

*Don't Take the Bait*  
*The Bait of Revenge*  
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# TALK IT OVER

## Key Scripture:

### **Matthew 5:38-42 (NLT)**

38 "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. 40 If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. 41 If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

### **Matthew 5:43-45 (NLT)**

43 "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. 44 But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! 45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

### **2 Samuel 16:5-13 (NLT)**

5 As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. 6 He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded him. 7 "Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. 8 "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!" 9 "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" Abishai son of Zeruiah demanded. "Let me go over and cut off his head!" 10 "No!" the king said. "Who asked your opinion, you sons of Zeruiah! If the Lord has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him?" 11 Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. 12 And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today." 13 So David and his men continued down the road, and Shimei kept pace with them on a nearby hillside, cursing and throwing stones and dirt at David.

### **Romans 12:19 (NLT)**

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What's the best practical joke you've ever played on someone? Did that person get you back?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read Matthew 5:38-42.** What does it look like for you to turn the other cheek or carry someone's gear an extra mile? How do we live out Jesus' commands in these verses while at the same time maintaining our dignity?
- **Read Matthew 5:43-45.** Why does Jesus want us to love and serve our enemies? Can you name a time when you were successful or unsuccessful at living out these verses? What did you learn from that experience?
- **Read 2 Samuel 16:5-13.** What was Shimei's problem with David? How did Abishai want to solve the disgrace? David said, "Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it." What did David mean by that?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Why do we have such a strong urge to pay someone back for a wrong done to us? Where does that urge come from?
- **Read Romans 12:19.** Why does vengeance belong to the Lord instead of me? How does knowing that God will bring justice for the injustices done to you bring a sense of peace to your life?
- Why did David want to be cursed? How does David's motivation change your perspective on getting revenge?
- What does it mean to allow God to be your defender? Are you doing that in your life today?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Identify one area where you are taking revenge and confess it.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Jesus, thank you that we can rest in your victory. Please help us to remain assured of that and that you are our defender, to love our enemies and to let you fight our battles. -Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

**Question: "How should we treat our enemies according to Proverbs 25:21–22?"**

**Answer:** According to Proverbs 25:21–22, the Lord would have us treat our enemies with kindness and generosity: “If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.” This passage states the paradoxical kingdom truth that the way to deal with an enemy is to do him good.

Elisha the prophet carried out a similar kindness for the Aramean army when they came against Israel, setting food and drink before the troops and then sending them home. After that, they stayed away from Israel (2 Kings 6:21–23; cf. 2 Chronicles 28:15). Old Testament law even commanded that an Israelite return his enemy’s ox or donkey if it strayed and give aid to his enemy’s ailing beast of burden (Exodus 23:4–5).

*Heap burning coals on someone’s head* is an expression associated with punishment in the Bible (Psalm 11:6; 140:10). The idea is that under the heat and pressure of applied kindness, the person will feel ashamed, regret his actions, and repent. The phrase could have originated from an ancient Egyptian propitiation ritual in which a person guilty of a crime was made to carry a basin of burning embers on his head as a symbol of his repentance. The goal of treating our enemies with kindness is to bring them to a place of conviction about their wrongdoing and, thus, cause them to repent.

In Romans 12:9–21, the apostle Paul cited Proverbs 25:21–22 to show that we overcome evil through love and goodness. He taught, “Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them” (verse 14, NLT). “Never pay back evil with more evil” (verse 17, NLT). “Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the LORD. Instead, ‘If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.’ Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good” (verses 19–21, NLT).

Our instinctive human reaction to being wronged is to retaliate against our enemies. Yet, such a response is prohibited to followers of Christ. Jesus taught, “Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matthew 5:39). As Christians, we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:43–48). We conquer evil by doing what is good, and we win over our enemies by loving them and treating them with kindness and compassion.

In His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called His disciples to be agents of peace in this world: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:9–12).

There are reasons why Christians should not take revenge. First and foremost, God has made it expressly clear in Scripture that it is His job to punish sin (Deuteronomy 32:35, 41; Ecclesiastes 12:14). And, since God wants “all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” Christians are to lead “peaceful and quiet” lives, so they don’t hinder the work of the gospel (1 Timothy 2:1–4). When we perform God’s job of avenging ourselves and punishing our enemies, we run the risk of bringing harm to the cause of the gospel. But when we love our enemies sincerely and sacrificially, God will honor and reward us.

For a Christian, the best way to defeat an enemy is to turn that enemy into a brother or sister in Christ. Romans 2:4 says that God’s kindness is intended to lead people to repentance. It stands to follow that our kindness to an enemy might also help bring that person to repentance. Treating our enemies with unexpected benevolence and generosity will have a disarming and discomfiting effect, with the potential of leading them to remorse, repentance, and salvation in Jesus Christ.