

Against the Grain: Retaliate With Love

Introduction (5 minutes)

This study explores Jesus's radical teaching on loving enemies and non-retaliation from Matthew 5:38-48, examining how fear reveals our enemies and how Jesus calls us to respond with radical generosity and love.

Central Thesis: Our homes must be embassies of God's kingdom where we identify our enemies through our fears and respond not by retaliating in kind, but by retaliating with love.

Opening Reflection: September 11, 2001

Most of us remember exactly where we were and how we felt:

- Sadness
- Anger
- Fear
- Hatred
- Pride
- **Vengeance**

Not just justice—vengeance. Wanting people to pay, to suffer.

Personal confession: "I wish I could say that was the only time my heart has been filled with vengeance, but it's probably not. Every time someone hurts me, disappoints me, threatens me—I feel that twinge of anger and maybe even vengeance."

I. Who Are Your Family's Enemies? (10 minutes)

A. The Challenge

Jesus's command: Love your enemies (Matthew 5:44)

The problem: How do we identify our family's enemies?

First attempts:

- "We don't have any enemies"
- "We don't hate anybody"
- "We love everybody"

If that's true: Then it's pretty hard to do what Jesus tells you to do, isn't it?

B. Questions That Don't Work

Who don't we like?: "Well, we don't dislike anybody"

Who doesn't like us?: Hard to identify

Who do we hate?: "We don't hate anybody. We love everybody."

C. The Question That Reveals: Who Do We Fear?

The key question: Who do you fear? Who does your family fear?

This reveals our enemies: The people we fear are often the people Jesus is talking about when He says "love your enemies."

D. Types of Fear

Fear of physical harm:

- People who might hurt you
- People who might hurt people like you

Fear of financial harm:

- "If these people get their way, I will suffer financially"
- "If this person gets what they're after, I'm going to lose what I have"
- "If that person is elected or becomes a leader, I'll lose"

Fear of unwanted change:

- "These people are going to change something I like"
- "These people will change the way things are"
- "I like things the way they are and they're going to ruin it"

Fear of preventing change:

- "These people will keep things from changing"
- "I want things to change and they're going to stop it"

E. Categories of Fear

Who might you fear?:

- People of a certain political party
- People of a certain political ideology
- People on the right or people on the left
- People that think a certain way
- People of a certain ethnicity
- People of a certain nationality
- People of a certain religion (Muslims, atheists, etc.)

Important clarification: "I'm not here to say your fears are unfounded. Maybe your fears are well-founded. Maybe the people you fear might end up doing the very thing you're afraid they might do."

The real question: What does Jesus say you should do with the people you're afraid of? How does Jesus tell you to treat the people you're afraid of?

Discussion Question: Who do you fear? What group of people makes you anxious about the future?

II. An Eye for an Eye: Understanding the Law (10 minutes)

A. The Text (Matthew 5:38-39a)

Read together: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil."

B. The Purpose of "Eye for Eye"

Part of the Law of Moses: This was civil law that God put in place through Moses.

Sounds like vengeance: But it actually existed to **curtail** retaliation, not **condone** it.

Important: This law existed to curtail retaliation rather than condone retaliation.

Not to legalize revenge: It was to **limit** revenge

- To limit the consequences of a crime
- So the punishment wouldn't exceed the crime

Examples:

- If someone kills your goat, you can't kill them
- If someone takes your cow, you can't kill their brother
- The punishment for a crime cannot exceed the crime

C. What This Reveals About Human Nature

The fact that this had to be law: Reveals human character and nature

How retaliation actually works:

- We don't just want to get even
- We want them to suffer **more** than we suffered
- We want them to **pay**
- We don't just want them to pay back what they did
- We want them to pay **more**

Human tendency: Not just to even the scales, but to one-up the other person

D. The Book of Judges

Read the book of Judges: You'll see this is human character

- Somebody does something bad to you

- You not only do the same thing back
- You do **worse**
- Then it starts a cycle that never ends

The purpose of these laws: Not to condone retaliation, but to curtail retaliation

- So a judge, a court, those in charge would ensure the punishment never exceeded the crime
- Because human nature says: "If you wrong me, I'm going to wrong you back even worse"

Nothing could be more carnal, more natural: Than that sort of feeling

Have you ever felt that way?: Retaliation, revenge, vengeance, anger

- Afraid that if I don't pay them back
- Afraid that if I don't give them worse than they gave me
- Then I'm going to lose everything I have
- So I have to make them pay

E. Vengeance Belongs to the Lord

Throughout the Law and Prophets: Reminders that vengeance doesn't belong to you

Romans 12:19: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

There's a time: For a court of law to step in and punish a criminal

But vengeance doesn't belong to you: It belongs to the Lord

Why?: Because we're not very good at doling out vengeance

- We don't just want an eye for an eye
- We want to give them worse than they gave to us

Discussion Question: Why is it so natural for us to want revenge that exceeds the original offense?

III. Jesus's Radical Alternative: Don't Resist Evil (15 minutes)

A. The Higher Standard

Jesus raises the bar: For those who would be citizens of His kingdom

- For those who would have households that are little embassies
- Little outposts of the kingdom of God in our neighborhoods
- He calls us to an even higher standard than "eye for eye"

B. The Text (Matthew 5:39b-42)

Read together: "But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

C. More Than "Don't Retaliate"

You might read that and think: Jesus is saying "Don't retaliate"

But it's more than that: Jesus tells His people:

- You are going to be so radically different than the rest of the world
- Your homes, your households, you people
- You are going to be so radically different

Here's what you're going to do: Instead of retaliating the way the world retaliates

- Instead of slapping the people who slap you
- Instead of taking from the people that take from you
- Instead of getting back at the people that got to you

Here's what you do: Retaliate with radical generosity

D. The Roman Soldier Example

The scenario: Some Roman soldier comes up to you and says:

- "Listen, it's the law"
- "You have to carry my pack and go with me for a mile"

The response: "No, thank you, sir. I'd rather go two. Let me go an extra one with you. I'll carry your pack for another mile."

Can you imagine?: What it was like in ancient Israel? What it was like for the disciples of Jesus?

E. The Context of First-Century Disciples

Like Johanna Katanacho (we'll return to his story):

- These followers of Jesus lived in a world where they faced opposition and persecution

From multiple directions:

- From Jewish brothers and sisters who had joined forces with the Romans (tax collectors)
- From Roman soldiers themselves
- From Roman governors
- From Pharisees and scribes (the purity police)

Everywhere they turned:

- People would harass them
- Take from them
- Push them
- Spit on them
- Slap them

Jesus doesn't just say "Don't retaliate": (That would be hard enough)

Jesus says: "Retaliate with generosity"

- When they take from you, give them more
- When they force you to go a mile, go with them an extra mile

F. "This Doesn't Apply to Me"

The objection: "Well, this kind of specific stuff never happens to me"

- "Nobody slaps me on the right cheek, so I guess this doesn't apply to me"
- "Nobody forces me to go a mile. This is a different context"
- "Those kind of things never specifically happen to me"

The response: Yes, they do. Maybe not that exact thing, but:

- People do these sorts of things to you
- And you're afraid that they will
- Aren't you?

Personal confession: "I am. I'm afraid."

- I'm afraid that someone might take something from me
- I'm afraid that someone might hurt me
- I'm afraid somebody might change something that I don't want changed
- Or I'm afraid that somebody might keep something the same that I want changed
- I'm afraid sometimes, church. Aren't you?

G. Jesus's Instructions for Our Fears

Jesus says: "Here's what you do when you're afraid:"

- When you're afraid someone might take from you
- When you're afraid someone might hurt you
- When you're afraid someone might change something that doesn't need to be changed
- Or keep something the same that needs to be changed

Here's what you do: Give to them. Meet them with radical generosity. Love them.

Discussion Question: What would "radical generosity" look like toward someone you fear?

IV. Love Your Enemies (10 minutes)

A. The Text (Matthew 5:43-48)

Read together: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

B. The Common Assumption

The law of Moses never said: "Hate your enemy"

But that was the assumption: Love your neighbor, and then what do you do with your enemy? You hate your enemy. Everybody knows that.

We say things like that all the time: "Hate is a strong word"

- We don't say "hate"
- But we essentially hate people sometimes, don't we?
- Because we're so afraid of them, we loathe them

The worldly logic:

- "I like the people that like me"
- "I respect the people that show me respect"
- "I respect people who earn my respect"
- "But you have to earn my respect"
- "If you don't earn my respect, then I don't have to love you"
- "If you're not a likable person, I don't have to like you"
- "If you don't treat me well, then I don't have to treat you well"

Jesus's response: Nonsense. That's the way of the world.

C. The Different Way

That's what everybody thinks: That's what other households say. That's what other families do.

But Jesus-following families: Have to live a different sort of way

Jesus says: Everybody else says, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy"

But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

D. What "Love" Means

When Jesus says "love them": He doesn't just mean have a warm fuzzy feeling in your heart for them

Jesus isn't necessarily commanding you to change your affections: He's telling you to change your **behavior**

Treat them with love: What does that look like?

Paul says (1 Corinthians 13):

- Love is patient
- Love is kind
- It doesn't envy
- It doesn't boast
- It isn't rude
- It isn't self-seeking
- It keeps no record of wrongs

Kind to whom?: People that are kind to you? Sure. Yeah. Them too.

But also:

- The people that are unkind
- The people you're afraid of
- The people whose ideology you can't stand
- The people that are wrong
- The people that if they get their way, you're going to lose what you have
- The people that if they get their way, you're going to suffer

E. The Challenge

"How can you?": It's real easy for you to talk like—

Wait, wait: This is Jesus talking in the first century to first-century disciples

- Who were living in Roman-occupied Israel
- Who were dealing with harassment and persecution and enemies on every side
- People that they had legitimate things to fear from them
- Things I cannot even begin to imagine

"And I'm not telling you this because I don't struggle with it": I'm telling you this because this is what our Lord says to do.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Discussion Question: How does understanding the first-century context help us grasp how radical this command is?

V. Anchored in God's Character (5 minutes)

A. The Foundation (v. 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.

Jesus anchors this commandment: In the nature and the character of God

Why?: Because God gives rain to both the evil and the righteous

- To the good and those who do good things
- To the people that are horrible, wicked people

B. God's Radical Love

Do you realize that?: To every atheist who curses God and says:

- "If there is a God, I don't want to believe in Him"
- "If there is a God, I wouldn't follow Him"
- "If there is a God, I don't want anything to do with Him"

God gives them:

- Air to breathe
- Blood coursing through their veins
- Rain on their head
- Food to eat
- Water to quench their thirst

God provides for them: And nourishes them and keeps them alive

He loves them.

C. Being God's Children

Jesus says: "If you want to be sons of your Father"

- If you want to be God's children
- If you want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven

Then you have to do away with this:

- Nonsense
- Carnality
- Fleshly, natural way of thinking that says "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy"

If you want to be God's children: Love your enemies, because that's the sort of thing that God does

D. The Gospel Pattern

In fact: That's what the gospel is, isn't it?

The Son of God giving Himself for His enemies: And who are those? Me and you and the whole world.

We were the enemies of God: Yet He gave everything for us

Romans 5:8, 10: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us... For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son..."

So if you want to be His children: If you want His will to be done not only on earth as it is in heaven, but in your home as it is in heaven—

Then love your enemies.

VI. Higher Than the World's Standard (5 minutes)

A. The Tax Collectors (v. 46)

"For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?": Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

That's low down, isn't it?: Jesus just calls it like it is

"Hey, you know those tax collectors you despise?":

- You know those tax collectors you're afraid of?
- You know those tax collectors that have sided with the Romans?
- You know those tax collectors that take money out of your pocket?
- That take food off of your table?
- That take things away from your children?

Even they love the people that love them: Even they are nice to the people that are nice to them

B. The Gentiles (v. 47)

"And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others?": Don't even the Gentiles do the same?

You know, all those Gentiles out there:

- All those other people
- All those other nations
- All those other ethnicities
- The Romans who oppress you
- The Greeks that have done all kinds of abominations to you

You know those Gentiles: They greet people that greet them. They're nice to people that are nice to them.

So if that's your standard, how are you any better?: If you love your neighbor but hate your enemy, how are you any different?

C. The World Does This

We're always talking about "the world": The world does this and the world does that and all of these worldly people

You know what the worldly people do?:

- Love the people that love them
- Greet the people that greet them

You know what's supposed to be different about Christians?: We love our enemies.

D. Be Perfect (v. 48)

"You therefore must be perfect": As your heavenly Father is perfect

By "perfect" Jesus means: Complete, mature

Be like God.

VII. The Story of Johanna Katanacho (5 minutes)

A. His Context

Johanna Katanacho (2005):

- A Christian
- A Palestinian
- Who lived in Israel, Jerusalem specifically

Imagine:

- Ethnically Arab
- A follower of Jesus religiously
- Living in Israel

So Johanna faced:

- Persecution
- Hurt and pain
- Being ostracized
- Being harassed by people for lots of different reasons

B. The Danger He Faced

One of the most dangerous things: Israeli troops

- Would stop Palestinians
- Would harass Palestinians
- Would even from time to time shoot Palestinians
- Because they were suspected terrorists

All of the time: Johanna dealt with people

- Stopping him
- Harassing him
- Having him show his ID card
- From Israeli troops patrolling and looking for terrorists

C. His Struggle

As a follower of Jesus: Johanna really struggled with loving his enemies

He read it: He saw what Jesus says in Matthew 5 to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

But as somebody who was:

- Constantly harassed
- Constantly mistreated because of his religion, ethnicity, or where he lived

He really struggled: With the idea of loving his enemies

D. His Solution

He printed out on flyers Isaiah 53:

- From the Hebrew Scriptures that these Israeli soldiers would recognize
- Isaiah 53 that talks about the suffering servant
- The suffering servant who gave His life for His enemies
- So that His enemies might be forgiven
- Isaiah 53 that points forward to Jesus our Messiah

What he did:

- Printed Isaiah 53 in both English and Hebrew
- At the top he printed: "Real Love. This is real love."

At first it was hard: He struggled with loving these Israeli soldiers that gave him such a hard time

But every time they called him over: He began to give them a flyer with his ID card

- "Here's my ID card and here's a flyer"
- Because it was printed in Hebrew

- Because they recognized the Hebrew Scriptures
- A lot of times it would begin a conversation
- He could begin to tell them about Jesus

E. The Transformation

Something changed: Before long he said he got to the point where **he wanted them to call him over**

He wanted them:

- To question him
- To say "Come over here. Show me your ID card"
- Because then it was an opportunity to share what real love was all about

VIII. Application: Retaliate With Love (10 minutes)

A. Two Possible Outcomes

I don't know what loving your enemies will do to them:

- It might change them
- It might change an enemy into a friend

If you go to the people you're afraid of:

- And you love them
- And you serve them
- Even if they've hurt your feelings or hurt you financially
- And you love them anyway

It might change them: Your enemies might become your friends

But there's no guarantee: Jesus loved His enemies and they still put Him to death

There's no guarantee that loving your enemies will change them: But it will change you

Loving your enemies might not change them: But it will for sure change you

It will change you forever: To love your enemies in the name of Jesus

B. The Phrase to Remember

As I think about this passage: Here's the phrase I keep thinking of:

Retaliate with love.

That's what Jesus calls us to do: Retaliate with love

- When someone hurts you
- Or someone hates you

- Or someone persecutes you
- Or someone threatens to do something that puts you in a bad situation

Retaliate with love: That's what Jesus calls us to do

C. Practical Application

I know there are times: When you turn on the television and you think "those people"

Whoever those people are:

- Maybe they're people on the right of you politically
- Or on the left of you politically
- People you're afraid will change things
- Or keep things from being changed
- People you're afraid will hurt you financially

Whatever it is, whoever it is: Here's what we do—**Retaliate with love**

D. For Fathers and Husbands

Speaking specifically to dads:

I believe: God made us to be warriors

I believe: God made fathers and husbands to be the commanding generals of our home

If that's true: If God made us to be warriors, then God also gets to define:

- Who's the enemy
- What are the rules of engagement

We have to allow God:

- Not only to call us to be warriors
- But to help us identify the real enemy

The real enemy is not flesh and blood: We don't wage war against people

Ephesians 6:12: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

That doesn't mean people can't hurt us: It doesn't mean people can't take things from us

It means the real enemy is Satan: And the rules of engagement—how we deal with the people in this world that are evil, how we deal with the people in this world that are hurtful—is we **retaliate with love**

E. The Worst Thing Your Enemy Can Do

Listen: The worst thing your enemy can do to you isn't take something that belongs to you

The worst thing your enemy can do to you: Is make you like them

The worst thing that evil can do to you:

- Is not hurt you
- Or take from you

The worst thing that evil can do to you: Is change you so that you participate in evil

F. Breaking the Cycles

So Jesus calls us to break these cycles:

- Last week: Cycles of distrust and deception—we break them with truth and trust
- This week: Cycles of hating our enemies, cycles of revenge, cycles of retaliation

Jesus doesn't just say "Stop retaliating": He calls us to an even higher standard

He says "Retaliate": But retaliate with love

- Find ways to feed your enemy when they're hungry
- To give drink to your enemy when they're thirsty
- To turn the other cheek
- To go the extra mile

G. What This Looks Like in Your Context

I don't know what that looks like in your context: I don't know what that looks like in your family's context

Maybe it starts with prayer: Maybe it just starts with prayer

Maybe there's a group of people:

- Locally or globally
- Nationally
- That you're afraid of

Maybe it just starts with:

- Realizing that Jesus liberates us from that fear
- Getting on your knees
- Praying for them
- Praying for the people you're afraid of

And then you find ways as a family:

- To love the people you're afraid of
- To love the people that might change things
- To love the people that might keep things from being changed
- To love the people who might take what belongs to you

- To love the people who have said things and done things that aren't kind and aren't loving

Love them anyway: That's what it looks like to be a family that belongs to the kingdom of heaven

H. The Family Mission

Work together:

- Identify your enemy
- Define the rules of engagement

Here's what we're going to do: We are going to love anyway

Because here's the thing, church: We can't lose, can we?

The only way we can lose:

- Is by failing to follow Jesus
- Is by failing to love the people Jesus calls us to love

We need not fear anyone: We don't have to be afraid because He is with us

- And this is the life
- And this is the battle to which He's calling us

Discussion Question: What would it look like practically for your family to "retaliate with love" toward someone you fear?

Closing (5 minutes)

A. The Call

Whether your home is made up of one or two or 20: Here's our job:

- To go into our neighborhoods
- To go into our communities
- To go into our cities, state, country, world

And love people anyway:

- Love them whoever they are
- Love them no matter what they think
- No matter how wrong they are
- No matter how wicked they are
- No matter how evil they are
- Love them anyway

Love them:

- No matter what they do to you
- No matter what they might do to you
- Love them anyway

Retaliate with love.

B. The Outcome

"But it might not work"': Yes, it will. It can't fail. It's already won. We're already victorious.

It might not change them: But it will for sure change you

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

C. The Difficulty and the Worth

Church, it's hard: It's hard for me

- It was hard for Jesus's first-century disciples
- It's hard for people living all over the world
- Dealing with opposition and harassment most of us can't even begin to imagine

But it's worth it: That's the thing with faith—it's hard, but it's worth it

Take the next step by faith.

D. Closing Prayer

Father, we confess that we have enemies—people we fear, people we're angry at, people we want to see pay for what they've done. We confess that our natural inclination is toward revenge, retaliation, and wanting them to suffer more than we've suffered.

Thank You for showing us a different way—Your way. Thank You that while we were still Your enemies, Christ died for us. Thank You for the radical love You've shown to us.

Help us to identify the people we fear, the people we consider enemies. Give us the courage and the power of Your Spirit to love them anyway. Help us to retaliate not with revenge, but with radical generosity and love.

Transform our homes into embassies of Your kingdom where we pray for those who persecute us, give to those who take from us, and go the extra mile for those who force us to go one.

Change us, Father. Even if loving our enemies doesn't change them, let it change us. Make us like You—giving rain to the just and the unjust, loving even those who hate You.

We cannot do this in our own strength. We need Your Spirit. We need Your grace. We need Your power. Help us to be sons and daughters of our Father in heaven.

In Jesus's name—who loved His enemies all the way to the cross, Amen.

Discussion Questions (Choose 3-4 for your context)

1. Who do you fear? What does your fear reveal about who you might consider your "enemy"?
 2. Why is "an eye for an eye" actually a merciful law rather than a vengeful one? What does this reveal about human nature?
 3. What's the difference between "don't retaliate" and "retaliate with radical generosity"? Why does Jesus call us to the higher standard?
 4. How does understanding that we were once God's enemies change the way we think about loving our enemies?
 5. What would "retaliating with love" look like practically in your specific context?
 6. Why is it significant that Jesus anchors this command in God's character (giving rain to just and unjust)?
 7. What encouraged or challenged you about Johanna Katanacho's story?
 8. How can fathers/parents model "loving enemies" for their children without being naive about real dangers?
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Key Scriptures for Reference

- **Matthew 5:38-48** - Jesus on non-retaliation and loving enemies
 - **Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21** - "Eye for eye" in the Law
 - **Romans 12:14-21** - "Bless those who persecute you... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"
 - **Romans 5:8, 10** - "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... while we were enemies we were reconciled to God"
 - **Proverbs 25:21-22** - "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat"
 - **Luke 6:27-36** - Parallel passage to Matthew 5
 - **1 Peter 3:9** - "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless"
 - **Ephesians 6:12** - "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood"
 - **Isaiah 53** - The suffering servant who gave His life for His enemies
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Summary: Core Truths to Remember

1. **Fear reveals our enemies** - The people we fear are often the people Jesus calls us to love
2. **"Eye for eye" curtails revenge** - It limits retaliation, not condones it; reveals our tendency to escalate
3. **Jesus calls for radical generosity** - Not just "don't retaliate" but "retaliate with love"

4. **Go the extra mile** - Give more than what's taken; serve beyond what's required
5. **Love means action** - Not warm feelings, but patient, kind, generous behavior
6. **Anchored in God's character** - God gives rain to just and unjust; we were His enemies
7. **The gospel pattern** - Christ died for His enemies (us)
8. **Higher than the world** - Even tax collectors and Gentiles love those who love them
9. **It will change you** - Loving enemies might not change them, but it will transform you
10. **We can't lose** - The only way to lose is to fail to follow Jesus

The Bottom Line: Identify your enemies by identifying your fears. Don't retaliate with revenge—retaliate with love. Go the extra mile. Give radical generosity. Pray for those who persecute you. Love your enemies because that's what God does, and we are His children. This is hard, but it's worth it. Take the next step by faith.