

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 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).

Words You Should Know

A. Bless (v. 28) eulogeo (Gk.) — To invoke God's favor

B. Do good (vv. 33, 35) agathopoieo (Gk.) — To be benevolent; to do good so that someone derives advantage from it

Say It Correctly

Assisi. Ah-SEE-see

Judea. joo-DEE-uh

Mosaic. moh-ZAY-ik.

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 Mosaic 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:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Luke 6:27-36

These commandments come at a time of Jewish oppression. Judea was under Roman rule, establishing enmity between the two people groups. Yet in this state—characterized by hatred, exploitation, bitterness, and malice—Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies. This teaching must have appeared to be heresy because the Jews felt it was justifiable to reciprocate hatred with hatred. Some believers today are under the oppression of antagonists who act as masters over them. The treatment they are receiving makes it difficult for them to respond in love. However, we must comply with Jesus' instructions to love our enemies because loving our enemies enables us to live the kind of life acceptable to God—a life of love.

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.

It is important to note the opening word, “but,” which serves to separate these verses from the woes listed just prior (vv. 24–26). Jesus is addressing His disciples in this passage. The woes do not apply to the disciples, because Jesus counts them among those who both listen to His teachings and obey them because they have ears to hear (cf. Luke 8:8, 14:35; Romans 11:8). They are members of His fold, subject to His teachings and commandments, and so they are meant to know the higher laws of life. This teaching opens by zeroing in on the last beatitude (v. 22; cf. Matthew 5:38–48). The Greek word translated “love” (agapao, ag-ap-AH-o) denotes loving “in a social or moral sense.” It is a genuine and selfless concern. Love here means to love dearly and sincerely (cf. Romans 12:14–21). This word is used to express the essential nature of God that ought to be found in every disciple of Christ and must be shown to others. To exhibit this love is to behave like Jesus, who defined humility, long-suffering, and compassion. There is a human tendency to hate one’s enemy, but Jesus tells us that our attitudes should transcend this tendency in order to fulfill God’s requirements. He mentions that love for our neighbors is the second greatest command (Matt. 22:39). One’s neighbor is not just the person living next door, but every human being. In this sense, an enemy—no matter how great our antagonism against them—is a neighbor who deserves to be loved. God has revealed three factors meant to prompt the Christian to exhibit God’s nature of love by obeying the commandment of love: the intrinsic nature of God, the command to love, and the fact that every human being needs love. Love should be an exercise of the divine will, be fulfilled by a deliberate choice, and made in obedience and service to God. Love means three things: to do good, to bless, and to pray for one’s enemies—which include three types: those who hate you, those who curse you, and those who abuse you. Jesus commands His disciples to show goodness in response to hatred. The Greek word translated “do good” (agathopoieo, ag-ath-op-oy-EH-o), means “to do well, to be of benefit to another.” Jesus is conditioning His disciples with a positive attitude to enable them to fulfill the law of love against the negative tide of maltreatment from evil people. This commandment of the Lord Jesus is meant to indicate the desired condition of the heart of a disciple. Each Christ-follower must have in themselves the spirit of love. With this spirit, they can tolerate harsh treatment from others, resist the pangs of offense, and develop the willingness to bless the one who curses them. The Greek word translated “bless” (eulogeo, yoo-log-EH-o) means “to speak well of, to invoke a benediction upon a person, to praise.” On the other hand, the Greek word translated “curse” (kataraoimai, kat-ar-AH-om-ahee) means “to pray against, to wish evil against a person.” The disciple of Christ is required to counter the person who wishes them evil with a blessing. In addition, we are given the responsibility of praying for those who misuse us. Jesus commands us to pray to God for the souls of those who mistreat us. The Lord Jesus says to pray for them rather than against them. God hears prayers about someone,

when we have obeyed Him concerning that person. The Greek word translated “despitefully use” (epereazo, ep-ay-reh-AD-zo) denotes “to insult, slander or accuse falsely.” Despiteful use is an opposition against us, and we are required to express love to those who oppose us in this manner.

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

Some believe verses 29 and 30 are intentional hyperbole to make a principled point. Jesus places no limits on the self-denial aspect of love. True love is as infinite as God. Verse 29 starts the illustration of concrete examples of actions in response to maltreatment and presents a command to resist continuing violence. If someone hits you or takes from you, don’t hit back—in fact, allow another strike. Secondly, we are told to refuse retaliation against extortion. Jesus says if someone takes away our cloak, we should not stop him from taking our coat also. Is Jesus telling us to stand still and accept abuse or theft? To get the full meaning, we must examine the surrounding scriptures. Verses 27-28 tell us to take four actions regarding those who wrong us: love, do good, bless, and pray for them. The point of offering the other cheek is not about being hit again. It is an example of refusing retaliation despite the repeated blows by our enemies. This is the non-violent response we saw in Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights advocates who brought shame upon the enemy who thought themselves victorious because of their hatred and violence. To take one’s coat has the implication of a violent action taken through authority. This is a reference to abuse by those with societal power. In both cases, the response to those who seek to abuse and humiliate us is to love, bless, do good, and pray. Jesus lived this example when He was tried unjustly, beaten unmercifully, stripped of His clothing, and crucified cruelly. While we will never go to the cross for the sins of others, our actions toward those in authority who seek to gain notoriety by wronging people they see as beneath them are not to retaliate in kind with acts of hatred. Instead, we must respond through actions that reveal our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is that relationship that strengthens us despite the evil around us.

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

Verse 30 takes us from the violence of those in authority to the negative actions of neighbors and even friends. To ask (Gk. aiteo, ahee-THE-o) means to beg. While “take” in this verse is the same as “take” in the previous verse, here a personal pronoun is used implying a friend who takes from you. The spirit of love should make us generous without discrimination. Jesus knows that no matter our state we are in a position where we can give help to other people. He commands us to give. “Every man” denotes any kind of person: the poor or rich, the old or young; relatives, friends, enemies, or strangers. “Every man” does not leave room for discrimination based on religion, background, race, color, beliefs, or social class. In other words, we are to lay down all we have for a friend (John 15:13).

Based on this command, the thief and the cheat become recipients of the love of God that is meant to emanate from the believer despite being the victim. This is the exact kind of giving that Christ showed to pay for our sin on the Cross.

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

This verse is considered the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We have a natural desire to receive good treatment from others. We love to be spoken well of; we love to hear kind words, to be encouraged, and to be given gifts. Jesus says that whatever treatment we love to receive from other people, we should also desire to give to others. The Greek word translated “would” (thelo, THEL-o) expresses a desire or wish. What you wish for yourself is what you should wish for others. The words of this verse are forever embodied with this line from a famous poem attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226), “Where there is hatred, let me sow love.” We could also say, “Where there is injustice, let me sow justice.” Remember, you might well be the only Bible the person in front of you ever reads. What lesson of faith will that person receive from you?

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.

Jesus teaches unconditional love. Love for others should not be spurred by the fact that the other person is capable of reciprocating that love. Sinners show their acts of love to people who they believe are capable of paying them back because they consider it an investment into the lives of these beneficiaries. The motivation behind a sinner's giving is the recompense he or she will receive from the person to whom they give. Jesus' point here is to define generosity in a new way and to encourage the growth of real relationships, as friends rather than as "business partners" seeking to exchange favor for a favor. The Greek word translated "thanks" (charis, KHAR-ee) in these verses is usually rendered "grace." It connotes "favor, benefit, pleasure." This means we derive favor and benefit by loving people who are not capable of reciprocating. The whole point of showing grace is that it cannot be repaid. We have been given such an abundance of grace and favor from Christ's gift of salvation. We certainly have enough to spare!

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.

Jesus poses a different motive for the actions of his followers. He admonishes them to love, do good and give without hope of anything in return. We are inclined to believe that those who have hurt us are undeserving of our love or our acts of kindness. This mentality fosters enmity and is a barrier to entering the realm of agape, selfless love. Jesus' command to love our enemies enables us to break down this barrier in our hearts. While it may be easy and convenient for us to love those we are pleased with or those with whom we have some affinity, it is generally impossible to love our enemies. According to God's economy, this impossible task of loving enemies leads to the greatest reward from the Lord. The Greek word translated "reward" (misthos, mis-THOS) means pay received later for services, wages. In this case, however, the term signifies our reward in heaven. Therefore, Jesus commands us to love, to do good, and to lend without expecting anything. God desires a distinction between His people and all others. The command to love our enemies is key to creating this distinction. According to Jesus, our acts of love firmly establish our standing as children of the Highest. God desires a distinction between His people and the people who serve other gods.

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

When we desire to take punitive measures against those who have done evil to us, Jesus urges us to be merciful to them. Since we are imperfect, liable to err, and likely to be subjected to adverse conditions of life, we inadvertently offend one another and become beset by ills. We all err and we all need mercy from one another. Mercy can be regarded as one side of a coin, with love on the other side: While love gives, mercy forgives. Mercy is a positive reaction in which we show forgiveness and kindness to one who has offended us. Being merciful is the character of God, and so showing mercy to our offenders means manifesting God's character to them. The child of God is called to be merciful like our Father in heaven. This is the best way to maintain relationships with others and to demonstrate our relationship with God.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Lord Is Merciful and Gracious
(Psalm 103:1-14)

TUESDAY

Responding to Unwanted Demands
(Matthew 5:38-42)

WEDNESDAY

Handling Family Difficulties
(Leviticus 25:35-39)

THURSDAY

Home Life of the Faithful
(Psalm 128)

FRIDAY

Forgiving the Ignorant
(Luke 23:32-36)

SATURDAY

Blessed and Rewarded
(Matthew 5:1-12)

SUNDAY

Love and Forgive Your Enemies
(Luke 6:27-36)