

SESSION 4

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

▶ ***The Point***

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 a family member wrongs you again and again, you're supposed to drop him—remove him from your life—and never forgive.

You're supposed to? That's the way 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. That includes 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?

▶ ***The Setting***

After going up onto a mountain and spending the night in prayer, Jesus called His disciples to Him and selected twelve to be apostles. (See Luke 6:12-16.) Coming down from the mountain, large crowds of people came to hear Jesus teach, to be healed, and to be freed from unclean spirits. (See vv. 17-19.) Jesus then taught on what it means to be His disciple. (See vv. 20-49.)

What does the Bible say?

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.

Luke 6:27-36

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.

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.

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.

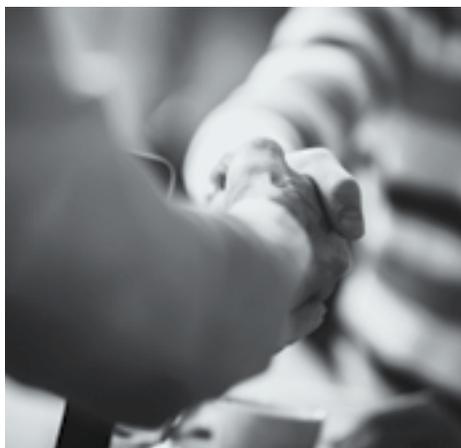
36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 93 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“When have you seen an enemy become a friend?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 94 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of loving our enemies by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, print images or create a slideshow of images representing a variety of “us vs. them” attitudes in culture today. Start with “easier” images such as one soft drink vs. another soft drink taste test; one college logo or fans vs. another; and other such images. Continue with other images showing the divisive attitudes displayed in the country today.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 94 of the PSG: **“Love your enemies even as Christ has loved you.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to help us identify those whom we have a difficult time loving as Christ loved us. Thank Him for the grace and strength to love them despite our differences.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

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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.”*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Luke 6:27-28 on page 95 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the Old Testament background for these verses.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 95-96 of the PSG. What does unconditional love look like?



- ▶ **Forgive others.** Since Jesus died for our sins, we can forgive others for the wrong they’ve done to us.
- ▶ **Do good to others.** Nothing makes Christians stand out in our broken culture like Christ shining through us while we do good to those who have wronged us.
- ▶ **Bless others.** 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.
- ▶ **Pray for others.** 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.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 9**, “Unconditional Love” poster. Divide group members into smaller groups of three to four members each. **Ask:** “What practical steps can we take to put these into action?” Allow time for group members to discuss; then invite volunteers to share their group’s responses aloud.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 95 of the PSG: **“Whom do you know that models Jesus’ teaching in these verses?”**

TRANSITION: Loving those who hate us should be seen in our attitude and actions. In the next verses, we see that loving others often requires action.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
 What’s your initial reaction to Jesus’ teaching in these verses?

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Luke 6:27-28 Commentary

[Verses 27-28] While Jesus affirmed the importance of keeping the Old Testament commands, He taught that His disciples should do better than their religious leaders. (See Matt. 5:17-20.) He called for His followers to love even those who hate them and to let their love show in their attitudes and actions.

After describing the characteristics that a disciple should possess (also known as the Beatitudes, see Luke 6:20-23) and pronouncing four woes against those who are self-satisfied in this life (see vv. 24-26), Jesus spoke of how a disciple should treat his or her enemies. Jesus began with **“But I say to you who hear.”** Those who listen (disciples) should not just listen with their ears, but rather also put Jesus’ teachings into practice in their daily lives.

The Old Testament Law contains several commands about how to treat one’s neighbor, including the last five of the Ten Commandments. (See Ex. 20:13-17.) The supreme command is to love your neighbor as yourself rather than taking revenge or continuing to bear a grudge. (See Lev. 19:18.) However, the culture of the Old Testament era expected someone who was harmed by another to desire to take revenge. God gave permission for equitable punishments for harmful acts but also set limits. (See Ex. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21.)

Though apparently some rabbis taught it was permissible to hate one’s enemies (see Matt. 5:43), Jesus commanded His disciples to **“love your enemies.”** Normally, our **love** is an emotional response to the good we see in others. However, Jesus used the word for *love* that denotes godly love. While godly love may include emotion, it is primarily an act of the will, regardless of how we feel. The three commands that follow—do good, bless, pray—are all actions. Our obedience to Jesus’ command leads us to choose to do what is good to those who hate us. To **bless** someone is another way of saying to do good to them, not merely with words but also with actions. The Greek word for *bless* is a different word than the one used in the Beatitudes. (See Luke 6:20-22.) In that passage the primary sense of *bless* is receiving good from God. In Jesus’ command to **“bless those who curse you,”** the emphasis is on doing good to others. To **pray** for someone is a fundamental way to do what is good and to bless someone.

What specific kinds of actions did Jesus imply by our doing good and blessing and praying? Of course, obvious attitudes would include the character traits Paul listed in the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (See Gal. 5:22-23.) Paul also gave specific instructions to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). However, genuine Christian love goes even further. Christian love looks to see what the other person needs and then attempts to supply that need. This is the kind of love God has shown us. (See 1 John 4:9-10.) John also noted that the proper response to God’s love is to share that love with others. (See v. 11.)

Luke 6:29-31 Commentary

[Verse 29] While Jesus said our primary response toward our enemies should be to love them, He didn't stop there. Jesus went on to point out types of actions that would demonstrate such love. Slapping someone on the face was often a sign of rebuke by an authority figure, such as when one of the temple police slapped Jesus. (See John 18:22.) Jesus had just promised that His disciples would be blessed when they suffered mistreatment for His sake. (See Luke 6:22.) That is the probable context for this instruction. So, what is being commanded is that when we are slapped (abused) for testifying about Jesus, instead of thinking about revenge, we need to show such people how true disciples acts—with love. Turn your other cheek toward the one who hit you. As usual, Jesus was the perfect example of what He taught. When He was beaten and crucified, He asked His Father to forgive those who were responsible. (See 23:34.)

The **cloak** was a person's outermost garment. It would normally be worn except when it got in the way while doing physical labor. Jesus seemed to be painting such a scene. A man had taken off his cloak and laid it aside so that he could work. Then someone came along and stole it. The man saw the theft, but Jesus said that instead of pursuing the thief to take back your cloak, offer him your inner garment—your **tunic**—as well. The reaction of a disciple of Jesus should not be to take matters into their own hands by seeking revenge/retaliation/personal justice, but rather to love the individual. The type of love Jesus expects of His disciples does not get defensive or become vengeful when hurt or abused. Instead, a disciple continues to love in spite of such hurt or abuse.

[Verse 30] Jesus moved from specific examples to more general principles. Note first the breadth of this principle—**“Give to everyone who begs from you.”** Jesus instructs us to be generous when anyone asks for our help. Furthermore, when we give or loan, we shouldn't be thinking about getting our stuff back. This attitude reflects the heart of one who loves and gives without limit. That's what Jesus did for us. That's how He expects us to treat others. However, it's possible Jesus may have been using an overstatement to make His point. There are times when exceptions to this rule occur. (See 2 Thess. 3:6-13).¹

[Verse 31] **“As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.”** This principle is also found in various forms in ancient literature outside the Bible. However, two key points are unique in the way Jesus presented it. In all the other examples the thrust was negative: If you don't want someone to do this bad thing to you, then don't do it to them. The way Jesus stated the principle was positive. What good things do you want others to do for you? Then do those kinds of good things for them. A second point was that Jesus' concern wasn't for His disciples' well-being but for the witness of the gospel. When we focus on the needs and well-being of others, we are reflecting Jesus' character which often opens the door for the presentation of the gospel.

Luke 6:32-36 Commentary

[Verses 32-34] Jesus stressed that His disciples' behavior should stand out among unbelievers. As His disciples do such things as loving their enemies, their love will demonstrate Jesus' love flowing through them. Jesus gave three examples, all of which are done for the benefit of someone else. First is to **love**. The Greek word is the one used throughout the New Testament for God's kind of love (*agapao*, see John 3:16) and the love Christians should practice toward one another. (See 13:34.) This is the word Jesus used when He stated that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor. (See Matt. 22:37-39.) The second example is to **do good** for others. The Greek term could mean "what is good or beneficial for someone" or "what is morally right and fair." The first meaning is probably what Jesus meant in this case. The final example is to **lend** to others.

In all three examples Jesus pointed out that even **sinners** do these kinds of things. Even those who don't know God do these good things for one another, but with self-serving motives. As followers of Jesus Christ, believers are to be motivated by the love of God shown to them through Jesus Christ.

Besides these specific motivations that Jesus included with each of these acts, He also added one common question for His disciples: "**what benefit is that to you?**" In the Greco-Roman world, the Greek term translated **benefit** was used to describe what a person could expect in return for the good acts he or she performed for others.² Disciples of Jesus do not act with the expectation that the recipients of our good deeds will at some time in the future repay us for what we have done for them. We love because God first loved us in giving us the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. (See 1 John 4:19.) We love because God is love and we share God's nature. (See vv. 7-21.)

[Verse 35] Jesus then summarized His previous teachings and contrasted the expectations of sinners with the expectations for His disciples. He stressed that His disciples are to do the opposite of common expectations and "**love your enemies.**" Of course, that is the way God has treated all of Jesus' disciples (Rom. 5:8). Jesus' disciples should **do good**, not only to those who are good to them but to everyone they encounter. (See Gal. 6:10.) Jesus' disciples should **lend** to those in need without expecting to be repaid. Through their actions, disciples will prove themselves to be **sons of the Most High**. The phrase *the Most High* is a title for God. Because Jesus' disciples love their enemies and show grace to all, they will be like the God of heaven who acts this way toward His creation, even to **the ungrateful and the evil** (Matt. 5:44-45).

[Verse 36] Jesus concluded this section with an admonition to be like God—children of the Most High—in a particular way. He commanded His disciples to **be merciful**. The Greek term comes from a word meaning to have pity or compassion on others. When we allow the love of God to flow through us because of our relationship with His Son, we will be merciful to all we encounter, regardless of how they treat us. Such mercy will demonstrate that we are truly Jesus' disciples.

1. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary, gen. ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 208.

2. Ibid.

