

Hatred in my heart

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October 20, 2014

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Have you ever been inordinately annoyed by someone else's clothing? I have, and in my experience this is a classic indicator of what this week's Leviticus reading calls "hating someone in my heart." When I'm repressing anger or frustration, I suddenly notice the hideously out-of-date belt my relative is wearing, or the way-too-short-in-every-inseam pantsuit my co-worker has on. The clothes are never the true offense, of course, but they send off alarms: time to speak up.

I first learned this lesson in a season of (repressed) conflict and disappointment with my father. With God's help, I recognized the dynamic for what it was—not an easy task when one identifies as a nice Christian girl with no hatred, ever. Hatred? Yuck. What an ugly word.

Yet I heard God's reconciling and holy spirit whisper that I'd better sit down and talk with my father if I didn't want to hate him forever. More scary words. The conversation that followed, however, remains one of the holiest moments of grace and reconciliation I've been given: my dad received my words of grievance with understanding and humility.

It's not often that the Bible offers up a directive that hits uncomfortably close to home for the conflict-averse. Usually it feels like our sacred texts expect humility and forgiveness and long-suffering and other virtues that can be twisted for the sake of avoiding (sometimes necessary) conflict. And when we imagine love we usually imagine kind acts.

But in Leviticus we encounter a little-discussed aspect of what it means to love your neighbor. Check out some of the alternate translations of this verse to see just how unclear this dynamic can be.

Deeper explorations of any given verse from Leviticus yield greater insight into the implications of Jesus' teaching on the greatest commandments in Matthew 22. What does it really look like to love our neighbor? To love God? In what ways is courage required to do both in the face of alternate, culturally driven codes for righteous living?