

Main Idea: In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus shows us that there are two approaches to love, and the approach we take reveals the condition of our soul.

- I. There’s the natural approach to love (43).
  - A. Love your neighbor.
  - B. Hate your enemy.
- II. There’s the supernatural approach to love (44-48).
  - A. Jesus commands us to love our enemies (44).
  - B. Jesus commends the example of our Father (45).
  - C. Jesus compares natural love with supernatural love (46-47).
  - D. Jesus calls us to be perfect (48).
    1. This is not sinlessness.
    2. This is a call to resemble God.
    3. This is made possible by the grace of the Father.

Take Inventory: Let’s ask ourselves these questions...

1. Am I truly a child of God?
2. Do I resemble my Father in the way I treat people?
3. Am I allowing the Lord Jesus to change me?

*Parent and Baby Dedication (at beginning of service):* Brad will introduce the parents and children, read Psalm 127, and explain the significance of what we are doing today. Parents are making a commitment. We as a church are making a commitment. Pastor Matt will then lead us in prayer, giving thanks, and asking for grace to fulfill these commitments. (Michael and Katelynn Dow, with Aerith; Douglas and Lacey Goncalves, with Olivia; Jeremy and Megan Rawlins, with Lincoln)

*Introduction of Scripture Reading:* This past Tuesday I looked for the first time into the eyes of our third grandchild, Judah Andrew. What a blessing! One of the common questions that arises at such times is, “Who does he resemble?” And there’s often speculation and suggestions that follow. “Oh, he looks like his father.” Or, “I see his brother.” Or, “To me he looks like his mother.”

This is how families work. There is often a resemblance. The Lord Jesus had something similar to say in today’s text, Matthew 5:43-48. I’ve entitled this message, “Loving Our Enemies: Like Father, Like Son.”

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:43-48*

Jesus said many shocking things in His ministry. In fact, in His sermon on the mount He moved from one shocking statement to the next, to the next, to the next.

His first words are shocking. “Blessed are the poor in spirit (5:3).” In Luke’s account Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor.” The *poor* are blessed? That’s what He said. Followed by, “Blessed by you who are hungry now,” and “Blessed are you who weep now,” and “Blessed are you when people hate you.” Followed by, “Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven (Luke 6:20-23).”

Then came this shocking announcement (5:20), “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” The people who heard those words didn’t know anyone more righteous than the scribes

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\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the series preached at WBC in 1988.

and Pharisees. These were the Bible men of the day. And they're not part of heaven's kingdom?

That kind of accusation needed some explaining, and Jesus provided the explanation in verses 21 and following. He gave six examples to show the deficient nature of self-righteousness. Six times He says, "You have heard that it was said...But I say to you."

He begins with murder. Everybody knows a murderer is a guilty sinner. But Jesus says that angry person who calls someone a fool is liable to the hell of fire.

Then He moves to adultery, and says that the person who lusts is just as guilty as the person who acts out that lust.

So it's not just the action that God sees, but the heart too. That's true when there's a divorce, says Jesus in His third example.

Then He takes us to the court room in His fourth example. Don't swear falsely after you've put your hand on the Bible. That would be unrighteous. Yes, said Jesus, it would be. But so is this. To need to take an oath in the first place. Truly righteous people speak the truth at all times. So let your yes be yes, and your no be no.

This is Jesus' standard, and it's the fulfillment of the Law's standard. And it's a standard that sinners fail to meet, whether they are the down and out sort, or the up and out sort, like the self-righteous are.

Last week we learned from Jesus' words in verses 38-42 that retaliation is out of the question for Christians. We are not to resist those who take advantage of us. When insulted, we are to turn the other cheek. When mistreated, we are to go the extra mile. When our rights are ignored, we are to go beyond our rights and look for ways to give, and give, and give.

Again, shocking, shocking, and more shocking. But He's not done. In today's text Jesus puts the icing on the shocking cake. Love your neighbor. Okay, sure, start there. But I say to you, *love your ENEMIES*.

So not only are we not to retaliate when wronged, now Jesus tells us we are to go out of our way to demonstrate love to our *enemies*.

I must issue a warning at this point. If you're here today and you're not a Christian, you will struggle with what Jesus says in verses 43-48. Even if you are a Christian, you may struggle. The Savior's words might even anger you. *Impossible!*, some will say.

And we might find ourselves attempting to tone down Jesus' words by saying, "Well, this doesn't mean what it sounds like. Jesus is just exaggerating to make a point."

Dietrick Bonhoeffer, a German pastor in the 1930's, pointed out why Jesus' words are so offensive to people, "To the natural man, the very notion of loving his enemies is an intolerable offense, and quite beyond his capacity; it cuts right across his ideas of good and evil. . . (Yet) the will of God is that men should defeat their enemies by loving them."

Bonhoeffer certainly practiced what he preached. He was executed by the Nazis in a concentration camp on April 9, 1945 because of his commitment to Christ. Bonhoeffer was only 39 years old.

Yet the very fact that we tend to resist and rationalize God's Word shows us how much we need the God of grace, and the grace of God. And specifically, how much we need the One who is speaking these words. He came to earth to save us, and He alone can give us the power to keep His commands, and He does, if we'll ask.

So let's not tone this down. We need these words. Oh how American Christianity needs these words. In Matthew 5:43-48, Jesus shows us that there are two approaches to love, and the approach we take reveals the condition of our soul.

#### I. There's the natural approach to love (43).

Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" When I say this is the natural approach, I mean it in the sense that it comes *naturally*. You have heard that it was said. This is what the religious leaders were saying in Jesus' day. Two instructions.

##### **A. Love your neighbor.**

##### **B. Hate your enemy.**

But the question is, where does the Bible say that? It doesn't. Did you recognize the error? Oh, certainly the first part is there, sort of. "You shall love your neighbor." That's in Leviticus 19:18. But I say *sort of* because there's an omission. If you turned to Leviticus, you'd notice that something was left out by the Bible quoters.

Two words. "As yourself." Just two small words. But when you leave out even two small words from God's inspired Book, you're diluting the pure milks of the Word by subtracting from it.

There's another way to dilute something. By adding to it. The question again is, in what Old Testament verse do we hear God saying, "And hate your enemy"? The answer is, it's not there. God never commanded His people anywhere in His Word to hate their enemies.

So how did they ever get "hate your enemy" out of God's Law? Here's how. God said, "Love your neighbor." Okay, got that. What about people who aren't our neighbors? How should we treat them?

Well, in Deuteronomy 23:6 He says, "You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever." In the passage the Lord is the Israelites what *not* to do with the Ammonites and Moabites. Do not seek their peace or prosperity. Why not? Because these people-groups, and others like them who worshipped false gods in all kinds of immoral ways, would turn the Israelites away from Him and His plan to bring hope to the whole world through them.

So we're to love our neighbors. Okay. And we're *not* to seek the peace of these pagans in the land. Okay. What then are we to seek? What verb describes what we *are* to do with such people? So they searched the rest of the Old Testament and found statements like these from Psalm 139:21-22, "Do I not *hate* those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? <sup>22</sup> I *hate* them with complete *hatred*; I count them my *enemies*."

That's strong language, for sure. But it's not spite for people that's coming from the psalmist, but a love for God and His honor. "The *hatred* here spoken of is *displacency*, and not malevolence," explains commentator William Plumer. "It is against the ways and characters, not against the persons of the wicked."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, now we have our word, even if we obtained it by taking the Bible out of context. Love your neighbor. *Hate* your enemy. That's what the Good Book says. Even if it doesn't.

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<sup>2</sup> Williams Plumer, Psalms, p. 1164

What would cause people to misread the Bible like this? It's because of *the noetic effect of sin*. When sin entered the world in Genesis 3, it brought disastrous consequences, including this one. Sin has affected our minds (*nous* is the Greek word for "mind"). We're not thinking right. We can't.

As Romans 1:21-22 explains, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."

So the religious people of Jesus' day used God's Word to justify actions their sinful hearts wanted to justify. This is the natural approach to love. Love your neighbor—absolutely, that's good, I like my neighbors. They're like me. And hate your enemy—that's everybody who isn't like me.

It's amazing what you can make the Bible say if you're not convinced that what the Bible says is truly what God has said, and therefore good and sufficient for us.

"*The Bible says that God helps those who help themselves.*" No it doesn't.

"*The Bible says that God wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and wise.*" No.

"*The Bible says that God created certain people to be slaves.*" Again, *no*, though lots of southern church-goers said things like that in the 1800s. It's in Genesis 9 and Ephesians 6, they said, as they justified keeping their fellow image-bearers in chains.

"*The Bible says that homosexuals should be put to death.*" Again, *no*. While 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 makes it clear that homosexuality is sin, it can be forgiven as any other sin can be.

Here's a more subtle one. "*The Bible nowhere talks about natural homosexuality like we have today. It only forbids homosexual rape.*" No, that's not true. That's called the "homosexual hermeneutic," and if you're not familiar with it, join us for our CDT on March 22.

For now, the point is this. We're all prone to use the Bible to say more than the Bible says, and at times less than it says. It's why we need to study the Book, first on our knees, prayerfully and humbly, and then *together*, with people who can challenge us, and hold us accountable. This is another reason why church is vital for Jesus-followers.

So, love neighbor, hate enemy? No. That's the natural approach to love.

## II. There's the supernatural approach to love (44-48).

As opposed to the natural approach, which comes naturally to us as sinful humans, the supernatural approach does not come naturally. It comes from God alone. He initiates this type of love ("For God so loved the world"). He also makes it possible for us to love in this way, and He does so through the One He sent, the One who is speaking to us, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus engages in four actions so we'll grasp this supernatural love in verses 44-48.

**A. Jesus commands us to love our enemies (44).** "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." This again is a command, not a suggestion. Once again these are shocking words coming from the mouth of King Jesus. Hate your enemies? No. Love them. And pray for them.

Actually He goes even further. What did Jesus say our responsibility is towards our enemies? If you have an ESV or NIV, you'll notice two responsibilities: love, and pray. If you have the KJV, you'll see two additional commands, "Love your enemies,

bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Why the difference? These same four responsibilities are listed in Luke 6:27-28. In the footnote the NIV Study Bible explains that the words "bless them that curse you, and do good to them that hate you" are not in the oldest and best Greek manuscripts of Matthew's text. Apparently, some scribe had Luke's gospel in mind, and inserted the words to Matthew's text to help us interpret our responsibility more fully.

It doesn't change the meaning. Jesus is clear. We do have four responsibilities towards our enemies (two in Matthew's account, all four in Luke's). Love them. Bless them. Do good to them. And pray for them.

This raises an important question. What does it mean to love? The Greek language has four different words for love:

\*Storge--family love and affection; love of a parent for a child, etc

\*Eros--sexual love; the passion of human love; associated with "lust"

\*Philia--warm, tender affection; love between warm and dear friends

\*Agape--Invincible goodwill; the commitment to do what's right towards another person; Regardless of how that person treats us, no matter if that person insults us, or injures us, or grieves us, we will seek nothing but his/her highest good. Agape love is not a feeling of the heart (although feelings may be involved). Agape love is a determination of the mind. In fact, we can only have Agape love when Jesus Christ enables us to conquer our natural tendency towards anger and bitterness, and replaces it with good will.

Agape is the word used in Matthew 5:44. We are responsible to do good towards our enemies. We are to "bless them that curse us." We are to "do good to them that hate us." We are to love all people with a love that is unconditional and indiscriminating.

Did not Jesus love us with an indiscriminating love? Indeed, He did. We read in Romans 5:6-8, 10, "For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. . . For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God. . ."

Jesus did not love us because we were friendly to Him. He loved us when we were His enemies, to the point that He died on a cruel cross for us. Do as I did, says Jesus to us. Love your enemies.

And pray for them too. For whom? For those who despitefully use you and persecute you. Barclay reminds us, "No man can pray for someone and still hate him."

One of the greatest manifestations of love is prayer. The more we really love someone, the more we'll pray for them. Why? Because when we pray we have access to Almighty God in behalf of that person. We can not only do what's best for that person ourselves, but in prayer we can ask God to do what's best for that person.

It's not easy to pray for someone who hates you and uses you. It's much easier to resent them and seek ways to retaliate against them.

Remember how Jesus responded at His crucifixion to the hatred of the angry Jewish mob, and the abuses of the hostile Roman soldiers? What did He do? He prayed for His tormentors. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)."

Bonhoeffer provides this insight, "Through the medium of prayer, we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God."

So who are we to love and pray for? Our neighbors? Sure, that's natural love. But our enemies too. That's the supernatural approach to love, because only God can make it happen. And He does, when His Son enters a person's life. The fruit of the Spirit is *love* (Gal 5:22).

Who are your enemies? Who are the people who are against you that God desires to love through you? Think about them for a moment. It's painful, isn't it? We'd rather not think about such people, let alone love and pray for them. But when King Jesus enters our lives, He enables us to do what the natural man could never do.

**B. Jesus commends the example of our Father (45).** "...so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

So why are we to love our enemies? Is it to merit God's favor? No. Loving our enemies does not earn our salvation and sonship. Rather it is the evidence of our salvation and sonship.

Jesus was a Jew. He spoke Aramaic. The Aramaic (and Hebrew) language was not rich in adjectives. So in place of adjectives, the people in Jesus' day would use the phrase "son of. . ." to modify a noun. For example, a son of peace was a peaceful man. A son of consolation (which is what Barnabas was called) is a consoling man. A son of God was a Godlike man.

When we chose to love our enemies, and pray for them, we are demonstrating character that is just like God's. Like Father, like son.

God does not discriminate with His love. Jesus illustrates this by pointing out two examples of what Calvin called "common grace". God's common grace is expressed not in the gift of salvation, but in the gifts of creation.

He makes the sun rise. He sends the rain. Who benefits from the sunshine each day? Only those that love God, or all mankind? Who benefits from the rainfall that waters the earth? Only Christians, or every inhabitant of planet earth?

I grew up in farm country in western Ohio. I knew a lot of farmers. Some were godly men. But many were evil men who blasphemed God's name, both with their lives and their words. But you know, when the sun came up in the morning, it hit the fields of the godless man just the same as that of his Christian neighbor. And when it rained, the soil of the godless man became just as muddy as the God-fearing man. Why was that? Because of God, and specifically because of God's common grace.

If God were not gracious, the planet would be empty today. God's love is an unconditional love. What kind of shape would the world be in if He loved only those who loved Him? What kind of shape would the world be in if we His children loved only those who loved us?

Many years ago while I was in seminary, Sherry and I were youth leaders in our local church. I'd been praying for growth, and that God would help our group to reach out to unsaved. One Wednesday evening, there was the answer. Two rough-looking Jr. High boys right off of the streets of Grand Rapids had come to our youth group meeting. I was excited. Later, after the meeting, I was talking with a parent of one of the regular youth members. Her comments let the air out of my sails when she said, "Those kids may be trouble. . . I'm not sure I want them around my daughter."

I didn't see a very good picture of our Father that night.

My fellow Jesus-followers, if we're serious about seeing people getting saved, then we're going to have to be willing to minister to people who need to be saved, and at times look like they need to be saved. We're going to have to learn how to love people we may feel uncomfortable around.

Notice the words "evil" and "unjust" in verse 45. Jesus says that certain people are evil and unjust. The fact that we're to love them doesn't mean we're ignorant of their

condition. They are evil and unjust and, apart from repenting and receiving Jesus, they're heading for an eternal hell, as we once were.

But we (those whom God has rescued) are to love them (those who need God to rescue them). At times we love them enough to talk about their evil and unjust condition, as we proclaim the gospel. But we do other things for them, too, like meet needs in their lives. Like our Father does.

Loving enemies isn't glamorous. It's messy at times. But we're never more like our Father than when we do. Like Father, like son.

Too many churches focus on reaching people just like themselves. They have an ingrown perspective, a love your neighbor perspective, but lack a love your enemy perspective.

What about us? There are a lot of evil people around us. Do they know we love them and are praying for them? Do they feel our love in tangible ways? May we always remember that evil people are not really the enemy, but are victims of The Enemy, as we once were. They need help. And we can provide that help.

**C. Jesus compares natural love with supernatural love (46-47).** "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Here's natural love, when you love those who love you, and greet your brothers. That's not necessarily easy to do, frankly. Sometimes even those closest to us hurt us, and we don't feel like loving them, and greeting them. But we do, and when we do, it's not spectacular. Even unregenerate people do that.

Jesus mentions tax collectors. They were corrupt men, hated and viewed as traitors by their own countrymen because they collaborated with the Romans. But what did they do? They formed their own little counter-culture. They stuck together. They supported each other. They loved each other. I'll scratch your back, if you'll scratch mine.

Nothing eye-catching about that. That's natural love. And if that's as far as our loves goes, we're giving the clear picture that we're no different from them, says Jesus.

Plummer said, "To return evil for good is devilish. To return good for good is human. To return good for evil is divine."

This brings us to Jesus' punchline in verse 48. "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

**D. Jesus calls us to be perfect (48).** Where did that come from? Is Jesus changing the subject, from loving enemies to being perfect? No, He's not changing the subject. The two commands go together. Love your enemies. Be perfect. They are two sides of the same coin.

How so? What's the connection? Notice that Jesus begins verse 48, "You therefore." By using that word *therefore* He's taking us back to verses 43-47, but really, all the way back to verse 20. Remember how He began this section?

Verse 20 "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

In verses 21 and following He uses six examples to show us the difference between the Pharisee's righteousness, which will take a person to hell, and the righteousness of the heart that Jesus has come to give. It's the difference between self-righteousness and saving righteousness, between natural righteousness, which a person

does in his own strength, and supernatural righteousness, which is God-like and God-produced.

You therefore must be perfect, says Jesus in verse 48. Perfect? How so? In your love, and in your righteousness.

Is Jesus suggesting we must attain sinless perfection? No.

1. *This is not sinlessness.* Remember what Jesus said as He began this sermon. He already told us in verses 3-6 that the type of people that meet God's approval (the "blessed") are those who are *poor in spirit* (that is, they realize their spiritual bankruptcy), those who *mourn* (specifically, mourn for their sin), those who are *meek*, and those who *hunger after righteousness* (that is, they realize that they haven't arrived).

No. He's not talking about sinlessness. The word "perfect" has a much fuller, positive connotation than we often think. If I say, "She made a perfect score on her test," it means, yes, she didn't answer any questions wrongly, but it also means that she mastered the material.

This word "perfect" connotes "completeness, wholeness." To say that something is "perfect" is to say that it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, designed, and made. If a person is perfect, in this sense, it means the person is complete, whole, spiritually mature.

So guys, you're working on a car and you need an open-ended wrench to remove a nut. So you try the 1/4" wrench. Nope, too small. Then the 1/2". Nope, too big. Then finally the 3/8", and you shout, "Perfect!" What do you mean? Are you saying you did a metal test and determined there are no imperfections in the metal? No. You're saying that the wrench fulfilled exactly the purpose for which you selected it.

So answer this. For what purpose did God create mankind? He tells us in His Word. The short answer is, *for His pleasure and glory* (Romans 11:36; Revelation 4:11). The longer answer, according to Genesis 1, is that He created us in *His image* (verses 26-27) so we could be *fruitful, fill the earth, and exercise dominion* over it (verse 28), all for His pleasure and glory.

But in Genesis 3, our first father and mother turned from the purpose for which God created them. Instead of living for God's pleasure and glory, they sinned. They broke His commands and went their own way and brought the tragic consequences of His curse upon themselves and the world.

So did God then abandon His purpose for creating mankind? No. How could He? He doesn't change. In Genesis 3 He continued to do what He set out to do, manifest His glory. Specifically, He began to make known the glory of His grace.

And so in His grace, instead of killing the man and his wife, He clothed them, and gave them a promise. He would send a Deliverer into the world who would reverse the curse and rescue a people who would live for the purpose for which they were created.

As you read the rest of the Bible you see the story unfold. In His grace, He chose a pagan man named Abram, said He would bless the world through that man, and did. How? He gave that man a miracle-son, Isaac, and through that son eventually formed a nation called Israel, and through that nation sent the Messiah.

And it's the Messiah who is now saying to us, "You therefore must be perfect." He's not telling us to be sinless. That's impossible, at least in this life. He's calling us back to our purpose. We are perfect when we fulfill the purpose for which we were created. Or to put it another way...

2. *This is a call to resemble God.* Notice Jesus' use of the word "as".  
"Be perfect, *as* your heavenly Father is perfect."

Our Father is perfect. He does all things for His pleasure and glory, and He never fails in that purpose. So you do that, says Jesus to His followers.

When Jesus commands us to be perfect, He is commanding us to be totally conformed to the purposes and character of God. God Himself is our standard. "Be holy as the Lord your God is holy (Lev 19:2; I Pet 1:16)."

You say, "That's my problem. I can't reach His standard." Nor can I.

So what do we do? What we're prone to do is lower the standard. If you set your standard low enough, you'll hit it every time. It's true in athletics. It's true in academics. It's true in religion.

So we start setting our own standard for what it means to be acceptable in God's sight. That was the Pharisees' problem. They were religious. They were more devoted to religious activity than anyone else. But they were heading for hell, and Jesus told them so, because their so-called righteousness was nothing more than *self-righteousness*.

My friend, lowering the standard isn't the answer. God Himself is the standard, and He doesn't change. Listen to Jesus. Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.

"How?" you ask. "How can I ever do that?" The answer is one word. Grace.

3. *This is made possible by the grace of the Father.* Notice the pronouns Jesus uses. "*You* therefore must be perfect, as *your* heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus is talking directly to His followers, to those who are God's children.

How did they become God's children? How does anyone become a child of God? Jesus doesn't answer that question in this passage. He does elsewhere. "You must be born again," He says to a religious man named Nicodemus (John 3:3-5).

How does that happen? "You must be born from above," says Jesus (John 3:3). In other words, it's by the grace of the Father, to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph 1:6).

This is our story, beloved. He called on us to repent (Matthew 4:17 "Repent, for the kingdom is at hand"), and He gave us that ability. He called on us to believe in His Son (John 1:12), and He gave us the faith to do just that. He has become our Father, by His grace, and for His glory.

So love your neighbor and hate your enemy? No, that's natural love and that's not for us. This is for us. Love your enemies. Supernatural love. And when we do that, we're behaving just like our Father. Perfectly. All to His glory.

Take Inventory: Let's ask ourselves these questions...

1. *Am I truly a child of God?* Don't rush past that question. Have you truly experienced the gracious, supernatural work of God the Father? Have you been born again? If so, God is your Father, so praise Him for His grace. If not, ask Him to save you. Receive His Son, and He will.

2. *Do I resemble my Father in the way I treat people?* This is the standard. Like Father, like son. Are we treating evil people the way our Father does?

3. *Am I allowing the Lord Jesus to change me?* "Ask," He says, "and it will be given to you (Matthew 7:7)."

**Closing Hymn:** #183 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus" (all three verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message was entitled, "*Loving Our Enemies: Like Father, Like Son.*" Take time as a group to re-read this section from the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:43-48. What's your first impression when you hear these words from Jesus?

2. What do we learn from verse 43 about how people often view love? What do we learn from verse 43 about how people at times use the Bible?

3. What did Jesus say we are supposed to do for our enemies (see verse 44), and why (see verse 45)?

4. What does Jesus teach us about love in verses 46-47? What are some practical implications for how we respond to what's happening in our country at this time?

5. Is it really possible to put Jesus' command in verse 48 into practice? If so, what is required? After discussing, spend some time as a group praying about implications.