



## Prison Break

**Read:** Matthew 5:38-48

In the gospel Jesus gives his disciples the command to love their neighbour. In the Old Testament, to love one's neighbour was understood as one's friend, and not one's enemy. Jesus extends the love of neighbour commandment to include our enemies and persecutors. As his disciples, children of God, we must imitate our Father's example. God does not show partiality when dispensing mercy and love.

**What does this mean for us?** Years ago I was betrayed by a close friend. This wound cut me very deeply and I carried it around for a long time. It became a cancer that poisoned my entire disposition. One day I confessed my troubles to a priest. He suggested that when I think of this person in a negative way, that I pray for them, just as Jesus asked us to: "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute [hurt] you" (Matthew 5:44).

I thought this was ridiculous at first, but I gave it a try. I will confess that my initial prayers were for my adversary's creative demise. But over time my petitions became authentic and my heart was transformed. I was able to let the anger inside of me go and I learned to love my enemy.

**What do I want you to do?** Jesus wants us to remember that we can easily harbour vengeance, betrayal, grudges and unspoken words in our hearts. They can become prisons that we lock ourselves in. The key to our freedom is Jesus' command to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors.

If there is someone in your life who has hurt you, I challenge you to pray for him or her. Every time their name emerges in your mind and begins to stir up unwelcome emotions, stop and pray for them. Over time your anger will disappear and your heart will be free to love as Jesus asked us to.