

Loving Our Enemies



SABBATH—AUGUST 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 5:44; Matthew 6:12; Luke 6:27-36; Luke 23:1-34.

MEMORY VERSE: “If possible, live in peace with everyone. Do that [live in peace] as much as you can” (Romans 12:18, NlrV).

SOME PEOPLE SAY THEY HAVE ONLY FRIENDS AND NO ENEMIES. Some people say they have no friends but only enemies. Most of us have some friends and some enemies. Having enemies may seem to be a simple fact of life. But as Christians, we cannot forget the fact that we have enemies. Nor can we forget that some people see us as enemies. The Christian message of love has special meaning for our relationship¹ with our enemies.

David advises us to “turn away from evil, and do good” and to “look for peace” everywhere we can (Psalm 34:14, NlrV).

This week, we will focus on ourselves and the way we relate to people with whom we have serious problems.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What does Jesus' example on the cross tell us about loving our enemies? How can we love our enemies? Why should we love our enemies? Why must we forgive our enemies before we can love them?

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 4.

¹relationship—the connection we have with other people in everything we do.

SUNDAY—AUGUST 29

JESUS AND HIS ENEMIES
(Luke 23:34).

Read Luke 23:34. Review what happened that led Jesus to say these wonderful words. Luke 23:1-34. What powerful lesson can we learn from Jesus' example about how we should treat our enemies?

Jesus has a very good reason to hate the people who treated Him so cruelly. But Jesus prayed for them. What a wonderful example of God's love! What a powerful rebuke (scolding) to our own pride, envy, and hateful feelings toward other people!

Some of history's meanest characters (people) have been able to show kindness and love to people who were kind and loving to them. Almost anyone can be kind to people who are kind. But Jesus shows unconditional (unlimited) love to people who hate Him! There cannot be a more powerful example to the world than the character of our God and His power to work in our lives.

Such love shows the basic reason for the Cross. "Once we were God's enemies. But we have been brought back to him [God] because His Son [Jesus] has died for us. Now that God has brought us back, we are even more secure [safe]. We know we will be saved because Christ [Jesus] lives"

(Romans 5:10, NIV). Our attitude² toward God may be bad. But He poured Himself out for us through the life and suffering of Jesus. And He did this even while we were sinners. He did this even while we were separated from Him. With such an example of God's love, how could we fail to show the same love?



In what ways have you been treated unfairly? How did you answer? What does your answer tell you about your own personal need to grow in grace?

MONDAY—AUGUST 30

LOVING OUR ENEMIES (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-36).

Gandhi³ (1869–1948) once said, "It is easy to be friendly to one's friends.

²attitude—how you think or feel about something.

³Gandhi—a famous religious and political leader of India who worked to win independence (freedom) for India from Great Britain through nonviolent ways.

But to be friendly to your enemy is one of the most important ideas of true religion.”—Adapted from *Non-Violence in Peace and War* (1945), vol. 2, section 248. These words sound like an echo of the words Jesus spoke long before Gandhi was born.



Gandhi

What principle⁴ of Jesus shows how we must control our relationship with our enemies? Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-36.

Jesus grew up in Galilee. Galilee was known for its political rebellions. Galilee also was controlled by a cruel foreign nation. Jesus knew about the rebellions against this nation. When Jesus began His work and challenged the beliefs and practices of the religious leaders, He made many bitter

enemies. But He loved His enemies, even when they arrested Him, whipped Him, and nailed Him to a cross (Luke 23:34).

How do the following verses help to explain more about what loving our enemies means?

Proverbs 24:17 _____

Proverbs 25:21 _____

Matthew 5:38-48 _____

Ephesians 4:26 _____



Are you giving the devil a chance? Do not end the day being angry!

⁴principle—a basic rule that is the basis for a specific rule.

“We are to love our enemies with the same love Jesus showed toward His enemies. He loved His enemies by giving His life to save them. Many people may say, ‘Loving my enemies is too hard. I want to keep just as far away as I can from my enemies.’ But if you do what you want, you would not be obeying Jesus’ words: ‘Do good. Love your enemies. Pray for those [people] who hurt you’ (Matthew 5:44, NIV). Matthew 5:44 shows one part of Christian perfection. While we were still enemies of God, Jesus gave His life for us. We are to follow His example.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry (Work)*, pp. 253, 254.

The Bible clearly teaches us to love our enemies. Now, if someone were to ask you, “How do you love your enemies?” what would you answer?

TUESDAY—AUGUST 31

INCREASE OUR FAITH (Luke 17:3-5).

For the past two days, we have studied one of the most noble principles in the Bible: Love your enemies. Jesus’ words encourage us to love our enemies. And His death on the cross is the greatest example of loving one’s enemies.

It is easy to have someone tell us what to do. It is easy to know what to do.

It is easy to even want to do what we should do. But to be able to do what we should do is not easy. To be able to do what we should do, we need power from God.

What question do the disciples ask Jesus? Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 17:3-5. How does He answer? How do they react to His answer?

We can all relate to how the disciples reacted (Luke 17:5). Jesus points His disciples to a principle that is new to them. This principle goes beyond what even many of the most forgiving people would be willing to try. This explains why they reacted the way they did. They want to be forgiving. But they need something more than what they have to be able to forgive. So they ask Jesus for help.

Faith is a gift (Ephesians 2:8). But there is so much we can do to receive faith and to make it grow stronger. Here is where a life of prayer and devotion⁵ is important. We learn to surrender ourselves to God (Romans 6:10, 11). We also let God work in us (Romans 6:4). Then with His help, we will be able to love our enemies, to pray for them, and to do good to them. If we do not surrender to God, our sinful hearts will never let us love our enemies. That is why we need to surrender to God daily. We surrender to Him daily by choosing to surrender to Him.

⁵devotion—the regular habits of prayer and Bible study.



Study and pray daily to surrender your life to God.

Who are your enemies? What makes them your enemies? If you are not loving them, what is the first step you could take in at least trying to love them?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 1

**THE GIFT OF FORGIVING
(Jeremiah 31:31-34; Matthew 6:12).**

Before we can love our enemies, we must forgive them. Before we can forgive, we must first learn to accept forgiveness. Accepting forgiveness is where the Christian life begins. The Christian life begins when we know for

sure that God has accepted and forgiven us through our faith in the risen Jesus.

How does the Lord's Prayer remind us that we must be willing to forgive people who have sinned against us? Matthew 6:12. Read also Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:12.

"If we really know Jesus as our Savior, our hearts are broken and cannot be hard. Then we cannot refuse forgiveness. If you are refusing forgiveness to anybody, I suggest that you have never been forgiven. . . . Pray to God and say, 'Forgive me, God, as I forgive other people because of what You have done for me. All I ask is that You forgive me in the same way, because all I do is imperfect. In the same way, as You have forgiven me, I am forgiving other people. Forgive me as I forgive them because of what the cross of Jesus has done in my heart.' "

—Adapted from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), vol. 2, pp. 75, 76.

This quote teaches an important point. To truly forgive, we must understand how much God has forgiven us. What other people have done to us cannot be worse than what our sins have done to God! How much we have to forgive other people is almost nothing compared⁶ to how much Jesus, the eternal⁷ God, has had to forgive us.

⁶compared—showed how things are the same.

⁷eternal—lasting forever.

How does the Cross help us understand what our forgiveness cost God? Isaiah 53:4-6; Philippians 2:5-8.

By thinking about the Cross and the cost Jesus has paid for our forgiveness, we can learn to forgive our enemies.

Are you having trouble forgiving and loving an enemy? Write down your understanding of what Jesus suffered at the Cross in order to forgive you. Pray and think about what He did for your sake. This will help you to be willing to help people who have made you angry.

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 2

WHY SHOULD WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES? (Proverbs 15:1).

If you answered the question in today's title, "Because God tells me to," you have given the best answer. We should love our enemies because God has told us to. If we are Christians, we obey God.

But God always has a good reason for asking us to do things. He loves us and wants what is good for us. (Deuteronomy 10:13). There is a lot of good that can come to both our enemies and ourselves if we love them. Think of how much different our world would be if we learned to love our enemies.

⁸eternity—life without end; forever.

What is Paul saying in Romans 12:20, 21 and 1 Thessalonians 5:15? How do his words help us to understand what it means to love our enemies?

God has done so much for us. As Christians, we have so much reason to hope. Why? We have both the promise of all things working for good now and the promise of eternity⁸ in a new life. This new life will be filled with love, peace, and comfort. This will be the life that we cannot even begin to understand. With this promise of a new life, we should be able to overcome the common hates that have poisoned this planet. Loving our enemies is one of the best ways of showing the world what Christianity is about. When we love our enemies we show people what they need most. They need Jesus.

In your own life, what changes would come about if you started to love your enemies?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 3

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read "The Measure [Amount] of Forgiveness" in Ellen G. White's book *Christ's (Jesus') Object Lessons*, pp. 243–251.

"Jesus teaches that problems between Christians are to be settled inside the church. These problems

should not be opened to people who do not respect God. If a Christian wrongs another Christian, the offended (injured; insulted) person should not appeal to unbelievers in a court of justice. Let the offended person follow Jesus' instruction. Instead of trying to get even, let the offended person try to save the person who did wrong. God will guard the interests of people who love and respect Him. With faith, we may give our case to Jesus, because He judges fairly."—Adapted from *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 248, 249.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Think more about the good that can come from loving our enemies. Discuss what this world would be like if all people loved their enemies instead of trying to have revenge.⁹
2. How can the idea that God will bring justice and punishment to evildoers

help us love our enemies? Is it really love if we want God to punish them? How does Jesus' prayer on the cross help answer that question?

3. The relatives of a murder or rape victim often say they will never be able to forgive the person who did that terrible crime. How can you help someone to deal with this problem of anger?

SUMMARY: Many of us have enemies, or are enemies to other people. It is important to study our relationships. We need to ask ourselves why some relationships have broken down and what can be done to fix them. Our challenge as Christians is to build positive relationships, even with people we do not like. Loving our enemies does not come naturally. But if we realize how God is always ready to forgive us, we should be prepared to forgive people who have wronged us.

⁹revenge—doing something to someone who has hurt you.