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Intercessory Prayer

Central Truth: God is pleased when you pray for others.

L172. Date: December 1994. **Text:** John 17:1, 2; James 5:16.

Topic: Prayer.

How important is it that we pray for one another? It is so important that failing to pray for others is a sin! God's prophet Samuel said, “*God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you*” (I Samuel 12:23). Why is it a sin for the Christian to neglect intercessory prayer? (1) It indicates selfishness when he prays only for personal needs and neglects to pray for the needs of others. (2) It leaves others with needs which could have been supplied in answer to prayer, if someone had prayed. (3) It ignores the body of Christ, in which each member cares for every other member and comes to the aid when one member suffers. (4) It thwarts the purpose of God, who would bless with answered prayer on behalf of others. It has been said, “You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.” Therefore, adopt a ministry of prayer for your own needs and for the needs of others.

The Master's Prayer (John 17:1-26)

What we commonly call “The Lord's Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13) is rather “The Model Prayer.” Jesus gave it for us to use as an example in our praying. The prayer offered by our Lord is recorded in John 17. This lesson deals with the real “Lord's Prayer,” though we do not use that title for it. It teaches us how to pray.

Jesus prayed directly to God (verses 1-8). The address of the prayer is

simple, yet profound. He looked up to heaven and said, “*Father.*” How simple! No glowing adjectives or theological terms were necessary. He addressed God just as He taught us to address Him: “*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven*” (Matthew 6:9). Is that the way you address God in prayer? On the other hand, consider how profound it is that we can address infinite deity with the title “Father”! But when we do, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are truly sons of God (Romans 8:16).

The goal of prayer is that God may be glorified in Jesus. “*Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*” (John 14:13). We pray for things which will meet human needs. Yet the ultimate end is not just meeting needs, but glorifying God. Is that what you have in mind when you pray?

The petitioner of prayer is God's only begotten Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He had free access to the Father because of who He is. Today, we children of God come to Him as our heavenly Father and have access because we came in the name (authority) of Jesus. What assurance that gives us when we pray! And what a challenge it is to ask only for those things which Jesus would approve.

The burden of prayer is threefold: (1) that people might know God; (2) that God's work on earth might be finished; and (3) that God might be known by all people. The wise person might glory in his wisdom, the strong person might glory in his strength, and the rich person might glory in his wealth; however, the greatest reason to glory is to do so in the Lord (Jeremiah.9:23, 24). The work of God is the greatest work in the world. To know God personally is the greatest acquaintance in the world. And that is the burden of the prayer of Jesus. What is the main burden of your praying?

Jesus prayed for His disciples (verses 9-18). Within twenty-four hours of the time that Jesus prayed He would be betrayed, tried, crucified, and buried — and He knew it! So He prayed for the disciples who were living at that time. What an example that is for us to follow. Jesus' disciples are given to Him by the Father (verse 9). Let each one recognize that he or she is one of the “*given*” ones and that every other Christian is “*given*” also. Only those who are given to the Son by the Father can come to Him and be saved (John 6:44). All those whom the Father gives shall come, and not one will be refused (John 6:37). Respect every person who believes in Jesus.

His disciples are kept by the power of God (verse 11). Jesus asked the Father to do that, and He does! Read I Peter 1:5 and rejoice! Kept in the hand of the Son and of the Father (John 10:26-29), the disciples are secure for time and eternity. His disciples are filled with joy (verse 13) even though

they are hated by the unregenerate world (verses 14-16). It is the same joy that Jesus experienced in this world (John 15:11) and the same hatred that He endured in this world (John 15:18-21).

His disciples are sanctified by truth, the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ (verses 17, 19). As water cleanses the body, so the Word of God cleanses the spirit (Ephesians 5:26).

His disciples are sent into the world (verse 18). Jesus gave the “Great Commission” five times in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. It applied to those first disciples and to all other disciples through each generation to the present time (Mark 16:15). Why did Jesus pray in that way for His disciples? John explains, “*Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*” (John 13:1). And He loves us the same.

Jesus prayed for you and me (verses 20-26). He prayed for all who would believe on Him through the witness of His disciples. That includes you and me and all who believe through our witness. For what did He ask the Father when He prayed for us?

He prayed for our unity in Him (verses 20-23). As He and the Father are one (John 10:30), He prayed that we might be one. In Christ, all differences are dissolved — differences of race, culture, and sex — and we are all one (Galatians 3:28). We are like a body composed of many individual members but so united as to be one body (Romans 12:4, 5). We are like a loaf of bread made from many grains of wheat but so united that we are one loaf (1 Corinthians 10:17). Our unity is not external and organic, but internal and spiritual. We are one in the Spirit; we are one in the Lord. How are you participating and promoting that unity?

Jesus prayed that we might be a witness to the world that God had sent Him (verses 21, 23). That principle is so important that Jesus mentioned it twice in His prayer. Our greatest goal in life is to be witnesses to Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests to God (Revelation 1:5). What are you doing to be a witness for Him?

He prayed that we might be in His presence (verse 24). What an expression of His love! He does not want to “*use*” us in this world, but He desires to share His glory with us in the next world. Every time a saint dies, God answers that petition. In those “*mansions*” in the “*father's house*,” Jesus enjoys fellowship with the believing dead (John 14:3). Bless His name for such a prospect!

Jesus prayed that we might be filled with love by His indwelling presence (verse 26). He said of himself and the Father, “*We will come unto him, and make our abode with him*” (John 14:23). So in order for you to live

the Christian life, Christ must dwell in your heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17) and the love of God must be broadcast in your heart by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5).

Each of those petitions of Jesus is certain to be answered. The Son asked, and the Father will give. Believe it and rejoice. And offer to God many of the same petitions that Jesus offered.

The Disciple's Prayers (James 5,16-18)

Of course Jesus could pray effectively; He was the only begotten Son of God. But can you and I pray effectively? The Bible answers "With a very positive yes! *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16). Effective praying worked in Bible times, and it still does. A common person can pray uncommon prayers.

Four elements must mark our prayers (verse 16). (1) Our prayers must express repentance. *"Confess your faults one to another."* Confession is difficult because it is humbling, but it is absolutely essential to effective praying. *"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy"* (Proverbs 28:13).

(2) Our prayers must be unselfish. *"Pray one for another."* We call that *"intercession"* because it is asking for others rather than for ourselves. Intercession is the highest form of prayer. It is love on its knees. It delights the heart of God. For whom are you praying earnestly and continually?

(3) Our prayers must arise from a pure spirit. The prayers of *"a righteous man"* gain an audience with God. *"The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry"* (Psalm 34:15). On the other hand, *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). Be pure when you come before the Lord.

(4) Our prayers will be powerful and effective. We will ask and receive, seek and find, knock and find an open door (Luke 11:9, 10). We will see how a common person can receive uncommon answers to prayers for himself and for others.

The biblical record shows uncommon answers to prayer (verses 17, 18). Meet Elijah. He was a common person who prayed and got uncommon answers to his prayers. He was *"a man subject to like passions as we are."* God heard and answered his prayer. So let common people be earnest in prayer today. *"He prayed earnestly."* Who can blame God for not answering halfhearted and unconcerned prayers? The prayer that moves the hand of God must first move the heart of the petitioner. A common person may

make an uncommon request. Elijah “*prayed earnestly that it might not rain.*” He had never known of a person asking for that and receiving it. But he dared ask, and he received an answer to his uncommon prayer. “*It rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*” That would be difficult to believe if God had not put it in the Bible. Who would have thought that the prayers of just one man, a man just like us, could have that effect? But the fact is that he prayed and God answered. However, his prayers did not end there. “*He prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*” There was a common man who had a ministry of uncommon praying_ Do you have faith enough to adopt such a ministry of prayer?

This study has reviewed an intercessory prayer of Jesus as He prayed for those who believe on Him. He was asking the Father's blessings and help on them. That is intercession. The lesson has also reviewed the prayers of a common man for his nation. He was asking God to withhold His blessings in order to lead the people to repentance. That is intercession. God answered both prayers. In like manner, He will answer when you pray for others today.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is intercessory prayer?
2. Why do we say it is the highest form of prayer?
3. Why do we say it is “love on its knees”?
4. How does Jesus show His intercession for us?
5. What good things does He ask the Father to give us?
6. How does Elijah demonstrate effective intercession?
7. What other occasions of intercessory prayers do you remember from the Bible?
8. How can your church have an intercessory prayer ministry?
9. How can you have a personal ministry of intercession?
10. For what persons or needs will your class intercede?