



# Firm Foundations

Following the way of Jesus

## Radical Love

**Date:** Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July

**Speaker:** Rachel Binder

**Key Verses:** Matthew 5:38-42

### Talk Summary:

The call to follow Jesus is a call to radical love. As children of God, we are called to live out God's love in our relationships with everyone, including our enemies and those who make our lives difficult. These verses point out the universal mercy and love of God the Father evident in the sunshine and rain. Jesus' life and death for us, as well as the joy we experience in relationship with Him, are fuller expressions of God's radical love. Jesus is always ready to forgive us and bless us. He always wants the best for us and looks out for our good. This is the same type of love Jesus invites us to extend to the difficult people in our lives.

As always, Jesus' teaching is focused on our hearts, rather than giving us a set of rules to govern our outward behaviour. In fact, Jesus (John 18:22-23) and early believers (e.g. Paul Acts 16:22-23 contrast with Acts 22:23-29) didn't always "turn the other cheek" and forgo their legal rights. When we are in dangerous or abusive situations, we should normally try to remove ourselves from them as soon as possible. But we are still left with difficulties we cannot escape and hurts we need to resolve. Reconciliation isn't always possible, but in this passage, Jesus gives one very practical step which is always possible and always appropriate: prayer.

So how are we to pray for the annoying or hurtful people in our lives? Sometimes, like some of the psalmists, our prayers for the nasty people in our lives start out something like, "God, please remove that person from my life, or better yet from the earth!" If that is where our hearts are at, we are invited to bring what is in our hearts to God. But even if we start there, Jesus doesn't want us to stay in that place of internal hatred and desire for revenge. The word revenge sounds like we are going to wage a full-on war to retaliate. But our revenge can be subtle as gossiping about the person who has harmed us or cultivating a hope that "that person" will have as many sleepless nights as they caused me.

Instead, Jesus invites us to pray for blessing and good for our enemies. This is how his words are recorded in Luke 6: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat

you...Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back..." (Luke 6:27-28, 35)

So radical love is so much more than forgiving, so much more than a begrudging prayer. Radical love means returning good for evil, praying blessing and goodness, even giving gifts to those who have wronged us! (See also Romans 12:17-21.)

The call to follow Jesus is a call to radical love. It is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit because we have been radically loved by God. When it seems impossible to love our enemies, the place to start is by renewing ourselves in the love of God, and then consistent, honest prayer with hearts open to God about those we find it difficult to love.

### **Worship**

*Worship is not just singing, it is thanking God for who he is and what he has done and is lived out through a life of trusting obedience. Discussing this together is an act of worship.*

*(Small group worship resources can be found at [bvc.so/sgworship](http://bvc.so/sgworship))*

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?

*If you have a time of singing you can skip the above questions but please do ask this question each week:*

- What has God been speaking to you about this week? *(Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it)*

### **Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)**

- What do you find most challenging about Jesus' teaching in these verses?
- How do you normally respond when someone treats you badly? How do attitudes of un-forgiveness and revenge tend to show up in your life?
- How have you experienced and how do you experience God's love in your own life?
- Have you ever returned good for evil, or prayed blessing on someone who offended you? Or did someone treat you well when you had offended them? What was the impact?
- What do you think God is speaking to you about from these verses and this teaching? What next step would you like prayer for?

### **Witness**

*We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don't know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus. Pick one of the below each week:*

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?
- What church events coming up would your friends appreciate an invite to?