STUDY GUIDE · 13 MAY 2026

Love Without Limits: Neighbour-Love and the Way of the Cross

Justice

What does it actually look like to love your neighbour when it costs you something? It is easy to love those who love us back — as one voice in these sermons notes, even our affection for our own children has a biological current running through it. But God's love, revealed in Christ, moves in a radically different direction: "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" — dying for enemies, not allies [1]. That is the standard Jesus sets before his followers, and it is far higher than mere niceness or social goodwill.

This study guide works through several interlocking themes drawn from a series of sermons: the call to love neighbours and enemies through genuine self-sacrifice; the temptation to retaliate or hold onto bitterness when we are wronged; the freedom that comes from entrusting justice to God; and the reconciling work of Christ that both demands and empowers this kind of love [2]. Because the early church was transformed by the "leaven of Jesus' mercy," ordinary believers began caring for the sick, the poor, and even their enemies — not out of duty, but out of wonder at what God had done for them [3].

Throughout these pages you will be invited to sit with hard questions: Where are you nursing a grudge rather than pursuing peace? What would it look like to take one concrete step toward someone who has wronged you? And how does the cross — the place where justice and mercy

meet — free you to love without keeping score [4]? This is not comfortable territory, but it is the very ground where genuine, neighbour-shaped love is grown [5].

Genuine neighbour-love absorbs hostility without retaliating — and that costly posture is made possible only by entrusting justice to God.

The sermons are candid about how hard this is: "Sometimes the hardest part about following Jesus isn't loving your neighbour — it's having the faith not to retaliate when your neighbour wrongs you." [1] Every human instinct pulls toward getting even, controlling the narrative, or at least nursing the bitterness in private. But the pilgrim's way, modelled on Christ, is different. Jesus himself — reviled, lied about, betrayed — "did not revile in return… but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." [2]

Practically, this means asking hard diagnostic questions: *Have I let bitterness take root? Am I secretly celebrating my enemy's downfall? Am I feeding the conflict even while praying for peace?* [1] It also means accepting that your name may never be cleared in this life — and releasing that ache to God who sees, and who will act. [2] The early church took this so seriously that by the third century, Bishop Cyprian was urging his congregation that "one might become perfect" by "overcoming evil with good and practising a merciful kindness like that of God, loving his enemies as well." [3] That leaven, rooted in the gospel, changed the ancient world — not through power, but through costly, self-giving love. [3]

The first step need not be heroic. As one preacher puts it, Jesus is not necessarily calling you to *die* for your enemy today — he is asking what *one thing* you could do. And there is something profound that happens when that first step is taken: rather than endlessly replaying the grievance, the act of love begins to cool the bitterness and move the heart toward compassion. [4]

- What does it reveal about your heart when you notice yourself secretly rehearsing a conflict rather than releasing it to God — and what would it look like to trade that rehearsal for a concrete, single act of good toward the person who wronged you?
- Contrast Jesus' teaching — 'do not retaliate; overcome evil with good' — with the instinct that retaliation restores fairness: where does that instinct break down, and what does the cross suggest is the truer path to justice?

The power to love sacrificially — even toward enemies — flows not from willpower but from standing in awe of how God first loved *us* while we were still his enemies.

The ancient world did not admire mercy — pity was considered a character defect, and compassion was thought unnatural. [1] What changed that world was not a moral campaign but a community of people who had been undone by a single, staggering fact: God had crossed the battlefield to die for his enemies. [2] As one preacher puts it, we have stories of soldiers dying for brothers in arms, parents giving their lives for children — but "do we have stories of enemies running across the battlefield to save one another? No. We have revenge films." [2] The gospel is the exception that rewrites the rule.

This is why the sermons locate the engine of neighbour-love not in duty but in wonder. When you come before Christ and let the mercy revealed in him actually land — "be transformed in awe by the mercy revealed in him" — his love begins to change you from the inside out and *empower* you toward mercy and compassion for others. [3] The Holy Spirit pours into believers "the love of God" described in 1 Corinthians 13: patient, kind, not irritable or resentful, bearing all things. [4] That is not a standard to strain toward on your own; it is the natural fruit of a life saturated in the gospel.

Practically, the call is modest and immediate: Jesus is not asking you to die for your enemy today. He is asking what *one thing* you could do. [1] Taking that first step — acting in love rather than

holding onto the grievance — begins to cool bitterness and move the heart toward compassion, little by little. [1] The early church discovered this at scale: leavened by the mercy of Jesus, ordinary believers began caring for strangers, the sick, the poor, and even their persecutors — not out of philosophical duty, but because they had received exactly that love themselves. [5]

- What does it stir up in you to hear that God died for his enemies — not his allies — and that this is the *standard* he now sets before you?
- Think of the specific person on your mind right now: what is one concrete, small act of love you could offer them this week, and what does your resistance (or readiness) to do it reveal about where you are placing your trust?

Reconciliation with a neighbour or enemy is not the result of straining harder — it is freed up when bitterness is surrendered at the cross, the only place where justice and mercy can simultaneously meet.

The preacher in these sermons puts it with disarming directness: true love toward an enemy works "like a sponge that just goes out there absorbing the hatred and the evil and quenching it and letting it continue and carry on no further." [1] That image cuts against every instinct for self-protection. Yet it is exactly the shape of love Jesus demands — and models. He did not retaliate, did not threaten, but "continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." [2]

What makes this kind of absorbing, non-retaliating love even imaginable is the cross. As one preacher shares from his own fractured relationship with his father: "The only place where justice and mercy can meet, where bitterness can die, where forgiveness can live, where love can flourish, is at the cross." [3] Standing before that reality meant seeing not only the wrong done to him but also his own bitterness, pride, and the walls he had built around his heart. The cross did not erase the need for confrontation or justice — but it decisively changed the spirit in which those things were pursued: "in love rather than in anger, in full view of the cross." [3]

History confirms what personal experience illustrates. When the early church was leavened by this mercy, ordinary believers began doing what the surrounding culture considered irrational — loving people outside their own circle, even those who opposed them. Bishop Cyprian captured the ethos plainly: *"there is nothing remarkable in cherishing merely our own people… but that one might become perfect, one should do something more… overcoming evil with good and practising a merciful kindness like that of God, loving his enemies as well."* [4] That transformation was never a matter of willpower; it was the overflow of people who had stood at the cross and seen what it cost God to reconcile his own enemies. [1]

- How does the image of the cross as the place 'where justice and mercy meet, where bitterness can die and forgiveness can live' reframe the way you have been thinking about a rupture in one of your own relationships — and what would it change if you believed that God's justice truly covers both parties?
- What if the first step toward someone who has hurt you is not an act of heroism but simply the willingness to stop rehearsing the grievance — and what, practically, might that one small act of non-retaliation look like for you this week?

Conclusion

The way of neighbour-love traced through this study is not, in the end, a technique or a moral programme — it is the overflow of people who have been undone by a single, staggering reality: that while we were God's enemies, Christ crossed the battlefield and died for us [1]. Every thread we have followed comes back to that point. The refusal to retaliate, the willingness to release justice to God, the courage to take one small step toward someone who has wounded us, the freedom found when bitterness is surrendered at the cross [2] [3] — none of these are achievements we strain toward in isolation. They are the fruit, slowly and sometimes painfully ripened, of standing before the mercy of God and letting it actually land [4]. As the Spirit pours the love of God

into our hearts [5], ordinary believers find themselves doing what the ancient world considered irrational: loving strangers, caring for enemies, absorbing hostility without passing it on [6]. That leaven changed a world then, and it is the same leaven at work now, in you. The clock is ticking toward a day when every injustice will be set right and every act of hidden faithfulness brought to light [7]. Until then, you are not alone, you are not forgotten, and you are not without the resources you need — for the native soil of a transformed life is nothing less than a living relationship with the God of mercy [8].

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