**EVEN MY ENEMY?**

**OVERVIEW**

Through TV shows, movies, and violence in society, teenagers have learned to deal with enemies in a manner differently than that required by Jesus. Most of them will struggle with the plan God lays out for dealing with enemies – they can’t imagine how it would help them. This will provide a great opportunity to challenge the youth to see if they really trust God enough to follow his commands, even when they seem bizarre!

**OPENER**

Hand out the “*Famous Feuds*” worksheet to the group. One-half of famous adversary pairs are listed, they must write down who the other half in each pair is. You can hold a contest and give out small prizes for the most correct pairs if you wish. After you have discussed this, explain that they will learn that society’s way of dealing with enemies is not the same as Gods’ way.

**LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION**

Pass out the *“Dealing with Enemies*” worksheet; give them a few minutes to complete it. Talk about the way people treat those who they think of as enemies. Which of the ways seem crazy and why? How does society in general treat enemies?

Read **Proverbs 25:21-22, Matthew 5:43-48** and **Romans 12:14, 17-21**. Make a list of what the Bible says about dealing with an enemy. Discuss how this conflicts with the way people usually treat those they dislike.

* Would it be easy to follow these commands? Why or why not?
* How would your enemy respond if they were treated as Christ instructed?
* How would you react if your enemy treated you as Christ commanded?

*Story – Mr. Smith silently made his way up the frosty steps of the state penitentiary. He unfolded his wool coat for the metal detector and dutifully signed the visitor roster. Mr. Smith seated himself in the paint-chipped chair that faced an empty seat through a thick wall of glass, interrupted by a small, screened speaking hole. Meanwhile, down in the dark halls of the prison, a number was called and a thin man slowly shuffled out of his cell and headed for the visitor area. This convict was spending his life in prison for the brutal rape and murder of a young high school junior, and his visitor – Mr. Smith – was here at the prison on a mission. He was here to tell the killer of his only daughter that he had forgiven him, and that God could forgive him too.*

Ask the group which of these best describes what Mr. Smith wanted to do:

CRAZY, NOBLE, UNNECESSARY, WEIRD, LOVING, EXEMPLARY, STRANGE, ADMIRABLE, STRONG, PERVERSE.

* What do you think of Mr. Smith’s actions?
* How do you think Mr. Smith has the ability to forgive this man?
* Do you think you could forgive someone who had done something terrible to you or to someone close to you? Why or why not?
* Why do you think God expects you to forgive people who don’t seem to deserve it?

Point out that doing an act of love for someone (even an enemy!) is simply a matter of will. Love is a choice, not necessarily a feeling toward someone.

**WRAP-UP**

Explain that it’s difficult – but not impossible – to care for those who hate us. Let them know that this process is done one step at a time, starting with something simple such as refusing to get back at a person or spread gossip. Once they have succeeded at little things, they can go on to other gestures of peacekeeping. Encourage them to ask God for help in dealing with their enemies and to ask Him for the strength to love the enemy back!

**SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION**

**Senior Group:**

List some examples of how people in society deal with their enemies – from the least to most extreme; from enemies of the state (world leaders versus world leaders, or country versus country) down to personal enemies (friends, relatives, etc.). What is the general message that society gives to those who hate an enemy? How does the media glorify enemies, and how to deal with them?

How did some biblical characters handle their enemies? Check out the relationship between Jesus and Satan in **Matthew 4:1-11**, Jacob and Esau in **Genesis 27:41-45**, Ester and Haman in **Ester 5:9-14 & 7:1-10**, and David and Goliath in **1Samuel 17:1-54**. How did God work in these relationships and what happened? Note how God used the bad for the good – just as he can with enemies today.

Challenge each of them to pray for one enemy during the week and to see what happens – does the relationship improve? What is God teaching us about love, patience and perseverance?

**Junior Group:**

Have the group list some examples of famous enemies from TV, movies or books. What are some of the common ways that these enemies relate to each other? What makes a person an enemy? How does the media glorify enemies – and how to deal with them? What is the general message that society gives to those who hate an enemy?

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Why is loving our enemies a hard order for most of us to follow? What are some ways to practice what the Bible teaches on this subject? Challenge each of them to pray for one enemy during the week and to see what happens – does the relationship improve? What is God teaching us about love, patience and perseverance?

**PERSONAL DEVOTION**

Rewrite **Matthew 5:43-48** by substituting the word *“enemy”* with the name of a person who you would consider your enemy. What does this verse say to you? Is this verse an encouragement to you? How do these verses relate to you being a Christian? Look for other examples in the Bible about dealing with enemies.