

DAY 28

ENEMIES



Matthew 5:43-45

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:43-45

When taken seriously, this short teaching of Jesus is one of the most challenging, revolutionary, and down-right difficult teachings of Jesus. In many ways, it is the litmus test for our spiritual maturity. It is the barometer of how we are being formed into the people of God.

The very logic of enemy love extinguishes the concept of enemies for the Jesus follower. We have to be careful not to reduce this teaching of Jesus to some sort of unattainable ideal, but rather, a very true teaching of Jesus that demands our efforts and discipline. As an example of this, we don't have to look any further than Jesus himself. The culmination of Jesus' ministry is a death at the hands of his enemies that was ultimately for his enemies.

We all have enemies. Sometimes we don't like to admit this. We want to think that we love everyone and that everyone loves us, but that is highly unlikely. In as polarized a world as we live, enemies are readily available in our minds, whether it is those we know and are not on speaking terms. Or it is someone across the political spectrum that we have "other-ized". We are all too common with drawing sharp lines of contrast between those in our circle and those out of our circle.

One of the most challenging aspects of following Christ is learning to love our enemies. Not only does Jesus demonstrate this, as was mentioned above, but Jesus' expectation is that we are becoming the kind of Christlike person that is not just capable of loving our enemies, but it becomes that natural outpouring of our lives. The process of discipleship and sanctification is aimed at the point where it becomes easier for us to love our enemy than it does to hate our enemies.

But what I find so fascinating about Jesus' teachings here and throughout the Sermon on the Mount is his brilliant mix of high ethical callings mixed with pragmatic steps to help shape us. And the same is true here. Most of us cannot simply walk up to our enemy and love them in the moment, but we must be formed and shaped into people for whom enemy love is natural. Because of this, Jesus offers a simple step toward learning to love your enemy...Prayer. "Pray for those who persecute you."

It is in genuine, honest prayer for our enemies that all negativity and hate within us are brought to the surface. It discourages us from saying or doing anything nasty to those we dislike. Prayer also has the power to change our attitudes. Maybe this is why Jesus specifically tells his disciples to pray for their enemies.

We may not be able to immediately love our enemies, but all of us are capable of praying for them.

Daily Practice

Pick someone today with whom you are not on speaking terms. Take a few minutes to pray specifically for God's blessing on his or her life.

The below reflections are written by congregants & staff of CPC. All reflections are following Trevor Hudson's book *Pauses for Lent* and are both heavily influenced and borrowed from his work. Any quotes without attribution should be credited to him.