

**Dwelling in the Word**

Prayerfully read Matt 5:43-48 and 22:39 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to what God says in this passage?

Beginning the Conversation

1. What teaching of Jesus do you admire most, but find the most difficult to actually apply in your daily life?
2. When you hear the word “neighbour,” who are the first people that come to your mind?

Digging Deeper *(pick some of the following questions to discuss as a group)*

3. According to the “Jesus Creed” (love God and love others) why was connecting the love of God with the love of neighbour considered so revolutionary?
4. Why is it important to understand the political context of Roman occupation when reading Jesus’ command to love one’s enemy and pray for those who persecute you?
5. How does the “easy love” that only greets friends or loves those who love us fall short of the standard Jesus sets for his followers?
6. What does the fact that God “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good” tell us about the character we are called to reflect?
7. In the specific context of 5:48, what does it mean to “be perfect” as our heavenly Father is perfect?
8. How does the concept of an “asymptotic” goal—constantly approaching a limit without ever fully reaching it—help us understand the lifelong journey of discipleship?
9. How does Augustine’s view that “every human being is neighbour to every other human being” challenge our natural tendency to exclude certain people?

Living it Out

1. The sermon suggests that the first step to loving an enemy is prayer; who is one person you find difficult to get along with that you can commit to praying for every morning this week?
2. What does it look like in practice to “fake/faith it until you make it” by choosing to act in love even when your emotions don’t match your actions?
3. Is there a “beautiful act” of service or a “Braver Angels” style dialogue you could participate in this week to bridge a gap with someone who has an opposing viewpoint?
4. Since none of us will reach perfection in this life, what is one way you can love your neighbour (or even your “enemy”) this week?



Perfect Love (Matthew 5:43-48)

April 26, 2026
Pastor Tyler Williams
Greenfield Community Church

The "Jesus Creed"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (22:36-40).

The "Jesus Creed"

Jesus's teachings on the altruistic love of strangers "would transform the moral sensibilities of the West, and in the end, simply become common sense."
– Bart D. Ehrman, *Love Thy Stranger* (2026) 136.

"In Matthew, Jesus' teaching about love reaches a highpoint in the Sermon on the Mount... and reaches its highest requirement in *loving* one's enemies." – Vernon K. Robbins, *Finding Love. A Journey through the New Testament* (2025) 25.

Loving God according to...



Pharisees:

Wholehearted devotion through obedience to the Torah.

Sadducees:

Wholehearted devotion through Temple and sacrifice.

Essenes:

Wholehearted devotion through separation and purity.

Loving God according to...



Jesus:

Wholehearted devotion through loving one's neighbour as oneself.



Extends neighbour love to include loving one's enemies (5:43-44)

Enemy Love



"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour' and 'hate your enemy'" (5:43).

- No commandment in Old Testament that says "hate your enemy."
- Essenes in their Community Rule: "Love all the Children of Light... and hate all the Children of Darkness" (1QS 1.9-11).

Enemy Love



"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven..." (5:44-45a).

- Easy love excludes; Enemy love embraces!
- Enemy love reflects the love of God.

Perfect Love



"Be perfect [in your love], therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect [in his love]" (5:48).

- Jesus calls us to love others in the same way that God loves others.
- Discipleship is a never ending progression towards godliness, striving to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect — and all of this is through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

3 Steps to Loving our Enemies



1 Pray "Pray for those who persecute you" (5:44).

2 Pretend "*Faith* it until you Make It!"

3 Participate In dialogues like braverangels.org

Invitation



"Every human being is neighbour to every other human being.
Is he unknown? He's human. Is she an enemy? She's human.
Is he a foe? He's human. Is she a friend? Let her stay a friend.

Is he an enemy? Let him become a friend"

(Augustine, Sermon 299, in *Sermons on the Saints*).