

Other Words: Fighting With Words
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This is a good journey we're on. I love this church. I love you more than I love preaching. I'm thankful to be able to be a pastor, and while driving to the property this morning, I was just reminded: this is where I'd want to be if I wasn't preaching. It's a real gift from the Lord that we can gather in this place and worship Him and study His word. There's a group of you that are gathered in the sanctuary right now, and that's still just weird for me to know that somebody else is sitting on the property outside of this room listening to what we're saying right now, and I'm grateful that we have stewarded our property that way.

In a moment, we will walk out of this room and will go back in our world outside of these walls. And its tense out there isn't it? I mean, it's pretty tense out there. If you're looking for a fight, it wouldn't take you but about 30 seconds. Politically-wow. Pretty tense, isn't it? I feel it. I might say something today that I would've said exactly the same two years ago and it be received totally different. There are landmines everywhere politically. Public life-just pick a topic. Social life- pretty tense. It used to be that social life for a generation was walking across the property line and talking across the fence. It was walking to the clothesline where the clothes were hung to dry and catching up. It was the bench down at the front step of the general store. That was the social network. Now the social network for our social life is held in our hands. We sit before it at our desk. It's on a pad; it's on a tablet; it's on a computer. And the social life out there is pretty tense.

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram- goodness, I'm so behind. Snapchat is like antique, isn't it? I don't know what we're using. I read this week, a guy said, "There are three kinds of people. There are people who like Twitter. There are people who like Facebook, and then there are people who are happy." Last week, we talked about praying for others. We talked about praying for others who are our friends. This week I want to build on that, and I want to talk to you about praying for others when those others are mean. It's a pretty simple word. If you're a seventh grader in here, you'd say, "Oh you mean like bullies?" Praying for others when those others are mean- if you're in 10th grade here you might say, "Oh you mean like bullies online?" The fact is you may react that way as a 7th grader or 10th-grader, but the fact is that bullies grow up- physically anyway. Bullies grow up, and you may be 70, you may be 60, you may be 50 - we live in a world where we have enemies.

Jesus said it would be like that. He said, "They persecuted me. If you're a follower of me, you'll be persecuted." How do we fight the enemy? How do we fight the tenseness that's out there? How do we fight the opposition that's in our life living for Christ? We find in the words of Jesus, the One that we are seeking to follow wholeheartedly- that the best weapon in our box for fighting our enemies is prayer for our enemies. My hope today is that somehow that our prayers for our enemies

would be more fervent than our rhetoric against our enemies. Have we prayed? Have we prayed? Are we praying for those who are in opposition to our faith, to our life, to our convictions?

Matthew chapter 5, beginning in verse 43: Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." He writes into their context, and he says, "I know what's out there. I know how we operate, and the thought is that you love those that love you and you hate those who hate you."

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is 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. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Jesus spoke similar words in Luke chapter 6 verse 27: "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Who are your enemies? Who's opposed to you? Who hates you? Who abuses you? Who curses you? Jesus instructs us that we fight that fight with our words. Not words toward those who hate us, not words focused at those who abuse us, but words offered to the Father. Words offered to our sovereign God. Words offered to our all-knowing, all-powerful Heavenly Father. It's pretty clear: pray for those who persecute you, pray for those who abuse you. The word **persecute** is also translated as "those who pursue you in opposition, those who are coming after you because of who you are." The word **abuse** in Luke is a word that is also translated to "mistreat." Those who mistreat you, those who abuse you. You say, "How, pastor?"

Certainly praying for those who hate us who are our enemies and who stand in opposition to us is very, very hard. It is not an easy thing, that's why Jesus spoke to it. The easy thing is to love those who love us and hate those who hate us. The Jesus thing is to pray for those who persecute us and pray for those who abuse us. So you may say, "How do I pray for an enemy?" Let me just say that when we talk about the enemy, and those who persecute, those who abuse, it may be in a political landscape; it may be in the social landscape. But for a lot of us here gathered on the property today, it would come maybe even closer to that right into our own home. If you live in a relationship where that person opposes you, like the relationship between parents and children, or children and parents, or husband and wife. It may be in your workplace. For you to clock in at 8 o'clock in the morning or for you to clock in at 10:30 at night on the night shift means that you clock into an environment where

people are opposed to you. You guard what you say; you say very little because you know that you're in an environment where it could blow in any moment.

How do you pray? What we pray for our enemies and those who are in opposition to us is the same way that we pray for our friends. Last week, I gave you five questions to guide us through intercessory prayer. And it's taken out of the way that Jesus prayed and the way that Paul prayed. The first question is: who are they? And as we think about praying for our enemies, we say, who are these enemies? Who is this person? Do they have a name? I got an email this week from someone who attends our church, and they took these five questions that I gave you last week and just walked through a prayer request. And it started out with a heading: "Who Are They?" They just put in sentence form: this is who I'm praying for. And they talked about this person's life dreams, what makes him happy, what makes him sad, what they've been good at.

The second question is: what do they need? What do they need? You may be in a situation where you can ask the person. You may be able to ask your opposition. You may be able to ask the one that you feel like curses you, "Hey, how can I pray for you? What do you need if God did something in your life?"

The third question is: what would be a win for Satan? You can ask this before the Lord. You ask, "Father, I'm praying for this person. I'm praying for this situation. What would be a win for Satan?" You're praying for a political system or you're praying for a terrorist leader; you're praying for some structure in our society- you look at it and sense there's this opposition. You're praying for a family member that has become your enemy. You're praying for your work environment where it's hostile. What would be a win for Satan? And the spirit of God would show you that when Satan gets ahold of this and carries it out to its full extent, this is what it looks like: It looks like an end to the relationship. It looks like the loss of a job, and it looks like people being hurt. It looks like life being lost. What would be a win for Satan?

The fourth question: what would be a win for the kingdom? "Father, show me what You want to do in this? Show me if You win in this situation, You win with this enemy's life, You win with this enemy's situation, You win in this persecution- what does that look like for the Kingdom?"

And number five: what do they need to know about God? And you pray, "Father, they need to know that you love them. They need to know the truth. Father, they have believed lies. Father, they need to understand what your justice is, what your wrath is, what your grace is, what your mercy is. Father, would you speak to them, draw them, teach them, and let them hear the truth of who you are, know the truth of who you are?" That's how we pray. We could understand how we should pray for our enemies and still find ourselves saying, "I can't." It's one of the hardest, genuine real prayers you'll ever pray is to pray for someone who's hurt you, who's abused you, who's mistreated you, who persecutes you, who stands in opposition to you.

Because what is our flesh? We're real people. We're living and breathing, we feel things.

Our reaction is- "What I really want to do, Pastor, is just punch him in the gut. What I really would like to do is load them up on the spaceship and send them to another planet that hasn't been discovered. That's really what I want to do." You know what you ought to do with those words? You ought to tell your Father. You ought to be honest to God. One of the incredibly real and clear truths from the book of Psalms is that the writers of the Psalms were totally honest from the heart. "This is where I am. This is what I'm feeling; this is the emotion that I have." Take that to the Father and lay it out!

Because one of the things that happens with us that keeps us from praying for our enemies is we think, "If I begin pray for them, then in some way it lessens what they've done to me. And if I come to a point of where it seems like I've forgiven them or I'm showing love to them, in some way it's going to communicate to them that whatever happened it's okay and it's no big deal." Let me just remind you that sin was such a big deal to Jesus, He died. It cost him His life. There's never a time where God looked at us in love and said, "You know what? Your sin's no big deal." He offers forgiveness through the death of his Son. So when you think about praying for others, let me remind you that it may be that the highest, purest form of love that you can show to somebody else is to intercede for them. Christ is interceding for us at the right hand of the Father.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who suffered at the hands of Nazi Germany, said, "This command is the supreme command." To pray for our enemies, to pray for those who oppose us is the supreme command. Chrysostom, who wrote hundreds of years ago said, "Praying for our enemies is the very highest summit of self-control." The very highest summit of self-control is when we offer intercession for those persecute us, who abuse us, who are opposed to us.

So why would we pray for our enemies? Number one: we pray for our enemies because of what Jesus says. These verses I've read to you from Matthew chapter 5 and also from Luke chapter 6- these were the commands of Christ. Without understanding all that it means, without knowing how it will all work out- you can trust God on the other side of obedience. We obey him by praying for our enemies. We do it because He's instructed us to. Pray for those who persecute you. Pray for those who abuse you. We are obeying when we are praying. Whether we understand it, whether it fits, whether we feel it emotionally or not, by the choice of the will, we choose to obey. Jesus commands by praying for those who our enemies.

Number two: we pray for those who oppose us because of what Jesus says, also we pray for those who oppose us because of who we were before Jesus, before Christ, before our salvation. We pray for our enemies because of who we used to be. Look at Romans chapter 5. Paul is unfolding for us in this letter to the Roman church what

it means for us to be sinners and fall short of the glory of God and what Christ's death on the cross means. And in Romans chapter 5, verse six listen to his description of who we used to be and what Christ has done in the midst of that: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." You can just substitute right there for the word **ungodly** "Carlos." You can just put that name. "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for Carlos." Put your name there. When we were weak, when we could not do anything about our sin, when there was nothing that we could do to satisfy the wrath of God- at the right time, in the fullness of time, Christ died for your name, for your life, for your soul. He died for the ungodly.

"For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It's the picture of someone drowning and a lifeguard standing on the bank. He looks out there and says, "That's a good person drowning. They've been kind to me. They've been good to me. They're a friend to me. It may cost me, but I'm going in after them." Some people would do that. But if someone was drowning out there and they've been mean to you and persecuted you, He basically pointed out that we would say, "Serves you right."

He's pointing out that God is showing His love for us through Christ in verse 8: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

The description of you and I to Christ, to our Heavenly Father is that we were enemies of His. So why should we pray for our enemies? Because of who you used to be! You used to be an enemy of God! Your sin stood you in a position of being separated from God, opposed to God, having offended God. That's who we are. And God in mercy, instead of giving us what we deserve, poured out His mercy on us. And Christ who lives in us now gives us the power, the motive, the ability, the reason, the life to be able to pray for those who would be enemies of ours.

C.S. Lewis would write letters to his brother. And in one of those letters to his brother, C.S. Lewis said, "I pray every night for the people that I am most tempted to hate." I was convicted by that this week. This whole message- I was just convicted by it. Because when I think of my prayer list, I have very few people that are enemies even on my list. I've got a lot of opinions about my enemies. I've got a lot of human wisdom about those who are opposed to me. CS Lewis says: "I pray every night for the people that I am most tempted to hate, with Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini heading the list." When you understand the time period in which he lived, that makes sense. In another letter that C.S. Lewis wrote, he said that as he prayed for them (a reference to Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini) that he meditated on how his own cruelty

might have blossomed into something like theirs. He remembered that Christ died for them as much as for him and that he himself was not "so different from their ghastly those ghastly creatures."

How do we pray for our enemies? Why? Because of what Jesus says, because of who we were, and number three: because of what He did. We're able to pray for our enemies because of what Christ did. He died. He died for His enemies. He died for sinners. He died for you; He died for me. He has given His grace; He has given us mercy. One of the difficulties for us in praying for those who are opposed to us, who stand against us is that we are forgetful. We forget the mercy of God. We can sing about His mercy; we read about His mercy, but in everyday reaction and interaction with people, we become forgetful that mercy has been shown to us, and we deal with people without any mercy.

Paul David Tripp writes about this, and he calls it "mercy-forgetful." We're mercy-forgetful. He says, "We all forget. In the busyness and self-centeredness of our lives, we sadly forget how much our lives have been blessed by and radically redirected by mercy. The fact that God has blessed us with his favor when we deserved His wrath fades from our memories like a song whose lyrics we once knew but cannot recall. We all tend to be way too mercy-forgetful. Mercy-forgetfulness is dangerous, because it shapes the way you think about yourselves and others. When you remember mercy, you also remember that you simply did nothing whatsoever to earn that with which mercy has blessed you. When you remember mercy, you are humble thankful, and tender. When you remember mercy, complaining gives way to gratitude and self-focused desire gives way to worship. But when you forget mercy, you proudly tell yourself that what you have is what you've achieved. And when you forget mercy, you take credit for what only mercy could produce. And when you forget mercy, you name yourself as righteous and deserving, and you live an entitled and demanding life. When you forget mercy and think you're deserving, you find it all too easy not to extend mercy to others."

Extending mercy to others begins with us praying for others. Why would we pray for our enemies? Fourth: because of what He prayed. When you think about the prayers of Jesus that are recorded in your mind, and when you take note of that, what prayer of Jesus do you remember Him praying? What did Jesus pray? What's one prayer He prayed on the cross and as He was headed to the cross? What did he pray? "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they're doing." The reason that you and I can pray for our enemies is because Jesus Himself prayed for His enemies. And in a time where He's dying, He's being nailed to the cross, He's praying: "Father forgive them." So we pray the prayer of Jesus.

Last, we pray for those who oppose us because of what others can be. This is the hope. We pray for others who oppose us because of what others can be. Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." Jesus dies, He's buried, He rises, and He ascends to heaven. The church has begun; the church has a time of

conflict. They appoint a group of men to serve tables. One of those men they appointed was Stephen. Stephen starts preaching the gospel, proclaiming the gospel, and people are opposed to him. They begin to persecute him, they take him to the edge of the city and they begin to stone him to death. In Acts chapter 7, Stephen is being stoned, and he begins to pray. He's praying as the stones are being thrown at him. In Acts 7:58: "Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Verse one of chapter 8: "And Saul approved of his execution." We pray for our enemies because of what others can be. Stephen is being stoned to death, and in the presence of a guy named Saul, as the stones are hitting him, Stephen prays, and he says, "Father forgive them. Don't let this sin be held against them." Just a few pages later, and a few days later this Saul is on his road to Damascus to persecute the church, and he has an encounter with Christ. And Saul becomes Paul. He goes from approving the persecution, approving the execution, from being on this road trip to persecute the church to being someone whose life was changed for eternity. And most Sundays, you and I stand together and at some point say, "And the apostle Paul said."

When you and I take on this intercessory work of praying for our enemies, it's like Stephen. We're stepping in the gap and we're saying, "Father forgive them. Don't hold this sin against them. Change their life. Let them be different. Let them know the mercy that I have come to know." Now no matter how loud I get, or how much I wave my hands, or what stories I tell, the reality is that praying for our enemies is hard. It's the hardest fight you'll ever fight. There are a lot easier ways to fight than praying for enemies. It takes a strong dose of faith to fight with prayer. When we pray for our enemies, we are leaning on every attribute of Almighty God. We're calling out to Him to be the God who He claims to be as we live out being the followers of Christ that He calls us to be.

I want you to just take just a moment and ask the Spirit of God, who's my enemy? Who is opposed to me? That situation, that name that comes to mind- would you begin right now and think: Who are they? What do they need? What would be a win for Satan? What would be a win for the kingdom? What do they need to know? Pray.

Father, work in our hearts and lives. Give us strength, give us a strong faith to trust You and not fear. Help us to fight with our prayers. Do your mighty work. We lean on all of Who You are. Give us wisdom; give us fervency. Thank you for your grace; thank You for Your mercy. In Jesus's name. Amen.