

Praying for Our Enemies

By Kim Butts

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:43-45a).

“But I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28).

Choosing to love and pray for those who persecute or mistreat us mystifies unbelievers, and yet this is the lifestyle to which we are called by God. We are to love all people regardless of how they treat us. Although some may set themselves up as enemies against us, they are people in need of a saving relationship with Jesus and an understanding of His Lordship in their lives. The Word of God instructs us to love them, praying that they might enter into His kingdom! Before reading any further, bring someone to mind whom you would consider to be your enemy. Read, study, apply and pray the truths from God’s Word that your enemies might be drawn to Jesus’ kingdom.

Knowing Your True Enemy

Scripture states that our chief enemy is Satan. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore, we should recognize that behind our flesh and blood enemies ultimately Satan is at work. The Apostle Paul probably understood this

concept more fully than any of the disciples or other believers. At one time, he persecuted the followers of Jesus, even casting his vote to have many put to death while he watched in approval. A case could certainly be made that Paul considered all believers to be his enemies and vice versa. But when God got Paul's attention on the road to Damascus, which ultimately led to his salvation through Jesus, he grasped for the first time, the mercy of the Lord. He understood that the followers of Jesus were not his enemies, as God gave him tremendous insight about his real enemy—Satan. Paul went from being an enemy of God to a child of God through a personal encounter with Jesus. He described the difference, from personal experience, to the Philippian church: "For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:18-20a). It is also important to remember that, like Paul, each of us was at one time an enemy of God: "Since we now have been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled shall we be saved through His life? Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:9-11). Because we have experienced the mercy of God, should we not also extend it to others?

- Examine your heart to be sure that you are not allowing the devil to have a foothold in your life where you have acted against others in a manner unworthy of Christ. With repentance and godly sorrow, ask for His forgiveness and seek the forgiveness of those you may have damaged by your words or actions. We are either serving the cause of Christ, or doing the work of the enemy of our

souls.

- Perhaps there are people who have hurt or persecuted you or your family in some way. If so, God calls you to forgive them. Pray that the Father will help you to see these enemies through His eyes. Ask Him to give you a forgiving heart. It may mean that you will need to go to someone to extend forgiveness so that your relationship may be healed and restored.

Jesus Prayed for His Enemies

Jesus had enemies . . . and they crucified Him. Yet, as we know, He had the ultimate victory in the end. But because God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus to die, His Son did not leave the earth without praying for those who were responsible for His death. Jesus, who told us to love and pray for our enemies, demonstrated the ultimate gift of love while hanging on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34a). Jesus prayed for His enemies . . . how can we do less? One of the most amazing commands of Christ is to love our enemies. In our flesh, we naturally want to retaliate or fight back when we are treated unkindly or persecuted. Jesus preached forgiveness and mercy: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). His lifestyle demonstrated grace, that ours might also. He took His command one step further, adding another level of difficulty: “Pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44b). May this article give you a firm foundation upon which to train your children to love their enemies so that they might be determined to pray for them to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Jude also spoke about the importance of mercy: “Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them” (Jude 1:22). Because of God’s mercy, we were saved. We must extend His mercy to those who are still enemies of God, so that they might also receive what we have been given.

Overcome Evil with Good

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is Mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21). How will the unsaved most likely come into God’s kingdom—through your revenge, or by your loving acts and your prayer for them? This is an extremely important concept to teach children, as their first response is often to hit back, think up revenge, cease friendship, etc., rather than praying, continuing to be kind, etc. Sometimes I say unkind things to my husband that I would normally not say to him. Precious man that he is, he always responds kindly to me and is never harsh. He doesn’t try to get back at me or say something hurtful in response. What does this do in me? It drives me to God in repentance and then to my husband to apologize! How many arguments or hurtful situations in our families could be avoided by simply responding kindly instead of fighting back—submitting to God instead of to our natural human sinful flesh! It really works! I feel terrible for hurting my husband’s feelings or lashing out at him because he is kind! If he responded back to me in anger, I doubt I would feel very repentant. But because he responds in love, it brings me back into right relationship with him, and with God.

How to Pray for Your Enemies

Our Lord is the “God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were” (Romans 4:17b). Sometimes it is hard to imagine that our enemies could ever turn away from evil and come to Christ, but He has called us to pray for them. What seems impossible to us is possible with

God (Mark 10:27). What greater love could there be than to pray for God to draw them into His kingdom? Remember the people you and each family member considered as enemies? Here are some passages from Colossians that you can pray on their behalf:

- Pray that God will rescue them from the dominion of darkness and bring them “into the kingdom of the Son He [the Father] loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).
- Pray God will make known to them His glorious riches through the mystery of Christ (Colossians 1:27). Pray that they may “know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3).
- Pray that they will “put to death whatever belongs to [their] earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5).
- Pray that they will rid themselves of “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from [their] lips” (Colossians 3:8).
- Pray that they will become one of God’s children, holy and dearly loved, clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).
- Pray they will come to know and possess the love of the Lord (Colossians 3:14).
- Pray that they will come to know the peace of Christ and that it will rule in their hearts (Colossians 3:15).

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