

LOVE IS SOMETHING YOU DO

by Tyler Peachey and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

FAITH STORY:

Romans 12:9–21

FAITH FOCUS:

You must love everyone and hate what is evil. Be sure to help others and put others before yourself. By doing these things you will be serving the Lord. You need to love those who persecute you and do not take revenge for yourself. God will deal with those who are evil. Do not do what is right in everybody's eyes but do what is right in the Lord's eyes. Take care of your enemies and give them what they need and in that way overcome evil with good.

SESSION GOAL:

To understand that we need to show love to all people no matter what they are like.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Study Paul's words in the scripture passage regarding how we should relate to others
- Think about their relationships with people and how they can actively show love to them

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for each student
- 2 Paper and pens and colorful self-stick notes

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Divide into small groups. **Give each group these three scenarios:**

- Your city is bombed by a terrorist group and many people die in the bombing. What are your feelings toward the terrorists? What do you think should happen to them?
- You have a good friend who is Muslim. Someone in school calls your friend a racist name in their presence. What would you do?
- Your best friend steals your boyfriend/girlfriend. What would you do?

Bring the groups back together and have them report on what they would do in each case.

Discuss:

- Was your response based on the degree of the "evil" that was done? (Killing someone versus saying something bad.)
- Was your response based on how personal it got? (People in your city versus yourself?)

CONNECT: (10 minutes)

Ask students to go back into their small groups and think of a situation where one of them was treated badly by someone else. Ask them to act out their incident for the rest of the students, complete with the way they responded. If they think there would have been a better way to respond than the way they did, they should portray that option as well.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (5–10 minutes)

Hand out Bibles and ask youth to read the Romans 12:9–21 passage one verse at a time.

Do a mini lecture to help youth understand the passage better, based on the Insights from Scripture.

Explain “heap burning coals” on someone’s head. This refers to an Egyptian tradition of carrying a pan of burning charcoal on one’s head as a public act of repentance. We don’t need to repay evil for evil because God will do the punishing. God will have the final say on everything. When you feed your enemies they will see what they have been doing and will repent. By being nice to them and helping them they will want to better themselves. When someone overcomes evil with evil they are no better than the person who did evil to them. They are trapped in a cycle where they will just keep going back and forth doing evil things to each other. By forgiving them and helping them, you will be set free from the bondage of that vicious cycle.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Option 1: Hand out paper and pens to students. Ask them to go through the passage, one verse at a time, and evaluate themselves on a scale of 1–10 on how they are doing in the area each verse addresses. Ask them to write down the verse numbers on their papers and beside each number, to write down their personal rating in that area. **For example:**

Verse 9—7

Verse 10—6

Option 2: This is a more active version of Option 1. Designate one side of the room to be number 1 and the other side number 10. Ask youth to read each verse on their own and move around the room based on the rating they would give themselves.

When youth have completed this activity, discuss it. What did they discover about themselves? Which areas are the most difficult for them?

Say: *This passage tells us that we need to love everyone and not just those that love us. We are also called to respond in a loving way no matter what people do to us. This is tough to do. Often, the people that persecute us probably have something going on in their life that makes them that way. Trying to find out what this problem is could be a way to help them, and helping them through their problem could be a way of blessing them. It shows that you genuinely care for them.*

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Ask students to choose two verses in which they rated themselves the lowest—two areas they are willing to work on in their lives. Hand out pens and self-stick notes. Ask students to think of a word or two that summarizes and symbolizes the areas in their life that need work

and that they are willing to try to improve. They should write those reminder words on the self-stick note, and then put the notes where they will be reminded, such as their dresser, school notebook, car, mirror, etc.

When students have completed their notes, ask them to hold them and to repeat this closing prayer:

Lord, if it is possible, so far as it depends on me, help me to live peaceably with all.

Repeat several times.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

It's tempting for us as "good people" and Christians to take upon ourselves the responsibility of avenging ourselves when evil confronts us. We often identify God's enemies as those people that displease us. But it isn't our role to decide that, or to repay evil with evil. God will do the punishing. God will have the final say in everything. Our task is to embody God's grace to our enemies as the way to reconciliation and peace.

This offer of peace to our enemies is one way to bring about repentance. This is what is meant by the phrase "heap burning coals" on someone's head. This refers to an Egyptian tradition of carrying a pan of burning charcoal on one's head as a public act of repentance. This was a way to shame someone. It was very embarrassing and it hurt the person's head. Paul is saying that when we offer peace to our enemies, it is a way to bring about repentance..

When someone overcomes evil with evil, they are no better than the person who did evil to them. They are trapped in a cycle where they will just keep going back and forth doing evil things to each other. By forgiving them and helping them, we can be set free from the bondage of that vicious cycle.

These verses give advice on how Christians are to conduct themselves in order to live in harmony with others, as long as that harmony doesn't come at the expense of our calling to resist evil and not be conformed to the world. In those cases, harmony may not be possible, and we may face emotional, spiritual or physical persecution. Even then, we are called to "bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them."

WORKS CITED:

Interpretation Bible Commentary, Romans; by Paul J. Achtemeier; published by Westminster John Knox.