



Bear WITH Me

BY LAURIE ZILIAK

In many different places, Scripture provides beautiful images and instructions regarding love. From the call to love God and neighbor, to the clear example of love seen in the life of Christ, the reality of love permeates the Bible. Passage after passage provide us with examples and lessons.



A moving passage in the lessons of love can be found in Colossians 3:12-17, which implores us to “put on” qualities that are essential for love. The list of qualities is not unlike what is found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13—compassion, humility, patience, and more. But then the Colossians passage directs us to put on these qualities while “bearing with one another” (3:13). This same instruction is found in Ephesians as Paul declares that the Christian life includes “bearing with one another through love” (4:2).

I find this piece of advice to be strangely comforting. It is not uncommon for people to use the phrase “bear with me” as a synonym for “be patient with me.” The phrase is often employed as a request to endure something someone is doing or not doing, and those somethings can have great variations among them. In my case, “please bear with me” is often a request to let me finish something else before someone has my full attention, a prolonged thinking through of something aloud, or a lengthier explanation of a situation. Asking someone to “bear with me” implies some recognition that I am being a bit of a nuisance or presenting a challenge. It also serves as a request for patience and compassion.

Another familiar saying is “bearing the brunt” of something, be it a misfortune or discomfort brought about by someone else. (“I had to bear the brunt of my colleague’s tardiness.”) The website theidioms.com states it even stronger, indicating that “bearing the brunt” means “bearing the main force that came from a blow” or “absorbing an attack.”

As I reflect on the biblical call to love, I’m struck by how real it is. Love is beautiful and life-giving in all its manifestations, but it can also be hard. It can ask a lot of us at times, and we can ask a lot of those people who love us. Sometimes my loved ones have to absorb a verbal blow from me on a bad day, or bear the brunt of my bad mood.

The challenges of love and the instruction to bear with one another speak to our ministry with children as teachers and catechists. Most of the time, we love what we do and love being with children. But not always. Some days are particularly challenging, as children act out, don’t pay attention, or display other disruptive behaviors. But we stay with the children and come back the next time, ready to begin anew. Other days, we bring our own life challenges and negative emotions to the group (often unintentionally). It is the children who bear the brunt of our bad days. But they stay with us, do what they are asked to do, and come back the next time, ready to engage.

On these challenging days, Colossians offers a good reminder that sometimes love means we need to bear with others on their bad days. And on days that we are challenged to love, we simply need to say, “Bear with me.”

