



## Revealing Words Bible Study

### “Love Your Enemies”

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#### Love Your Enemies

Jesus’ command to “love your enemies” is often softened into something far less demanding than what He actually said. Many of us interpret it as a call to be generally nice, tolerant, or agreeable, especially toward people who irritate us. In this diluted version, “enemy” becomes synonymous with “someone who gets on our nerves,” and love becomes mere politeness. Yet Jesus’ words are far stronger, “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 NIV). When this teaching is reduced to niceness, it loses its moral force and becomes a vague encouragement to avoid conflict. Instead of confronting wrongdoing, we sometimes use this verse to justify passivity, silence, or emotional distance, imagining that avoiding confrontation is the same as Christ-like love. The result is a misunderstanding that strips the teaching of its radical, countercultural edge.

When Jesus said “love your enemies,” He meant actual enemies. Those who harm, oppose, or persecute you. Jesus’ audience lived under Roman occupation, religious tension, and social injustice. Loving enemies in that context was not about being polite; it was about refusing to mirror hatred, violence, or vengeance. Jesus grounded this command in the character of God Himself, “that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good” (Matthew 5:45 NIV). Love, in Jesus’ teaching, is active goodwill toward those who do not deserve it, expressed through prayer, forgiveness, truth-telling, and courageous compassion. It is not sentimental or weak. It is a deliberate choice to respond to hostility with a love that seeks the other’s good without surrendering to injustice. Jesus modeled this on the cross when He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34 NIV). His command is a call to moral courage, not passive niceness.

This is a delicate balance. How do you not “give in” but still hold to account? The answer is that we lean on discernment that can only come from the Holy Spirit. There will be times for prayer and time for action. Moving forward without seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is rebellious and typically leads to bad outcomes.

“Loving your enemies” recently has been tough for a few Christians in the politically charged environment we find ourselves in today, where we strongly oppose the policies, personality, or leadership style of national leaders. Our disagreement may be sincere and rooted in moral conviction but instead of praying for those leaders as stated in the Bible, “*I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*” (1 Timothy 2:1-2 NIV), we treat our leaders as objects of contempt. We mock them online, share demeaning memes, speak about them with bitterness, or celebrate their failures. We may even

justify our hostility by saying these leaders are “dangerous,” “corrupt,” or “ruining the country.” Jesus didn’t carve out political exceptions. He didn’t say, “Love your enemies unless they hold office.” In fact, as I stated earlier, His original audience lived under Roman occupation, an oppressive, unjust political system. Yet He still commanded love, prayer, and non-retaliation. That doesn’t mean blind loyalty or silence in the face of wrongdoing. It means refusing to let hatred, contempt, or dehumanization take root in our lives and letting prayer and reliance on God to be our first steps for change.

Jesus’ teaching is misunderstood because genuine enemy-love is extraordinarily difficult. It demands vulnerability, courage, and moral clarity. Qualities that challenge our instincts for self-protection and retaliation. As Christians, we sometimes prefer a version that feels safer and more socially acceptable. As a result, we sometimes confuse avoidance with love, hatred with righteousness, or politeness with holiness.

For example:

- Refusing to confront a manipulative leader because “we’re called to love,” even though silence enables harm.
- Avoid addressing racism in our family because we fear conflict, calling our silence “loving.”
- Staying in a toxic friendship or relationship, thinking endurance equals Christlikeness, rather than setting healthy boundaries.
- A congregation ignoring a victim’s plea for help because they want to “keep the peace.”
- Equating forgiveness with immediate reconciliation, pressuring ourselves or others into unsafe situations.
- Praying passionately for leaders we voted for, but never praying for leaders we oppose allowing political hostility to shape our tone and conversations and justifying cruelty online because “the other side deserves it.”

These distortions arise because we forget that Jesus also said, “*If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault*” (Matthew 18:15 NIV). Love does not avoid truth; it embodies it. It does not mean compromise and it does not give us permission to hate.

As Christians, we need to recover the strength and clarity of Jesus’ teaching rather than settling for a shallow version shaped by cultural niceness or “righteous” hatred. Loving enemies does not mean tolerating injustice, enabling abuse, or avoiding hard conversations. Jesus Himself confronted hypocrisy, challenged corrupt systems, and spoke truth even when it provoked hostility towards Him. His love was fierce, honest, and transformative. The Bible reminds us, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:21 NIV). That kind of goodness is active, not passive. It requires discernment, wisdom, boundaries, courage, humility, and a willingness to engage with love, prayer, rather than retreat or hatred. We are called to embody a love that refuses hatred without surrendering to fear. A love that prays for “our enemies” while also standing firmly for what is right. Recovering this balance is essential if we as a church are to reflect the character of Christ in a world that desperately needs more than politeness and hatred.

## **Bible Study Questions:**

1. Jesus says, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Who do you honestly consider an “enemy” in your life? Not just someone annoying, but someone who opposes, harms, or deeply frustrates you? Follow Jesus’ charge and pray for that person(s).

2. Matthew 5:45 says “God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good.” What does God’s impartial generosity reveal about the kind of love Jesus expects from you?

3. In Luke 6:27-28 Jesus says, “Do good to those who hate you.” What would “doing good” look like in a real situation where someone has wronged you?

4. Romans 12:20 instructs, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him.” How does this challenge the instinct to withdraw, retaliate, or ignore those who have hurt you?

5. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them” while being crucified (Luke 23:34). What does His example reveal about the difference between forgiveness and passivity?

6. Matthew 18:15 teaches us to confront a brother or sister who sins. How does this verse correct the idea that “loving your enemies” means avoiding conflict?

7. Romans 12:18 says, “If it is possible... live at peace with everyone.” What does this imply about setting boundaries while still practicing *enemy-love*?

8. Think of a time you avoided a hard conversation in the name of “keeping the peace.” How might that avoidance have been the opposite of the love Jesus describes?

9. Jesus warns against hypocritical judgment in Matthew 7:3-5. How does self-examination help us love enemies without becoming self-righteous or condescending?

10. In today’s politically charged climate, many of us treat ideological opponents as enemies. How does Jesus’ command challenge the way you speak about, think about, or engage with people who hold opposing political views? The people in authority that you disagree with?

11. Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9). What must change in your heart for you to become a peacemaker rather than a participant in political hostility, contempt, or tribalism?

12. Reflect on someone you struggle to love. What concrete step: prayer, truth-telling, forgiveness, generosity, or boundary-setting could you take this week to obey Jesus’ teaching more fully?