

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

a 10 minute daily devotional | week 8

thursday | prayer

Take 10 minutes to pray that God will help you love your enemies. Here's a prayer to get you started: "Lord Jesus, you are gracious, merciful, and kind. Set me free from my prejudice and intolerance towards those I find disagreeable, and widen my heart to love and to do good even to those who wish me harm or evil."

friday | application

Pray for someone (or some group) that you consider enemies or opponents. Even better, do something kind for someone you consider an enemy or opponent.

saturday | journaling

Spend 10 minutes recording your thoughts/feelings from your week immersed in Matthew 5:43-48.

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

Matthew 5:43-48

monday | devotional

“Many have learned to offer the other cheek, but do not know how to love him by whom they were struck.” - Augustine

Sports have always been a big part of my life. In middle school my AAU team played over 70 games a year. We traveled to Portland almost every weekend during the basketball season to play in tournaments. At these tournaments we would see many of the same teams from week to week. They say that familiarity breeds contempt. For me it is more accurately, familiar competition breeds disdain.

Through the years of seeing the same competition over and over I developed a strong dislike of certain players on certain teams. Frankly, I'm wired this way. If someone isn't on my side, especially when it comes to competitive sports, I view them as against me. A teammate of mine in middle school (and later high school) wasn't wired this way at all. He'd hangout with people from the other teams, even have them spend the night at his house. It has been almost 20 years and just last month I gave him a hard time about it—I was partly joking. In high school my girlfriend said to me, “If you ever look at me like you look at players on the other team, I will break up with you.” Yikes.

We live in a society that has taken my attitude about people on other teams and applied it to almost every walk of life. Far too many treat those of a different gender, nationality, race, political party, or religion, as enemies. Sadly, this has trickled into American Christianity. Far too many Christians have taken and us against them mentality. People may not say they hate the opposition, but they sure act like it. This stands in stark contrast to Jesus' parable that is usually called The Good Samaritan.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus is responding to a question by an expert of the law. The expert is having a conversation that starts with him asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the law says and the man responds by saying love God and love people. Jesus declares him right, but for some reason that man isn't satisfied. Luke 10:29 says, “But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” Jesus responds with the parable and his words are instructive for our passage. He says:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (Luke 10:30-36).

The answer to Jesus' final question is obvious, the Samaritan was the neighbor. There is a lot to say about this parable, but the important thing to understand is that Jesus shows us that loving our neighbors isn't about loving those who live next to us, who think like us, or who are on our side (whatever side that might be). Loving our neighbors is about loving whoever is right in front of us.

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus tells his followers to, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” This is not dissimilar to the words Paul would later offer in Romans 12:18-20 (which is partially a quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22), it says, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

In a culture that has become increasingly divisive, Christians have a unique opportunity to be different. Instead of finding more and more enemies to hate based on smaller and smaller differences, we should strive to see everyone as a neighbor. And because they're our neighbors, we ought to bless, love, and pray for them. This is what Jesus is calling us to, but even more, this is what Jesus did for us. While we were still in utter opposition to him, he died for us. Romans 5:10 says, “...while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...” As followers of Jesus we should try to be Jesus-like. We probably won't have to die for our enemies, but at least we can make small sacrifices for them—sacrifices of kindness, care, love, forgiveness, and prayer.

I've outgrown my disdain for those I compete against. I think it is time for Christians in our country to outgrow their disdain for those that are against us. We must resist evil, but persist in loving people who do evil.

tuesday | commentary

Below are seven snippets of commentary. After you've read them write a short statement explaining how it helps you better understand Matthew 5:43-48.

“Love” (*agapao*), “describes an unconditional, sacrificial love, which ultimately is the love that God is (1Jn 4:8,16) and that God demonstrates...”

Loving your enemies requires “self denial.”

“Jesus has set the bar very high for us. If the torture of crucifixion did not prevent our Lord from praying for His enemies, what insult, injury, enmity, pain, cruel word, etc from our persecutors should silence our prayer?!”

Tax collectors “the revenue officers or toll collectors who were considered to be disloyal Jews hired by the Romans to tax fellow Jews for personal profit and as a result this group became symbolic of the worst kind of people...”

“Reward” “refers to rewards which God bestows for the moral quality of an action, such rewards most often to be bestowed in eternity future.”

AT Robertson explains that “perfect” “comes from telos, end, goal, limit. Here it is the goal set before us, the absolute standard of our Heavenly Father. The word is used also for relative perfection as of adults compared with children.”

John MacArthur, “Because God is perfect, those who are truly his children will move on in the direction of his perfect standard. If you are stalled, or if you are slipping in the opposite direction, it is right that you examine yourself.”

wednesday | questions

1. In what ways does our culture embrace the idea of hating our enemies?
2. Who do you consider your enemies?
3. Read Romans 5:9-11. In what ways can you more fully align your attitude those who oppose you with God's attitude towards those who sinned against him?
4. Share one thought from this passage that you find most meaningful and why.