Dear Open Door Family,

It seemed like such a good idea at the time. If we could take out the monster shrubs in front of the house, we could then put in smaller shrubs and flowers. So this week I went out to do battle with the monsters. If you have ever had to dig up a large shrub you know how hard it can be. After a lot of hard work I dug up ONE shrub and then decided I would try to yank the next one out with the truck. I tried twice to pull it out by the roots but I broke one cable and bent the hooks on another one. The shrub was still solidly in place; it had NOT budged. So I got out the shovel and worked hard cutting all the connecting roots, and then pulled it out by hand. (I still have two left to tackle next week.) When something is deeply rooted it is hard to dig out and it takes a lot of work.

As I read these verses today I am reminded that Jesus asks us to do things which are impossible for us to do in our own strength. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus challenges us to go past loving our neighbor to loving those who may not like us all that much. That is hard to do - that is like digging up a large shrub with deep roots. But we don't have to do it alone. We can ask for His help and strength. Jesus never asks us to do anything for which He does not offer us daily on-going grace and strength. Let's look at these verses together.

Matthew 5:43-45 *(NIV) "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.*

Matthew 5:45 *(NLT) 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.*

Life Application Study Bible Notes: *When we are wronged, often our first reaction is to get even. Instead Jesus said we should do good to those who wrong us! Our desire should not be to keep score, but to love and forgive. This is not natural - it is supernatural. Only God can give us the strength to love as he does. Instead of planning vengeance, pray for those who hurt you.*

I show who my Father really is by the way I act. If I want to represent my Heavenly Father, well then I will love not just my neighbors but my enemies and I will pray for those who are against me. God who could do away with evil and ungodly people with a mere thought does not. That is a good thing because without God's Grace and Forgiveness He would have to do away with each one of us. Instead, God continues to give sun and rain to all so that perhaps somehow they may seek after the Him. He extends His Grace and Offers of Forgiveness. He bears with evil and sin so that people like me and you might at some point see His Love and Grace and turn to humbly seek after Him.

PRAYER: Lord God, thank you for Your Grace towards me. I do not deserve Your Sun and Rain or even the air I breathe. But in Your Love and Grace You have given me not only all of that but Your Awe-Inspiring Forgiveness. Please Lord, help me to LOVE others with the same Love You have for me.

Pastor Mark Kieft

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