

Why You Should Pray for Those Who Abuse You

Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). He also said, “Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27–28).

Whether someone “persecutes” or “abuses” or “hates” or “curses” us, we are to pray for them. They may be family members whose “abuses” are small and annoying—“loved ones” we don’t think of as “enemies,” but sometimes act like they are. Or, they may be mortal enemies who really do plan to kill us. Small or great, we are to pray for them.

What this command does is make God a necessary part of enemy love. Prayer is to God. Therefore, God is involved in loving our enemy. We are to turn to God when our enemy abuses us. We are to talk to God about this. We are to ask him to do something about this.

What to Pray for Those Who Hate You

What are you praying for your enemies—the people who treat you badly?

Here is a good place to start—the way you pray for yourself. Would it not be strange if a prayer for our enemy should ask for less important things than we are told to ask for ourselves? Do unto others what you want others to do to you (Matt. 7:12). No. More than that. Do unto others what you *should* want them to do for you. And pray for others the way you *should* want them to pray for you.

I wish the word “should” were not necessary as an expansion of the Golden Rule. But many professing Christians are so worldly that they only pray for natural things rather than spiritual

things. That is, they pray for food and health and safety and success and happy relationships. But they don't pray for more faith, or holiness, or contrition, or purity of heart, or love for Christ, or courage in witness. It won't do to say to them, *Pray for others the way you want others to pray for you*. They show by their own prayers that the things they really need they don't pray for.

That is not how we should pray for our enemies.

The Lord's Prayer—Even for Your Enemies

The place to start in praying for our enemies is the prayer that the Lord taught us to pray. Whatever else you pray for your enemies, pray for them like this:

- Father, grant that my enemy—my colleague who snubs me, my wife who belittles me, my child who disrespects me, the ISIS member who wants to kill me—grant that they would come to hallow Your name. Grant that they would treasure You above all, and reverence You, and admire You more than anything.
- Father, grant that my enemy would come under the saving, purifying sway of Your kingly rule and that You would exert Your kingly power to make my enemy Your own loyal subject.
- Grant, Father, that my enemy would love to do Your will the way the angels do it in heaven with all their might, and without reservation, and with the purest motives, and with great joy.
- Grant, Father, that my enemy would have all the physical resources of food and clothing and shelter and education and health care and transportation that he needs to fulfill Your calling on his life.
- And forgive my enemy his sins, as you bring him to repentance, and make him a forgiving person, and protect him from overpowering temptations, and from the destructive power of the devil.

This is what we should be praying for ourselves. And therefore, it is what we should be praying for our enemies.

Be and Pray Like Jesus

Don't think you have loved your enemy if you only work and pray for his natural needs, and omit his eternal needs.

It is appalling and pathetic to see love stripped of God. Even some Christians think you can love others without longing for and praying for and aiming at the exaltation of God in their heart. What is so sad about this is that it not only betrays the diminished place of God in the heart of the Christian, but also implies that there can be real love where we don't care if someone perishes eternally, as long as they have prospered here on earth.

It is true that our love and prayers may not succeed in wakening our enemy to faith in Jesus, and to the hallowing of God's name. Our love is not conditional on that. Love is the *aim* of our sacrifice, not its success. We may or may not succeed in the Jesus-exalting, God-hallowing transformation we aim at.

But a heart that does not aim at its enemy's eternal joy in Jesus is not the full-orbed, robust love that Jesus demands. It is a narrow and pathetic substitute, no matter how creative and sacrificial and media-admired the labor is for our enemy's earthly welfare. Real love prays for our enemy with all the aims and longings we *should* pray for ourselves.

Come, join me in the quest to be, and to pray, like Jesus.

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