

SESSION 4

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES



What's an experience you've had with an obnoxious fan?

QUESTION #1

*Love your enemies even as
Christ has loved you.*

THE PASSAGE

Luke 6:27-36

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

- ▶ When it comes to sports, you're supposed to trash talk the other team and its fans.
- ▶ When a coworker makes you look bad in front of the boss, you're supposed to make him look worse.
- ▶ When someone spreads a rumor about you, you're supposed to retaliate and spread a more hurtful rumor about her.
- ▶ When someone blunders in a way that affects you, you're supposed to gossip about the person.
- ▶ When even a family member wrongs you again and again, you're supposed to remove him from your life and never forgive.

You're supposed to? That's how the world expects you to act, and the same thinking resides in our sinful human nature. But Jesus calls us to a different approach. A radical approach. Jesus calls us to love, serve, bless, and pray. That's easy enough with those we like, but Jesus calls us to do the same thing for our enemies. Those who trash talk us, make us look bad, spread rumors, hurt us, and even hate us.

How do we do that in a world that says hate and anger is the answer?

Luke 6:27-28

27 “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

KEY WORD: Bless (v. 28)—The root of the Greek word means “to speak well of.” As new creations in Christ (see 2 Cor. 5:17), we are able to extend God’s good will and good actions to others.

Christ calls those who know Him and follow Him to live lives that reflect who He is. To follow Jesus means to be like Him, and that means we reflect His love through our actions and attitudes even toward those who hate us—with no exceptions or escape clauses. We are to love unconditionally.

What does unconditional love look like?

- ▶ **Forgiving the person.** “Love your enemies,” begins with forgiveness. Forgiveness is hard, but it is completely doable. Jesus modeled forgiveness on the cross. As He died in our place, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He stood in the gap so that we can be forgiven for our sins. Just as God forgives our sins, we should forgive others’ sins. Forgiveness frees up space in our heart where bitterness or hatred wants to take root. Forgiving others is a response to the forgiveness we have received from God. Since Jesus died for our sins, we can forgive others for the wrong they’ve done to us.
- ▶ **Doing good to the person.** “Do good to those who hate you.” Serving others requires faith to know the Lord is good and He works His goodness through us. Faith is active. Faith takes initiative. Faith seeks to please God by serving people who are difficult to serve— people that the world neglects or tells us not to love. They may have personally wronged us, but at the

end of the day, they are still the ones we are called to love and serve. Nothing makes Christians stand out in our messed-up culture like Christ shining through us while we do good to those who have wronged us.

- ▶ **Blessing the person.** “Bless those who curse you.” Our words have the ability to speak life or death. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21). Wow! When we speak affirmation or praises, or speak well of our enemies, we are choosing to bless them by “speaking life” over them. Sincere affirmation of others frees us from a spirit of hatred. The more we affirm people, the more our hearts warm toward them, resulting in greater willingness to forgive.

This is hard to do—as hard as offering forgiveness. When we focus only on our own hurt and pain, we fail to see things from their perspective or understand what pain they may be experiencing that leads them to hate. That is not to excuse their behavior, but “seeing through their eyes” certainly helps us to pray, bless, and speak life over them. Our hearts begin to soften toward them—even as Jesus loved us when we were His enemies (Rom. 5:8). The person becomes less of an enemy and more of a human with his own pains and insecurities.

- ▶ **Praying for the person.** “Pray for those who abuse you.” Jesus made a clear correlation between loving our enemies and praying for them, but why? Why do we need to pray for those who have wronged us? Because it’s not about us. It’s about our relationship with Jesus—living in Him and for Him. Prayer brings us closer to Jesus; therefore, it brings us closer to healing, and praying for those who hate us sanctifies us in humility. Praying for those who hurt us requires us to lay down our pride, which paves the way for an abundance of God’s grace in our lives.

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Pet. 5:5).

How do you know when someone has crossed the line and become your enemy?

QUESTION #2

Luke 6:29-31

29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.

30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.

31 And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

The Christian life is a life of sacrifice; sometimes we may even be required to sacrifice the parts that are the most near and dear to us. You won't hear our culture promoting or encouraging this, especially when the sacrifice is for our enemies. Nevertheless, the Lord does call us to sacrifice ourselves.

Loving others, especially our enemies, will often require intentional sacrifice. These sacrifices may be in the areas of money, time, schedules, energy, goals or expectations. We certainly will need to sacrifice any pride or self-centered thinking. But we can only give sacrificially of any of these things by knowing and walking with the Lord.

Jesus communicated this truth through three examples.

1. **If someone slaps your cheek.** Being slapped on the cheek by another person was an insult, but Jesus said to let him slap you again; in other words, if a person insults you once, don't be afraid to let him insult you again.

2. **If someone takes your garment.** Taking another person's garment was a legal matter to a Jewish audience (Matt. 5:40). Luke was writing to a Gentile named Theophilus (Luke 1:3), so the Old Testament law on this matter (Ex. 22:26-27) would not have been all that important to him. Even without understanding the law concerning the issue, however, it is clear that we are to give generously to whoever is in need.

3. **If someone takes your things.** This implied taking someone's things without permission; that is, stealing them. Even here, Jesus stressed a selfless approach to those who take advantage of us: "do not demand it them back." See it as a gift, not a loan.

Jesus gave the perfect summation of His teaching in verse 31: "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them." Versions of this statement can be found in ancient literature, but they were stated negatively: "Whatever you would not like done to you, do not do to another." That's fine to prevent us from doing bad things, but Jesus doesn't just want us to avoid doing harm; He wants us to do good to others! He gave us a positive command to follow, one that is grounded in love and mercy for the other person. We are to reflect love and mercy toward others just as Christ has shown love and mercy to us.

Jean Valjean is one of the most beloved characters in literature. In Victor Hugo's novel *Les Miserables*, Valjean was a prisoner released after nineteen years. He spent the night in the home of Monseigneur Bienvenu, a gracious cleric, but he took advantage of the bishop by stealing several pieces of his silver. When Valjean was apprehended with the silver, Bienvenu did not press charges. Quite the opposite. He gave Valjean two silver candlesticks as well. By modeling Jesus' teaching on giving to one who has taken advantage of you; the bishop's love paved the way for Valjean to become a noble man.

Sacrificial giving speaks unconditional, undeniable love to the recipient. It's not surprising when we do that for a friend or loved one, but when we do it for someone bent on harming us, it can be life-changing.

How do you think most people in our culture would react to Jesus' teaching in these verses?

QUESTION #3**Luke 6:32-36**

32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Why does all this “love your enemies” talk even matter? Why can't Christians just fit into the culture and live their lives without radically loving our enemies? Here's why: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). To be a Christ-follower means to live like Jesus. Jesus loves others; therefore, we love. His love for others is far different from the way the world expects us to love, and we are to love as He loves.

What does it take for a person to live the way described in these verses?

QUESTION #4



WHAT MADE ONE A SINNER?

The Greek word translated “sinner” is *harmartolos*. It was used in secular Greek to describe “missing the mark” or “to be mistaken.” The Greek word referred to failure or deficiency but did not convey a clear concept of moral failure.

The New Testament translators of the *Septuagint* frequently chose *harmartolos* to translate the Hebrew word *rasha* (“wicked person,” “guilty”). In the Old Testament, a sinner is someone who ignores or intentionally violates God’s commands.

In later Judaism, rabbinic instruction expanded the Old Testament link between sin and keeping the Law. The legalism that developed during the intertestamental period is reflected in the use of “sinner” in the New Testament. The interpretation of the Law (as defined by rabbinic teachings) became the basis for labeling people as “righteous” or “sinful” in first-century AD Judaism. Jews involved in scandalous activities such as tax collection, prostitution, and other such activities were specifically labeled “sinners.”

Hal Lane, “What Made One a Sinner?” *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2017, pp. 60-63.

One word describes the way the world thinks: *expectations*. We always expect something in return. I will treat you well *if you treat me well*. I will loan to you *if you repay me*. I will love you *if you love me*. We always expect something in return. Not so for the follower of Christ; God is calling us to take our expectations out of the picture. Do good to the other person even if he is not good; love even if she doesn’t love you; loan without asking for repayment.

Jesus loves us even though we do not deserve His love; because of this, we must “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph. 5:2). He loves us and paves the way for us to love others in the same way. Christ loves us radically, so we should love radically. This radical love changes us; it shapes us to be more Christ-like. It inspires us to extend kind treatment to those who hate us. Christ loves us in a way that far exceeds any standard of love our world or culture could ever know. The best way to spread this love is to love others as He loved us.

Jesus modeled a life of service (Matt. 20:28). Christ was a servant to all people, even those who wronged Him. We are to do the same. We are not here to be served, but to serve others.

Actively loving our enemies may simply begin with a kind word to them, a smile as they walk by, or making eye contact when they speak to us. Simple acts of kindness can begin to break down the walls of hate and soften the heart to God's love. But it doesn't stop there. Love will also call for sacrifice.

God gave us mercy when we deserved death. Who are we to decide what our enemy deserves? Jesus freely provided forgiveness to us when we were ungrateful and wicked. He gave forgiveness clothed with grace, kindness, and love. To follow in Christ's example means that we too give forgiveness clothed with grace, kindness, and love—even to the ungrateful or wicked in our lives.

What are some tangible ways we can do good to those who treat us poorly?

QUESTION #5

LOSSES AND GAINS

Circle what you would have to sacrifice in order to love an enemy.

Pride	Time	Money	Family
Friends	Goals	Desires	Self
Other _____			

What can you gain when you make these sacrifices?

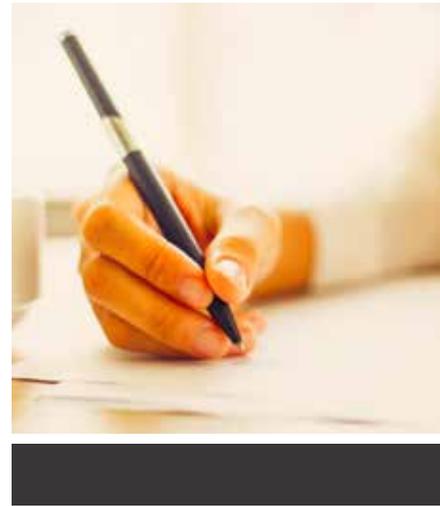
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LIVE IT OUT

Loving others—especially our enemies—is hard, but it’s what we’re called to do. What will you do this week to love as Jesus loves?

- ▶ **Bless.** If you’re continually around a person who is hard to love, be intentional in blessing them with a smile, a greeting, or some simple gesture of kindness.
- ▶ **Identify.** Write down the names of those who have wronged you or could be considered your enemy. Convert that list of names into a prayer list. Pray for their needs and pray for God to move your heart to love and serve them. Ask God to help you see them as people He loves, people who were created in the image of God.
- ▶ **Serve.** Invest your time and energy in helping an enemy with something they could use some help. Use the opportunity to point to Christ.

Living our lives to reflect the life of Jesus is what sets us apart. Loving people radically through our words and actions points to the One who fills us with His love.





FORGIVING THE UNFORGIVABLE

BY DENISE GEORGE

On the morning of June 17, 2015, the Reverend Anthony Thompson's wife, Myra, makes the last few notes on the Bible study she will teach tonight at the old historic Emanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina. She joined the church as a 10-year-old girl and a half-century later is still actively involved.

Her husband, Anthony, is pastor of Charleston's Holy Trinity Reformed Episcopal Church. His own Wednesday evening church activities keep him from attending Myra's Bible study at Emanuel.

After the church business meeting, Myra Thompson welcomes a dozen fellow friends and worshippers. They meet and greet, seating themselves around tables and opening their Bibles. Myra reads from Mark 4. Before she finishes reading the selected Scripture verses, a young man with a pale boyish face slips inside the fellowship hall. Dressed in a gray sweatshirt, worn blue jeans, and Timberland® boots, he wears a black waist pack. As a famous old African-American church in Charleston, the group isn't surprised to have a visitor or tourist walk down the street, see the church lights on, and wander into the fellowship hall. The Bible study members warmly welcome the young blonde-haired man, pulling out a chair and seating him beside Emanuel's pastor, the Reverend Clementa Pinckney.

THE END OF THE EVENING

Myra finishes teaching about 9 p.m. Before she dismisses the group, they stand and end in prayer. Suddenly, *Crack! Crack! Crack!* Loud gunshots explode throughout the hall. With a Glock® .45 pulled from his waist pack, the boy-faced man opens fire on the 12 praying members. A storm of rapid gunfire rings out as he moves from one table to the next, shooting the worshippers at point-blank range, shell casings hitting and bouncing off the linoleum floor. In his sudden killing frenzy, Dylann Roof stands over his victims, shooting them again and again before they die. Myra Thompson, along with seven others, lies dead on the fellowship-hall floor, her body riddled with bullets and bleeding, her Bible and study notes scattered, soaked in her own blood. The ninth victim dies at the hospital later during the night. Around 9:06 p.m., Dylann Roof stops shooting, turns around, and walks out the door. One of the survivors makes a frantic call to 911.



After his own church's activities, Anthony Thompson goes home and waits for Myra. As he prepares dinner, he receives a confusing phone call about "a shooting at the church." He jumps into his car and races to Emanuel. The streets are chaos, filling quickly with law officials, police dogs, federal agents, and horrified residents. When Anthony discovers his wife has been murdered, his body goes limp, and he sinks to the ground. With his face against the sidewalk, he openly weeps.

Soon after the shooting, Anthony Thompson and others learn the reason Roof killed the nine church members. He holds deep, strong racist beliefs and chose Emanuel A.M.E. Church for his murderous deed due to its long past history.

The horrific murders leave Charleston residents in shock, as well as the rest of the nation. But what happens 48 hours later will stun the world.



THE APPEAL FOR REPENTANCE

At Roof's bond hearing two days later on June 19, 2015, Anthony Thompson stands before the judge, publicly and directly expressing his forgiveness to Roof, who watches and listens with an expressionless face via a video connection from jail.

"I would just like for you to know that I forgive you," Thompson says softly. "And my family forgives you. And we would like you to take this opportunity to repent."

Showing concern for the young man's soul, Thompson continues addressing Roof. "Repent. Confess. Give your life to the One who matters most—Christ. So that He can change you and change your ways."

THE PROMISE FROM SCRIPTURE

News reporters, civic leaders, and others around the world scratch their heads in disbelief, asking Thompson how he can forgive the hateful man who killed his wife as she prayed in church.

"I choose to forgive Dylann Roof because I believe and trust God's Word when He tells me that vengeance is His to repay, not mine," Thompson answers. "I need not avenge the vile deeds of Roof myself. 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' Scripture promises me." (Deut. 32:35, NIV)

Thompson's forgiveness isn't based on his feelings or the gruesomeness of the crime. As a choice of his will, Thompson gives Dylann Roof the gift of biblical forgiveness. A born-again believer in Jesus, a minister of God, and a Christ-appointed shepherd to a congregation, Anthony will accept and choose to obey, with God's help, the hard and necessary commands of biblical forgiveness.

To an unbelieving society, this type of forgiveness seems illogical. Human nature wants to harshly avenge the offender, to get even with him—not forgive him.

"Scripture tells me that as I, myself, am forgiven by Christ, I am obliged to forgive others who hurt me and take from me those

I dearly love. Jesus asks us to pray and practice (Matthew 6:12, NIV): ‘Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors,’” Thompson says. “How can I expect God to forgive me if I choose to withhold forgiveness from others, no matter how abhorrent their actions? As a Christian who is forgiven by God, I must also forgive Dylann Roof, no matter how repulsive I find him and how savage his murderous deeds.”

In this process of biblical forgiveness, I am discovering that my deliberate choice to forgive is allowing me a surprising sense of healing and peace.

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Anthony misses his wife, Myra, a beautiful Christian woman whose life and ministry have been so cruelly cut short. But he is recovering, discovering how choosing to forgive as Scripture commands brings personal and community healing.

“It isn’t easy to forgive a man who purposely kills your wife,” Thompson admits. “Yet in this process of biblical forgiveness, I am discovering that my deliberate choice to forgive is allowing me a surprising sense of healing and peace and the ability to begin to move forward in my life.”



Denise George is author of *Called to Forgive: The Charleston Church Shooting, A Victim’s Husband, and the Path to Healing and Peace* (Bethany House). This article originally appeared in the August 2018 issue of *Mature Living* magazine. You can subscribe to *Mature Living* by going to www.lifeway.com/matureliving, by using your church’s quarterly literature order form, or by calling 1-800-458-2772.