

God the Father

By Matt Sanders

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to Matthew 5:43–44 in the section **It's in the Book**. Read Luke 23:34. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How did Jesus show His love for His enemies? Can you think of other examples from the Bible where Jesus or someone else showed this kind of love?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to Matthew 5:45 in the section **It's in the Book**, where Matthew makes a connection between the Father and love. Read 1 John 4:1–12. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What are six ways the love of God is described here?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to Matthew 5:46–47 in the section **It's in the Book**, where we see that God loves His enemies. Read Romans 5:8–10. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Why is it important that God loves His enemies?

Scripture to Memorize

“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 causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” Matthew 5:44–45

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will have a basic understanding of who God the Father is and how His identity is related to their lives.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

"You look like your mother." "You remind me of your father." Maybe you have heard statements similar to these, but you're not always sure how to take them. Much depends on what you know about your parents and how you feel about them.

The Bible portrays God as Father who created humanity in His image. Jesus directs us to be like the Father. Some people think of God like their earthly father or like an ideal father. This is often misleading. This study will look at how the Bible describes God as Father and what that means to our lives.

Read Matthew 5:43–48 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 43–44

These verses are part of one of the five great sermons in Matthew. This one is sometimes called "The Sermon on the Mount." Picture thousands of first-century Hebrew people who took a break from their jobs and responsibilities. They left the city and headed to a nearby hillside to listen to a man teach. He spoke to them in ways no one had before about how God wanted them to live.

Verse 43. You have heard that it was said. Jesus here summarized His statements (see vv. 38–42) and introduced what would follow. He had been telling them something radical and difficult. The Jewish people had been conquered by the Roman Empire. For nearly one hundred years, they had been occupied and controlled by the Romans. Imagine how you would feel if another country invaded the United States and changed laws to favor its people, put its people in power, and kept most Americans in poverty. Most Jewish people hated the Romans, but they were powerless. Many were looking for a champion to rally the people and drive the Romans out. Some listened to Jesus because they thought He might be the one.

According to the law, a Roman soldier could order a Jewish person to carry his gear for a mile. In verse 41, Jesus had said not just to obey but to go above and beyond whatever the Roman law required. He told them not to fight back in a physical sense. In verse 43, He reported that some had said to **hate your enemy**. This must have gotten their attention. Maybe now Jesus would tell them how to fight back. And He did, just not the way many were expecting.

Verse 44. love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Jesus changed everything with this simple statement. It was not enough to "put up" with your enemies. Jesus said to love them and pray for them. Jesus used the same word for *love* that He often used when referring to God's love for us. He was saying, "Love your enemies as God loves them." But Jesus was also saying, "Love your enemies as God loves you."

Much can be said about how the Bible defines love. For now we need to know that it is very different from how most people understand love. "Love your enemies" is enough to show how radically different this kind of love is. The Gospel of John and 1 John are good places to learn more.

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now answer the questions related to Matthew 5:43–44.

On Your Own

Think about who your true enemies are. They are not just people you don't like or who do not like you. They are people who work against what's good for you or against your well-being. Pray for them and for your attitude toward them. Ask God to show you ways to love them without simply giving in to them. In the space below, write some of the first thoughts He brings to your mind.

Verse 45. so that you may be sons of your Father. Here Jesus makes the connection between love and God the Father. In essence He is saying, "If you want to be a son of the Father, love as the Father loves." This means love both your neighbors and your enemies because this is how the Father loves. **in heaven.** But this verse tells us even more about who God is. He is in heaven. This helps us understand that the Father is not one of us but that He is above us.

His sun. God is the owner and controller of the sun and the rain. If Matthew were writing to Romans or Greeks, they might think the Father is one of many gods controlling parts of nature. But Matthew was writing to Hebrew people, who believe in one God who controls all. The Father blesses even the unrighteous with the sun and rain—two key ingredients for cultures that rely on crops. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now answer the questions related to Matthew 5:45 and 1 John 4: 1–12.

Discussion Questions

What are other ways God's love is described in 1 John 4:1–12? In what other ways does the Bible describe how God expresses love?

On Your Own

Make a list of ways God shows His love to you personally. Be as specific as you can. For example, instead of writing that He provides family and friends, write the names of the ones He provides. Then thank God not just for what He does but for who He is.

Studying the Passage, Matthew 5:46–47

Verses 46–47. tax collectors . . . Gentiles. Jesus compared the way most Jewish people understood love to two groups of people the Jewish people hated, tax collectors and Gentiles. Gentiles are anyone who is not Jewish. The Jewish people considered Gentiles as unclean. Plus, the Romans were Gentiles. Tax collectors were even worse. They were Jewish people working for the Roman government and had the reputation of stealing from the people. Jesus said that even tax collectors and Gentiles are kind to people who love or like them. The sons of God do more than this. They love even their enemies because God loves His enemies.

Assignment Three Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now answer the questions related to Matthew 5:46–47 and Romans 5:8–10.

Discussion Question

In Romans 5:8–10, God sent Christ to die for us while we were helpless, ungodly, sinful enemies. How should this change how we react to God?

On Your Own

In the space below, write a prayer to God, thanking Him for being the Father who would send His only Son to die for the sins of the world.

Verse 48. you are to be perfect. Here is the connection Jesus makes. We should be like the Father in this area of love. What does Jesus mean? The word translated “perfect” can also have the sense of completion. Be complete or be whole. In common usage today, the word *perfect* sometimes can mean “an unreachable, ideal state.” If we give this understanding to the verse, the goal becomes even more unreachable because it is not some human ideal of perfection but the Father’s perfection.

If we think of *perfect* meaning “completion,” we can understand this to mean that we should be all the Father created us to be, just as the Father is all He can be. The details of being all we are created to be vary from person to person. But Jesus was saying we *all* take powerful steps in that direction when we love as the Father loves. And that means loving both our neighbors and our enemies.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

In many places throughout the Bible, we can learn more about God the Father. Matthew 5:43–48 focuses on the Father's love that extends even to His enemies. In this passage we also saw the Father presented as Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of all things.

We are made in the image of God, and Jesus tells us to be perfect as the Father is perfect. In some way the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden damaged that image. The two questions that need to be asked are: (1) How can the image be restored? and (2) What does it mean if it is restored?

In Romans 8:29, Paul writes that the community of believers will be conformed to the image of the Son. In 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:3 the Son is called the perfect image of God. Only through the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives can the image of God be restored. The Son is the perfect image of the Father, and we are being conformed to the image of the Son.

The focus on the love of the Father raises the need to understand what the Bible means by love. First John 4 says that to love, one must be born of God. One cannot truly love any other way. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul gives an extensive definition of love.

But the important distinction many people fail to make is the difference between love and the expression of love. If we are truly born of God, we love because it is now our nature to love. We have no choice when it comes to love. The choice comes in how we express that love. The Bible even gives specific expressions that are appropriate in some situations and not in others.

True disciples love because they are born of God and it is therefore their nature to love. They also grow and learn how to express that love to different people in different situations. Part of growing up as a believer is to learn how to express love well in every situation. Sometimes love means helping. Other times it means letting someone learn on his own.

Is it your desire to show love in every situation to everyone involved? That should be the desire of every disciple who is becoming more and more like King Jesus for the glory of God.

Parent Question

Can you tell me a way God the Son reveals the character and personality of God the Father?

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