

How to respond

When People Hurt You

By Dave Batty

What comes to your mind in response to the questions, “Who has hurt you? Who has offended you? Who has lied about you? Who has betrayed you?”

How quickly can you make a short list of people who have caused you pain? And who were these people who hurt you? Family members? Your wife? Your husband? One of your parents? Your children? Or was it a person at work? Or a friend from church—perhaps better labeled “a former friend.”

How many friendships have been shattered because their cruel words or actions left you feeling betrayed?

Hollywood makes blockbuster movies with a simple story line—the

hero of the movie is hurt or a victim of injustice, and throughout the movie seeks to recover what is rightfully his or hers. And when they finally get to the end, we cheer the hero’s revenge, “All right, go for it, that evil person deserves it!”

But how does God want us to respond to people who hurt us? Whether that person is a family member or an enemy, how should we react?

The Bible speaks quite plainly to the issue of revenge: “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:19 NIV) Just in case there is any confusion—God does not need you to tell Him when or how to get revenge.

So how does God want me to respond to those who hurt me? Luke 6:27-36 speaks to this issue with great detail. In some areas of the Christian life we struggle to find out how God wants us to respond. That is not the case here. God’s instructions are detailed.

Jesus said, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:27-28 NIV) In the following verses Jesus gives several specific examples of how to

treat those who have hurt you, and He concludes with, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (vs. 36NIV) Talk about an impossible standard!

Are those who have hurt you the most family members or former friends?

Let’s take a look at each of these instructions Jesus gave us, but let me warn you in advance—they are not logical from a human perspective.

Love your enemies

So who are your enemies? We look at other parts of the world where war is raging, and we see this on TV—the Arabs and Jews in a cycle of violence, hatred, and death. But who fits the label of “enemy” in your life?

Many of those who come to Teen Challenge for help are from a background of violence and anger. A huge percentage of them have been deeply damaged as children. Juan’s mother gave him away to an uncle because she didn’t want him. The uncle raised Juan, but cruelly abused him. Eventually Juan ended up in a

- ❖ **How can you love your enemies?**
- ❖ **How can you bless those who curse you?**
- ❖ **What happens when you bless those who hurt you?**
- ❖ **What is God’s plan regarding revenge?**

series of foster homes and jail before coming to Teen Challenge. So who were the enemies in Juan's life?

Rita came into a home with a mom who didn't want her. She too was given away and ended up in foster homes. One foster mother would discipline her by putting a plastic bag over her head and hold it tight until Rita passed out. Sexual abuse was also part of her childhood experiences.

So how long is Rita's list of enemies?

For many of us the definition of an enemy is "a former friend." You were in a relationship with someone that should have been a positive friendship—but they betrayed you.

And Jesus says, here is how I want you to respond to that enemy today—love them!

"This does not make sense!" you say. Why should I love them? Look at all the damage this person caused in my life, and now you just want me to love that person? If this enemy has come to beg for my forgiveness—if they have really changed—I still find it hard to forgive and love them.

But what about the enemy who has not changed—they are still the same evil person that hurt me so deeply.

Or maybe your "enemy" is a Christian, perhaps even a pastor, or some other church leader who hurt you. "Why should I love this hypocrite? They should know better—they are a leader. They should have been showing me love—instead they betrayed me!"

In response to all your "whys" Jesus simply says, "Love your enemies."

How can I love my enemies?

But how? How does Jesus want me to show love to my enemies? I simply do not have any love in my heart for that person. Are you saying that I should have "warm fuzzy feelings" in my heart for this person?

God knows our weaknesses, and He has promised to provide the power we need when we do not have the strength to do what He asks us to do. So the good news is that if you don't know how to love this enemy, God will help you.

The promise of 2 Timothy 1:7 offers great hope to you: "For God

Loving those who have hurt you may be the key to change in that person's life.

did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." (NIV) God will give you the power to love your enemies the way He wants you to love them.

The best place to start is the list of love characteristics given in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Over 15 different expressions of love are listed here, and not one of them talks about romantic warm feelings for the other person.

The first love trait relates well to enemies—"love is patient." How can I express patience in relating to this enemy? Let's look at it from the other end—when you show patience toward this person, you are expressing God's love. So does this mean I let this person keep on abusing me—and I respond by showing patience as they abuse me? Not at

all!

As much as it is in our power, we need to put in place boundaries that keep us safe from the damage our enemies try to bring into our lives. We need to seek help from others who can assist in providing this safety.

The wife who is being beaten by her husband should call the police. To simply stay in that place of abuse, and say, "I'm just being patient, doing what God says," this is not God's way to express love to that abuser.

Patience can be expressed toward our enemies by what we think and what we say. It is "normal" and easy to lash out with our words, or at least in our thoughts, toward the one who has hurt us. Love can be shown by not going down the path of revenge—even in our thoughts.

The second expression of love in 1 Corinthians 13 states, "love is kind." Perhaps the most important prayer you need to say is, "God, how do You want me to show kindness to this person? God give me the power to show kindness to this person, because in my own heart, I simply do not have the desire or the power to do this." Look in the life of Jesus at how He showed kindness to those who mistreated Him.

The list in 1 Corinthians 13 goes on, each trait very specific and practical in providing appropriate expressions of love toward our enemies. And there are many other scriptures that speak to love.

But with all this scripture, you may still be saying, "I just do not want to love this person. They had no right doing what they did to me."

You cannot change your enemy—but you can change your response to this person. That is what God is concerned about for you—what is your response?

God will give you the power to change if you are willing to change.

Do good to those who hate you

This second response from Luke 6:27 calls us to action—to “do good to those who hate you.” This response cannot be fulfilled with kind thoughts alone—action is required.

God created us to do good works. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10 NIV) What an incredible promise for us to stand on!

We were created for a purpose—our life has a mission—a mission planned by God Himself! Our whole reason for being on earth is to

do the good works that God Himself prepared in advance for us to do!

Luke 6:27 makes it quite clear that the good works He has planned for us are not to be restricted to those who love us and do good things to us. God has a bigger plan.

Not only does God want us to do good works, He also equips us for these works. “May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (Hebrews 13:20-21 NIV)

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious

promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” (2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV)

So how do I know what are the good works that God wants me to do for the one who hates me? We need

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God’s help in making that decision.

Don Swartzlander, the director of Teen Challenge in Buffalo, NY, recently told me of an experience with a lady who hated their ministry. She was a well-known “advocate” for anyone who had a complaint in their city. She had been protesting Teen Challenge’s move to a new location where they could expand their ministry.

One day Don was at a community meeting, and saw this lady come limping into the meeting. “God spoke to my heart and told me to pray for her,” stated Don. “So I bowed my head and breathed a prayer to God for her. Instantly in my heart God responded—‘No, you go pray for her!’

“So at the end of the meeting I went up to where she was seated and asked if I could pray for her. She was willing, so I placed my hand on her shoulder and prayed a very simple prayer for her.”

A few weeks later Don saw this same woman at another community meeting. “When she

Four responses to use with those who have hurt you

Luke 6:27-28 offer four specific responses to those who have hurt you.

1. Love your enemies
2. Do good to those who hate you.
3. Bless those who curse you.
4. Pray for those who mistreat you.

Each of these responses challenge us to a standard radically different from what the culture around us teaches.

However, Jesus offers another standard to use in determining our responses to those who have hurt us. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31 NIV)

We may find it easy to make a list of those who have hurt us with their hateful words or their betrayal.

Have you ever wondered if someone else put your name on their list of people who have hurt them? How do you want that person to treat you?

The “Golden Rule” of Luke 6:31 is a powerful tool for helping us see this whole issue from a more realistic point of view. Instead of just looking at how others have hurt me, I need to take careful steps to treat others the way I want to be treated.

I want others to be kind to me, patient with me. I want them to show me mercy, and love. Perhaps these 4 standards from Jesus are not so unrealistic after all—please use them on me!

entered the room, she loudly called out—‘I love you!’ ” Don stated, “I was not paying much attention to her, since she was always talking loud. But she repeated this, and came right up to me, threw her arms around me and gave me a great big grandma hug!”

“God had touched her—not only had she experienced God’s healing physically, but God had touched her heart,” shared Don. “From that day on she was a friend and advocate for Teen Challenge in any issue that related to our ministry.”

When God calls us to do good to those who hate us, it rarely seems logical. But God has a plan bigger than we can see. I cannot guarantee that your act of doing good will bring results as quickly as Don experienced.

God wants us to do good works whether or not the other person changes. Your job is not to change your enemy. Your job is to follow Jesus, and do what He directs you to do.

Jesus made the point that even when we give a cup of cold water to someone in need, God sees this and will reward us. (Matthew 10:42)

Jesus also illustrated clearly that whatever we do to others, we are really doing it to God. (Matthew 25:31-46) So however we treat our enemies is really how we are treating God.

If you don’t know what to do for that person, then pray, “God I am willing to do whatever you want me to do to express kindness to this person.”

Bless those who curse you

The third response God calls us to do toward those who have hurt us is “bless those who curse you.” (Luke 6:28) Why should I bless someone

who is cursing me? Human logic says the opposite.

How do people curse you? Let’s broaden the definition beyond those who swear at you. When others show you disrespect—that qualifies as “cursing you.” Let’s also include when they say hateful things, or lie about you, or do hurtful things toward you, or betray you.

God says bless them—not *after*

God did not create you to curse others. Are you setting yourself up to be cursed by God or to be blessed by God?

they have repented, but bless them even if they continue with that hurtful behavior. Why would God want you to bless someone who is treating you so badly?

Blessing others is a powerful protection to keep you from becoming bitter, hateful, and bent on revenge.

The normal response to someone who curses you is to curse them back. When we do that we fall into the same sinful gutter the other person is already in. We stoop to their level.

God has a better plan for you—He has created you to do good works—not to curse others.

Your actions need to be determined—not by the response of the other person—but in focused obedience on what God wants you to do. When you bless those who curse you, you show you are not a slave to that other person’s behavior.

God gave a powerful promise to

Abraham in the Old Testament. “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse.” (Genesis 12:3 NIV) God says, I will stand back and watch how other people treat you—and their response will determine My response.

God says my way of treating people determines how He will treat me. When you bring this powerful truth into the picture, it begins to make more sense why you should bless those who curse you. When you bless others you bring God’s blessing on your life!

And God’s blessing is far more important than the curses from other people.

So the greatest benefit from following God’s instructions to bless those who curse you—the greatest benefit comes to you. God will bless you. The one who is cursing you may continue to treat you badly. But God

Does loving my enemies mean I have to trust them?

For those who have been sexually or physically abused by family members, the Luke 6:27-28 pattern of loving your enemies presents special challenges.

The one who has been abused is certainly doing the godly thing by protecting themselves from more abuse.

When Jesus calls on us to love our enemies, it is primarily for our benefit. It deals with our attitudes and feelings and responses.

But showing godly love to our abuser does not mean we trust them—they may still be very unworthy of trust.

has a better plan for you!

So how do you bless someone who is cursing you? Instead of planning revenge, offer a simple prayer, “God, please bless this person.” Every time this person comes to your mind, use those thoughts to trigger this simple prayer. You may find yourself praying this prayer a hundred times a day—keep doing it!

What does this prayer accomplish? First it frees you from thinking curses back on this person. It also fits closely with God’s view of forgiveness—you release to God the full responsibility to punish their sin. This prayer of blessing enables you to be at peace in your heart even though the relationship may not have changed.

Blessing those who curse you also speaks to how you talk about this person who has cursed you. Instead of speaking to others about the hurt and how wrong the other person is, you can choose to only speak in a positive way about that person. Do not repeat the curses of this person so the whole world can know how wrong they are; instead choose to speak kind words.

If you can’t say anything else, tell others you are praying that God will bless this person who has hurt you.

Pray for those who mistreat you

God’s fourth assignment for you is to “pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:28) Many times we are not in a position to force the other person to stop their hurtful behavior. Rarely do we have the power to change them, but we do have the power to change our response to this person.

God simply says, pray for them. So what should I pray about? Pray that God will help you to love this person. Pray that God will help you to see what are the good things God wants you to do for this person. Pray that God will bless this person.

What do these prayers do? They focus your attention on God. Instead of being consumed with the hurt, you focus on God the one who can heal the hurt, and give you the power to respond in a radically new way.

I remember seeing a young

child run to his mother with a sad face, and as soon as he was in the arms of his mother he burst out crying, and eventually told her why he was so sad. I remember being so amused by this child because he had waited until he got to his mother before he started crying.

But what a beautiful picture of how God wants us to respond! Instead of sitting down in the midst of the one who has hurt us, and crying to ourselves about the hurt, we need to keep our mouth shut, and run to Jesus, and pour out our heart to Him.

Joseph—A lifetime of hurtful things done by those around him

Joseph was cruelly sold by his brothers into slavery, as a way to make money off him rather than just killing him.

As a young man in Egypt, he had plenty of reasons to harbor anger toward his brothers for their evil actions.

But it’s clear that Joseph put his trust in God, and chose to have a positive attitude toward his circumstances. Soon he was the leader in Potiphar’s house.

Then betrayal came crashing on him again, when Potiphar’s wife falsely accused him of raping her. This time he ends up in prison—probably spending many of the best years of his young adult life behind bars.

Even in prison Joseph continues to put God first in his life, and God blesses him.

Joseph had no way of knowing what the future held for him. Yet he harbors no bitterness toward Potiphar.

Finally God opens the prison doors and in one day Joseph goes from prisoner to leader of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

God uses him to prepare the nation for the coming famine.

When the famine finally affects Joseph’s brothers and father, they come to Egypt looking for food.

Joseph could have planned revenge and killed his brothers, but instead he loves them, and brings them all to Egypt to live with his blessing.

When his father dies many years later, the brothers come pleading for mercy because of their past actions.

Joseph still responds with love and forgiveness, showing in his answer how he sees this past painful experience: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:20 NIV)

King David demonstrates this many times in the Psalms he wrote, speaking of the betrayal by friends and enemies—calling on God to punish them. What is interesting to note is that David did not cry out to his generals to go kill those who were treating him this way.

When David was fleeing for his life because his son Absalom was leading a rebellion, a man named Shimei came out and cursed David and threw stones at him. When one of David's generals asked permission to take off his head, David responded—leave Shimei alone, perhaps God has told him to curse me. (See 2 Samuel 16:5-14.)

What an incredible response in such a difficult time! David protects himself from sinning by trusting God, and assuming that God's plan is beyond his own understanding.

How can we pray for those who mistreat us? King David's response gives a powerful example. God may want to use the hurtful behavior of others to help you grow.

The example of Christ sends the same message. Those who crucified Jesus did it with the intention of getting rid of Him. But God used their evil actions as His path to provide for the salvation of the whole world.

When people say and do hurtful things, God has a plan for our response. These four steps in Luke 6:27-28 are only the beginning of what God says in the Bible, but they will provide most of us with a fulltime challenge of putting them into practice.

These four responses God calls us to use do not in any way send the message that God endorses the hurtful things others do to you. God sends the message to you that He has a plan for your response, and His plan will take you beyond the hurt to a place of healing and growth. Then, just like Joseph you will be able to look back on that hurtful experience and say, "You intended to harm me, but God used it for good to accomplish His plan in my life."

How to respond when people hurt you Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read Luke 6:27-28. Share an example from your life where someone has hurt you. Which of the four responses best relates to how you could have responded to that person?
2. Read 2 Samuel 16:1-14.
 - A. What would you have been thinking if you had been with King David and experiencing the curses and rocks of Shimei?
 - B. What does King David's response indicate about how he is viewing this whole experience?
3. Read Luke 6:27-28. Which of these four responses is the hardest for you to put into practice in your life?
4. Read Luke 6:38. What are the challenges you experience in putting this verse into action in your life?
5. Based on Luke 6:27-28, share an experience where someone hurt you and you responded with one (or more) of these godly responses.



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