The Backhand and the Second Mile

MATTHEW 5:38-42 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

When somebody wrongs you, you don't have to play their game. Jesus is telling you that you can refuse to let the person who insulted you decide who you become.

Opening Lines

Picture the last time somebody had a cutting line ready and you had a sharper one ready to fire right back. Jesus walks into that exact moment tonight and does the last thing you'd expect.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see that turning the cheek, walking the second mile, and giving to the one who asks are not doormat moves but the freedom to refuse the insulter's terms. They should leave able to name one person they've been trading blows with.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time is short, cut the extended courtroom history on 'eye for an eye' down to one sentence. Do not cut the second-mile exercise where they name a hard-to-be-generous person.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment someone says out loud the name of the person they most want to pay back. Everything before that is setup for that confession.
- Your prep: Know cold why the RIGHT cheek matters — it's a backhand, an insult from a superior, not a brawl. If you don't get that detail, the whole passage sounds like Jesus telling abuse victims to take more.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening, the backhand mime (5 min). Read the passage and teach the word 'rhapizei' with the physical image (10 min). Courtroom history of 'eye for an eye,' kept short (5 min). Write-then-speak on question 3 — 30 seconds silent, then discussion (10 min). Questions 4 and 5, naming the hard person (10 min). Out-loud commitments and prayer (5 min). Transformation happens in the write-then-speak turn into naming their own reflex. Cut the courtroom history to one sentence first.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening on the group chat comeback (7 min). Read passage, teach the backhand word deeply (12 min). Questions 1 and 2 (12 min). Write-then-speak on

question 3 (10 min). Question 4 — every person names their hard-to-love person out loud (12 min). Question 5 to the cross, then commitments and spontaneous prayer over the names (7 min). Transformation lives in question 4 where names get spoken. Cut question 1's discussion first if you're tight.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — 'who would you most like to get even with?' (5 min). Read the passage together, you explain the backhand insult in two sentences (7 min). Straight to question 4 — name the hard-to-love person, you go first (10 min). One take-home action each, spoken out loud (5 min). Short prayer over each other's names (3 min). Transformation is the mutual confession over coffee. Cut the word-study detail to one line if the conversation is already going deep.

One Thing Deeply

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. You met it back in week 3; this time go harder. Level 2 rule: don't just teach one word deeply, refuse the second word entirely. This passage hands you four vivid pictures — cheek, coat, mile, the beggar's hand — and the temptation is to touch all four so nobody feels shortchanged. Resist it. Pick the backhand. Spend real minutes on that single Greek verb and the humiliation behind it, and let the other three images live only as quick echoes. A room remembers one image burned in deep. It forgets four images brushed past.

Why This Passage Matters

Everyone in your room has a scoreboard running. Someone snapped at them in a text, a family member took and never thanked, a coworker got the credit. And the human default is to keep the score even — one insult repaid with one insult, exactly measured. That instinct feels like justice. It even sounds biblical: an eye for an eye. What most of your people don't know is that 'eye for an eye' was never a green light for revenge. It was a leash on it, a courtroom rule to keep a lost tooth from becoming a burned village. Jesus doesn't loosen that leash. He reaches past it to something the law could never touch — the churning wish to get even. That's why this passage matters right now, in a culture that runs on the perfect comeback, the clapback, the last word. Jesus offers your people a stunning freedom: you don't have to let the person who wronged you set the terms of your soul. And here's the privilege in teaching it — every command in these verses, Jesus first kept in his own body. You get to show a room the very posture their Savior took when he was struck for them and didn't strike back.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach this, do the exercise yourself. Take thirty seconds, pen on paper, and name the actual person you're hard to be generous toward right now — not a type, a name. Then write what 'going the second mile' would concretely cost you with that person this week. If you can't do it without your stomach tightening, good. That tightening is the

passage working. Don't walk into the room having only studied the backhand; walk in having felt the resistance you're about to ask of everyone else.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time someone had a cutting line coming and you chose the soft answer instead — what did the restraint cost you?
- A time you 'went the second mile' for someone difficult and they never noticed or thanked you.
- A person right now you find genuinely hard to be generous toward — name the resistance, not a tidy resolution.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'I learned to love my enemies through patience.' Real — 'My brother-in-law borrowed three hundred bucks two years ago, never mentioned it again, and I have rehearsed the confrontation in the shower probably forty times.'
- Guardrail: keep it not-raw — tell a story you've already made peace with, not one that's still bleeding on you in front of the room.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Try to backhand the person next to you — don't actually, just mime it. Notice which hand, which cheek. A right-handed man striking your right cheek can't use his palm; he has to use the back of his hand. In Jesus' world that wasn't how you hurt someone. It was how you insulted them — how a master hit a slave. Hold that detail. It changes everything Jesus says next."

Start with a concrete cultural detail so the text stops sounding like a platitude.

SMALL GROUP: "Everybody's got a group chat or a family text thread where somebody said something and you had the perfect comeback loaded and ready. Tell me — is it satisfying to fire it off, or does it just keep the thing going? Hold that, because Jesus walks straight into that exact reflex tonight."

Open with a shared modern experience before naming the ancient one.

COFFEE: "Who's the one person you'd most like to get even with right now — not violently, just, you know, even? Sit with that for a second. This whole passage is Jesus talking to the part of us that wants the score settled."

One honest question, no setup, aimed at the heart.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word behind 'strikes' — Greek 'rhapizei.' It doesn't mean to punch or to brawl. It means to slap, specifically the backhand blow. Put your own hand up and show it: a right hand crossing to strike a right cheek can only land as a backhand, and a backhand was the blow of contempt — the way a superior put an inferior in his place. So when someone

turns the other cheek, they're not inviting more abuse. They're standing up straight and saying, without a word, 'You don't get to define me by that.' The insulter loses control of the exchange. That's the freedom Jesus is handing to occupied, humiliated people. Say the keepable line slowly and then stop talking: 'Refuse to let the insulter set the terms of your soul.' Let it sit. Don't rescue the silence.

Discussion Questions

1. 'An eye for an eye' — what did you always assume that phrase meant, and what did you just learn it actually was?

Coaching note: Let them voice the wrong assumption first without correcting too fast; the gap between 'license for revenge' and 'leash on revenge' is the whole hinge of the lesson.

If it stalls: Simple version: was 'eye for an eye' meant to encourage revenge or limit it? What surprised you?

2. If turning the other cheek isn't being a doormat, what IS it?

Coaching note: Push past the first sentimental answer. Steer them toward 'handing control to God' and 'refusing the insulter's terms' rather than 'just being nice.'

If it stalls: Concrete version: someone insults you and you don't fire back — are you weak in that moment, or strong? Why?

3. Where does the 'eye for an eye' instinct show up in your ordinary week — in text, in traffic, at the kitchen counter?

Coaching note: Run write-then-speak here: thirty seconds of silent writing before anyone talks. This is the pivot from ancient text to their real life, and you want deep answers, not the fast talker's reflex.

If it stalls: Yes/no way in: when someone snaps at you, do you have a comeback ready before they've finished talking? Most of us do.

4. Jesus said give to the one who asks and go the second mile. Name one person who's genuinely hard for you to be generous toward right now.

Coaching note: This is the table question and the heart of the night. Do not let anyone answer with a category ('difficult people'). Press gently for a name or a real relationship. Go first yourself.

If it stalls: Easier way in: think of the person who takes and rarely thanks. Who came to mind first? You don't have to say the name out loud if you'd rather not.

5. Every one of these commands, Jesus kept in his own body before he asked it of us. How does it change the demand to know he was struck and didn't strike back — for you?

Coaching note: This lifts the whole thing off willpower and onto the cross. Don't rush it or tack it on at the buzzer. If you only get to this question, that's a full night.

If it stalls: Concrete version: when you picture Jesus silent in front of the men beating him, does that make the second mile feel more possible or less? Say why.

Questions You May Hear

"Is Jesus telling abuse victims to just take it?"

No — the right-cheek detail tells us this is about an insult, a backhand from someone

claiming to be your superior, not physical danger. Jesus is confronting the instinct to repay contempt with contempt, not commanding anyone to stay in harm's way.

"Is Jesus contradicting the Old Testament law here?"

No. 'Eye for an eye' was a courtroom limit given to judges to keep punishment from outrunning the crime, and Leviticus already forbade personal vengeance. Jesus isn't overturning that justice, he's reaching past it to the heart it could never touch.

"What's the deal with carrying the pack a mile?"

Roman soldiers could legally compel a civilian to carry their gear one mile. Jesus says go two — do the extra thing on purpose, so the person who tried to use you is left wondering why you're free.

"Does 'give to everyone who asks' mean I can never say no to any request for money?"

It's aimed at the calculating, score-keeping heart, not a command to fund every request without wisdom. The point is generosity that doesn't quietly resent afterward — give something real without weighing whether they deserve it.

For Experienced Leaders

- Do the backhand mime yourself before you ask the room to — a teacher who won't perform the gesture gets a room that won't either.
- When someone names the person they can't be generous toward, resist the urge to fix it or add a Bible verse. Let the confession stand. The silence after it is doing more than your next sentence would.
- Watch for the person who intellectualizes 'eye for an eye' history to avoid naming their own name. Warmly bring them back: 'Great — now who's yours?'

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and finish this sentence out loud: 'This week, the second mile for me looks like ___ with ___.' Say the action and the name.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names and actions people just spoke — the coworker, the in-law, the neighbor who never thanks them. Don't reach for a written prayer; say their real words back to God and ask him for the strength Jesus showed when he was struck and didn't strike back.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 — where the 'eye for an eye' reflex shows up in their week — that's a real night. Don't drag them to question 5 just to finish the list.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text one question to each person: 'Did you get to your second mile yet? What happened?' Ask for the actual outcome, not a thumbs-up.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/5-38-42/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- 'An eye for an eye' — write what you always thought it meant, then what it actually was:
- Where the 'get even' reflex showed up in YOUR week (text, traffic, kitchen counter):
- One person who's genuinely hard for you to be generous toward right now:
- The keepable line — finish it from memory: 'Refuse to let the insulter set the terms of your ___.'
- 'This week, the second mile for me looks like ___ with ___.'

Take-home actions:

- When someone snaps at you this week, give the soft answer. Let the last word be kind even when you had a cutting one ready.
- When a real request comes — the coworker short on lunch, the text asking for a small loan — give something real without calculating whether they deserve it, and don't resent it afterward.
- For the difficult neighbor who takes and rarely thanks, do the extra thing before they ask: carry in the bins, bring the mail to the door. Go past the minimum on purpose.

He was struck for you and did not strike back. By his wounds you are healed.