



## WEEK TEN: LOVE THE FINAL CHALLENGE

Welcome to the final week of the *Loving People* study! This week we will explore love's final challenge—**loving our enemies**. From the beginning of this study, we've learned true love is seeking God's best for another person. But Jesus challenges us to take it one step further. He says the ultimate test of true love is whether we are willing to love our enemies. This goes to the heart of God's vision for our lives, because God loves His enemies (Romans 5:8,10). This is why Jesus came: to transform us so we can become like our Creator again and develop the capacity to love even our enemies!

This week we will explore several passages of Scripture where Jesus teaches and models this high calling in our lives. We will also read three accounts of modern Christ-followers who have loved their enemies in a wide variety of situations. On the last two days of this week's study, we will step back and review the *Loving People* journey to prepare us for our final Life Group next week.

Before starting your study, you may want to download the PDF with the three stories of the modern-day Christ-followers. Simply click "Download Resource" on Week 10 of the [lovingpeople.rockypeak.org](http://lovingpeople.rockypeak.org) website. All three excerpts you will need this week are included in a single PDF.



# DAY ONE

## DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 5:43-48
- ◆ **READ:** “Refusing to Be Silenced,” pgs. 189-193
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On loving our enemies

### ◆ EXPLORE

As you start the study this week, ask the Holy Spirit to create a deep desire in you to love others as God has loved you—including your enemies. Then read **Matthew 5:43-48** in the New International Version (NIV) and answer the following questions.

- 1) In this passage, Jesus is challenging the common religious teaching of His day about how to relate to enemies. How does His teaching differ from that of the religious leaders?
- 2) According to this passage, **why** should we love our enemies? What is Jesus’ **vision** for our lives?
- 3) In this passage, Jesus teaches us to pray for our enemies. What specific things do you think we should pray for in our enemy’s lives?

### ◆ READ

Nik Ripken is a respected Christian researcher who has traveled all over the world to interview Christ-followers who are facing severe persecution for their faith. He shares their stories in his powerful book *The Insanity of God*. Today we will read one of those stories from the chapter “Refusing to Be Silenced.” This is the first excerpt in the PDF available on Week 10 of the [www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org](http://www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org) website. Simply click on “Download Resource” and read **pages 189-193**.

### ◆ REFLECT

- 1) How did reading this story impact you? What were some of your first thoughts, emotions, or insights?
- 2) Have you ever been persecuted for your faith (in big or small ways)? If so, how did you respond to your persecutors?
- 3) At the end of this story, Nik writes,

*The blind, invalid, middle-aged man lying helpless in the bed before him was the prison guard who had spread human waste on the pastor’s*

*breakfast every morning for the first nine months of his imprisonment.*

*“Oh, Lord! Do not let me fail you now!” Stoyan’s father prayed beneath his breath. Without identifying himself or saying anything that might give away the connection, the pastor granted his former tormentor forgiveness in his heart, helped the old woman administer the medicine to relieve the man’s pain, prayed for her son, and then returned home awed by a new and deeper understanding of God’s grace. In fact, he was so overwhelmed by God’s grace that the experience changed his life and the lives of his family members.*

*-The Insanity of God, p. 193*

What lessons or insights about love and forgiveness stand out to you from this quote? List them below.

4) This is likely not the first time this pastor had been asked to practice this kind of love for his enemies. How do you think his years in prison may have prepared him for this difficult test?

5) Write a prayer in your journal based on the Scripture we explored and the story we read today.

# DAY TWO

## DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Luke 6:27, 6:31-36
- ◆ **READ:** “Brothers,” pgs. 160-165
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the power of love to reconcile enemies

### ◆ EXPLORE

Today we will explore another passage where Jesus commands us to love our enemies. Read **Luke 6:27** and **Luke 6:31-36** in the New International Version (NIV), and then answer the following questions.

- 1) How would you summarize Jesus’ teaching in this passage in your own words?
- 2) According to this passage, **why** should we love our enemies? What is Jesus’ **vision** for our lives?
- 3) Do you have any **personal** enemies in your life right now? If so, list them in your journal.
- 4) Do you see any people, groups, or organizations as **public** enemies in your life? (Think of politicians, political parties, media outlets, special interest groups, etc.) If so, list them in your journal.
- 5) Jesus challenged us to “do good” to our enemies (6:35). What would it look like to “do good” to both the **personal** and **public** enemies you just listed?

### ◆ READ

Today we will read an excerpt from the book *Born Again* by Chuck Colson. Chuck was one of the top aides for President Richard Nixon. He had a reputation for being a ruthless political operator who was willing to do whatever it took to advance the president’s agenda. When the Watergate scandal broke in 1972, Chuck was convicted for obstructing justice and sent to prison for seven months. However, this crisis led to his conversion shortly before he was indicted. He went on to become one of the most influential Christ-followers in our nation until his death in 2012.

Shortly after his conversion, Chuck (a Republican) was introduced to a famous Democratic U.S. senator from Iowa, Harold Hughes. Harold Hughes was a Christ-follower, but he and Chuck had been bitter political rivals up to this point. It was a third Christ-follower, Doug Coe, who engineered this first awkward meeting, shortly before Chuck was indicted for his crimes in Watergate.

Read about what happened next on **pages 160-165** in the “Brothers” PDF. This is the second excerpt from the PDF you downloaded at the beginning of the week.

## ◆ REFLECT

- 1) How did this story impact you? What were some of your first thoughts, emotions, or insights?
- 2) Chuck and Harold Hughes were longtime, bitter political enemies. Why do you think they both agreed to this awkward meeting?
- 3) Towards the end of their meeting, Chuck writes,

*“As a new Christian I have everything to learn, I know that. I’m grateful for any help you can give me.”*

*For a moment there was silence. Harold, whose face had been enigmatic while I talked, suddenly lifted both hands in the air and brought them down hard on his knees. “That’s all I need to know. Chuck, you have accepted Jesus and He has forgiven you. I do the same. I love you now as my brother in Christ. I will stand with you, defend you anywhere, and trust you with anything I have.”*

-Born Again, p. 150

What are some lessons we can learn about love from this powerful story of reconciliation?

- 4) Today we live in a world that is increasingly hostile toward Christians and Christian values. How do you think we should respond to those we see as political enemies, who oppose everything we stand for?
- 5) Spend some time reflecting and praying about what you are learning today.

# DAY THREE

## DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Luke 23:32-43
- ◆ **READ:** “My Son Shot 10 Amish Girls in a Pennsylvania Schoolhouse”
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the relationship between forgiveness and loving our enemies

### ◆ EXPLORE

Today we will read part of Luke’s account of Jesus’ execution. Read **Luke 23:32-43** in the Message (MSG) and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) What were Jesus’ enemies saying and doing to Him in this scene?
- 2) How did Jesus respond to His enemies?
- 3) Do you think it’s possible to love our enemies without forgiving them? Why, or why not?
- 4) How does Jesus model His own teaching about loving our enemies in this situation?

### ◆ READ

Read the article “My Son Shot 10 Amish Girls in a Pennsylvania Schoolhouse.” This is an article originally published in *Woman’s Day* magazine. This is the last article in the single PDF you downloaded at the beginning of the week.

### ◆ REFLECT

- 1) What part of this story impacted you the most, and why?
- 2) This story illustrates the powerful connection between loving our enemies and forgiveness. On the last page of this article, Terri Roberts writes,

*It was a moment of sudden, healing clarity for me. **Forgiveness is a choice.** The Amish had made that very clear, but now I knew what it meant: Forgiveness isn’t a **feeling**. These sweet parents were as grief-stricken as I was, their hearts broken like mine. I did not have to stop feeling anger, hurt and utter bewilderment at the horrific decisions Charlie had made. I only had to make a choice: to forgive.*

What do you find most helpful in this quote, and why?

3) Is there anything you need to forgive your **personal** or **public** enemies for, in order to love them well? If so, explain.

4) Write a prayer based on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you about the relationship between forgiveness and love.



# DAY FOUR

## DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Matthew 22:34-40
- ◆ **READ:** Weeks 1-5 of the *Loving People* study
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On your most important insights from Weeks 1-5

### ◆ EXPLORE

Read **Matthew 22:34-40** in the New Living Translation (NLT) and then answer the questions below. (You can find this on YouVersion.) This is the first passage we used to start this journey of *Loving People* almost ten weeks ago.

- 1) Why did this religious expert ask Jesus this question?
- 2) According to the Jewish rabbis, there were 613 commandments in the law of Moses. However, when asked which one is the most important, Jesus responded immediately. How do you think He was able to identify these two so quickly (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18)?
- 3) In Matthew 22:40, Jesus says: “The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” What do you think He means by this statement?

### ◆ READ

Read through the questions on the study guides for **Weeks 1-5** of *Loving People*. You can use your hard copies for each week or simply read them online at [www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org](http://www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org).

### ◆ REFLECT

- 1) What are **five to ten** of the most important lessons you’ve learned about **spiritual maturity, emotional maturity, or living a life of love** from the first five weeks? Create a bulleted list in your journal.
- 2) Which of the **first five weeks** of this study/series had the biggest impact on you, and why?
- 3) Take a few minutes to thank God for what He has taught you through the first five studies. Write a prayer asking God to help you remember these lessons and to put them into practice.



# DAY FIVE

## DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** John 13:33-35
- ◆ **READ:** Weeks 6-10 of the *Loving People* study
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On your most important insights from Weeks 6-10

### ◆ EXPLORE

Read **John 13:33-35** in the Message (MSG), and then answer the following questions. (You can find this on YouVersion.) This passage is from the last night Jesus spent with His disciples before His arrest. Read it and then answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Jesus tell them to do, and why?
- 2) Why do you think Jesus chose to give them this new command at this time?

### ◆ READ

Read through the questions on the study guides for **Weeks 6-10** of *Loving People*. You can use your hard copies for each week or simply read them online at [www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org](http://www.lovingpeople.rockypeak.org).

### ◆ REFLECT

- 1) What are **five to ten** of the most important lessons you've learned about **spiritual maturity, emotional maturity, or living a life of love** from the last five weeks? Create a bulleted list in your journal.
- 2) Which of the study weeks (**6-10**) had the biggest impact on you, and why?
- 3) Has your understanding of love changed over the course of this series? If so, explain.
- 4) What are some of the most significant ways you have grown and changed as a result of this study? Write them out in your journal.
- 5) Take a few minutes to thank God for how He has used this study in your life. Write a prayer asking Him to help you remember what you have learned and to continue to teach you how to live a life of love.

# WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the tenth message in this series (*Love . . .The Final Challenge*), answer the following questions.

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, illustration, or quote from this week's message, and why?
- 2) Are there any specific steps the Holy Spirit is asking you to take to love someone you consider an enemy? If so, explain.