

## L.O.V.E. or H.A.T.E.

Jesus taught that love for God and love for neighbor are vitally connected. He said that loving your neighbor as yourself is a necessary byproduct of loving God. And the Bible is clear that if you say you love God, but you hate others, then you don't actually love God.

Of course, these things fall along a spectrum of degrees. To the degree that we are actively seeking to love God, it will be reflected in our desire to love people. And to the degree that we are closing our hearts to people, we are closing our hearts to God. So, as we desire to love God more, we will also desire to love people better. Or if we are starting to hold people in contempt, it is because our relationship with God is starting to grow cold. The truth is that loving God includes more than loving your neighbor. But it isn't less than that. Those who love God will love their neighbor. And as Jesus told us, our neighbor is someone who has a need. Right now, our nation needs people to exhibit and experience love, and to put a restraint on hate.

None of us is perfect. Everyone has encountered hate. And we have all had moments where we gave in to hateful thoughts and actions. But the only way to make the world more loving and less hateful is to become more loving and less hateful yourself. So, when we realize that we have given in to hate, and if we feel bad about it, we turn back to God, asking for mercy and forgiveness. We pray for God's grace to be able to change our ways. And that points to the truth; if you are failing to love others as you should, then you are failing to love God as you should, and you need a course correction. And if we are going to change, we need to understand how hate gets a hold of us and shapes how we react and respond to events, situations, and circumstances.

I want to talk to you today about how love and hate process in your life. Love and hate can take the same information and have very different reactions and responses. They come to different conclusions and imagine different consequences because they interpret the information differently. This is because love and hate use different filters. You've experienced this yourself. People can see the same event, but with different eyes. They think of it with different minds. They feel it with different hearts. They process it with different motivations. When it comes to the difference between love and hate, love can respond lovingly even when it isn't loved. Hate can respond hatefully even when it is loved. Your filters influence your feelings which impact your actions.

In order to understand how this process plays out in your life, and in the lives of others, I am going to use the letters of each word, both love and hate, to describe those filters. In that way, you will be able to see where you give in to hate, and how you can track back to love.

As an example, I want you to think about the current crisis in the US. We have many people who are protesting in many cities. This was sparked by the recent death of a man in police custody. There have been many different reactions and responses, both to the death of this man, and to the protests his death resulted in. As we learn more about what's going on, and we think about how this is a reflection of an undercurrent in our society, we need to understand our love and hate filters. Because we can approach and process these events with love. And we don't have to give in to hate.

First, we will look at how love filters your interactions with the information you receive about people, movements, protests, events, etc., and how love reacts and responds.

**Listen** to their heart. Love will listen with the intent to really understand what someone is saying. It is listening to learn, it won't just hear what it wants to, looking to be offended. It won't stop with what seems to be hateful to it, it will look for good and right intentions and motivations. In moments of intense pressure, someone who may have something good and right to say may not say it in a way or act in a way that makes it seem good and right. But that doesn't mean that some of it isn't right, especially at its core. Love gives them the benefit of the doubt. Even when it seems as if they purpose to offend your sensibilities. Think about it. When people are offended, they often respond in kind. When someone feels they are the victim of hate, their response may seem hateful. It's that way for all of us at times. Our first reactions to hateful events may not be as loving as our motivations are. But for your part, even when someone else seems to "start it", remember that love is patient and kind. Find out what they really mean, don't just scratch the surface, think you see dirt, and call them dirty. We all need cleansing, and listening to their heart is part of the process.

**Open** your heart. Be open to the idea that this person, movement, protest, idea, ideal, etc., may have some good and right motivations at its core. Just because some people exploit a situation for sinful reasons doesn't mean that the idea for a protest is sinful in itself. Don't keep your heart and mind closed by looking at the bad actions or intentions of a few and then dismiss or demonize the idea itself. Don't harden your heart because of the bad. Open your heart to the possibility of good.

**Value** them as a person. Value their right to a position, and as having a right to develop their position over the course of time. Allow them the opportunity to grow and to change. All human beings are made in God's image. They are not pure instinct. They have the ability to reason. Value them as a person, their opinions, even uninformed, underinformed, or misinformed opinions and ideals. Love gives them a chance to change. And love gives itself the chance to change. Maybe the answer lies in between you somehow. Love looks for common ground not a battleground.

**Empathize** with their feelings. When you listen to their heart, and you open your heart, and you value them as a person, then you can learn to feel their position. Love gives time to process. Love believes things can improve, and endures while it patiently waits and kindly helps. Love isn't looking for a fight. Love is looking to forgive. Love is looking to forge, foster, and find fulfillment in connection. Love sees, hears, thinks, and acts in accord with that.

**L.O.V.E.** Listen to their heart. Open your heart. Value them as a person. Empathize with their feelings. That's the love filter.

Now we will look at the hate filter, and learn how hate can influence your feelings and actions.

Love listens for the heart. But instead of listening to the heart, hate will...

**Hear** selectively. Hate isn't listening to learn what someone is really saying. It isn't listening for the core of someone's intent and motivation. It is listening for anything that it can find fault with and fight about. Hate just hears what it wants to, the very things that will enflame its angry and aggressive passions. Hate holds up a barrier, with tiny little holes in it, acting as a filter. And the only things that get through it are not the great big pieces of good and right, but the tiny little offenses and wrongs of the other person, group, movement, or event. Love is listening to be enlightened and instructed. Hate is listening to be offended, incensed, and ignited.

Loves opens its heart. But instead of opening your heart, hate will...

**Assume** the worst. Hate isn't interested in the core ideas, ideals, intentions, and motivations of what it labels as the "others". Hate has closed off its hard heart, being suspicious of others. It immediately sees something as all bad and amplifies it, making it bigger than it really is, and magnifying its own sense of offense. Hate thinks and acts as if some person, group, movement, protest, event, etc., is trying to ruin their way of life, trying to destroy society, trying to put down "my people", or my beliefs. Love gives the benefit of the doubt. Hate assumes the worst. No doubt.

Love values the person. But instead of valuing the person, hate will...

**Trash** the person. Hate is occupied with demonizing any and all who disagree with it. Hate loves labels, and it takes joy in labeling its designated demons with hateful, mocking, scornful, and spiteful stereotypes. Hate doesn't place value in the objects of its scorn. It looks for buttons to push, bridges to burn, ideas to ridicule, and people to throw on the scrapheap. Hate doesn't look for common ground, it longs for a battle ground. Hate loves to lump things into one great big pile called "enemy". Its vision is limited by an "us vs. them" mentality. Hate is envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, irritable and resentful. Hate believes in hell for others, but not for itself.

Love empathizes with the person. But instead of empathizing with their feelings, hate will...

**Enrage** your feelings. Hate wants to escalate. It is all out of proportion. It takes anything wrong and magnifies it. It takes anything good and right and diminishes it. If it feels attacked, it amplifies its response. It isn't interested in understanding the other person's pain, it is looking to inflict pain. As hate grows and deepens in your soul, it imagines the pleasure it will get by placing its pain on others and turning up the volume full blast. It is looking for targets, and they are all too easy to find. Hate is hurt, so hate will hurt others. Hurt people hurt people. Hate says I feel justified in hurting you, because that's what you deserve.

**H.A.T.E.** Hear selectively. Assume the worst. Trash the person. Enrage your feelings. That's the hate filter. **L.O.V.E.** Listen to their heart. Open your heart. Value them as a person. Empathize with their feelings. That's the love filter.

Which filter, which approach, which means of reacting and responding do you think will help our national crisis? And which will hurt our crisis? You have the opportunity to use the love filter even when others are using the hate filter. Or even if they aren't processing things the way you would right now, or ever. Your responsibility isn't just to point out wrong, but to do right.

Make sure you don't just brush this off, or just dismiss this by telling yourself that "the other side started it". Yes, there is a time to speak up, to protest, and to do something about injustice. When things need to change, we must say so. And sometimes, it is time to do more than talk. Yes, we need to point it out when people's reactions to injustice are unjust. But we cannot dismiss the voices of so many. We must listen to people's hearts. We must open our own hearts. We must value all. And we must empathize with their feelings. No matter what happens, before you give in to hate, think about it. Because the only way to make the world more loving and less hateful is to become more loving and less hateful yourself.