

WHY LOVE YOUR ENEMIES?



Scripture:

Genesis 45:3-11, 15

³Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’

¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Luke 6:27-38

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed

down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



WHY LOVE YOUR ENEMIES?

On the Voice of America website, Talia Hadavi tells the story of Phyllis Rodriguez whose son Gregg died in the World Trade Center on 9/11.

She said, “Many Americans felt the need to retaliate after the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. And ever since then, U.S. forces have waged a world-wide war against the Islamic extremists who claimed responsibility. But not all Americans seek retribution to ease their pain.”

FORGIVENESS NOT HATE

Phyllis Rodriguez is one mother who expresses forgiveness, not hate, toward those who killed her son on September 11, 2001. Greg was a computer specialist working on the one-hundred-third floor of the north tower. She recalls how she found out that something terrible had happened that Tuesday morning. “On our answering machine was a message from Greg, our son, that said, ‘There’s been a terrible accident at the World Trade Center. I’m OK, call Elizabeth.’”

Sadly, Greg Rodriguez was not okay, and neither were nearly three-thousand others. “I was just hoping, hoping that he had survived, and not allowing myself to admit the worst,” recalled his mother. That news came soon enough when Greg Rodriguez was declared dead. And with it came his parents’ conscious decision to make a difference.

“The main thing that we realized very early the morning of the twelfth is that our government, given its history, was going to do something military and violent in retaliation in the name of our son and that that wasn’t going to do any good and we didn’t support it.”

Phyllis Rodriguez and her husband Orlando released an open letter to then President George W. Bush. “It ended up

being circulated around the country and around the world. It was part of the way to help us cope with the loss,” Rodriguez explained. The couple wanted no part of revenge.

They opposed the death penalty for the man who became known as the twentieth hijacker, Zacarias Moussaoui. Phyllis befriended Zacarias’ mother.

She said, “I felt that this woman has to be very, very courageous because her son is the most hated person probably at the moment and here, she was standing up for her son,” said Rodriguez. “We realized what we had in common was our common humanity. We were human beings. We were both mothers. Our friendship has become a very valuable part of my life and my healing.”

Rodriguez says she is disappointed by the way the U.S. government has used the war on terror in her son’s name. “I feel terrible sorrow at all the losses, all the bereft families. We had the whole world in sympathy with us. We could’ve been leaders and working for world peace and peace in the Middle East. And what did we do? We blew it.”

Phyllis Rodriguez says she copes with the loss of her only son by opposing war and participating in human rights

and forgiveness projects.

“I don’t think it happened for a reason, but it did happen, and I feel fortunate that I had the faith resources to respond in the way that I did.”

Rodriguez says she is at peace about what happened to her son. But she is not at peace with the state of the world. That is why, she says, she is trying to make a difference.

JESUS' AGENDA OF LOVE AND MERCY

Today's passage contains the concluding words of Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" that I preached about last Sunday. I connected the Wabi Sabi Japanese philosophy for humble peaceful living with what Jesus was proposing in this sermon.

This sermon on the plain sums up Christ's teaching of the Way to be in this world. It is the agenda for God's Kingdom. It gives those who follow him a foundational philosophy to understand his further teachings and actions.

If you took all the good advice from wise sages about how to live an authentic and ethical life and if you boiled them all down to the real essentials, you would hear echoes from this great sermon.

Jesus explains his agenda of love and mercy. And when Jesus commands his followers to "love your enemies," he doesn't keep it abstract. He tells us exactly how to accomplish it. He said, "If we love our enemies, we do good for them; bless, and pray for those who abuse you."

This is not a warm, fuzzy feeling that we have deep in our hearts. That is probably heartburn. ... This kind of love for enemies is transformative and intentional. It not only has the potential to heal the enemy, but also to heal oneself when you are in the process of doing it.

BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU

His command to: Bless those who curse you reminds me of when Michelle Obama said, "When they go low, you go high." Don't be tempted to call people names or speak evil of them when they are speaking evil of you. Take the higher ground and demonstrate with your words and actions what kind of person you are.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said, "Love your enemy; it will ruin his reputation.

Jesus would want you to defend yourself from physical harm, but not retaliate in the same way. Retaliate with love. When we show calm restraint, we are showing God's strength.

PRAY FOR YOUR ENEMIES

It helps to pray for your enemies. One way is to figure out what common ground you have with them. Are you a flawed human as they are? Maybe they had a difficult childhood. Have you ever been scared and anxious? What are our common fears? Do they love their family and their children like you do? Most of us deep down want peace, security, and a purposeful life.

Pray both for justice and for the hearts of those committing injustices. If you have hate in your heart pray: "God, I hate that person, and I don't want to."

C.S. Lewis has said, "[Prayer] doesn't change God - it changes me." Praying for your enemy opens you up to the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

FORGIVENESS

To forgive your enemies it helps to repeat Christ's words from the cross: "Forgive them for they know not what they do!"

When relatives of the victims in the South Carolina church shooting offered forgiveness to the young man who murdered their loved ones, they were taking these words of Jesus seriously?

Loving your enemy does not mean you have to add them to your Christmas list, or make them your best friend. It doesn't mean you excuse their actions. It means you forgive them, with the knowledge that God is both merciful and just. Pray for a way to repay injury with blessing and hate with love. The truth is that enemies bring only toxic emotions. If you're truly to live a prosperous life, you can't carry hate baggage around.

Mahatma Gandhi drew great inspiration from Jesus' teachings in the sermon concerning doing good to evil. The Sermon

on the Plain became an important source for developing his philosophy of non-violence.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals into a powerful and effective social force."

Gandhi believed in these six principles:

1. There is more power in giving than in receiving.
2. There is more power in sacrifice than in greed.
3. We must hate the sin but not the sinner. Love your enemy not his ways.
4. Love can be an alkaline to poison. Love can detoxify.
5. Always leave room for reconciliation and redemption.
6. Gandhi was fond of saying, "An Eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth leaves us blind, disfigured and ugly."

Greed and fear creates enemies. Jesus said that perfect love casts out fear. Fear no man. Love is the unifying force in the universe. Freedom from fear disarms the oppressor. Love, fearlessness and faith puts you in another zone of consciousness with no fear.

NELSON MANDELA

Nelson Mandela, after twenty-seven years in jail in South Africa said, "Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon." And he added,

"As I walked out the door toward my freedom, I knew that if I did not leave all the anger, hatred and bitterness behind that I would still be in prison."

Thomas Christianson says that Christ's command to love our enemies is the most unreasonable command Jesus gave. It seems almost impossible at times. Yet it is important to remember in all circumstances that we are dealing with humans, God's special creation.

When dealing with humans, we can have hope.

- Hope that messages of love and acceptance and peace can be heard.
- Hope that God can redeem even the worst of sinners.
- Hope that God can redeem our own deep, dark sins, too.

And when we treat our adversaries as humans, no matter how flawed, we hope that ultimate justice will prevail. We cling on to the belief that God will eventually make all the wrongs right. That's God's job.

As Miroslav Volf says in *Exclusion and Embrace*, "If you want justice and nothing but justice, you will inevitably get injustice. If you want justice without injustice, you must want love."

A video was shown to the congregation: <https://youtu.be/0YMxk3v7mVY>

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen



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