

Flipping the Script

Matthew 5:43–48

Sunday July 18, 2021

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“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I tell you, love your enemies.” —Jesus (Matthew 5:43–44)

“Well, well, Preacher, how the tables have turned.” Those were the first words I heard from the man with whom my wife had just been in a fender bender. Lesli had called me to say that she had rear-ended a pickup truck at a stoplight. Everyone in the cars involved were fine.

Our youngest, Megan, was just a baby in the backseat when something happened, and Lesli looked back for a second to check on her. In that split second, the slow-moving traffic had suddenly stopped. And Lesli ran into the back end of the pickup in front of her.

The minor accident happened close to my office, and so I told Lesli I would come to her to help with any paperwork or whatever was needed. As I got to the intersection, pulled to the side of the road, and got out of my car, the truck driver walked up to me. I recognized him immediately. Just about three weeks earlier, he had been in my office at the church cussing me out. I was a young pastor and naively thought no one would ever use that kind of language and call me so many obscene names in my church office. It was his truck Lesli had rear-ended.

The man’s third-grade son attended the Christian school in our church and had brought some pornographic items to school and had shown them to other kids on the playground. The boy had been caught doing this several different times, and the parents had not responded to our attempts to discipline their son and seek their help to end his inappropriate behavior. Finally, after many warnings, the student had been expelled.

Since our Christian School was a part of our overall church ministry, if parents wanted to appeal a discipline decision by the principal, their appeal started with me—the Senior Pastor. After talking to the parents, I supported the principal’s decision. As I did, the father shouted a few paragraphs of vile, foul, four-letter words, and some choice names for me. That was the last I had spoken to him until the day of the minor accident.

He quickly put two and two together as I got out of the car and started to walk toward Lesli. That’s when he walked up to me and said, “Well, well, Preacher, how the tables have

turned.” I thought, “Oh boy, Lesli happened to rear-end this guy—of all people.” I was also concerned about his saying the tables had turned. What was he planning to do to retaliate? We exchanged insurance and contact information and went our separate ways.

He called our house that night. I thought this is it. This was when he might bring up a lawsuit to get back at me. After all, his first words to me on the roadside had been about the tables turning. But, in the call, he was checking to make sure Lesli and the baby were still OK. He ended the call by saying he was glad to hear they were all right and wanted me to “Give them my love.”

He flipped the script on me. I expected more hate and disrespect because I had backed the principal. It struck me then that his flipping the script was actually what we are to do as the followers of Jesus. Before the conversation in my office that turned ugly, I had never personally met the man. His kindness and thoughtfulness were the exact opposite of what I expected from him.

I’ve often thought of that situation and thought how much our kindness and love toward those with whom we disagree or those who might even consider us their enemies ought to be that same kind of script flipping love. Jesus told us to love our neighbors AND our enemies. He wants us to demonstrate love toward our very enemies.

Who do you dislike, get irritated by, or even hate? Maybe a national or local politician, a former spouse, a co-worker pushing you aside to advance their career? Choose to love them. Choose to pray God’s very best for them. You may not want to do that, but the very act of praying for them will be a part of God reshaping your heart to make it more like the heart of Jesus!

Jesus calls us to love our enemies, not just our neighbors!

Today’s Prayer

Father, help me to see people through your eyes. Bring to my mind those with whom I have struggled to be kind and caring. Help me to love those who do not return kindness toward me. Let your love flow through my life to my neighbors and my enemies. —Amen