



Heal Our Land

Part 3 – Love Your Enemy

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If you're brand new or visiting Branson this weekend, we are in this series *Heal Our Land*. Part 1 was *Love Each Other* where we talked about part of healing our land means followers of Jesus need to come together and learn how to love each other. **"By this, all men will know that you are my disciples."** This is the proof to the world, the test that says, "Yeah, they are followers of Jesus. Watch how the love and how they get along and how they bear with one another and forgive one another." Last week, we looked at *Love Your Neighbor*, those who are like you and those who are not like you. For those who are your countrymen, yes, it's good to love your people, but we are to love all people.

Today, in Part 3, we are talking about... It's a marriage message. *Love Your Enemy*. No, it is not a marriage message. I use this in counseling when someone says "I'm at the end and I can't love this woman." I take them to where I want you to go and that's Matthew 5. We are going to look at what Jesus said about loving your enemy. We have to really put it into context today. But before we get there, let's look at some strategies for loving your enemy.

Today we are talking about the person who has wronged you, the person who has offended you, the person who has hurt you, the person who has come against you, or the person that you are just afraid of. Here are some of the strategies we use in dealing with our enemies.

1. We get even. Isn't that how we do? You hurt me; now I'm going to hurt you. You said that about me; watch what I say about you. You told my friends what about me? Now I'm going to go after you and I'm going to share some stuff about you. We like to retaliate. We like to get revenge. We like to keep score. We like to make demands. That's the "get even" part and the "get even" strategy in dealing with enemies.

2. We stay angry. How many of you have found this strategy really helps in your relationships? Someone wrongs you and you're just going to stay mad; that will show them. "I'm going to stay angry with them. I'll just keep it in me forever and that will teach them a lesson." We know several things about this. 1) Unresolved anger is like drinking poison, expecting the other person to get sick. There are some in here this morning that are drinking this by the gallons. 2) You never bury anger dead; you always bury it alive. It will resurface in another relationship.

I was at a retreat years ago when a lady came up to me afterwards and said, "I don't want to be here. I didn't want to come to this and listen to marriage. I have no desire to be here, but you said some stuff

last night that made me mad. I don't like you and I don't like what you have to say."

I didn't say it out loud, but in my mind, I'm thinking *Bucket of sunshine we've got standing right here in front of us*. But, as she was talking to me, she goes, "Here's my prayer. I've been praying this every morning. Then you said something that really triggered it. I've been praying this prayer every morning. I've been praying 'Lord, you know how much I hate my ex-husband and I hope you kill him today.'"

That's when you step back and when you can really have some opportunities for ministry. She said, "I didn't want to hear it, but you prayed something that really hit me." As she's standing there with her new husband, she said, "You said you never bury anger dead; you always bury it alive. In other words, it will resurface in another relationship."

Think about that whenever you share that. Some of you are here right now and you hate someone. You can think of an enemy, someone you can't stand, someone that wears you out. It may be an ex-husband or ex-wife, but you're sitting next to someone today who has just fed that anger with you. I want to just help you see today, hopefully, that at some point, if it's not resolved, it will come out on you.

I think this new husband was thinking, *Yeah, I hadn't even thought of that until you brought it up, but there's so much in her right now I don't want to deal with*.

Maybe you've been in stores where you hear somebody yelling at an attendant or a cashier and they're just horrible. Did anybody experience that this weekend? Do you know what my first thought is when I see that now? I feel sorry for her husband. Her husband may be out in the car going, *This is the few minutes where I get some alone time and I get to be at peace. Let her put her venom in there*.

But, I immediately go to how this is something coming out in public that... Think of all the relationships where this is resurfacing. This lady at the retreat said, "You were talking about anger last night like a little pet." That's how I like to describe anger because it helps me remember it.

Some of you carry around anger like a carnival gold fish. It lasts a day or two and then it's gone and you don't have to worry about it too much. Others of you carry around this guinea pig that lives five to seven years. And with your thoughts and with your list of all the reasons this person has offended you and all the reasons why you hate them and all the reasons you would love to get even with this person, you're just feeding this little guinea pig every day and you carry this guinea pig everywhere you go.

Some of you have a parrot and this parrot can live 75 years. Some of these parrots get willed to people after they die and you're sitting at the lawyer's office and the lawyer tells your brother, "You get the house" and tells your sister, "You get the bank accounts" and tells you, "You get the bird." First service didn't get that joke. That was a poultry joke. And you're thinking *Yeah, I just got the bird*. You know what you need to do with the bird. You don't need to return the bird, which is what some of you do when you get the bird; you give the bird right back. I love that some of you have no idea what I'm talking about right now.

Do you know what you need to do with the bird you've been carrying around your whole life? You need to take it off your shoulder, throw it into the air, and yell, "PULL!" Only in the Ozarks does killing a bird get a laugh. On the east and west coast, we'd have to release it in a forest preserve down the road.

But do you know what this lady said? She said, "After you gave that illustration, do you know what my husband and I realized? We weren't carrying a bird. We didn't have a guinea pig. We didn't have a carnival gold fish. We were carrying around a tortoise together. A tortoise can live 150 years and we were carrying this tortoise everywhere we went. And what I didn't realize was when we got married, I was asking my new husband to be as angry and mad and have as much hate in his heart towards my ex-husband as I did. We would feed it together." There were just some moments in their lives that weekend and moments in their heart where they went "Oh, no, once this guy's gone, once he's no longer the issue, this is going to resurface in this marriage." I love what she said to me. This was a great moment, one of my favorite moments over the last couple of years. She said, "Just so you know, we left the tortoise back in our room. The tortoise is not going home with us."

For some of you, what you're dealing with right now is an enemy. You're dealing with someone who has hurt you deeply and you want to get even and you want to stay angry or you want to be like the one old guy who made it to 100 years old. He was being interviewed by a television reporter. The television reporter said, "Wow, 100 years old. Give me some practical wisdom from that long upon this earth."

The 100-year-old goes, "I'll tell you one thing, I don't have any enemies."

The television reporter was inspired and said, "How do you go about life with no enemies?"

The guy said, "You've just got to outlive them all." That's a strategy too.

3. Wait for them to die. Have you heard the expression? "Friends come and go, but enemies are for life." Even the people we're no longer in contact with, we're in this self-made prison called unresolved anger. We're tearing ourselves apart, thinking the best thing to do in this situation is to hate that person.

Jesus gives us a clear strategy and it's this simple: love them. Some of you were just having fun. We were talking turkeys and ducks and chickens and talking about the weekend and then your posture just went closed. You're like, "Love the person who hurt me?"

Watch what Jesus says in Matthew 5. This is very powerful. **43 "You have heard that it was said ..."** Let's put this whole thing in context. Right here, Jesus is not going to be correcting an Old Testament teaching. Nowhere in the Old Testament, nowhere in the writings of Moses do you read "Hate your enemy." We read out of Leviticus last week, quoted by Jesus. "Love your neighbor." The idea of Jesus' day was we are to love our neighbor, those who are like us, those who we feel comfortable with, those who are our countrymen, but the people who go against us, go against God, are the ones we hate. Love this person, hate this person. It's very important when Jesus says, **"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'"**

He's not quoting the Old Testament. Love your neighbor is the Old Testament, but some people interpreted... The teachers of the law, the Pharisees of that day said "Okay, when we see the theme from our ancestors, the theme of the Old Testament is God's judgment against evil." The idea went something like this: "These people here hate you, they abhor you. They don't follow your ways. They actually mock your ways. They take your name in vain and because they hate you, we will hate them." Jesus is saying "You've heard that said."

Let's pause there for a second because I think we're still dealing with that today, 2,000 years later. As we think of those in our country, in our land that go against God, his plans and his ways, we can let seep into our heart the idea of because they won't follow Him... Not only will they not follow Him, they mock Him, they make fun of Him, they are His enemies, therefore, I will hate them. And Jesus comes in and says, "You've heard that and you've been living that way, but that's not it."

44 *"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."* So, the theme through the Old Testament is very clear. The theme is God's wrath upon evil, but when you read the Psalms, you get a lament Psalm and that is very important. Today we are going to look at a wisdom psalm, the lament psalm

Personal and national anger, hatred, and revenge. The Psalm we are going to look at today is Psalm 139. We are going to look at that because David is now talking about the enemies of God. He says, "...are my enemies and my hatred towards them is strong." We're not talking about what is said in Psalm 139. When Jesus said, "You've heard it said," he's talking about how the Pharisees, the teachers of the law in his day were interpreting that. When Jesus says, "You've heard it said, but I tell you..." He's correcting a misinterpretation of this text. This is very clear, but you get this passion, you get this frustration for those who rebel against God.

I want some of you to be clear today, to know my heart and the desire for us to grasp this is that yes, you have a lot of emotions right now for those who do not walk with the Lord. There is frustration and even fear about those who have turned their back on God and would be an enemy of God. And it comes out maybe as it comes out in Psalm 139. **19** *If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!* **20** *They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.* **21** *Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?* **22** *I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.*

Now look at this text through the eyes of a Pharisees. It's why Jesus is correcting this in Matthew 5: 43. Jesus is correcting the idea of "Oh David said it right there, so it is good for us to love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But you need to understand who this is being directed to. And I think this is so important. This psalmist is not taking this to the enemy, this psalmist is taking it to God. For some of us who are dealing with anger and hatred right now towards an enemy, we are misplacing the source, going to the wrong source. We are taking everything inside of us and wanting to go at our enemy, but that's not the first place you start. What we need to understand this from the psalm and have a proper interpretation of it... not like the Pharisees had a misinterpretation of it. We need to understand the psalmist is doing the right thing.

God, not your enemy, is the source for resolving your anger. He's the source of life, the source of love, and the source of forgiveness. Many of us need to start in our relationships with less talk with your enemy and more talk with God. Less going at our enemies and more going to God about our enemies. This may take some of you a long time because your list is long of all of the offenses that have been brought against you. They are deep, they are cutting, they are painful to even think about. Instead of taking that list back...

I sat down with a friend years ago, trying to reconcile a relationship and he brought the list out. This list was years old. I told him, "We could walk through those one at a time, but please hear me. Forgive me. I want us to walk in reconciliation as brothers in Jesus Christ, would you please forgive me."

He said, "I can't we've got to go through this list so you clearly understand what's going on."

At that moment... Maybe you've been there. I felt like if I went back through that list one item at a time, I think at the end, he would have as much anger in his heart as he did when we started the list. That's because I'm not the source for him. Your enemy is not the source. You're spending too much time focused on, talking to, directing things at your enemy when you should be spending far more time with the Lord about this. God, not your enemy, is the source for resolving your anger.

A guy in the first service told me his enemy right now is his spouse. He goes, "That was good. I didn't plan on this being a marriage message today. I thought we were going to be talking about other people groups outside of our nation, but it's about my wife. I've been trying to reason with her."

I said, "Stop right there. How has that been working for you?"

He said, "It's not working; it's getting worse."

I go, "That's why. You stop reasoning with her, stop explaining to her, stop clearly communicating." I love when a guy tells me he's been clearly communicating.

He said, "And I hope you don't misinterpret my passion for anger."

I'm like, "No, I got it. Take it from here and bring it right down here right now. How much time have you spent with the Lord on your spouse? How much time have you spent alone in a closet and just gone at it, sharing your raw emotions with the Lord? How much time have you spent doing that?"

He said, "None."

God is your source.

David, the psalmist, does this. After he declares his hatred for the enemies of God, here's what he says. ***23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*** Call it out. That's why we say around here "Holy Spirit, call them by name. ***24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.***

Going back to what Jesus said in Matthew 5. This love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, he says this: **45** *“...that you may be children of your Father in heaven.”* When you do this, you are a mini me of your Father. Does anybody know what I’m talking about?

I have a mini me in my family and his name is Carson Cunningham. He’s 11 years old. He looks like me. He talks like me. He acts like me, both good and bad. I can’t discipline him because he’s just acting out what was in my head, but I’ve learned not to let it out. Anybody know what I’m talking about? People are telling him all the time that he looks just like his dad. At that very moment, I’m kind of proud, but he’s letting out a big sigh. I know what he’s thinking. He comes over to me and his favorite thing to do is wiggle my double chin a little bit. He knows he’s going to get it one day. But he’s a mini me. He looks like me. He walks like me. He talks like me.

Jesus is saying, “When you love, when you pray, when you bless, when you handle your enemy the right way, you will look like your Father in heaven. You will be taking on the heart of your heavenly Father.”

“He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain...” Let me just share this for the farmers. He sends rain on the democrats and the republicans. *“...on the righteous and the unrighteous.”* The term for this is “common grace,” goodness, blessing even those who do evil. Obviously, the hope there is that it would lead to repentance and they would see who God is and know who God is and cry out to him. But, this is what it means to take on the heart of your heavenly Father. To look at someone who is cursing you and not respond with a curse, but respond with blessing. To take someone who has hurt you and not go back at them to hurt them, but to pray for them. With whatever is inside of you that you just want to explode onto them, you get alone, you and God, and you vent. Less venting on Facebook and more venting in prayer closets. And all God’s people said... Amen. This is how it is supposed to be that you would be like your Father in heaven.

Jesus goes on in this text to teach us this very important principle:

There are no special skills required to love easy to love people. It requires nothing special to greet someone who is kind and gracious. Maybe you’ve experienced this with a waiter or waitress or in a store. You go to ask a question and you’re met with anger. You’re met with just a little short, rude, frustrated person. At that moment is when your skill comes out. If you walk into a store and you’re met with “Good afternoon, we’re glad you’re here. Welcome. Is there anything I can do to help you,” it’s so easy to respond to that person. That’s like the easiest person on the planet to respond to. But, when you walk in and they are standing there with no expression on their face and there is no good response to your questions, it’s at that moment, follower of Jesus, that you get to test your skills. You get to shine because greeting an easy-to-greet person is easy. Loving an easy to love person is easy. Caring for someone who receives it is easy. Caring for someone who doesn’t receive it is hard. That’s where the skill comes in.

Jesus says, **46** *“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors...”* Who were extorting people for money for the Romans. *“...doing that?”* These people you technically consider your enemies because they are stealing and robbing from you, they know how to do that. There’s nothing special in that. **47** *“And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing*

more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” In other words, loving your enemy is a mark of maturity. Be perfect. Don’t lower the bar on loving; raise the bar on loving and be a child of your heavenly Father. Don’t lower the bar and be like, “Until that person changes, until that person conforms...” No, raise the bar on love. We should be known for our love.

I have friends that their churches in bigger cities are being picketed for the way the pastor preached about this or that. I love hearing... We’ve never been blessed with like 50 picketers outside of our church. I thought *Wow, what a tremendous opportunity to show our skills.* I’m not challenging anybody to please come and do this, but my friends that have had this brought against them bring them water and doughnuts and coffee and they don’t go out and preach to them. They don’t leave gospel tracks for each one of them to read. They just love them. They wave at them. There is something that just frustrates people who just want the anger. It’s not our job to get picket signs, stand on the other side, and scream nasty things at them. We respond a completely different way.

Loving your enemy is ultimately trusting God to be the judge of all. This is simply what Jesus is getting at. That’s what the psalmist does. He says, “I’m going to take this to you. You deal with my enemy and I will do what you have called me to do. I will love, I will bless, I will pray.”

For some of you, this is the break through you need right now in your marriage. This is the break through you need, trying to reconcile a relationship with a child. We work with so many parents at Woodland Hills who have prodigal children. I just want you to know that from a personal, pastoral point of view, I can mourn with you in that relationship. I’m there with you. I see the way they are living and it’s like this should be so easy for them to see and to figure out. I get that, but one of the biggest struggles a parent of a prodigal has is their child is far from God.

Last week, a guy came up to me and wanted me to help him figure this out. He said, “The child is far from God, hates everything we’ve taught him, all the ways we tried our best to raise him, he is far from it. Ted, here is my concern...” Don’t raise your hand on this, but I just want to know. If you have a child who is far from the Lord right now, I wonder if you’ve had this exact same concern. “Ted, if I love this child, will it validate their sin?” You’re going to have to show me a text that says that’s true because I’m here to tell you there isn’t one. “Ted, what do I do with my son who won’t walk with the Lord, who has taken on a relationship that is outside of God’s traditional view of marriage? What should I do?”

Well, first of all, Thanksgiving is coming up. Invite him over for Thanksgiving for sure. Your son should be at your table. “Yeah, but if I invite him over and prepare a meal for him, what do we talk about?” The Cubs won the World Series. That could take a long time there. I find the best way to start out a Thanksgiving meal is just this simple little conversation starter. “Who did you vote for?” That’s a great way to start a conversation.

I think the struggle here is the pain and the emotions involved in that broken relationship coupled with the right response. The right response is to love. I don’t know every story in here, so this is a pretty broad statement to make, but I can almost guarantee you that your children know what you believe. To

sit down and preach to them over Thanksgiving, I don't think they need that. I think they need you to pour them another glass of root beer. I get this and it's tough.

For example, I am praying for our leaders, our government officials, our elected leaders, our appointed leaders. Right now, we are in the appointing phase, but we have an elected leader and now the appointed leaders' job is to promote good and punish evil. So, here's how loving your enemies plays out as a citizen of heaven and a citizen of the United States of America. I'm praying for my leaders to root out and to punish and to wipe out radical Islamic terrorism. I can have that in my heart and at the very same time have love for Muslims. I need to say that again.

I shared that and some of you came to me last week and said, "That's so easy I don't know why people are having a hard time separating the role of the government and the role of the Christian. What's the challenge here?" Some can't because the rhetoric is so spun up in our country. You turn on the news and you have "We must defeat..." I am for leaders that are going to promote good and punish evil. But at the same time, I don't look at Muslim people... I don't see one in an airport and start to have hatred in my heart towards that person. No, no. For some, the enemies you have created in your life, the enemies that, through circumstances in your life, have made an enemy out of you, you need to humble yourself. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Go to your heavenly Father and trust him to be the judge of all.

One more passage. Turn over to Romans 12 as we see this practically played out. Paul is going to instruct Roman Christians. Here's what he says in Romans 12. ***9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.***

I love this and Gary Smalley taught on this passage for almost his entire ministry. He loved the word *honor*. It means to esteem as highly valuable. He said the way you honor someone is to greet them first with your face. When you meet someone, to communicate honor with them, you simply look at them with awe like you can't believe they just walked into the room and you're so glad they are there. He did that with everyone: strangers, neighbors, enemies.

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Be a healing people with one another.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. We don't return a curse with a curse. We don't return the bird with a bird. ***15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*** This is the body of Christ.

Just this morning in the first service, we had family members who have lost family members and we are mourning. It happened to me again this morning in the lobby. Within five minutes, I was hugging a friend who just lost a parent and then going over and meeting the parent of a new child. We rejoice and we mourn and we do it all at the same time. ***16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*** In other words, don't put yourself above others.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. This next verse is the verse many of you want an answer to this morning. **18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

If there has been one question I get asked a ton in a counseling office, it is “Ted, have I tried everything? Do I now have grounds for a divorce? Is it okay? Have I made every effort?”

Some of you are asking that question today. Let’s break it down. “If it is possible…” For some of you in here right now, there are relationships that it is not possible right now. For some, it will never be possible to be reconciled in a relationship because the enemy that you were harboring in your heart is no longer living. “If it is possible…” and here is the key: “as far as it depends on you.” I love this. It doesn’t say “as far as it depends on your enemy’s response” or “As far as it depends on the way your enemy receives your olive branch”. No, “as far as it depends on you.”

Isn’t this the hardest thing we teach our children when they are very small? You see your kids fighting and you pull them in and ask what’s going on. They start blaming each other. You pull them aside one at a time. They start to tell you what the other did wrong. “You missed the whole question right there. I didn’t ask you what she did to cause you to lick her. I didn’t ask that question. I’m not asking about her right now.”

That’s why when you come into my office, you’ll see this plaque that I love that one of our elders, Bill Rogers, gave me. It says, “Those who are absent are protected here.” In other words, if I’m talking to you right now and your spouse is not in the room, we are not going to talk about your spouse. We are going to talk about you. Some of you right now are going, “Well that’s the problem. The problem there, Ted, is I’m not the problem. They are the problem. Why don’t you give me strategies for dealing with them?”

“No, we are going to talk about you. As far as it depends on you. Have you made every effort at peace? Let’s talk about that question and then we are going to talk about everything you’ve done to reconcile the relationship, to work through this, to love this person who has been very challenging and difficult to love. Have you made every effort?” “

That’s why I’m here. You need to tell me if I’ve made every effort.”

Then they will leave and go home and tell their family, “I even met with someone. I’ve tried everything and it’s not going to work.” I’m telling you that the majority of the time if not all the time, you haven’t tried everything. You’ve tried the same thing multiple times and received the same results, which is what we call the definition of insanity. “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you…” This is personal responsibility. This is you taking responsibility for what is going on in your heart, not the actions of the other person. Loving the son, loving the daughter, loving the ex-husband, loving the ex-wife, loving the wife, loving the husband, loving the mom, loving the dad.

19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: Now he’s going to quote from Proverbs 25.

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Some commentaries say that your enemy may feel ashamed and begin to reflect on their own decisions and their own attitudes and their own words and actions.

21 Do not be overcome by evil... If we could end this series with this thought and heal our land. I pray that you would not be distraught with evil, but would respond with love. That you would not be overcome, that you would not be overwhelmed with evil, ***but overcome evil with good.***

I like what one pastor says. He puts it this way. *“Christians do not distinguish between neighbors and enemies. The one who loves his enemies can no longer have any enemies. He is left only with neighbors.”*

I’m going to ask you to bow your heads with me as we pray. We are going to have a time of worship and prayer. We are going to corporately pray together during our last song together. God may be stirring something up in you and there may be something that you have come to grips with in this message and you need to talk to someone and work it through. We will have prayer team down here on each side of the stage. We are going to pray together. You can pray individually, but I want to encourage you, as we worship together, that you would take this time to do business, you and the Lord.

Father, it’s in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time together. I just pray for the husband, the wife, the mom, the dad, the brother, the sister, who just needs a moment with you that they would set aside the reactions, the words, the issues in the relationship for a moment and deal with their heart towards the person and that before you today, they would begin to resolve that anger. I pray that they would take these intense emotions to you, not their enemy. That they would start there. And then if it is possible, they can make every effort to begin to reconcile the relationship.

For the one in here right now that has hatred toward a people group, that when a name is brought up or a nationality is brought up or an ethnicity is brought up, something stirs in them, that they would begin to resolve that as well today.

Through the authority of the name of Jesus and the power of the blood of Jesus, we pray this today as a church family. Amen.