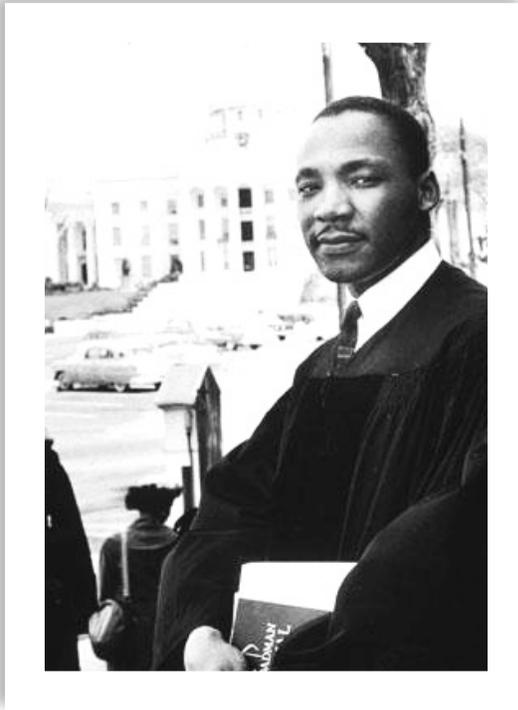


The Philosophy of Dr. King

# Love Your Enemies



# The Philosophy of Dr. King



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christian Minister and a leader in the American Civil Rights Movement who inspired people to fight against racial inequality without using violence. Much of his thinking was influenced by his religion. One passage from the Bible was especially important to him. In it, Jesus says that you should not just love your neighbors and friends, but also “Love your enemies.”

Dr. King thought that loving your enemies was incredibly important, even though it might seem hard to do. “...It’s hard to love your enemies... it’s difficult to love those people who seek to defeat you, those people who say evil things about you,” Dr. King said. “It is painfully hard, pressingly hard.”

## What does it actually mean to love your enemies?

Dr. King said that some people are going to dislike you for no reason at all. Not because of something you’ve done, but just because it is in human nature.

“Some people aren’t going to like the way you walk; some people aren’t going to like the way you talk. Some people aren’t going to like you because other people like you. Some people aren’t going to like you because your hair is a little shorter than theirs, or your hair is a little longer than theirs. Some people aren’t going to like you because your skin is a little brighter than theirs; and others aren’t going to like you because your skin is a little darker than theirs.”

Even though people might dislike us for all kinds of bad reasons, we have to admit that sometimes people don’t like us because of something we did that upset them. That’s why Dr. King said, “In order to love your enemies, you must begin with yourself.”

Sometimes it is our job to take responsibility for the things we have done that upset other people, and make it right.

***“...within the best of us, there is some evil, and within the worst of us, there is some good. The person who hates you most has some good in them.”***

He thought that the second thing someone has to do in order to love their enemy is to discover the element of **good** in the other person. “Every time you begin to hate that person, and think of hating that person, realize that there is good in them...”

Dr. King even said that when people do their best to see the good in others, they find that they can see “the image of God” in everyone.

The third way that someone can love their enemy is to avoid the temptation to defeat them, or bring them down. Instead, he said, there will be opportunities for you to show them love. “There will come a time when the person who hates you most... the person who has gossiped about you most, the person who has spread false rumors about you most... there will come a time when you will have an opportunity to *defeat* that person. This is when you should help them, not defeat them, he said. “That is the meaning of love.”

Dr. King pointed out that in Greek, there are three different words for love: *eros*, *philia*, and *agape*. *Eros* is romantic love, the kind of love we read about in books and see in movies. *Philia* is a love between best friends. *Agape* is the kind of love where you would do anything for another person—the sort of love that parents often have for their children.

According to Dr. King, when someone loves their enemy they are showing love in the form of *agape*. When someone has *agape*, they seek nothing in return. “You look at every person and you love them... even though they might be the worst person you’ve ever seen.”

***“Love is not merely an emotion... Love is creative, understanding, and goodwill for all people. It is the refusal to defeat any individual.”***

## Why should people love their enemies?

If someone hates you, and you show them hate in return, then all you are doing is creating more hate. “Hate only intensifies hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you and you hit me and I hit you back and you hit me back and so on... that goes on

forever. It just never ends. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate... And you do that by love.”

Why else is it more important to love your enemies than to hate them? Dr. King said it is this: Love can help others become better people. Eventually, it transforms them. If you keep loving people even though they treat you poorly, they may react badly at first. They may become mad at first. But eventually they will “break down under the load.”

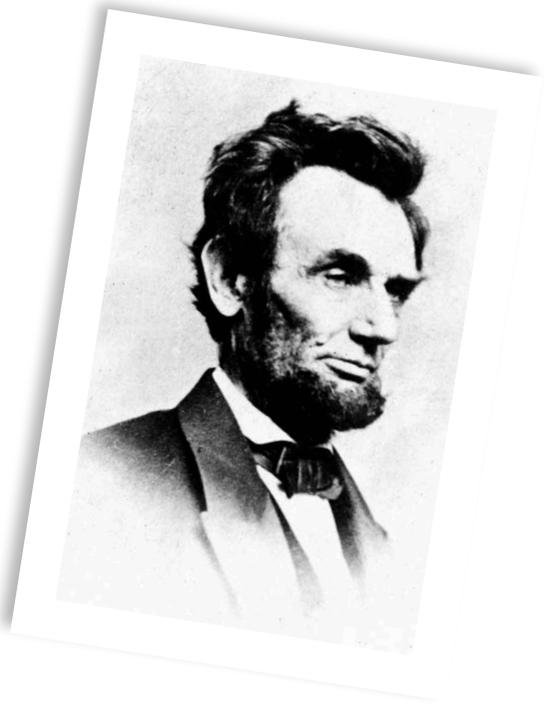
One example of this that Dr. King gives comes from a story about Abraham Lincoln. When Lincoln was elected president, he had to choose someone to become his Secretary of War, a very powerful and prestigious position in the government. He thought long and hard, and chose a man named Mr. Stanton. This was strange, because Mr. Stanton had said many bad things about Abraham Lincoln. When he told his advisors about his decision, they said “Mr. Lincoln, are you a fool? Do you know what Mr. Stanton has been saying about you? Do you know he has tried to defeat you on every hand? Did you read all of those bad things he said about you?”

Abraham Lincoln stood in front of his advisors and said, “Oh yes, I know about it. I read about it. I’ve heard him myself... But I find that he is the best man for the job.”

So Lincoln made Mr. Stanton the Secretary of War, even though Mr. Stanton hated him. When Lincoln was assassinated a few months later, Mr. Stanton said some of the greatest words about Abraham Lincoln that anyone had ever said. Mr. Stanton said that Lincoln was a man of fine character.

If Lincoln had not shown love to Stanton by making him the Secretary of War, then they would have gone on hating each other until the end. But through the power of love, Lincoln was able to redeem Stanton.

Dr. King thought that most people never discover how powerful love really is because they believe that bad people should have bad things done to them. This is sometimes expressed with the rule “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”.



One day Dr. King told all of this to his congregation. He explained why loving your enemy is important, how people can do it, and told them the story of Abraham Lincoln. When Dr. King told his congregation all of this, he ended his speech by saying this: “So, this morning, as I look into your eyes... and all over America and over the world, I say to you, ‘I love you. I would rather die than hate you.’ And I’m foolish enough to believe that through the power of this love somewhere, the worst people will be transformed.”

From the ‘Loving your Enemies’ Sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. November 17<sup>th</sup> 1957. [http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_loving\\_your\\_enemies/](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_loving_your_enemies/)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Philosophy of Dr. King

# Writing Reflection

Write a 5-8 sentence paragraph in response to this question:

*According to Dr. King, what are ways we can show love for our enemies? In your opinion, how can love can be powerful?*

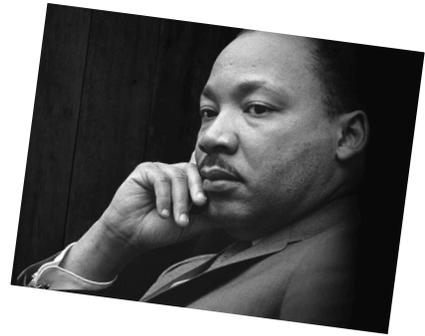


✓ when finished	
	<b>Step 1:</b> Carefully think about what you would like to say. What were the most important points that Dr. King made?
	<b>Step 2:</b> Summarize the main points in the graphic organizer.
	<b>Step 3:</b> Use what you have written in the graphic organizer to type your one-paragraph essay.

**Step 4:** Make sure that your **topic sentence** tells the reader **the main idea** of the paragraph. *Do the details in your paragraph relate to the paragraph's main idea?*

The Philosophy of Dr. King:

# Graphic Organizer



Topic Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Body Notes:

According to Dr. King, how can we show love for our enemies? How is love powerful?

○

○

○

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Conclusion: \_\_\_\_\_

