click the little thumbs up. I can only celebrate, I can only affirm, and I can only applaud lifestyles that line up with God's definition of love and if you do not like that, it means you are living your truth instead of his truth. So, what do you think? Tender? Not a chance, right? That is pretty tough.

But then Paul moves on. He says in number 12, "Love always protects." This is where it is actually a little bit difficult to translate from the original Greek, but if we stick with the translation protection, it really implies protecting something from danger. Right? If you are on the offensive line and a blind side sack is coming, protecting the quarterback is tough. If you are in middle school and all the other girls are picking on one of your friends, standing up to the popular kids is pretty tough. When people are protected, it feels very tender, but the actual job of protecting someone if I had to vote would be a vote for tough.

Home stretch, 13th and 14th, the Apostles says, "Love always trusts," and then he adds, "Love always hopes." Love says, "Shh! Shh! It is going to be okay. Be still. He is God. I just trust. I know. I believe he is going to get us through this. I have hope. There is a good future, so let us just take a deep breath, calm down, and put our trust in God." And it is not just my tone I hope, but the words itself that imply two votes for tender.

And then finally, Paul says this, "Love always perseveres," description 16, "and love never fails." The Greek word for persevere means to remain underneath a pressure or a weight. Think of it when you are squatting. Your legs are burning. Last set. You do not want to do it. You want to throw the weight off. When you persevere, you stay under it until the job is done. You do not quit. It is like the last round of one of those high-intensity interval training workouts. You ever done one of those where you just hate life and you are angry and you are moody and you are sweating, and you could quit, but you do not? Love always perseveres and love never fails which sounds like two votes for tough. All right.

You still awake? Yeah? Still with me? Sixteen descriptions Paul crams into this essential paragraph and if you ask Paul is Christian love tough or tender? He would say, "Yes." And then if you pushed him and said, "Well, Paul, how tough and how tender," he would say... By my count it was five toughs to 11 descriptions of tender. Love does not delight in evil. It rejoices with the truth, always protects, always perseveres, never fails. That feels pretty tough to me, but love is patient and it is kind. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. That feels very, very tender. For every one time love is tough, at least two to three times it is pretty tender.

So, grab your pen and your program. I want you to write this down. According to the Scriptures love is tough and tender. Love is tough and so tender. Now, what does that mean for our daily lives? Before I say amen, you have done a great job sticking with me so far. I want to give you just three takeaways as you think about your relationships and your families, your significant others, your next-door neighbors, your bosses, your kids, your whoever, there are three things that God would love for us to take out of church today.

Here is the first one. According to God, tough does not equate to hate. Do not equate tough with hate which is what everyone does these days. Right? When someone calls you out, when someone gives you tough love, when mom says, "I love you, but no," when a pastor or Christian friend says, "You cannot," that is not hate. When someone opens a bible and rebukes you, please do not quote Taylor Swift. As soon as it gets tough, you are a hater. "I thought you were my friend. I thought you loved me." I do, and God says that love has to be tough. If you take off from every church, every relationship, every friendship where someone has to have a tough conversation with you, please know this, you are walking away from love because according to God love is tough.

I know those moments are difficult. I know all of us would rather not experience them, but to be biblical love, it must be both tough and tender. So, I have some scary homework for you today. I want you to ask at least one person, ideally three, if they are scared to talk to you about tough things. If you are dating, if you have a boss or some employees, your brother, your sister, your

whoever, parents, I would love for you to ask your children this, "What is it like to talk to me about tough things?" I think you would learn a lot about you, and I think after the tough part was done, you would end up with a lot more love. You are welcome and enjoy.

Number two. Here is the second point we can take away from this bible teaching, "Tend towards tender." Yeah, love is tough. Yes, Christians take the side of the truth. But according to this definition for every one time that happens, a whole bunch of times we should tend towards tender. Did you ever hear about that study back in the 1970's where a couple of researchers were trying to figure out which couples would stay married and which ones would eventually divorce? Here is what they did. They got a couple in a room, and they timed them for 15 minutes and during those 15 minutes, the couple had to talk about some issue that was a source of tension in their relationship, and the scientists started the clock, they observed, and at the end of the 15 minutes, they made a prediction, "Is this couple going to make it or are they not?" Well, nine years later, the researchers followed up, and it turns out that they predicted correctly over 90% of the time.

So, it makes you wonder what made them guess this or that? Here is the answer. They were specifically tracking how much tough and how much tender couples brought into their conversation. Every time there was a tough moment like an interruption or an accusation or a raising of a voice or an "always" or a "never" and every time there was a tender, "that is a good point," "I am sorry for interrupting you," "I see what you mean," "Yeah, I never thought of it that way," and they found that the married couples who made it were not equally tough and tender. They were about one part tough to five parts tender. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not easily angered. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love trusts, love hopes, and love never fails.

Finally, this is my favorite part. Write this down. God is tough, and God is so tender. There is a beautiful bible passage that says God is love which means sometimes when you read this book, God will be tough with you. He will call you his kid, but he will not let you run his kingdom. It is his will, his kingdom, his glory, his plans, his truth, and he isn't changing his mind about that, not for me and not for you. That is pretty tough, but oh my goodness, for every time in this book that God calls us out, he is so tender. Some of you, I think, tragically grew up in churches where you did not hear much of that. It was the commandments, the expectations, do this, the repentance, a little bit of heaven, a whole lot about hell, but when you actually read the bible, you meet a God who is so insanely tender.

Last night, I was tucking my baby girl into bed, and I was giving her snuggles and kisses, and I said to her, "Maya, do you think God loves me more than I love you?" And she said, "Oh, yeah!" She said, "Compared to God, Dad, your love, your love is like this." I am like, "No, that is impossible. I love you so much. I would take a bullet for you. I would do anything for you. I would almost clean your room for you. My goodness! I love you so insanely." She is like, "Daddy, God loves us so much more." And she is absolutely right because God is the kind of God who tends toward tender. He is so patient with us. Right? I mean, day after day, Sunday after Sunday we struggle to do the right thing, to change our ways, and God is so patient and he is so kind. He always protects us. When the devil would accuse us or those negative thoughts

pop into our head that we are unloved, unforgiven, unworthy, Jesus says, "Uh-uh. You want to get to my brother, my sister? You have got to come through me." And he is the risen, almighty, powerful son of God and nothing gets through him because he persevered. When it was painful the son of God did not shrug off the cross. He hung there, and he would never fail you because God is love. He is so tender. He is so compassionate. We sing sometimes in church, "God, our sins are many." But do you remember the next line? "But his mercy is so much more." God is tough, but if you know him, if you have seen him, you know that he is so tender. Friends, believe that. God will call you out like a good parent, and he will hold you and love you and treat you better than you ever imagined. Let us pray.

Oh, Father, thank you for revealing yourself. There are so many philosophies and religions and ways to see the divine in our world, but no one says this. No one says that there is a God who keeps no record of wrongs. No one preaches grace that is so amazing it separates sin from us as far as the east is from the west. The gods of human invention are just tough and a little bit tender, but you are the flip of that because you are our father.

I pray today, Lord, for faith for everyone who grew up in an oppressive church, people who were just threatened and controlled and commanded, but they were never led to the cross of Jesus to know that your true heart, God, is to love and accept and forgive and protect people forever and ever. Help them to believe that this is what you are really like despite what they have been told.

And then, Father, give us your spirit. There are people that we are going to see this week who are messy, and to be honest, they deserve some of our toughness, so fill us with your heart that we could at times be tough but infinitely more we could be tender. Restore, Father, reconcile. For couples who have been too tough on each other, may their families be different in the days to come as they understand what love really is. For parents and children who have been separated by time and distance and sin, God use this message as a seed that may not fix things today or tomorrow, but a year from now things could be different.

Heavenly Father, love can change the world, and you tell us exactly how to do it with a little tough and a lot of tender. We pray these things, Jesus, in your beautiful name, and all God's people said, Amen.