

# Loving Enemies (Matt. 5:43-48)

## A Small Group Outline



### 1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
  - Sing a few songs of praise to God

### 2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

### 3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

### 4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

### 5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

#### • **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings (MB)*, pp. 73-78
- Vs 43: You have heard: "This is what is generally taught, but I, as the Author of the law say..."
- Vs 43: A neighbour to Jews was a fellow Israelite who was born or converted to Judaism.
- "The Jews held that God loved those who served Him,—according to their view, those who fulfilled the requirements of the rabbis,—and that all the rest of the world lay under His frown and curse. Not so, said Jesus; the whole world, the evil and the good, lies in the sunshine of His love" (MB 74).
- Vs 44: When we pray for our enemies, it is easier to love them. It takes the "poison" out of our attitudes.
- Vs 45: To be 'sons of our Father in heaven' means, in the context of this passage, that we need to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Jesus not only loved His enemies, He died for them as well (see Rom. 5:6-10)
- Vs 45: God brings sunshine and rain: That is, God is intimately involved in human life. He lovingly sustains our planet and the universe: "Every good thing we have, each ray of sunshine and shower of rain, every morsel of food, every moment of life, is a gift of love [from God]" (MB 74).
- The concept of God as a loving **Father** who yearns over His children, has only been given to the world by the Bible (see MB 74).
- "God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart. By it He changes pride into humility, and enmity and unbelief into love and faith" (MB 76)
- "[God's] love received, will make us, ... kind and tender, not merely toward those who please us, but to the most faulty and erring and sinful" (MB 75).

- Vs 46: The tax collectors / publicans: They were seen as wicked extortioners, hated by society, and avoided as far as possible. By mentioning them in this verse, Jesus is saying that a legalistic religion, and no religion at all are driven by the same worldly principles
- “The children of God are those who are partakers of His nature. It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity. Even sinners whose hearts are not utterly closed to God's Spirit, will respond to kindness; while they may give hate for hate, they will also give love for love. But it is only the Spirit of God that gives love for hatred. To be kind to the unthankful and to the evil, to do good hoping for nothing again, is the insignia of the royalty of heaven, the sure token by which the children of the Highest reveal their high estate” (MB 75).
- We can sometimes downplay the counsel to love our enemies by:
  - Redefining the word *enemy* (‘Mary is not my enemy, I just don’t like her)
  - Blaming (It’s John who caused this situation. He needs to come and apologise to me)
  - Making excuses (I was under pressure at work, that is why I lost my cool with Henry. Now he’s upset, but he should have known that I just started a new company)
  - Ignoring it (i.e. downright disregarding as if it were never written in Scripture)
- If there is tension between people, and even if the other person is at fault, the Christian should always be ready to initiate reconciliation and settle matters quickly (see Matt. 5:23-25). It is important to be forgiving if we desire God’s forgiveness (see Matt. 18:21-35)
- One of the best ways to love our enemies, and deal with the pain they have caused, is to do something good for them. Each situation may be unique and may need divine wisdom, but a small gift, a special note, an act of kindness, a visit, etc., can be life-transforming. Even if we get rebuffed, there is still benefit: We would have taken a giant step closer to becoming like Jesus; and we would surely have planted a gospel seed in the person’s heart for them to ponder about. This indeed is Christianity at its best!!
- Vs 48: The word ‘therefore’ brings to conclusion vss. 43-47 and shows us what being perfect means. It means loving our enemies like Jesus does, who sends sunshine and rain on the just and the unjust.
- Vs 48: The word perfect means mature, complete, reaching a goal – see 1 Cor. 14:20; Heb. 5:14.
- Perfection is a process. A child or a plant can be perfect at every stage of development, even though it is not fully mature. Christians can therefore be perfect but not yet perfect (see Phil 3:12, 15). Jesus in this passage is not dealing with absolute sinlessness (see *Steps to Christ*, p. 62; *Review & Herald*, March 18, 1890).
- “Jesus said, Be perfect as *your Father* is perfect. If you are the children of God you are partakers of His nature, and you cannot but be like Him. Every child lives by the life of his father.... That life in you will produce the same character and manifest the same works as it did in Him. Thus you will be in harmony with every precept of His law...” (MB 77).
- “We have nothing of ourselves, but the light of His love shines upon us, and we are to reflect its brightness. ‘In His borrowed goodness good,’ we may be perfect in our sphere, even as God is perfect in His.” (MB 77)
- “God has made provision that we may become like unto Him, and He will accomplish this for all who do not interpose a perverse will and thus frustrate His grace” (MB 76).
- *Read Matt. 5:43-48. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*

- **Discussion Questions** (*use only a few*). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
  - Why is it so difficult to be like Jesus in loving our enemies?
  - What are ways we can downplay or ignore the counsel to love our enemies?
  - What are practical ways to love our enemies?
  - What would have to happen in the heart in order for a person to pray for an enemy?
  - What could be the result if we pray for, and love our enemies?
  - Why do you think Jesus used the term **Father** in vs 45? What was He trying to illustrate?
  - Why do you think Jesus mentioned tax collectors / publicans in vs. 47?
  - What do you think it means to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect?
- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
  - For which of your ‘enemies’, do you commit to praying for this week? (*This is meant to be done in silent reflection, unless a person feels comfortable sharing this*)
  - What are some specific ways that you can show love this week to someone whom you dislike?
  - What does the concept of a heavenly **Father** mean to you?
  - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group’s secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. “I will pray this week for my boss who humiliated me in the staff meeting 2 days ago. It is going to be very difficult, but I’m going to ask God to help me find a way to be kind to him. I really want to be more like Jesus.”

**6. Share** (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today’s lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

**7. Closing prayer**

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