



**IDENTITY- Amity to our enemies**

**May 26, 2024**

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## **BIG IDEA – God wants us to behave like He does towards our own enemies.**

**scripture focus** - [Matthew 5:21-22](#) You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, '**You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.**' **But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.** Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

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- **We are created on purpose for purpose.**
  - Our **free choice shattered what** we see as the image of God in us and in others.
  - **Life is a miracle.**
  - **We're crafted to connect.**
  - **Eye on the vulnerable**
  - **Nuncio to the Nations**
  - **Amity to our Enemies**

Division has plagued human relationships ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden. It can be difficult to see the image of God in another person when that person opposes us, does us harm, or spurs violence against us. The first expression of our brokenness came in the form of extreme violence when Cain's anger boiled over into murdering his brother, Abel. **Jesus, obliterating the excuse-laden culture of the religious, went after the heart – the seat of saints and sinners.** How do we see the image of God in our enemies?

Picture you're an enemy in your mind right now. Let's not pretend we don't have any. For just a moment, think about what they did to you, how that made you feel and what would happen if they came and sat down next to you right now.

**We'll do one better. Let's just say that I know one of the enemies of someone here today. And I have invited them to join us. They will be coming through the back doors. Our lead usher, Mark is going to open the doors and let our guest in this morning. Mark, would you invite them in please?**

As we have been discussing in this series, our free choice, our own brokenness are the very seeds planted to eventually make enemies.

Anger and pain escalate. Pain gives birth to hate. Once hate is born it makes enemies of us all.

Like the law of inertia, once enemies are formed in motion, the enemies tend to remain enemies until there is something more powerful than hurt or hate that it started with – love, healing and forgiveness from God is that powerful force that can stop the inertia of hate.

What is an enemy?

**An enemy is someone who is actively opposed or hostile towards some thing or someone.**

**Why is it my fault if someone is hostile towards me?**

**It's not. But our reaction to those who want to cause us harm can become a deadly poison unto itself.**

Someone doesn't need to have violence to be an enemy.

**Martin Luther King used an interesting phrase to describe the process of how enemies are made and continue to exist.**

**"Hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe ...it is all a descending spiral ultimately ending in destruction for all and everybody."**

**- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.**

We ride this **descending spiral** when we respond with more division, more anger.

As I said, Jesus being the radical Rabbi of his day, shocked and stunned his listeners with these counter-cultural, godly ideals:

**Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-45**

You have heard that it was said, '**Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.**' But I tell you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**, 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. [Matthew 5:43-45](#)

## **Was Jesus serious or crazy?**

Anyone that hears or reads those words spoken by Jesus must confront the contents of their own heart!

**The whole world operates on the general principal Jesus mentioned earlier – it's a dog-eat-dog, eye-for-eye world we live in.**

**It's a full on, leave a horsehead on the pillow of your enemy kind of existence we live in! That's the way it was then, that's the way it is today.**

Let's trace this back to the beginning and take a look at where hate, violence and enemies first took place.

### **Cain and Able is the first lesson in this human experience!**

There was a scene from an old movie starring Robert Mitchum and Shelley Winters, where Mitchum plays a fake preacher to steal some money from a widow. It's called [The Night of the Hunter](#). Mitchum describes this story about hate and love to the two children.



*The Night of the Hunter*

**Cain's anger birthed hate. And his hate grew into murder.**

**Obviously, this is exactly why Cain killed his brother, Abel. In Cain's mind, Abel deserved to die for some unknown comparison and favor from God.**

**In Genesis 4:1-2 we go from this beautiful love scene where Adam yada-yada's (yada in Hebrew is the word to 'know' sexually) his wife Eve and she conceives and produces Cain. Later Adam and Eve do similar and make Abel. The Bible simply gives the boys a brief bio on what they do, not who they are: Abel becomes a shepherd and Cain becomes a farmer. Notice right away that Abel is mentioned first, flipping the birth order.**

**In verses 3-4, The Bible just tells us what each son brought to God as an offering. This time Cain is mentioned first. He brought the fruits of the soil. Seems nice,**

right? Then Abel also brings an offering, the fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

The Bible says that the Lord looked with favor on **Abel** and his offering. The Hebrew word is "**shaah**," **God put his gaze upon Abel. But on Cain and his offering God did not gaze.**

Another use of the word "**shaah**" is **respect. God looked favorably on Abel, but did not look respectfully on Cain.** Hmmm?

Cain was very angry, he "**charah**" (burned with anger) and his face could not hide his disappointment of failure – his countenance fell.

In verse 6, God asked Cain, "**why are you burning with anger - your face shows it?**"

**God admonishes Cain in verse 7,** "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? **But if you do not do what is right,** sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

**What happened? We don't know.** But **God gave Cain the choice to do right or do wrong.** But wrong came with consequences, sin was already "**rabats**" **stretched out at his door** – the entrance to Cain's heart.

Remember, the Bible is not chronologically ordered, so it's not like the next hour, day or even year it happened. But **eventually Cain's heart led him to invite Abel on a little trip to his farm. It was there that Cain slayed/murdered his brother.**

Our series about our identity is not just seeing ourselves as image bearers of God, but others as well. This week it becomes the most difficult.

**At some point in life, could I be a CAIN? And, in some point in my life, will I be an ABLE?**

**How could we possibly see the image of God in Cain?**

**Here is THE point from today's message:**

**God wants us to behave like He does towards our own enemies.**

**How do we see God's image in our enemies?**

Before we answer that question, we may need to spend a few minutes looking at our own heart, seeing our own frailties and fractures.

**Q: How often have we allowed anger to lead us to something we would regret?**

**Anger is like cancer. Untreated, it turns into hate. Everything it touches dies.**

**Anger robs us of joy, peace, relationships, family, community and country. Hate also hurts the hater.**

**The more we hate the more we develop physical and emotional symptoms. Anger that converts to hate distorts our personality, our physicality, and spirituality.**

People get sick when they are filled with anger and hate. **We imprison ourselves!** We become guilt ridden and suppress certain emotions, not just towards others, but also towards ourselves.

**The more we hate the more we develop neurotic responses. We become unstable and it leads to doing the unthinkable. "You can't see straight when you hate. You can't walk straight when you hate. You can't stand upright. Your vision is distorted. There is nothing more tragic than to be an individual whose heart is filled with hate."**  
- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

**What happens when you think of a mass shooter who walks into a school and violently kills innocent children?**

**What happens when a young man walks into a movie theatre specifically to murder a young couple on a date?**

**What happens when someone cuts you off on the freeway and a mother flips them the bird, then an angry passenger takes out a gun and shoots the woman's car killing a six-year-old little boy?**

**Q: Is it hard to see the image of God in them?**

**Q: Do we only see a forever damaged, dehumanized person?**

**It is extremely hard to see the image of God in a person that is filled with hate and carries with them thoughts of anger and murder.**

**Q: Should this person be seen as the image of God with dignity that God gave all humans?**

**Yet we know that image bearers frequently perpetrate hate, abuses, and crimes against other people.**

**Do we like it? Do we just accept it? Do we just pretend that it doesn't matter? Do we participate in the "descending spiral," that Martin Luther King spoke about?**

We might not see ourselves as a murderer or someone who deeply hates as we seen in others. **However, it is absolutely true – those capabilities, those possibilities live within us all.**

Murder begins in the heart – Jesus said.

[Matthew 5:21-22a](#) You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, '**You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.**' But I tell you that **anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.**

But maybe murder is too much. **Let's look at the fact that everyone has injured someone either purposely or accidentally.**

**We injure with our mouth, with criticism, condemnation, gaslighting or shaming. We injure with our actions or inactions.**

James, the brother of Jesus tells us that it only takes a little spark from a sassy tongue to start a forest fire of pain in others.

[James 3:5-6](#) In the same way, **the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.**

**We all have the capacity to be Firestarter's! All of us have it within our capacity and capability to hate.**

**Every image bearer stands guilty before God were it not for the blood of Jesus.**

Sin makes us ugly before each other. And that ugliness is exactly the reason enemies even exist!

**Q: Have you been hurt by someone else?**

**We are all painfully aware of the many injustices perpetrated by people, even those who profess to be Christians!**

In the [Daily News](#) — August 12, 1905, asked the greatest minds of Britain at the time, "What is wrong with this world?"

The well-known author G.K. Chesterton responded with this:

**“The answer to the question, “What is Wrong? Is, or should be, “I am wrong.””**

**G.K. Chesterton**

No matter how hard we try, we will always have enemies.

**Two things we all have in common with every human on the planet.  
We were all made in God’s image**

**We are all broken, having shattered God’s reflection in us and through us with our own sin.**

Even our worse enemies are not less than human. They are still sinners just like us.

**God calls us to love just like He loves:**

**But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. -- Jesus**

We don’t mind hearing Jesus words in “theory” of what Christ followers are supposed to be like. But when it comes right down to someone we don’t like, someone that has actively tried to hurt us we shift our thinking to “that’s for someone else,” or “God doesn’t understand my situation.” We find excuses and justify our thoughts and actions – becoming just another casualty in the cycle of anger, hate and retribution.

**How do we bless and not curse our enemies? It’s tough. It’s faith. It’s a decision.**

**We first look at the person that hurt us first. Instead, we can look to God first and seek His heart, will and wisdom. We keep our focus on God instead of the hurt and pain of what someone did to us.**

**Our enemy may never respond in kind. But that’s not our responsibility nor our ability to resolve.**

**When we see every individual through this image of God and see what God sees, only then can we listen and obey the Holy Spirit to help us with the next right step.**

Be obedient to the Holy Spirit today!

All I am asking is for you to be open to what God would say to us in our hurt, pain and possibly even hate.

Something to think about...

**“The narcissist loves only himself.  
The nationalist loves only his tribe.  
The activist loves only his cause.  
The idealist loves only his thoughts.  
The humanist loves only his concept of humanity.  
The Christian loves the irritating person right in front of him.”**  
-- Skye Jethani

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## NOTES

### Scriptures

[Matthew 5:43-45](#) You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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.

[Genesis 4:1-2a NLT](#) Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the Lord’s help, I have produced a man!” Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

[Genesis 4:2b-5 NLT](#) Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel. When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

[Genesis 4:6-7 NLT](#) “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

[James 3:5-6](#) In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And **among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself.**



## Further Notes for Study

### Am I capable of murder?

Lawrence R. Samuel writing for [Psychology Today](#), “most of us are capable of it in the right (or wrong) circumstances.” Douglas Fields, a [neuroscientist](#) and author of the book *Why We Snap*, has claimed that **humans are biologically predisposed to commit violence in certain situations**. [Aggression](#) is a natural [defense mechanism](#) against a perceived threat, his research showed, making us all capable of violence—even killing another human being—if it means our own survival.

Given the right circumstances? What does that mean? Self-defense or family defense is normally given as the right circumstances.

### **READ [Genesis 4; Matthew 5:21-26; James 3:6-9](#).**

A couple weeks back we learned that every human being is precious in God's sight. Life is a priceless gift from God and thus worth protecting, especially when that life is vulnerable. After God “breathed the breath of life” into humanity, He provided for all human needs through His Creation. He affirmed the freedom of humanity to enjoy each other as well as the abundance of His provision in the garden, except for the fruit of the tree of the “knowledge of good and evil.” To partake of that tree, God said, would mean death. With all of the options available to Adam and Eve, it's a wonder that they seemed to beeline straight to the wrong tree. But, then again, we would too, every one of us (see Romans 3:23).

This “all have sinned” idea provides an essential backdrop for this week's topic, for it is from our individual sin that human discord arises and makes enemies of us all.

In the verses from Mathew 5 that we read for today, Jesus taught His listeners to stop killing or harming one another. Notice the unique pattern that He employed. It's the first of six teachings that begin with “You have heard...but I say...” The rabbis had created additional “clarifying” laws for the people to follow; Jesus made His own clarifications to change their warped thinking.

**Read the [Matthew 5:21-26](#) passage one more time. Write down one thought from these verses that seems most meaningful to you, and why.**

With these teachings, Jesus raises the bar on the righteousness expected of those who would try to “earn” their right status with God. “Do not murder”

comes straight out of the Ten Commandments, but Jesus points out that the religious leaders of His day had incorrectly limited their interpretation to the passage's most literal meaning. In His discussion of "murder," He included harmful words (*Raca* means empty-headed or fool), and insults that have the power to "kill" a person's deepest sense of self and spirit.

**Reflect on Jesus' expectations of how we are to treat others.**

**Q: In what way do Jesus' expectations elevate the value of human life and relationships?**

Contempt toward another person may seem a far cry from murder, but as Cornelius Plantinga puts it, "sin is a dynamic and progressive phenomenon...a polluted river that keeps branching and re-branching."<sup>1</sup> It's like a contagious virus that spreads, leaving behind a trail of death. Contempt has the peculiar ability to dehumanize its target and undermine the moral basis for human relationships.

Jesus insists that He considers one thing far more important than any gift we might bring to God—namely, the way we view and treat His image-bearing people.

**Compare the words of Jesus to those of James ([James 3:6-9](#))**

**Q: Why do you think Jesus connects words to the act of murder?**

In Matthew 5:23-25, Jesus prioritizes reconciliation with others over the religious practice of offering gifts to God in worship.

**Q: What happens to our relationship with God when we remain angry with others?**

The story of Cain and Abel includes sibling rivalry and murder. God shows favor to Abel's sacrifice, which makes Cain very angry and jealous. Cain murders Abel and so becomes the epitome of anger gone wild. This incident provides the perfect picture of pain begetting pain, of sin leading to judgment—but also of God's grace.

**Q: What do you see in Cain's story that echoes Jesus' warning about contempt leading to murder?**

**Q: How does God's reaction to Abel's death, and His grace to Cain, affirm the dignity of human life?**

**Q: In what way does the relationship between Cain and Abel reflect the posture we tend to have toward others, especially those we dislike, view as our adversaries, feel jealous of, or feel superior to?**

**PRAY.** Ask the Lord to help you see anger as a warning light and as an encouragement to work on the relationship that has sparked your anger.

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<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 53.

## **Pain Begets Pain**

**READ** **Matthew 5:38-42.**

*The people of Jesus' day seem to have taken the "eye for an eye" passages (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:19–20; Deuteronomy 19:21) as justification to judge others harshly, and to hurt those who hurt them. But Jesus rebuked the people for using the law (intended to bring justice and limit violent retaliation) as a tool for revenge.*

**How do broken relationships and acts of injustice contribute to the pain we see in the world?**

**Q: Suppose you were sitting in the crowd when Jesus said the words recorded in Matthew 5:38-42. How do you think the crowd would have responded when He called them to "turn the other cheek" to those who treated them unjustly?**

**Q: How would you have responded, both then and now?**

*Jesus gives five examples of God-like mercy, each meant to call us to value the Kingdom of God and to love others more than the things we own (including our rights, honor, comfort, and possessions).*

**Q: In what way do the examples mentioned by Jesus challenge us to trust in God as the final arbiter of justice?**

*On one of the hottest Southern California days in recent years, a couple felt excited to learn whether the baby they were expecting was a boy or a girl. Joined by several friends and other children, they traveled to an open field, walked to a grassy area, and watched as a friend lit up a fireworks device. They expected to see either a huge splash of blue or pink dust. Perhaps secretly, they said a little prayer for their preference before the big bang. The device ignited and the blue powder flew in every direction, but before the family could celebrate, a fire broke out in the dry brush. The few water bottles the group had*

brought proved no match for the fast-spreading flames. Within a few days, more than 10,000 acres lay charred and thousands of families had to evacuate their homes.

A local news radio station invited listeners to call in with their suggestions for how to punish the couple. People immediately jumped at the chance to put on the judge's robe, calling for a variety of "eye for eye" punishments: "Bankrupt them!" "Make them work one hour of community service for every burned acre!" "Force them to name their child 'Forest' so they will always remember their evil act!" It quickly became clear that most of us are quick to think of ways to pay back evil for evil, but slow to offer grace and mercy.

**With this story in mind, read and reflect on Paul's words in Romans 5:6-11.**

When you consider the ramifications of human sin—their sins, our sins, your sins, past, present, future—how big would you say is the fire and devastation that humanity has kindled on God's Creation?

**Q: What should be the just punishment for such a catastrophe? What does Jesus do instead?**

**Q: How does the fact that Jesus "died for the ungodly" and "sinners" demonstrate the image-bearing identity of every person on Earth?**

Most people believe in the "Golden Rule," which calls us to love others as we would desire to be loved. But the word and the idea of "love" carries a lot of cultural baggage and gets interpreted in many ways by different people. Some think of it as an emotional, sweet, or romantic expression. Others think of it as a rational acceptance of others as they are. Still, others think of love as a helpful action toward other human beings in their time of need.

Jesus modeled a very different kind of love, a love that is far more than emotional, rational, or comforting. His love challenges every person to rethink the meaning of the word.

**Q: How does the love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross differ from the love our culture expects or is willing to give? How does it differ from the love you're willing to give to others?**

Jesus calls His followers to live in ways very different from the rest of the world. He urges His followers to behave like their Heavenly Father and to love all people, even those who mistreat them. Believers should reflect the love and glory of the Father by demonstrating God's grace and mercy to others, and so shine before the world (Matthew 5:16). Does this seem like an impossible

expectation to live up to? It would be, except for the power of the Holy Spirit, who helps us love as Jesus did.

**Q: In what way does loving like the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrate that while we're still sin-stained, we do not cease to bear the image of our Creator?**

To show mercy and grace to someone who offends you, steals from you, or hurts you is not the same thing as willingly submitting yourself to continued abuse. It means, rather, to abstain from retaliation or taking revenge.

**PRAY:** Ask the Lord to build in you a willingness to love others as He loves—sacrificially, slow to anger, and quick to show mercy and grace.

## The Beauty of Glory

The “glory” of God refers to the awesome totality of His divine attributes, such as His beauty and excellence, His magnificence and purity, His goodness and infinite nature, His power, wisdom, mercy and justice, and so much more. Psalm 19 proclaims that everything God created reflects His glory. Isaiah 43:7 makes it clear that the very existence of Israel was planned, conceived, and achieved because God wanted to reflect His glory through the descendants of Abraham. But in fact, every human is created for God's glory, not Israel alone! This is what God has been up to from the beginning and is doing still. This is why Jesus calls us to “let your light shine among others” (Matthew 5:16) and why Paul calls us to do everything “for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). God formed you. God made you. God created you for His glory!

**READ Psalm 8.**

The Psalmist makes it clear that God created us to reflect God to everyone and everything, a privilege stemming from our unique place in God's creation as persons made in the image of God.

**Q: How does our status as image bearers affect the way we are expected to represent God to others?**

It is both a privilege and a blessing to be made in God's image, designed to reflect His glory. This is why God takes sin so seriously; because it undermines the dignity and worth of persons. When we sin against each other, we violate our value as humans and we assault the quality of human life. Sadly, all of us are both victims and perpetrators of sin. We participate in devaluing the image of God. Even so, we cannot erase God's image from ourselves, nor from others.

The most offensive symbol in human history is the cross, yet it bears witness to the value of human worth and dignity. By sending His Son to the cross, God declared that human beings, even sinful and rebellious human beings, are of immeasurable value to Him. **John 3:16-17** declares that the cross brought freedom from sin and salvation to those who put their trust in Jesus. While not all will choose to accept God's gift of grace and transformation, such a tragic choice does not diminish their value in the eyes of their Creator.

**Q: How does the Psalmist express the dignity of human beings? Make a list of the words used to describe humanity.**

**Q: Why do you think no persons, types of persons, nations, classes, or races are excluded from these descriptions?**

Jesus Christ is the fullest embodiment of the image of God. He is the only human who has ever perfectly reflected God's glory, and He perfectly models what it means for us to do so. His actions and teachings left an example for us to follow. He not only tells us who we ought to be, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, He transforms us and gives us what we need to live as we ought. As God promised to help Israel (Isaiah 41:10), so Jesus Christ is our only hope. To trust Jesus is to allow Him to remold us so that we may reflect God's glory, as God intended from the very beginning.

To reflect God's glory is both a privilege and a responsibility. We are not gods, nor will we ever be. We are not to make a name for ourselves—that was the sin of the builders of the tower described in Genesis 11. But God transforms us in His loving hands to make us into vessels He can use in His ongoing efforts to redeem others.

**READ and reflect on God's words in **Isaiah 48:9-11**.**

While this text refers to God's chosen people, Israel, we who trust in Jesus have been grafted into the family of God (Ephesians 3:6, Romans 11:17-24). God's purposes do not change with time. God will save His people and will bless them abundantly. He does this for His "own sake," remaining consistent with His name.

Honoring human dignity should be as vital to us as it is to God. This means that our view of others must match His view of them. We need help from Jesus to see the image of God in others, especially those whom we dislike or even those we consider pure evil.

**Q: How do we bring our hearts into alignment with God's way of seeing people? How does the gift of the cross help us humble ourselves before God? What must we think, feel about, and do for others, if God's glory is to shine through us?**

**PRAY.** Ask the Lord to help you become more humble and more reliant on the Holy Spirit in order to reflect God's love, mercy, and grace to those He made in His image.

## Expensive Love

A key element of survival is to know who you can count on to help you stay alive. The reverse is equally important: who is not trustworthy? Deep within our human psyche, we have a "homing device" that detects enemies. It works well, with both speed and precision, when we're in the wilderness worrying about a mama bear intent on protecting her cub.

The same system helps us when we're in a social setting, worrying about protecting ourselves from a bully or an abusive individual. The challenge comes when we use this system to determine the boundaries of who we allow into our hearts and who we don't; who we choose to love and who doesn't deserve our love. I say "a problem" because we tend to love only those who love us, something that Jesus seriously opposed.

### **In the words of Skye Jethani,**

"The narcissist loves only himself.  
The nationalist loves only his tribe.  
The activist loves only his cause.  
The idealist loves only his thoughts.  
The humanist loves only his concept of humanity.  
The Christian loves the irritating person right in front of him."

READ **Matthew 5:43-48.**

Jesus meant it when He called us to love our enemy. That kind of love shocks us. We consider that kind of love too expensive, and in fact, it is expensive. To love our enemy is to seek their best interest above our own (Philippians 2:3-11). Such a love shows someone favor, devoid of any positive response, romance, emotional gain, or relational benefit. But this kind of love was exactly the kind Jesus showed us when we were still sinners.

We know God loves the evil person, because "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."  
(Matthew 5:45 NIV) He loves the person who does not love Him. He loves first (**1 John 4:19**). He does not withhold His love from His Creation and is generous with that love.

Since God alone knows the heart, He has the ability to justly determine who is evil and who is not—yet He chooses to love both.



How does this compare to our tendency to love only our friends, or our eagerness to greet only those who acknowledge us, or our preference to let in only those who think like us?

Jesus insists there are serious implications for those who love only those who love them back. They already have received, on Earth, all the reward they will ever get. But loving our enemies brings a much greater reward, “that you may be children of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:45).

READ and reflect on the words of **1 Peter 3:8-9**.

**Q: What gift do we receive from God for our sacrificial and obedient love?**

To love our enemy requires us to be on the side of people, no matter what they do in return. We are to seek their best interests, even when they provoke us to dislike them. We are to love, even if we do not receive the apology or approval that we deserve. We are to do good, simply because Jesus calls us to do good. This type of love is costly.

Describe the cost associated with loving our enemies. What must we let go of? What do we lose? What do we give of ourselves? What do they gain?

**Q: Describe the cost of hating our enemies. What do we let go of?**

**Q: What do we lose? What do we give of ourselves? What do they gain?**

Loving our enemies does more for us than we can imagine. It has the potential to help us grow into the likeness of Jesus, as we depend on Him to love like Him. But also, it has the potential to help us see the image of God in others and to see our enemy in the way God sees them is a blessing of immeasurable value.

PRAY for someone who has been difficult, if not impossible, for you to love. Ask God to help you see Him or her through His loving eyes. Ask God to help you love with His love and not your own.

## Summary of teaching outline

- **Divided We Stand**
- **The Enemy Within**
- **Running from and to Our Enemies**
- **Loving like Jesus**

## Discussion Guide

**WEEK 7 - SERMON DATE 5/26/2024**

**IDENTITY | Amity to our Enemies**



## **QUICK REVIEW**

Thinking about this week's teaching, was there anything you heard for the first time or something that caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?

### **Read aloud Genesis 4:8**

**Q:** Is it hard to see the image of God in Cain? Or our enemies?

**Q:** Do you take the opportunity to get even, get revenge or feel justified in giving people what they deserve?

### **Read aloud Mathew 5:21-26**

**Q:** In what way do Jesus' expectation elevate the value of human life and relationships?

**Q:** What happens to our relationship with God when we remain angry with others?

**Q:** What do you see in Cain's story that echoes Jesus' warning about contempt leading to murder?

**Q:** Based on what makes you feel loved & on Mathew 7:12 what are some tangible things we can do to actively cultivate a sense of love, belonging, and interconnectedness with others in our daily lives?

### **Read aloud Romans 5:6-11**

**Q:** How does the fact that Jesus "died for the ungodly" and "sinners" demonstrate the image-bearing identity of every person on Earth?

**Q:** How does the love that Jesus demonstrated on the cross differ from the love our culture expects or is willing to give? How does it differ from the love you're willing to give to others?

**Q:** In what way does loving like the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrate that while we're still sin-stained, we do not cease to bear the image of our Creator?

## **MAKE ONE**

Ask God to help you love with His love and not your own.