

Series: TRANSFORMERS. Changing Direction One Choice at a Time

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 3, 2019
DEALING *DIFFERENTLY* WITH YOUR ENEMIES
Matthew 5, 2 Kings 6, 2 Corinthians 6:7, 10:4
SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. A little over a two years ago, Lori and I needed to move her Stepmom, Ruth, out of her apartment into a nursing home. That was a **really** stressful time! What we went through in closing things out with her landlord—a very angry man—made it **way** worse than it ever needed to be. In the whole process, I honestly tried to be as civil and level-headed as I could be, but that honestly didn't seem to help.
 - a. What I realized during that time is that it's possible to make enemies without hardly even trying. It was the inner stress that got to me. I'd be out running—and I would feel the anger rising up in me. And then I'd think, "Oh, yeah. Jesus tells us to **love** our enemies—and **forgive** people who do wrong to us."

-By the time I saw him again, I had processed all this stuff with God—and I was able to truly forgive him, shake hands, and not hold a grudge. Now, please understand, **we didn't become best friends**. Proverbs warns us to be really careful about that:

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.
(Proverbs 22:24-25 NIV)
 - b. Now, why did I tell you that? It's because **everyone's different**—but we **all have enemies!** And **that** means we have to **figure out how to deal with them**. And **how** you deal with your enemies **transforms** you.

-Jesus' teaching about how handle our enemies is about as counter-cultural as you can get. And it will push you to the very limits of learning how to love, how to forgive, and how to be wise.
 - c. So, here's the question I want to ask you. Close your eyes—and **think: Who is your enemy?** Who is it that you're angry with, frustrated with, scared of—and their face—right now—either raises your blood pressure—or makes you sick? Now, can we start **here: You don't want TOO many of those people in your life!** The closer to zero you are—the healthier, kinder, less distracted you'll be.
2. Here's what you need to know: Some people collect enemies like baseball cards. It's almost as if they **like** hating and being disliked. In fact—and this is **embarrassing** to admit, there are whole **churches** that are known for who they hate! Their favorite passage is:

O Lord, shouldn't I hate those who hate you? Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you? Yes, I hate them with total hatred, for your enemies are my enemies.
(Psalm 139:21-22 NLT)

 - a. Two things about this: First, God's **ultimate** enemy is the devil, not people. Jesus said that it was the Father's love for the **world—all** of it—that brought Him here—and

that he sends rain and sunshine to the just **and the unjust!** That is—people we like—and people we **don't** like.

-The **second** thing about this is that David is here baring his heart before God—not **creating theology!** And after this outburst, David says:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that *offends* you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23-24 NLT)

-It's almost like David realizes that he's off-track; that our hatred offends **God**—and that hatred of any kind **doesn't** lead to life. How many of you have at some point been an **enemy** of God what's right? I have! Sure glad God had mercy on me! So, let me just be **crystal clear here: Any preaching, movement or organization that is hate-based has nothing to do with God!**

- b. Now, let me give you the **irony** about having enemies. According to Jesus, that doesn't keep you from being blessed:

God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. (Matthew 5:11 NLT)

-From what I'm seeing here, the **blessing** depends on **why** you have enemies. Sometimes people claim this verse—when the **truth** is, **they're** wearing friend repellent—they're difficult to be around because they're irritable, judging, self-righteous people.

- c. Just know this; if you like to judge and criticize, Jesus warns that this stuff comes full circle; that what you dish out to others will be dished out to you—poured, overflowing, into your lap. The only way to **stop** that is to take responsibility for it and stop it!
- d. If you like to **control** others—as in family and the others around you—get them to do what **you** want them to do—that also creates enemies. It's impossible to **love** people **and control** them. And unwillingness to humble your pride, to make things right, to accept responsibility **also** creates enemies.

3. Speaking of creating enemies, Jesus indirectly addresses that too. The first part of his Sermon on the Mount deals with this whole concept of a **blessed** life. When we ask God to bless us, what we usually mean is, "Keep me safe and make me rich!"

-But **Jesus** talks about blessing very differently; that we're **blessed** when we see how much we need God—and when we long for what's right and show mercy; when we keep our motives pure—and are gentle peacemakers. Blessing comes from **walking the path God has already blessed.**

- a. What comes next in this message Jesus gives describes the makings of the **unblessed** life—a life that hurts you, hurts God—and creates enemies. And **stoking anger** is one of them.

-An enemy is, by definition, someone **you're** angry with—and someone who's angry with **you**. Jesus takes the command to **not murder**—and backs it up to the **cause** of

murder—whether it's taking their life, damaging their heart—or destroying their reputation. And Jesus is **brilliant** here as he describes the escalation of anger.

-It starts in your heart as an emotion you feel—triggered by fear or frustration. Then it moves to your mind—in how you **think** about them as less than human, and it travels through your eyes, your mouth—and sometimes your hands. **You want someone to feel pain. Humiliation.** And that **escalates** a war.

-Once you make them **less** than human, murder is only a step a way—and each step takes you closer to where you **don't** want to be—in jail or in hell. How many of you need **one more enemy?** Jesus is saying, “So don't nurse grudges and **create** them!”

- b. The second thing Jesus addresses is the issue of lust—basically using someone else's body or life for your own purposes. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but I'll bet some of you have had someone use you to get what they wanted. They didn't want **you!** To them, you were a commodity. They ate the candy bar and threw away the wrapper!

-Jesus said, “Why would you think that's okay? Do you think the people you lust after and use will want to be **friends** with you? The bottom line is that **using people to get what you want creates resentment and hatred.** And when this leads to betraying the person or family you promised to be faithful to?”

- c. And that's what Jesus goes on to discuss next; divorce. The **specific** issue Jesus deals with here is breaking the promises you made to someone—simply because you don't want **them** any more. You've gotten tired of the one you made promises to—and you want someone else.

-Hear this; rejection and betrayal creates pain of a kind that takes anger and hatred to a whole new level. Talk about creating enemies! This is **so common** that whenever there's a suspicious death, the police check to find out where the “ex” was! This kind of rejection is devastating.

- d. Jesus goes on to say that broken promises of **any** kind create anger—and **enemies.** Has anyone here ever had someone promise to repay a loan, or help you—until they got a better deal and backed out? How do you feel about that? It creates **enemies!** Jesus is saying, **Why would you want MORE enemies?**

4. Now, think about how the world system tells us to deal with enemies. There's a whole **list** of them. The mildest advice would be to just **avoid** them.

Pretend they don't exist. And then there are more **active** ways to deal with them. One way that gets used a **lot**—even among believers—is to **discredit** them. **Slander** them. Tell your friends how unworthy they are of **yours** and **Jesus'** friendship. Let's just clarify; this is saying, “If you want to be **my** friend then you need to **hate my enemies!**” Oh, you don't shoot them, you just assassinate their credibility. **Please understand; it's every bit as sinful as stealing and adultery.**

You can dress it up to look nice—but a pig is a pig—even if you put lipstick on it! Paul in Ephesians says stuff that's driven by anger and malice **grieves** the Holy Spirit and gives the devil a foothold in your life.

-And **then** Jesus gets into all the stuff we do to get revenge—celebrated in movies like **Taken** and **The Godfather**. It's retaliation. **Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth**. Revenge, as you know, **always** escalates violence. You insult me--I slap you--you punch me--I **Dirty Harry** you; pull out my 44 magnum and put a crease in your hat! But Jesus' ways are **totally** different. Listen to what Jesus, Son of God says here:

But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. (Matthew 5:39-42 NLT)

- a. Now, how many of you think this sounds outrageous? Humiliating! Like you're **groveling!** And yet what Jesus is saying, "**You don't need more enemies!** Don't let a slap, a shirt, carrying someone's gear or an ask create one!" Why? Because—**as I found out**—it's not **worth** it!

-Grudges, revenge fantasies, smear campaigns, lawsuits, and shouting matches all steal your joy and **feed** on peace, happiness and love—and **you can't afford what it will cost you in terms of the anxiety and stress it causes!** This stuff is **toxic**.

- b. Know why Jesus words sound so weird and foreign? They **are!** We're used the weapons of the **world system**. When he was defending himself against a bunch of childish and abrasive people from Corinth, Paul said:

We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. (2 Corinthians 10:3-4 NLT)

-In an earlier chapter where he discusses the pounding—and opposition he and his team took simply for spreading the Good News of Jesus, Paul said:

We faithfully preach the truth. God's power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense. We serve God whether people honour us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. (2 Corinthians 6:7-8 NLT)

-Know what the weapons of righteousness are? Truth, grace and love. See, we're tempted to use the **same ugly** weapons as everyone else—threat, lawsuits, slander, hostility, lying, cheating and retaliation. Here's the question—**is it possible to use worldly weapons and have God's blessing?**

- c. And **then** in this magnificent message, Jesus goes right after the core issue. He says:

You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbour' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48 NLT)

-**This** is **so** counter-cultural we read it and think, **Who actually does that!** The answer? **Not nearly enough people.**

- d. Now, just think of it practically. I think we **all** know that anger and hatred is extremely corrosive. It poisons everything about you. So...what **good** does hating your enemies do for you—or anything else? So why not choose to love them as someone God loves!

-Let me clarify some things. Loving your enemy doesn't usually mean bringing them into your home and letting them babysit your kids. No, choosing **love** instead of **hate** keeps you from being poisoned—and makes a way for them to **not** be your enemy some day.

-When you pray for those who persecute you—you take away the joy they get from doing that. When you hate people who persecute you—you reward them and give them fuel to take it further. It's a little like taking venom from a rattlesnake—to make **anti-venom!**

- e. Jesus' final point here is so incredibly powerful. He says, "If you love those who love you—and are kind to those who are kind to you—**how does that make you different than anyone else on the planet?**"

-How many of you think Hitler loved those who loved him? How about the Mafia? It's **one** thing to pray for peace on earth—and God's Kingdom to come here. But it's just **jibber-jabber** unless you join Jesus' revolution of love, forgiveness and kindness! Jesus **died** for his enemies!

5. Our immediate thought is, "If I do that—I'll get taken advantage of! Truth? We **will** at times get taken advantage of. And that's why we believe that judgment of the earth belongs to God, not us. Peter—one of Jesus' closest friends, said:

He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. (1 Peter 2:23 NLT)

-Why do we get angry, judge, and want to get revenge? It's because grudges are fueled by a desire to see **other** people get hurt worse than **us**—mainly because of the stuff we've been through. And then there's this whole part about trusting God to judge and make things right. Revenge turns us into atheists. We think God **can't** take care of it or **won't** take care of it as efficiently as us--so we pretend He doesn't exist and do it ourselves.

- a. And that brings us right down into the mud and the blood and the beer: Who **are** your enemies—and **why?** Are these persons **dangerous?** Are they a threat to you? *Is it someone you just **don't like** cause there's something about their personality that grates on you? And it's pretty clear that **they don't like you either!**

*Is it someone who is a threat to you, your job, someone you love—or your need to be the **fairest one of all?** Do they have what you want—but can't have?

*Is it someone you once loved—maybe once slept beside—and are now rejected by? Now you're in the process of ripping apart everything you built together—and you're both competing for the love of—and time with children you both created?

*Is it someone who took something from you that can never replace?
Someone who molested you—or one of your children; someone who lied about you and ruined your reputation? Someone who took advantage of your weakness or inability—or need?

*Did someone vomit their rage all over you, humiliate you—and leave words stuck in you like shrapnel? And today those words are **still** there—festering, causing pain, constant reminders of what happened?

*Is it someone who **just keeps doing** dumb hurtful stuff—stuff that’s driven by an addiction or narcissism—and it keeps that wound open?

- b. Here’s my challenge: Are you ready—cause you **may** hate this—and **hate me!** But it comes from Jesus—so you’ve gotta deal with Him. **Will you let it go! Like—LET IT GO!**

-See, what Jesus says here about how to treat your enemies is based on something He taught all His life. Forgiveness. Forgiveness isn’t a **nice to do**—it’s what Jesus calls us to do if we’re ever going to fully experience His forgiveness. Forgiveness is the **only antidote to hatred and pain!**

- c. Let’s just be clear what forgiveness is. Let me use a graphic illustration. A few years ago, I was doing some work on our family cottage standing on a ladder, lost my balance, grabbed a rafter, and rammed a giant splinter into my thumb. It **hurt!** I was bleeding all over the place—and couldn’t finish what I was doing.

-When I got to the medical clinic in Markham, they had to cut it out. The splinter felt like it was 6 inches long—but it was less than an inch! And then a chunk left in there started to get infected—and **that** had to come out. To **choose** not to forgive—is to **keep** the splinter! **Let it go!**

-Please understand—one person can forgive—and Jesus calls us to do it—because it’s the only way to be free. **Reconciliation** is different; it takes two. To **reconcile** means that two people agree on what happened—and, together, let it go and have at least some kind of relationship.

-**Restoration** takes longer—and is much more rare. It’s when **things go back to the way they were**. If a couple was divorced—they get remarried; if an employee was fired for embezzling money—they make it right—and get re-hired.

-Here’s what I know; forgiveness **always** starts with a decision. In fact, it may sound like this, “God, I’m still angry and hurt—but I don’t want to die from the infection. I **choose to forgive!** Now, please—**make that my reality!**” And he does—but it **takes time!**

- d. Love—like real love, like how you **treat** people—not how you feel about them—love is God’s secret weapon for **making things right on the planet**. And love is **way more powerful than hatred and retaliation!** But love almost **always** requires a sacrifice—which is why it is forever symbolized by a cross.

6. One of the songs we sing around here at The Olive Branch is, **This is how I fight**

my battles. It may look like I'm surrounded, but I'm surrounded by you!

In closing, I want give you the background for that song, tell a story—and then we're done. Okay?

-A *lot* of the fascinating stories in the Bible involve the prophets—or the people who spoke for God and acted on His behalf. One of the most fascinating stories involves the prophet Elisha—not to be confused with his predecessor, Elijah.

-It was 800 B.C. and a time in Israelite history when they were being tormented by a neighbor; the **Arameans**. To protect his people, God would let Elisha know what the king of Arma, Ben Haddad, was planning so that it frustrated Aram's military moves. Ben-Hadad, the king, thought that he had a traitor in the ranks. Then this:

"It's not us, my lord the king," one of the officers replied. "Elisha, the prophet in Israel, tells the king of Israel even the words you speak in the privacy of your bedroom!" (2 Kings 6:12 NLT)

-So the kings brilliant solution was, "Let's find Elisha—and kill him!" So the king of Aram (modern day Syria) sent a massive army with all of chariots—that days version of tanks, to surround Dothan—the city were Elisha was staying.

- a. So imagine Elisha waking up that morning—and seeing this massive foreign army, bristling with weapons, surrounding him and leaving no possible way of escape. Well, his servant goes outside—sees them—and **freaks out!** This is Elisha's response:

"Don't be afraid!" Elisha told him. "For there are more on our side than on theirs!" Then Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes and let him see!" The Lord opened the young man's eyes, and when he looked up, he saw that the hillside around Elisha was filled with horses and chariots of fire. (2 Kings 6:16-27 NLT)

-Do you see what the song is saying? **It may look like I'm surrounded—but I'm surrounded by you!"**

-Now, how do **you** think the story ends?

As the Aramean army advanced toward him, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, please make them blind." So the Lord struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. (2 Kings 6:18 NLT)

-So Elisha led them to downtown Samaria (capital of Israel), had God open their eyes, told the King to feed them—and send them home, which he did. And then the Arameans left Israel alone—for a while.

- b. Here's the question I want to ask you. **How do you see yourself?** Are you all alone with your problems, surrounded by enemies who plan to take you out? Second question; is that your reality—or is that **only what YOU can see?** Is it possible, like this servant boy who only saw the armies—that God needs to open your eyes, expand your reality.

-Most of us don't see troops with tanks, automatic weapons and grenade launchers; we see bills, people we don't like, ex's, need, disease, aging, rogue politicians, germs—I mean the list of fears—which is what this is **really** about—is almost limitless. And the question is—are you surrounded by enemies, or by a God of unimaginable power—but who uses **love** and **grace** as His best weapons?

c. One final question is—how will you handle your enemies?

*How many of you approve of the way Hitler handled **his** enemies?

*How many of you are okay with how al Qaeda or ISIS handle their enemies?

*How many of you are okay with how CNN, Fox News, and CBC handle their enemies?

*How many of you are okay with how **TDCanadaTrust** and **Enercare** and **Powerstream** handle their enemies.

-Jesus' teaching about how to treat people who hate us and what we stand for was **brilliant**. We love them, pray for them, and forgive them. To get down and roll in the mud—you know, return slander for slander, insult for insult, lawsuit for lawsuit, eye for eye, tooth for tooth just complicates life and makes us miserable.

-How we treat our enemies says **volumes** about our character. And how we handle our enemies is a **transformer**. We either find freedom—or get ensnared and infected with bitterness—our peace shattered. We choose.

7. When I started into high school, I didn't have to travel any further than my 10th grade biology class to find a guy who seemed dedicated to poking fun at me and making my life miserable. Phil Conklin seemed to **love** making me squirm—especially when he found out that I was a Christian and my Dad was a pastor. It was like he went out of his way to make me feel awkward. And I wasn't sure why—except I knew I didn't like him.

-I was in the high school cafeteria one day sitting with my brother—who both pounded me **and** protected me. Phil came by and sat at our table, and I thought, "Here's my chance!" So I said to my brother, "This is Phil Conklin, the guy who's been giving me such a hard time!!" My brother just **looked** at me as if I had three heads. Later that day, Phil said, "You know you made me feel like a jerk!" And I **felt** like one, too! We made our peace and that was that.

a. Months later, Phil Conklin showed up with his girlfriend, Doris, and a bunch of other friends at our church on a Sunday evening. I thought, **Oh, Oh!** In case you didn't know, a Sunday Evening Service is like a Sunday Morning service—only worse. That night my Dad was giving a chalk talk—a message he then illustrated with a chalk drawing.

-I was **terrified** of what Phil and his friends were going to report back to the school about my weird church. Phil's response after the service, though, was very odd. He said, "Your Dad was talking right to me!" I wondered if he was just messing with me—but I could see tears brimming at the bottom of his eyes. We moved to Pittsburgh shortly after that, and I never thought too much more about it.

b. Years later I had to do a funeral in Punxsutawney for a little 8 year old boy who'd been killed in a farm accident—that was a tough one! After the funeral, I got a card from a visiting pastor who had been there--telling me that he really appreciated what I had to say. I almost fell off my chair; it was signed, **Pastor Phil Conklin**.

-Years later he spoke at a camp that my brother was leading—to people who **knew** me! In Phil's message he talked about growing up without a **clue** about God—and how in some way God had used my life to influence him. You have to understand—that is **totally** mysterious to me! But then, God **is** really into miracles, **right?**

-Right now as **I** speak, Phil is speaking at the First Church of God--his church in Ellwood City, PA.

8. The one thing that the devil has used down through the years to thoroughly discredit God and the fact that Jesus **died** for His enemies—has been how Christians have treated **their** enemies—people they didn't like or agree with. Jesus said, "Do that—and the outcome is predictable; live by the sword, **die by the sword! Hate—and you'll be hated!**

-And the one thing **God** has repeatedly used down through history to astound the world and transform relationships—has been those times when followers of Jesus have simply done what He said; that is, **stop using** the world's weapons that make things world, and **start** using the weapons of righteousness; love, grace, forgiveness and generosity.

-I dare you to try it! At the core—it's simple; its **treating your enemies** as you would want them to treat **you!** Loving them. Praying for them. Forgiving them. And over-coming **evil** with **good**. It'll **transform your life**—and maybe **theirs!**

-Jesus says, "If you won't love like this, then **what makes you different than Hitler, the Mafia, ISIS and Donald Trump?**"