

A Breath of Intercession

#3 in Series – *Prayer: A Breath of Fresh Air*

1 Tim. 2:1 (NASB) “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men”

Praying is as natural to the Christian, as breathing is to the body... In our short series, we have seen how desperation and gratitude motivate our prayer-life... But, there is another picture I think would be helpful for us to understand what aspect of prayer we need to consider today: What should you do when you come up on someone who has just collapsed in front of you and it is obvious that they have ceased breathing?... Everyone in this room who is trained in CPR – which stands for *cardiopulmonary resuscitation* – knows that they need to go into action. They send someone to call 911, and then they get busy ... they get busy providing a “breath of life” to that person in need...

Some of you may be thinking – “NOT me! ... I’m not going to even attempt CPR, because I’m not trained and certified!”... Well... get trained!...

Listen – if prayer for the Christian is as natural as breathing is to the body – then guess what?... Christians are called and trained for spiritual CPR – *Critical Prayer Resourcing* – otherwise known as – intercessory prayer!

Let’s begin by simply addressing the question –

1. What is Intercessory Prayer?

➤ Intercession Defined:

The word “*intercede*” comes to us from the Latin – which means – “*to go or pass between*”. Intercession is an act whereby an individual positions themselves between two parties – one with a need and one with the answer – and seeks to bring the two parties together.”

Simply stated – *Intercessory prayer is praying on behalf of others with the determination of seeing their needs met.*

We need to understand that intercession is deeper than merely praying for others... Intercession involves praying for others – but praying for others is not necessarily intercession... Intercession has a motivation at its core that will not be satisfied with a casual prayer...

Sometimes it is better for us to look at some examples of what intercessory prayer looks like. That will help us get a better understanding than simply defining terms... So let's consider –

➤ **Intercession Demonstrated:**

Throughout the O.T., we see examples from the patriarchs, prophets and priests who interceded on behalf of God's people... Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Hezekiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel – where all great men of prayer who interceded in behalf of the Israelites...

Let's consider one example of intercession in –

- **Moses for Israelites**

God has given us a biblical pattern for intercession in the example of Moses...

In the book of **Exodus** we read that Moses was on the mountain, meeting with God and receiving instructions from God... What was going on down in the valley below?... There was a tragic demonstration of sin was taking place... Moses had been gone so long, and the people became impatient and drafted Moses' lieutenant Aaron to lead out in a "building campaign" to built an idol to become their object of worship...

Why would they do that?... It seems that Moses was up on the mountain long enough for the people to begin to doubt God's presence and power... A doubt that defies explanation... All they had to do was look up. The fiery cloud still hung over the camp. They were still eating the manna that God provided every morning... But the people became tired of waiting on Moses.

We need to remember that when Israel was at the foot of Mt. Sinai – that Moses ascended and descended the mountain several times in order to enter God's presence to receive instruction.

In **Exodus**, chapters **20-24** he received instruction on how God was to be worshipped... On one occasion Moses stayed for forty days and nights and received instructions for the construction of the tabernacle (chapters **25-31**)... It was sometime during this time that the Israelites got Aaron to make them a visible representation of God in the form of an idol...

Moses came down the mountain in time to find the people in the middle of worshipping their new idol. Moses was so angry – he broke the tablets of the law... He then called upon the people to make a choice and asked all those who would continue to follow the Lord to come over to him. Then the sons of Levi were commanded to kill the ungodly Israelites, and some 3,000 were killed... The next day Moses again went up the mountain to intercede on the behalf of the people of Israel.

In **Exodus 32:30** Moses says, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Moses assumes the position of an intercessor when he says, “I will go up to the Lord” with the specific purpose of making an “atonement for your sin”... When he says he will make atonement he is referring to an act by which the offenses of an individual are covered so that fellowship can be restored between the offender and the one offended. Moses went up to plead with God to cover the sins of Israel so fellowship between Himself and his people could be restored.

True intercession faces the facts! Moses does not seek to minimize the circumstances. He doesn't make excuses. He doesn't argue on the basis of extenuating circumstances. He doesn't argue that the people did what they did because Moses had been gone so long. He doesn't imply that God should “*understand*” their sinful actions, or appeal that He should just “overlook their sin”... There are no excuses!

Moses calls the situation what it is – sin. And He understands that a sin problem is something that only God can forgive and cleanse – so he takes that matter to God in behalf of the Israelites...

In **Psalm 106:21-23** David looks back on the events recorded in **Exodus 32** and writes –

Psalm 106:21-23 (NASB)

²¹ They forgot God their Savior,

Who had done great things in Egypt,

²² Wonders (i.e. Wonderful acts) in the land of Ham

And awesome things by the Red Sea.

²³ Therefore He said that He would destroy them,

Had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him,

To turn away His wrath from destroying *them*.

I want you to focus in on the words :23 – “had not Moses, His chosen one stood in the breach...” Moses stood between God and the people and he pled for them the Father...

Another, very helpful example of intercessory prayer is seen in –

- **Paul for Christians** – specifically those in Colossae...

The Apostle Paul is a man of prayer, and we learn something of the process of intercessory prayer in how he prayed for the church at Colossae.

Col. 1:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Look at the specific things for which Paul prayed –

- He prayed that they would know God’s will for their lives (:9) “we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will”
- He prayed that they would not only *know* God’s will, but that they would *do* God’s will... (10) “¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him ...”
- He prayed that they would be productive with their lives (:10) “... bearing fruit in every good work”

- He prayed that they would grow in the Lord (:10) “and increasing in the knowledge of God” ... Notice that this is *relational*, not merely *academic*... In other words, he prays that that would KNOW God better – not just have more knowledge about God...
- Paul prayed that they would have God’s power in their lives (:11) “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy”

(Adapted from John Maxwell. *Partner’s In Prayer*. pp. 68-72)

This passage provides for us a great example for how we should pray for others... If you ever wonder how to truly pray for your children, or grandchildren, or even your church – this passage would always be appropriate to use as an example...

The ultimate example of intercessory prayer is seen in –

- **Jesus and The Holy Spirit for Christians**

Jesus faithfully prayed for His disciples – He even interceded for those who were involved in crucifying Him – “*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34)... We learn from Paul and the writer of the book of Hebrews, that Jesus is interceding even NOW for those who belong to Him –

Rom. 8:34 (NASB) “who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.”

Heb. 7:25 (NASB) “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Christians should be comforted to know that Jesus and The Holy Spirit are representing us and our needs before the Father right now!

Rom. 8:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God*.

Notice also what the Holy Spirit prays for... He prays for that which is in accordance with “*the will of God*”!... God’s will is equal to God’s best for any situation!... Again – that’s what we are to pray for also!

I love what – **Warren Wiersbe** said about the ministry of intercession that Jesus and the Holy Spirit performs on our behalf –

“A dual intercession keeps the believer secure in Christ: the Spirit intercedes (Rom. 8:26–27) and the Son of God intercedes (Rom. 8:34). The same Savior who died for us is now interceding for us in heaven. As our High Priest, He can give us the grace we need to overcome temptation and defeat the enemy (Heb. 4:14–16). As our Advocate, He can forgive our sins and restore our fellowship with God (1 John 1:9–2:2). Intercession means that Jesus Christ represents us before the throne of God and we do not have to represent ourselves.”

2. Why Should We Pray for Others?

The short answer is – because God wants us to... Prayer is God’s economy for how needs are often to be met... And it is the privilege and responsibility for all Christians to pray...

1 Tim. 2:1-2 (NASB)

¹First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

If we are followers of Christ – then we should embrace the privilege and responsibility He has assigned to us – we should intercede in prayer for others!

3. For Whom Do We Pray?

➤ Those who are lost

Believe it or not, there are some Christians who would argue that we don't need to pray for the lost... They take the position that if God wants to save someone He will, and there is nothing we can do to "persuade" Him to do so...

That is not the position you will find in the Bible... The Apostle Paul even said –

Rom. 10:1 (NKJV) "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."

Oswald Chambers was a Scottish evangelist, author and teacher who died at the age of 42, same year Andrew Murray died,... the same year my grandfather was born... He is best known for the devotional My Utmost for His Highest, which was actually compiled from his writings by his wife and published seven years after his death... In that devotional he said – "You cannot truly intercede through prayer if you do not believe in the reality of redemption... What we must avoid in intercession is praying for someone to be simply 'patched up.' We must pray that person completely through into contact with the very life of God. Think of the number of people God has brought across our path, only to see us drop them! When we pray on the basis of redemption, God creates something He can create in no other way than through intercessory prayer."

I believe we should be praying for the lost as well... Don't you?

We are also to pray for –

➤ Those who are sick

God's Word gives instructions for the Christian who may find themselves in a physical state of chronic illness to call upon their elders to come pray for them (James 5:14)...

It is never wrong to "carry your sick friend" to the Lord, and to appeal to Him and His grace in behalf of a friend (Mark 2).

➤ Those who are broken

You might say – “God has a special place in His heart for those who are broken”

Ps 34:18 (NASB)

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Surely – we can pray for them to draw near to Him...

We can not only pray for the broken – but you can pray for –

➤ Those who want to break you

Jesus gives clear instruction about this –

Matt. 5:44 (NASB) “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”

Paul demonstrated an intercessor’s heart even toward those who “abandoned” him –

2 Tim. 4:16 (NASB) “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.”

The final question we will address today is –

4. Will You Pray for Others?

That is a question that only you can answer for yourself...

You and I are called by God to pray for others... Others who are in desperate need for the Lord!... Others who are in desperate need for the Lord’s wisdom... others who are broken ... others who are burdened...

Look around – we are surrounded by many who are not enjoying a healthy relationship with the Lord – and the best thing we can do for them is pray for them!...

Now I realize that many do not believe that last sentence I just said... For some reason we do not believe that prayer is the BEST thing we can do for someone else... We have gotten to the place of believing that prayer is the

“last” thing we do, after exhausting all other efforts in our attempts to improve a situation...

Just why would prayer be the best thing?... Because prayer is THE exercise of our faith that must precede all other expressions and actions of our faith!... The issue is – FAITH... Faith is a matter of fully trusting God for Who He is and what He does in any and all situations of life!... There is nothing we can do for the genuine improvement of another’s situation without trusting that person and that matter to the Lord – and that happens through prayer...

Vance Havner, one of my heroes of the faith – had the ability to get to the heart of a matter so clearly and effectively... He told the story of the hypochondriac who had exhausted the patience of her physician... Finally exasperated – the doctor said to her, *“Ma’am, you simply must put your faith in God.”* The lady was heartbroken and said – *“Oh my! Has it come to that?!”* Vance Havner said, “Sooner or later it always comes to that, so we might as well start with that.”

So how do we “start with that”?... How to we begin exercising our faith in God about anything?... It begins with talking to Him about it!...

1 Sam. 12:23 (NASB) “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.”

Two final quotes I want you to consider:

A. W. Tozer – “The church that is not jealously protected by mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspected corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray.”

Vance Havner – “If you can’t pray as you want to, pray as you can. God knows what you mean.”

Questions to consider in Community Group:

- Are you trained in CPR? How about in *Critical Prayer Resource*?
- What is a good definition of “Intercessory Prayer”?
- What should we learn from Moses’ example of interceding for the Israelites?
- What are some specific things we see in Paul’s example of praying for the Colossians that we should pray for others?
- What is it about the intercessory ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit that should encourage us? What should we learn from their example?
- Why should we pray for others?
- For whom are you praying, and for what? Please give examples from Scripture for how we should pray for others?
- Please discuss these quotations offered in the message:

Oswald Chambers – “You cannot truly intercede through prayer if you do not believe in the reality of redemption... What we must avoid in intercession is praying for someone to be simply ‘patched up.’ We must pray that person completely through into contact with the very life of God. Think of the number of people God has brought across our path, only to see us drop them! When we pray on the basis of redemption, God creates something He can create in no other way than through intercessory prayer.”

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