

ENEMIES

THE LESSON: ACTS 16

*To forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts,
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

It is natural to want to retaliate against our enemies. But the New Testament calls believers to something that does not come naturally at all: love for our enemies, and prayer for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

How does that work? Well, first of all, we are reminded that because of our sin, *we* were once the enemies of God (Romans 5:10). If God’s grace has done so much for us, we need to be willing to show grace to others. Moreover, our *real* enemies aren’t human beings at all, but rather “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). So the people we are tempted to see as our enemies are actually just lost people in need of rescue, whom we should seek to “save by snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 23).

The epistles call Christians again and again to a standard of behaviour that shows we are followers of a good God, and that we trust him to take care of us and to deal with those who wish to harm us. Listen to what St. Paul wrote to the Romans:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink’... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:14,19-21).

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In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke tells us about the many amazing things that the Holy Spirit was at work doing in the early Church. Check out how St. Paul and St. Silas responded to their enemies.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Spend some time praying again with the phrase “*Give us today our daily bread*”. Are there “enemies” in your life that you need God’s help in dealing with? Ask him to remove a spirit of vengeance from your heart, to help you to trust in his care, and to see your enemies through his eyes. Spend some time praying for those same enemies. Read Romans 12:21: “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” Conclude with a time of thanksgiving.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer.

O God, our Father, who makest thy sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendest rain upon the just and upon the unjust: Help us to love our enemies, and to forgive those who trespass against us, that we may receive of thee the forgiveness of our sins, and be made thy children in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(PRAYER FROM A PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP PAGE 614)

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ACTS 16: THE RESCUE OF THE JAILER

¹⁶As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed Paul and us, crying out, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.” ¹⁸And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the rulers. ²⁰And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practise.” ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” ²⁹And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

³⁵But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, “Let those men go.” ³⁶And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, “The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.” ³⁷But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.” ³⁸The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.