

Conversation Starters

- How has your week been?
- Have you ever had someone (now or in the past) you just didn't get along with?

Discuss

We all have someone who has wronged us or is just not our favorite person in the world. For most of us, our natural response would be to retaliate or at the very least smile when we see them trip up or receive justice. Jesus asked us to do something unnatural...he asked us to love them.

“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.” (Matthew 5:38-42 NLT)

- What is your natural response to someone who has wronged you?
- How does culture influence how you respond?

When Jesus asked us to love our enemies, he was asking us to submit our privileges, power, and resources for the cause of service. He was promoting a value system that was not of this world. To meet evil with love rather than evil with evil.

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43-45a NLT)

- Are you looking at anything that causes you or could cause you to stumble?
- Do your actions (flirting, speech, dressiness, etc.) ever say more than they should?
- Are there fences in your life that you have built to help prevent deviating from a pure life?

Loving our enemies is not easy. It isn't natural. It is supernatural. Loving those who love you already will cost you absolutely nothing. Would you only want to be loved according to what you deserve? A life marked by Christ will look different – it should look like Jesus' life. We can't be perfect, but we can grow in maturity and choose to treat others based on values that are out of this world.

“If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.” (Matthew 5:47 NLT)

- If you have, do you remember the first time that you accepted God's grace? If not, what is keeping you from accepting it?
- Do you do anything to show love to an “enemy”?
- Are you taking any steps to grow in servant-heartedness?

Next Steps

Jesus asked us to pray for our enemies. When Jesus was being crucified, he asked God to forgive the very people that were crucifying him. It is likely that he was already modeling what he was teaching us, and had already been praying for them all the time already.

This week, pray for someone that you do not get along with easily. Can you serve them in any way?

Further Reflection

See Matthew 5:38-48.

Pray

God, your ways are so good and challenge us to be so much more than we would be on our own. It is not our first thought to try to show love to people that we don't get along with. Thank you for the grace that you have shown us when we did not deserve it. Help us to remember that grace and share that with others, especially those who we think don't deserve it.