

Small Group Study Guide

Turning Enemies in to Neighbours

Series: God's Stump Speech

Matthew 5:38-48

From Sunday March 7, 2021

Take a moment to pray for the Lord to still your mind, as well as direct your thoughts, conversation and response to the study.

Appetizer:

Do you think hockey should ban fighting? Do you care?

Has anyone ever fought in a war or have a relative that has fought in a war? What have they expressed about their involvement in war? How did they perceive the "other side?"

Main Course:

Have someone read Matthew 5:38-42

Question to discuss: What is the law of retribution? How does that play out in our society (our laws, court systems, prison systems, etc)?

Jesus' answer to justice in the Sermon on the mount is as radical today as it was then. He suggests an alternative to retribution. When faced with an injustice like being insulted, or being sued, or being forced into labour, or being called on to give, he does not suggest that we should slap back, or hire a lawyer, or go on strike, or shoo someone away.

It seems that Jesus is suggesting that we should live in the indignity of the insult, give everything off our back when being sued, work harder than required by unjust managers, and give to those that may not even deserve it.

Question: Does Jesus way of doing justice work? What are the challenges with it?

Question: Are there elements of "love-manipulated justice" that we see in our system of law today?

Have someone read Matthew 5:43-48

Pastor Jeff told a story how Jarred McKenna, a Christian social justice worker, got involved in non-violence activities. When he was being mugged, instead of running or fighting, he sought to make a friend, and in turn, got a chance to share God's Word with the person that was violent towards him.

Discussion: How does this story make you feel? Is the choice to turn an enemy into a friend a legitimate alternative to justice?

Jesus talks about loving our enemies the same way that God loves all people (he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous).

Discussion: Does anyone have a story in which they "loved their enemies and prayed for those who persecuted them"? What was the result?

Dessert:

One of the great challenges of Jesus' "beyond retribution" justice strategy is the part where loving enemies is a sign of our Christian maturity (be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect).

We can't ignore the fact that we are called to love our enemies, which means by implication, to be present with them. Obviously, in cases of abuse or physical harm, running is a legitimate response. But love requires some kind of engagement. When we don't love our enemies, we haven't learned what God is all about. These are challenging words.

Group Activity:

1. Take a moment to answer the question, "Who is my enemy?" Write it down on a piece of paper. Be honest with yourself.
2. Once people have been given some time to write, get them to ask themselves the question, "How will I love them as a neighbour?"

The Truth and Reconciliation commission in Canada (and earlier, in South Africa) are an interesting case study on restorative justice. Encourage one another to read through the Commission's Call to Action this week as a practice of seeing what it's like to seek justice from a people who have faced injustice.

You can find it here:

http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Take a moment to pray for one another, especially when it comes to finding the strength to “pray for those who persecute us.” Everyone has a different situation that they are dealing with; we cannot simply stand up to justice in a Jesus way without the Spirit’s strength.