

Loving Your Enemies  
Luke 6:27-38  
2.20.22

Today is a first for me. I've never done anything like this before. I feel like the young artist who was exhibiting her work for the very first time and a well-known art critic was in attendance. The critic said to the young artist, "Would you like my opinion on your work?" "Yes," said the artist. "It's worthless," says the critic. The artist replied, "I know, but tell me anyway."

This moment isn't about **my experience** or **your evaluation** – but **our listening to God together.**

Will you pray with me?

Almighty and Loving God, your Word is a treasure of the greatest value. As we look into it this morning, may all those listening hear something of eternal value. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

Please join me on the journey I have taken with this passage.

The first thing I noticed came right at the start when Jesus said in verse 37, "But to you who are **willing** to listen..."

Yes! I am willing to listen! I want to know what Jesus wants me to know, even when it's hard to hear and the application seems impossible.

Since you are here, I am quite certain you want to listen as well. So, let's get started.

### **First Stop – The Check List**

Okay, this is what I've got to do:

- Love my enemies
- Do good to those who hate me
- Pray for those who hurt me
- If someone slaps my cheek offer the other one
- Give to anyone who asks
- How did **you** do?

As I read through this list on my own, thoughts started coming to mind:

- ✓ people standing with signs asking for money whom I'd purposely avoided making eye contact with
- ✓ choice words for the driver who wouldn't let me in
- ✓ the time I slapped the cheek of another

I realized - this is beyond me. I can't do this. Reading on in verses 32-34 took me down another notch, pointing out that even sinners love those who love them.

And if I'm truly honest, I don't even love those I love as Jesus teaches 100% of the time.

How naïve for me to think this passage was about carrying out a list of behaviors. I needed another approach. What did Jesus want me to know?

### **Second Stop – God's Heart**

After being reminded of how far short I fall below God's heavenly standard, the Holy Spirit gave reassurance. Verses 35 & 36 reminded me my loving Father is generous and gracious. Even when I'm at my worst, He is kind.

I took a step back in time, remembering the moment I discovered **God loved me** when **I was His enemy**.

I had acknowledged Jesus as God's Son when I joined the church as a teenager; but I saw Jesus as my friend, not my Savior. Due to pride and ego, I thought of myself as "a good person" who didn't have any sins to be saved from. It wasn't until my late 20's that the Holy Spirit enabled me recognize **I was a sinner** and my sins **offended God**.

Upon grasping this fact, I was filled with a sense of unworthiness. What a sweet and tender moment of relief when the Holy Spirit spoke deep into my convicted heart reassuring me all my sins were forgiven the moment I accepted Jesus as my Savior.

I'm so grateful for God's patience and His kindness as He gently pursued me and patiently waited for my eyes to be opened. God had loved me all along, first as an enemy, now as His adopted daughter.

One of the things I truly enjoy and appreciate about God is - He doesn't ask us to do anything He doesn't do. He lives the way He commands us to live and He sent Jesus to show us how to love as He does.

Jesus gave us the supreme example of loving our enemies when he gave his life for those who hated him. In the height of his pain and suffering on the cross he prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34NLT).

How many times has someone hurt us and it was clear upon reflection that they didn't know what they were doing either?

Jesus gives us moments like this to help us become more like him. And as we extend love and forgiveness to others **our hearts** become more like **God's heart**.

Jesus' presence on earth was the inauguration of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is here but not yet complete. During this time between Jesus first coming and his return, he reveals his love through us. When we live as Jesus taught us to live and our hearts overflow with mercy and compassion for our enemies, the world takes notice. We reflect our Father's love for ALL people and it is winsome! God works through us to usher in His Kingdom!

### **Third Stop – How Do We Love Our Enemies?**

It is human to return evil for evil, but when we accept Christ as our Savior, God makes us new creatures. He transforms our motives, will, and emotions so that we genuinely desire good for our enemies. We begin to love as our Father does – freely, without restrictions. But practically, how does this transformation take place?

Going back to today's scripture passage, I noted that everything Jesus mentioned involved action: bless, pray, serve, minister, give. Jesus said, "**Do** to others as you would like them to **do** to you." It's about doing. He never mentions feelings.

As we submit our wills and **do** our part, the Holy Spirit does what we cannot. God transforms our hearts by filling them with His love by the Holy Spirit. Little by little, we begin to truly desire good for those who have treated us badly.

This is not a "one and done" experience. Living God's way is only possible through an ongoing relationship with our Heavenly Father. God wants us to enjoy a moment by moment relationship of love and dependency on His complete sufficiency for our every need.

One of the most powerful examples regarding loving our enemies is that of Corrie Ten Boom's forgiving a guard from the concentration camp where she and her sister Betsie were sent after being arrested for concealing Jews in their home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Corrie describes God's transformation of her heart once her will was submitted.

Many of you may be familiar with this story. But do you know what her life was like after that moment of transformation? In an article she wrote for *Guideposts* magazine, Corrie lets us in on "the rest of the story".

*"And having thus learned to forgive in this hardest of situations, I never again had difficulty in forgiving: I wish I could say it! I wish I could say that merciful and charitable thoughts just naturally flowed from me from then on. But they didn't.*

*If there's one thing I've learned at 80 years of age, it's that I can't store up good feelings and behavior—but only draw them fresh from God each day. Maybe I'm glad it's that way. For every time I go to Him, He teaches me something else.*

*I recall the time, some 15 years ago, when some Christian friends whom I loved and trusted did something which hurt me. You would have thought that, having forgiven the Nazi guard, this would have been child's play. It wasn't. For weeks I seethed inside. But at last I asked God again to work His miracle in me. And again it happened: first the cold-blooded decision, then the flood of joy and peace. I had forgiven my friends; I was restored to my Father.*

*Then, why was I suddenly awake in the middle of the night, hashing over the whole affair again? My friends! I thought. People I loved! If it had been strangers, I wouldn't have minded so. I sat up and switched on the light. "Father, I thought it was all forgiven! Please help me do it!"*

*But the next night I woke up again. They'd talked so sweetly too! Never a hint of what they were planning. "Father!" I cried in alarm. "Help me!"*

*His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks. "Up in that church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on ringing, slower and softer, until it stops.*

*"I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive someone, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."*

*And so it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversation. But the force—which was my willingness in the matter—had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at last stopped altogether.*

*And so I discovered another secret of forgiveness: that we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts."*

With complete transparency, Corrie explains so well a life of moment by moment dependence and a relationship of love with our Heavenly Father through his Son Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Final stop – The Icing on the Cake**

In the final verses of today's passage, verse 37 & 38, Jesus adds a few examples of things NOT to do and then he explains what our life will be like **now** as well as **eternally** when we live as he teaches. The Message translation explains like this:

<sup>37-38</sup> "Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don't condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you'll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

The way we live matters. It affects our lives and the lives of others, now and throughout eternity. Sometimes we can't see this right away, but the promise is – when we bless, pray, serve, minister, give, forgive... – these gifts will be returned to us in full – verse 38 of the NLT says "pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount we give will determine the amount we get back."

Wow! Isn't God amazing! He not only returns what we give, He delights in giving us a return that is abundant, running over, and poured into our laps!

Having worked with this text, we discover our goal is not to check off boxes on a list, but to follow pathways for loving both friends and enemies: (Show slide "Pathways for Loving Others")

- We recognize we can't do it on our own
- We run into the arms of our Loving Father
- We follow Christ's example, submit our will, and "do" what is commanded
- We experience the Holy Spirit's transformation of our hearts
- We love as God's children, reflecting the nature of our Loving Father to a lost world that is hungry for His love.

This a lifelong journey. And over time, little by little, we are transformed into God's likeness. We become more generous, more gracious, our hearts overflowing with **His** love for ALL people, friends and enemies alike.

**Closing Prayer:**

Please pray with me.

Heavenly Father, thank You for your Word which shows us how to live and reassures us of Your love. Thank You for always loving us, even when we were Your enemies. Thank You for Jesus' supreme act of love making it possible for us to become your children. Thank you for the transformation of our hearts by your Holy Spirit that takes place as we submit our wills and learn to live in moment by moment dependence on You. Thank you for letting us play a part in the inbreaking of your Heavenly Kingdom. Use us, to reveal your heart of love, to a world in desperate need. In Jesus name we pray, amen.