

Since getting my truck last October, I now consider myself a truck guy. So when I read this story I could relate.

Len Sweet, who is a pastor, speaker, and theologian, told of his encounter with a fellow truck guy, Tom.

Len arrived in Phoenix, Arizona still in mourning from trading in his Dodge truck. But the gentleman who picked Len up arrived in a new Ford pickup. They bonded immediately, sharing truck stories and the bumper-sticker truism: "Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."

A day later when Tom arrived to take Len back to the airport, Len noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. Naturally, he wanted to know, what happened.

Tom told Len, in a downcast voice, that his neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and scars.

Len commiserated by saying, "You're kidding! How awful, this truck is so new I can smell it."

"What's even worse, said Tom, is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage."

Rising to his newfound friend's defense, Len said, "Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"

Tom replied, "This has been a real spiritual journey for me. After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: **I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor.** Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that **I'd rather be in a relationship than be right.** Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected."

I don't know that I could respond with that same degree of acceptance. I'd want my neighbor to pay up for his irresponsible actions. And if he wasn't going to be responsible for the damages; then I'd probably want revenge. I'd want to inflict upon him the same pain that he caused me.

Have you ever wanted revenge; your pound of flesh, your eye for an eye, your tooth for a tooth?

Our game of the week is subtitled, '*The game of sweet revenge.*' After all, when you play, **Sorry**, you want revenge on your opponent for sending you back to the start.

But revenge is more than a board game or a popular television show; **revenge is how we respond to being wronged by another.** Sometimes it is overt, sometimes it is subtle; but in either case it is our opportunity to get even.

But getting even is often not the outcome of revenge. As someone has rightly said, "*Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.*" The implication here is that a desire for revenge may ultimately hurt the seeker as much as the victim.

Revenge may be sweet in the game of Sorry, but revenge is not the action that we want to teach our children or model for those who look at us as examples of what Jesus would do.

So this morning we want to look at a passage in which Jesus dealt with the ethics of those who call themselves followers of Jesus. The passage comes from the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:38-48**.

Before we get into the practical steps that you and I can take in response to being disciples of Jesus; let me unpack a few verses in this larger passage that often get misinterpreted. For this portion of the message I am indebted to Pastor Steve May for his insights.

Look first at this phrase from v. 39. *Do not resist an evil person.*

At first it sounds like that is an invitation for others to walk all over us. Or, it could be understood as never standing up for your rights. But that doesn't square with several examples from the scripture. Jesus drove the money-changers out of the Temple. That wasn't passive. And in Acts 16, Paul demanded his rights as a Roman citizen for a trial before Caesar.

In the context of Matthew 5, the word resist means retaliate. Jesus is talking about revenge, not self-preservation. Jesus isn't telling us to be weak and passive; Jesus is telling us not to be vindictive.

Another statement that can be misapplied is v. 48 were Jesus said: *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.*

Being perfect sounds impossible to most of us, but it's not. Jesus is not commanding us to do something that we aren't capable of doing.

The Greek word for perfect is *teleios*. It means to reach an intended end or completion. In other places in the Bible the word is translated as mature. So in other words, a person is *teleios* if he or she fulfills the purpose for which they were created.

In the context of this passage, Jesus is saying you can be perfect...you can fulfill your purpose in life..**you can demonstrate your maturity, by loving your enemy.** And we are never more like God than when we love those who don't love us.

Paul said, *But God demonstrated his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

And John said, *We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19)

So when Jesus urges us to be perfect, it is not attained through sinless perfection, because that is not possible. The kind of perfection that Jesus is referring to here is being perfect in love- in loving our enemies.

And what I want to do is show you two steps that we can take to show love to our enemies.

First, **Don't respond to insults.**

Jesus said, If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39)

Jesus is talking about more than physical violence, because he specifies the “right cheek”. The only way a right-handed person can hit you on the right cheek is with the back of their hand. According to Rabbinic Law, hitting a man with the back of your hand was twice as insulting as hitting a man with the palm of your hand. Jesus said that when that happens, don’t return the insult, don’t retaliate.

Jesus’ point is not that we should let people physically abuse us; his point is that we should **refrain from trying to get even when someone insults us**. How many times have you fumed and fretted over an insult—playing and replaying it in your mind, thinking about what you should have said...what you wish you had said.

It never does any good, does it? It never makes you feel better. It never resolves the problem. It never takes away the hurt. In fact, the longer you hold on to the idea of retaliation, the more the insult hurts.

Sometimes the best way to respond to an insult is to move on.. Solomon said... **A prudent man overlooks an insult. (Proverbs 12:16)**

The Apostle Peter said... **Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)**

When you’re insulted, you can waste your energy thinking of ways to get even, or you can choose the alternative to revenge—you can be perfect instead. You can be like your heavenly father. You can love your enemies.

Second, **Treat mis-treaters with kindness.**

Jesus said, If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (5:41)

Everyone is familiar with the phrase “Go the second mile.” When Jesus spoke these words he was referring to a common custom in Roman occupied lands. Roman law gave a soldier a right to force a civilian to carry his pack for one mile. Needless to say, this caused great inconvenience to civilians. Imagine being late for a business meeting, and suddenly being stopped on the street and forced to drop everything in order to carry a soldier’s pack for one mile. Jesus told his followers, “When that happens, instead of just walking one mile, walk two.”

There’s no greater way to show God’s love than to be kind to someone who hasn’t treated you with kindness.

Jesus summarized this teaching by saying, *You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. (5:43-44)*

In the real game of life, we are never more like our heavenly Father than when we love those who don’t love us; especially neighbors.

Remember Tom’s comment to Len Sweet at the beginning of my message. Tom said, *I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will*

*probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that **I'd rather be in a relationship than be right.***

Too often we miss out on relationship because we want to be right or worse yet, want revenge. And when we miss out on relationship in order to be right, we miss the opportunity to be perfect, to demonstrate our maturity by loving our enemies. After all, getting even, or getting your revenge will never make you feel better.

For far too long Christians have missed out on loving their neighbor in deference to being right.

All that has done has been

to build walls rather than bridges,
destroy relationships rather than develop them,
create enemies rather than nurture friendships.

So instead of trying to influence the outcome of the game of life we've played to win; we need to develop the relationships that will make all of us winners. And when we all win, no one needs to say sorry.

I'd rather be in a relationship than be right.

Disciples of Jesus are called to build bridges, to build lasting relationships because our neighbors are going to be with us longer than our truck.