



LESSON 2: LOVE ISN'T ALWAYS EASY

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN: That it's easy to love people who love us back, but it takes a heart after Christ's to love those who don't like us.

WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED: Identify some examples of what it practically looks like to love their "enemies," and to commit to living out their responses.

Scripture Focus: Matthew 5:43-48

Supporting Scripture: Romans 13:8-10

OVERVIEW: The technological world we live in offers many ways to brand someone an enemy. A vicious post over social media, posting of an unflattering picture, or even texting gossip can quickly make us aware of who our friends are and who our enemies are. Unlovable people have been around since God created the world. When Jesus came to Earth 2,000 years ago He ushered in a new way of relating to God by accepting the love gift of His Son. In teaching this new type of believer about God's love, Jesus wanted to show people what real love really looked like. With that in mind, He started teaching about a new way of expressing God's love and that was by loving enemies. Loving those who love back is easy. Jesus was preparing His disciples and all believers to realize that following Him may be difficult at times and one of those hard things to do would be to love the "unlovable."

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

The Jesus And Loving Others Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "Jesus And Loving Others Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-loving-others-teacher-prep>

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details give you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By “context” we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a “big picture” understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

THE DETAILS

- **Author:** Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his gospel.
- **Time frame:** Most people hold to Matthew's gospel being written in the late 50's or 60's AD, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.
- **Purpose:** Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

THE SETTING

The main passage in this lesson comes from Matthew 5 which is part of a discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount. The name comes from the fact that Jesus preached this sermon from the side of a mountain. His audience included His disciples, people who had already started following Him, as well as interested bystanders.

Jesus preached The Sermon on the Mount, which covers Matthew 5-7, at the beginning of his three year ministry on earth. Jesus more than likely sat and taught, as was the style of rabbis in Jesus' day, while His disciples and others gathered to listen. People passing by this spot would either move in closer to find out what was being said, listen and keep on walking, or not listen at all.

THE MAIN POINT

Talk to any teenager and they can quickly come up with a list of those people who are friends and those who could be labeled as enemies. Society's answer to handling an enemy is to put these people in their place, retaliate by slamming them with words or deeds, or to simply ignore them. Jesus' teaching is a stark contrast to the way the world says to handle people. Jesus said to love our enemies and that is a message today's Christian teenager needs to hear.

Your students may consider this a hard teaching but that's okay because they need to know that living the Christian life is filled with doing difficult things. Even on the cross Jesus did the difficult thing and that was to show love to and forgive those who had Him crucified. In this lesson you will teach your students not only what the Bible says about loving enemies but some practical ways to apply that truth to daily life.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead-In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

THE LEAD-IN

- **Goal:** To help students identify some of the greatest things in their lives in order to transition to the study of the Greatest Commandment.
- **Set-Up:** Print out the “Lesson 1 Lead In Activity Sheet” (contained in your lesson 1 folder) so that each student has one. Also, provide a pen or pencil for each student. Or if you would rather do the activity as a group discussion, arrange to display the categories either on a dry-erase board, or by showing the PDF on tablet or projector. You can also display the sheet digitally to help in the discussion.

FIRST, tell your students that you know there are some people that are just difficult to even like much less outright love. Pass out a copy of the Activity Sheet to each student along with a pen or pencil. Tell them you want them to rank the types of people on a “difficult to love” scale with 1 being the most difficult to 10 being the least difficult. Remind them there are no right or wrong answers and more than likely no one will come up with the same rankings.

After a few minutes ask if anyone would like to share their most difficult type of person to love then their least difficult type of person to love. Allow time for students to share their thoughts and respond to other people’s rankings.

NEXT, ask if was hard to come up with their individual rankings. Comment by saying that some types of people are harder to love than others. But, explain to students that this poses a little bit of a problem. Why? In Jesus’ teachings, that you’re going to study today, He encourages us to love all people, especially those who are hard to love. Explain that this can be especially tricky in our current culture. Lead students in a short discussion. **Ask something like:**

- **How do all the social media options add to tensions between you and your friends?**
- **Have you ever lost a friendship over something that was posted on social media?**
- **What personality traits make a person difficult to love?**
- **Are there people who might consider you unlovable?**
- **Can you think of any other teachings in the Bible that may be difficult to follow? (Turn the other cheek, take up your cross daily, lay down your life for another, etc.)**

THEN, when you’ve finished the discussion lead into the Main Event by **saying something like the following:**

• **This is the second lesson in the Jesus and Loving Others series. Last week we talked about the Great Commandment and this week we are going to look at why genuine, Christ-centered love must include loving others, especially the unlovable. Jesus’ words were sometimes considered radical because they tended to contradict the life of living the law so many Jews had gotten accustomed to. In the Great Commandment Jesus commanded His followers to love God and to love others. Today we are going specifically look at what it means to love others who are difficult to love.**

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students see that it's easy to love people who love us back, but it takes a heart after Christ's to love those who don't like us.
- **Set Up:** None needed.

FIRST, briefly remind your students that this is the second lesson in a four-part Bible study called "Jesus and Loving Others." Ask if anyone can remember what you talked about in the previous lesson, or any high-points that stood out for them. Use the following bullet points to guide your review:

- According to Jesus, loving others is second only to loving God. It's a crucial part of being the person God wants us to be.
- Because of this, we have to evaluate our own attitudes toward loving others, especially in light of what it says about how we love God.

Explain that this week, you're going to build on this idea by helping them discover what Jesus says about loving difficult people.

NEXT, instruct students to turn to the Gospel of Matthew. While they are doing so, ask if anyone knows anything about the Book's author. Provide details of the context of the Book and the passage by using the Bible Background, specifically the Details and Setting sections. Then, read or have a student read Matthew 5:43-45. When you've finished, lead students in a brief discussion. **Ask something like:**

- **When Jesus says, "You've heard it said . . .", can anyone guess what He was referring to?**

Answer: This is a tricky question, but it's an important one. Jesus was talking to His Jewish audience who lived by the Law that God gave His people thousands of years before Jesus' time. But the Jewish leaders throughout the years had added laws to God's Law. Jesus was basically addressing His day's cultural understanding of what it meant to follow God. He was basically saying, "The religious leaders have been telling you X, but I'm telling you that in God's eyes, X isn't exactly the way to be going about it."

- **Just to be clear, what had the religious leaders apparently been teaching God's people?**

Answer: That it's OK to love your neighbors, but to hate your enemies.

- **Knowing what you know about God and His heart for all people, does this teaching line up with God's character?**

Answer: No. This is why Jesus was looking to set it right.

- **In verse 44, Jesus gave a new commandment which was to not only love an enemy but to also pray for persecutors or, as some versions say, those who curse you. What's the difference between the law and Jesus' new commandment?**

Answer: The word hate is replaced with the word love. The people were told to even pray for people who cursed or persecuted them.

- **The first part of verse 45 sheds light on how God views the love we have for others, especially our enemies. What does Jesus say about this?**

Answer: Our willingness to love those who are hardest to love is a sign that we are God's people, His children. Our love for our enemies identifies us with God and His character.

- **The word enemy can trip us up a bit. Most of us probably don't have true enemies. Let's make this teaching relevant to the 21st century. In your context, describe that person or people whom today's teenager might see as equivalent to an "enemy." What's an example of what someone might do to make your life miserable?**

Answers will vary.

- **Persecution looks different around the world. In some parts of the world, Christ-followers lose their lives for their faith. What kind of persecution do you face?**

Answers will vary.

- **What is the challenge in praying for the people who persecute you?**

Answers will vary.

- **Jesus equates loving others with God providing sun and rain for both the righteous and the unrighteous. What parallel is Jesus trying to make here?**

Answer: Sun and rain represents provision or sustenance. The idea is that God gives sun and rain to help crops grow and thus feed people. The cool thing is that God doesn't just grow the crops for believers. He provides for those who do not believe in Him, as well.

Say something like:

- **So, if God shows love and compassion to those people who don't believe in Him, as Christ-followers, we're supposed to imitate God in this way. It's easy to love those people who love us back, or who bring joy or happiness to our lives. But it's a lot harder to love those who only bring us down. However, as Christ-followers, God has set the example for us to follow. If it's good enough for God it should be good enough for us, right?**

THEN, move on and read or have a student read verses 46-48. Tell them that Jesus was a master teacher. He loved to offer stark contrasts when He gave examples to make a point. Explain that if loving only those who love you was such a big religious deal then why did one of the groups of people Jews hated the most, tax collectors, have little difficulty in abiding by that principle? (You may want to point out that tax collectors were hated because they collected taxes for the oppressive Roman government, and the amount of tax collected was not a set figure so the tax collector would often "squeeze" as much as possible out of each person.) **Ask something similar to the following:**

- **Summarize verses 46-47 in your own words. What point is Jesus trying to get across?**

Answers will vary.

- **In verse 48, Jesus uses a word that scares us a bit. What is that word? (Perfect) We know that we will never be perfect this side of heaven, but Jesus wants us to strive toward perfection in how we show our love to others. Describe why you think this is such an important thing to strive for?**

Answers will vary.

Remind students that the world around them is very comfortable with the idea that you love your friends and family, but that you don't really have to go out of your way to love those people who are kind of jerky to us. However, when we as Christ-followers go out of our way to show love to those who are the hardest to love, we make a profound statement about the difference Jesus makes in the lives of His followers. We show people how life-changing a relationship with Jesus can be.

NEXT, begin to close the Bible study portion of the lesson by reading or having a student read Romans 13:8-10. Tell the students that Paul begins by stating that the debt of loving others should never be paid off. **Ask:**

- **What do you think this phrase means?**

Answer: Point out that loving others is not to be treated as a check off list item or something that can be done once and forgotten about. Paul stressed that love should be something a Christian does daily and consistently.

Go to the end of the passage and use the opportunity to once again bring home the point that loving God and others fulfilled all the requirements of the law and the Ten Commandments.

FINALLY, transition into the Last Word by **saying something similar to the following:**

- **The Jewish people in Jesus’ day, especially the religious leaders, knew a lot about trying to keep the Law but seemed to forget about the purpose of the Law. The Law’s purpose was to teach people to live like God, loving God and loving others. Jesus began His ministry by emphasizing that loving God and others was the greatest commandment. Even with that said, the Jews loved only those like them or people who were easy to love. For the Gospel to be spread into the world, God’s love would have to be spread into the world. We are not to be selfish with His love and we are not to take the easy approach with God’s love. Loving others means loving all people, even our enemies and those who may be hard to love.**

Make sure no one has any questions, then move to wrap up the lesson with the Last Word.

THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students identify some examples of what it practically looks like to love their “enemies,” and to commit to living out their responses.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, explain to students that today you have spent a lot of time teaching them about loving difficult people and now you want them to hear a story where that kind of love is expressed. **Say:**

- **In 2003 Gary Ridgway confessed to being the Green River Strangler, killing at least 49 women over a time period of 20 years, making him the deadliest serial killer in US history. At his sentencing the families of victims called him a monster and said that nothing short of hell would be enough for what he had done. Ridgway sat emotionless as family member after family member spoke their minds. Then, something powerful happened. Robert Rule, the father of victim Linda Rule, stunned the courtroom with his comments.**

Explain that this is a good example of the kind of love Jesus was talking about in today’s lesson. Remind students that being a devoted follower of Christ is sometimes a difficult calling. But also help them see that when the standard is set high it helps us see that we are not perfect. Living the Christian life is not something that can be done outside the power of the Holy Spirit.

NEXT, explain that the vast majority of us will (thankfully) never have to show love to someone who caused the kind of pain the Green River Killer caused. But, we will have to deal with people who hurt us. Have students brainstorm a list of ways that teenagers hurt each other. Help them identify specific as well as general ways this happens. Some ideas to help you get started may include:

- *A friend steals your date for the prom.*
- *Someone starts gossiping about you.*
- *You see some people picking on another person in the lunchroom.*
- *Friends are laughing at a poor student at school who has bad body odor.*
- *Your dad, who lives in another city, forgets to call you on your birthday for the 6th year in a row.*

THEN, remind your students that love is an action word. Tell them it is easy to say we love somebody who is hard to love but expressing that kind of love is a totally different thing. Encourage them to start thinking about people who are hard to love and to ask God to give the strength to love these people. Challenge them to come up with ways to love these people that are practical and tangible. Remind them to look for opportunities to put their love into action. Explain that their gesture of love may be met with resistance from the other person, or maybe even hostility, but they are not responsible for the actions of others. Tell your students their responsibility is to be obedient to words in the Bible and to leave the results up to God.

FINALLY, remind students that it’s only by the power of the Holy Spirit, God living in them, that they can love people with genuine and perfect love.

If there are no more thoughts or questions, close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Social Media, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU...

Do you have questions about a lesson?

Something that worked particularly well you want to share?

Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.