CORE VALUE 8 OF 10 · WEEK 8

ANABAPTISH

Pursuing Peace

We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and non-violent resolution of conflict.

John Dixon | Sunday, November 1, 2026 | Crest Community Church

For the Nightstand

THE TEACHING

Pursuing peace may be the most distinctive value in our whole family of churches. And Jesus' call to love even our enemies cuts against the grain of the flesh. This week we didn't try to prove that Jesus teaches nonviolence. We asked a harder question. How might we pursue peace today? Jesus ends his sermon with two builders. Both hear his words. Only one puts them into practice.

So what does he say? "You have heard that it was said… But I tell you." Expect something new. A slap on the right cheek is a backhand, the slap of a master to a slave. Turn the other cheek, and now you face each other as equals. Someone wants your shirt? Give them your coat too, and let them see what they're doing. A Roman soldier forces you to carry his gear a mile? Carry it two. The first mile is slavery. The second mile is freedom.

This isn't passivity. It's active, creative, nonviolent love. Rational people will call it ridiculous. Yeah, it is. Thank God it is. What does God do with his enemies? He reconciles with them, at cost to himself. That was us. So how do we love an enemy? Do good. Bless. Pray for. Only by the Spirit's power.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 5:9
Peacemakers will be called children of God.

Matthew 5:44
Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.

Romans 5:10
While we were God's enemies, he reconciled us.

John 14:27
My peace I give you. Not as the world gives.

A PRAYER

Father, you send your sun and rain on the evil and the good. You loved us while we were your enemies. We can't love like that on our own. Holy Spirit, teach us to do good, to bless, and to pray for those who hurt us. Make us peacemakers. In Jesus' name, amen.

PART TWO

For Your Home Church

Gather together. About 60 minutes, after your meal or around it.

FOR LEADERS

This is shared language, not a script. Everyone in the room can see these notes, so feel free to read them out loud. The times add up to an hour. Hold them loosely. If a conversation is alive, stay with it and trim somewhere else.

Check In

5 min

Start by hearing how last week actually went.

LEADER NOTE

Go around the room. **How did last week's practice go?** Three were offered: read one story each day of Jesus moved with compassion, take one step closer to someone whose life looks different from yours and just listen, or serve one person the slow way (or get out a basin and a towel and wash feet with your family or a friend).

Some people will not have done it. That is fine, and it is worth saying out loud so nobody performs. Ask them instead what the week was like. No fixing and no follow-up questions. Just receive it.

Take Communion

5 min

We come to this table as enemies God has made friends.

LEADER NOTE

Share the bread and the cup, before, during, or after your meal. If your group doesn't have its own words yet, have someone read this psalm out loud first.

PSALM 85:8–11 · NIV

8 I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly.

9 Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.

Read This Overview

5 min

LEADER NOTE

Ask someone to read this out loud.

Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with a story about two builders. Both hear his words. Both show up. Only one puts them into practice, and his is the house still standing when the storm comes.

So what does Jesus ask us to practice? Some of the hardest words he ever said. Turn the other cheek. Go the second mile. Love your enemies.

Nearly five hundred years ago, a group of believers in Switzerland read those words in Matthew 5 and took Jesus at his word. They were among the first Anabaptists, and they laid down the sword. The Brethren in Christ, the family of churches Crest belongs to, grew from that stream. That's why peace is one of our ten core values. It may be the most distinctive one we have.

That doesn't mean we all agree. Some of our brothers and sisters serve in law enforcement or the military, following their conscience and their best understanding of Scripture. We honor them. We can accept each other even when we don't agree. We can hash it out, as family.

So tonight's question isn't, "Does Jesus teach nonviolence?" It's, "How might we pursue peace today?"

Zach Spidel, a Brethren in Christ pastor in Dayton, Ohio, once watched his friend Donald, a man well acquainted with violence, walk across the street and drop a wet washcloth in the lap of a kid who had just been hurling racial slurs at his younger brother. "Clean your face," Donald said. How does anyone do that? Zach's answer: only by the Spirit's power.

Pursuing Peace

We value all human life and promote forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation, and non-violent resolution of conflict.

To love an enemy is to reflect God's image in this world.

Go Deeper in the Scripture

20 min

Hear the words. Then picture what it would take to put them into practice.

LEADER NOTE

Have two people read the passage out loud, switching at verse 43. Read it slowly. You won't get to every question. If time is short, start with the three marked START HERE

MATTHEW 5:9, 38–48 · NIV

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

BACKGROUND NOTES

Eye for eye. This comes from the law of Moses (Exodus 21:24). It set a limit, so payback could be no bigger than the harm. Then Jesus says, "But I tell you." Expect something new.

The right cheek. Most people struck with the right hand. To hit someone's right cheek with your right hand, you have to use the back of your hand. That was the slap of superiority, a master to a slave, an oppressor to the oppressed. Turning the other cheek says, "Face me as an equal."

Shirt and coat. Most people had just two pieces of clothing, a shirt underneath and a coat on top. Hand over both and you're standing there naked. In that culture, nakedness shamed the one who saw it, not the one who was naked. Remember Noah's sons in Genesis 9. So the one doing the taking is the one put to shame.

The second mile. Roman law let a soldier force a civilian to carry his gear, but only for one mile. The first mile plays by the rules of this world: Rome against Israel, oppressor against oppressed. The second mile is a choice. Now it's two human beings, both made in the image of God.

"Hate your enemy." The Old Testament never says it. It says love your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18), and it even tells you to return your enemy's lost ox or donkey (Exodus 23:4). Hatred of enemies just got assumed, because it comes so naturally to us.

Tax collectors and pagans. Tax collectors worked for Rome, and their own people saw them as traitors. Pagans were outsiders to Israel's faith. Jesus' point is simple. Even they love the people who love them back.

Be perfect. The Greek word, *teleios*, means whole or complete. Here it's the Father's kind of love. He sends sun and rain on everyone. Indiscriminate love. God loves those who don't love him back.

A THIRD WAY

Jesus isn't teaching passivity. He doesn't say, "If someone slaps you, let them." He gives us active, creative, nonviolent ways to answer violence and injustice. They may disarm an aggressor. They may not. Either way, they hold the door open for the enemy to change. As Walter Wink puts it, "Jesus abhors both passivity and violence as responses to evil."

In Luke's telling, Jesus names three practical ways to love an enemy. **Do good. Bless. Pray for.**

LUKE 6:27–28 · NIV

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.

How can anyone live like this? The night before he died, Jesus made a promise.

JOHN 14:25–27 · NIV

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy
Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and
will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my
peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts
be troubled and do not be afraid.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Look at the three examples in verses 39–41: the cheek, the coat, the second mile. In each one, what does the person who has been wronged actually do? START HERE
2. In verses 45–47, who gets God’s sun and rain? Who does Jesus say already loves the people who love them back?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. “The first mile is slavery. The second mile is freedom.” What do you think that means? Where have you seen someone step out of the “us against them” story? START HERE
4. In John 14:27, Jesus says, “I do not give to you as the world gives.” How would you compare the world’s peace and Jesus’ peace? Try to describe both from everyday life.
5. When someone wrongs you, which way do you tend to lean, shrinking back or striking back? What might a third way look like for you?

WHAT DOES IT ASK OF US?

6. How does pursuing peace and reconciliation touch your life and your home right now? Where does it feel hardest? START HERE
7. Imagine our neighbors meeting a church that really loves its enemies. What would they notice? What might change?

FOR ANOTHER NIGHT

Which parts of human justice, the way our world settles scores, run against Jesus’ call to peace and reconciliation?

Nationalism is often at the root of war. How could the message of peace and reconciliation from our tradition help hold it in check?

Time to share more personally. How do you deepen your spirituality, so your faith doesn’t become just culture?

Practice for the Night: Pray for One Name

20 min

Love an enemy the way Jesus taught. Do good. Bless. Pray for.

LEADER NOTE

Have paper and pens on hand. The silence will feel long. Don't fill it. When it's time to pray, go first, and keep it simple. Nobody says a name out loud tonight.

Loving an enemy never means putting yourself back in harm's way. If the name that comes to mind belongs to someone who has truly harmed you, praying from a safe distance is enough. Some people may not follow Jesus yet. That's welcome here. Invite them to simply hold the person in mind and notice what they feel.

1. **Get quiet** · 3 min
   Phones face down. Have someone read Luke 6:27–28 out loud, slowly, from the Go Deeper reading. Then the leader prays: **"Holy Spirit, we can't do this on our own. Teach us to love."**

2. **Let one name come** · 5 min
   In silence, ask the Spirit to bring to mind one person who is hard to love right now. Someone who hurt you. Someone you're at odds with. Someone on the other side. Write their first name or initials where only you can see it. Then pray for them quietly: **"Father, send your sun and rain on them too."**

3. **Pray in pairs** · 8 min
   Turn to one other person. Without naming anyone, share as much as you want about why this one is hard. Then pray for each other, one at a time. Keep it simple: **"Holy Spirit, give my friend your peace, and a love they can't make on their own."**

4. **Read it together** · 4 min
   Come back together. Read Matthew 5:44–45 out loud, all at once, from the Go Deeper reading. Then go around the room. Anyone who wants to can name one small good they could do for their person this week, without saying who it is.

KEEP THIS

Do good. Bless. Pray for.

Only by the Spirit's power.

Cut this card out and keep it close this week.

Practice for the Week Ahead

3 min

Choose one small, honest step. Start where you are, not where you think you should be.

IF THIS STILL FEELS NEW

Hear it, then try it. Read the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5–7, a little each day. Jesus says the wise builder hears these words and puts them into practice. As you read, ask, "Which line is he asking me to practice?"

IF YOU'VE FOLLOWED JESUS A WHILE

Pray for one name. Each day this week, pray for the person who came to mind tonight. Bless them. Ask God for their good, the same sun and rain he gives you.

IF YOU'RE READY FOR MORE

Go the second mile. Do one real good for someone who doesn't love you back, where it's safe to. Or take one step toward peace in a conflict you've been avoiding.

Next week, we'll start by checking in on how it went.

Close in Prayer

2 min

LEADER NOTE

Gather everyone and close your time in prayer, however the Spirit leads.

COMING UP · SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8

Core Value 9: Living Simply

We value uncluttered lives, which free us to love boldly, give generously, and serve joyfully.

WANT TO GO FURTHER?

Compelling Convictions, the companion book to this series, is free to borrow from the church library. Chapter 8, by José Otamendi, is on this week's value, and Zach Spidel tells Donald's whole story in his essay at the end of the chapter. Ask your home church leaders.

Walter Wink's ***Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*** is a short book John finds so helpful on these verses. New to Jesus' teaching on nonviolence? Talk it over with your home church leaders.