

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

Transforming Grace

Goal for the Session Youth will deepen their understanding about what it means to embody grace and kindness as an act of resistance.

■ 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

Acceptance by peers is an important part of the journey of adolescence. As teenagers move away from parental orbits and develop kinship with their peers, they can open themselves to the best of times and the worst of times. As they navigate relationships youth can be deeply hurt emotionally, and these hurts can last a long time. These are times of BFF, best friends forever, until a hurtful action or word turns a friend into an enemy. Be aware that Jesus' teachings about loving enemies might provoke strong feelings for some group members.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint, marker
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- pencils
- battery-powered votive or tea light candles

For Responding

- option 1: children's book on forgiveness (optional)
- option 2: paper, colored pencils, fine-tipped markers
- option 3: current magazines or newspapers, scissors

For Video Connection

- Internet-connected device

Luke 6:20–49 is called the “Sermon on the Plain” because of the reference to Jesus speaking “on a level place” (Luke 6:17). A similar teaching in Matthew 5–7 is called the “Sermon on the Mount” because it is placed in a different setting (see Matthew 5:1).

O God, help me to create a safe place where youth can express their opinions without being judged and be empowered to respond in new ways. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print the following statements on one sheet of newsprint: “Don’t get mad—Get even!” “Don’t get mad—Get curious!” If you are using Responding option 2, go to www.doodle-art-alley.com/word-coloring-pages.html and print a sample of the “forgive” coloring page. If you are using option 3, go through recent magazines or newspapers and cut out headlines or stories that report situations of hurt or anger, at least two per group member.

Greet youth as they arrive. Point out the first statement on the newsprint and discuss experiences of wanting to “get even.” Ask:

- ✂ Why does it sometimes feel so good to get even or take revenge?
- ✂ Is it ever right to take revenge? Why or why not?
- ✂ What can be some of the consequences of taking revenge?

Look at the second statement on the newsprint and talk together about what this could look like. Ask:

- ✂ How might getting curious be more helpful than taking revenge?

Explain that in this week’s focus scripture Jesus offers some surprising advice about difficult relationships. Pray aloud:

O God, help us to follow Jesus’ teachings and expand the boundaries of our love and care for others. Amen.

EXPLORING

Explain that this week’s reading is a continuation of Jesus’ teachings in Luke 6, called the “Sermon on the Plain.” Have youth turn to Luke 6:17 in their Bibles and ask a volunteer to read aloud verses 17–20a. Recall that the first part of Jesus’ teaching (verses 20–26) turned conventional understanding about who was blessed by God upside down.

Striking someone on the right cheek was seen as punishment by someone superior; to offer the left cheek suggested a confrontation between equals.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Live Generously) and pencils. Ask four volunteers to each read one section of verses from the resource sheet. After each section of verses, pause for a quiet moment for youth to underline what they think is the most important phrase or word in that section and to make question marks by any words or phrases they have questions about. Before moving on to the next set of verses, invite youth to tell what they underlined and to discuss the questions they have.

Discuss:

- ✪ What is your first reaction to Jesus' teaching?
- ✪ How would you define the word "enemy"?
- ✪ Which of Jesus' teachings in these verses would be the most difficult for you to follow? Why?
- ✪ Do you think it takes more courage to retaliate and get revenge or to respond peacefully? Why?

Jesus lived in an "honor-shame" society and even though getting even was an appropriate response when treated badly, one could only do to another person what had been done to oneself, but no more.

One of the verses in Jesus' teaching has come to be known as "the golden rule." Ask youth to find it in their Bible or on Resource Sheet 1 (verse 31). Explain that the teachings of every major faith group in the world include a similar "rule." Ask:

- ✪ If you were explaining this rule to a child, what would you say?
- ✪ If Jesus had been teaching revenge as a fair response, how would this verse need to be rewritten?

Ask youth to circle the action verbs in the text on Resource Sheet 1. After a few moments, ask them to call out these verbs. List them on newsprint. Invite youth to imagine responding in these ways when someone has treated them poorly.

Summarize by saying that Jesus' advice to his followers was revolutionary in a culture that believed in "an eye for an eye." Read aloud Luke 6:32-35. Ask:

- ✪ What reasons does Jesus give for repaying enemies with kindness instead of revenge?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (With Christ's Strength) and read it aloud to the group. Discuss:

- ✪ What is the good news here for all of Jesus' followers today?
- ✪ How do we receive this "power born from above"? (You may want to review your church's teaching about the Spirit.)

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Enemy Talk** Youth will dramatize Jesus' teaching to love our enemies. Invite youth to think of people whom they might consider to be enemies (someone who makes fun of them, tries to get them into trouble, or hurts them, physically or emotionally). Form pairs, exchange stories, and then take turns dramatizing these situations for the entire group. Pause after each presentation and invite everyone to offer suggestions for ways to respond to the situation that demonstrate Jesus' approach.

Option: read together a children's book about forgiveness, such as *Enemy Pie* by Derek Munson (Chronicle Books, 2000).

**EASY
PREP**

Show a sample page from www.doodle-art-alley.com/word-coloring-pages.html, but encourage youth to create their own designs.

- 2. Doodle Reflection** Youth will ponder Jesus' challenge to respond with compassion and love when we are treated badly. Distribute paper and pencils or markers and invite youth to print a word or phrase from the biblical text (such as, "LOVE ENEMIES" or "FORGIVE") in the middle of their papers and create "doodle" designs around the phrases. As they draw and color their designs have them reflect on the question: How can I respond with grace and kindness, instead of reacting with words or actions that seek to respond to hurt with more hurt?
- 3. News Stories/New Stories** Jesus taught his followers to resist revenge and respond to hurt and injustice in other ways. Place the stories and headlines you cut out on a table and have the group walk around the table and look at them. Ask each youth to pick up a story or headline that caught his or her attention and reflect on these questions while looking at it: Why might this situation have happened? What could happen next that reflects Jesus' teaching? Invite youth to take turns presenting the news stories to the group and then outlining a new story for each situation—one that reflects Jesus' teaching.

CLOSING

Gather the group in a circle and give each person a battery-powered votive or tea light candle. Invite participants to take a moment to think about someone who has treated them badly. Ask them to hold this name in mind as you read aloud: "Jesus said: love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly." Invite youth to light their candles and say a silent prayer for the one who treated them badly and ask for Christ's strength to help them do something good for that person.

Bless the person on your left by saying: "(Name), may God bless you and help you to live generously and kindly." That person then blesses the one on his or her left. When everyone has received the blessing, say in unison, "Amen!"

■ ENHANCEMENT

VIDEO CONNECTION

Jesus taught that we should love our enemies. The Forgiveness Project (www.theforgivenessproject.com) was started in 2004. It collects and shares stories from individuals and communities who have rebuilt their lives following hurt and trauma by creating relationships of empathy and hope. Invite youth to listen to Shad Ali (www.theforgivenessproject.com/shad-ali), an ex-social worker and British Pakistani. Ask:

- ✪ Why was it so important to Shad to visit his attacker?
- ✪ What question do you wish you could ask him?

Shad Ali says that the only way to resolve conflicts between people is to sit together, talk, and find a way to move forward.

- ✪ In what ways do Shad's ideas echo Jesus' teaching?

Live Generously



²⁷⁻³⁰“To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more tit-for-tat stuff. Live generously.

³¹⁻³⁴“Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them! If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal? Garden-variety sinners do that. If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that’s charity? The stingiest of pawnbrokers does that.

³⁵⁻³⁶“I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind.

³⁷⁻³⁸“Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment. Don’t condemn those who are down; that hardness can boomerang. Be easy on people; you’ll find life a lot easier. Give away your life; you’ll find life given back, but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity.”

Luke 6:27–38. *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright (c) 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

With Christ's Strength

The admonition of Luke to love even our enemies is not just a good idea where we try our best to make it happen. It is not a call to grit our teeth and make a resolution to be nicer even to those who are not nice to us. Rather, the call of Luke is to live in a way contrary to our human nature, a way that is possible only as we “live out” of a new power born from above.

In none of the four Gospels in our Bible is the term “Christianity” used. Luke wants us to see that faith in Christ is far more than giving cognitive assent to doctrines. Rather, this faith is a way of life, a way that is contrary to our own inclinations. To answer hurt with forgiveness is plausible only because the Christ is our strength.

—Charles Bugg, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Pastoral*, p. 384.

