



LOVE YOUR ENEMIES Matthew 5:43–48

CONNECT

1. Jesus is crystal clear—we are to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Of course, for many this seems utterly impossible. Take time to talk through why it's so hard to love an enemy. Perhaps, respectfully, share a particular personal situation. If that situation still weighs on you, why?

CELEBRATE

2. Throughout our study of the Sermon on the Mount, it has become clear that Jesus is raising the bar regarding how we understand God's vision and values for human flourishing and God's glory. Rather than merely live by the letter of the Law, we are to embody the fuller spirit of the Law. With that in mind, thoughtfully read Leviticus 19:9–18, the foundational background for Jesus' comments in Matthew 5:43–48. Notice God's concern for the "poor," the "sojourner" (migrant) and the "neighbor." What is God's posture toward these and what does He say ours should be?
3. Leviticus 19:17 tells us we should not hate our "brothers" in our hearts. In what way might the religious influencers of Jesus' day have twisted this statement to allow for or even encourage hating an "enemy"? (See Matthew 5:43 for the perspective in Jesus' day.) Read Luke 10:25–37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. How does this important story help you see the thinking of the religious influencers?
4. Throughout the Psalms, we read of the psalmist calling down curses or judgment upon his enemies (traditionally known as Imprecatory Psalms). Psalm 69:20–28 is a good example. It appears that there is a place for such. But how might the previous few verses (Psalm 69:16–19) help us correlate these imprecations with Matthew 5:43–44? Read Romans 12:19–21 for further insight.
5. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus tells us that loving our enemies and praying for them (blessing them) proves our sonship with our heavenly Father. In what way is this so? How does verse 45 affirm the character of our heavenly Father and what are the implications of this for us who call ourselves Christians?
6. In the New Testament, many times when the love spoken of by Jesus (Matthew 5:43–44) is referred to, it is in relation to His death on a cross. Consider John 3:16, John 13:1, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:34–35. Knowing Jesus' death was for sinners like us who are by nature enemies of God, with what kind of love did He die? What does that mean for how we are to love our enemies? See Romans 15:7 for an important hint.
7. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus tells listeners that they must be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. This is a high demand. On the surface, it seems impossible. What was meant by these challenging words? What does that mean for you?

CONTRIBUTE

8. Today's social media environment finds many (even Christians) caught up in so much vitriol (hostility), in which enemies, real or perceived, have to be confronted, called out or cancelled. What might it look like for followers of Christ to love well in that kind of toxic environment?
9. When Jesus was being crucified, He repeatedly asked His Father to forgive those who were nailing Him to the cross. He was truly blessing His enemies—those who hated Him and were seeking to destroy Him. In what way could you embody that same loving spirit today, in real time, with any enemies that you have? How might you truly bless the enemies in your life?
10. In our day there are many real enemies and then there are those who are characterized as enemies simply because their stories are so different than ours (a view common among the religious influencers of Jesus' day). In the face of these dynamics how might New Hope Church love well? How might you?