

LESSON 5: COMPASSION

This includes:

- 1. LEADER PREPARATION**
- 2. LESSON GUIDE**

1. LEADER PREPARATION**LESSON OVERVIEW**

Our society says it's OK and expected if we hate our enemies. But in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says we need to treat our enemies as our neighbors. "You've heard" that you should hate your enemies, Jesus says, but you should love them. In this thought-provoking lesson, students will see how Jesus challenges not only our concept of "neighbor" but also our willingness to show compassion to people who are against us.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- 1. WHAT:** Students have heard we should love our neighbors, but Jesus says we should also love our enemies.
- 2. WHY:** Jesus expands our understanding of sin to include anything that goes against his patterns of love.
- 3. HOW:** Students will consider how they treat others by seeing how Jesus compares loving our enemies to loving our neighbors.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 5:43-48

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Romans 12:20-21

TEACHING PREP

**LEADER
TIP**

Use this short overview to prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your group, you'll want to absorb it as you prepare to lead.

Read Matthew 5:43-48.

In this passage, part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges our understanding of compassion. Loving our neighbors, family, and friends is often easy, but loving people who hate and persecute us is another story.

Jesus says our expressions of love should have no limits or boundaries. He was likely speaking of both personal and collective enemies, telling us to take the additional step of praying for their best interests. Note that Jesus isn't telling us we must like our enemies, approve of them, or even associate with them. But we are to seek their best interests and extend our forgiveness in all circumstances.

This kind of *agape* love isn't possible on our own. God gives us the strength to do this so we can act as his true children (verse 45). By loving our enemies and praying for people who persecute us, we imitate our Creator, who sends sunlight and rain to all people in their best interests.

Loving without limits requires total devotion to Jesus, as we strive to live like him. If we pursue righteousness, it will be evident in how we treat others.

For more background about Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, see the "Teaching Prep" section in Lesson 1 of this series.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [OPTIONAL]

TEXTS OR TWEETS

Send one or both of these messages to your students prior to your meeting. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Are your enemies your neighbors? If so, do you have to love them? Join us for a thought-provoking discussion!
- Want to change the world? Check out another one of Jesus' revolutionary ideas—and bring a friend (or an enemy)!

PARENT EMAIL

Send this email to parents following the lesson to encourage them to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

We've just completed our series that compared what culture tells us to what Jesus tells us. In the final lesson, we looked at Matthew 5:43-48, where Jesus challenges us to love our enemies.

Although students have heard that it's good to care for neighbors, friends, and family, Jesus urges us to have compassion for people who may never return the favor. This is a very profound and difficult concept to put into practice—for people of all ages.

I encourage you to spend a few minutes this week talking with your teenager about our lesson. You may want to use these questions to launch a conversation, either at home or in the car:

- Who is your neighbor, and who is your enemy?
- What differences are there, if any, between loving your neighbor and loving your enemy?
- What benefits do we gain by loving our enemies?
- What role does trusting God play in loving your enemy?

Thanks for all the ways you support our young people. Blessings as you go forward to love your neighbors in Jesus' name!

LESSON 5: COMPASSION**2. LESSON GUIDE****GETTING THINGS STARTED [OPTIONAL]****LEADER
TIP**

You'll need printed copies of Matthew 5, as well as colored markers or pens.

Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then lead students in this opening activity.

Give each student a copy of Matthew 5 and assorted markers or pens. Ask students to underline each of the shocking, countercultural statements Jesus makes in this chapter. Have them make a special highlight of the statements that seem especially different from what our culture would say.

VARIATION: Instead of distributing printed copies of Matthew 5, have students mark statements in their own Bibles.

Allow a few minutes for students to work. Then start a discussion based on these questions.

ASK:

- *We've been studying Jesus' "You've heard it said..." statements from his Sermon on the Mount. What are some countercultural statements throughout this chapter?*
- *To you, which statements seem especially revolutionary, and why?*
- *Which words of Jesus do you think most people in our society agree with? Which words do you think most people struggle with? Explain.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Jesus taught with incredible truth and authority, but his words often bothered people who had power in society. Today's lesson is no exception. Jesus challenged a commonly held view that we should love our neighbors and hate our enemies. Jesus tells us to love our enemies just as we love our neighbors. The idea of loving someone who hates or persecutes you is tough to accept.*

TEACHING POINTS**LEADER
TIP**

Use the Teaching Points to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Matthew 5:43-48 together as a group. Because this passage is so brief, consider having students read the verses several times, from different translations of the Bible.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Today we're finishing our study of Jesus' countercultural teachings from his Sermon on the Mount. Let's see what he says about loving our enemies—and how that compares to what our culture says.*

1. WE'VE HEARD WE SHOULD LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS BUT NOT OUR ENEMIES

ASK:

- *Who would you say are your neighbors? Why is it good to love them?*
- *What are some ways you benefit by loving the people around you?*
- *Without naming names, who would you say is your enemy? Why does it feel natural to distrust or even hate these people?*
- *Respond to this: It's impossible to love someone who doesn't love you back.*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We like to think of a neighbor as someone we should naturally help or befriend. But throughout his ministry, Jesus challenged culture's idea of loving only those people who share our beliefs or bring us personal benefit. Jesus expands the idea of "neighbor" to include people who disagree with us—and even those who wish to harm us. How could we ever love our enemies?*

2. JESUS TELLS US WE SHOULD LOVE OUR ENEMIES JUST AS WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS

ASK:

- *If you were an Israelite being oppressed by the Romans, how might you have reacted to these words from Jesus?*
- *How can prayer for someone who persecutes you be a form of love?*
- *What do you think is Jesus' point when he mentions sunlight and rain?*
- *Jesus mentioned tax collectors and pagans in verses 46-47—who might we substitute for them in today's culture?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *These types of teachings eventually got Jesus into big trouble. His words were so provocative that people rejected and eventually crucified him. Because these teachings run counter to everything our society has taught us to think, they aren't easy to put into practice.*

3. JESUS WANTS TO REPLACE OUR HATRED WITH COMPASSION

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Here in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges us to take loving action toward people who might hate us and never return our love.*

ASK:

- *What does it feel like to show kindness to someone and get nothing in return?*
- *If you were kind to someone and got hatred or meanness in return, how might you be tempted to react?*
- *How did Jesus model loving his enemies? In what way were we his enemies?*
- *Look at verse 48. How does loving our enemies help us be more like God?*

EXTRA DISCUSSION [OPTIONAL]

Ask students to form groups of two or three to discuss these questions.



ASK:

- Read Romans 12:20-21. What real-world actions might powerfully demonstrate Jesus' teaching about loving our enemies? Be as specific as possible.
- Look at verse 21. How is doing good more powerful than doing evil?

Bring everyone back together, and ask for volunteers to share answers to the previous questions, as time permits.

LIVING IT OUT

ASK:

- Which part of today's conversation was most challenging to you, and why?
- Think of someone who's mistreating you that you can start praying for. What can you pray in love for them?
- What parts of your own heart might Jesus need to work on before you can freely respond to your enemies with love?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *We've explored some tough concepts in this series. If you'd like to follow up with someone about anything that has come out of these conversations, please don't hesitate to do so. Talk to a leader, a parent, or a friend. And of course, be sure to talk to Jesus in prayer about all these things, too.*



Ask students to each find a quiet spot in your meeting area for a few minutes of prayer and reflection. Consider praying together as a group or asking if any students would like prayer from the rest of the group.

SUMMARY



Provide a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) this lesson's content, (2) the dialogue that took place today, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the Scripture below.

"Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good" (Romans 12:21).