

July 21

Lesson 8 (NIV)

TRANSFORMING LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 12:9–21

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew

5:38–48

MATTHEW 5:38–48

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ **39** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **40** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. **42** Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors

doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”



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KEY VERSES

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. —Matthew 5:43, 44

COVENANT IN GOD

Unit 2: A Heartfelt Covenant

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Jesus’ teaching about how to treat friends and enemies.
2. Explain the differences between

human and divine displays of love.
3. State a way he or she will show love to an “enemy” in the week ahead.

Mahatma Gandhi	Muh-hot-muh Gawn-dee.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Samaritan	Suh-mare-uh-tun.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. The Code of Hammurabi
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Turning the Cheek (MATTHEW 5:38–42)
 - A. Limited Retaliation (v. 38)
Road Rage
 - B. No Retaliation (vv. 39–42)
- II. Confronting the Enemy (MATTHEW 5:43–45)
 - A. Limited Love (v. 43)
 - B. Limitless Love (vv. 44, 45)
Honey, Not Vinegar
- III. Becoming Like the Father (MATTHEW 5:46–48)
 - A. Self-Serving Love (vv. 46, 47)
 - B. Perfect Love (v. 48)

Conclusion

- A. The Code of Jesus
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Babylonian	Bab-ih-low-nee-un.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Hammurabi	Ham-muh-rah-bee.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
lex talionis	leks-taw-lee-oh-nis.

Introduction

A. The Code of Hammurabi

What limits should there be to retaliation against a person who has wronged you? Imagine a situation of two rival villages. One villager insults the chief of the other village. The result? The insulted chief takes a war party to the other town, kills all the people, and burns it to the ground. Rather than return the insult in kind, or even escalate violence only against the insulter, the retaliation is without limits, as bad as it could be.

Several centuries before Moses gave the law to the people of Israel, a Babylonian king named Hammurabi developed a set of laws to regulate the government and the behavior of citizens in business and other situations. Some of the Code of Hammurabi seems quaint and primitive now, but it represented advances in legal protections not seen before.

One of those was Hammurabi’s edict, “Only one eye for one eye.” This embodies the principle of limited retaliation, that punishment or compensation for an injury should be equivalent to the originally inflicted injury. Moses gave similar

nally inflicted injury. Moses gave similar instruction to Israel, “Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: ... eye for eye, tooth for tooth” ([Leviticus 24:19, 20](#)). In legal tradition, this is known as the *lex talionis*, the law of legal, limited retaliation. Punishment for a crime should be in proportion to the offense. A jaywalker should not be executed. A premeditated murder should receive more than a small fine. A person who makes a snide comment should not be beaten senseless.

B. Lesson Context

[Matthew 5-7](#), the Sermon on the Mount, makes up the largest uninterrupted block of Jesus’ teaching found in the Gospels (over 100 verses). His teachings in these three chapters are seen by some as defining the essence of what it means to be a Christian and a citizen of the kingdom of Heaven. The kingdom of Heaven is the establishment of God’s promised rule over the world. Sin has made us God’s enemies. But in God’s kingdom, God reestablishes his reign over all. He overcomes sin and invites sinners—his enemies — to become his friends.

In [Matthew 5](#), Jesus challenged his disciples to move beyond the righteousness they saw in the religious leaders—the teachers of the law and

Pharisees. Jesus did this to push his followers to go beyond the behavioral righteousness of the Pharisees to a broken and contrite heart yielded fully to God (compare [Psalm 51:17](#)).

Jesus’ followers don’t just avoid murder; they eliminate murderous anger ([Matthew 5:21-26](#)). They don’t just avoid adultery or divorce; they control their lustful thoughts ([5:27-32](#)). They don’t just avoid breaking oaths; they make oaths unnecessary by always telling the truth ([5:33-37](#)). The ethics that Jesus teaches are the way of the kingdom of Heaven. As such, they often run counter to popular thinking and earthly wisdom. This lesson continues Jesus’ teaching on righteousness in two more areas: retaliation and love for others.

I. Turning the Cheek

([MATTHEW 5:38-42](#))

A. Limited Retaliation (v. 38)

38. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

Jesus introduces an ancient teaching as *you have heard that it was said*, a formula he has already used in this sermon ([Matthew 5:21, 27, 33](#)). In this case, Jesus cites a teaching found several times in the Law of Moses, the principle of limited retaliation (*lex talionis*). In its fullest expression, this allows for one to be

repaid an eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, and life for life for crimes committed (Exodus 21:23, 24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21). The law saw this as justice. To go beyond was to seek vengeance, and that is limited to the Lord (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 32:41–43; Romans 12:19).

As time went on, however, some understood this law to mean that people are authorized to seek personal revenge whenever they have been harmed. Rather than understanding these words as a limitation on what punishment the community could exact for a crime, the law was taken as permission to get even. Jesus does not take issue with the law in and of itself. Instead, he takes issue with people's abuse of the law.

ROAD RAGE

Tales of road rage are legion, and they follow a familiar, escalating formula. One particularly terrifying incident near Santa Clarita, California, illustrates the formula taken to extremes. An offended motorcyclist pulled alongside a car and kicked the driver's door. The driver swerved into the motorcycle, sending it toward the median barrier.

The car then lost control, crashed into the barrier, ricocheted across two lanes, and hit an SUV. The SUV flipped over and went spinning down the road on its top,

the car was disabled on the shoulder, and the motorcycle sped away.

Sadly, the accepted behaviors of society can lure even Christians into committing acts of rage and even hate. This should not be true of citizens of the kingdom of Heaven. In what other areas of life besides our driving should we be modeling Jesus' "turn the other cheek" attitude?

—C. R. B.

B. No Retaliation (vv. 39–42)

39. "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

Jesus redefines the situation of personal injury in extreme, hyperbolic ways. He cautions his disciples not to *resist an evil person*, not to fight such people with evil of your own (compare Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Peter 3:9). He illustrates this in three ways. First is the insulting person. Among Jesus' hearers, to slap a person's face is more than an attempt to injure. It is a stinging, physical insult. In his example, the insulter slaps *the right cheek*. Instead of retaliating in kind and thereby getting even, Jesus' answer is to present *the other*, left cheek, for a slap. Thus the one being insulted becomes vulnerable to receive yet another insult (Luke 6:29).

This text is not intended to teach abso-

lute pacifism. Jesus' concern here is not self-defense. He is speaking about insults that take the form of minor blows, not threats of death. The context here speaks specifically about the disciples who will be insulted and persecuted for being followers of Jesus ([Matthew 5:11, 12](#)). Jesus' followers must focus on their mission to preach his message, not on retaliation for inevitable insults.

What Do You Think?

What are some guardrails you can put in place to ensure you do not strike back when insulted?

Digging Deeper

How would those guardrails differ, if at all, between being wronged by a friend, a family member, and a stranger? Why?

40. “And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

In his second illustration, Jesus speaks of two common garments for men of his day. The *shirt* is the inner garment, worn next to the skin; the *coat* is the outer garment. Clothes are costly in both material and production time in Jesus' day, not mass-produced inexpensively in factories. Each article is worn as long as possible. Their sturdiness makes even a well-used piece of clothing valuable. In the Law of Moses, the outer garment is

not subject to being seized for debt or other reasons ([Deuteronomy 24:13](#)).

In Jesus' extreme example, the person who loses an inner garment should be willing to give up the outer garment as well. This is much more than passive nonretaliation! God does not immediately retaliate against sinners as they (we) deserve (exceptions: [Daniel 4:28–33](#); [Acts 12:21–23](#)). Instead, he sacrifices his very Son for us. If God's people have been given such a generous gift, then we are compelled to act similarly toward others. We can do this in the confidence that the God who gives his Son for us will also supply all our needs ([Matthew 6:25–34](#)).

41. “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

The third illustration involves a practice of the Roman military. By law, a Roman soldier can compel a person to carry his gear, but only for *one mile*. The Romans furnish their roads with mile markers, so keeping to this limit is not difficult. The Jews hate this practice: it is an affront to their dignity to be used as menial servants or slaves; it is an arduous task to carry 40 or 50 pounds of gear for a mile; and, worst of all, it requires them to assist Roman soldiers who occupy their homeland.

Rather than seek retaliation for this indignity, Jesus' followers are commanded to carry the luggage not just one

mile but *two miles*. No one in Jesus' day offers to go an additional mile! This is a sacrifice for the kingdom of Heaven. As with the insulting slap or lawsuit, the follower of Jesus accepts insults for his sake and as his representative.

The message is clear. God's kingdom does not come about by resisting the Romans. God's kingdom does not manifest itself through military or political force. Rather, it comes through the radical gift of God given for rebellious sinners. Because God is so generous as to give his Son to die on the cross for the sake of his enemies, then his people need to show similar generosity toward those who are their enemies.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways you can go the extra mile for others?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances, if any, would going the extra mile be ill-advised?

42. “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

This statement summarizes what Jesus previously said. Loans in Jesus' day are not as common as in our modern economy. They are emergency measures that allow someone without any means to continue to eat. To have surplus goods or

food to the point that a poor person would seek to borrow from you would put you in a position to humiliate the needy one. Jesus instead commands that they not be turned away ([Luke 6:30](#)) or treated with disrespect ([Deuteronomy 15:8](#)).

It is not just the person's desperate circumstances that matter here. For those who know the gracious generosity of God, the only right response to need is one of generosity, like our Lord's response to our need. Because God has been generous to us, we citizens of the kingdom of Heaven are also generous to others.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances should we be open or not open to lending to someone who wants to borrow?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances will it be preferable to give, without expecting repayment, rather than to lend? How, if at all, do [Psalms 37:21; 112:5; Proverbs 11:15; 22:7, 26;](#) and [Romans 13:8](#) influence your conclusion?

II. Confronting the Enemy ([MATTHEW 5:43-45](#))

A. Limited Love (v. 43)

43a. “You have heard that it was

said, ‘Love your neighbor

The last of Jesus’ examples of righteousness exceeding that of the teachers of the law and Pharisees concerns love for others. [Leviticus 19:18](#) and its injunction to “Love your neighbor as yourself” is well known in Jesus’ day and taught by him as well ([Matthew 19:19](#); [22:39](#); [Mark 12:31](#); [Luke 10:27](#)). What exactly this love requires is debated by teachers of the day, as reflected in Jesus’ interaction with an expert in the law ([Luke 10:29](#)). In that case, Jesus responds by telling a parable. He presents the most unlikely of persons — a despised Samaritan — as the one who understands that his neighbor is the person who needs his help.

43b. “and hate your enemy.’

Jesus goes on to note a popular misapplication of the command wherein the logically opposite has been added: *hate your enemy*. The command to love one’s neighbor is very clear in [Leviticus 19:18](#). But nowhere does the biblical law command one to hate an enemy. That is the idea that Jesus challenges.

It is easy for the people of God to conclude that their enemies are also God’s enemies and to justify hating them on that basis. For many in Jesus’ time, this outlook justifies hatred for the Roman occupiers. Yet as far as Jesus is concerned, God’s people must do something very different from hating their personal

enemies. Whether they are truly God’s enemies or not isn’t the main issue.

B. Limitless Love (vv. 44, 45)

44. “But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

Jesus does not merely acknowledge the appropriateness of love for neighbors and then leave the question of love for everyone else open. Instead he demands love, active love, for *enemies* ([Luke 6:27, 28](#)).

Jesus’ disciples are not to return evil for evil, nor are they merely to ignore enemies completely. Instead, they are to return good for evil— just as Jesus himself does ([Luke 23:34](#); [John 15:20](#); [1 Peter 2:23](#)). They are to *pray for* malicious opponents (see [Acts 7:60](#); [Romans 12:14](#); [1 Corinthians 4:12](#)). This is not what their enemies deserve, especially in light of the “eye for an eye” provisions from the Law of Moses and the teachings of the Pharisees.

HONEY, NOT VINEGAR

It’s been said that you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. In 2012 the chief operating officer (COO) of Chick-fil-A put this axiom to the test. The man is committed to Christ, and his company reflects Christian values. As the battle

over same-sex marriage was heating up, Chick-fil-A publicly announced support for traditional marriage. A group that rates colleges on friendliness to self-styled “lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer” (LGBTQ) students subsequently launched a boycott of the company.

As the public story unfolded, the COO privately sought out the founder of a nationwide LGBTQ organization. The two talked on the phone and in person many times. Though neither changed his view on same-sex marriage, the founder of the LGBTQ organization came away with a new respect for the company executive. The executive’s Christlike willingness to speak openly and honestly with the founder of the LGBTQ organization was a graceful example of Jesus’ call to love one’s enemies. How can we also follow Jesus’ example of grace and love toward those who consider us their enemies?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What are some practical ways Christians can bless those who curse or otherwise disparage them?

Digging Deeper

If a Christian is living a curse-free life, is that an indication that he or she isn’t doing enough light-shining for Christ (see lesson 6)? Why, or why not?

45a. “that you may be children of

your Father in heaven.

Jesus tells his disciples to look on their enemies with God’s eyes, from a divine perspective. All people, friends and foes, are *children of the Father* for all are his creatures (see [Acts 17:28](#)). If we genuinely belong to God as children belong to their father, then we will show the family resemblance in the way we treat our enemies. Jesus pronounces blessing on “peacemakers” as God’s children for this very reason ([Matthew 5:9](#)).

45b. “He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Jesus uses the natural cycles of the earth as an example of how God shows mercy to all people, regardless of whether they are *good* or *evil*, *righteous* or *unrighteous*. From Jesus’ perspective, God is the loving Father of all human beings, even those who are disobedient and do not return his love (compare [Luke 6:35](#)). Just as a parent continues to love a disobedient child, so God the Father loves all his children.

We should be careful not to push this too far. Lack of rain may be part of creation’s cycles, even though it results in crop failure. But drought and famine will hit the righteous and the unrighteous too, just like rain blesses both groups. Jesus is warning that our acts of kindness, our humility, and our lack of retaliation,

tion are not reserved for those we love. These blessings must be given to all who need them.

III. Becoming Like the Father (MATTHEW 5:46-48)

A. Self-Serving Love (vv. 46, 47)

46. “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”

There is no lasting merit in lavishing love or respect on those we know will return it in kind (compare Luke 14:12). This is not the type of love Jesus advocates. He teaches unselfish love that gives and expects nothing in return. If we love this way, we give our other cheek, our second mile, and our outer coat without expecting anything back.

Jesus points out that *even the tax collectors* show favor to those who might show favor to them (compare Luke 6:32). The tax collectors are the despised revenue gatherers of the Romans, Jews who had sold out to the enemy to become rich at the expense of other Jews.

These tax collectors are notoriously wicked and self-seeking. They are regularly held up as examples of immorality, living on the fringes of Jewish society (see Luke 19:1-7). If blatantly greedy, sinful tax collectors manage to love their neighbors when it serves their interests,

can it be counted as righteous? Jesus expects far more than self-serving love from his disciples.

47. “And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?”

In Jesus’ culture, to offer greetings to people in public is an important and elaborate duty. But there are those who are excluded from the social circle. A person indicates who is a friend and who is an enemy by offering or not offering greetings.

Again, Jesus points out that such behavior does not mark one out as God’s person but as someone who does not know God. God invites all to come to him, no matter how they have rejected him in the past. His people have to do the same.

B. Perfect Love (v. 48)

48. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

If the original readers wonder what Jesus’ standard is for perfection, he tells them: as *perfect ... as your heavenly Father* (see Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16). This is more than “being better” than most other people. We don’t compare our righteousness with even the paragons of our community. God is the measure.

What Do You Think?

How will you keep the standard of

God as your own without falling prey to despair as you realize perfection cannot be attained in this life?

Digging Deeper

What roles do you see for prayer and the Holy Spirit in your answer?

Jesus wants disciples who desire deeply to be like God. He knows our hearts and knows what we need to be perfect like God. For the rich young man Jesus encounters later in Matthew, the path to perfection and life is about giving up his love for money and possessions and then following Jesus. He needs a change of heart, and in this he fails ([Matthew 19:16–22](#)). Jesus does not want us to fail. He wants to free us from the trap of earning God’s favor by keeping the law. But remember unless our self-righteousness is superior to that of the greatest law-keepers in history, the Pharisees, we have no place in the kingdom of Heaven.

Conclusion

A. The Code of Jesus

Mahatma Gandhi, the Hindu teacher and leader, was famously a student and admirer of Jesus’ teachings. Gandhi is often attributed as saying, “An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.” Gandhi understood Jesus exactly

at this point. In the kingdom of Heaven that Jesus introduced, equalizing violent responses is no answer. It leaves two injured parties.



Visual for Lesson 8. *Point to this visual as you ask your learners to describe, without using names, the type of person they have the most trouble loving.*

The *lex talionis* principles of Hammurabi, Moses, and others continue to guide legal systems today. Fair courts the world over still seek to limit punishment to fit the crime. Jesus, however, exhorts his followers to go beyond limited and equal retaliation to have hearts that don’t desire it. Are you willing to endure insults without trying to get even? Are you willing to love people who will never love you back?

God’s love transforms us so we can learn to love others in the same way, even those who have hurt us deeply. Let us follow his example and find ways to love our enemies.

B. Prayer

Father, create in us hearts according to your good and perfect will. May we strive every day to be perfect in love for all your children. May we not avoid “two-mile situations,” but embrace them as your Son did. We pray for this in his precious name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Love helps heal broken relationships.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Write these clauses on separate name tags: *he who pays the piper / calls the tune / lie with dogs / and rise with fleas / what goes around / comes around / you've made your bed / now lie in it / sow the wind / reap the whirlwind.* Shuffle the tags. To begin class, hand the name tags to 10 volunteers to wear. Have each one find the classmate that completes the proverb of his or her tag.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Consequential Quote” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work to piece together a quote about vengeance, jigsaw style.

After either activity, ask, “Is it always good that someone gets what he or she deserves? Are there times when it is better if people do *not* get their ‘just deserts’”? Lead into Bible study by saying, “‘What goes around comes around.’ ‘You made your bed; now lie in it.’ ‘Your just deserts.’ These common expressions say that people should get what they deserve. Jesus taught something different. Let’s examine why his way works

best.”

Into the Word

Copy this page and cut apart the following three case studies. Divide the class into three groups to discuss one case each.

Case Study 1—Pool Problems

The John Smith family has a swimming pool surrounded by an 8-foot fence. While they were away on vacation, Bryan Jones scaled the fence to go swimming, slipped on the wet surface, and broke his leg. Jones sued the Smiths, and the judge ordered the Smiths to pay Jones’s medical bills.

What might be the Smith’s human reaction to this situation? How might the Smiths respond after studying [Matthew 5:38-42](#)?

Case Study 2—Goodbye and Good Luck

Wendy Johnson had always gotten along with her superiors at work. That is, until Michael Morgan was promoted to be her supervisor. From the start, Morgan openly criticized Wendy’s work and ridiculed her publicly. This went on for almost a year. When another company offered Morgan a higher paying job, he gave his notice. Wendy’s coworkers plan a going-away party for him and ask Wendy to help.

What might be Wendy’s human reaction to this situation? How might Wendy respond after studying [Matthew 5:43, 44](#)?

Case Study 3—Hey, Pal!

The ladies’ group at First Church assigns each other secret prayer pals every year. Over the course of the year, the women are asked to send notes of encouragement and small gifts to their secret pal. Last year, Marge Owens received nothing. She later found out that Viola Banks, who had a long-standing feud with Marge’s mother, was Marge’s partner. Viola had even told other women that she had no intention of giving anything to Marge. As the luck of the draw would have it, Marge was assigned to be Viola’s pal the following year.

What might be Marge’s human reaction to this situation? How might Marge respond after studying [Matthew 5:45-48](#)?

Gather the class together and have groups report. Point out that Jesus commands us not to be vindictive, to demand payback, or even to ask for basic fairness. We emulate God’s perfect love that offers his most precious gifts to those who live in enmity with him.

Into Life

Have class members think of people in their lives who probably consider

them to be enemies. Close with silent prayers for those who live as enemies to us.

Alternative: Distribute copies of the “Persecution Map” activity from the reproducible page. Have class members take the map home and pray for leaders in the countries throughout the week.