



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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PRAYING FOR YOUR ENEMIES

The teachings of Jesus Christ are radical. They go against the grain of modern thinking and worldly feeling. This is apparent when you encounter **Matthew 5:44**, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those that spitefully use you and persecute you." Jesus Christ teaches His people to respond to persecution and mistreatment with love and prayer. Revenge and retaliation should have no place in the Christian's life.

A Christian is going to face persecution and mistreatment by others. It is inevitable. The Christian lives in a fallen world where sin is rampant. The sin of others is going to affect Christians. At the same time, Jesus warns those who follow Him about the reality of persecution, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant

is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (**John 15:20**). The Christian has to be prepared to face persecution and mistreatment with love and prayer.

You are going to face mistreatment and persecution in this world. It is going to happen. The question is not, "Will this happen to me?" Rather, it is, "How will I respond when this happens?" Prayer is crucial in responding to these things in a Christlike way. It will enable you to love and minister to your enemies.

In **Matthew 5:44**, the Lord Jesus commands you to "pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." This is a difficult command. It is easier to respond with hatred to those who mistreat or persecute you. Yet, how can you learn to pray for your enemies? This article focuses on praying for your enemies. In learning to pray for your enemies, we first need to understand who our enemies are.

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Who Are Your Enemies?

Jesus Christ defines who your enemies are through His teachings on this subject. These types of people are your enemies because of their feelings toward you. It is not that you feel this way about them. Yet, this is the result of their feelings and actions toward you. Your enemies fit in one of two categories. *First, your enemies are those who persecute you for your faith in Jesus Christ.* In

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Matthew 5:44, He declares that you are to pray for those who persecute you. This is referring to those who oppose you and hurt you because of your faith in Jesus Christ. There are going to be people who will not like your stand for Christ. They will dislike you and attempt to hurt you because of your relationship to Jesus Christ.

Second, your enemies are those who mistreat you. In both **Matthew 5:44** and **Luke 6:27**, Jesus teaches to respond with prayer and love to those who mistreat you. Sometimes this is a result of persecution. Yet, there are going to be times when you are mistreated because you live in a fallen world. The sinful words and actions of others are going to hurt and wound you. You live in a sinful world and the sins of others are going to adversely affect you at times.

These are the “enemies” that Jesus wants you to pray for and love. Again, this is a difficult task, especially when they have wounded you. Why should you pray for them? The Bible gives some powerful reasons why you should pray for your enemies.

Why Should I Pray For My Enemies?

You should pray for your enemies because it is a matter of obedience to Jesus Christ. In both **Matthew 5:44** and **Luke 6:27**, Jesus commands His people to love, minister to, and pray for those who persecute or mistreat them. This is the example that Christ has set for you. He desires that you respond in this way to those who do you wrong. It is a matter of yielding obedience to Christ’s teaching. When you pray for your enemies, you are doing what Christ desires.

You should pray for your enemies because of their need. If someone is persecuting or mistreating you, it is the revelation of a deeper, spiritual problem. When people do these things, it is a sign that they are not right with God. Something has gone wrong in their lives. Jesus says in **Mark 7:21-23**, “For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from without and defile a man.” When people wound you, it is an indication that there is an

inward problem, a heart problem. By praying for them, you are asking God to help them deal with the root cause of their sinful words or behavior. You can actually have a positive and powerful influence on your enemies by praying for them.

Praying for your enemies provides proof of your faith in Jesus Christ. When you respond in this way to those who have hurt you, it is a sign that you are following Jesus Christ. It is a proof that you are a child of God. When you respond with prayer and love for your enemies, it is a confirmation that you are a child of God. Jesus declares in **Matthew 5:45**, “That you may be the sons of your Father in heaven for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good; and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” You show the validity of your relationship to God by being merciful and good to those who sin against you.

Praying for your enemies is a testimony to the power of the gospel. The good news about Jesus transforms peoples’ lives. Jesus Christ brings genuine change to those who accept the good news about Him and surrender themselves to Him. When you love and pray for your enemies, it is a testimony to the fact that the gospel transforms lives.

By nature, people are sinful, selfish, and unforgiving. The natural reaction to being done wrong is to hold a grudge and look for revenge. Our natural tendency is to love those who love us and to do good to those who are good to us. Jesus says, “But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same (**Luke 6:32-33**). It is easy and natural to love those who love you and to do good to those who do good to you. Jesus is teaching that even the worst of sinners can do this. This is no great accomplishment in the eyes of Jesus Christ. It is a natural response to those who are kind and good.

Yet, praying for your enemies is not natural. It is a supernatural work in you. It is something that the Holy Spirit has to enable you to do. It testifies to the power of the gospel. It declares that Jesus Christ truly transforms people. When you pray for and love your enemies, it is a living example of how Jesus Christ saves, forgives, and changes.

Praying for your enemies enables you to develop a forgiving spirit. The Christian is to

forgive his or her enemies, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (**Ephesians 4:32**). When others have hurt you, it is difficult to forgive. Yet, praying for those who have hurt you can enable you to work through the pain to forgiveness. Praying for your enemies impacts you as well as them. As you pray for them, God melts away the anger and the resentment that you feel. He can heal the damaged emotions. When you pray for your enemies, you open yourself to the transforming power of God. As you do this, it creates within you a forgiving spirit. You cannot truly pray for another and continue in a spirit of resentment and revenge. A forgiving spirit is created in your life as you intercede for those who have hurt and wounded you.

A final reason to pray for your enemies is because God will honor and bless such praying. Jesus insists that God will bless and honor your praying for your enemies, "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; **and your reward will be great**, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil" (**Luke 6:35, emphasis mine**). The reward is great for those who will pray for their enemies. They will please God. They will be following the example of Jesus. They will have a positive impact on those who have deep spiritual problems. They could possibly restore or start a relationship with those who have hurt and wounded them. They will develop a forgiving spirit to those who hurt and wound them. They will prove the validity of their profession of faith in Christ. They will have eternal glory and joy. God abundantly rewards this type of praying.

Will you make a commitment to pray for those who hurt you? Whether it is persecution or mistreatment, will you respond with fervent prayer? This commitment will be challenged. Because of this, your commitment to do this must be made in the still and silent moments before you enter the world. You must decide that this is going to be your response when these things take place in your life.

How Do I Pray For My Enemies?

The following is a prayer guide that you can use to pray for your enemies. This guide is

intended to help you carry out your commitment to pray for those who wound and offend you. You can use the suggestions offered or develop your own from them.

- ◆ *Pray that God would meet this person's spiritual need* (**John 3:15-16; Acts 4:12; Proverbs 14:14; Hosea 14:1-2**). If a person is persecuting you or if they are doing and saying things to hurt you, it is apparent that they have a deep spiritual problem. Their words and actions against you are a revelation of a heart problem. This person has a spiritual need that only God can meet. Pray fervently that God will meet this person's spiritual need. Ask Him to save the person or restore him or her to a right relationship with God.
- ◆ *Ask God to grant emotional healing in this person's life* (**Psalms 147:3**). When others wound you, it is sometimes due to the fact that they have been wounded. Their reaction is a response to the pain that they are feeling on the inside. I have found that when people have hurt me, it is often because they are experiencing deep emotional pain in their own life. Their words and actions are the result of past hurts and a wounded heart. Plead that God would grant emotional healing to this person. Call on Him to touch and transform his or her wounded heart. Pray that He will deal with the past hurts that are fueling this person's behavior in the present.
- ◆ *Plead that the Holy Spirit will convict this person concerning their attitude, words, or behavior* (**John 16:7; 1 John 1:9; Proverbs 28:13**). It is only through the Holy Spirit's conviction that a person will see his or her sin and repent. Pray for a powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the life of this person. Ask the Holy Spirit to flood this person's heart and mind with conviction concerning their attitude, words, or behavior. Plead with Him to reveal to this person how hurtful his or her attitude, words, or actions are. Pray that He will show this person how much pain that he or she is causing in your life or in others' lives. Ask Him to strip away the pride that fuels the persecution or mistreatment. Call on Him to bring this person to repentance and reconciliation with those that have been persecuted or mistreated.

- ◆ *Pray for the wisdom and opportunities to minister to this person (Exodus 23:4-5; Romans 12:14).* Ask God to give you insight on how you can love and minister to this person. It may not be possible to minister to this person. He or she may not be inclined to give you the opportunity to do this. Yet, you can pray that God would give you opportunities to do so. Ask Him to give you the opportunity to show the love and compassion of Jesus to this person. Plead with Him to give you insight on how to respond to this person. Pray that He will empower you to speak the right words to this person. By doing this, you can receive guidance on how to deal with this person and possibly reconcile with the person and lead them to repentance in this matter.
- ◆ *Ask God to grant you the humility to deal with those who mistreat or persecute you (James 4:6, 10; 1 Peter 5:6-7).* Humility is essential in dealing with those who persecute you or mistreat you. It will keep you from responding with retaliation toward this person. It is pride that moves a person to strike back when persecuted or mistreated. Humility equips you to bear the persecution or mistreatment without retaliating toward the person. At the same time, it will enable you to commit the matter in God's hands and then depend on Him to deal with the situation. Humility is the declaration, "God, I can't, but You can." In this situation, you are saying to God, "I can't handle the mistreatment or the persecution. I can't change the person or this situation. But, You can. I am committing this into Your hands so that You can work out Your purpose in this." Ask God to create this humility in you.
- ◆ *Pray that God would have mercy on this person and would forgive him or her (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).* Both Jesus Christ and Stephen suffered mistreatment and persecution from the hands of others. Yet, both prayed that God would forgive those who did these things to them. Both asked God to have mercy on those who mistreated them. When you are done this way, plead that God would have mercy on the person. Pray that God would forgive them of their sin. This person has to confess and repent of his or her sin. Yet, your prayer for mercy and forgiveness moves God to work in his or her life. It is praying for God to bring them to confession and repentance. This type of praying affects not only that person; it also affects you. It creates a forgiving spirit within you. It enables you to respond with love and forgiveness toward this person. Ask God to have mercy on the person. Plead with Him to pour out His abundant mercy in the person's life. Pray that He will forgive this person. Pray that He will do whatever it takes to bring this person to repentance and a right relationship with God and with you.
- ◆ *Pray that the person will understand the consequences of his or her sin (Galatians 6:7).* Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to this person how much pain that he or she is causing in the lives of others. Plead with Him to convict the person about the consequences of his or her mistreatment of others. Pray that this person will understand clearly that he or she will give an account to God for his or her actions toward others. Call on the Spirit to show this person that the mistreatment or the persecution of others is a sin in His sight, a violation of His holy standard (Matthew 22:39).
- ◆ *Ask God to give you a spirit of patient endurance (1 Peter 4:12-14).* As you pray for those who mistreat you or persecute you, you might not see a change immediately. Sometimes God is pleased to change a person or a situation immediately. Yet, in many cases, genuine change and reconciliation may take a long period of time. You may have to pray through many layers of problems and hardness before you see a change in the person or the situation. In this case, plead with God to give you a patient endurance. Ask Him for the strength and the courage to face and bear the mistreatment or the persecution. Pray that your life will be flooded with His grace so that you can patiently endure until God changes the person or the situation.
- ◆ *Plead with God for the grace and power to overcome the desire for retaliation (1 Peter 3:8-9).* The natural response to persecution or mistreatment is to retaliate. It is to strike back at those who have hurt or wounded you. Yet, the Word of God teaches that vengeance belongs to God and no one else (Romans 12:19). The wrath of man does not produce the