Love Your Enemies

Bible Background • LUKE 6:27-36
Printed Text • LUKE 6:27-36 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 1:12-17

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE Jesus' teaching about what it means to love our enemies, REFLECT on times when we felt hate toward others or were hated by others, and IDENTIFY ways to love our enemies.

In Focus

Greg looked out the window at all the trash on the lawn and let out a deep sigh. "I'm tired of them knocking our trash cans over every week and I have to clean it up." Greg had a right to be upset. His neighbors, the Jacksons, had been a nuisance to his family since they moved in next door. It first started with the all-night parties and loud music. Greg had asked them to turn it down a notch, and after that, the Jacksons intentionally began to show hostility toward Greg and his family. Knocking down trash cans and taunting Greg was not enough. The Jacksons' oldest son, Dayshawn, began to insult and threaten Greg's son William at school. Greg sighed again as he put on gloves to pick up the trash. "I guess they need a little more love."

William was fuming with anger. "A little more love? I think they need a little more fists, and Dayshawn is going to be the first to get his."

"No, son," interjected Greg. "That may be how they do things, but we do things differently in this family."

What has been the response when you answered injury with kindness?

Keep in Mind

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28, KJV).

"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you" (Luke 6:27-28, NLT).

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 6:27** But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,

28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.

30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

NLT **Luke 6:27** "But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.

28 Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.

29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also.

30 Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back.

31 Do to others as you would like them to do to you.

32 If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them!

33 And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!

34 And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.

35 Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.

36 You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate."

The People, Places, and Times

The Disciples. The word disciple means learner or student, and it was common for rabbis to take on students as Jesus did. These students of Jesus were distinct from the multitudes that gathered when He preached and performed miracles. The Gospels refer to the Twelve and another larger group of unnamed disciples. Jesus spent intensive time with the Twelve; the other larger group of disciples did not spend as much time with Jesus but accepted and followed His teaching and practices. These close students, rather than a massive crowd, are the main audience for the Sermon on the Plain.

The Sermon on the Plain. Today's text is a portion of what scholars refer to as the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's equivalent to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. The content of the sermon in Luke emphasizes the ethical aspects of following Jesus. Since Matthew's audience was primarily Jewish, he emphasized the aspects of Jesus' sermon that built off of Mosiac Law. In contrast, Luke's audience was primarily Gentile. They did not have the Law as the basis of their society. Instead, Luke's presentation of Jesus' sermon continues to press Luke's emphasis on inverting current, unjust social orders.

Background

After spending all night in prayer and choosing the twelve apostles, Jesus descended to a plain where a group of disciples and a great multitude from all over the surrounding country were waiting for Him. They had traveled to hear this great teacher and be healed of their diseases and evil spirits. As Jesus came down the mountain and delivered this sermon, He symbolically created a new Israel. Just like Israel at Sinai had a set of laws that governed their behavior as a people, Jesus gave His disciples a set of "laws" that would govern their behavior. This set of laws is called the Sermon on the Plain.

The Sermon on the Plain is one of the most powerful passages in the entire Bible. In it, Jesus gives an agenda for God's kingdom, a set of rules and instructions for His people to live by. The first part of these instructions consists of four blessings and four woes. These are followed by more explicit instructions that do not cover every situation but can all be summed up under the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would like them to do to you" (6:31, NLT).

At-A-Glance

1. God's People are Called to Live a Distinctive Lifestyle (Luke 6:27–30)
2. Jesus' Strategy (v. 31)
3. The Total Unselfishness of Love (v. 32-36)

In Depth

1. God's People are Called to Live a Distinctive Lifestyle (Luke 6:27–30)

Just as Moses established a "constitution" for Israel at Sinai (Exodus 20), Christ sets forth the foundation of Christianity as He begins His ministry (Matthew 5-7). An important part of this foundation is the principle, "love your enemies." The Pharisees thought they knew the full implication of Moses' Law when they said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy" (Matthew 5:43; cf. Leviticus 19:18). However, Christ showed that true righteousness exceeds what the law demands. When others wrong us, we ought to respond with patience—but more than that, Jesus wants action. He commands us to actively do good to those who hate us.

Those who disagree with this philosophy likely do so because they believe others will not respond. Our problem is that we are not willing to obey if others refuse to do so as well. It takes

a great amount of trust to perform this simple commandment.

Does failing to love the unlovable indicate a lack of love for God? Explain.

2. Jesus' strategy (v. 31)

Perhaps the best-known principle in the New Testament is this "Golden Rule." Jesus' guideline sums up the main way that His followers will live a distinctive lifestyle: "Do to others as you would like them to do to you" (v. 31, NLT). It is the guiding principle of seeking another's goodwill. We must follow this rule even when it hurts.

Today's society has several common misconceptions about this verse. One is that to be gracious and loving in the face of hostility is a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it takes a great deal of strength to control the urge to fight back. Someone might also claim that these verses will lead to letting evil take over. However, Jesus is demanding that we fight vigorously against evil. Our battle, however, is to be fought by setting a good example.

What makes our understanding of this commandment difficult?

3. The Total Unselfishness of Love (v. 32-36)

Jesus makes it very clear that Christians have no corner on good deeds (v. 32). The non-Christian does good to those who will return the favor and lends to those who can repay. This kind of behavior does not distinguish us as Christians. Good for good is a fair exchange. Good for evil is the mark of a believer.

Jesus lays it all out in verse 35. His followers are to completely sacrifice themselves in love, energy, and possessions—even for the enemy. The basis of this is God and the very nature of His character. God is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He is merciful, bestowing His love for those who don't deserve it. The proof: Christ loved us and died for us while we were still sinners (Rom. 5:6,7). Following the example of loving our enemies shows that we are "children of the Highest." In that relationship, we show that God is our Father. We show mercy to others because he showed mercy to us. The reward for our obedience is not in the favor of men but the favor of God.

How can we keep the principle of God's mercy in the forefront of our minds?

Search the Scriptures

1. Name eight actions mentioned in today's lesson that are expected of Jesus' followers. (6:27-30)

2. What good things do sinners do? And why do they do them? (6:32-33)

3. Do unloving people sometimes look as though they really love others? In what ways? (6:32-33)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why do you think so many people regard Jesus' commandment to love our enemies to be unrealistic? How are we as believers empowered by God to love our enemies?

2. Give an example of what it means to "turn the other cheek." Some people feel Black people are not "turning the other cheek" when they fight for their rights. What is your opinion? How do we balance loving our enemies with fighting systemic injustice?

Liberating Lesson

As followers of Jesus, one of the ways that we live a distinctive lifestyle is by practicing radical love. We can love those who are considered unlovable because we are loved by God. In this way, we point the way to Jesus and His radical kingdom.

In our efforts to turn the other cheek, we should not conclude that we have no need for protection against lawbreakers. To love our enemies does not mean we allow ungodly

behavior. The command to love our enemies actually places a weapon in the hand of the powerless. When deprived of physical, political, and economic power, we still have the power of a righteous life.

Application for Activation

It is almost normal to think of an enemy as someone who attacks us with unkind actions. Too often, we categorize people as enemies because of their religion, ethnicity, or political persuasion. Because we have the favor of God and His Holy Spirit, we can resist labeling people as our enemies and embrace love without looking for it in return. Very likely someone you know will mistreat you, belittle you, or do something to upset you during the coming week. Brainstorm ways to obey God's command, love them, or do something kind to prove your love. Consider having lunch or coffee with that person.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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