



THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER
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ISSUE I

INTERCEDING FOR YOUR ENEMIES

One of the toughest teachings of Jesus is to bless and pray for our enemies, “Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (**Luke 6:27-28**). Those are some tough commands! Yet, these are the demands of our Lord Jesus Christ. He desires that we model the character of our Father, “for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (**Luke 6:35**). This issue of The Prayer Closet will offer some suggestions on how to put this teaching into practice.

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 1 4:1-2**). 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* (**Psalm 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; I 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 (I 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 (I 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 righteous behavior that pleases God (**James 1:20**). Therefore, you need to cry out to God for grace and power to overcome a spirit of retaliation. Pray that God will help you patiently endure the mistreatment until He changes the person or the situation. Ask Him to help you manifest the grace and power of Christ to this person.
- ◆ *Ask God to search your heart to see if you have done the person wrong or have provoked this person (I Peter 4:15-16).* It is one thing to suffer persecution or mistreatment because of the sinfulness of another. It is quite another thing to provoke someone to mistreat you. In **I Peter 4**, Peter explains that there is a difference between suffering for Christ's sake and suffering for your sin's sake. There are times when people are unkind and spiteful because they have been provoked. If someone has a problem with you, you must be willing to pray and seek God about this matter. You must examine your heart to make sure that you have not provoked this person. You must look and see if you have done anything to damage the relationship with the other person. There are times when self-righteousness creeps into our hearts. We want to believe that the other person or persons are wholly at fault. There

has to be a willingness to examine our words, attitudes, or actions. Plead with the Holy Spirit to search you and reveal anything that you feel or that you have said or done that might provoke the other person or persons.

- ◆ *Ask God to enable you to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).* The Word of God declares the responsibility of every Christian in this matter, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Pray that God would empower you to stand against evil and to overcome the persecution and mistreatment of others with the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

A Prayer of Commitment

The following is a prayer that you can use when dealing with a problem person. You can use this prayer or develop your own from it. The key issue is to commit this person and the situation to God. You may need to continue committing this person and the situation to God.

Father, in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray for _____. I am struggling to deal with _____. You know how he/she feels about me and treats me. I commit _____ into your hands and pray that You would deal with her.

Holy Spirit, I plead that You would envelop _____ in Your conviction. Show _____ how hurtful and evil he/she is behaving. Release Your power into my life so that I can show _____ the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Grant me the wisdom and strength to deal with this situation. Through this situation, teach me humility. Show me what I need to see in this situation.

Father, You declare that vengeance is Yours. I am not to repay evil with evil. I am to overcome evil with good. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray that You would enable me to do this concerning my situation with _____. You are my God. You are my Rock, my Refuge, and my Strong Tower. I trust You and know that You will work this situation out according to Your own pleasure and purpose. Amen.

Developing A Forgiving Spirit

It is inevitable that you are going to be done wrong. People are going to sin against you. What others say and do will adversely affect you. This is a living reality for you for two basic reasons. First, you live in a sinful world. Every person is a sinner (**Romans 3:23**). This means that everyone who surrounds you is a sinner and has the capacity to sin against you. Because you live in a world where sin is rampant, you face the living reality of being hurt and mistreated.

Second, you are a Christian. Your beliefs and lifestyle are different from that of non-Christians. You will face persecution at some level because of your faith in Jesus Christ. You may never suffer physically, but there is a price to be paid for following Jesus Christ, “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you” (**John 15:18-19**). You will experience ridicule, indifference, and pain due to your relationship to Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul leaves no room for doubt concerning this truth when he writes, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (**2 Timothy 3:12**). Your desire to follow Christ and live godly can spark persecution against you by others.

The question then is not, “Will I suffer mistreatment?” It is, “How will I respond when I am mistreated?” The Christian is to respond with forgiveness. For the Christian, forgiveness is not an occasional activity. It is a permanent attitude. The Christian is to walk in a spirit of forgiveness toward others. Because of this, the Christian is to develop a forgiving spirit. This is the ability to forgive others regardless of the offense and then to freely love and minister to the person.

This is not easy because of our natural inclination. It is our natural inclination to be petty, hold grudges, and retaliate. The spirit of this world affirms these evil responses by condoning and advocating them.

Yet, how can you develop a forgiving spirit? How can you overcome the strongholds of unforgiveness in your life? The following are some steps that you can take to develop a forgiving spirit. Developing a forgiving spirit takes time and demands the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. These steps are not a quick fix. Yet, these are things that you need to put into practice in your life. They can help you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit so that He can do His work in your life. You might even consider turning these directions into prayer requests for yourself or for others who have a problem in this area.

- ◆ **Remember that forgiveness is a choice that you make (Ephesians 4:32).** Forgiveness is an act of the will. It is not based on your feelings or the worthiness of the other person or persons. You must choose to forgive and continually affirm this forgiveness. I am not saying that forgiveness is easy. But, I am saying that it can be a reality.
- ◆ **Do not place any limits on your forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-22).** Christ teaches that His people are to practice unlimited forgiveness. This means that you should not put limits on whom you will forgive, why you will forgive, or when you will forgive. Those who sin against you should be equal in your sight. You should forgive them all.
- ◆ **Reflect on what God has done for you (Matthew 18:22-27; 1 John 2:1-2; Ephesians 4:32).** Forgiveness requires a good memory—you must remember what God has done for you. God has forgiven you of your sin. He has loosed you from a debt that you could not pay (**Romans 3:23, 6:23**). You deserved to die in your sin and suffer eternally in hell. You did not merit God’s mercy, grace, or forgiveness. This is something that He granted You through His Son, Jesus Christ. He freely bestowed this on you through Jesus Christ. When you lose sight of what God has done for you, you are vulnerable to a petty, unforgiving spirit. It is a good exercise to reflect on the suffering and death of Jesus. In

my counseling, I often suggest this, especially those who are struggling with unforgiveness and bitterness. Read the passages that describe His suffering and death. Read the passages that talk about the benefits of His suffering and death. Contemplating the cross can melt the pride and pettiness that fuel unforgiveness in the heart of a person.

- ◆ **Consider the consequences of your unforgiveness (Matthew 18:28-35; Ephesians 4:30).** Unforgiveness creates a variety of unsavory consequences. It binds and wounds you. It binds and wounds others. It angers and grieves God. It damages the testimony of Christians. It provides Satan with an opportunity to work among believers. It is a revelation of your true condition before God. When struggling with unforgiveness, you need to consider the consequences of this sin.
- ◆ **Meditate on the character of God (Lamentations 3:22-23; Psalm 103).** It is helpful to meditate on the mercy and the love of God. As you do this, you are reminded of how He has responded to you. This should help you to respond with love and mercy toward others. As you grow in your understanding and experience of the love and mercy of God, it should foster a spirit of forgiveness in your life.
- ◆ **Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life (Galatians 5:22).** Plead with the Holy Spirit to create within you a forgiving spirit. Ask Him to cultivate His fruit in your life. Call on Him to search you and see if there is any unforgiveness and bitterness in your life. Pray that He will bring it to light so that you can deal with it.
- ◆ **Deal immediately and harshly with any anger and unforgiveness (Ephesians 4:26-27).** When you are sinned against and hurt, you must immediately and harshly deal with it. Cry out to God for strength and help. Release the person from the debt and pray for God's wisdom in how to deal with the situation. When you do not deal with the hurt and the anger, it will harden into bitterness and

unforgiveness. It will also give the devil an opportunity to work in your life to attack you and to attack others.

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