

# Week 1: (Not Only) Don't Murder, BUT...



## Big Idea

Jesus revolutionized what it meant to obey the commandment “do not murder” to show that it included being a person of reconciliation and grace in our relationships.

## Ice Breaker

What’s the most memorable “let him have it” scene from a movie where one person lets loose verbally on someone else?

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, He makes several statements that follow this equation: “You have heard it said.... But I tell you....” It is in these statements that Jesus presents truth that can revolutionize the way we live and the ways we interact with each other. Truly living by these statements would change the world.

## Matthew 5:21-22

*<sup>21</sup>You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.*

We don’t just say things in the moment: we have thought and feeling patterns that spill over into angry and vengeful speech because of bitterness and resentment we store up against people, including (and maybe especially) the people we are closest to, because after all, they are the ones who make us mad most often.

1. Who are the people in your life to whom you are most prone to speak harshly?
2. What is one guaranteed way someone close to you can really get your goat? (Bonus points for the person who can say where the phrase “get your goat” came from!)

As we are about to see in the following scripture, the expectation for Christ-followers may be surprising when it comes to how we are to respond in our anger.

Have the person in the group you all agree is the most mild-tempered read the following scripture aloud. It might help you digest it!

## Ephesians 4:29, 31, 32

*<sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. . . <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Arguing is the primary love-language in many of our families. Sometimes we call it “lively discussion” but rarely do “lively discussions” avoid stumbling into the kind of talk scripture explains is unacceptable for God’s people. Communication is critical to any relationship. It would be easier to avoid the pitfalls of our unruly mouths if we just kept our thoughts to ourselves. However, the call to love others doesn’t mean avoiding conflict and refusing to address issues, nor does it mean letting loose with a barrage of verbal assaults in the name of love and concern.

3. How are you wired? Do you avoid conflict at all cost or are you more prone to address conflict head on at the risk of damaging your relationships? Or are you maybe a mixture of both?

## **Matthew 12:34-35**

*<sup>34</sup>For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup>The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.*

4. What are some things the good man stores up in him? How about the evil man?

There are times when the good things bubbling out of our hearts are building and strengthening relationships, yet other times we feel helpless as we know our words are spilling out seemingly out of control and doing damage we will not be able to fix. Often times when we step back to look, we can see our anger either directly connected to an old wound, or resulting from some built up resentment or frustration we haven’t dealt with.

5. Revisiting your answer from the icebreaker, in that movie scene, where do you think the angry outburst stemmed from?
6. Remember that thing that really gets your goat? Can you trace that to a root? If you can’t identify it, see if someone in the group can.

Jesus is trying to help us live so connected to God that we won’t hold on to any root of bitterness against anyone in any way. He calls us to work toward reconciliation after the fact, as well as in the moment when conflict and anger arise.

## **Matthew 5:21 - 24**

*<sup>21</sup>You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. <sup>23</sup>Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

Herein lies the “but” in the Bible for this week. It is easy to justify our anger by measuring it by how controlled it is. Yet Jesus is always dealing with our hearts – because our hearts dictate our actions, not vice versa.

7. What do you think is a real example of what it would look like to live out vs. 24: “leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”
8. What about those anger roots that go back a long, long way? What might it look like to reconcile those wrongs?

## **Ephesians 4:26-27**

*<sup>26</sup>In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. Anger is real and it is natural and let us be clear that it is not a sin to be angry. However, what we do in our anger is what we will be judged by.*

9. What are ways you can fight the temptation to construct roots of bitterness and resentment in your anger?

## **Next Steps**

**Pray for each other.** Prayer is a powerful tool that often times we miss out on. Commit this week to pray for the person to your right. Pray for anger triggers – pray that the roots of what really gets his or her goat will be healed, and that peace will fill both mind and heart.

**Make an un-reconciled list.** Put the names of individuals you are not currently reconciled to and invite God to speak to you about those relationships. If He makes it clear that there is work for you to do, go to that person. If you have done everything in your power to heal the relationship, pray daily this week for those individuals.



## Week 2: (Not Only) Don't Commit Adultery, BUT...



If your group periodically breaks off into gender-specific groups, this would be a GREAT week to do that! If you don't, this would be a GREAT week to give it a try! We highly recommend dividing your group into two for this study if at all possible.

### Big Idea

Sexual purity and integrity aren't just about refraining from having sex with someone to whom you're not married. It's about our thought life, as well, and the stakes are high.

### Ice Breaker

Tell a story of a time you took a big risk. Was it worth it? Would you say you are a person who is prone to taking risks, or do you shy away from risky situations?

For people who grew up in the church, the scripture Jeremiah 29:11 was used A LOT. Probably 40% of graduation cards had this verse somewhere on them.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

We typically apply this Scripture to times like graduations or when someone is struggling with a big choice, the unknown or a loss. What if we apply Jeremiah 29:11 to God's plan for our sex lives?

1. Have you ever heard that God has a plan for your sex life? If not, what are your initial thoughts about that? If so, do you remember your initial reaction?

For some people, the idea that God has a plan for us as sexual beings (apart from a plan to say "no" to everything our bodies, minds and culture says is the right thing to do) is definitely intriguing. However, the minute we begin to grasp the real cost of living a pure life, we tend to want to ignore the details of God's "plan" – especially in how it might require work and discipline.

2. Did you ever take a pass/fail class? What kind of attitude did you have about the assignments? How about in relation to the rest of your course load?

A lot of times we look at God's expectations as if they are on the syllabus of a pass/fail class. When we make decisions based upon this kind of logic, we are robbed of the significant blessings and abundant living God LONGS to see us experience.

### John 10:10

*"My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."*

In Jesus' first public sermon He says a lot of seemingly shocking things. However, when we look deeper, these are significant life-principles! Jesus is building the foundation of a lifestyle to enable His followers to experience the abundant life He came to give.

## Matthew 5:27-30

*27You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' 28But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

If you took this scripture literally, what part of your body would you remove? OK... I'm just kidding! Don't answer that in your group. But this Scripture is really extreme isn't it?

3. If you were familiar with this scripture before today, how did you make sense of it?

Honestly, considering the sacrifice God made to reconcile us to Himself, it's not that shocking He'd use such imagery. Sacrifice isn't something God shies away from. He knows that right relationship with Him does not come cheap.

But this Scripture isn't about self-mutilation. If it were, we'd all be hopping around missing eyes and limbs and other important parts. Remember God's plans to give us hope and a future? This Scripture directly relates to that plan. This is our part.

4. Do you know anyone who has made a drastic lifestyle choice in an attempt to live a pure life? Did it work? Did you think they were crazy or does it inspire you?

Running from sexual temptation might seem a little drastic, but according to Scripture, it's a powerfully important move.

## I Corinthians 6:18

*"Flee from sexual immorality."*

## Ephesians 5:3

*"Let there be no hint of sexual immorality among you."*

Typically we associate "flee" and "not even a hint" as permission to avoid people and places associated with sexual immorality. However, if we look at Jesus' life, that's not how He lived.

5. Which do you think is harder and why:
- Refusing to look at a woman who is dressed provocatively.
- OR
- Training your mind to view her as a woman created in God's image to bring Him glory.

- a. Avoiding the people at work who notoriously tell dirty jokes.
  - OR
  - b. Spending your lunch hour with that person without compromising your humor standards OR making them feel judged.
6. How do you think Jesus “fled” sexual immorality while not disassociating Himself from the sexually immoral in His community?
7. How would living these two commands of Paul’s impact a “normal” life in our culture?

Temptation is a fact of life, but the exit sign is always, ALWAYS, illuminated.

“And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

8. Thinking of a time you saw the way out (regardless of whether or not you took advantage of it and got the heck out of the situation), explain how you KNEW it was the way out.
9. What do you think this says about God?

In order to experience that abundant life – abundant sex life if you will – we need to approach this subject in attack mode. We’ve got to advance against temptation; equip ourselves with tools and plans that will serve to keep us from painful consequences.

10. What would you say to a young person of your gender not yet dealing with the consequences of giving in to sexual temptation to encourage them to remain pure?

We cannot do this alone. Regardless of what the secrets are that we harbor, if not brought to light in the presence of those who desire God’s best for us, they will destroy us.

“We all have our secrets, our secrets have us, too.”

11. How has that quote proven true in your life?

God has a plan for our lives – but it’s not a pass/fail. If we want to experience sex as God created it for us, we must live as Christ described.

## **Bonus Question**

12. Do you currently use, or have you ever used, one of these tools in the fight with sexual temptation? Which are you most prone to use, which are you least prone to use and why?
- a. Internet software (XXXchurch.com)
  - b. Accountability partner
  - c. Intentionally open conversation with your husband/wife
  - d. Entertainment standards (a general rule of what you will not watch on TV or in a movie)
  - e. Guidelines on interaction with someone of the opposite sex (ie: not riding alone or meeting only in public places, etc.)

## **Next Steps**

Consider volunteering with a Parkview Student Ministry small group. Investing in the lives of young people is a great way to use the difficult lessons you've learned to help guard and instill wisdom in young people fighting to remain pure.

### **GET ACCOUNTABILITY!**

Finding someone you can speak honestly to is invaluable in the fight for mental, heart, and physical purity. There is FREE software available at [www.xxxchurch.com](http://www.xxxchurch.com) that will send a report to someone you choose and inform them of any sites you have visited weekly that contain pornography.

## Week 3: (Not Only) Don't Divorce, BUT...



The following study is primarily dealing with the relationships between husband and wife – HOWEVER – single people are faced with these same issues in intimate friendships and within their families as well. DO NOT disregard this if you are not currently married. This study is for you too! Not only will it apply to ALL relationships, but if singles hope to be married – this is a CRITICAL study!

### Big Idea

Jesus teaches that to be connected to God means a radical redefinition of faithfulness to your spouse in marriage

### Ice Breaker

It doesn't matter if you don't watch Entertainment Tonight, read the magazines in the grocery store check-out, or subscribe to PEOPLE – somehow we all seem to find out information about celebrity break-ups. Which celebrity break-up has made the longest lasting impression on you? Why?

Someone once said, "95% of finding the right person is becoming the right person." When we are looking for a spouse we typically think more about how "right" the other person is than how "right" we are for them.

1. Do you think this is true in marriage, as well as before marriage? Why or why not?

I was riding the Chicago city bus recently and I saw an advertisement for a divorce service. The ad featured a picture of a bride and groom wearing paper bags on their heads and holding hands. The slogan read, "When 'I do' becomes 'I wish I hadn't.'" I thought the paper bag masks and the handholding were a profound contrast. This ad isn't about divorce – it's about a skewed view of marriage.

2. What do you think this city bus advertisement says about the target audience's view of marriage?

The reality is we live in a world that views marriage as a means to happiness and fulfillment. When that isn't accomplished, we are told we are entitled to seek another path for ultimate happiness and fulfillment.

But we know God has a different plan. God's main concern is not our happiness. His ultimate goal is to draw us closer and closer to Him. His desire is to help us love better, reflect Him more, and be on mission with Him to restore His family back to what He originally intended. That is His master plan.

3. His desire is to help us love better, reflect Him more, and be on mission with Him to restore His family back to what He originally intended. How do you think this master plan relates to marriage?

Read this quote from Gary Thomas' book *Sacred Marriage*:

*"Any situation that calls me to confront my selfishness has enormous spiritual value, and I slowly began to understand that the real purpose of marriage may not be happiness as much as it is holiness."*

Holiness is the process of being created more and more into the image of Christ. When we go into marriage thinking it's about making our own lives better, we experience a major collision of expectations. We go into it focused primarily on what this is going to do for ME. And God designed marriage primarily to fulfill His vision of what He wants to do in you and through you to change the world. He wants marriage to draw you and other people closer to Him.

4. Has someone ever come to you for relationship advice? How did you answer them?
5. How do you think they would have responded if you read them the above paragraphs?

This is the truth that nobody really likes to embrace: that marriage is a crucible, a refining thing that brings out either the best in us or the worst in us, and it's meant to help take the worst OUT of us.

## **Philippians 1:6**

*"He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it . . ."*

6. Do you think this scripture can be used to apply to marriage? Why or why not?

1 Corinthians 13 is easily the most popular wedding scripture. Have someone read this out loud:

*<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

7. Now be honest: Were your thoughts more about the love you receive or the love you give?

So back to the "95%" quote above: If, indeed, the greatest part of finding contentment within any relationship really is who we are becoming through those relationships, we need help. We need others who will fight against our selfishness and not sympathize with our hurt egos.

8. If a friend comes to you and complains that their marriage is full of fighting and neither partner is as satisfied as they once were, how would you seek to counsel that friend based upon this study?

9. Do you think it's likely you would counsel them this way? Why or why not?

While allowing God to transform us through these painfully intimate relationships is the goal, we cannot do that alone. Look around the room. Each person in this group needs others to help them work this out. Not ONE of us can fight the selfishness that our most intimate relationships stir up within us. We need community to help us be healed and empower us to fulfill God's ultimate desire to bring healing to our neighborhoods, communities, and the world through us.

## **Next Steps**

- Find someone who will be faithful to journey with you – even if that means opposing you for the good of your relationships. If you do not have someone like that in your life – pray an honest prayer asking God to bring a friend into your life to help hold you accountable to personal growth.
- Write up a declaration of intent for your marriage. Sitting with your spouse with the information covered in this sermon and study, prayerfully draw up a mutually agreed upon statement. If you are single – this is still a GREAT document to spend some time creating.

## **BIG STEP**

Share the document with another couple you trust and ask them to hold you accountable as a couple and as individuals to the intent of your marriage.

Singles, share this with a same-gender friend who is already married. Ask them to help you as you seek to become the right person.



## Week 4: (Not Only) Don't Retaliate, BUT...



### Big Idea

Jesus teaches us that living connected to God releases us from cycles of vengeance and retribution, and frees us up to live generously and creatively in the face of wrongs done to us.

### Ice Breaker

What's the best prank war you've ever been a part of or witnessed? Or who is the best prankster you know?

This is the fourth week we've looked at some pretty revolutionary words of Jesus. Each week we've been challenged to take a deeper look at God's wisdom and take on some attributes that are counter intuitive, but have the potential to change families, relationships, communities, and our world. This week is no different.

### Fight or Flight

These are what we typically think are our choices when we are attacked by someone. Most of us prefer one of these to the other – either we're prone to avoid those who hurt us by shutting down or walking away, or we stand toe-to-toe with our aggressors, weapons loaded making it clear we're not going down without a fight.

1. Which is your natural response to attack and why? Does it change with the attacker?
2. If you had to give a summary of what you think Jesus wants us to do as Christ-followers when we face conflict, what would you say

The following Scripture outlines Jesus' radical approach to conflict:

### Matthew 5: 38-42

*<sup>38</sup>You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'<sup>39</sup>But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup>And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup>If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

These verses are some of the most misunderstood verses in all the Bible: so many think Jesus is calling us to passivity and being wimpy doormats. This is exactly the opposite of what He is actually saying. Responding in the ways He calls us to takes courage and strength and resolve.

3. What has been your understanding of this Scripture before this study?
4. Have you ever heard someone use this Scripture to justify unhealthy behavior? Explain.

### The Third Way

Jesus is calling us to a third response to our normal fight or flight. This third option requires us to lay down our weapons and allow a warfare of love to work through us.

## **Matthew 5:38-39**

*<sup>38</sup>You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' <sup>39</sup>But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

Jesus is not suggesting we let people beat up on us. He's telling us that if we use our minds and hearts together – we can take control of a situation by not just defending ourselves but forcing our aggressor to take responsibility for their actions. Turning the other cheek required the use of the left hand for an additional attack. This was shaming as the left hand was seen as “unclean” in Jesus’ culture. Turning the other cheek didn’t say “go ahead, hit me again” rather, it was more of a trick move that puts the attacker in checkmate. Either shame himself by hitting again with his left hand, or step down.

5. What are some practical ways you can “turn the other cheek?”

Shawn was a very mean, angry, frightening homeless man who was threatening to cut one of our friends and others. He showed the friend his box cutter when he realized his verbal threats weren't working. Our friend asked him to surrender his weapon until he was ready to leave the church gathering where this friend was a pastor and the friend promised to return it. To our friend's shock – and Shawn's – he cooperated. A week later our friend brought Shawn a new pair of size 16 boots and some new socks to help him make it through the Chicago winter. Today – two years later – Shawn is very close to our friend. Yes, he's still homeless and possibly violent in some ways, but in the relationship with our friend, Shawn will do anything to protect him. Taking a third way with Shawn was TERRIFYING but changed his life and others.

6. In this story, what are some examples of the third way?

7. Have you ever chosen the third way and seen a relationship transform from enemies to allies? Tell the story.

## **Matthew 5:40**

*<sup>40</sup>And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak, as well.*

Again, Jesus is teaching us to use our wit and our brains to find new ways to combat those who come against us. In Jesus’ culture, being seen naked wasn't shameful – looking at someone who was naked was shameful. If someone sues you for your undergarments and you give him your outer garments, too, you've exposed yourself but not to your shame – to his.

Now – Jesus is NOT teaching us how to be manipulative and play mind games with people – punishing them for their bad behavior. It might seem that way, but if we look a little deeper we can see that these new tools allow us to help others take responsibility for their behavior by choosing to suffer even more.

8. How would you translate this tactic in today's culture? Is there a cultural equivalent?

## Matthew 5:41

*<sup>41</sup>If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.*

Again, another example of Jesus' counter-attack. In His culture, Roman soldiers could force people to carry their packs for a mile – but not any further. By continuing on another mile, the soldier is not only shamed, but faces consequences from his commander. The thing is – this requires sacrifice. If you didn't want to go one mile – you SURELY don't want to go two. But in going two, Jesus is showing us warfare of love.

9. How do you go the extra mile?

PLEASE understand: Jesus is NOT suggesting we be doormats and allow the world to beat up on us. Jesus wants to show us a third way – a way that keeps at the forefronts of our minds and hearts that both parties are created in His image and that He desires to draw ALL to Himself.

When we choose to follow this third way, we draw our enemies closer to Jesus – and Jesus desires to place us on the same team to transform the world – but only He can do that.

10. Consider the most recent conflict that you either ran from or attacked during. How might a third option have changed the outcome of that situation?

### Bonus Question

11. If anyone is willing to, share a current conflict in which you would like to turn the other cheek, and allow the group to help discern the best way to apply this study.

### Next Steps

12. Honestly look at your arsenal. What is your weapon of choice? Are you a fighter or a flier? How would this third way change your most volatile relationships?

13. Read through Mark and see how Jesus handled conflict. Keep a written record of your observations.



## Week 5: (Not Only) Love Your Neighbors, BUT ...



### Big Idea

Jesus teaches us to be radically loving and good to the people who treat us the worst. Only God can bring about this major of a shift.

### Ice Breaker

Have you ever had an arch enemy? Maybe a competitor at school or a bully on the playground. Who has been one of your significant arch nemeses?

### Intro

During the last four weeks, we've covered some really difficult statements by Jesus containing the word "but." In each statement, Jesus was speaking about our normal understanding of how things go, and then blew our minds beginning with a new paradigm; a new way of living.

This week's BUT OF THE BIBLE is no easier to swallow than the others. In fact, it might become the most counter-intuitive one, yet!

### Matthew 5:43-46

*<sup>43</sup>You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup>But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?*

1. What do you think it means to have an enemy?

We don't like to think of ourselves as having enemies, but everybody does: an enemy is anyone who has animosity toward us or we have animosity towards. With some enemies, the animosity is ongoing. With others, the hostility is short term - when things go wrong. Often, the people we are closest to and love the most can temporarily feel like enemies to us.

2. Do you have anyone in your life you'd consider an enemy?

(Still need help? Who do you go out of your way to avoid? Who would you be happy never to see or talk to again? Who do you have animosity towards; who makes your jaw clench and your blood boil? How about people who take issue with YOU - regardless of the fact that you don't have a problem with them?)

3. Now do you think you have anyone in your life you'd consider an enemy?
  - a. Too many to count!
  - b. A couple, but I hadn't thought of them as enemies before
  - c. Several in my past, but none now.
  - d. Nope! I get along with everyone, always!

If we are all honest, no one is without an enemy. Jesus definitely doesn't classify; "if you have an enemy" – he just states the obvious. Enemies are a fact of life. Also, in reality, having an enemy doesn't necessarily constitute sinning. What we do with our enemies is where the choice to sin or not comes in. I know this might sound strange, but being a Christ-follower doesn't mean getting along with everyone. Jesus had enemies – and He even spoke very harshly to them at times. The trick is to handle these difficult relationships without allowing sinful thoughts to creep into our minds and hearts.

4. How do you typically respond to an enemy?
5. Is it any different when the enemy is short-term; like when your spouse or co-worker or best friend momentarily becomes your adversary? If so, how do you deal with them?

## A True Story

Growing up my mom was determined that my brother and I would not grow up as enemies. One of her ways of helping us work through our issues and remain friends was to punish us by requiring that we can only play with each other. She would ground us from outside friends and even from the house, forcing us to explore the many opportunities in the back yard that were not fun without a friend. Who wants to build a tree house alone? Building a dam in the creek or a fort in the woods was always easier with a companion. Every time the animosity drifted, truces were negotiated, and my enemy became my best friend and brother again.

I always thought mom went above and beyond on that one – but Jesus more than topped her! Jesus doesn't just say "play nice with each other!" He says "Do good to your enemies, pray for them, treat them the opposite of how you want to; want the best for them."

Romans 12 unpacks this even better:

*<sup>17</sup>Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup>Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

6. Do you think overcoming Evil with Good is really possible? Have you ever seen this lived out in real life?

The truth is when it comes to our enemies; there are only two possibilities: we will either overcome evil or be overcome by it. There's no neutrality. Think about it; when animosity springs up between us and somebody, it's not just there, it does stuff in us. We go over and over the situation in our heads and rehearse scenarios about how we'd like to get them back or put them in their place. When we're fantasizing about revenge – we're being overcome by evil. It's sucking us in and taking up space in our lives and relationships.

We can either find ways to overcome evil, or we will be overcome by it.

7. How do you combat the desire to get revenge...to put someone in their place when they've wronged you?

Often we try to convince ourselves that there's a third option – that we can just be neutral; if we don't think about it, act like nothing happened, or avoid the person, we can avoid sin. The truth is all that energy is evidence that evil has still overcome us. The only solution is to follow Jesus' loving, yet REALLY difficult instruction.

8. How do you think praying for your enemies daily could impact your relationships with them? Be specific.

Jesus isn't just telling us to love our enemies because He just wants us to get along – it's not a discipline to simply bring peace. Loving and praying for our enemies, asking God for His best for them, and working for their best transforms us! Instead of looking at them as the perpetrator of whatever wrong they inflicted on us – we see them in a more humane light. We see them as women and men with broken homes, relationships, and hearts. Jesus knows this is a sure-fire way to become more like Him.

9. Have you ever experienced this kind of transformation? If so, tell the group.
10. Is there any particular enemy you could never imagine your heart softening towards? Why?

The truth is, we were once enemies of God.

## **Romans 5:10**

*10"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"*

Jesus' plan for us isn't that we learn how to "fake it" or "suck-it-up" or even ignore our enemies behavior. Jesus is equipping us with tools that will not only help us through these situations, but will transform our hearts in the process and make us more and more into His image. And that's just another way that He uses us to reveal Himself to those around us.

## 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (The Message)

*Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.*

11. Share one way this study has challenged or changed your perspective of what it means to have an enemy and how God designed us to interact with them.

### Next Steps

12. On a note card write the name of your enemy – or the word “enemy” with these words underneath and put it somewhere where you’ll have an opportunity to pray for that person specifically (the car, bathroom mirror, etc.)
  - a. Relationships
  - b. Success
  - c. Health
  - d. Joy/Peace/Hope/Contentment
  - e. Blessings
13. If it is possible and appropriate – send a note of encouragement to the person (persons) you are praying for. It can be anonymous. Let them know you are praying for them. Consider even writing a prayer in the note. THEN SEND IT.