

There is no way for us to love our enemy apart from God. But when we become followers of Jesus, we are a new creation and God places a new heart in us, His heart. With His heart in us, we can love like Jesus did, and people will identify you as a member of God's family.

27 "I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. - John 14:27 NLT

When our actions become a reflection of God, we have brought Jesus into the space, and that is when we can make peace. Look at how Jesus described the peace He gives us. Where do we find His peace displayed within us? What counterfeit sources of peace might we try to replace it with? What are we able to let go of when we have this peace?

WRAP-UP

In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus challenges the cultural norms when He examines our heart, not our actions, in situations where we are injured or offended. Yes, the law allows for retaliation, but the heart of God says, "forgive, be generous, and love unconditionally like I did." If we want to find peace in our lives and in our world, we must bring Jesus into the space. Peace begins when we focus on the presence of Jesus in our own lives. Peace is the gift He offers us, and without it, we have no true peace to offer others.

MEMORY VERSE

27 "I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid. - John 14:27 NLT

Challenge –

Begin this week with time in Jesus' presence where you can experience His gift of peace. And throughout this Advent season be aware of situation that cause you offense or injury. At those times pause and draw from His peace to reflect the heart of the Father to others.

Peace

Welcome to Our World #2

INTRODUCTION

As we view the world around us this Advent season it is hard to image our world at peace. Conflicts are evident at every level, from nation against nation to family members who no longer speak. But Jesus stepped into our world to reconcile us to God and to one another. Peacemaking is fundamental to following Jesus, the Prince of Peace. And so, we take time to consider what it means to live as a reflection of our Heavenly Father and be the peace makers He has called us to be.

Ice Breaker

What are some of the events or situations where you've found it nearly impossible to maintain peace? (perhaps related to sports, politics, or family gatherings)

Key Passage

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. - Matthew 5:9 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Peace Makers not Peacekeepers

In our key verse (Matt 5:9) we read that God blesses those who work for peace. Peacemakers are those who bring about tranquility, harmony, and safety where none had been. It is not just peace keeping, which is focused on maintaining the status quo. It is not

accomplished with insincere “over the top” kindness or by pure will power.

Can you recall a time when someone stepped into a volatile situation and was able to diffuse it, and create peace? Is there someone at work or in your family who takes the role of peacemaker? If so, how would you describe them?

2. Counter Cultural

38 "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. 40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. - Matthew 5:38-42 NLT

Wow! To a people living under Roman oppression this must have been the last thing they would have wanted to hear. These people had a legitimate excuse for retaliation and revenge from the law in Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:19-20. The law said, if someone hurts you, you hurt them back. So, Jesus was shaking them to their foundation, and challenging the cultural norms that had shaped them.

It is easy to read this passage and think it was rhetorical or that it only applied to the people Jesus was living among at that time. But what if Jesus said, "If you are injured in a car accident, don't sue for damages."? Wait a minute, that's not fair! This forces us to do a heart check. When we are injured or offended, are we willing to forgive, or do we demand revenge, retaliation, and restitution, after all the law allows us to do that? Do we hang on to our anger and indignation as if it is giving us some power over the offender? Do you think Jesus is really challenging us to live differently from our surrounding culture?

Some of the references in this verse need cultural context to understand. The slapping of the face was likely a reference to being insulted. So instead of returning an insult and engaging in the war of words and escalating anger, Jesus says, “don't take the bait”.

23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. - 1 Peter 2:23 NLT

How did Jesus respond to those who insulted Him?

The term “going the extra mile” comes from this verse. It means doing something above and beyond what was required. There was a practice of those in authority pressing people into public service. We see an example of this when Simon the Cyrene was forced by the soldiers to carry the cross of Jesus to Calvary. Once again this takes a heart check. Do we resent being forced to serve and do only the minimum requirement or are we generous with our time and effort?

What are some contemporary examples where you might “go the extra mile” when you are compelled into serving?

Why did people give away their clothes? In Exodus 22:26-27 we see that the inner garment can be given as security for a loan, but the more costly outer garment couldn't be taken because it was used as “bedding” for the poor. So, if you defaulted on your loan, you literally “lost your shirt.” And in verse 42 we are told to give to those who “ask” which can also be translated “beg”.

Defaulting on loans is not a contemporary problem. The stewardship of our resources reflects our obedience to God. Our issues may be related more to our over-consumption than poverty. But whatever the cause, our response reveals our attitude about what God has entrusted to us, be it great or small. Do we view our wealth or our goods as ours or as God's? Are we generous to those in need? How do you respond to the many requests for donations during the holidays, or how do you react to the people with signs on the street corners? Are you skeptical and critical or compassionate and generous? Are you a conduit of God's blessing to those in need?

3. Right Motivation

43 "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. - Matthew 5:43-45 NLT