Love Your Enemies

MATTHEW 5:43-48 (BSB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

God rains on people who hate him and lights up the morning for people who spit at him, and he's asking you to be that kind of family — the kind that loves people who've done nothing to earn it, because that's exactly how he loved you back when you were the enemy.

Opening Lines

The morning sun doesn't check your record before it warms your face. Jesus noticed that, and he built the hardest command in the whole sermon on it.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Everyone in the room names one real person who's hard to be generous toward, and takes one concrete step toward them this week. Not a warmer feeling about enemies in the abstract, but a name and an action.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the long historical setup on Qumran and Leviticus if time is short. It's fascinating, but the room needs the name-and-action more than the footnote.
- Where the moment lives: In the moment someone says an actual name out loud and admits they've been quietly avoiding that person. The sun-and-rain image does its work when it hits a real face.
- Your prep: Have your own hard person named before you walk in, and be ready to say the name. If you can't, the room won't.

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 (sun/deserve, 5 min). Read the passage and teach the misquote — Leviticus plus the human addition (8 min). Teach teleios with the unfinished-circle image (7 min). Questions 1-3 in the full room (12 min). Questions 4-5 in pairs so quiet people can say a name (8 min). Commitments out loud and close (5 min). Transformation lives in the pair-share on questions 4-5. If short, cut the Qumran detail in the teaching block.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening (the Bible verse that isn't in the Bible, 6 min). Read and teach the sun/rain grounding (10 min). Teach teleios (7 min). All five questions around the circle, going slow on 4 and 5 (25 min). Commitments — a name and a verb from each person (7

min). Spontaneous prayer over the actual names (5 min). Transformation lives in the silence after question 4 when the first real name lands. If short, drop question 1.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening (hold the hard name, 3 min). Read verses 43-45, name the sun/rain point plainly (6 min). Skip formal word study; just say teleios means 'leave no one out' (2 min). Questions 4 and 5 only, both directions, you first (13 min). Each name one good turn for this week (3 min). Short prayer over the two names at the table (3 min). Transformation lives in going first with your own hard name. If short, cut the reading down to verse 44 and go straight to question 4.

Commitments, Not Summary

The habit is closing on commitments instead of summary — a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach, and this week we drill it deliberately. You ran this at level 1 back in week 4. Level 2 is harder: this week you don't accept a commitment that has no name and no verb in it. When someone says 'I'll try to be more loving,' you gently push back in the room: 'Toward who? And what will you actually do?' Make them say the name of a person and the thing they'll do this week. 'Do good' is a verb here, not a mood, and your close should force that same specificity. Remember week 4 was 'here's a commitment.' Week 9 is 'here's a name and here's the action, out loud, before we pray.'

Why This Passage Matters

This is the last thing Jesus says before the sermon turns a corner, and it's the hardest thing in it. He's just taken your reputation, your anger, your marriage, your wallet, your yes-and-no — and now he goes for the one place you were sure you had the moral high ground: the people who genuinely wrong you. He quotes a line that sounds like Scripture, 'hate your enemy,' and it never was Scripture. Somebody added it, because a love that stops at your own kind is a love you can actually pull off. Jesus tears that wall down. And here's why it matters for the people in your room: everyone sitting there has a name they don't want to say. A relative, an ex, a coworker, the neighbor with the note about the trash cans. This passage doesn't ask them to feel differently. It asks them to do a good turn toward that name — and it grounds the whole ask in the sunrise, in a God who has already been generous to people who earned nothing, including them. You get to hand the room the thing that finally makes enemy-love possible: not gritted teeth, but the memory that they were loved first. That's a privilege. Most people never get told this out loud.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach a word of it, do the exercise yourself. Sit down this week and name the person you're avoiding — the specific one, the one whose text you're slow to answer, the one whose politics make your jaw tighten. Write the name. Then do one actual good turn toward them before you stand up to teach: pray for them by name out loud, bless their family, their health, their joy, or do them a quiet favor they'll never trace back to you.

Notice how much it costs you. Notice the resentment loosen, or notice that it doesn't and you have to keep at it. You cannot lead a room into this if you've kept your own name a secret. The room will smell it.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time someone was generous to you when you had done nothing to earn it — and you knew it.
- The name you'd rather not say out loud right now — the person hard for you to bless.
- SAMPLE (polished vs real): Polished — 'I learned that forgiveness sets us free.' Real — 'My brother didn't call for two years, and I still brought his kid a birthday present, and I hated doing it, and I'd do it again.'
- Guardrail: keep it one notch rawer than comfortable, but don't dump — one true detail beats a full confession.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Ask them: 'When you walked in this morning, did the sun ask whether you deserved it?' Let that sit, then read verse 45. God's weather doesn't run a background check. That's where Jesus starts, and so will we."

Start with a shared observation everyone can verify, so nobody's a spectator.

SMALL GROUP: "'Jesus quotes a Bible verse here that isn't in the Bible. Half of it is Leviticus. The other half — hate your enemy — somebody made up. Why do you think that half was so easy to add?'"

Open with the misquote so the room feels the wall before Jesus tears it down.

COFFEE: "'Who's one person you find it genuinely hard to be generous toward right now? Don't answer yet. Just hold the name while we read this.'"

Go straight to the personal because the table's small enough to be honest fast.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word 'perfect' — teleios. It sounds like flawless, and it wrecks people, because they hear Jesus demanding a spotless moral record and they give up before they start. But teleios means whole, complete, brought all the way to its intended end. Here's the image: think of a circle drawn most of the way around, with a gap left open on one side. That gap is the enemy you left out. Teleios is the pen finishing the circle so no one stands outside it. God's love has no gap — his sun rises on the evil and the good, both. So when Jesus says 'be perfect as your Father is perfect,' he's not saying be sinless. He's saying leave no one out, the way your Father leaves no one out. And the keepable line, the one to say slow and then stop talking: 'He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good.' [Let the silence hold.]

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus quotes 'hate your enemy' as something they'd heard — but it's not in the Law. Why do you think people added that half?

Coaching note: You're warming the room with a low-risk question. Let them speculate; don't correct. The point is to feel how naturally we narrow love down to our own kind.

If it stalls: Is it easier to love people who are already like you? Just yes or no.

2. Jesus grounds the whole command in the sun and the rain. What's he trying to show us about God with that?

Coaching note: Guide them toward common grace — God gives good things to people who've earned nothing. Don't let it stay abstract; ask what that says about how God treats them personally.

If it stalls: Does the sun come up on good days for people who don't deserve it? What does that tell you about the God who runs the sun?

3. Jesus says even tax collectors love the people who love them back. Where do you catch yourself only being kind to people who are easy?

Coaching note: This turns the mirror. Sit in the silence. People will laugh it off; wait past the laugh for the honest answer underneath.

If it stalls: Think about your week. Was there anyone you were nice to only because they were nice first?

4. Who's one person that's genuinely hard for you to be generous toward right now? You don't have to give details — just a name or a relationship.

Coaching note: This is the heart of the lesson. Go first with your own name. Do NOT rescue people from the quiet; the discomfort is the work. A relationship word ('my ex,' 'a coworker') is enough.

If it stalls: You don't have to say who. Just answer this: is there someone whose name made you flinch when I read verse 44?

5. The passage says we love our enemies because our Father already loved us when we were his enemies. When have you been on the receiving end of love you hadn't earned?

Coaching note: This connects the ask to the gospel and softens the whole thing. Their own memory of being loved undeservedly is the fuel for the command. Let it get personal and slow.

If it stalls: Can you think of one person who was good to you when you'd given them no reason to be?

Questions You May Hear

"Is 'hate your enemy' really in the Old Testament somewhere?"

No. The first half, 'love your neighbor,' is straight from Leviticus 19:18. The 'hate your enemy' half was never written by God — it was a human addition, and some groups like the Qumran community taught members to hate 'the sons of darkness.'

"Doesn't this contradict all the war and judgment in the Old Testament?"

The Law itself already told you to return your enemy's stray ox and help his fallen donkey — Exodus 23. Jesus isn't overturning Moses; he's recovering the mercy that was buried in the Law the whole time.

"Does 'be perfect' mean I have to be sinless?"

No. The word is teleios, which means whole or complete, brought all the way to its intended end. It's not a spotless scorecard — it's a love that leaves no one out, the way the Father's love leaves no one out.

"Did anyone in the Bible actually pull this off?"

Stephen did. As they stoned him, he prayed, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' — a child praying for his persecutors, dying the way Jesus died in Luke 23.

For Experienced Leaders

- Someone in your room may have seminary Greek or thirty years of reading you haven't done. Don't compete. Before class, give them a job: 'When we get to teleios, I'm going to lean on you — can you be ready?' Their knowledge now serves the room instead of testing you.
- When you ask for names, the room will try to keep it abstract — 'people who are difficult.' Gently push: 'Not people. A person.' The lesson dies in the plural.
- Watch your own tone on 'love your enemies.' If you say it like a demand, they brace. Say it like news — he already did this for you — and they open.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say a name and a verb out loud: 'This week I'll ___ for/toward ___.' No 'I'll try to be more loving.' A person and an action, said out loud.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names people just said — their coworker, their ex, the neighbor. Don't reach for a written prayer; ask God to bless those specific people by name, the way the room just named them, and thank him for loving each person here when they were his enemy.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 4 and someone finally says a real name, stop there. A named enemy prayed over beats five questions rushed.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, text each person one line: 'Did you do the good turn for the name you said? No wrong answer — just checking.'

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/matthew/5-43-48/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- The sun doesn't check your record before it warms your face. Write one good thing in your life this week that you didn't earn.
- Half the verse Jesus quotes ('love your neighbor') is real Scripture. The other half ('hate your enemy') was added by people. Why is that half so easy to add?
- Write the name of one person who's hard for you to be generous toward right now.
- 'Do good' is a verb here, not a feeling. Write one actual good turn you could do for that person this week.
- Finish this sentence: 'Someone loved me when I didn't deserve it when ___.'

Take-home actions:

- Do the neighbor you quietly avoid an actual good turn this week — bring in their bins, wave first. Good is a verb, not a feeling you wait to arrive.
- Someone said something cutting to you or about you lately. Pray for them by name, out loud if you can — not 'God fix them,' but genuinely bless their health, family, joy. Watch the resentment loosen.
- In your next easy conversation, notice how effortless your kindness is — then ask God for the harder kind. Christ is calling you higher than pleasant.

You love your enemies because your Father loved you when you were his. Today, borrow from a mercy you've already received.