

Love Your Enemies
Matthew 5:38-48

Sermon Point: Caring for people's well-being is a key part of the new life following Jesus. God has loved us—the unlovable! This is hard when people seem unlovable or have hurt us. Sometimes we have to care at a distance. God does not want us to be burdened with bitter thoughts of revenge, but instead to pray for their well-being.

(Invite children forward. Have handout with five love languages on it, pencils or other writing implements.) Love is caring for someone. We all need to be loved. That's the way God made us. On this piece of paper, draw an outline of a person. Now, draw a circle inside the person. This is like your love gas tank. When our love-tank is full of caring by people around us, we are healthy and happy. Do you know what happens when a car's gas tank is out of fuel? It can't run! It stops. In the same way, when a person's love-tank is empty, they stop being healthy. People with empty love-tanks can be grouchy and upset all the time.

Here's the thing: we can't fill up our own love-tanks. We need other people to do that. When our parents, grandparents, teachers, and other people care for us, our love tank fills up. There are five different kinds of ways to care: words, acts of service, spending time together, touch, and giving gifts.

Do you know that your parents and grandparents also have love tanks? You can help fill up their love-tanks too! When you use your words, acts, time, touch, and gifts, God works through you to fill them up!

Sometimes it's hard to love our parents, especially when they correct us when we are wrong, or are frustrated or angry, or when they don't pay attention to us. In those times, we may want to call them names or not listen to them, or hide from them.

God understands what we're feeling. When Jesus came, there were people who were angry and frustrated with him, but he didn't yell at them or call them names or hide from them. He loved them. He cared for them. Even as he was dying on the cross, he prayed, "Father, forgive them. They don't understand what they've done."

That's what God does. There's times when we don't feel like we are loveable, especially when we've done something wrong. We can feel like no one cares for us. But here's the good news: God does care, especially in those times!

Jesus tells a story about a son leaves home after asking for some of his father's money. The son goes away to a faraway country and spends all the money on toys and fancy food—and he spent it quick! When the money was all gone, he went to work in the dirtiest, nastiest job of that time. What kind of job do you think that would be?

After a while, he remembered that his father's workers ate well and didn't have to do that nasty job. So, he decided he'd go back to his father and ask to just be a worker.

But when he was on the road back to his Father, his father saw him coming when he was just a speck in the distance. His father ran out to meet him, and hugged him and cried over him. He called for his workers to bring the best clothes and to cook food for a big party because, as he said, "my son who was lost has been found!"

What ways did the Father love his son? Words, actions, time, touch, gifts? All of the above!

Loving a family member is easier than caring for a stranger. But the point is that God loves the unlovable—you and me--this is what Jesus did in his life and in his death. So, Jesus asks us to love people that are difficult to love. Can you think of somebody you're having trouble caring for?

Back in Jesus' time, Roman soldiers would stop random people and force them to carry their equipment. Jesus tells his disciples not to insult the soldiers or refuse, but even carry their equipment a second mile. Was that difficult to do? Sure it was! But Jesus

Back in Jesus' time, people worshipped the Roman emperor like a god. Is the emperor a god? No way! But people built cities, statues and monuments to the emperor. So, what should Christians do? Should they hate the emperor? No, Jesus says: care for the emperor. Pray for the emperor. When the Romans persecuted Christians, should they stop praying? No, Jesus says: pray for those who persecute you. Paul in Romans 13 suggests even when Christians resist the Emperor's unjust actions, they should pray for the Emperor's well-being.

Can you think of somebody you're having trouble caring for? Caring for them doesn't mean you need to be best friends. You may even need to keep your distance. Loving your enemies does not mean you even have to talk to them; but if you do, we talk with respect and care. Loving your enemies doesn't always mean doing what they ask us to do. If it doesn't violate the Ten Commandments, like carrying a pack, we should do it. If it means bowing down to something or someone other than the one true God, then we should not—but refuse peacefully and without violence, just as Jesus did.

Dear Children of God, you are loved by the God of the Universe! God will help you do what is difficult: love those who seem like enemies but who are also God's children who need to be loved.