



Bridges or Roadblocks – Part 3

Who Is My Enemy? – *By Georgia Coats*

“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” - Matthew 5:44

I am continually confronted by Christ’s challenge to love our neighbors, our brothers, the nations, and our enemies. What about when my brother and I disagree? What happens when the neighbors drive me crazy? Can’t I just love the nations from afar? Are my enemies those who bug me?

Not too long ago I was talking on the phone with a friend who was seeking advice on how to reach out to some neighbors who come from a very different religious, cultural and political background than her own. She was torn inside—she had a burning desire to share the love of Christ, but could not let go of the idea that she had to defend herself and her faith at every encounter. As I spoke with her the Lord brought Ephesians 6:12 to mind... **“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”** These people were not her enemy—Satan and his powers are the enemy. It’s as if the Lord was releasing us both of our defense and allowing us to more freely love people.

Since that conversation, I’ve realized that in our ministry context, collaborating with locals looks a lot like befriending the “enemy”. There are very few believers, and often on political, religious and cultural levels our intended audience is perceived as our “enemies” by our Western Christian community. So what does it mean to love our enemies as Christ called us to? If I truly love them, they would cease to be my enemy. Once I was an enemy of God, but through Christ He now calls me friend. (Romans 5:10 and John 15:13).

The more I get to know and understand the people of the East Med Region, the more I love them. It’s not just compassion for the Lost, but a healthy respect and admiration for a nation made in God’s image. The media reminds me every day of these people who oppose the West politically and we fight with them on a political level. That’s confusing! We can’t solve spiritual problems on a political level. If I continue to “Love my enemy” without truly making them my friend, I will never reach them. People can feel my defenses and can sense fear, disdain or mistrust. They also understand respect.

I don’t need to defend Jesus every time I have a spiritual conversation with someone who doesn’t understand Him. It’s okay for me to build bridges of common ground. I can sit with my East Med friends and share in common a desire to be a good wife and mother, to honor my husband and raise my children with a love for God in an increasingly godless society.

So I constantly remind myself and others that our struggle is not against a people group, our “battle” is not against an “opposing religion”. Am I willing to let my political affiliations be challenged by the love of God’s nations? Satan comes to kill, steal and destroy. Jesus came to bring life! (John 10:10). I want to be a part of bringing life abundant to those around me, even if it means letting go of fear and prejudice to let more of His love flow freely through me.
