

“Love Your Enemies” | Luke 6:24-26 (The Sermon on the Plain)

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(Discussion questions on page 8)**

A Shift in Perspective When I was a teenager a group of friends invited me to go White Water rafting to the Grand Canyon, I had no idea what that meant., but I had been on a few camping trips and survived so I figured you just add water, and it was essentially the same thing. I can swim.

I remember less and less about that trip, but there is one thing I will never forget... the countless number of stars that were so bright at night that they lit the ground up like daylight. I could see satellites as hundreds of rocks streaked above burning in the atmosphere.

There was only one thing up there that I couldn't figure out. There was a cloud that seemed to sit behind the satellites and the stars. It seemed impossible. Until I realized for the first time, I was looking at the arm of the Milky Way galaxy. And just as I was trying to pick up my jaw, the moon began to peek through that narrow chasm of the Canyon walls, that framed this panoramic image, the light off the moon was blinding.

My view of myself and the world changed that night.

In Luke 6:20, Jesus shifts his focus from the crowd to his disciples, signaling a move from a time of public ministry to a more intimate teaching for his followers. In his teaching, Jesus instructs them to love and pray for their enemies.

Imagine how bewildering it must have been for the disciples when Jesus said, "love your enemies."

I imagine it was similar to me looking at that sky as it demanded a complete worldview transformation and challenged them to adopt God's perspective instead.

Let me ask you a question:

Would God love us, if he didn't love his enemies, past present and future?

To be a true worker of God who can "do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return," especially for their enemies, discipleship must go beyond mere belief. To become an active participant in God's ongoing love, disciples need to grapple with the deep-seated issues within their hearts, minds, and habits.

Jesus' Call to Love Your Enemy

Today, we will explore three aspects of what it takes and means to Biblically love our enemy based on Jesus' teachings by thinking through 3 questions:

What does it mean to:

1. See the enemy with Christ's Eyes: Rethink Who Our Enemies Are
2. Love the enemy like Jesus
3. Have mercy Like Go.

See. Love. Mercy.

I. First, let's rethink who our enemies are. Let's see enemies with Christ's eyes.

Jesus begins this section by saying,,

"But I say to you who hear..."

To truly understand why the disciples struggled with this command, it's crucial to take into account the widespread influence of the cultural concept of "an eye for an eye" during Jesus' era. By introducing an entirely new framework of love and forgiveness, Jesus went against the grain and profoundly challenged their understanding of the enemy and their right to seek a measure of revenge.

This is vividly demonstrated during Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane. When a follower cut off the high priest's servant's ear, Jesus healed him and said,

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

Loving our enemies, and praying for those who mistreat us, speaks to an inner transformation and mirrors the character of God.

In the teaching, Jesus employs hyperbole, which would have been deeply grasped by the original listeners.

Luke 6:28-31 reads:

29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who begs from you,

The depth of this instruction reflects Christ's emphasis on radical love and sacrificial behavior in our dealings with others. The call to benevolently respond to adversity and harm, and to embody a spirit of generosity illustrates the magnitude of love that Christ modeled for us.

Jesus, through his choice not to retaliate, echoes the posture of his heart, becoming a template for our response to offenses. This crucial decision does not endorse the passive acceptance of harm; instead, it embodies a proactive reflection of the grace and mercy of God.

Cancel Culture: A Modern Parallel

So what does that mean for us today? We face a different but equally challenging cultural phenomenon akin to the principle of "eye for an eye": the tendency to "cancel" people. In our society, this results in the ostracizing or shaming of individuals who have made grievous errors or expressed unpopular opinions. Essentially cutting them out of relational spaces.

To be clear, Jesus's teaching does not discard the role of setting boundaries. Protecting oneself and others from harm is essential and a part of living as responsible and healthy community member. Seeking justice and holding others accountable for their actions can seamlessly coexist with the resounding call to love and pray for our enemies.

This culture of "shutting out" our enemies abandons the ideals of absolution, redemption, transformation and restoration, much like the "eye for an eye" mentality opposes Jesus' call to love your enemy. It discourages us from wrestling the battle within ourselves to love those whom we feel are irredeemable or undeserving of mercy.

The Inner Moral Struggle

Have you ever encountered someone who feels like a foe or an enemy, someone who seems to stand against or threaten things you hold dear? This could happen either on the playground or in the boardroom. Have you ever felt a little desire to see them fall and not rise again? It's a struggle to fully walk in Christ's footsteps when someone is being unfair and we feel a bit of satisfaction envisioning them receiving their just desserts.

This is the inner moral struggle that Jesus is addressing. It's the modern-day tendency to surpass the "eye for an eye" mentality and adopt the belief that we can combat sin with sin, which ultimately results in harming others.

And the reason why we mustn't succumb to this is Echoed in the narrative of the Gospel,

Jesus says, in verse 27, "Do good to those who hate you."

It speaks to us: The full trajectory of judgment has been enacted, and Jesus stands ready to bear our sins and the burden of our desire to strike back in sin, and our offense that he would suggest that we choose to not retaliate. He was crucified for all the sins of mankind. The gravity of sin comes with the assurance of retribution, whether through the forgiveness found in Christ's crucifixion or, as John Piper eloquently described it, in hell for those who reject repentance--and no better judgment exists.

As Paul said in Ephesians 4:14, we must strive to be mature in our faith, "no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."

Transition:

Returning to our initial query, 'Who is the enemy?' we understand the enemy not as humanity itself, but as sin, which represents both the historical and ongoing rebellion against God. This sin encompasses past, present, and future opposition to God's will. Yet, God's response through Jesus Christ was one of radical love and mercy. Jesus loved us and extended mercy, and even as our sins contributed to His suffering, He doesn't cancel us, he cancels our sin!

Point 2: What does this radical love in action mean to you and I? What does it mean for us to Love like Jesus.

Do we offer our enemies, the last slice of pizza or a ride to the airport--though these acts can certainly be expressions of love. Jesus challenges us deeper in Luke 6:32-36.

32 "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great,

Embodying God's love requires wisdom to discern what this looks like in each unique situation. He asks us to love without expecting anything in return, radically extending kindness not just to those who will reciprocate, but especially to those who won't.

One of the best ways to see through Christ's eyes is by doing what we are doing today, engaging with the text and having conversations with one another. All of that will help us gain insight.

The Struggle of Addiction and the Challenge of Reconciliation, Confrontation and the Reality of Boundaries

Our former Bishop, Bishop Guernsey once told me once, "...testimonies are life changing for all of us, and that's not just how I came to Jesus testimonies, but testimonies of what God did last week so that we can just gossip the Gospel.."

So here is a little bit of the gospel story in my life:

Growing up my father was an alcoholic. And that darkness and addiction profoundly we impacted my childhood. By the age of 15, it left me feeling bitter and angry. In my 20s, he broke my heart and I did what I felt was necessary: I cut him out of my life.

In 1 John, chapters 2, verses 9 to 11 it says

"9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him[b] there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

One day I came across my birth certificate, did some math and realized that in 1975 my father was still a teenager. He received one of the last draft cards for the Vietnam War, just a month after the birth of his first child and less than a year after he got married to my mom. While there is still a relational boundary in place there, God helped me see a more full picture of my father - this man who had often felt like an enemy to me. I could see his humanity more clearly. We are both broken sinners in need of grace. Oswald Chambers wrote:

"The greatest crisis we ever face is the surrender of our will... True surrender means being so united with Christ that nothing appeals to us that did not appeal to Him." It's Jesus' remarkable gift of redemption on the cross that empowers us to love our enemies, as it was first extended to us.

Love for our enemies isn't something we are supposed to drum up on our own or muscle up- it comes from God. God moved towards us in love when we were still his enemies - we didn't deserve it - and we can serve as vessels for the outpouring of that same love and mercy from God to our own enemies.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:6-9,
6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

While we were yet sinners... that encourages us to forgive even those who have deeply hurt us. Even when the enemy we must love is closer than we would like. It might be a family member, a close friend, or it might be ourselves. In every case, to give the love, we must first receive Jesus' love and let it redeem the many ways the sin of our enemies has broken us inside.

Transition Statement

What have we covered so far? One, the cross is the foundation of our ability to love others, to rise above culture and worldly expectations, and to embrace redemption and peace over vengeance and retaliation. And as Disciples of Christ we live in full knowledge that sin is the ultimate adversary we face.

As we extend love to our enemies we offer tangible experiences of the transformative power of the love of God. Which leads us to question 3 - how are we to be merciful? What does that look like?

Point 3. How are we to Live the Love of God Daily. What does it look like to have mercy like God?

Jesus ends this section of his teaching saying,
"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

Jesus is pointing to the mercy of God.

Though simple at first, this verse holds profound implications, for as missionary Jim Elliott once said,
"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

In God's becoming man in the person of Jesus Christ we discover a beauty truth. Through his life, we witness a model exemplifying all that he requires of us.

Please travel with me briefly to John 21.

The Power of Mercy in Reconciliation: John 21 verse 4-8 and the Restoration of Peter

4 Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. **5** Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." **6** He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, because of the quantity of fish. **7** That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. **8** The other disciples came in the boat, Upon meeting Jesus, Peter was reminded of his three denials of Jesus. Despite Peter's failure, Jesus offered mercy, echoing His earlier call: "Children, do you have any fish?" that is why Peter's leap into the water.. it symbolized his commitment to reconciliation, to being right with God.

Like Peter, we often return to what's familiar when life doesn't go as planned. That's why Peter was back to working on a fishing boat, he failed. But God called him back, offering mercy and a path to restoration, and Peter, though they were not far from shore, didn't hesitate to immediately take it..

As we navigate our lives, we too are called to respond to Jesus' call, overcoming shame and obstacles. Christ's mercy allows us to reach Him, no matter our past failures.

Paul so beautiful wrote in Romans 8:38

8 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In John 21, we find a striking demonstration of this limitless compassion in full display. There on a peaceful beach at the break of dawn, Peter's betrayal, his seeking redemption, his desire to be a better version of himself, came face to face, not just with Jesus, but with the risen Christ, and it formed a powerful backdrop for depths of His mercy.

Jesus urged Peter to affirm his love three times, corresponding to his three denials. This repetition wasn't meant for humiliation but for restoration. The mercy shown to Peter didn't stem from a mere oversight of his wrongs, but rather from the transformation of each one into opportunities for redemption.

Mercy as a Lifestyle

"When disciples of Christ embody mercy, they seek opportunities in the darkness to bring light to those who are lost, ashamed, or feel forgotten. They elevate God's presence, bear witness to Jesus, and guide others on the restorative path that Jesus laid.

Transition

Jesus' emphatic command to love our enemies is purposeful—it seeks restoration. This directive is not merely about reconciling with others; it's fundamentally about realigning our relationship with God. By embodying this command, we move toward shalom, a holistic peace with God that transforms us, drawing us closer to Him and extending this peace to others, guiding us all toward our ultimate home with Him.

Conclusion

Jesus's call to love our enemies is challenging and often strikes at the heart of our closest relationships. Loving our enemies as Jesus commands isn't just about suppressing feelings of hostility or begrudgingly wishing someone well. It's about active, transformative love that reflects the very heart of God. This love doesn't ignore justice, nor does it overlook wrongdoing. Instead, it seeks restoration and reconciliation, mirroring how Christ loved us—even to the point of death. As we leave here today, let's challenge ourselves not just to avoid retaliation, but to actively seek the good for those who oppose us, to pray for their wellbeing, and to show them the same mercy we've received from God. May our lives be a testament to the radical, life-changing love of Jesus, drawing others not just to us, but through us to Him.

Small Group Questions

1. In the sermon, the call to love our enemies is emphasized as a transformative act that challenges our natural inclinations. Reflecting on Luke 6:20–26, what are some practical from societal norms?
2. Jesus' directive to "love your enemies" was a radical departure from the cultural norm of "an eye for an eye." How do modern-day practices, such as cancel culture, reflect or contradict this ancient principle? How can we, as Christians, respond differently in light of Jesus' teachings?
3. The sermon mentioned Jesus' interaction with Judas and Peter, highlighting His mercy and willingness to forgive. How do these examples help us understand the depth of God's mercy? How can we apply this understanding in our interactions with those who have wronged us?
4. Personal anecdotes and struggles with forgiveness were shared in the sermon. Have you ever experienced a similar situation where forgiving someone felt impossible? How did you navigate that challenge, and what role did your faith play in the process?
5. The concept of mercy was explored as more than just being nice but as a sacrificial, selfless act. Reflect on a time when you had to show mercy to someone who hurt you. What was the outcome, and how did it impact your relationship with God?
6. Discuss the statement, "Would God love us if He didn't love His enemies?" How does this question challenge our understanding of God's love and mercy? How does it influence our perspective on loving those who are difficult to love?
7. The sermon concludes with a call to actively seek the good for those who oppose us. What are some concrete ways we can live out this directive in our communities? How can we support each other in this challenging but essential aspect of discipleship?
8. Reflecting on Paul's words in Romans 8:38–39, how does understanding the inseparability of God's love empower us to love others, especially those considered our enemies? How can this knowledge transform our approach to conflict and reconciliation?
9. The sermon highlighted the importance of viewing enemies through Christ's eyes and extending radical love and mercy. How can we cultivate this perspective in our daily interactions? What spiritual practices or disciplines can help us align more closely with Jesus' teachings?

This is a preaching draft.

10. In what ways can our church community embody the principles of love, mercy, and forgiveness as outlined in the sermon? How can we create a culture that reflects these values and supports one another in the journey of discipleship?

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