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### Love Your Enemy?

**An inmate brother wrote** to tell me that he struggles with the notion of loving his enemies — those who wish to do him harm. He is certainly not alone in this. It's natural to put up a defense against an enemy, and if he or she has hurt you or yours, to want to inflict a more painful hurt upon him or her. Loving an enemy, no matter how you define it, is not something a normal human being easily does.



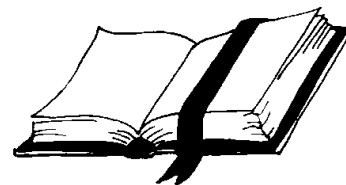
*only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

But God does not want us to be merely normal human beings.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5-7) is Jesus' major teaching about how we should live according to God's design. Its main theme, to my thinking, is that we should desire and strive to live God's way, not the world's way; not the way we may selfishly want to live.

First, we need to get rid of a very common misunderstanding about the word "love." Jesus is not saying we need to feel loving toward our enemies, or even to like them, or approve of them and what they do. Love has nothing to do with feeling good about a person. Love, the kind of love Jesus is talking about, is a decision, plus appropriate actions that go with it. If you feed someone who is hungry, you are loving that person, trying to help, whether he or she is "lovable" or not.

Let's look at a few more Bible passages.



Let's look at what Jesus says to us about loving our enemies ...



*(Matthew 5:43-48) "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*

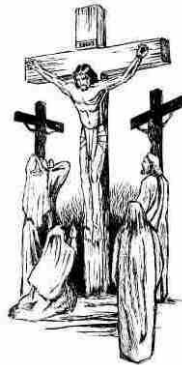
*And one of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)*

Your enemy is also your neighbor. Don't forget that. You're commanded to love him or her, second only to loving God..

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)*

*... if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)* To the extent that we sin against God, we have been and still are His enemies. But He has loved us, and He does love us, and in spite of our sin He has made a way for us to live forever as His adopted children; to enjoy the eternal blessings of the destiny He has planned for each one of us.



*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)*

Why are we supposed to love our enemies? First, because God commands it. But secondly, and just as important, it is part of our being transformed from lost sinners to saved souls, becoming more and more like Jesus. The more we think and act like Jesus, the more we will understand God's will for us, and why loving others, even our enemies, is so important.

When we think honestly about how selfish and sinful we have been, and still tend to be, it is easy to see that God might be disgusted with us and choose to have no more to do with us. But no; He loves us, in spite of our past actions and our present failures. He loves us. That is more than enough reason for us to love Him, and to want to please Him by obeying Him and loving others.

*We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother*

*whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:19-21)*

I'm assuming you now understand why we must love our enemies. The next question you ask is, "How can I do that? The guy is a jerk!" Even much stronger words than that might be appropriate. "That @\$%^ is totally unlovable. Not even his mother could love him!"

And of course you're right. Sometimes we can't bring ourselves even to think about loving a person who has been and still is our enemy, much less do it. It's impossible. If we try to do that in our own strength, just by the strength of our will, we can't. We cannot do the impossible ... until we let God help us.

God has given us the Holy Spirit, to be our guide and our helper. When we can't do it, He can. Even though we literally cannot do anything very useful by ourselves, with His help we can say, with Paul, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)* Peter's words are also helpful: *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)* In other words, ask God for help.

Here's the bottom line: Are you supposed to love your enemy? Yes, you are. Can you do it? Yes, with God's help, you can. God does not expect us to do impossible things without His help. But, with His readily available help, he expects us to do all that He asks us to do.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, please give us the grace we need to keep depending on You, to keep loving You and learning to love you more, and to keep asking for Your help to do the things that don't come easy for us, like loving an enemy. Please help us to be more obedient, more forgiving, more loving (even of our enemies), and more like Jesus. Amen.

Peace.

*Bro Roland*

The first step in loving your enemy is to forgive ...

## C. S. Lewis on Forgiving Others

*“Pray then like this:*

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*

*Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

*(Matthew 6:9-15 ESV)*

We say a great many things in church (and out of church too) without thinking of what we are saying. For instance, we say in the Creed “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” I had been saying it for several years before I asked myself why it was in the Creed. At first sight it seems hardly worth putting in. “If one is a Christian,” I thought, “of course one believes in the forgiveness of sins. It goes without saying.” But the people who compiled the Creed apparently thought that this was a part of our belief which we needed to be reminded of every time we went to church. And I have begun to see that, as far as I am concerned, they were right. To believe in the forgiveness of sins is not nearly so easy as I thought. Real belief in it is the sort of thing that very easily slips away if we don’t keep on polishing it up.

We believe that God forgives us our sins; but also that He will not do so unless we forgive other people their sins against us. There is no doubt about the second part of this statement. It is in the Lord’s Prayer; was emphatically stated by our Lord. If you don’t forgive you will not be forgiven. No part of His teaching is clearer, and there are no exceptions to it. He doesn’t say that we are to forgive other people’s sins provided they are not too frightful, or provided there are extenuating circumstances, or anything of that sort. We are to forgive them all, however spiteful, however mean, however often they are repeated. If we don’t, we shall be forgiven none of our own.

From “The Weight of Glory”

Compiled in *A Year with C.S. Lewis*.

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Every month I send an extra copy of the “Good News Guide” to a few inmates and some others. If you would like to receive two copies so you can share one (or both), just write and let me know. Your willingness to share with others will spread the Good News of the Gospel a little farther, which will bless us both and, I’m sure, please God.



**Questions?** If you have a question about Bible truth or the Christian life, I'll be glad to share my thoughts with you, and maybe with the other readers of the “Good News Guide.” Write to me.

**Moving?** If you're being released, or moving to another facility, please send me your new address. Inmates, don't forget to include your SID number. I would like to keep sending you the “Good News Guide” for as long as you'd like to receive it.

Here is my address: **Brother Roland, P.O. Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222**

# Forgiveness

God loves you and me, and He demonstrates that by forgiving us. We need to forgive, too.

## Puzzle:

T S L A L S B B I T T E R N E S S L U Y V A S E V L E S R U O X P Y  
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Z C T Y H U O B D K X D L A P Z A V E E P Y Q D Y E B O K A E K E R  
C J U J K S H I M J C M E I L M A F U Y Y E W G T C B X S V D L Y U  
I E O O L P Q V V O X T U S O L O S A T P I A N P I T E E E B O M T  
J J W Y V I Q U O W S K I Q U R R F N H F O D C X N G R A Z Y F X A  
J Q H Z L H F H R W C U B E G B R E O E I G J L E O Y T Y Y T H W M  
F A F O M S I D M Z A X S I K E A F C L R P Y M D O H G G I I C D K  
O V J S N N K F E E T Y V E S N Z S Y O C W N Q N S F Y H X L I G L  
S Y A D P O O H F N N E U H I Y D F I R N R Q E Q S Y M L M I R B L  
E L P R Z I R Y F T N T S I K M S X X D E C L L F B I Y I R B M S J  
I I G J S T R C T T L T A T S J E M Q V N L I I A D J H Y N E O P G  
F M L T M A B I H I A R Z L O V A N O R T Y W L F F B R Z J D D H W  
E A E V O L E E T R L C E C I S E G E S Q S A F I E V M W U T E Y M  
K F C I C E L T T U I A D P K M E A E P H Y S I C A L I L L N E S S  
N T H A V R I Q N V A S T L E H B B B V E J A B S Y T U M D X R I L  
U R R D N D K R R V D L T I T N K A N Z Z G N G M V Y I N V U F C T  
S C I M V E E P F L K V C S V X T W L W W D W F J V C Z O W A G A U  
U G S A C L J Z K N I C V L S Z X A V A S H O W I S X Y C N U H L I  
X V T J I A E S K S O C N H E A R V N L N Q Y Q S I A C V N R C H U  
A Q I S P E S H K S L I U X R A C M Y C C C Y B M V S A S A Y S E T  
H V A G M H U B Y T L V T F E L N R S S E X E P K D K Z G Z D N A P  
Z R N Y P S S X U E Q L W A V J S S I I D S I X Q F S C U R B K L H  
W U G H Z G F W K G V M A E R K W P I F V N L L E H T R I N L S T Y  
C U R D T T J F R E S T O R A T I O N N I R E S E N T M E N T N H O  
U M O Q S C B O N D A G E X P K S U M H G C I I T C R G V H J C D S  
Y Y W C V W V H E G C H Y O R L B U E A P E E M R S E Q B N T A C R  
M M T B U P X T Z O G F N D N E Y I R X X X S E K F C F Z L I O I M  
U J H T Z W P V Y R V N Q E M A L J K F N M X Q Y N K C N Q F F Q I

## Words:

### \*Fruits of unforgiveness

BITTERNESS  
RESENTMENT  
ANGER  
FRUSTRATION  
ABUSE  
BONDAGE  
MENTAL IMBALANCE  
PHYSICAL ILLNESS  
DEBILITY  
DEATH

### \*Fruits of Forgiveness

PEACE OF MIND  
PHYSICAL HEALTH  
SPIRITUAL CLEANSING  
CHRISTIAN GROWTH  
MATURITY  
REPENTANCE  
RECONCILIATION  
RESTORATION  
HEALED RELATIONSHIPS  
A FRESH START  
FREEDOM  
VITALITY  
LOVE  
JOY  
LIFE

### \*Those we must forgive

FAMILY  
FRIENDS  
ENEMIES  
THE GOVERNMENT  
RICH FOLKS  
OURSELVES  
OTHERS  
EVERYONE

### \*Reasons to forgive

OBEY THE LORD  
HONOR CHRIST'S SACRIFICE  
BE LIKE JESUS  
PLEASE GOD  
BE FORGIVEN