

August: Love your Enemies

Before you read the intro this month, have a read of Matthew 5:20-48.

Most of us like to think that we have no enemies. There are wars going on in the world at the moment, but not where we live. There are people who are getting persecuted because of the colour of their skin, but not where we live. There are people getting bullied by bosses and classmates and parents, but not us. We get along well with all the people around us. Oh sure, every now and then there are people we strongly dislike - a referee during the World Cup, an overly controlling boss or teacher, a prime minister or politician, the cop who put his speed camera at the bottom of a hill, an annoying little brother, a co-worker who disagrees with everything we say - but we wouldn't wish them dead or anything. Even people with different lifestyle choices to us - we might dislike how they're living, but we don't hate them. You know, "love the sinner, hate the sin" and all that. We're Christians after all, which basically means we are nice people who love everybody, so that "love your enemies" verse is probably not something we need to take too much notice of. Right?

As usual, Jesus' words here go a little deeper than that. Many of us read this and think it doesn't apply to us because we don't hate anyone. But throughout this chapter Jesus is giving instructions on what to do when *other people* cause us trouble - people who don't really like us, or who don't treat us fairly, or who frustrate or annoy us. We all come across "enemies" like this in our lives, and the way we respond in these situations really shows what kind of person we are.

- How do you react when your teacher gives you detention for something you didn't do?
- What do you do when your boss constantly overlooks you or when someone else gets credit for your hard work?
- How do you react when someone says mean things about you to other people?
- How do you respond when someone mistreats you because of your beliefs, or your gender, or your race?
- What about when someone borrows something of yours and then ruins it?
- How do you react when someone steals your car park?
- What about when someone is patronising or judgmental, or when someone laughs at your opinion or beliefs?
- What do you do when someone tells you how you should be parenting your kids?
- How do you talk about your ex?

We all face situations like this in our lives. So what are we meant to do with people like this?

Firstly, Jesus wants us to see them as he does: as people who are valuable and loved by God. "Pray for them," says Jesus. Pray for good things, that they'd be happy and healthy, that they'd have good friends and financial security and that things will go well for them. After all, God gives the rain to bless everyone, not just the good people.

Secondly, we need to forgive. How many times? Well, Jesus says don't stop until you've hit at least 490. As followers of Jesus, we are working to become forgiveness gurus.

The third step is to start treating them differently. This means being friendly, asking about how they are going, doing kind things for them. Jesus even suggested doing it in secret - stealth kindness! - so that it can't possibly come across the wrong way. It means treating them like your friends and not showing any bias against them.

What kind of person are you? When it comes down to it, it's situations like these that show who we really are. Many people are good at doing kind things for the people they love. It's one of the great characteristics of our Aussie culture that we look out for our mates. So what is it that distinguishes Christians from everyone else? It is not that we treat our friends and neighbours better, but that we love our enemies. This is where the rubber meets the road. This is the value that most clearly shows who the followers of Jesus are. Without this value in our lives, we look just like any other loving, caring person. That's why this month's challenge may be one of the most important of all.

Challenges



ADULTS



MONK

- Pray for your enemies using a slightly different version of the Lord's prayer. Where the words "us" and "our" are, substitute the name of your 'enemy'. For example, "...give John today his daily bread..."
- Write or print out the text from Romans 12:18 and put it where you will see it every day. Then, whenever you're in a conversation and you hear yourself or others criticising or complaining, stop and say something positive instead.
- An 'enemy' is not simply someone you don't like, it might be someone who doesn't like you or doesn't treat you well. Consider the people in your life who you might list as an 'enemy'. For each of these people, take one dry grain of rice and wear it in your shoe as a reminder that these people significantly impact your everyday life. Whenever you become aware of the discomfort, pray for these people and ask God to bless them.



CHEERLEADER

- Share or post a link on social media (with a personal note) that shows your support for a group of people who you think many people consider to be enemies.
- Consider whether you have any enemies in your own family. Perform a secret act of kindness for this person and pray that God will bless them.
- Identify a person you might have excluded and include them in something you're doing this month. Identify a person who has excluded you and pray for God to bless them.



ACTIVIST

- Find three examples of people who are peacemakers. Identify one thing that they each do that you could start doing and do it this month. If you have trouble finding some peacemakers, try going to www.peaceheroes.com or www.cpt.org/
- When you finish playing a game or competing at sport take time to genuinely congratulate your co-competitors and apologise for any unsporting behaviour. Take a bag of lollies for the other team to have at the end of the game.
- Many people see refugees and asylum seekers as enemies. With your crew, find a way this month to welcome these people. Make it your 8 hour challenge to spend time hosting a dinner, making welcome packs or cards to send to a charity/welcome centre.