

# RETALIATION AND LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

Jesus preached a powerful sermon on a mountain side that many refer to as “The Sermon on the Mount.” The themes of His sermon could be seen as pictures of a kingdom lifestyle. Just about everything that He says is upside down in comparison to the way the world operates. In chapter 5, Jesus says that His disciples are to put off the desire to retaliate and get revenge on those who wrong us. He goes as far as to say that we are to love our enemies and pray for them. As we live this way in the power of God’s grace, we show His power to love those who are unlovable. We also show that we trust God to vindicate us when He brings His kingdom.

*Read Matthew 5:38-48.*

Discuss: How would a person show love towards an enemy?

## “You have heard that it was said”

When someone wrongs us, our most natural response is to retaliate and get even. In fact, as Jesus mentions in Matthew 5:38, 43, there was actually biblical law that said essentially if you harm me, I have liberty to harm you. So the level of retaliation was equal to the degree of harm. “An eye for an eye.” Our culture is no different. Many people live with the mentality that if someone mistreats me, I am obligated to strike back. (Exodus 21:22-27)

Discuss: What are some things that people do or say that make us most eager to retaliate?

## “But I say to you”

Jesus tells us that the gospel brings a different response than retaliation when others have wronged us. Jesus tells us that our response should not be equal harm, it should actually be no harm at all. Jesus calls us to extend forgiveness when we have been wronged and loving compassion to those who are in opposition to us. (Luke 6:27-32; 1 Sam. 24:1-7)

Discuss: What is most challenging about the gospel call to not retaliate and show kindness to enemies?

Can you think of a time you have seen this done?

## How to love your enemies

God's word tells us that one of the ways we can have strength to extend forgiveness and love our enemies is to entrust ourselves to God who will vindicate us. (1 Pet. 2:18-23; Romans 12:17-21) This means that we believe that God is the sovereign judge, not me. Therefore, I leave judgement to Him, and I am free to extend grace. Another way we can have strength to extend forgiveness and love our enemies is to remember that we used to be the enemies of God before grace. (Rom. 5:9-11, Col. 1:21-22)

*Read Matthew 18:21-35.*

Discuss: How does the grace that God has shown us when we were His enemies impact how we should view our enemies?

Many have the mindset that we will forgive up to a certain level of offense; is that consistent with the gospel?

## Personal Application

What are some personal changes you would need to make in your heart before you could have the strength to love those who have wronged you? Think of two people that you have had a negative relationship that you could pray for.

Ask God to give you the strength to love that person and eventually forgive them.