

There was a man named Doug Nichols who went to India to be a missionary. While he was just starting to study the language, he became infected with tuberculosis and had to be housed in a sanitarium in India.

It was not a good place to be. It was not clean and conditions were difficult because there were so many sick people there, but Doug decided to do the best he could in that situation. So, he took a bunch of Christian books and tracts and tried to witness to the other patients in the sanitarium, but when he tried to pass out tracts, they were rejected. No one wanted them. He tried to hand out books, but no one would take them. He tried to witness, but he was handicapped because of his inability to communicate in their language, and he felt so discouraged.

There he was. Due to his illness, he would be there a long time, but it seemed like the work that he had been sent to do would not be done because no one would listen to him.

Because of his tuberculosis, every night at about two o'clock he would wake up with chronic coughing that wouldn't quit. One night during a coughing spell, he noticed across the aisle an old man trying to get out of bed. He said the man would roll himself up into a little ball and teeter back and forth, trying to create the momentum to get up and stand on his feet, but he just couldn't do it. He was too weak. Finally, after several attempts the old man laid back and wept.

The next morning Doug understood why the man was weeping. He was trying to get up to go to the restroom and didn't have enough strength to do it. So, his bed was a mess, and there was a smell in the air. The other patients made fun of the old man. The nurses came to clean up his bed, and they weren't kind to him, either. In fact, one of them even slapped him in the face. Doug said that the old man just laid there and cried.

That next night about two o'clock, Doug started coughing again. He looked across the way, and there was the old man trying to get out of bed once more. He really didn't want to do it, but somehow Doug managed to get up and walk across the aisle to help the old man stand.

The old man was too weak to walk and very light in weight, so Doug took him in his arms and carried him like a baby to the restroom which was nothing more than a dirty hole in the floor. Doug stood behind him and cradled him in his arms as he took care of himself. Then Doug carried the old man back to his bed and laid him down. As he turned to leave, the old man reached up and grabbed Doug's face, pulled him close, kissed his cheek, and said what he thought was "Thank you."

Doug said, the next morning, there were patients waiting when he awoke, and they asked if they could read some of the books and tracts that he had brought, and others had questions about the God he worshiped. In the following weeks, Doug gave out all the literature that he had brought, and many of the doctors and nurses and patients in that sanitarium came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Doug said, “Now what did I do? I didn’t preach a sermon. I couldn’t even communicate in their language. I didn’t have a great lesson to teach them. I didn’t have wonderful things to offer. All I did was take an old man to the restroom.” (From a sermon by Scott Kircher, “The Challenge of Radical Love”)

That was love on display – and given the difficult circumstances and conditions, in some ways, it was love the hard way, and that’s where Jesus takes us next in His *Sermon on the Mount* where little by little, He dives deeper into matters of the heart and gives us a pattern to follow in how we are to think about our personal relationships with others.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 5** and let’s pick up where we left off with **verse 38** where Jesus says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’”

I think we have all heard that phrase before, and so did the crowd who were listening to Jesus – it was taught to them by the Jewish religious leaders, and it comes from **Leviticus 24**. Let me read it to you beginning with **verse 17**.

¹⁷ If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death.

¹⁸ The one who takes the life of an animal shall make it good, life for life. ¹⁹ If a man injures his neighbor, just as he has done, so it shall be done to him:

²⁰ fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; just as he has injured a man, so it shall be inflicted on him.

This is a passage that requires some background and some context. If you recall from biblical history, the Israelites made their way out of Egypt after 400 long years of bondage – but now free – a new nation, the Israelites needed their own standards and principles for a system of civil and criminal justice – where justice was really served, retribution and repayment was fair, and punishment actually fit the crime. Moses gave these principles to govern the wheels of justice in this new nation, to prevent the authorities from handing down excessive punishments, and to deter people from engaging in certain behaviors knowing there will be consequences.

So, Moses gave these principles as a basis for their system of justice, but these were not intended to govern personal relationships and that's where the Jewish religious leaders went wrong. They misinterpreted and misapplied these principles to allow for personal retaliation – it became a license to hurt others just as badly as they hurt you – and it left no room for grace and mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus was well aware of this *tit-for-tat* teaching by the religious leaders, Jesus knew what the crowd was thinking – it was their God-given right to exact revenge, but beginning with **verse 39**, Jesus gives them something radical to think about from God's point of view. He says,

³⁹ “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. ⁴¹ Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.”

In this passage we got *slaps*, and *suits*, and *solicitations*, and a first glance it seems that in all of this, Jesus is asking His listeners to be doormats, but understand that Jesus is sharing the kingdom principles of grace and mercy and forgiveness in contrast to their understanding of personal vengeance. Jesus knew that the *right* responses to the *wrong* behaviors – unnatural as it might seem, could potentially lead to repentance and reconciliation.

So, right out the gate, Jesus says, **do not resist an evil person** – meaning revenge and retaliation is not a personal right, and then He gives some relatable examples of what He means to not resist an evil person.

Jesus begins and says **whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also**, and let me say at the onset, that Jesus is not talking about self-defense. Jesus is not telling us to “*roll over and play dead*” while someone is beating the snot out of us.

As Charles Swindoll explains, “*Jesus is not telling us to be submissive victims of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, rape, terrorism, murder, or other threats of true harm. It's noble to bite your tongue when some guy insults you in the checkout line, or to refuse to lean on the horn when an aggressive driver cuts you off in traffic, or to take a step back when an upset mother slaps you for scolding her out-of-control child. But it's deplorable to sit back passively as a bully injures a defenseless victim, or to refuse to defend your children if a kidnapper tries to drag*

them off, or to raise the flag of surrender if an army of terrorists rolls across your nation's border."

So, in perspective, the words "**whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also**" is not about self-defense or coming to the defense of another, instead, in the context of personal relationships, Jesus is forbidding us from responding to evil with evil.

Now, if you notice, Jesus mentions the **right cheek** which tells us something. Although it's not stated in the Bible, there seems to be an assumption that everybody is right-handed, and if there are those who are left-handed, then the Bible tends to point that out. For example, in the book of **Judges**, the tribe of Benjamin had these left-handed men who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss. These guys were left-handed, it was unusual, and it was pointed out. Anyway, for someone to slap another on the *right cheek* with their *right hand* as assumed, then we would describe that as a backhand. That's what's being described here, and in the Jewish culture, a backhand was not intended to cause physical harm – it was intended as an insult, and Jesus says in so many words:

"I know what you've been taught. I know what's in your heart. I know what you naturally want to do, but don't do what you want to do. Refuse to retaliate and get even – instead, show you are My followers – show you are different by being different and overcome their insult with your grace and mercy and forgiveness."

That's some radical teaching there, especially for people like us who tend to bristle up and say "*Well, I got my rights*" but Jesus might ask, "*What's more important – your rights or potentially a right relationship by loving the hard way?*"

Then, Jesus moves a lawsuit involving a piece of clothing, and to understand that, we need some background. Under the Old Testament borrowing laws, a poor person who borrowed money could provide their shirt as collateral because his clothing might be all he had. So, a lender could literally *take the shirt off the back* of the borrower until the loan was paid back.

But what if the lender or the borrower violated the loan agreement? Well, this is where a lawsuit in court might come into play to deal with the dispute, but here Jesus says something stunning: "*Before you get to court, if anyone wants to sue you and take away your shirt, let him have your coat too*" which would've been unthinkable to a Jew. **Does Jesus expect His followers to walk around naked?** No, I hope not, but to His point – we should not be so attached to our stuff that we

personally retaliate and seek revenge against someone who takes something from us. Instead let it go and thank God, that for you, life is far more important than stuff.

Jesus continues and says, **“Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two,** and I need to explain this. The Romans had adopted a practice from the Persians whereby if a soldier put his sword or his spear tip on a person’s shoulder, the Roman soldier could infringe on a person’s freedom and force them to carry something for the distance of a mile.

In Jesus’ day, this practice was considered the right of the Roman government and the Jews resented it, and if you recall, this is exactly what happened to Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry the cross of Jesus to Golgotha. Simon was forced to go where he did not want to go and to carry a burden he did not want to carry, and for us, instead of retaliating, we too must be willing to do the same.

Lastly, Jesus says, **“Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you”** and this speaks to a heart of generosity. Instead of greed and selfishness – especially towards an evil person – be sacrificially generous and give to those who have a genuine need.

So, thus far, the principles that Jesus has shared seem completely upside down from what comes naturally – from what the listeners had been taught – if an evil person insults you and offends you, don’t retaliate. If they compel you to do something difficult or ask you to give something sacrificially – then do more and give more than they ask. That’s hard – its love the hard way.

Now, Jesus is not done, and He dives into something that everyone likely assumed was taught in God’s Word. He says in **verse 43,**

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’”

This is what the listeners had been taught all of their lives. **Love your neighbor** – that’s a command from Moses that goes way back – but **hate your enemy** – and that isn’t found anywhere in God’s Word. You won’t find it. It was added by the Jewish religious leaders who reasoned that if you love your neighbor then it only makes sense that you must hate your enemies – but God never said that – and again, this is about personal relationships – this is about you loving your enemies the way God loves your enemies.

So, beginning with **verse 44**, Jesus sets the record straight from God's point of view and He says,

⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Mosab Hassan Yousef grew up as a Muslim. From an early age, he studied the Quran, memorized its teachings, said the daily prayers, and followed the way of Islam as faithfully as he could. In that respect, he was like many other young men growing up in Palestinian towns in the West Bank, with one important exception: His father was one of the founders of Hamas.

You wouldn't think he would be a likely candidate for Christian conversion, but the ways of God are beyond human explanation. In his book "Son of Hamas", Yousef tells how he met a man who gave him a New Testament. Because of his interest in religious matters, he decided to read it to see for himself what it said. Naturally, he started with Matthew, and soon he encountered the "Sermon on the Mount" and there he got his first unfiltered exposure to the pure teachings of Jesus. It blew him away.

He couldn't get away from the revolutionary nature of Jesus' teaching, and one particular point stayed in his mind – love your enemies. These three words so captured his heart he simply couldn't get away from them.

Yousef said, "All the other religions say, 'Love your friends' or 'Love your neighbors,' but only Jesus says, 'Love your enemies.'"

Love your enemies – your personal enemies – those who have turned against you, that's the context here, and just so you know, that word *love* is not an emotional, warm fuzzy feeling kind of love – this is a love of the will, it's a one-way, no-strings-attached, undeserved kind of love that flows from grace and mercy.

Now granted, nothing seems more natural and justifiable than to hate those who hate us, but here Jesus turns everything upside down and gives us a better way.

The world says, "Get angry and get even with those who **persecute you**," but Jesus says, "**Pray for them.**"

When German pastor Martin Niemoller was arrested by the Nazis in World War II, he prayed daily from his prison cell for his captors. Other prisoners asked why he prayed for those who were his enemies, and he replied, “Do you know anyone who needs your prayers more than your enemies?” **But what if you hate the person you are praying for?** Tell that to the Lord. He won’t be surprised. “Lord, I hate this person, but You already know that. I ask You to love this person through me because I can’t do it in my own. I ask You for a love I don’t have and can’t seem to produce.” God will not turn you away when you come with an honest heart, admitting you need His love to flow through you.

The world says, “Don’t waste your time and your effort loving an evil person,” but Jesus says, “Do what they least expect. Catch them completely off guard. Love them and bless them anyway. Do right by those who have done you wrong.”

The world says, “Show them who’s the boss” but Jesus says, “Show them your **Father who is in heaven**”

Notice, Jesus didn’t say that His followers should love the lifestyles of their enemies, love their beliefs, love the way they treat others – no, instead they are called to love people by showing the same blessings of grace and mercy that God bestowed upon them. And as a reminder for us, Paul said,

But God demonstrated His own love towards us, that even while we were still yet enemies of God – still in our sin, Christ died for us.

No matter how hard this teaching of Jesus might be – especially when it comes to loving the hard way as He described, none of us can get past the truth of how much God loved us – even at our very worst. Without excuse, that’s our motivation to do the same.

Now, in **verse 48**, Jesus summarizes everything that He has said with these words:

Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Well, that’s a wake-up call, **isn’t it?** Listen, this is not about salvation – this is about kingdom living, and in light of all that Jesus has said – here’s your standard. Measure yourself by your Father, and if want to be more like your Father who is perfect and complete in all His ways, if you want to mature, if you want to live up to the goal and the purpose for which you have been created, then graciously love your personal enemies, for in that way, you are so much more like Him.

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