

**Gen. 45:3–11, 15**  
**Ps. 37:1–11, 39–40**  
**1 Cor. 15:35–38,**  
**42–50**  
**Luke 6:27–38**

## Listen and Love

**Goal for the Session** Adults will confront Jesus' summons to love even enemies, which is grounded in God's gracious mercy for all.

### ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

#### Focus on Luke 6:27–38

##### WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Dena L. Williams

Matthew's Jesus preaches righteousness. Luke's Jesus affirms these behaviors and attitudes, but preaches that enemies, thieves, and beggars are, as well, to be blessed (*eulogēō*), a word not used in the parallel passage in Matthew. The writer of Luke seems to summarize the message of his Jesus in verses 35 and 36. Luke's Jesus seeks to bring forth the kingdom of God and persuasively invites hearers to live into the future to which God calls them.

##### WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Susan E. Hylan

Luke portrays the disciples both as poor and as those who truly possess a superabundance, who have been given all the good things of God's reign. When the teachings of the Sermon on the Plain are not grounded in the disciple's identity as God's child, they become an onerous list of ethical demands that do not further justice and wholeness. When the disciple understands his actions as flowing out of God's abundance, to which he belongs and which belongs to him, turning the other cheek becomes an act of resistance to evil that has the power to transform others and the world.

##### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Charles Bugg

Luke reminds us that the coming of the Christ into the world makes a difference. In fact, the inbreaking of God into human history makes all the difference in the way we respond to other people. Here is the dilemma. How do we move from the natural instinct to match blow for blow and word for word? To put it another way, how do we live our lives responding with grace and kindness, instead of reacting with words or actions that seek to answer hurt with more hurt? According to Luke, Jesus indicates that followers of Christ remember how God responds to us. "Be merciful," Jesus states, "just as the Father is merciful."

##### NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Vaughn Crowe-Tipton

Focus on the grace and transformation necessary for us to live out the radical faith Jesus demands. In other words, the "great reward" we receive is not full pockets, garages, or self-esteem, but who we become in the process. Jesus knows full well that we will never love our enemies without an amazing grace that transforms us and makes us different than we are. What changes us and allows us to love is a grace greater than our sin, our best intentions, or even our hard work. Grace transforms us, even as we resist. Jesus points his followers then and now toward a narrow and difficult path illuminated only by grace, but it is one that rewards us in ways we can hardly imagine.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Luke 6:27–38**

## Focus on Your Teaching

What might adults in your group identify as the limits of love? That is, what words or attitudes or actions on the part of an individual or group might be taken as just cause for not extending love in their direction? Consider how your life decisions have revealed your own responses to those same questions. Today's session explores one of Jesus' most challenging set of teachings. Irrespective of their age, adults who view love primarily as emotional fondness or base relationships on reciprocity may find this passage and session difficult if not offensive.

*Guiding Spirit, direct my thoughts and preparations, so I may lead this session according to your good purposes. Amen.*

### YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 3, 2019, unless it will be emailed to participants

#### For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 1, paper, pens

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, clear an area of the meeting space so participants can move from one side to the other.

Welcome participants as they arrive. Explain the following continuum activity. Designate one side of the room as “strongly agree,” the other side as “strongly disagree,” and the space between for degrees of agreement or disagreement about statements you will read aloud. Ask participants to move silently to the area that represents their position on each statement. The statements are:

- ✠ Loving others is the most important way we express love for God.
- ✠ We are to love others who do not love us.
- ✠ Loving enemies is a good way to get taken advantage of.
- ✠ It is easier to love someone who hurts me than to love someone who hurts others.

Ask for brief responses to the exercise. Affirm that today's focus scripture confronts us with Jesus' challenging teachings on love.

Pray aloud:

*Speak, O God, that your sons and daughters may listen. In Jesus Christ.  
Amen.*

### EXPLORING

Ask adults to turn to Luke 6 in their Bibles. Point out that today's focus scripture is the second part of Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain,” continuing on from last week's focus scripture. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 6:17–19 aloud to reset the context for Jesus' teachings. Discuss with participants how those details might influence the attentiveness of that audience to Jesus' teachings.

The Greek word translated as “listen” in Luke 6:27 is *akouo*. The Greek word for “obey” is (*hup*)*akouo*. In Greek, to fully hear/listen is to obey (see Luke 8:25). Likewise in Hebrew, *shama* means both “to hear” and “to obey.”

Before you begin the reading of Luke 6:27–38, relate the information in the sidebar. Underscore how Jesus, nurtured in the traditions of Judaism, would have been keenly aware of the linkage between listening and obeying. Encourage adults to keep that integral connection in mind as you read the text.

Explain that the group will read today’s focus verses as a litany, with the unison refrain being the first line of verse 27: “But I say to you that listen.” Have the group practice saying that line in unison. Ask for six volunteers to serve as readers. Give each reader one of the following sets of verses in Luke 6: verses 27b–28 (minus the litany refrain); verses 29–30; verse 31; verses 32–34; verses 35–36; and verses 37–38. Explain that at the beginning of the reading and after each set of verses, the group will respond with the unison refrain. Carry out the litany reading.

Discuss the following questions and other questions that arise about the passage as a whole:

- ✪ How did the repeated refrain influence your understanding of the passage as a whole, and/or its individual sections?
- ✪ What effect did elevating the connection between listening and obeying have on your understanding of Jesus’ words?
- ✪ If you had been in that crowd, what would you have talked about with your friends on your way home?

Form two groups. Give each group one of the following New Testament passages that present other calls to love: 1 Corinthians 13; 1 John 3:11–18. Have groups read their assigned passage and discuss it in comparison with Luke 6:27–38 using the following questions:

- ✪ How do these verses define love?
- ✪ What light does this passage shed on the “how” and “why” of loving others, including one’s enemies?
- ✪ In what ways does this passage connect loving others with God’s love for us?

Gather the entire group, and invite brief reports from the small groups.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 6:27–38). Give adults a few moments to read the “So What” excerpt. Call attention to the final two sentences in the excerpt. Invite silent reflection on the following questions:

- ✪ “Be merciful just as God is merciful.” What does it mean to be merciful even to the ones do not seek our good? What does that say to your life as a disciple? What does that say to the mission of this church?

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. **Love’s Unconventional Wisdom** Adults will confront Jesus’s summons to love even enemies with love that is grounded in God’s gracious mercy for all. Comment that Jesus’ summons to love even our enemies contradicts conventional wisdoms about who should be loved and who should not be loved. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2

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(Love's Unconventional Wisdom). Have adults read the information silently, and then engage in a group discussion using the questions on the sheet. Close by encouraging participants to name one specific thing they will commit to saying or doing this week to embrace Jesus' summons to love one's enemies.

- 2. Love, Grace, and Transformation** Adults will explore contemporary responses to Jesus' summons to radical love that is grounded in the transformative grace of God. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on Luke 6:27–38) and ask a volunteer to read aloud the "Now What" excerpt. Distribute paper and pens as needed, and have adults write a journal entry that reflects on an experience of or need for God's grace, grace that makes possible the love that Jesus bids us to practice. Encourage adults to return to that journal entry each day in the coming week, prayerfully seeking grace in their practice of love for others.
- 3. Resisting Evil** Adults will consider how Jesus' summons to love one's enemies does mean not acquiescing to evil. Read aloud the sidebar note to the group. Engage participants in a frank discussion of how Jesus' call to love may be understood and misunderstood when it comes to resisting evil or hatred levied against us or others. Consider how your congregation might help its members and friends to wrestle with this very difficult element of discipleship. Have adults look in the coming week for an example where evil was resisted not by withdrawing love, but by love that sought to overcome evil with good.

"Turning one's cheek may send the message that the violence is justified. . . . Does Jesus call the listener to endless cycles of violence? Should the faithful allow evil deeds to flourish—not only against oneself but against others?"

— Susan Hylen

## CLOSING

Gather in a circle. Invite participants to offer an affirmation or question that summarizes what they will carry away from this session.

When all have had an opportunity to speak, lift up these four imperative verbs from the opening verses of today's focus scripture: love, do good, bless, pray. Ask the group to repeat those words aloud. Invite participants to consider those four verbs to be their benediction for this day and their commissioning for the coming week. Pray aloud:

*Your love for us, O God, bids our love for one another. Every good we enjoy comes from your hands. May we bring good to others. You bless us with your gracious presence. May your Spirit help us be a blessing to others. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, for we would live and love in his example. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for March 3, 2019, or email it to participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and resource sheet prior to the next session.

## Focus on Luke 6:27–38

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## Love's Unconventional Wisdom

Consider Jesus' teachings in Luke 6:27–38 in light of ancient and modern conventional wisdoms.

Conventional wisdom would say:

*Love your enemy, and you're likely to get a knife in the back.  
So love those who love you.*

Conventional wisdom would say:

*Do good to those who hate you, and you'll get spite in return.  
So do good to those who do good to you.*

Conventional wisdom would say:

*Give to the takers of this world, and you'll end up empty.  
So give to those whose track record insures repayment.*

Conventional wisdom has logic and tradition on its side. Hating enemies and sticking with friends is the proven model. It's the way things work. Everybody knows that: except, that is, for the rabbi from Nazareth called Jesus. Instead of prescribing a formula for community based on what conventional wisdom dictates, Jesus seeks to construct a community based on alternatives: love in place of hatred, good in place of vengeance, giving in place of receiving.

### For Discussion:

- ✦ What conventional wisdoms in the world at large do you see at odds with Jesus' teachings in Luke 6:27–38?
- ✦ What conventional wisdoms in your faith community do you see in conflict with Jesus' teachings in Luke 6:27–38?
- ✦ What words or actions today would embody Jesus' summons to love in the world; in your congregation?

