

Title: "Loving Our Enemies"

March 23, 2026

One of the most challenging directives Jesus gives us is to love our enemies. Many find that truly loving enemies feels nearly impossible. The *good news* is that loving our enemies gets *much* easier when we work with Jesus to heal wounds from hurtful things our enemies have done to us in the past, and also experience Jesus' living presence with us when we encounter them in the present. Racheal, a friend of ours, recently sent us an email with the story below, providing a beautiful example of what it looks like when Jesus puts these two pieces together (shared with permission):

"In grade school I went through a difficult season with mean friends. Two friends were particularly mean, and we had a teacher who particularly favored these two friends and joined them in their cruelty to me.

"Over the years I have worked through forgiveness for many of the hurtful things that these two friends and the teacher did to me, but only recently did Jesus lead me back into some of the painful memories to heal them. In a recent Immanuel Prayer session, Jesus took me back to a 4th grade classroom memory -- one of my most painful rejection moments -- with that teacher and these two friends putting me down in front of the other students in a way that was particularly hurtful and intentionally cruel. I felt the pain from the memory so deeply, but then I also felt so seen and cared for by Jesus. Jesus met with me in that moment, and one of the first things He did was walk up to the front of the class to quietly get my teacher's attention. (I would have been embarrassed if he had made a scene in front of my classmates.) When she noticed Him, He directed her attention towards me as he looked at me over his shoulder with compassion in His eyes. This simple gesture was so satisfying for me because I somehow knew that Jesus saw the injustice, and now I realized the teacher also recognized how horribly she had acted. Jesus then walked back to be with me and provided additional comfort. I now felt defended in that memory, and also no longer felt alone.

"Well, last weekend one of these childhood friends got married in Maine, and the second mean friend and the teacher who treated me poorly were both at the wedding as well. I have continued to be friends with them over the years, so it completely caught me off guard when we were all together and the three of them rejected me in a scenario that almost exactly mirrored the grade-school classroom memory Jesus had taken me back to. (Just like in grade school, it felt like they were deliberately hurtful to me in front of others. It was mean, horribly immature, and just wrong!)

"As I was experiencing the same situation again, real time in the present, all of the painful things they had said and done came flooding forward into my mind. I hid away in a nearby empty room to cry. It suddenly felt ridiculous that I had even traveled to attend the wedding. In this place, Jesus helped me realize I had the opportunity to experience this with Him in a way I didn't know how to do when I was young. My heart responded to that invitation, and I suddenly felt Jesus there with me in the present -- I felt Him seeing me and comforting me, just as He had done in the grade-school memory. And I could feel that He was proud of all the forgiveness I had walked through towards them over the years.

"Then Jesus gave me this warm, inviting, victory-like smile. Somehow something connected with my heart, and I realized that Jesus was defending, comforting, and healing me, *and also calling out my*

true self to victory. He was giving me an opportunity to enemy love, but it felt so effortless and almost like an adventure. The pain I had been feeling somehow just melted in that moment. I was so seen and cared for and defended by Jesus that I just suddenly felt free and alive. I was able to walk into the wedding/reception area and see these people through Jesus's eyes -- I loved them for their good true hearts down inside. I danced with them and laughed, and it felt like my true heart was there. Somehow, my friend's mean words and actions no longer had a sting because I could see that it wasn't their true hearts saying and doing those mean things.

"Somehow with Jesus there, all of the painful experiences with these two friends and the teacher were transformed into victory moments for me. I'm so thankful I had that Immanuel Prayer experience a few weeks ago, and then a further healing when unexpectedly facing the same hurtful behavior last weekend! Jesus' healing presence in the childhood memory and His helping presence last weekend were both so real! I can't even believe how much love I have for them now."

Finally, there has been lasting fruit from Rachel's interactions with Jesus at the wedding. She encountered the two friends and the teacher in social settings several months later, and reports, "I still feel a surprising, unexplainable love for them. How wild!"

You might be asking, "But what about justice? And if I truly forgive the person who has hurt me, is it still okay for me to set boundaries so that they don't keep hurting me, or am I supposed to just let people be mean to me without any kind of pushback?" And you might be worrying, "But if I forgive them and let go of my anger, then I will lose my energy/motivation for justice and correction, and the problem will never be addressed -- if I forgive them, then they will just get away with it!" This story of exceptional enemy-love raises important questions and understandable concerns.¹ AND it contains a huge gold nugget of truth: when we are trying to love our enemies, it will be a *lot* easier if we work with Jesus to heal past trauma and experience his living presence with us in the present.

Blessings,

Dr. Lehman/Karl

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¹ Get a good connection with Jesus, and then look at these important questions and understandable concerns *with Him*. He has profoundly wise, helpful insights that will prevent these questions and concerns from getting in the way of loving your enemies. An essay that Charlotte wrote about forgiveness, "Wrestling with the Nature and Demand of Christian Interpersonal Forgiveness," and the discussion of forgiveness in Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) may also be helpful. (Charlotte's essay is available as a free download from the "Special Subjects/Advanced Topics" section of the Resources page of www.immanuelapproach.com.)