

Praying for Our Enemies in Colour

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Praying for others in act of hospitality. It involves opening the doors of our hearts and minds and admitting people into our consciousness. We invite them to take up residence for a time and allow them to engage our feelings and thoughts. Like entertaining guests for the weekend, praying for others requires time and energy. It is a way of saying, “Yes, I will hang with you and support you in your challenges and suffering.”

In Matthews Gospel Jesus tells us,

“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”
(Matt 5:44 KJV)

Praying for his enemies was just another example of the radical hospitality that Jesus practiced. He invited people of questionable character and occupation to share meals with him. He let a woman- and even worse, a woman of sketchy repete- wash his feet and rub them with oil. He touched and healed the unclean. He opened his heart and life to men, women and children that we would not even notice on the street.

Praying for our friends and loved ones in one thing. Offering the same kind of hospitality to our enemies is a lot to ask. Praying for the people who irk us, the people who hurt us, or the people we dislike or even hate is difficult because we do not want to think about them, let alone permit them to enter the sacred privacy of our prayers. We want to avoid enemies, to forget that they exist. Even saying their names gives them a prestige we do not want them to have. Hospitality is out of the question.

Seeing a person as a child of God and praying for them changes both the person we pray for and us in ways we cannot plan or predict.

Using markers and pen does not make praying for enemies easier than other prayer practices. It will probably not feel at all relaxing or playful. Writing the names of people you dislike or who “spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt 5: 44 NKJV) can be a big step. It may turn your stomach. Unlike the verbal prayers you say, the name doesn’t vanish into the past once it has been spoken. It sits on the page and stares back at you as you draw and colour. Instead of writing the person’s name, you can also write initials or a coded version of the name. In case someone stumbles on your prayer drawing, this can protect the anonymity of the person as well as your feelings.

You can start by making two columns on a piece of paper (see example below), one for the left brain (the analytical and logical side) and one for the right brain (intuitive and creative side). In the right-hand column put the person’s initials or code name and draws. When thoughts or words come into your head

about the person, write them down in the left-hand column. These might include feelings, things to dislike about the person, or things to admire about the person.

Negative and angry thoughts about the person may challenge your hospitality. Write them down; then arm yourself with a one-line prayer or scripture passage to counter the challenges. Here are some examples:

“You strengthen me more and more;
you enfold and comfort me.” (Ps 71:21 BCP)

“When we extend our hand to the enemy who is sinking in the abyss,
God reaches out for both of us ...” (Thomas Merton)

“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”
(Luke 11:4 NIV)

“...God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.”
(Rom 5:8 RSV)

You can repeat the words to yourself over and over or write the words in one or both columns of the drawing.

When you are finished, if you can stand it, place the drawing in a prominent place. Whenever you see it, remember the person as a child of God. If the temptation come to use it as a dartboard, shoot a dart prayer at it instead.

Reference

MacBeth, Sybil *“Praying in Color: Drawing a New Path to God”* (Paraclete Press, Brewster, Massachusetts) 2013 pp 72-75

THINGS TO LIKE

HOSPITALITY FRIENDLY
ACCEPTING
GENEROUS

FEELINGS, THOUGHTS

I feel betrayed,
angry, resentful,...

HELP ME TO:

FORGIVE
UNDERSTAND MY PART
TAKE MY OWN INVENTORY

THINGS TO DISLIKE

arrogance self-righteous
gossip SNOBBY
ENTITLED

