



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

[CALL TO HEAR]

Matthew 5:43-48 ESV

Love Your Enemies

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Pastor – "People of God, this is the Word of God."

People – "Thanks be to God."

Pray

Introduction

Well family, we have made it through another year, and I remember telling you this time last year that it was going to be a long year, especially in light of it being an election year. It was a year when all of media, took the last four years and like a tube of anchovy paste they squeezed out all the bad stuff into the first ten months of the year. It made everyone on edge whether you like politics or not because no matter where you went you were always around someone that was affected by it perhaps stronger than you were. Whether you were affected by it or not, like me it made you aware of people who did not think like you did. Maybe like me you started thinking that perhaps you were the minority.

That puts us in this position this morning that I am going to call you to pay attention to, and that is how are you going to choose to be towards those people in 2025? How will you be towards those in your family that don't hold to your same beliefs? How will you treat those you do business with when



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

everything they did this past year reminded you of why you don't vote like they do? How will you work with those peers that are going to keep bad mouthing politicians, newscasters, and the elites? Because if you don't figure that out before the next year starts you will find that 2025 could be just as anxiety driven as 2024 was. Let me offer to you this instead, how about we adhere to the words of Christ this morning, perhaps stop reasoning if you should be loving towards someone or not but instead let this command of Christ control what you do this year:

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

MP:

Love your enemies as Christ loved us.

Jesus' command to love our enemies is literally the command to love others as He has loved us. Jesus loved those that didn't think like He did, He loved those that didn't do what He wanted, and He loved those that hated Him for being different than they were. He loved those that were at war with the Kingdom of God BUT the way in which He loved them he turned an enemy into a friend. I would put forth for my family in this room today, let us spend our energy towards this endeavor, let us determine today to love as Christ loved us, and let us then determine at the end of 2025 if it was worth the time and effort.

To prepare for such an endeavor I want to break up our study this morning into three sections. **First** thing we want to do is **Know our enemy**. If we will commit to defining the enemy first, we will then know how to overcome them.¹ Then **second**, we want to **Know why we are to love our enemies**, which is the point to the SoM. The Sermon on the Mount is not about how to become a Christian but it is a description of how to 'be' a Christian, or what a Son of God will look like. In this case a Son of God will be a person that is loving their enemies. Once we figure that out, **thirdly**, we need to **Know how**

¹ Sun Tzu, a Chinese military general, strategist, and philosopher, once said "Know thy enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated."



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

to treat the enemy, or how we can make an enemy a possible friend as Jesus did.

1. Know your enemy.

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

By this time, you know the formula, *you have heard it was said*, means that yet again here is another way in which you are being misled by the Pharisees. We have built this up enough over the last several weeks so we can summarize it like this. First, the Pharisees had taken something in the law, highlighted something they could use for their gain to make themselves look good and to get ahead. We also know, as is their track record, that in every instance their new oral tradition was never the intent of the law. The law, while it shows us where we fail, where we have fallen short, also encourages those who are following God to be gracious to those that are trying to enter into the same kingdom.

The Pharisees had taken and mutated God's stance against organized evil, that is evil in the nations other than the Jews, evil of those people that came against God's people with evil intentions. They used those teaching points in the OT to build their philosophy that one must hate their enemies. They took things like the Psalms to justify their intentions and motives against people:

Psalms 26:4-5 ESV

I do not sit with men of falsehood,
nor do I consort with hypocrites.

⁵I hate the assembly of evildoers,
and I will not sit with the wicked.

Psalms 139: 21-22 ESV

Do I not hate those who hate you,
O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise
up against you?

²²I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Then the Pharisees used the national angst against anyone not a Jew and used that emotion against their own people. Again, they would call out things in their brothers and neighbors and say *look see you are being false, you are*



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

mixing with Gentiles, you are not keeping to your people, you are being a hypocrite! As examples the Pharisees would lead the charge against tax collectors, Jews that would collect money for the Romans, and they would have them kicked out of Jewish life. So, you have a bunch of people using their political clout, and their popularity to apply tribal pressure to people that did not align themselves with the way their party thought. Does that sound familiar at all? Like if you didn't accept how other people were thinking you could be ostracized for your beliefs? But when you look into the OT law you find a different story.

Exodus 23:4-5 ESV

If you meet your **enemy's** ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

Now compare this with Deuteronomy's summary and restating of this fact.

Deuteronomy 22:1-4 ESV

You shall not see your **brother's** ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. ²And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him. ³And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it. ⁴You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.

The intent of the OT and the intent of Jesus' sermon is that the people you are around in your personal life, your friends, your family, your neighbors, your coworkers, daily acquaintances (brothers in Deuteronomy) sometimes can come off like personal enemies but not national ones. What makes someone your personal enemy? We automatically see that in our heads as someone that is out to get you, someone that acts towards you with vindictive behavior. But many times, it could be people that don't know you yet, that because of their upbringing are naturally against you, they don't vote like you,



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

they don't see things like you, but it doesn't mean they have suited up in armor, that they have raised a battle flag and have come against you.

In the OT when that happens you gird yourself, and you go to war. But that is not the intent of most of our daily actions with those different than us. The intent of a personal enemy is simply those that are against you just because they are on the opposite side. The Pharisees had made it sound like everyone that didn't see the world like they did was someone one should hold disdain for and never love! Jesus says those that aren't like you that you are to treat them as with kindness as in the OT commands, as in how Jesus treated us when we were naturally against Him.

In the story of Advent, we see in the very first encounter with the virgin birth that God resets the standard for who the Gospel is for. It's not just for the religious elite, it is not just for the morally correct, it is for the sinner that is still at odds with God. Before Jesus ever left the stable the Father was already demonstrating that He had come with a message of JOY for all men.

Illustration of the Shepherds (*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*)

How were **shepherds viewed in ancient times**? Perhaps the picture in our head is a person that is caring, honest, hard-working but in the ancient world this is the farthest thing from the truth.² Although, ironically enough, many of the heroes of the Jews had been Shepherds.

The shepherd was considered the lowest class of people in that day and age of Palestine. You see the nature of their profession meant that they would not always be able to participate on the Sabbath, nor were they able to attend the synagogues because watching sheep when they were in the fields was a 24-hour job. When you went to sleep you slept with them inside a pen and you were the physical door to that pen.

Not only that but fighting off predators would put you into the contact with all types of dead animals which was another way that a shepherd would be made

² Sproul, R. C. (1999). [*A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke*](#) (p. 30). Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

unclean under mosaic laws. And because they could not get away from the sheep, they could never perform the ritual cleansing required to be accepted among the populace.

So, it is only natural that shepherds garnered the **reputation for not being trustworthy**. They were considered to be unscrupulous and therefore could not even give testimony in their court of law, which also meant that if charges were brought up against them, **they could not defend themselves**. To the Pharisees this would be the perfect enemy, someone to hate, someone that could not even defend themselves and God chose them that night to be the first to hear that their Savior was born, and they were welcome to come and worship Him.

To know our enemy means to understand it can be anyone that does not believe like you, does not live like you do, and does not look like you. Their life choices perhaps are not making your life easier, but it's not necessarily a malevolent choice to be against you.

Your enemy could be the person across the street that doesn't go to church anymore because they judge God based on a bad experience with the church.

Your enemy could be the person that believes all men are created equal, but they go to the god of government instead the God of the Bible for answers and reconciliation.

Your enemy can even be a person in another church that was taught bad theology and was never shown how to read the scripture.

In short, your enemy **looks just like you did** before God graciously came to you and saved you, that's the enemy, and if you are grateful to your Savior, then you should want to learn how to love them as Jesus has loved you.

2. Know why we love our enemies.

- **It shows God is our Father.**

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be **sons of your Father** who is in heaven.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

Why do we love our enemies because we are showing the relation to a Heavenly Father, through the obedience to His only Son. We are the living representation that the Gospel doesn't stop at the boundaries of narrowly defined neighbors, but that good news extends to people on the fringes.

The first command that Jesus gives us is to love. Love in the text there is a verb (present imperative) and the way it is written is in continuous action. Loving neighbor is not a sporadic and periodical thing, we are called into a continuous motion of thought and action for other's good. Jesus' greatest teaching on this comes from **Luke 10:25-37** where he taught the sacrificial, active and ongoing care by a **Good Samaritan** man, an enemy to true Jews, that loved a distant but needy brother while presumably godly men would not. He followed the intent of the law and so showed who was His true Father.

Jesus, our first brother, also gives the command to pray. Again, the word is present imperative, a command to continually pray for those that come against you. That's how you handle those that strike your cheek, that take more from you than they should, that require your freedom of choice, you go that extra mile, and you do so by praying for them. As we said last week Jesus modeled so perfectly in praying from the cross for His tormentors that it made such an impression on Stephen that he was able to do that for his accusers before his stoning. I heard it said this week, praying for an enemy drags them before the throne of God, it lifts up their predicament and it makes you ponder their heart. If like David, we are praying for ourselves that God would know our heart (Psalm 139:23) then we too should show we have concern over the heart of others.

Luke 6:27-36 ESV

"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.

Actively loving and praying shows that we are related to the one that mastered blessing those that cursed Him, that abused Him, that struck Him. Active love and active prayer for our enemies is how the Sons of God live out their lives.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

- **It shows how God loves indiscriminately.**

⁴⁵For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

When we love others, yes, our enemies, it displays the character of God, and that love is never conditional, it is an unconditional declaration and consideration for those far from God. I was reminded this week that sun and rain are aspects of both natural revelation and common grace. This displays that God is loving and benevolent to all humanity in which His image lies. God blesses those that hate him as well as those that love Him. Since He commands the stars of the heavens, He therefore has declared that the sun, created as a good thing in the beginning, will be used even for the benefit of the evil. Rain is the mechanism for growth, especially coveted in the Middle East. Rain was a blessing before modern irrigation, and it was shown in the OT God controlled it and could withhold it for punitive purposes. Rain is a revelation of God's provision and an example of His indifference not to sin, but to the need of all men for their welfare.

As we are sons of God let us remember the Gospel and its' good news, given in active love and prayer is not withheld from those that oppose Him, and in this way, we reflect His character of Grace.

- **It shows who does and doesn't know the Father.**

⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

To love those that only love you in return is "self-serving pragmatism" and that is even what the lost do. We are new creations in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), we no longer do what the world does (Rom 12:2), we have been adopted by a Heavenly Father (Eph 1:5), we have been removed from an earthly domain of darkness and placed into an Heavenly Kingdom of Light (Col 1:13).



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

Jesus took one of their easiest examples of an unrighteous person or a personalized enemy and made this point very clear. Even the Tax collectors, authorized robbers that supported foreign invaders, know how to be friends do they not know how to love those that do for them? That pretty much took out the legs from the Pharisees on that one.

Jesus even compared people who only greeted brothers as being just like the pagans. That means Gentiles, and a Jew back then did not like Gentiles at all! Again, he notices the similarities of a person that is only friendly to their kind, the world does this but that is not what a child of God does. They go above and beyond cultural traditions for they do not discriminate based on ethnicity or ethical practices. Greeting, interacting, and being for the general welfare of others distinguishes for the world who is sent from God and who is not. We love our enemies because it shows we are 'from' the Father.

- **It conforms us into the image of the Father.**

⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Ok and this is where we all stop and take a breath because it has sounded hard up to this point, but now this seems like it just got impossible. You therefore must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.

Well Jesus wraps up the first 48 verses of the SoM with the goal of why He has been preaching, it is to perfect us. There is always a goal to Christianity, there's always a work to do, and just so you know there is never a stopping point, you live out these words until you die.

Righteousness has been achieved, yes thank God for the gift of Christmas, we got that when we were saved, we were justified with God. The concept of perfectness though is completion or fullness. All 48 verses of the SoM is a summing up of the character of God, that Jesus has laid out, for those that will follow Him. We are to live striving on filling ourselves up with these traits, for our Father is filled with all these traits. That's the goal aiming towards perfection, to be filled up with these things as our Father is filled with these things.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

Jesus is saying loving our enemies is the path towards perfection, and that is the path that makes us like the Father. That could be daunting if we didn't have someone show us what the SoM looks like lived out, oh but wait...

Paul says in 1 Cor 11:1, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ." The path towards being like the Father is imitating Christ. This is our goal to be imitators of Christ, He imitates the Father for He is the one that has seen Him and we imitate Him, and we do that for a reason.

Daniel Aiken said it this way this week, "Who and what we will be someday in eternity should impact how we love and conduct ourselves today. We are to be what we are becoming! We pursue the ideal with the full confidence and conviction that we will arrive there." P. 79

1 John 3:2-3 ESV

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

Loving our enemies as Christ loved us is the path to look and image our Father rightly, it is the goal of our existence. The gift of Christmas is to make us into people who represent the gift giver.

To sum up, by now **we know who the enemy is**, it is the person that looked just like us, those that were against God and His people until they were saved by Grace.

We also **know the 'why' we should love our enemies**, for it displays the Father and who belongs to Him all the while, at the same time we are being conformed into the image of Christ.

Now let us wrap this up family with the call to obey and some practical suggestions on how to actively love your enemies.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

[CALL TO OBEY]

3. Know how to treat your enemy.

Luke 6:35-36 ESV

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.

You might have your own ideas on how to love your enemies better today, but let me offer some suggestions and by no means stop there. Let this be just a beginning on how you can live out the SoM.

- **Make it a point to obey Jesus' command to pray for those who oppose and insult you. Pray for them by name.**
Praying for them by name means committing to knowing them personally and seek to understand their issues.
- **Give unconditional love a try and do something for a person in your life that is far from God and expect nothing in return.**
It doesn't mean gift buying it means being polite, it means showing empathy, it means general care giving, it means treating them as if this person was in your home. For wherever you go there the presence of God goes with you.
- **Ask the Lord in prayer to give you a discerning heart to know when to fight like a lion and when to be humble like a lamb.**
Discerning means NOT to always trust your gut instincts but question your gut as to why or why you don't like someone.
- **Don't take rejection and bad attitudes as failure but recognize that some will never be reconciled but others could become allies down the road.**
Remember the Spirit saves, convicts, and regenerates, your call is to be the deliverer of the need for these things through active love and prayer. Because of those things remember those are always time sensitive issues so it most likely will take longer than you think.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

- As we proceed together be conscious about building the reputation of Christ not yours.

The goal is not to look good to others, the goal is that others can associate your name with Christ.

MP:

Love your enemies as Christ loved us.

Prayer

Communion

Matthew 26:26-29 ESV

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Today when you eat of the bread remember the life of Jesus. He chose before the church was ever birthed to live a life for those that were far from God. He loved them through His actions and prayed for them while they were still His enemies. Praise be to Him for His wonderful love.

Today when you drink the juice remember the cost of our sin displayed by His blood. His blood brings the rebellious enemy into the camp of God. It appeases the call for justice, it negates the need for revenge, and it does so perfectly for all our sins all the time. Praise be to Him for His wonderful Love.

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

Family the LBCF 1689 .6; *Of Good Works* our forefathers reminded us.

6. Nevertheless, believers are accepted through Christ, and thus their good works are also accepted in him.¹⁷ This acceptance does not mean our good



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

works are completely blameless and irreproachable in God's sight. Instead, God views them in his Son, and so he is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, even though it is accompanied by many weaknesses and imperfections.¹⁸

¹⁷[Ephesians 1:6](#); [1 Peter 2:5](#). ¹⁸[Matthew 25:21, 23](#); [Hebrews 6:10](#).

* The Congregation will stand

Elder – "Christians, what do we believe?"

Psalm 121 ESV

I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

⁵ The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.

⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷ The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

⁸ The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

[OFFERING+LAST SONG]



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, that sent His Son while we were still sinners so we would have the **joy** of becoming the Sons of God.

Go in the name of the Son, "who for the **joy** that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)

Go in the name and power of the HS, that brings **joy** to the world through the acts of us loving our enemies, now go and love others as Christ has loved us.



Sermon on the Mount
Wk.18 "Learning to Love, the Hard to Love"
By Pastor Jody May 12/22/2024

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