

Love and forgiveness

What Does This Mean?

Love, in biblical terms, is a strong attachment to others and also a commitment to a way of behaving and thinking about others that does not depend on feelings alone. The Apostle Paul lists its characteristics in (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). This attitude of love is kind, patient, humble, forgiving, selfless, and hopeful.

Hatred is an opposite of love, an intense feeling of hostility that can become a prolonged resentful feeling of bitterness. The two can lead to wanting revenge, which in turn is the opposite of mercy. Probably more common than hatred is apathy, a general failure to care and to respond to others with love.

God's character is defined as love (1 John 4:8). The Bible says God as slow to anger but quick to forgive, since forgiveness is central to his character (Micah 7:18). Forgiveness is ceasing to carry resentment toward an enemy, and mercy is ceasing to demand full punishment. Note that forgiveness does not mean evil is allowed to continue; sometimes justice and making amends still need to happen. Forgiveness often is the first step toward reconciliation in a relationship. Even if a reconciliation does not follow, Jesus taught that hatred is not the Christian way; he called for people to love their enemies as well.

For Christians, forgiveness is a response to being forgiven by God and was modeled by Christ, who forgave his enemies (Luke 23:24). Asking God for forgiveness should lead us to forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15; Colossians 3:13). Forgiveness is not just a feeling; it can be an act of the will.

Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. Corrie Ten Boom

What Does This Mean in School?

We can explore love, forgiveness, mercy, and their opposites across the curriculum.

- We can include stories of love, forgiveness, and mercy (or their opposites) in history, civics, drama, English, and other subjects. Both negatives (hatred, bitterness, and revenge) as well as positives (love, forgiveness, and mercy) can teach us something.
- We can be intentional about introducing these terms and their definitions and highlight them as they occur, relating them to students' lives and culture.
- We can make sure students have the language of apology and forgiveness in modern foreign languages and use it in class.
- We can review the way people relate in our classes and our own ability to apologize when necessary.

Think of a lesson where love, forgiveness, mercy, and their opposites are relevant to the subject matter— for example, apathy toward the environment in geography, and love or revenge as a motive in literature. How could you draw attention to these in teaching and learning?



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