



Dancing To Jazz: Too Close | May 30, 2018

Discussion Guide

The Scoop

It's a sad truth that places like our churches can be some of the most unkind places. The other sad truth is that this isn't a reflection of God.

Key Verses

Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)

"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, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Discussion

If we're honest with ourselves, sometimes we cover up our tendency to pick on strangers at a distance with our humor and wit. Social media makes this pretty easy. We can snap a photo of someone we've never met from across the room and call attention to their shoes, hair, clothing, etc. and compose a witty caption to send to all of our followers. Before we know it, we are making fun of someone behind his or her back. Something that, for some reason, feels ok on social media but goes against what we learned back in elementary school about treating others with respect.

1. Be honest with yourself... When was the last time you picked on someone from a distance, whether on social media or in person to a friend? What was your driving motivation?
2. Why do you think it's so natural to us to pick on others, especially strangers? How might we disguise this behavior for humor and wit? Do you have a tendency to do that?

Unfortunately, religious institutions – our churches – can be some of the most unkind and unfriendly places. They are full of people who not only have moral high ground, but also high ground in other places as well. This can turn into judgment very quickly if we're not careful. The sad truth is that this distorts the character of God. Secular institutions, on the other hand, can often be more "friendly" and accepting places than our churches.

3. Have you experienced this kind of "higher ground" environment in a church you've been a part of?
4. Why don't you think churches are always the best reflections of God's character?

In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus challenges us to not only love our friends and neighbors – something that's not too difficult – but to love our enemies as well. This is a better reflection of God's character. God nourishes all people, it doesn't matter if you're friend or enemy, and he desires that same behavior for all of his followers as well.

5. How does this challenge hit you? Is it hard for you to wrestle with? Why or why not?
6. How have you either lived this challenge out or avoided it? What is one way you can love an enemy this week?

What's Next?

If we are truly reflections of God, we are called to go live like it. We must live out our God created identity, graciously and generously toward others, the way God is toward all of us.

This week, examine the broken places inside of you where it may be hard to love your enemies and begin to live out your faith in a way that better reflects what God wants from us as we relate to others. Ask God for help to trade your humor and wit for a desire to life others up in encouragement and kindness.