



Life of Christ

A study of the life and teachings of Jesus

Be Merciful

by Nate King

Have you ever had an enemy? None of us are card-carrying members of the Avengers. Most of us have never faced down a terrorist or tried to apprehend someone bent on violence. It's a strange question, so why ask it? Because Jesus said the way we treat our enemy is a sign of what's in our heart.

This one simple statement by Jesus is pretty incredible: "I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst." It's as powerful as it is hard—as demanding as it is clear. Love your enemy.

Okay, Jesus. When You said I should love my neighbor, I could get on board with that. I mean, his cat won't stop going to the bathroom on my welcome mat, and he has terrible taste in music, but I know I should love him. But my enemies?

What is the upside to loving your enemy? The upside is what happens on the inside. It's a reminder that God's love has changed and shaped you from the inside out. Your actions are no longer at the mercy of your emotions. Instead of being tossed around by the moment, or an enemy who takes pleasure in your pain, you lean into the one overwhelming thing God asks of you: love.

So how do you love your enemy? Pray for them. Unhitch your agenda and your opinion from your action. Just do what Jesus would do. Love. Ask God to help them—not just to help them stop giving you a hard time, but to actually make their life better. Loving easy people is easy. Duh. Want to demonstrate what God has really been working on under the hood? Love your enemies.

What if your life has been like mine? I've never really had an enemy. In fact, the closest thing I could think of was a teammate who didn't like me very much in high school. That was a long time ago. I haven't seen him in over 20 years. There's not exactly much of an opportunity for demonstrative love in an absence stretching across decades. The

last time I saw this guy, the Internet was still barely a thing and Amazon was a side hustle in Jeff Bezos' garage.

But we do live in a world of social media. That's where an opportunity presented itself. The teammate that used to give me such a hard time on the basketball court? Turned out he used Facebook, too. And the last 22 years have been hard ones for him. Drugs, broken relationships, homelessness, and a litany of other problems had assailed him. And in a desperate attempt to just feel something, anything, he despaired on social media for the world to see.

I have to be honest, the first couple of times he aired his problems online I just kind of thought, "Couldn't happen to nicer guy," or something equally sarcastic. But not on that Thursday afternoon. There was something different about the tone of his statement. I couldn't shrug it off. I couldn't ignore it. And I couldn't believe what I was typing until I'd already released the message into the great permanence of the Internet. What was my message? In a nutshell, "There's still hope. If you need to talk about it with someone, call me." And I attached my phone number. I patted myself on the back and felt good about it. Like I'd done something incredible. But then the phone rang and immediately I knew it was him.

I hate talking on the phone with anyone. That's how I know God was in on what happened next. I answered my phone, and I talked with him for over two hours. One for each decade, I guess. What started as a conversation about why his life was over and why hope was gone turned into a dozen reasons for why hope is alive and love is bigger than your worst day.

Answering that phone made me feel like an awkward kid on the basketball court again. But hanging up was like God had restored something lost. Not for me. Not completely. But stepping into my discomfort regarding a man who had once relished making life pretty hard for me created an opportunity for Jesus to be real for both of us.

Before we ended the call, he asked me to pray for him and his relationship with Jesus. So I did. He apologized for a long list of stuff, some things I couldn't even remember, and some I could. Then I told him to call me again anytime he needed someone. And he has. God is still doing a big work in his life.

***Jesus was looking for an opportunity
for someone to put love first.***

He's still working in mine, too. I know because I still answer the phone when my old teammate calls. Something turned around in him that day, but it turned around for me, too. Why? Because Jesus was looking for an opportunity for someone to put love first. Mercy made a way for love to pull my teammate out of his own self-destruction.

Jesus told His friends it would rain on the "just and the unjust." We don't decide where the rain goes. We just get to decide if we're willing to hold the umbrella.

Question When was the last time you prayed for your enemy? This may be someone you know or maybe even someone you don't know but you just don't like—at all!

Family Chat *Today's Question and Take Action are great to walk through together as a family.*

Take Action Spend some time today praying specifically for people you don't like, people who hate you, and people you don't agree with.