

When I Don't Like People

There are days when I catch myself saying, "I don't like people." And almost as soon as the words leave my mouth, I feel guilty. How can a pastor—someone called to love God's people—say such a thing? But honesty is where grace begins. It's not hatred I feel; it's weariness. It's the ache that comes when compassion meets human selfishness and weariness, including my own.

People can be hard to love. Sometimes they are thoughtless, self-centered, or unaware of the impact of their actions. They interrupt, assume, complain, have no idea how much space they are taking, let their children shout, throw things and climb all over things, or take without gratitude. When that happens, I feel something tighten in me—a frustration that says, *Really? Again?* But then, if I'm quiet long enough, the Spirit nudges me toward humility: I can be that person too. I can be inattentive, impatient, and self-focused. I've had the impatient, unruly child with me before. I am, after all, human and imperfect.

Recovery teaches us this truth beautifully. One of the first lessons I learned in recovery was that I can't control other people's behavior, only my own response to it. The *Big Book* and the *Twelve Steps* remind me that resentment is "the number one offender," and that we are invited to let go of it daily. In recovery, we talk about taking our own inventory instead of taking someone else's, and that when we are pointing a finger at someone else, three are pointing back at us. That's another way of living *Matthew 7:5*: "First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

When I find myself saying "I don't like people," I try to pause and ask, *What in me needs tending right now?* In recovery, we are taught that feelings aren't facts, but they are signals—signs of unmet needs or spiritual disconnection. When I feel repelled by others, it's often because I'm spiritually drained or trying to love from my own limited supply instead of drawing from God's abundance. Am I hungry, angry, lonely or tired?

Jesus knew this tension. He loved deeply, but he also withdrew from the crowds to pray. *Mark 6:31* tells us, "He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'" Even the Son of God recognized that love requires boundaries and replenishment. There is no shame in needing space to reconnect with God so that we can reconnect with others.

In *Romans 5:8*, Paul reminds us, "While we still were sinners Christ died for us." God's love was never conditional on our likability—it's a love that endures even when we're at our worst. Recovery echoes that truth: "We are not saints... we claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection." Those words remind me that ministry, like recovery, is a daily practice of surrender—turning my frustrations over to God, one interaction at a time.

When people are thoughtless, recovery teaches me to pray for them—not to change them, but to change me. It's the essence of *Step Eleven*: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God." When I pause long enough to pray, my perspective softens. I start to see not just their behavior, but their humanity. And I remember that God loves them just as much as God loves me—imperfect, moody, recovering me.

In recovery and in ministry, gratitude becomes the great rebalancer. When I find myself weary of people's faults—or my own—it helps to shift the focus from what frustrates me to what sustains me. Gratitude doesn't deny the difficulty of human relationships; it reframes them. *1 Thessalonians 5:18* says, "Give thanks in all circumstances," not *for* all circumstances, but *in* them. When I pause to name the gifts hidden in the mess—the person who shows up even when they're hard to love, the lesson tucked inside my irritation, the quiet strength God provides when I want to walk away—I start to feel my heart soften. Gratitude reminds me that grace is always present, even when it comes disguised as a challenge. It restores perspective, helping me to see not just the flaws in others, but the beauty of being in relationship at all.

So yes, there are moments when I don't like people. But maybe that's okay. Maybe that's just a sign that I'm human, and that God isn't finished with me yet. What matters is that I don't stay there. I keep showing up. I keep seeking grace. I shift my focus to offer a smile, seek to help someone in need or just take a deep breath and put my headphones in to listen to music that makes me happy. And I keep trusting the truth of *Philippians 2:13*: "For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for God's good pleasure."

When I say, "I don't like people," what I often mean is, "I'm tired of people acting without thought for others." But in truth, my frustration is also a confession that *I'm tired of loving without feeling loved back*. Ministry is full of moments where compassion feels one-sided, where generosity meets indifference, and where forgiveness is taken for granted. It's in those very moments that I most need to remember *John 15:9*: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love."

To abide is to stay rooted—to rest in the truth that love is not something I manufacture. It is something that flows through me from God. My task as a pastor is not to *like* everyone; it is to keep my heart open enough for God's love to pass through, even when my own patience runs out.