

4

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES



When have you seen an enemy become a friend?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Love your enemies even as Christ has loved you.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

When it comes to sports, you're supposed to trash-talk the other team and its fans. When a coworker makes you look bad in front of the boss, you're supposed to make him look worse. When someone spreads a rumor about you, you're supposed to retaliate and spread a more hurtful rumor about her. When someone blunders in a way that affects you, you're supposed to gossip about the person. When a family member wrongs you again and again, you're supposed to drop him—remove him from your life—and never forgive.

You're supposed to? That's the way the world expects you to act, and the same thinking resides in our sinful human nature. But Jesus calls us to a different approach. A *radical* approach. Jesus calls us to love, serve, bless, and pray. That's easy enough with those we like, but Jesus calls us to do the same thing *for our enemies*. That includes those who trash-talk us, make us look bad, spread rumors, hurt us, and even hate us.

How do we do that in a world that says hate and anger is the answer?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Luke 6:27-28

²⁷ **“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,**
²⁸ **bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”**

Christ calls those who know Him and follow Him to live lives that reflect who He is. To follow Jesus means to be like Him, and that means we reflect His love through our actions and attitudes—even toward those who hate us—with no exceptions or escape clauses. We are to love unconditionally.

What does unconditional love look like?

- ▶ **Forgive others.** “Love your enemies,” and love begins with forgiveness. Forgiveness is hard, but it is completely doable. Jesus modeled perfect forgiveness on the cross. As He died in our place, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Just as God forgives our sins, we should forgive others’ sins. Forgiveness frees up space in our heart where bitterness or hatred wants to take root. Forgiving others is a response to the forgiveness we have received from God. Since Jesus died for our sins, we can forgive others for the wrong they’ve done to us.
- ▶ **Do good to others.** “Do good to those who hate you.” Serving others requires faith to know the Lord is good and He works His goodness through us. Faith is active. Faith takes initiative. Faith seeks to please God by serving people who are difficult to serve— people who the world neglects or tells us not to love. They may have wronged us, but at the end of the day, they are still the ones we are called to love and serve. Nothing makes Christians stand out in our broken culture like Christ shining through us while we do good to those who have wronged us.

***Whom do you know that models
Jesus’ teaching in these verses?***

QUESTION #2

- ▶ **Bless others.** “Bless those who curse you.” Our words have the ability to speak life or death. “The tongue has the power of life and death” (Prov. 18:21). Wow! When we speak affirmation or praises, or speak well of our enemies, we are choosing to bless them by “speaking life” over them. Sincere affirmation of others frees us from a spirit of hatred. The more we affirm people, the more our hearts warm toward them, resulting in greater willingness to forgive.
- ▶ **Pray for others.** “Pray for those who mistreat you.” Jesus made a clear correlation between loving our enemies and praying for them, but why? Why do we need to pray for those who have wronged us? Because it’s not about us. It’s about our relationship with Jesus—living in Him and for Him. Prayer brings us closer to Jesus; therefore, it brings us closer to healing, and praying for those who hate us sanctifies us in humility. Praying for those who hurt us requires us to lay down our pride, which paves the way for an abundance of God’s grace in our lives.



Luke 6:29-31

²⁹ “If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

The Christian life is a life of sacrifice; sometimes we may even be required to sacrifice the parts that are the most near and dear to us. Loving others, especially our enemies, will often require intentional sacrifice. These sacrifices may be in the areas of money, time, energy, or expectations. We certainly will need to sacrifice any pride or self-centered thinking. But we can only give sacrificially of any of these things by knowing and walking with the Lord.

What might we have to sacrifice in order to live out these verses?

QUESTION #3

BEYOND FORGIVENESS

Which of these ways Jesus was wrongly treated especially stands out to you?

Rejection Ridicule Shame False Accusation
Betrayal False Arrest Other _____

How did Jesus respond to those who injured Him?

What are some of the wrongs that have been inflicted upon you?

How can you respond to those who have hurt you?

*"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge
against anyone among your people, but love
your neighbor as yourself, I am the LORD."*

—LEVITICUS 19:18

Jesus communicated this truth through three examples.

- 1. If someone slaps your cheek.** Slapping a person on the cheek was an insult, and Jesus said to let him slap you again; in other words, if a person insults you once, don't be afraid to let him insult you again.
- 2. If someone takes your garment.** Taking another person's garment was a legal matter to a Jewish audience (Matt. 5:40). Luke was writing to a Gentile named Theophilus (Luke 1:3), so the Old Testament law on this matter (Ex. 22:26-27) would not have been important to him.
- 3. If someone takes your things.** This implied taking someone's things without permission. Even here, Jesus stressed a selfless approach to those who take advantage of us: "do not demand it back." See it as a gift, not a loan.

Jesus gave the perfect summation of His teaching in verse 31: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Versions of this statement can be found in ancient literature, but they were stated negatively: "Whatever you would not like done to you, do not do to another." Jesus gave us a positive command to follow, one that is grounded in love and mercy for the other person.

Sacrificial giving speaks unconditional, undeniable love to the recipient. It's not surprising when we do that for a friend or loved one, but when we do it for someone bent on harming us, it can be life-changing.

Luke 6:32-36

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Why does all this “love your enemies” talk even matter? Because to be a Christ-follower means to live like Jesus. Jesus loves others; therefore, we love. His love for others is far different from the way the world expects us to love, and we are to love as He loves.

One word describes the way the world thinks: expectations. We always expect something in return. I will treat you well *if you treat me well*. I will loan to you *if you repay me*. I will love you *if you love me*. We always expect something in return. For the follower of Christ, however, this isn’t enough. Instead, God is calling us to take our expectations out of the picture. Do good to the other person even if he is not good; love even if she doesn’t love you; loan without asking for repayment.

The only way to spread this kind of love is to love others as He loved us, spreading His glory throughout all of our relationships and situations—and that goes far beyond words. Others see it in our actions.

Jesus modeled a life of service (Matt. 20:28). Christ was a servant to all people, even those who wronged Him. We are to do the same. Though our culture encourages instant gratification and rarely promotes selfless acts, we are called to serve. As Christians, we are not here to be served, but to serve others. When we realize the magnitude of our sin, experience God’s love despite that sin, and begin to understand what He did for us, we can’t help but be transformed into servants to all people as well.

In what ways can loving our enemies be personally rewarding?

QUESTION #4

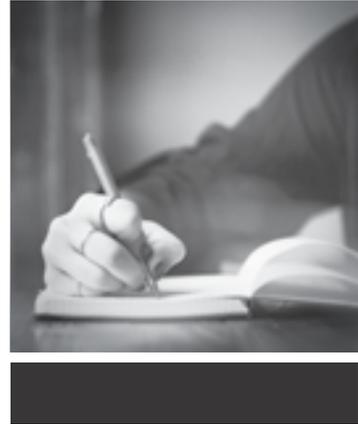
What are some tangible ways we can do good to those who treat us poorly?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Loving others—especially our enemies—is hard, but it’s what we’re called to do. What will you do this week to love as Jesus loves? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Bless.** If you’re continually around a person who is hard to love, be intentional in blessing them with a smile, a greeting, or some simple gesture of kindness.
- ▶ **Identify.** Write down the names of those who have wronged you. Convert that list of names into a prayer list. Pray for their needs and pray for God to move your heart to love and serve them. Ask God to help you see them as people He loves, people who were created in His image.
- ▶ **Serve.** Invest your time and energy in helping an enemy with something they could use some help with. Use the opportunity to point to Christ.



Living our lives to reflect the life of Jesus is what sets us apart. Our radical love for people through our words and actions points to the One who fills us with His love.

My thoughts