

Small Group Guide

Summer on the Mount: Loving Your Enemies

Based on Matthew 5:43-48

Overview

This week's sermon concluded the Summer on the Mount series with what may be Jesus' most challenging teaching: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Drawing from the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the broader context of Leviticus 19, the sermon called us to move beyond basic human love toward the extraordinary, boundless, and perfect love of God — not just on the mountaintop, but in the valleys of everyday life.

Key Takeaways

- The law of Moses never commanded hatred of enemies. That addition came from people who wanted to justify their own attitudes and narrow the definition of "neighbor."
 - A neighbor is anyone in close proximity to you. An enemy can also be your neighbor, which means the command to love your neighbor has no exceptions.
 - Love, in the way Jesus describes it, is not primarily a feeling. It is a doing — praying, serving, and blessing others even before the feeling follows.
 - When we love those who do not love us back, we begin to relate to and resemble the heart of God, who sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike.
 - The Parable of the Good Samaritan flips the script. Jesus does not just ask us to love our enemies — He shows us what it feels like for our enemy to love us, which forces a decision in our own hearts.
 - Once we were enemies of God, and yet He sent His Son to die for us. The gospel itself is the ultimate model of loving one's enemy.
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Discussion Questions

Opening (Choose One)

1. The sermon opened with a story about a steep half-mile hike to a mountain summit. Describe a time when something that looked short or simple turned out to be much harder than expected. What kept you going?
 2. Which teaching from the Summer on the Mount series has been the most challenging for you personally, and why?
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Digging In

3. The sermon pointed out that nowhere in the law of Moses does it say to hate your enemies — the people of Israel added that themselves to justify their attitudes. In what ways do we do the same thing today? How do we redefine "neighbor" to exclude the people we would rather not love?
4. Read Leviticus 19:9-18 together as a group. Who is included in the command to love your neighbor according to this broader passage? Does anything on that list surprise you?

5. The sermon drew a distinction between love as a feeling and love as a doing. How does that distinction change the way you think about Jesus' command to love your enemies? Does it make it feel more or less achievable?
6. Jesus says in Matthew 5:45 that God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. What does this tell us about the nature of God's love? How does that challenge the way we typically decide who deserves our kindness?
7. The sermon asked the group to identify with the characters in the Parable of the Good Samaritan — the robbers, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan. Which character do you most honestly relate to in a current relationship or situation in your life? Why?
8. The sermon made this observation: "The magic of this story of Jesus is not Him just saying, love your neighbor. He's saying, what does it look like for the person that you hate to show love to you?" Has anyone in your life ever shown you unexpected kindness or love when you expected hostility? What effect did it have on you?
9. The sermon connected the Parable of the Good Samaritan to the gospel itself — that once we were enemies of God, and yet He loved us and sent His Son to die for us. How does keeping the gospel in view change your motivation for loving difficult people?

Going Deeper

10. The sermon challenged us to pray blessing over our enemies rather than praying that they would see how wrong they are. What makes that kind of prayer so difficult? What would it require of us internally to pray that way sincerely?
11. The sermon said: "It is when we love those who don't love us back that we begin to resemble our Heavenly Father." Do you agree with that statement? What does it reveal about what spiritual maturity actually looks like?
12. Jesus closes His teaching with the phrase recorded in Matthew 5:48 — a call to a kind of completeness or wholeness in love that mirrors the Father. How do you personally understand that standard? Does it motivate you, discourage you, or both?

Practical Applications

This Week, Choose at Least One

- **The 40-Day Prayer Challenge:** Write down the name of one person you are struggling to love. For the next 40 days, pray a blessing over them each day — not a prayer that they would change or admit they are wrong, but a genuine prayer asking God to bless their life, give them favor, and bring good things their way. Journal what happens in your own heart over those 40 days.
 - **A Small Act of Service:** Identify one person in your life who would qualify as a difficult neighbor or even an enemy. Over the next two weeks, perform one small act of service for them without announcing it, without expecting anything in return, and without keeping score. Notice how your heart responds.
 - **Widen Your Definition of Neighbor:** This week, pay attention to who you naturally pass by — the coworker you avoid, the person at the grocery store you do not make eye contact with, the neighbor whose politics or lifestyle frustrates you. Make one intentional move toward one of those people. It does not have to be grand. A greeting, a question, a moment of genuine attention is a start.
 - **Gospel Reflection:** Spend time this week meditating on Romans 5:8, which describes how Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Write down two or three ways your relationship with God mirrors the dynamic of the Parable of the Good Samaritan — where you were the one left on the side of the road and God was the one who stopped. Let that reflection fuel your motivation to love others the same way.
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Closing Prayer Focus

Close your group time by praying for one another in two specific ways. First, ask each person to share the name (or simply a description) of someone they are finding it difficult to love right now. Pray blessing over those people together as a group. Second, ask God to give each person in the room not just the knowledge of what to do, but the heart and the strength to actually do it — because as the sermon reminded us, this is not something we can manufacture on our own.

Memory Verse for the Week

Matthew 5:44 — Jesus' command to love enemies and pray for those who persecute us, so that we may reflect the character of our Father in heaven.