

# 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?

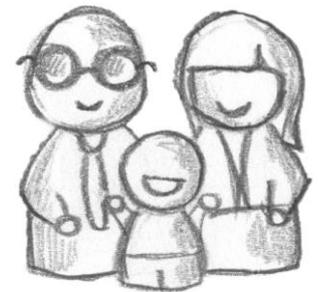
We all face situations like this in our lives. So what are we meant to do with people like this?

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.



FAMILIES



MONK

- Print out [Matthew 5: 43-47](#) and put the page up next to your big year jar. Try to say hello to someone you wouldn't usually talk to every day. Sign your name on the page with this verse each time you do it.
- 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.
- Talk in your big year crew about whether there is anyone who has made your life difficult lately? Draw a picture that shows what happened and how you feel about that person. Write this prayer underneath the picture: "Dear God, Thank you that you love (fill in the person's name). Please help them feel loved today. Amen". Pray this prayer regularly.



CHEERLEADER

- 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.
- Think of someone who often doesn't have anyone to play with at school. Ask if he/she would like to play with you.



ACTIVIST

- 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.
- If you know someone who is being bullied, do something to stand up for them this month. Talk with your big year crew about what you can do. This website information on [how to counter bullying](#) might be helpful