



# THE WORK OF IMAGINATION

**Devotional**



The three of us sat in the pew long after the church service had ended. Sylvie was dreading going back to work the next day. On Friday, a project she'd been working on for months had ended in disaster, and her partner in the project told their boss the collapse was all Sylvie's fault.

They were assigned as partners. Though they'd both worked for the company for several years, this was their first real project together and their first time getting to know each other. Sylvie thought they'd worked well together, encouraging and refining each other's ideas. They made every decision together, every step of the way. Over the course of those months, Sylvie thought they were starting to become friends, too. But when it all went wrong, her co-worker tried to save herself by sacrificing Sylvie.

Her boss hadn't said a word to her. Sylvie didn't know what he believed, nor what he blamed her for. He'd sent her an email late on Friday asking for a meeting on Monday afternoon. Sylvie was so nervous about the upcoming meeting and so angry at her co-worker that her hands shook as she recounted the story.

Finally, she said, "I just don't know what to do. I don't understand why she would betray me like that. I thought..." she trailed off, but the hurt in her voice lingered in the air.

The other friend who had been listening to Sylvie's story leaned in, took Sylvie's hand in her own, and said, "We'll pray for her."

And I thought she was being sarcastic. Our setting, there in the sanctuary, made me think this friend had suggested prayers because that's what you do in church, like how "Jesus" is the right answer to every Sunday School question, regardless of what the question is. I let a giggle escape. She turned to me, and I saw the confusion and sincerity on her face. She'd been quite serious.

Sylvie loved the suggestion of praying for her co-worker. "Yeah, yeah," she said, nodding, letting the idea sink in. "Yeah, that's what we should do. I think that would help."

We didn't bow our heads right there, but parted ways, promising each other that we would all pray for Sylvie, for her boss, and for her co-worker.

The next day, I texted my friend to ask about her meeting:

*“Thinking of you...how did today go?”*

Several minutes later, her reply came:

*“I’m not sure yet what my boss will do. The meeting didn’t give many answers. But I am okay. I have been in a state of prayer all day.”*

And I was reminded of the deep power of prayer to change the one who prays. Calling on God, centering in God, offering our cares to God—responding to God’s invitation to do all of that reminds us of our belonging to God and our home in God—the One who loves us and wills our good.

I wonder how the earliest disciples responded to Jesus’ instruction to pray for their enemies. Did the idea only make sense to Sylvie because she grew up hearing the teachings of Jesus, and while to pray for her co-worker might be uncomfortable or a stretch, it wouldn’t be unthinkable? Or does the instruction make some intuitive sense, too? Might the gathered disciples have responded as Sylvie did to our other friend’s suggestion: “Yeah, yeah, that’s what we should do.”

Praying for our enemies *begins* as a challenge to remember our own humanity and *becomes* an exercise in remembering the humanity of every other person, even those who might appear to mean us harm. Though it may be a difficult stretch, holding others in sacred remembrance is a way to open our hearts to them, to become curious about their stories, to remind ourselves that God holds them, and everyone, just as God holds us.

All of that pushes back against the powers that want to keep us separated from each other and suspicious of one another. Praying for enemies—working to love more than just those who love us—is an exercise in resisting transactional, calculated relationships. It is a practice of generous imagination. Speaking another’s name gently, willing ourselves to remember our connectedness and seek their good, praying for our enemies, might even convince us that enemies aren’t real after all. If we could believe that, what else could we do?

### Reflection Questions

1. Imagine you are a disciple hearing Jesus’ words for the first time. What in this list of blessings and instructions gives you hope? What raises new questions for you?
2. Who comes to mind when you hear or read the word “enemy”?
3. What are some ways you practice being the person you were created to be?
4. Has prayer ever changed your mind about something or someone? How would you describe the change?
5. What is the most challenging part of this scripture for you to put into practice? Why?