

Love Actually

BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER

Can any of you identify with this?

“



I never make stupid mistakes,
only very very clever ones.

John Peel (b. 1954)

”

Anyone ever made a stupid mistake? Anyone ever made a stupid mistake that had more serious consequences? Truth is we all make mistakes; some of those mistakes are what we'd describe as "stupid mistakes" some of those mistakes have no real consequences other than to leave us a little embarrassed. Some of those mistakes can lead to quite serious consequences.

Watch this: the script of the short drama follows here:

We all know what happened yesterday....but what if?

Alec: (enters wearing long coat and red & white scarf)

[Looks at audience and slowly swings his gaze to encompass everyone]

I have never felt so ashamed of a team in my entire long career. [Pause]

So what did you think you were doing? – There were 65,000 fans out there cheering you on, heaven knows how many more supporting you around the world, and do you know what? If it hadn't been for the Red shirts with Man U on them, they wouldn't have known who the premiership side was and who plays in the conference!

I really cannot believe what I saw out there! - How much did I pay for you lot? 125 million was it?

I tell you I feel totally let down! For 75 minutes you didn't make a single chance, you didn't even get a shot on target!

And by the way Wayne, I know you scored a wonder goal last week, it was fantastic, and the fans love you for it. But that doesn't mean you try an overhead kick every time you get the ball! [Pause] Especially I might add! When the balls rolling along the ground!

***YOU PLAYED LIKE GIRLS!! I'M DISGUSTED WITH YOU!!**

75 minutes you played like idiots. I had to bring on Nani and Giggsy to sort it out, and then you started to play as if you were quality. 10 corners in the last 10 minutes, incredibly you missed the first nine of them. But that last one, wow, that was something – over floats the ball and there's Wayne, somersaulting again to score a goal in the top corner, just like last week, absolutely superb... unfortunately Wayne, we were defending that corner, **THAT WAS THE BEST OWN GOAL I'VE EVER SEEN!!**

Do you know what? I've finished with you, you're an embarrassment. I'm putting all of you on the transfer list; you'll never play for Man U again. [Storms out]

Now in many ways what happened there is not unreasonable is it? These guys playing for Manchester United are, after all, supposed to be some of the best

players around – certainly in the premier league. In this game they made a mistake by not winning. If you play for Man U you are expected to win – especially if you’re playing a team of a lower division. Manchester United can’t stay at the top of the game if they don’t beat the teams below them, and there are hundreds if not thousands of other players waiting to take the place of those deemed not good enough!

So, in the cut throat business of top flight football, if you make a mistake – you’re out! Truth is, if you want to be successful, you have to be ruthless. Maybe though, there’s another way! Let’s rewind and see what might be different:

[Rewind to alternative ending]

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But do you know what? I’ve got faith in you, even though you were an embarrassment today you’re 4 points clear at the top of the toughest football league in the world. I’ve invested a lot of time, energy and money in you lot, so I’m picking the same team to play against Wigan next Saturday. [Pause] I’ll see you all at training on Monday [walks out calmly]

The mistake has been made – the game has been lost. But what a difference! Now these players have been given the room to become great players. Here the manager acknowledges mistakes have been made but chooses to look to the potential in his team, so he gives the players the opportunity to become what he believes they can be. Truth is, there are likely to be more mistakes along the way, but he will choose to give them the room to become great.

Friends, we all make mistakes – that’s not at issue! But will we give one another the room to become the people God has called us to be? The question is: Will we bear with one another as we journey together?

Bearing with one another requires that we give people room – room to be who they are, room to become who God intends. The words “bear with” literally mean “to give slack to.” We are to give each other the slack we need to become all that God intends for us! We are to give people the room to be themselves! Seems to me that’s a massive challenge for us. If we choose to give people the room to be themselves, to give them slack, then it is very likely that there will be a whole lot of things about which we will see things very differently. There will be plenty of scope for us to disagree. We might find ourselves disagreeing on issues of theology, lifestyle, and churchmanship.

But bearing with one another doesn’t mean that anything goes! It does mean that we have to be very, very careful though. For anyone to call themselves a Christian there must be some things they believe: Jesus came and died for us and rose again; we all stand in need of God’s mercy. The posh word for those things we must believe to claim to be Christian is dogma. Next to dogma, the essential beliefs of the faith, is what are called doctrines. We can agree on dogma and disagree on doctrine. So we might have different doctrines on the church, the work of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the spirit, but it doesn’t mean we are not a Christian! Next to doctrine is the whole realm of speculation, or opinion, things we think might be, but in truth we are not really sure!

The point here is that there is plenty of scope outside our core beliefs, which define us as Christians, for us to bear with one another. Anything does not go, there is a line, but there is plenty of grey! Most of us like to think we’re right.... on everything.... and therefore everyone else is.... wrong.... or misguided. Seems to me, bearing with one another holds out the possibility that I might be wrong! And even if I’m not, I’m willing to give others the room to grow!

Brian Clough the famous football manager was asked once what he did if his players disagreed with him. He said he let them talk and give their view and then told them they were wrong, and he was right! That’s not forbearance, that’s arrogance!

Bearing with one another is fundamental to building community. Forbearance builds trust and allows relationships to grow and develop where they otherwise

would not. Bearing with one another is anything but easy, but in Ephesians Paul gives us some clues that will help us do it better. He says three things will help: be humble, gentle and patient.

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”
(Ephesians 4 v 2)

Being gentle with one another is what gives us room to be. I love the image I've used before of what it means to exercise gentleness. If I catch daddy long legs in my hand, I have the power to crush it! To destroy it! But I also have the power to choose not to exercise that power, and to hold it without damaging it or harming it! To hold others without damaging or harming them when I have the power to crush them, is to be gentle. Gentle people don't try to impose their views on others. Gentle people let God be Lord of their own lives and the lives of others too! Gentle people don't want others to be copies of themselves but rejoice in the fact that God has made us all unique. Gentle people are not judgemental when things don't really matter. Gentle people don't create artificial standards and then expect everyone to live up to the standards they've created. Gentle people are not controlling of others.

How are you doing in gentleness?

Gentle people don't believe that anything goes, but they know how to challenge in ways that don't damage or crush others, and they know when to compromise over things that are in the end, speculation. Bearing with one another does not mean we don't challenge those things we know are wrong – absolutely not! It doesn't mean that sin is left unchallenged. It does mean we challenge, rebuke and correct by exercising discernment and gentleness.

Giving people room to be requires us to exercise gentleness. Giving them room to become all they can be, requires great patience! My favourite definition of patience is: long suffering with aggravating people! Bearing with one another does not mean we leave what is not good, right or true unchallenged, but it does mean we stick with people over the long haul because we see their God given potential! We will need patience with one another if we are to do that well.

Truth is it takes time to mature. People are like a good wine or a good whiskey – it needs time to become its best! Just take a moment to think back to some of the things you did or said when you were younger and less mature than you are now! My best guess is we all have things we look back on that make us cringe when we think what we did or said! I need you to be patient with me! I saw a “T” shirt once that said: “Be patient, God hasn’t finished me yet!” I need you to bear with me if I am to reach my full redemptive potential! Patience gives people time to outgrow and overcome their immaturity.¹

If we are to bear with one another, to give people room to be and to become, we also need to give people room to contribute. To give people room to contribute requires us to exercise humility. Humility recognises that people are imperfect but accepts what they have to offer. Humility is what makes all of us teachable. Perhaps another way of saying this is that if we are to give people room to be and to become and to contribute, we must learn to listen to others!

In some ways I am really good at listening and in some ways I am really bad at listening. Truth is, we will learn little from those with whom we already agree! If we want to be stretched, challenged, grow and mature we will need to spend time listening to those with whom we disagree. This doesn’t mean we embrace what others say, but it does mean we engage with them. This is crucial to the life of the church, this church and the wider church. When we refuse to listen, we divide. It seems to me that however strongly we hold our convictions, we must hold out the possibility that it might be me who is wrong on any particular issue! Listening holds us together in Christ.

Friends, we are told to bear with one another – to give each other slack. It does not mean anything goes, there is a line that needs to be challenged with discernment, but we are to give people room to be themselves, room to become all that God created them to be, and the room to contribute in their own unique way.

¹ Sittser, Gerald, *“Love One Another: Becoming the church Jesus longs for,”* IVP 2008 page 58

When we choose to bear with one another and exercise humility, gentleness and patience...we see a transformed community.

When we choose to bear with one another, we live as children of our heavenly Father.... we take on the family likeness. Truth is none of us would be here today, if our heavenly Father did not bear with us! He has chosen to bear with his people from the moment of creation. How many times could God have given up with those who are his? How many times could he have given up on you? I'm sure we've given him many opportunities, but you are too precious to him for him to give up on you. He will bear with you because he loves you...actually! He sees your wonderful potential, and one day he will bring that to fulfilment. He bears with those you love too, and those who don't yet know him.

When we bear with one another, we simply reflect what our heavenly Father does for us. That is...Love, Actually!

Preached in Crawley Baptist Church on Sunday 20th February 2011 by Rev. Ian Phillips.