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Good morning. Children may be dismissed at Children's Church. Let's start with a word of prayer. Father, please help me to words together correctly for this sermon. I pray that you open up our understanding to learn from your word. In Jesus' name, Amen. Okay. I'm going to start with a story that's a little embarrassing, but that's always a good place to start. So I recently went to one of our local game stores here. Some of you don't even know what that means. There are stores who ... Can you turn those receivers? I'm wondering if that's my problem here. Thank you. Let's see if that fixes it. There are stores whose sole purpose is to sell board games. Like that's all they sell, and card games. And so I went to one of these stores, and it's the same ... All across the country you go to any game store, and you're going to have the same experience. There's going to be long lines of shelves full of games and stuff, and then there's going to be a big room or wall full of tables, and the tables are going to be full of people playing games, and inevitably there is a severe lack of hygiene coming from that side of the room. And it's every game store I've ever been in. It's something ... I realize I'm a person who loves board games, so I've got to be really careful. But something about that culture, there is just sort of this "I don't care" attitude about hygiene. And so I found myself walking into the game store, and it was right during the middle of some kind of tournament, and you just stepped in the door and the smell hit you, and it was like, "Oh my goodness." And I was thinking about hanging out there for a while, and I started changing my mind, and I said, "I don't want to hang out with these people." And at that moment, God decided to convict me of my attitude about other people. And from that point on, for another week or so, he keeps bringing that to mind, and I think that's what I'm going to be talking about every time someone else makes a little comment about how we think about and treat other people, and that's what he laid on my heart as our sermon today. It's a problem for me. I think it's a problem for many other people, and I honestly think that it may be one of the biggest obstacles in the way of growth. So I think it's important that we deal with it. It's not just saying, "Oh, that person has bad hygiene." It's any time we allow our flesh to determine how we are going to relate to other people. If you say, "I'm going to treat them this way," or "I'm not even going to interact with them," or anything based on how you feel, how your flesh is, then this is ungodly. This is not fit for the children of God. Maybe it's because they're too gross. Maybe it's because they're caught up in too much sin. Maybe that person is too rich. I don't hang out with those snobby people. Or if that person is too poor, I don't hang out with those low-class people. Maybe they're Republican or Democrat. Maybe they're too immature. Or maybe they're just taking this church stuff too serious. Maybe they're too old. Maybe they're too young. Maybe they don't like the same kind of music and worship that I do. Maybe you don't agree with their beliefs on some biblical topic. Whatever it is, when we have these thoughts about a person and his preconceptions, and we relate to them based on how we feel rather than on how God feels towards them, then it's sin, and it is disrupting our effectiveness in the kingdom of God. It conveys a clique-ish, standoffish attitude, and it misrepresents God's attitude for them, because we are Christ's ambassadors. We are supposed to represent, "By the way I treat you, you're supposed to get a feel for how Jesus feels for you. And if I treat you in any other manner other than how Jesus would treat you, then I'm misrepresenting him and I'm not being a good ambassador." The Bible deals with this a lot. I'm going to read from the scripture. "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. If there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings and fine apparel, and there should also come a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Sit here in a good place,' and to the poor man you stand there, or sit at my footstool. Do you have your own partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him?" In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is talking to them, he says, "When you come together in one place, it's not to eat the Lord's supper, because in eating, each one of you takes his food ahead of the others, and one is hungry, and another is drunk. Don't you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you." Luke 14, Jesus says, "When you were invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him, and he invited you and him. Come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you were invited, go sit down in the lowest place, so that when he invited you, come, he may say, 'Friend, go up higher, and then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.'" Jesus also said, "Do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment." This idea of considering others, treating others, judging them according to their parents, or their stature, or what they have, is wrong, and it's evil. And they make it clear that this is not how God relates to people, and since we represent God, we are not to relate to people like that. Our culture loves to judge, though, don't they? I mean, it's just sort of a given that when we think about new friends, when we look to new people, we think, "What does that person do for me?" Maybe they have an "in" into the business world, and you want to make friends with them because they get you the connections you need in business. Or maybe they say real nice things to you all the time, make you feel good about yourself. It's always something about that person that's for us. Ultimately, we tend to make friends because in the end, we feel good about it. We like the way they make us feel, or we like what they can do for us. In addition to this judging people and treating people based on what they can do for us, we also have a tendency to treat people based on the problem of our own pain. My dad told us the story as we were growing up that when he was in college, there was this one guy in his dorm or whatever, and he had these really amazing shoes. I think they might have been sandals. All the guys just loved these things. They were so cool. One time, they were going home for one of their breaks, and the guy said, "Give me your money and I'll go buy you each a pair. Tell me what size shoes you wear, and I'll go home, and I'll bring some back with me." They said, "A fantastic deal." The guy left and never came back, and they never saw him or their money again. Things like that happen to us, and we start to say, "Wow, I need to stop trusting people so much." Then, little by little, hurt by hurt, we start building up these little walls around us. We no longer trust and love people completely because we remember those hurts, and we're afraid of experiencing those hurts again. We keep building up those walls until we become little emotional islands. I've got friends who say, "Man, I wish I could move to Indiana, because I have no friends in the town where I live." I say, "You live in a huge town. How can you have no friends in the entire town?" I know that inevitably it's because hurts and pains in the past have shut that person off, and they don't trust people. They don't want to open themselves up. They don't want to risk being hurt. So they just say, "No." But we are to be love. What does love look like? Love suffers long and is kind. It does not envy. It does not parade itself. It is not puffed up. It does not behave rudely. It does not seek its own. It is not provoked. It thinks no evil. It does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. And that last bit, that's from 1 Corinthians 13. That last bit is from verse 7, and I love it. "Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." That is a fantastic description of how we are to relate to the difficult people, to the people we don't want to relate to. Love bears all things. It bears with the shortcomings of others. It believes all things. It believes the best about others rather than assuming the worst. It hopes all things. It hopes that even at this moment, if I have the short end of this relationship, that I'm having a good effect on that person. And it endures all things. It endures the hurt that always comes with opening yourself up to another. Friends, you will be hurt in the service of our Lord, I promise. Because God calls you to open yourself up to other people. He calls you to love. And when you love someone, you are giving them the opportunity to hurt you. There's no way to love someone without giving them the opportunity to hurt you. And because we live in a broken, falling world with messed up people, the people you love are going to hurt you. It's inevitable. And that's what God calls us to. Because that's what He went through for us. He came down here. He opened Himself up to us. He lived among us, taught us the ways of truth, performed miracles and wonders. And we crucified Him. How does God regard people? How does He think of people? Job chapter 34 verse 19 says, "God is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of His hands." He doesn't show preference to one person or another because to Him they're all people. They're all His children and He loves them all the same. Acts 10.34, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'" Hebrews 10.24, this is Paul again, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching." It's funny that those last two verses are from Peter. Peter is the guy who Paul stood up and rebuked in front of everyone for not obeying this advice. The church was growing. They realized, "Oh my goodness, God's bringing Gentiles in with the Jews. This is crazy." They're having to deal with all this explosive growth. These Jews who have spent their whole lives separating themselves from the Gentiles, they're real uncomfortable. They don't like being around those kinds of people. They come together for their big group meeting, their good meals, and the Jews would come off here and do their own thing. The Gentiles would just be over here. Peter is like, "Yeah, I'll go over here with the Jews because I'm a Jew." Paul stood up and said, "You cannot do that. That is wrong. Jesus died so that there wouldn't be these divisions anymore." He rebuked Peter in front of the whole group. Apparently, Peter has learned his lesson because now he's preaching on this very subject. He's saying, "There is no more division. We are all brothers and sisters and children of God, and we need to love and accept one another at whatever level, at whatever place those people are at." You might have an objection. You might say, "What about the people who are going to take advantage of me when I open myself up to them?" Is everything always sunshining rainbows? Well, no. There's a couple stipulations to doing this. It's not willy-nilly. There's a phrase that I heard growing up that says, "Never buy a drunk a drink." By this, I mean we had people in our extended family who struggled with alcohol and drugs and just messing up their lives. They would like to come to our family because we were financially stable enough that they would come and ask us for help. "I need a car so I can get to work, so I can hold down a job," and so on. We would give them the money for these things, and then they would go and spend it on drugs or something. They would waste it. They would hurt themselves and destroy their lives. Eventually, it got to the point where they came to us and asked us for that money, and we would say, "No, we're not giving that to you." They would say, "I thought you were a Christian." Our answer is, "Yes, we are Christians. We're not going to give you money to hurt yourself. That would be an unchristian thing to do." Now, we tried to work out a situation where it's like, "If you need food, we'll buy you food. We won't give you money for food, but we'll give you the food. We'll get you a bus pass that you can use to get to work," stuff like that. Of course, they didn't want to hear anything about that. The point is, loving people doesn't mean you just do whatever they say and don't think about the consequences. Loving people is a conscious thought about that person's future and their well-being. You have to be careful. Also, does that mean that you just smile and say, "Bless you, brother and sister, and never let a mean harsh thing come out of your mouth?" A lot of the times, yes, but Jesus and other people in the Bible had harsh words, but those harsh words were always saved for the religious folks, the people who thought they were all cool and altogether and God's favorites. Those are the ones who got the harsh words. The unsaved, the people outside the church, never received the harsh rebuke. If someone is being all religious and yet living in sin, it's okay to come to them with a harsh word and say, "You need to straighten up because you're misrepresenting God." But if someone is not a Christian, do not, do not, do not come to them and say, "You need to clean up your behavior." An unsaved person cleaning up their behavior just results in an unsaved person. Only Jesus saves that person and the transforming power of his spirit inside them saves them. If you get on an unsaved person's case about all of the bad things they're doing, all they're going to hear is, "You need to stop doing bad things," and that accomplishes nothing. Save your harsh words for the religious types and to the people who are on the outside show grace and love, show a better way. Rather than saying, "I cleaned up my life," now look at me and say, "I found Jesus and his light is inside of me." And now I deal with the difficult situations in my life, not with drugs or whatever. I deal with them because God gets me through that stuff and I rely on his Holy Spirit to get me through it. Show them a better way. Don't condemn their actions because if they fix their actions, they're still going to hell. But for the rest of the people, smile, be nice, be kind and courteous, be loving towards people. Even people you don't like, especially people you don't like. And you might think, "Well, that sounds kind of disingenuous. It sounds like you're telling me to put on a mask and pretend to be someone I'm not. Isn't that like lying? That's not Christian, is it?" What you're saying is true if love is an emotion. But according to the Bible, love is a choice. God did not give us the full penalty for our sin. The moment Adam and Eve sinned, they should have been obliterated from the universe and none of us should have ever come into existence. That was the penalty for their sin. But God chose to not give them what they deserved. Even though his wrath, I'm sure, was kindled, he held back and refrained and chose to demonstrate love. And that is what God calls us to do. Even when you see someone who stresses you out, who makes you uncomfortable, whatever, you separate yourself from how you feel and you make the choice to love. You make the choice to care about them and to see them with God's eyes. That's why my sermon is called "Cross-Eyed" today. Because we're seeing people through the love that was shown for them on the cross. So it's not disingenuous to be nice and loving towards people who stress you out or to people who you just don't like. In fact, it's very godly to love someone and care for them and consider them above yourself. All of this comes down to pride. Pride is the real issue here. It's the idea that I'm better than you, the idea that you have nothing to offer me, and it's the idea that you're not worth the effort. And oh my goodness, they are so worth the effort because Jesus died on the cross for them. They are worth the effort. They are worth the stress and the headache of dealing with. They are worth it. Jesus died for them just like he died for you. They have no less value than you do. If you look at the people, maybe it's the people in this church, maybe it's people outside this church, but if you just say, "I'm just too tired to deal with these people and they stress me out and I don't want to offend them because I'm in a bad mood, so I'm just not going to talk to them and I'm out of here." If that's your attitude, then you are admitting you live by the flesh and not by the Spirit. You're admitting that you have allowed yourself to get to the point where your flesh controls you, you can't keep it in check. That's bad. We need to walk by the Spirit. When you start to walk by the Spirit, you see the difficult person coming, you realize there's that emotion inside you, that that's your flesh, and then you say, "All right, Jesus, I want to choose the right thing. I want to choose love. Help me put a leash on my flesh. Help me to kill my flesh and to treat this person the way you would treat them." And that is why, in conclusion, the prescription for this ailment is Galatians 2.20. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. In the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." I have been crucified with Christ. What has been crucified? Not me physically. I'm not actually nailed to a cross with Jesus, but something has been killed. What has been killed? It is my will. My sense of me, what I want, my selfishness, my pride. Being a Christian is not conforming your will to Christ. It is killing your will and replacing it with Christ's will inside you. It's a complete will transplant. If you're still judging whether or not you want to do this or that, how you want to treat a person, then that judgment is still that you're filtering things through your will. That has to be gone. When you start to feel the reaction of your flesh, you just say, "I'm nailing you to the cross. Desires, anything I want, anything how I want to treat this person is now getting nailed to the cross." Now what does Jesus want? When you have crucified your will, there is no more me to make the judgment call. There is only, "What is my Lord's will? What is my Lord's will for this person?" That's what it looks like when you've crucified your flesh. In Matthew 5, I forgot to write this one in your notes, Matthew 5, 46, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." When the world sees us picking and choosing our relationships the same way they do, they realize that we have nothing authentic to offer them. But when our hearts open up to everyone, regardless of age, political affiliation, religious beliefs, whatever, when our hearts show love to all, no matter what their apparent value or worth or coolness is. And when the great people and the worthless people are all treated in this family like brothers and sisters, that's when they will see the power of God at work in us. That's what's going to change their hearts towards God, is when they realize that God is the great equalizer. The love of God is the great equalizer. One of my favorite preachers, his name is Tim Chadwick, and he runs a church called Reality LA out in Los Angeles. And he talks about when he first got saved, he literally just went to the first church he found. And he was early 20s maybe, and everyone there was his parents' age or older, and you wouldn't think that someone that age would just be hanging out with someone like their parents' age or older. And yet he was just like, "These are my brothers and sisters in Christ. I'm so excited. I'm saved. We're all brothers and sisters. Isn't that amazing?" And that's what the love of God is supposed to do to us. It's supposed to be able to see each other past what the world sees and into the value of what God sees. And I tell you, there is such a great freedom that comes when you no longer have to care about what people think about you. When you approach them and you're no longer trying to impress them, you're no longer trying to win them because you think they're valuable, and so you're trying to do your best to be cool to them and impress them because you want them to be your friend. When that is gone, when all that is gone, and you just love everyone indiscriminately, there's such a freedom in that. It's beautiful. To be cross-eyed means to look at someone through the value God paid for them on the cross. It will feel like dying, especially the longer you've been living with your flesh, the more it's going to feel like dying every time you have to do it. The more you do it, the easier it's going to get because God will be transforming your heart, but it starts with your choice. You'll feel like dying, and that's why the Bible says we identify with Christ's death. We do identify it. When you are nice to someone who you don't want to be nice to and you just feel like you're dying, you can just tell yourself, "I'm crucifying myself with Christ right now, and that's why it feels like death, but I can remember that Christ died for me." It's the most beautiful thing you can do with your life, and I believe it's the future of this church if we are to have one. Everyone walks in here and gets loved and hugged and cared for, no matter how messed up their life may be or how cleaned up their life may be. When we love and treat everyone the same, we won't be able to keep people away. It will be beautiful. Let's have our time of open worship now. [Silence] I'm going to make a suggestion. It's just that, just a suggestion. On your way out, after we dismiss, you ought to shake the hand of someone that you don't know or that you don't know well. Right now, your flesh is probably saying, "I don't want to do that." Crucifying the flesh starts with just one difficult first step. Let's choose to love people the way God does and stop considering people with our flesh and start considering them with the cross of Christ. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, please help us to crucify our flesh. Please help us to see your love for the people in our lives. Please help us to see the value you've placed on each one of them at Calvary. Give us the strength to say no to our feelings and our emotions and our flesh and help us to be filled with your love and your joy and sharing in fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters and in sharing your love and goodness with people outside this church who haven't yet put their faith in you, Jesus. Help us to remember to do this every day, every situation. In your name, Jesus, amen. Amen.