

# The Life of David

## Week 6: How to Love an Enemy

1 Samuel 24, 26

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- September 24, 2023

Good morning! What do you think is the most difficult thing that Jesus asks His followers to do? Out of all of His commandments, what is the hardest thing that Jesus asks of us as believers? I think it's this in Matthew 5: **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven."**

Love your enemies. I notice that Jesus tells us that we will have enemies in life—people who are hard to love, people who we don't want to love, people who don't show love towards us.

So, how do you respond when someone hurts you? What do you do when you're treated unjustly? When someone ruins your reputation at work? When your neighbor dings your car door and they don't apologize for it and they don't offer to help? Or when that dysfunctional family member or parent keeps throwing sticks and stones at you, and yeah, they don't break your bones, but they hurt a lot—especially from someone who you feel like you should trust? How do you respond in the right way when someone does wrong to you?

This fall we're studying the life of David—the eventual King David. And in today's episode of David's life we're going to ask this question: How do you love an enemy? And David's actually going to show us, and he's going to show us in three ways.

So, please open up your Bible with me to the book of 1 Samuel. We're going to be studying chapters 24 and 26.

Just a brief of summary of David's life so far—early on he's King Midas. Everything he touches turns to gold. At a young age he's just a child and he's anointed to be the future king of Israel. Just a couple of years later he strolls onto a battlefield when all the soldiers are terrified, and it's he who kills the giant and cuts off his head for everybody to see. David grows up and he gains more fame and fortune and he wins more victories. And it keeps going! He becomes King Saul's favorite musician. He plays private concerts. And David and Jonathan, Saul's son,

become best friends. They're closer than brothers. David even marries into the royal family, so now he's the king's son-in-law. The future is so bright.

And then overnight the man who David saw as a friend and a mentor and even a father figure begins to burn every bridge between the two of them. Saul treats David as this adversary. He becomes his enemy. And he doesn't just hurl insults at him; he throws an actual spear—twice. Two separate times the Bible says that Saul tries to pin David to a wall. And when he can't kill David himself he sends these assassins.

And so, David's life just collapses. He goes on the run, he's in hiding, he's living in caves. This is his Robin Hood era. He's got this small group of warriors, his band of merry men. He's hiding out in his own personal Sherwood Forest of En Gedi. And King Saul is hunting him.

In 1 Samuel 24, Saul takes a break from this murderous quest, and he goes into a cave to use the bathroom. And of all the caves to do this in, wouldn't you know it, it just so happens that David and his men are hiding out in this one. And David's buddies whisper to him and say, "This is it. This is your chance! Kill the king and we can walk out of the cave and straight into the palace." And they even sprinkle in a little bit of spiritual language to justify it. They say, "Hey, God's giving this to you. This is a gift. Just take it—it's yours."

David has a golden opportunity to take revenge against his enemy. And why shouldn't he? I mean, he's lost everything. He's lost everyone he loves. And the man responsible for it is standing just yards away in a very compromised position. *Kill your enemy and take your kingdom.* That's his choice.

Neuroscientists at the University of Wisconsin analyzed the brain waves of people who were insulted and offended. And they found that when people are hurt in that personal way, there's this burst of activity that takes place in your left prefrontal cortex, which is interesting, because that's the part of the brain that also lights up when we're hungry.

So, that increased activity is not showing the sensation of being angry; it actually demonstrates this desire to express that anger—the longing to hit back, the willingness to exact revenge.

Because pouring out anger or wrath or vengeance, we believe, is going to satisfy our appetite for it. The doctor in charge of the study said, "Think of the urge as a kind of hunger, a lust, a deficit that the brain is seeking to fill ... that is why revenge fantasies can be so delicious."

And so, here's Saul stalking his prey. And here's David, treated unreasonably, unjustly, unfairly. I think David's hungry. I think he has that hunger for revenge, and I think he's been dreaming about a moment like this.

And so, in the darkness he crawls up behind Saul, he draws his sword, and he just slices off a small patch of Saul's clothing. The Bible says that **“After doing this David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed.’ So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul.”**

Why doesn't David kill him? This is his enemy. And Saul has grown more and more deranged. He's hurting the country, he's hurting other people. Killing him makes political and military sense. One swing of the sword and it changes everything for David. And he says it's not the right thing to do. And he tells us why. He says that Saul is the Lord's anointed. David looks at him and he sees Saul the way that God sees him. Saul is marked by God, so it's not David's time or place or right to harm him.

**How do you love an enemy? The first lesson from David is you see them the way God sees them.** When someone harms you and you're tempted to retaliate and hit back, when you feel that hunger for revenge, the way you turn from that temptation is to see your enemy the way that God does.

Now Saul specifically has been anointed by God to be the king of Israel. How does that translate to our life? When that person cuts you off in traffic on the way home from church today are you allowed to just go after them because they're not anointed by God to be king? No, that's not what it's saying.

But the truth is this. No matter who that person is, no matter what they've done, even done to you, no matter what they believe about God, no matter what, that human being is in the image of God. The Book of Genesis tells us that God created us in His image. And so, for that reason alone—for no other reason—but because of God's divinity, every human person deserves dignity. Because a person is made in God's image, he or she is inherently valuable and worthy of honor and respect.

James 3 applies this for us. It says, **“With our mouths we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”**

So, that guy at work who is spewing venom about you behind your back is made in the image of God. That person who is writing hurtful gossip about you on that text thread or online is made in God’s likeness. When that person insults you and you’ve got this perfect, witty, cutting comeback that’s going to hurt them and put them in their place, the Bible says, *Don’t say it. Hold your tongue.* The first step to loving an enemy is to see them the way that God sees them.

Let’s return to the cave. David feels so guilty about slicing Saul’s robe that he gives himself up. He walks out of the cave, out of hiding, and he bows down and says, “I had the chance to kill you and I didn’t.” He says, **“May the Lord judge between and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.”**

Saul realizes he’s been spared and he weeps. And he asks David to forgive him for everything he’s done. He swears to never harm him again. He says, “I’ll stop chasing you.” And Saul goes home. And if the Book of 1 Samuel ended right here, this would be an incredible story of loving an enemy and how that enemy becomes a friend again. But it doesn’t end here.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 26. This is just two chapters later. **“Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to hunt David in the wilderness.”** Saul is at it again. It’s the same injustice, it’s the same enemy. Saul picks up his spear, he gathers his army, and he goes after David ... again.

Has this ever happened to you? Someone hurts you and then they apologize. There are tears, there’s a pledge to do better next time, there’s this promise to make things right. And when those things happen there’s so much hope. There’s hope for the future, there’s hope for this relationship to be restored or reconciled.

So, what happens when that hope evaporates, when the tears dry up and then the behavior doesn’t change at all? When all the words just turn out to be hollow? And that person who hurt you goes back and hurts you again and again? What do we do with enemies who remain enemies?

Let’s look and see what David does. Saul is hunting David and his army camps for the night. They put Saul in the middle. They create this perimeter around him to protect him. And

David and his crew are looking down from the hills around them. And the Bible says that God puts the whole army into a deep sleep. And David and one of his men sneak into the camp at night. And in 1 Samuel 26, starting in verse 7, we're told that **“David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay asleep around him. Then Abishai said to David, ‘God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice.’”**

This is almost out of a movie, isn't it? I mean, Tarantino himself couldn't write a better script. These two guys tiptoe through a sleeping army. They get to the very center and like a bullseye right in the middle is the person they're after, their enemy, and he's asleep. And what's that right next to his head, pointing like a compass needle? It's Saul's spear!

I have to imagine that David recognizes this spear. *I remember that. The last time I saw it, it was flying by my head. Last time I saw that spear it was stuck in a wall and it was meant for me. Saul tried to pin me to a wall, and right now I can pin him to the ground.*

And just like in the cave, there's this sense of poetic justice to all of this. It's like the bully who put a “Kick Me” sign on your back, and he turns around, and there's one stuck to his back.

And Abishai recognizes it too. It's déjà vu all over again. And so, he tries to remove any guilt that David might have. He says, “God's given you another gift. Come on, man, take it. First the cave, now a sleeping army. Once is coincidence, twice is a confirmation that God wants you to kill this guy.” He says, “Listen, I get it, if you don't want to kill a king, I'll kill him for you. I'll even make it quick. It'll just take one stab.”

And armed with this chance to extract this pound of flesh from his enemy, David says no. He says, **“Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?” And David said, ‘As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let's go.’”**

David spares Saul again. And he turns his back on vengeance again. And he chooses to trust God for justice. **It's the second way to love an enemy: you trust God for justice.**

David says, “Saul is going to get what he deserves. A day of reckoning will come. God might just strike him down tonight. Or he’ll die at some future point. Or he’ll be killed in battle. But that’s not my place, it’s not my job.”

So, David doesn’t kill Saul because he’s the Lord’s anointed—he’s the king. And then David doesn’t kill Saul because he’s trusting God for justice, and he knows that justice is God’s to give.

Very quickly—this is important—loving our enemies doesn’t mean that we just let them off the hook for injustice. It doesn’t mean that you just allow anything to happen to you. It doesn’t mean that you don’t allow legal systems to step in and act when necessary.

But loving an enemy means that you are intentionally looking for the difference between justice and vengeance, because there’s a difference. When we’re insulted and we want to return the favor with interest, that’s not for justice’s sake; we just want to avenge ourselves. When someone hurts us and we feel that hunger, that desire to strike back, is it because it’s right or because we know it will feel good?

Loving an enemy doesn’t mean shunning justice. Loving an enemy means not lusting for revenge. **Romans 12:19** says, **“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”** *Vengeance is mine. I will repay.* That’s what justice is.

So how do we do that? How do we trust God for justice? Most of the time it means letting go. You let go. Not every offense needs to be added to this nuclear arsenal of anger that you’re storing up. You don’t have to go through the mental checklist and add every time that you’ve been wronged by that person. You don’t need to settle every score.

Instead, you trust that God will repay, that real justice will be done. Because only He knows what a person deserves and only He has the right to give it to someone. This is how we love our enemies. We see them as God sees them and we trust Him for justice.

And if you look at David’s life, he actually goes one step further. Watch what David does. It says, **“David went over to the other side and stood far off on the top of a hill, with a great space between them ...”** Other side, far off, top of a hill, great space between them. Look how intentional this one verse is to tell us that he gets a safe distance from Saul.

Now David has the high ground and he yells down to wake up Saul and the army. And he says, “Look, I could have killed you again, and I didn’t! It’s the second time I’ve spared your life.”

And Saul sees David and he sees him holding his spear. He realizes he could’ve been killed. And he weeps. And he asks David to forgive him for everything. And he swears to never harm him, and he says, “I’ll stop chasing you.” And then he invites David to come down and come home with him.

Haven’t we already done this? David has seen those exact tears before. He’s heard this speech before. He’s been right here. And so, **“David answered and said, ‘Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it.’ And then David went on his way, and Saul returned home.”**

How do you love an enemy? The third lesson from David’s life is that we forgive them. We forgive, but not foolishly.

Just look what David does. He does not go down to meet with Saul. He yells to him from a distance. Remember all that separation between them. He stays up high where he’s safe. David invites Saul to make things right, but it’s on David’s terms. He says, “You can send someone to get this spear. It belongs to you. But I’m not coming down.” David doesn’t rush to reunite. He doesn’t return home with Saul. He doesn’t give him a big hug and say, “Yeah, everything’s great.” In fact, after this encounter, they go in opposite directions. David forgives his enemy, but he also knows his enemy. So, he’s not foolish with the forgiveness.

And this is such an important distinction, and it’s worth looking at: what forgiveness actually is and how to forgive wisely.

Because forgiveness doesn’t mean that we just say, “Oh, it didn’t really matter” or “That didn’t hurt.” No, it did hurt. It did matter. Otherwise there wouldn’t be anything to forgive. Forgiveness isn’t pretending that something didn’t happen; forgiveness address what happened.

If you invite someone over to your house and they walk in and they knock over a lamp and it shatters with pieces everywhere, someone has to pay for it. Well, actually, no one can pay for it, and the situation goes unrepaired, unresolved, and you just live with less light in your house. Or you can make that person pay for it, and they need to buy you a new lamp or give you money to buy one. Or you can pay for it yourself, and so you end up restoring what was broken.

When a debt is incurred, someone has to pay it. So, forgiveness releases another person from their debt to you. Forgiveness means that I absorb that debt myself and I'm not making you pay for it.

So, in the context of relationships, how do you forgive? How do you forgive someone who hurt you? Forgiveness means you stop bringing it up. You say, *I will not keep bringing this up to you, trying to shame you. I will not keep bringing this up to other people, trying to hurt you. And I will not keep bringing it up to myself so that I can stay angry with you.*

When you forgive, you refuse to indulge in ill-will and mental vengeance. You release that person who hurt you from their debt to you. That's what it looks like to forgive.

And yet, we don't have to be foolish about it. If someone wrongs you, and they're behaving as an enemy toward you, forgiving them doesn't mean that you instantly need to be reconciled with them. Boundaries are so often necessary after forgiveness takes place.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you immediately trust this person again. They've wronged you. That relationship doesn't have to continue as it once did, at least not right away. Trust has to be re-earned.

Again, forgiveness doesn't mean acting as if the wrong never took place, especially if the wrongdoer doesn't repent or they're a repeat offender. If someone is likely to hurt you again, don't make it easy for them. It is never loving to let someone continue to sin again and again. And it's not loving to let someone sin against you again and again.

So, with that side of your family or with that person in your family that's making life miserable for you—they're acting as an enemy towards you with their words or with their actions—listen, don't go to Thanksgiving dinner this year. Just don't do it. You can forgive them. Don't be mean, don't retaliate. Don't keep bringing these things up. But don't make it easy for them to wound you over and over. You don't have to go.

It is okay to maintain distance from someone who has hurt you, who is acting as an enemy toward you. It's appropriate to say, "Right now this relationship is only going to take place with text or phone calls, and we're not going to do any visits for a while."

You're still forgiving that person. You don't hold it over them, you don't try to get revenge. But don't allow the offenses to continue. **That's how you love an enemy. You forgive them, but not foolishly.**



Now how in the world do we do this? How in the world do we do any of this? Where do we find the strength to love, especially an enemy?

And I'll tell you, it's only when we experience, when we know and take hold of the love of God for us that we're ever able to love someone else. And only when you know and love Jesus and you know His love for you will you be able to love an enemy.

Because the truth is this: Jesus loved us *when* we were His enemies. The Book of Romans tells us so clearly that **“God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ dies for us ... For if while we were His enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.”**

The only way that we can love an enemy—it's the only way. We can love our enemies because Jesus first loved us. Listen, the truth is that we all want to be like King David. We all want to be someone who kills giants and is a person after God's own heart. We want to be like David in our lives. But the truth is that we are all way more like Saul.

The Bible tells us that on our own, in our sin, we were enemies of God. And God saw us and He loved us. And He didn't ignore justice. He didn't say that sin doesn't matter. But He took ultimate justice upon himself. He paid the debt himself—to forgive us. And He did this by not sparing His Son.

Twice, David spares Saul's life. And he asks, “Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed?” David says, “Not me.” In 1 Samuel the word “anointed” is the word “Messiah.” In Greek the translation of that word “Messiah” is the word “Christ.”

Jesus the Christ, the Lord's anointed. Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed? Not David, not you, not me. But God himself does.

Remember that spear sticking out of the ground? David refused to plant that spear into Saul to gain a kingdom for himself. But in John 19 a spear is plunged into Jesus' side, and it gains a kingdom for us.

David risks his life over and over to show mercy to Saul. And Jesus is the one who gives His life to show mercy to us.

David climbs to the top of the hill and he looks down on an enemy with forgiveness. Jesus climbs to the top of a hill and He's nailed to a cross, and He looks down, and He says, “Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.”

And when Jesus died on that cross, God poured out His wrath and His justice on His anointed. And He did it out of love for His enemies, so that His enemies could become His children.

And so, when we, His children, grasp that truth—when we let it pierce our hearts and we let it overflow from who we are, that’s when we’ll be able to go and do likewise.

**How do you love an enemy? You see them as God sees them. You trust Him for justice. And then you forgive. And then you quit looking at your enemies.** You quit looking at them. You quite focusing on the sticks and the stones and the spears that they’re throwing at you. And instead, you look up. And you look at Christ on the cross, and you say, “Thank You for loving me. Thank You for forgiving me. Help me to love others. Help me to be someone who forgives others, especially my enemies.”

In that late 1700s, here in America, there was a pastor named Peter Miller. And during his life he endured unjust persecution from his next-door neighbor named Michael Wittman. Michael was violent towards Peter and towards his family. He damaged the church building over and over. He spread rumors and gossip. He did everything he could to denounce Peter as a pastor.

After the Revolutionary War, Michael Wittman was arrested and he was accused of and convicted of treason. And he was sentenced to death. And while he was absolutely an unpleasant person and an enemy, the pastor knew he was not a traitor.

So, Peter Miller set out to acquire a pardon for this convicted man. And he walks seventy miles to the home of an old childhood friend, someone who he thought maybe could help—someone named George Washington.

And when they met, the old pastor asks this new president, “For our old acquaintance sake, George, I have come to beg for the life of the accused.”

Washington answered, “I’m sorry, Peter ... I cannot give you the life of your friend.”

To which the pastor responded, “My friend? He is the bitterest enemy any man has ever known. But Jesus tells me to love my enemy.”

And after hearing this, Washington said, “I cannot give you the life of a friend but I will freely pardon your enemy.”

Peter Miller loved an enemy and he spared his life. And miraculously, actually, years later Michael Wittman's life would be transformed by that pardon and by the pastor's forgiveness. And he would give his life to Christ. And it's Peter Miller who baptized him.

Listen, perhaps one day you will have a story like that, where an enemy becomes a friend. Maybe one day forgiveness and reconciliation will go hand in hand and a relationship will be restored. Pray for that. Ask God for that.

But just know that it may not happen. It doesn't happen between David and Saul. They go their separate ways and they stay there. But as far as it depended on David, David did what he could do, and he loved an enemy. And that's our calling as well. And we can do that. We can love our enemies because Jesus the Christ first loved us.

So, let's pray together, and let's ask God to do that—for the strength to do that. Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we thank You for who You are and for what You've done for us. And God, we know that we don't deserve this love and this compassion and this grace. But You love us and You give it to us freely. And so, help us to turn and look at people around us—people that we might even consider enemies in this world. And help us to love them. Help us to be people who would show Your love to them. Help us to pray for them.

God, we pray that we would be people who are marked by this different kind of love; that people would look and see us and know You. God, we thank You, that You did not spare Your Son; that You gave Him for us, so that we could become not just friends, but that we could become children. We pray these things in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.