

Praying for (and against) our Enemies

Psalm 139:19-24

Introduction: As we continue our study of different types of psalms that help guide our praying, we come to a type of psalm called an imprecatory psalm – a psalm in which the psalmist asks God to do terrible things to one’s enemies. You may or may not be able to identify an “enemy” in your life and you may be reluctant to ever designate someone as an enemy. But probably from time to time all of us have encountered someone who actively worked against your best interests, or who was mean or cruel to you or someone you love. The type of praying we’ll discuss this morning will have implications for praying about such persons. And so, may God give us insight into how we can pray about our “enemies.”

Opening Discussion: Do you ever think in terms of having enemies? If so, how?

Read Psalm 139:19-24

1. What is your first reaction when you read a passage like this?
2. How does David describe the wicked?
3. What does David ask God to do to the wicked?
4. How do you make sense of this kind of praying in light of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:43-45?

Steve said:

If we learn anything about praying from the Psalms, it’s that our praying must be honest. We shouldn’t cultivate and nurture hatred toward anyone; but if hatred toward our enemies is already in our hearts, it’s better to express it as David did than to keep it bottled up. It’s better to pray about our hatred of others than to take revenge. When we pray like David prayed, at least we’re leaving things with God.

5. If hatred is in your heart, why do you think it might be better to express it through prayer rather than to bottle it up?

Steve said:

In a few minutes I'll argue that as Christ followers we should learn to move away from our hatreds. But sometimes we experience things at the hands of other people that are so hurtful (and even horrific) that I'd have a hard time condemning someone for praying the way David prayed in Psalm 139. If you have hatred toward your enemies, praying honestly is the place to start. "We must pray who we actually are, not who we think we should be."

6. What do you think Steve means when he says that "We must pray who we actually are, not who we think we should be"? How does this apply to praying about our hatreds?

Steve said:

Since our prayers should reflect our experience with Jesus, we should pray as those who have received mercy. This is where I believe our praying should (eventually at least!) deviate from David's example. Whereas we should side with God and confess that His enemies are our enemies, and whereas we are to express our hatred to God in prayer when it exists, we are ultimately to get to the place where we can pray for our enemies to experience God's mercy as we have experienced God's mercy.

7. What do you think it means to "pray as those who have received mercy"?
8. How do that last two verses of this psalm affect how you think about what David prays? What do you think David was inviting God to do?
9. What is your main take-away from this study?