

The Remorseful Robber

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But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (*Matthew 5:44*)

I was sitting in my car one night, warming up the motor, when a man forcefully swung open the door. Then he reached across me with lightening speed and grabbed my purse. We struggled. Then I screamed and he ran down the street. I was overwhelmed. The next thing I knew, I was running after him. I didn't get very far. Within seconds he disappeared around the corner and I stopped running. Then I walked back to my car, tears streaming down my face. The motor was still running, the door was wide open, and my shoes were lying out in the middle of the street. For the first time, I realized I had been chasing this man in my stocking feet.

The police came and took a report. After they left, I grieved—for myself and for a world in which these things happen every day. I also thought about the reasons people hurt each other—poverty, drugs, greed, anger. Then I went to sleep.

The next day I lay in the bed thinking about what had happened. Then I thought about the man who had robbed me. Who was he? Why did he do this to me? How could I stop being so angry? How could I find some peace of mind?

Suddenly I realized the answer to my dilemma. I must pray for this man as Christ asked us to do. So I closed my eyes and asked God to heal this man who had robbed me and to help me get over my anger.

About an hour later I felt the anger dissipating. Then suddenly the phone rang. In a soft, almost inaudible voice, a young man said to me "I guess you know who this is. I'm the guy who robbed you." Like a surprised child I found myself saying without hesitation, "Oh yes, I'm so happy you called." After a moment, the young robber said, "I just wanted you to know that I am sorry and that I am going to bring your purse back to you." I thanked him. Then he said, "I wouldn't have done it if I didn't need the money." "I understand," I replied.

For the next few minutes I listened to this young man and got in touch with his pain. Then I talked to him about the pain he had caused me. Finally, I counseled him a little. He listened quietly. When I was finished he said, "You know, I try not to personalize what I do, but I feel bad about robbing such a nice lady." "Good," I said. "Perhaps your remorse will help you change."

After this I said, "If you want to bring my purse back just leave it on the porch after it gets

dark. Then it will be there in the morning when I wake up. He responded by saying, "Someone might take it if it's out there all night. I will tap on your door when I drop it off and then you will know it is there." "Okay," I said. (The irony of my robber being concerned about me being robbed again did not escape me, but I didn't say anything.)

After this, there was silence. I think we were both hesitant about breaking the connection and yet it seemed the practical thing to do at that point. So I said goodbye and he hung up. An hour later there was a tap on my door. (I resisted the urge to look out the window.) A few minutes later I opened the door and my purse was lying on the porch.

To this day, I continue to pray for this young man. I pray that his remorse has become atonement. I pray that he was released from the burden of his sins. I pray that he was saved even though I will never know if he was. I do know, however, that God used me to try and bring this young man into the light—if only for a moment. And in the process of loving my enemy, who had suddenly become my friend, I got the peace of mind I had prayed for.

Epilogue

I want to add that I chose to share this story with my readers, not just because it is about forgiveness, but because it is about *grace*. It is about the mystical power of the Lord to intervene—to talk to us through our hearts—to move us to do things we would not ordinarily do. Christ lives my friends! Not just through the Word, but through *action*. We are not alone and we never need to feel forsaken, because he takes bad things and transforms them into good things. Our enemies become our friends if we are open to that possibility—if we pray for those who sin against us. We may not live in Eden anymore, but we have the Lord at our side. This is what my experience with the young robber taught me, and I think about what happened every time I get discouraged about the world I live in.