

## **Learning to Love Your Enemies** (Matthew 5:38-48)

When faced with opposition, how do you respond? When wronged, how do you react? In Matthew 5:38-48, Jesus turns our instincts upside down, calling us to answer hate with love and vengeance with grace. In choosing this path, we mirror God's heart and reveal His kingdom.

### **1. Overcoming Evil with Good** (Matthew 5:38-42)

*"Eye for eye and tooth for tooth"*-Lex talionis (Ex. 21:22-25; Deut. 19:16-21). Intended to enforce justice and restrain revenge. Punishment should meet the crime. For the law courts, not personal relationships. Images of subversive and creative love that shocks our enemies out of hate to view us as human beings.

- Turning the other cheek. Forces the enemy to slap with an open hand (treat as an equal vs. inferior).
- Take your tunic as well. Shows the oppressor and everyone around the gross injustice happening to you (Exposed and without warmth or protection).
- A Roman Soldier could force you a mile. The extra mile treats him as a friend in hopes he sees and respects your dignity. Radical Generosity.

These acts of radical and creative love move us from a victim mindset to one empowered to utilize every situation to make much of Jesus and reveal the kingdom of God. 1 Peter 2:21-25

Romans 12:14-21 *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good"*

*"Love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. That's why Jesus says, "Love your enemies." Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that at the very root of love is the power of redemption."*-MLK Jr.

### **2. Loving your Enemy** (Matthew 5: 43-48)

Love your neighbor (Lev. 19:18)

Hate your enemy. Not in O.T. Summary that Scribes had taught during occupation.

Lev. 19:33; Ex. 23:4- Care for immigrants and enemies. Who is your neighbor?

God is generous (sun & rain) to those who don't deserve it. Relentless generosity subverts our enemies and can even turn them into friends.

The greater rightness Jesus invites us into through loving our enemies, is what it means to be complete as God is complete. Not a sinless perfection, a striving for wholeness found in and through trust in Jesus and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

**QUESTIONS** (Pray, read the passage and pick 4-5 questions to discuss. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide.)

1. How does Jesus' teaching in verses 38-42 challenge the natural human desire for justice and retaliation?
2. What was the common teaching about retaliation in Jesus' time (Matthew 5:38)?
3. What does it mean to "turn the other cheek"? What does Jesus mean by going the extra mile (Matthew 5:41)?
4. What does Jesus mean by loving our enemies? Why is prayer so vital in loving them?
5. Have you ever seen someone live out these principles? What impact did it have? Have you ever chosen to forgive or show kindness instead of retaliating? What happened?
6. In what ways does this passage point to the gospel and our need for Christ? How does Jesus' ultimate sacrifice shape our response to those who mistreat us?
7. How would the world look different if we followed Jesus' teaching in this passage?
8. What are some practical ways you can apply Jesus' teaching in your daily life? How does this passage bring guidance to conflicts in our families, workplaces, or communities?