Five Ways to Pray for your Enemies

By: Karen Martell

Elijah was born free in Africa. But a fellow African betrayed him and his fellow villagers to slave traders. As he was dragged from the village in chains, he turned to face his betrayer, forever imprinting the hated face into his memory.

In America, he poured out his fury on the plantation owner that bought him. He was uncooperative, rebellious, and the plantation owner feared for his life.

Then Elijah began to listen to the other slaves singing spirituals as they worked in the fields. Slowly, the music, and the Scriptures they shared with him, melted away the hardness in his soul. Elijah yielded himself to the love of Jesus and began a radical process of transformation. Elijah became such a reliable slave that his master entrusted large portions of the estate to his care.

One day, the master asked Elijah to purchase new slaves for the plantation. He picked a number of slaves, then chose an older African man.

The man was old and could do little work, but Elijah took him and kept him in his own hut. He shared his rations with the man, made clothes for him, and gave him easier work. When the old man became sick, Elijah cared for him, returning to the hut throughout day to cool the man's fevered brow.

The master noticed Elijah's frequent breaks from work and followed him to his hut one day. He watched Elijah hold the man up and give him water from his own cup.

"Why do you do this Elijah? Is this man your father?"

"No, he not my fader."

"Is he your uncle?"

"No Massa, he not my uncle."

"Then who is he? Your friend?" Demanded the master.

"Massa, he my enemy. He sold me from my village in Africa."

"What! Why do you do this for him? He is useless!" The master was furious.

"Because Massa, de Lord Jesus, He say to love our enemies an' do dem good." Elijah paused. "This slave, he be de man that sold me to the slave traders many year ago

when I am a free man in my village in Africa. Now I finds him an' does him good, like the Good Book say."[1]

Loving & Praying for Your Enemies
Gandhi once said, "It is easy to be friendly to one's friends. But to be friendly to your enemy is one of the most important ideas of true religion." [2]

Yet as followers of Jesus, we are called to do more than be friendly with our enemies. Jesus calls us to love them and pray for them.

"Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." Matthew 5:44.

When we choose to forgive, love and pray for our enemies, we choose to be like God. And when we do that, God transforms us into His likeness.

So how do we love those who are most unlovely to us? How do we pray for those who have abused us? Here are five practical ways to begin loving and praying for your enemies.

Five Practical Ways to Love & Pray for Your Enemies

1. **Identify your enemies.** This would be people who have wronged you in one way or another. It is also those you would like to take revenge on or you would like to see punished in some way. Make a list of these people.

2. **Identify your feelings.** For each person on the list ask yourself, "How do I feel when I think about them?" Angry? Hateful? Bitter? Revengeful? Write it down. Then tell God about it and surrender those feelings to Him. Be honest with Him. You can tell Him how you feel. David did.

   > *"It was "while we were yet sinners," that "Christ died for us." [Romans 5:8.] In view of his unmerited **love** and mercy toward us, how can we cherish malice, or even one feeling of unkindness toward our brethren, the purchase of his blood? Let us put away all suspicion and hatred, and all feelings of bitterness, even toward our worst **enemies**, those who seek to do us* harm.[3]

3. **Meet their needs.** Look for practical ways to meet your enemy's needs. Enemies usually have a past hurt, insecurity, or fear that they try to mask with cruelty. Ask God to help you listen to what your enemy says and watch what he or she does. The better we know our enemy, the more we will understand his/her needs.

   > *"**Love your enemies**, bless them that curse you." We are to **love** our **enemies** with the same **love** that Christ manifested toward His **enemies** by giving His life to save them. Many may say, "This is a hard commandment; for I want to keep just as far as I can from my **enemies**." But acting in accordance with **your** own inclination would not be carrying out the principles that our Saviour has given. "Do good," He says, "to them that hate you,*

*and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of **your** Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." This scripture illustrates one phase of Christian perfection. While we were yet **enemies** of God, Christ gave His life for us. We are to follow His example.* [4]

4. **Do the hard thing.** Love and bless your enemy. Do what your heart resists doing. It will soften your feelings towards him/her. Most of all, **pray** for him/her.

   "Christ enjoins upon His followers to "love your enemies, ... do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). He would have us love those who oppress us and do us harm. We must not express in words and acts the spirit they manifest, but improve every opportunity to do them good." [5]

   "Prayer unites us with one another and with God. Prayer brings Jesus to our side, and gives to the fainting, perplexed soul new strength to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. Prayer turns aside the attacks of Satan." [6]

5. **Look in the mirror.** It is possible that someone sees you as the enemy? Ask God's forgiveness for any behavior in your life that would make you an enemy to someone. Ask that person's forgiveness.

   "If you have wronged your neighbor, acknowledge to him your sin and show fruit of the same by making restitution. Then claim the blessing. Come to God just as you are, and let Him heal all your infirmities." [7]

Note: For more on forgiving and praying for our enemies, see the chapter entitled "The Measure of Forgiveness" in Christ Object Lessons.

A Story of Forgiveness

For 20 years, Elliott had been employed as a chef in one of the biggest restaurants in town. Then he was fired, abruptly and for no apparent reason. Anger over the injustice rankled in his soul.

The problem was that Elliott was an elder at the local Seventh-day Adventist church. He knew that his hate and desire for revenge dishonored God. Yet, he couldn't seem to shake the feelings. They had ruined his life!

Then one more God woke him up at 3 a.m. with the distinct impression that he needed to pray for those who had fired him. Elliott obeyed the Holy Spirit's prompting and got up and began praying for his enemies. Praying for those who had fired him was incredibly difficult, but he found that as he prayed, it began to get easier. He prayed for several hours until feelings of overwhelming love for his enemies flooded his soul.

Later that morning, Elliott got a call saying he might get his job back. The restaurant was going to hire some people back through a lottery system. Elliott was thrilled and

immediately began praying that he would get the job back. But there was one thing he needed to do. He needed to ask for Sabbath's off when he was rehired.

Elliott wrote a letter to his former boss asking for Sabbath's off, then called his pastor. He knew that his pastor spent every Wednesday on the mountain above the city praying and fasting for his members and the city's inhabitants. "Pastor, would you pray that my former boss is impressed to let me have Sabbath's off? And that I would get rehired?"

God answered Elliott's prayers and he was chosen in the lottery. He received his job back—with Sabbath's off—and went back to work with a light heart. No anger towards his boss clouded his vision and he was able to establish good relationships with all his coworkers again.

[1] Adapted from https://www.stepstolife.org/article/children-story-love-enemies/

[2] Adapted from Non-Violence in Peace and War (1945), vol. 2, section 248.

[3] White, Ellen. Gospel Workers 1892. eBook Copyright © 2010, Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. p. 430

[4] White, Ellen. *Medical* Ministry. eBook Copyright © 2010, Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. 1932. p. 253.

[5] White, Ellen. *The Upward Look.* eBook Copyright © 2010, Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. 1982. p. 220.

[6] White, Ellen. *Christ Object Lessons.* Review and Herald Publishing Association. 1900. p. 250

[7] White, Ellen. *Testimonies for the Church.* Volume 5. eBook Copyright © 2010, Ellen G. White Estate, Inc. 1889. p. 649.