DEVOTIONAL · 21 MAY 2026

Devotional

Church & Community, Discipleship, Person of Christ

What does it mean to love our neighbours — truly, sacrificially, without counting the cost? This week we sit with one of Jesus' most demanding and most beautiful teachings, drawn from his Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6. Day by day, we will follow Jesus as he presses deeper into what genuine love looks like: love for enemies, love without strings, love that overcomes evil rather than returning it.

These are not aspirational ideals for the especially devoted. Jesus addresses them to every person who claims to follow him. And yet he does not leave us to manage them alone. Each day's reflection moves from the challenge of the command toward the power of the gospel that makes obedience possible — because the same Lord who calls us to love is the one who pours his own love into us by his Spirit.

Day 1 — A Love That Costs Something

Luke 6:27-28

> *But to those of you who will listen, I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

Romans 12:21

> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

There is a kind of love that comes easily — the love we offer to people who are kind to us, who return our calls, who remember our birthdays. Most of us are quite capable of that love. But Jesus steps into the crowd and calls his followers to something altogether different: a love that reaches toward enemies, toward those who have hurt us, spoken against us, or treated us with contempt.

This is not a command for sentimental feelings or vague goodwill. Jesus is relentlessly concrete. He says *do good* — boots on the ground, hands at work, moving toward the very person it would be most natural to avoid or punish. And the discomfort we feel when we sit honestly with those words is a sign that we have heard them correctly. They are meant to unsettle us.

Yet the discomfort is also an invitation. When we notice the gap between the love Jesus commands and the love we actually manage, that gap is not meant to crush us — it is meant to draw us back to him. He is the one who can do in us what we cannot do by ourselves. The same Lord who gives the command is the one who empowers obedience.

Reflect: Who in your neighbourhood or community is it hardest for you to show genuine kindness to, and what would one concrete act of goodness toward them look like this week?

Day 2 — Blessing Instead of Cursing

Luke 6:28

> *bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

Acts 7:59-60

> *While they were stoning him, Stephen appealed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Falling on his knees, he cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

One of the most radical things Jesus asks of his followers is not an action at all — it is a prayer. Pray for those who abuse you. Bless those who curse you. This cuts deeply because our natural impulse when we have been wronged is to want justice to fall on the person who hurt us. The honest cry of the human heart is often closer to the imprecatory psalms — *God, deal with them* — than it is to intercession.

But Jesus redirects that energy entirely. He calls us to pray for our enemies' blessing — and the deepest blessing we could ever wish on anyone is that they would know the mercy and forgiveness of God. To pray that prayer sincerely is to want for our enemy what God has given to us. It is an act of profound generosity.

History bears witness to the power of this kind of prayer. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was being killed, he cried out for his persecutors to be forgiven rather than punished. That otherworldly response left an indelible mark on those who witnessed it. Enemy-love, expressed even in prayer, has a way of breaking cycles of hatred that nothing else can reach. It begins to cool our own bitterness and soften our hearts toward the very people we find most difficult.

Reflect: Is there someone you have been nursing resentment toward? What would it mean to begin praying genuinely for their good — even today?

Day 3 — Overcoming Evil with Good

Luke 6:29-30

> *If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone takes your cloak, do not withhold your tunic as well. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.*

Romans 12:17-21

> *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Carefully consider what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone. Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written: "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord." On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For in so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

1 Peter 2:23

> *When they heaped abuse on Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats, but entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.*

Retaliation feels like justice. When someone wrongs us, the instinct to strike back seems not only natural but fair. And yet Jesus points to a different logic entirely — one where evil is not matched and escalated but absorbed and quenched, like a sponge drawing out poison before it spreads further. Non-retaliation, in Jesus' vision, is not weakness. It is a form of power that the world has rarely seen.

Jesus taught this not as a distant ideal but as something he was about to demonstrate in the most costly way imaginable. He went to the cross without retaliating — absorbing the hatred, the injustice, and the violence of those he came to save. And what did that non-retaliatory love accomplish? Nothing less than the salvation of the world. The same pattern has played out across the centuries wherever his followers have lived it: communities transformed, enemies disarmed, the kingdom advancing through self-giving rather than self-protection.

It is worth noting that this teaching does not make Jesus' followers doormats. Loving our enemies sometimes requires us to stand firmly against evil — to name what is wrong, to seek justice, to protect the vulnerable. But when we do those things, Jesus calls us to do them from a radically different place: not out of vindictiveness, but out of genuine love for the person who has done the harm, desiring even their repentance and restoration.

Reflect: Where in your relationships or community have you been caught in a cycle of retaliation or cold withdrawal? What might it look like to break that cycle with an act of unexpected goodness?

Day 4 — Love That Expects Nothing Back

Luke 6:32-35

> *If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.*

Luke 6:36

> *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Judging Others (Matthew 7:1–6|MAT 7:1-6 ; Romans 14:1–12|ROM 14:1-12)*

Matthew 5:44-45

> *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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.*

Most of our love has strings attached. We give, but we keep a quiet account of what we are owed. We serve, but we notice when our service goes unappreciated. We help, but we tend to help people who are in a position to help us back. Jesus names this pattern plainly and without flattery: even those who have never heard his name do the same thing. Transactional love is simply human nature.

But Jesus calls his followers to something qualitatively different — a love that gives to those who cannot repay, that is generous to those who will never be able to return the favour: the very sick, the elderly, the poor, the orphan, the stranger. This kind of love is so unusual that when the early church practised it in the Roman world — staying to care for plague victims when everyone else fled, taking in abandoned infants, feeding the poor who had no social capital to offer — it astonished the surrounding culture. People wanted to know what made these communities different.

The answer Jesus gives is straightforward: this love is family resemblance. When we love freely and without expectation of return, we look like our Father in heaven, who is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. We are not generating this love from within ourselves; we are passing on what we have already received. God has not loved us because we were loveable or because we could repay him. He loves us in order to make us new — and that freely given love, received deeply, begins to flow outward toward those around us.

Reflect: Who in your neighbourhood or community is unlikely to be able to give you anything back — and how might you offer them something concrete this week, simply because your Father has given freely to you?

Day 5 — Empowered to Love

Luke 6:35-36

> *But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Judging Others (Matthew 7:1–6|MAT 7:1-6 ; Romans 14:1–12|ROM 14:1-12)*

Romans 5:5

> *And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. Christ's Sacrifice for the Ungodly (John 3:1–21|JHN 3:1-21)*

Galatians 2:20

> *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*

By the end of a week of sitting with Jesus' commands, the honest response of most hearts is something like: I cannot do this. And that response is not a failure — it is the beginning of wisdom. The love Jesus describes in Luke 6 is genuinely impossible for us to generate from our own resources. Our default settings are either retaliation or careful calculation of what we will get in return. Admitting that is not despair; it is honesty.

But here the gospel breaks in with the best possible news. God does not stand at the top of the mountain calling us to climb up to him in our own strength. Through Jesus, he has come down to us. On the cross, he absorbed our failures, our selfishness, and our bitter reciprocity, and he made a way for us to be adopted into a new family — his family — with a new capacity for love that comes not from us but from him. The Spirit of God, poured into our hearts, is the very love of the Father becoming active in us.

This means that when we feel too afraid to love generously — afraid we will lose too much, afraid we will be taken advantage of — we can look upward rather than inward. We have a Father who sees every need and promises to provide. We have a Spirit who can do in us what we cannot do for ourselves. And we have an eternal horizon that puts every present cost in perspective: what we give up in this life for the sake of love is not lost but invested in something that will outlast everything we could have held onto. Jesus calls us not to suffer pointlessly, but to participate in the renewal of the world — neighbourhood by neighbourhood, person by person, one act of sacrificial love at a time.

Reflect: Where do you feel most powerless to love the way Jesus calls you to? How might you bring that specific weakness to God in prayer this week, asking him to do what you cannot?

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