

# Connect360: Blessed Are the Peacemakers

January 29, 2024

- *Lesson 4 in the Connect360 unit "Kingdom Power: The Sermon on the Mount" focuses on Matthew 5:33-48.*

Many of Jesus' hearers were poor. If they gave an adversary their shirt, it literally would have been the shirt off their back. They also were subject to the governing Romans, who were their oppressors. By law, the Romans could force a Jew to carry their enemies' load up to a mile. Why did Jesus ask a poor person to give his last shirt away, or go two miles carrying his oppressors' bags, or even to give to those who ask him for help? This action would have been degrading and humiliating.

If a person's goal is the accumulation of wealth, this lifestyle creates suspicions and greed causing an impulse to hold onto everything a person owns. Generosity is the opposite of greed. A symbol of our society might be a closed hand. How do we grasp all we can and hold on to it, keeping our wealth away from others who seek to seize it?

Jesus' example is the opposite. In Philippians 2:5-11, the picture of Christ is one who gave himself away rather than grasping what was rightfully his. Instead of the symbol of grasping of the closed hand, a Christ follower must be one with an open hand, giving himself away because of a love for others.

The ultimate challenge for a peacemaker is to love his enemies. Just as our heavenly Father sends rain and causes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust, we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Two of the countries where the church is growing most quickly are Iran and China, two nations totally opposed to religious freedom. The most

powerful evangelistic tool for the church in these nations is love.

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