



LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

MATTHEW 5:38-48

GOAL

- ▶ **To teach children to imitate the exceptional love of Jesus Christ.** He left His glory—His position as King of the universe—not to be served, but to serve by giving up His life to rescue the world from the eternal curse of sin. He loved us while we were still enemies and haters of righteousness. This extreme love is an attribute we inherit as His children; it is proof that we belong to Him. Teach children practical ways to imitate the love of God, especially in response to their enemies.

WORDS TO KNOW

- ▶ **Love:** As in “Love your enemies.” Love is patient and kind, it is not resentful, it does not take joy in the failure or misery of others, and love believes and hopes for the best. We are called to love even our enemies —no matter how hateful or cruel —and to wish for them God’s greatest blessings.

Enemy: As in “Love your enemies.” An enemy is someone who opposes you; someone who despises you and wishes bad things to happen to you.

Persecute: To persecute is to act hatefully, or punish a person for what they believe, and to do whatever is necessary to silence them.

MEMORY VERSES

- ▶ **Matthew 5:44:** But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
- Proverbs 25:21:** If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.



OVERVIEW

▶ **Read Matthew 5:38-48:** The law of God is perfect and exists to convert hearts and minds, promote peace, and protect from injustice and overbearing punishment. The problem with the religious leaders in Jesus' day is that they used the law for vengeance. The religious leaders used the law to control those who offended them and inflict as much pain as the law would allow. Contrary to this understanding, Jesus taught His disciples to imitate the love of God in every action, even in view of His law. Instead of looking for an opportunity to inflict harsh punishment, or return evil for evil, He told the disciples to seek a peaceable solution and to act in love and forgiveness. We are to respond as our Father in Heaven would respond. Love your enemies and do good to those who hurt you.

SUGGESTIONS

▶ **Help children to identify characteristics of the Father's love through the actions of Jesus Christ, specifically, His actions in response to His enemies.**

1. Servanthood: Jesus ministered to the sick, the weak, and the helpless. Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32).

2. Sacrifice: Jesus gave up everything, including His life, to save the world from sin and eternal death. "Having loved His own, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

3. Friendship: When we were still enemies of God, God made a way to restore friendship and to make us His very own sons and daughters. "But God shows His love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

4. Humility: The God of glory gave up His throne in Heaven to walk among mankind—to feel our pain, to understand our weakness, and to give up His life as a ransom. "And being found in human form, he humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:15).

5. Prayer: He prayed for those who persecuted Him and blessed those who cursed Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

6. Salvation: God offers His gift of salvation to everyone—no one is excluded. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).



PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY



Ages 5-7 Inner Circle | Supplies: One large hula hoop for every five to six kids and large objects to prop up the hula hoops about 6 inches.

Divide the kids into teams of about five or six. On the count of three, one child at a time will step into the hula hoop without knocking it over. The team that can get the most kids into the hula hoop without disturbing it wins!

This is a game that teaches inclusion of others and making friends.

Ages 8-10 Scripture Relay | Supplies: Poster board, chalkboard, white board, or butcher paper; markers, chalk, or dry erase markers.

Select one of the memory verses to use for this game. Divide the group into two teams. If using poster board or butcher paper, secure it to a wall. Line up the two teams a good distance from the writing surface. On the word “go,” have the first child run to the board and write the first word of the memory verse, run back, hand off the pen to the next child, and go to the back of the line. The next child will write the second word of the Bible verse and go to the back of the line. This should continue until the entire Bible verse has been written. The first team to finish wins.

Ages 8-10 Friendship Chain | Supplies: Clear tape, strips of colorful construction paper, pens, and/or crayons.

Give each child two strips of paper and have them write their own name on one strip and an example of how to be a good friend on the other. While they are working on their answers, explain to them how we are to be kind to everyone, even those who are difficult to love. Using the clear tape, link the names and answers to each other, creating a colorful paper chain that can be hung in the classroom as a reminder.



MEMORY
VERSE
MEANING

▶ **Matthew 5:44:** It is easy to love someone who loves you, but the real blessing and reward is in loving the unlovable, those who hate you, those who are cruel, and those who wish you harm.

Proverbs 25:21: Instead of hurting the person who hurts you, look for ways to show him or her unexpected kindness. Hatred and revenge fuels rage, but mercy and kindness makes it possible to earn friendship.

POST-LESSON
ACTIVITY

▶ **Ages 5-7 Follow the Leader/Follow the Father**

Have everyone form a large circle. Select one child from the group to be the “guesser.” Have him or her leave the room. While out of the room, select one person to be the “leader,” then invite the guesser back and have them stand in the center of the circle. The group will throw their arms up and down three times, then the game begins. The leader will direct the rest of the group to perform other movements, which the kids in the circle will imitate, such as, waving their arms back and forth, standing up, sitting down, kicking their left foot, kicking their right foot, and so on. The center guesser must try to guess who the leader of the group is. To make it more difficult for the guesser, the children imitating the leader must do so in a way that isn't too obvious, so the guesser will not suspect. The guesser gets three chances to figure out who the leader is. If none of the guesses are correct, the round continues; if the guess is correct, the leader becomes the guesser, and the guesser joins the group. This activity helps younger children understand what the word imitate means, as in “imitate the Father's love.”

Ages 5-7 Verse Hop | Supplies: sheets of paper.

On sheets of paper write words or phrases from one of the memory verses. Place the words on the floor close enough together that children can safely hop from one word to the other. Have the kids take turns hopping from one word to the next, in order of the Bible verse. In the beginning, read each word/phrase to the kids and have them hop as you say them, toward the end of the game give the children the opportunity to hop through the verse without help.



Ages 8-10 **Heart of Love** | **Supplies:** a large heart cut from construction paper or poster board. Smaller slips of paper and items to use for decoration, such as ribbon, yarn, glitter, buttons, etc.

On small slips of paper, have children write and/or draw ideas about how to show love, even to their enemies, such as sharing, forgiveness, patience, giving, kindness, etc. Let the kids glue their various responses to the heart along with decorative items that will give it flare.

TAKE HOME

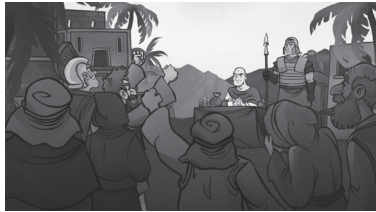
As sons and daughters of God, we are to imitate His love to others—even our enemies. Based on what we learned about our Father's love for us, how can we imitate Him in our everyday lives? Use the following to stir up conversation.

1. Jesus ministered to the sick, the weak, and the helpless. How can we ease the suffering of those who are sick or hurting?
2. Jesus gave up everything, including His life, to save the world from sin and eternal death. How can we show love and kindness to not only our friends, but also to our enemies?
3. When we were still enemies of God, He restored us to friendship and made us His very own sons and daughters. How can we promote reconciliation and peace with others? How can we promote peace and reconciliation with God?
4. The God of glory gave up His throne in Heaven to walk among us—to feel our pain, to understand our weakness, and to give up His life as a ransom for the forgiveness of sin. If God can give up His throne and His life, in what ways can we humble ourselves to forgive, show kindness, and serve the people God puts in our lives?
5. He prayed for those who persecuted Him and blessed those who cursed Him. How does the understanding of God's love change our attitude toward others? How does prayer change our attitude toward others?
6. God offers His gift of salvation to everyone—no one is excluded. What are some ways we can share the good news of God's love with others and invite them to be a part of the family of God?



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 1



Q1a: Who ruled Jerusalem during Jesus' time?

A1: The Romans ruled during Jesus' time.

Q1b: Has anyone ever bullied you?

TN: Bullying is a big issue these days, and it is likely that every student in the class has been bullied on some level. It can be a sensitive topic for some, so it's not necessary that everyone share their experiences. Being bullied is a difficult situation to handle. It's scary and discouraging to be threatened and treated poorly. Often, we are given advice on how to deal with bullies. While Jesus gave this and all other lessons more than 2,000 years ago, they all still apply to situations we face on a daily basis.

SLIDE 2



Q2a: What surprising thing did Jesus say about the Romans?

A2: Jesus said that people should love the Romans.

Q2b: Which would you rather try: jumping to the moon using only a trampoline or loving your enemies?

TN: Most of us would prefer to spend our time doing something impossible that will waste our time than confront our feelings about people who do mean things to us. Jesus asks us to love our enemies, and that is such a difficult thing to do because it means letting go of our pride. Responding to evil with love feels like we're letting someone get the best of us, and that's not easy. We can rest in this knowledge: If Jesus asks us to do it, there is a good reason and He will help us accomplish it.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 3



Q3a: What did Jesus say people should do when someone slaps them in the face?

A3: Jesus said they should let the person slap them on the other cheek, too.

Q3b: Is Jesus asking us to be weak?

TN: Not at all! Often, our first reaction to the example Jesus gave of someone slapping us across the face is to slap back, or to hurt the person in some way. Choosing to love someone who slaps you across the face requires far more strength than it does to seek revenge. It is very important to remember that God doesn't ask us to do things to put us at a disadvantage; He asks us to do these things because he has a plan. There is nothing—no action, no words, no plans—we can do that will serve justice as perfectly as God can. When we turn the other cheek, we are putting our faith in that plan.

SLIDE 4



Q4a: Poor people used their coats for what?

A4: Poor people used their coats as blankets.

Q4b: How does it make you feel to give something really nice to your best friend?

TN: Giving our best friends something really nice feels great! What about giving something really nice to someone we don't like or who has been mean to us? Why does it feel better to give to a friend than to an enemy? Because of love. We love our friends and want them to be happy! Jesus loves our friends and our enemies the same, and He wants us to love them the same, too. That's not easy, but it is something we can accomplish with God's help.



QUESTION & ANSWER

SLIDE 5



Q5a: How far could Roman soldiers force people to carry their gear?

A5: Roman soldiers could force people to carry their gear for one mile.

Q5b: Have you ever done something for someone and he or she didn't thank you?

TN: Doing good for ungrateful people isn't super fun, but that shouldn't stop us! God sees our work and His appreciation and acknowledgment means more than if everyone in the whole world gave us a standing ovation!

SLIDE 6



Q6a: God gives His goodness and love to who?

A6: God gives His goodness and love to everyone, even those who don't deserve it.

Q6b: Have you ever had a day when it just felt like nothing would go right?

TN: Students don't have to share details of this bad day, but ask them to think about the things that happened. Then ask them to think about how they reacted to the problems that came up that day. How did they behave that day? Then ask them how a person who had never met them before might think of them based on their behavior on this particular day. No matter how angry, mean, or difficult we are on our worst days, Jesus loves us. Despite our behavior and actions, Jesus would still come to die on the cross so that we could live with Him in Heaven forever.



SLIDE 7

QUESTION & ANSWER



Q7a: Instead of taking revenge or getting even, what did Jesus do to those who hurt and insulted Him?

A7: Instead of taking revenge or getting even, Jesus gave His own life as payment for our sins.

Q7b: Can you tell whether a person is good or bad based only on the way he or she acts?

TN: The way a person acts in any given situation can give us a good idea of that person's personality, but this is just one instance. What if that person was having a bad day and was grumpier than usual? Without being able to see every part of a person's life and see into his or her heart, we are unable to judge a person as good or bad; only God can do that. Jesus loves our enemies just as much as He loves us, and if Jesus finds them worthy of love, they deserve the same from us. By loving our enemies, or even just people who aren't particularly nice, we are displaying love like Jesus.



MEMORY VERSES

▶ **Matthew 5:44:** But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Proverbs 25:21: If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

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BIG IDEA

▶ God loves everyone, even our enemies, and He wants us to love them, too.

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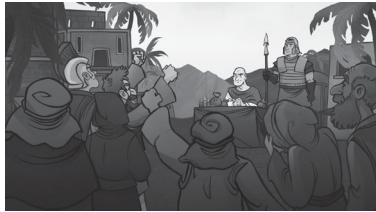
CLOSING PRAYER

▶ Dear Lord, thank You for Your example of love, that while we were still sinners, You died for us. Help us to be kind and to do good things, even to those who say and do mean things to us. We love You, and ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 1



During the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans had invaded Jerusalem, and they made life very difficult for many Jews. The Roman emperor demanded that the people worship him instead of God, Roman tax collectors took the people's hard-earned money, and Roman soldiers bullied anyone who disagreed. Throughout Jerusalem, the Romans were viewed as an enemy—they were hated!

SLIDE 2



One day, Jesus sat down on a hillside, surrounded by His disciples and a large crowd of people. Many of those listening had seen first-hand how cruel the Romans could be, and they listened eagerly to Jesus' teaching. What would Jesus say about people like the Romans? Would He say people should hate their enemies? Would He say they should get even with them? Much to their surprise, Jesus said that they should love their enemies.

SLIDE 3



Jesus explained what this love looked like by giving some examples. First, He told the people, "If someone slaps you on your right cheek, let them slap your left cheek as well." This would have been very difficult for the people to accept, but Jesus wanted everyone listening to understand something very important: Love doesn't take revenge. Love doesn't hurt others who have caused harm.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 4



Jesus gave the people a second example: “If anyone brings you to court to take your shirt, let them have your coat as well.” A person’s outer coat was very important in Jesus’ time. For example, the poor would use their coats as blankets to sleep in on cold nights. But Jesus wanted the crowd to understand that true love comes from a deep trust in God. Love will give away things of incredible value, even to those who don’t deserve them.

SLIDE 5



Next, Jesus said, “If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it for 2 miles.” According to their law, Roman soldiers could force people to carry their heavy gear for 1 mile. People hated having to do this, and they would never think of going an extra mile. But Jesus taught the crowd that love always serves others, even enemies, with a humble heart. Love always goes above and beyond, doing more than expected.

SLIDE 6



Jesus was letting the crowd know that they should love others the way that God loves them. Jesus explained that God was like a good Father in Heaven. God shows His goodness and love to everyone, even those who don’t deserve it. Jesus reminded the crowd that God gives his very best gifts, like warm sunshine and nourishing rain, to everyone—good and bad. Jesus challenged the crowd to love each other in the same way.



LESSON TRANSCRIPT

SLIDE 7



Later, on a cross, Jesus would become the perfect example of God's love. There, people hurt and insulted Him, but He didn't take revenge or get even. Instead, Jesus gave away the most valuable thing of all—His own life—as a payment for our sins. Our Savior went the extra mile so that we could be free from our sin and live with God in Heaven forever. God loved us first, even when we were sinners. It's amazing! And this is how Jesus says we are to love others!