# Loving Isis

## Good Questions Have Groups Talking Check our more Bible Lessons at [www.mybiblestudylessons.com](http://www.mybiblestudylessons.com)

You might ask a few of your people to Google the perspective of parents whose kids went bad—who became serial killers or joined ISIS.

You might ask someone else to do a little research and be prepared to give an overview of Islam, while another gives and overview of the history and goals of ISIS.

### Love Your Enemies / Matthew 5.43 - 48

### OPEN

Let’s each share your name and who was your enemy when you were a kid.

### DIG

1. Matthew 5.43 – 48. Love your enemies. Poetic, isn’t it? What does it really mean to love your enemies?

The Bible commands us not only to resist hating and retaliating against those who might harm us, but it tells us to go beyond that and actually bless them. That’s what Jesus instructed to those who heard His Sermon on the Mount: “ ‘But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you’” (Luke 6:27–28).

To truly love your enemies, you must treat them as if they were your friends. — John MacArthur, *Truth for Today : A Daily Touch of God’s Grace (*Nashville, Tenn.: J. Countryman, 2001), 221.

1. Who were the enemies back in the day?

Listeners probably identified their enemies as their Roman oppressors, but an enemy can be anyone we avoid or find annoying, or who treats us disrespectfully. — Jan Johnson, *Savoring God’s Word: Cultivating the Soul-Transforming Practice of Scripture Meditation (*Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 181.

1. What does it mean to love your enemies in a world where our enemies cut off our friend’s heads?

THE ISIS PLAN to rid the world of Christians isn’t clandestine. It’s not a carefully guarded secret confined to quiet meetings behind closed doors. It’s not even a dream to be realized only when the Islamic State has consumed the entire world. On the contrary, ISIS is so dedicated to perpetrating a Christian holocaust that they talk about it boldly and often.

In fact, in October 2014, the cover photo of the magazine published by ISIS was a picture of St. Peter’s Square in the Vatican. With utter and complete audacity, ISIS had superimposed their chilling black jihadist flag on the ancient Egyptian obelisk that adorns the center of St. Peter’s Square. Their cover article promised to “break the crosses” and “trade and sell the women” of the Christians. In every public appearance or written statement by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—the infamous leader of ISIS—he mentions specifically that they intend to march all the way to Rome. It is noteworthy that he didn’t select New York City, Paris, or London. The plan at the heart of the ISIS threat is to plant their radicalism into the heart of St. Peter’s Square, and to raise their black flag over one of the cities that most symbolizes Christianity.

They would revel in the opportunity to have the Pope endure the same fate as St. Peter himself, and then behead every priest and parishioner in a grotesque display of power and terror. They would love to put the severed heads of those working in the Vatican atop Bernini’s sculptures lining St. Peter’s Square. They would turn St. Peter’s Square into a river of “infidel” blood and its Basilica into a mosque, after raiding the Vatican’s museum and archives.

They would crush her ancient statues, burn her priceless art, and turn the Sistine Chapel into a market for sex slaves, or a prison for those awaiting execution. The executions would take place prominently, publicly in St. Peter’s square. The leader of ISIS would take the Papal apartment as his home with the entire world as his goal.

This isn’t a far-fetched dream they aim to realize. This is a rock-solid goal they are pursuing at this very moment, and they believe entirely that they are capable of executing their plan. ISIS is unabashed at their desire to eliminate Christianity all together.

This isn’t just a part of their plan.

It is the heart of it. — Johnnie Moore, *Defying Isis: Preserving Christianity in the Place of Its Birth and in Your Own Backyard* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

1. How much do you love the members of ISIS? Or the latest person who shot up a school or church or movie theater?

That question may seem absurd. And maybe it is. I think “love your enemies” is the most unreasonable thing Jesus says.

And that’s saying something, because it’s coming from a guy who also says stuff like “eat my flesh and drink my blood,” “hate your mother and father” and “sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor” (John 6:56, Luke 14:26 and Matthew 19:21, respectively).

But love your enemies? Come on.

And this is more than just the inconsiderate jerks who pop up occasionally in your life. We’re not just talking about the guy at work who keeps stealing your lunch, or the lady who cut you off on the highway and then gave you the finger.

Jesus and His audience lived under an oppressive occupying Roman government. The Romans employed torture and murder to keep people in line. Everyone listening to Jesus talk about this “love your enemies” stuff had plenty of opportunities to experience “I hate you with every ounce of my guts” enemies in the soldiers and prefects that carried out this daily social domination.

Read more at <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/worldview/what-it-actually-means-love-your-enemies#Z6c9LdI2lzJywbG7.99>

1. What is your natural reaction to ISIS and others who do terrible, unspeakable, despicable things?

As I read about the latest shooting, or the latest beheading, my natural response is to dehumanize the people who do these things. I think of them as monsters. Or demons. Or something else that allows me to pretend that they are not fellow humans.

But that’s not true.

Each one was born. Each one has a mother and a father. They eat. They drink. They have personal stories and experiences full of pain and joy.

They are human. And if I take the narrative of the Bible to be true, they are fellow children of God. They are loved by God.

I want to be very clear: I’m not supporting or accepting of terrorism or mass shootings. I’m also not arguing against legal consequences for those actions.

But if I hate the people who undertake these actions, I am not hating monsters or demons. I’m hating fellow humans.

Some are suffering from mental illness, or from personal anguish or from religious manipulation. In the midst of grief and anger for those who suffer, can I not spare some compassion for those who have missed out on the life filled with grace and hope that Jesus has called all of us to live?

We like to live in a binary, black and white world, where everyone is basically “good” or “bad.” But life isn’t so cut and dried. Someone can be guilty of terrible things and still deserve compassion.

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1. By the way, occasionally you will hear someone say that all religions are basically alike and it doesn’t really matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. How does Islam differ from Christianity?

Wearing the right armor is important, but so is going into battle with the right attitude. Jesus shared this part of God’s strategic plan in Luke 6:27–28. “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

This strategic attitude is counterintuitive, which is what makes it so effective.

The Bible’s truth of God’s unconditional love for humanity is a truth not found in the Quran. Love is not one of the ninety-nine names for God found there. The god of Islam can love people for what they do, but it’s only a performance-based love. The idea of love existing as part of the very essence of God doesn’t exist in Islam. And that’s what makes Jesus’ words so revolutionary. — Charles H. Dyer and Mark Tobey, *The Isis Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

1. What do you know about Islam? Who could give us an overview?

JUST AS IN the days of Muhammad, the fundamentalist followers of Islam today are pursuing world conquest. The best way I can describe this mind-set is to let one of the leaders say it in his words.

One of the clearest writers and thinkers of modern jihad is Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, the founder of Pakistan’s fundamentalist movement. He has written many books and is one of Islam’s most well-known scholars. The entire Islamic world considers him a leader who will be remembered throughout history. He explains the purpose of Islam as follows:

Islam is not a normal religion like the other religions in the world, and Muslim nations are not like normal nations. Muslim nations are very special because they have a command from Allah to rule the entire world and to be over every nation in the world.

He points out that the purpose of the strive is not about land, but about the religion—the goal is to subdue the world to the rule of Islam:

Islam is a revolutionary faith that comes to destroy any government made by man. Islam doesn’t look for a nation to be in better condition than another nation. Islam doesn’t care about the land or who owns the land. The goal of Islam is to rule the entire world and submit all of mankind to the faith of Islam. Any nation or power in this world that tries to get in the way of that goal, Islam will fight and destroy.

In order for Islam to fulfill that goal, Islam can use every power available every way it can be used to bring worldwide revolution. This is jihad.

Mawdudi also expressed the idea that Islam is a political system and way of life that must replace all other ways of life:

Islam is not just a spiritual religion; Islam is a way of life. It is a heavenly system revealed to our world through the angel Gabriel, and the responsibility of Muslims is to destroy any other system in the world and to replace it with the Islamic system.

Everyone who believes in Islam in this manner can be a member of Jamaat-i-Islami [the Pakistani fundamentalist movement founded by the author]. I don’t want anybody to think that Muslims who join the party of God are just normal Muslim missionaries or normal preachers in the mosque or people who write articles. The party of God is a group established by Allah himself to take the truth of Islam in one hand and to take the sword in the other hand and destroy the kingdoms of evil and the kingdoms of mankind and to replace them with the Islamic system. This group is going to destroy the false gods and make Allah the only God.

By saying “false gods,” the author is referring to political leaders who are not under Islamic authority, such as presidents or prime ministers of Western countries.

As you can see, Islam is the faith of struggle, revolution, and war. Islam doesn’t want a little piece of the world—it wants it all. — Mark A Gabriel, *Islam and Terrorism (revised and Updated Edition): The Truth about Isis, the Middle East and Islamic Jihad* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2015).

1. Does loving your enemies mean you would not try to prevent them from harming you?

But until that day arrives, peace remains little more than an elusive dream. Does that mean we are doomed to live our lives in fear?

Thankfully, the answer is no. God has given His followers a battle plan to defeat the forces of darkness and evil.

First, we need to make clear an important distinction between what God expects from our government and what God expects from Christians. The apostle Paul reminded the church in Rome to “be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God” (Romans 13:1). There are times when governments go beyond the boundaries set for them by God. And in those instances, we must choose whether we are to obey God or government. The actions of Daniel when told not to pray (Daniel 6) or Peter when told not to preach (Acts 5) are compelling reminders that “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Certainly believers living in the areas now controlled by ISIS must disobey when ordered to deny their faith.

God instituted human government, and its primary role is to protect its citizens and to promote peace. Our government has been doing that in its fight against Al-Qaeda and ISIS, and we need to support our leaders in those efforts. But we also need to realize that there are limits to what physical force can do. America has spent trillions of dollars, and lost thousands of lives, in its struggle to stop Al-Qaeda and ISIS, but the threat remains and has even intensified. — Charles H. Dyer and Mark Tobey, *The Isis Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

1. Does loving your enemies mean you would not want them to receive justice for their bad deeds?

Imagine your son was a serial killer. You might recognize that he needed to be taken off the streets. You might realize that he had to be punished. But you would see him punished with a broken heart. This is how we should feel toward our enemies. We might realize that have to be stopped. We realize that mankind must be protected. We realize there is a place in this world for society to administer justice and bad people must be punished. But we see them punished with tears in our eyes. We wish it were not so. We wish that had taken a different path. We wish that had repented and found grace.

1. Imagine your son became a serial killer, or joined ISIS. How would you feel toward him?

Becky Watts's stepmother has insisted she still loves her killer son and will visit him in prison in a quest to find out why he murdered the schoolgirl.

Becky, 16, was brutally murdered in a sexually motivated kidnap plot devised by her stepbrother Nathan Matthews and his girlfriend Shauna Hoare.

Speaking after the pair were convicted yesterday, Becky's father Darren Galsworthy and his wife Anjie Galsworthy, who is Matthews's mother, spoke of the pain of the 'betrayal'.

TV viewers were today treated to an extraordinary united front as Darren, the father of a murdered girl, and Anjie his wife, mother of the murderer, gripped each other's hands and told how the killing had turned their lives upside down but would not tear their marriage apart.

Mr Galsworthy revealed he has decorated the bedroom where the teenager was murdered 'just the way she would have liked' and the couple will not move out.

Mrs Galsworthy told Good Morning Britain her son had become a monster but insisted she still loves him.

'He's a different person, he's not the child I remember bringing up,' she said. 'I still love him, I just find it hard looking at the monster he's turned into.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3315250/I-love-says-mother-Becky-Watts-killer.html#ixzz3sjszqoSU>

1. Does loving a person mean always being nice to him? Explain.

The English pastor G. A. Studdert-Kennedy reminds us that even kindness has a limit: “Christians in trying to be kinder than Christ cease to be kind at all.” — Rich Nathan, *Who Is My Enemy? (*Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

1. Do people in ISIS deserve to be loved?

I’m not seeking to humanize terrorists and murderers because they deserve it or because I am ignoring their actions.

I’m seeking to humanize them because it’s true.

It is also the only way we can hope to stem the tide of terrorism and shootings at schools and malls and workplaces and houses of worship.

Because if these actions are the work of monsters and demons, I am powerless to stop them. I can only shake my head and feel sad that such beings cannot be stopped.

But if I’m dealing with humans, I can have hope. Hope that messages of love and acceptance and peace can be heard. Hope that God can redeem even the worst of sinners. Hope that God can redeem my deep, dark sins, too.

I look to examples like the Civil Rights movement, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa, where I see clearly that only when we treat our adversaries as humans—no matter how flawed—can we hope to prevail in our cause: the cause of ultimate justice. The belief that God will eventually set all the wrongs to right.

As Miroslav Volf says in Exclusion and Embrace, “If you want justice and nothing but justice, you will inevitably get injustice. If you want justice without injustice, you must want love.”

Much more could be said on the topic of justice, but that is perhaps for another time.

If you’ve been willing to go with me this far, perhaps you’re willing to ask the next question: How do I love my enemy?

Read more at <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/worldview/what-it-actually-means-love-your-enemies#Z6c9LdI2lzJywbG7.99>

1. Is this a new problem? Is it a new thing to live in a world where Christians are harmed because they are Christians?

The world in its hostility murdered Jesus, and the world in its hostility continues to murder Jesus’ followers to this very day. It was the world in the form of the Chinese Boxers who slaughtered hundreds of foreign missionaries and tens of thousands of indigenous Christians at the beginning of the twentieth century. E. J. Cooper, a Protestant missionary, wrote to his mother about that world:

The Lord has honored us by giving us fellowship in his sufferings. Three times stoned, robbed of everything, even clothes, we know what hunger, thirst, nakedness, weariness are as never before, but also the sustaining grace and strength of God and his peace in a new and deeper sense than before…. Billow after billow has gone over me. Home gone, not one memento of dear Maggie [his wife] even, penniless, wife and child gone to glory, Edith [his other child] lying very sick with diarrhea, and your son weak and exhausted to a degree, though otherwise well.

The world attacked two families and six young children in the Chinese town of Luchen, chasing them from one village to another, hurling sticks and stones and shouting, “Death to the foreign devils.” One seven-year-old named Jessie Saunders understood the character of the world when, after being stoned, she said to her mother: “If they loved Jesus, they would not do this.”

The world still practices crucifixion at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the Sudan, the largest country in Africa. After enduring more than forty years of civil war, the predominantly Christian population in the southern Sudan is subject to torture, rape, and starvation for their refusal to convert to Islam. Christian children are routinely sold into slavery. Muslims in the north who dare to convert to Christianity are faced with the death penalty. In the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Sudan’s estimated death toll of more than 1.9 million is far greater than the much better publicized slaughter in Rwanda (800,000), Bosnia (300,000), and Kosovo (several thousand as of the beginning of 1999) combined.

The world in the form of the modern Chinese government acknowledged “the church played an important role in the change in Eastern Europe” and then it ominously added, “If China does not want such a scene to be repeated in its land, it must strangle the baby while it is still in the cradle.”

The world is also found in the “Christian” West. For Western Christians to have the proper perspective on this, they must listen to people who come to the West from other cultures. Eugene Peterson makes this astute observation:

If you listen to a Solzhenitsyn or Bishop Tutu, or university students from Africa or South America, they don’t see a Christian land. They see almost the reverse of a Christian land. They see a lot of greed and arrogance. And they see a Christian community that has almost none of the virtues of the biblical community, which has to do with a sacrificial life…. The attractive thing about America to outsiders is the materialism, not the spirituality…. What they want are cars and televisions. They’re not [attracted to] our gospel.

Rich Nathan, *s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

1. Jesus also said to pray for our enemies. How does praying for our enemies help us?

I’m not talking about “please give that person what they have coming to them” prayers. But I also don’t mean that you need to spend an hour each night asking God to pour blessings upon them. There’s a way to pray both for justice and for the hearts of those committing injustices.

If you have hate in your heart for somebody, maybe it starts with “God, I hate that person, and I don’t want to.”

As C.S. Lewis has said, “[Prayer] doesn’t change God—it changes me.”

Read more at <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/worldview/what-it-actually-means-love-your-enemies#Z6c9LdI2lzJywbG7.99>

1. Is ISIS the real enemy? Who is the real enemy?

We like to put faces to our fears. We want to see what our enemy looks like; to demystify him; to give him a tangibility that lets us stare him in the face so we can take him down. But sometimes that works against us.

When America made Saddam Hussein the ultimate enemy, we foolishly announced “Mission Accomplished” once he was captured. But the fight went on.

When we made “Osama bin Laden” world enemy number one, we declared that Al-Qaeda was “on the run” after his death. But the threat continued.

Could it be that all this time we’ve been pursuing the wrong enemy?

**STILL OUR ANCIENT FOE**

Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, penned his magnificent hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” In that hymn he brought keen insight to the nature of our true enemy, Satan. “For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe; his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate; on earth is not his equal.”

Paul wrote his letter to the church in Ephesus while shackled to a soldier in Rome, under house arrest, and on trial for his life. His friends were concerned as they speculated on the different forces aligned against this outspoken apostle. Their list of possible suspects was long … and complex. Caesar, other Roman authorities, the Jewish religious leaders, even jealous Christians upset over Paul’s popularity. But Paul pointed his readers in a different direction.

The real enemy facing Paul, and all other believers, wasn’t to be found in Rome or Jerusalem. This enemy, and the battle he directs, extends into heaven itself. Paul declared that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against … the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The ultimate commander of ISIS remains unseen by most of his followers, but he is not unknown. This commander is Satan himself. — Charles H. Dyer and Mark Tobey, *The Isis Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

1. Is it OK that we just ignore this problem and hope it goes away?

Ignorance is the enemy not just of our democratic system but also of our moral integrity as a nation, as the land of the free and home of the brave. — *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore* by Jay Sekulow

1. How big is this problem?

ISIS has emerged as not just the most ruthless of the Sunni jihadist organizations in Iraq and Syria; it is also the most successful. ISIS is so extreme that other well-known, radical Islamist and jihadist groups have not only distanced themselves from ISIS, they have also publicly condemned ISIS’s actions and even fought ISIS fighters directly.1 ISIS jihadists commit violence against fellow Muslims in violation of Islamic law; they routinely commit war crimes and engage in torture in violation of international law; and they also kill and threaten Christian, Jewish, and other religious communities. In short, ISIS is composed of religiously motivated psychopaths.

Not only are ISIS leaders and fighters ruthless, but they also have obtained sufficient material assets to support a standing military force. They possess the will to use weapons of mass destruction to carry out their fanatical aims. They’re no longer a terrorist gang, but a terrorist army possessing greater striking power than any terrorist force in the Middle East, greater striking power than al-Qaeda ever possessed.

Ominously, this terrorist army is proving to be irresistibly attractive to a subset of British and American Muslim men, with hundreds (if not thousands) flocking to the black flag of jihad. By some estimates up to three hundred Americans currently fight for ISIS, all of them now enemy combatants against their own country. Britain faces an even worse crisis, with more of its Muslim young men volunteering to fight for ISIS than volunteering to serve in their own country’s armed forces. — *Rise of ISIS: A Threat We Can't Ignore* by Jay Sekulow

1. Most of us will never have to meet a terrorist. What does it mean to apply Jesus’ teaching about loving our enemies in the world in which we live?

She told me about an encounter she had had with two Mormons who knocked at her door. She welcomed them in and offered them something to eat. As they sat around her kitchen table, she talked with them about a relationship with Christ.

“What church do you go to?” they asked her.

“I attend the Vineyard on the northeast side of town,” she replied. The two young Mormon men looked at each other and laughed.

“We thought so. The Christians in your church are the only Christians in town who don’t slam the door in our faces and who show us any kindness at all.”

As you can imagine, I couldn’t have felt more proud of the people in my church than I did when I heard her story! — Rich Nathan*, Who Is My Enemy?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

1. As we watch the news each night, we need a little biblical perspective. How will this all end up? Will the terrorist win?

The threat facing us is the threat of a thousand kinds of Nazis spread throughout the entire globe without a single vein of conscience restraining their evil. The terror of it all is that these arbiters of hate aren’t confined to a Third Reich. They are dispersed in every corner of the world, quietly “sleeping” in their cells, awaiting the order or opportunity to shed innocent blood to strike terror in us all.

Every drop of innocent blood prompts their celebration to the world’s horror, and every ounce of fear fuels their unbridled evil.

Perhaps at the hands of the strong and good in our world these terrorists will eventually realize—as previous generations of terrorists have—that “love is . . . more powerful than death.”

But, between now and then, their hate will rage wildly across the globe, particularly targeting Christians.

They will not win their fight to eradicate the world of Christianity, nor will they win their war with the West, but they might very well win their fight to eradicate the Middle East of it. Through it all have arisen stories of men, women, and children who have given everything for their faith, even their lives, and stories of those who when facing inevitable death lifted their eyes to their God in hope that good will eventually triumph over this evil. The terror they endured jarring the world from its lethargy. — Johnnie Moore, *Defying Isis: Preserving Christianity in the Place of Its Birth and in Your Own Backyard* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

1. What did you learn to day? What do you want to recall from today’s conversation?
2. Let’s pray as Jesus taught us to pray: Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. What else can we pray for?