

Love Your Enemies

Matthew 5:43-48

MEMORY VERSE

MATTHEW 5:44

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..."

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A sign that says "Man's Way" on top and "God's Way" upside down underneath.

A cake or pie pan (preferably heart shaped), a towel, and a pitcher of water.

A few small prizes such as pencils, stickers or erasers.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

The "Opposites" Game

Invite a panel of 3 or 4 students to the front of the class to help you.

Tell the panel of children that you are going to shout out a series of words, one at a time. They must respond to the word by shouting out an opposite word back. Use words like "good" ("bad"), "dark" ("light"), "big" ("small"), "up" ("down"), "open" ("close"), "in" ("out"), "over" ("under"). For your last set of opposites use "love" ("hate"). You can come up with as many "opposites" as you like and give other children an opportunity to play.

Explain to the class that they are going to learn about the opposites "love" and "hate," and how the Lord's ways are very different than the world's ways. In fact they are opposite.

LESSON TIME!

Did you know that God's kingdom is in operation right now? It is!!! And it is a very real kingdom. When we give our lives to Jesus we are part of His invisible, but very real, kingdom. The kingdom of God goes by entirely different rules than the world. In fact, its ways are so different that those of us who practice them make people stop and take a second look. They know there's something different about us.

The Bible is full of the unique principles of God's kingdom. His ways are always higher, always wiser, always more right than the ways of man. His ways are usually opposite from man's ways, topsy-turvy to man's thinking. Because of that, people often reject God's way. It doesn't make sense to them because they don't have Jesus.

Today we're going to look at one of God's rules that is very different from the world's rules. **God gives us true love for others.**

MATTHEW 5:43

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

Here Jesus is quoting a teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees. Leviticus 19:18 told the children of Israel to "love your neighbor as yourself." God's Word never said to "hate your enemy." The religious leaders added that part to the law. It is really the easy thing for us to do. But Jesus has an entirely different way of looking at things. He doesn't tell us that we should only love those close to us and hate our enemies. His kingdom works in a much different way.

Have you ever heard people say that we should only like those who like us? Maybe others around you who don't know Jesus have told you to only love those who love you back and to hate your enemies. But even if the world tells us that this is how we should be, Jesus had something very different to say.

MATTHEW 5:44

"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..."

What's this? It sounds absurd! Upside down! Backwards! What did Jesus say? Love my enemies? But they hate me and want to hurt me! They do all those things the rest of the verse mentions. Our enemies curse us, wish evil and bad times on us and even hate us. They spitefully use us to get what they want. They have no thought toward us other than what they can get out of us.

What did you say Jesus? Do good to those who hate me? Wow! That does seem backwards. Shouldn't I just hate them back? You want me to pray for those that persecute and torment me? That's a really hard one...really hard! How can I do that? Everything in me wants to hate back, hurt back, and be spiteful back. Everything in me, that is, without Jesus.

Man's Way/God's Way

Make a sign that says "Man's Way" on top and upside down underneath it says "God's Way." Ask for a volunteer that can do a handstand against the wall. Tape the sign to the child's shirt with "Man's Way" facing up. Have the child get back on his feet so that "God's Way" is facing up. Thank the child and have him sit back down.

Explain to the children that even though the world tries to tell us that "God's Way" is upside down, really it is right side up. "God's Way" is right!

Listen to this verse: ROMANS 5:5

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It says the Holy Spirit has poured out the love of God in our hearts. That's the secret! That's how we can love our enemies, do good to those who use us, and pray for those who persecute us. It's because it isn't our love at all. It's God's love that He poured out into our hearts when we ask to be filled with His Holy Spirit! **God gives us true love for others.**

Pour Out Your Love

Place a cake or pie pan (heart shaped if possible) on a towel on a table. With a pitcher of water, fill the pan to the top.

Ask for volunteers from the class to explain how this illustrates Romans 5:5. (Water represents the Holy Spirit who is poured out into our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to love like Jesus).

MATTHEW 5:45

"...that you may be sons of your Father 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."

This is simply saying that when we love our enemies we are being like our Heavenly Father. The Bible tells us that at one time we were God's enemies; we hated God. Before we had asked Jesus into our lives to be our Savior and Master we were on the opposite side from Him. We were in darkness and He is light. We were full of

hate, but He is love. But now that we are His, we can be like Him and love like Him.

Do you know any earthly Dads that have sons that look just like them? Sometimes they have look-alike contests for Dads and their sons. When we belong to Jesus, we can have a "love-alike" contest! We can be just like Him in the way He loves, because we can have His love in us. Romans 5:5 says He poured it into our hearts. When it runs low, He'll pour more in by His Holy Spirit. **God gives us true love for others**, even the "hard to love" people.

Love Covers All

Ask the children to share who may be some "hard-to-love" people without mentioning names, i.e. the bully at school, a difficult sibling, homeless people, people from different cultures, someone who hurts their feelings, etc. Write these descriptions on the chalkboard.

After writing these down, take the eraser and with large sweeping motions, erase all of them. Take the chalk and write the word "LOVE" over the erased words.

Explain to the children that God's love will cover everyone when we ask for it. We need to never stop asking for God to fill our hearts with His love, even if it's a hundred times a day.

MATTHEW 5:46-47

"For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

"And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"

If someone were to be very kind to you, give you lots of wonderful presents, give you bags of your favorite candy, take care of you when you were sick, make you laugh when you feel sad, think you're the best person in the world and loves you with all their heart, do you think you would love them back? Yes, you probably would. There's no great reward in that kind of love. Anyone can do that! There is nothing special or unusual there; even evil people love those who love them.

Which One Should I Love?

Ask for two volunteers from the class. Give one a small prize in front of the rest of the class. Next, lightly step on the other child's toe (make sure to do this very lightly, it is for illustration not to really hurt them).

Ask the class to tell you which of the children has more reason to love you, the child with the prize or the child with the hurt toe.

Reward the child you stepped on for being a good sport by giving him a prize as well. Explain that even though it is difficult, we need to love those who don't treat us very nicely.

If we are acting like loving people only to those who love us, we are no different than the world. If we who belong to Jesus love our enemies, we immediately make visible, through love, God's invisible kingdom. It's mysterious and it's awesome. **God gives us true love for others.**

It's His love flowing out of us. It's a miracle. It happens everyday, all day, in God's kingdom. People see this love and wonder; it points them to Jesus. There are many people who testify that they came to know Jesus because some Christian that they tried to be hateful and mean to just kept on loving them. It was God's love poured out in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. It's an exciting way to live. His love is the only thing that can really conquer our enemies.

ROMANS 12:19-20

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

What does it say? If our enemy is hungry, starve him? If he's thirsty, ignore him? No! God tells us to do the exact opposite. Give your enemy food and drink--love wins! But it has to be God's love. We cannot do it with our love. God's love is pure and exceedingly powerful.

How do we get that love in us? First, we have to have Jesus as our Savior. He gives us new life so we can step into God's kingdom as God's child. Then we ask Him for His love. It's very simple. We ask and He pours it out in our hearts. When you feel like being mean, or yelling back, or hurting back, you must stop and ask God to pour His love out into your heart by His Holy Spirit. **God gives us true love for others.**

MATTHEW 5:48

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

We all know we are not perfect. And we certainly aren't perfect in love. But because we are in Jesus, we wear His righteousness (rightness) and that makes us perfect to God. He sees the rightness and perfection of Jesus when He looks at us. We can love perfectly, too. We can even love our enemies when we ask God to pour His love into our hearts. Love is the way of God's kingdom and we can have it just for the asking. **God gives us true love for others.**

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer asking God to fill each heart with His love by His Holy Spirit. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them the opportunity to do so.