

Pastor Letter: Intercessory Prayer (9/18/22)

This week's scriptural passages caused me to hit rewind on my faith journey as I attempted to discern what to highlight in this week's pastoral letter. After serving the maximum 2 terms as a ruling elder, I was then nominated to serve on the board of deacons. We created a list of our elderly, shut-ins, and widows in the congregation. Each deacon was assigned 1 or 2 individuals. Each deacon committed to making a personal contact with their assignment weekly, praying daily for them, and making sure their assignments felt connected to their home Church. This experience became the foundation for my pastoral care ministry and for engaging in intercessory prayer.

My seminary classes helped to develop my pastoral care skills and intercessory prayer. One class required us to visit someone in a home, a nursing home, and an ICU room of a hospital and write a paper on the different aspects of each visit. This is where I learned to engage in prayer in the car, elevator, or waiting room before each visit.

During my first pastoral call, our congregation became involved in Stephen Ministry, a Christian caregiving outreach program. Each trained Stephen Minister was assigned an individual who had requested a personal Christian caregiver to walk beside them through whatever trial they were experiencing. Intercessory prayer skills were taught to these caregivers before they received their individual assignments.

During my last fulltime pastoral call, our congregation provided a Healing Ministry in conjunction with another congregation. Those involved in our biweekly healing services were trained in intercessory prayer skills and many other spiritual healing practices.

Nearly everything I have gleaned about intercessory prayer I have obtained from Richard Foster's book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, that describes many different types of prayer. He writes, "Intercession is a way of loving people. When we move from petition to intercession, we are shifting our center of gravity from our own needs to the needs and concerns of others. Intercessory Prayer is selfless prayer, even self-giving prayer. In the ongoing work of the kingdom of God, nothing is more important than Intercessory Prayer. Intercessory Prayer is priestly ministry, and one of the most challenging teachings in the New Testament is the universal priesthood of all Christians. As priests, appointed and anointed by God, we have the honor of going before the Most High on behalf of others."¹

The Apostle Paul's instructional letter to his young pastor, Timothy, in Ephesus encourages the practice of different types of prayer saying, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity," (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Each type of prayer is a designated avenue to a specific goal that builds a conduit to our heavenly Father's ear and heart.

In John 14:1-6, Jesus tells his disciples he is leaving them, going to the Father, and will prepare a place for them, so don't be afraid. Foster uses this scripture to enhance his description of Intercessory Prayer, by writing, "What is it about Jesus going to the Father that so radically changes the equation? Why would that make such a difference in their—and our—prayer experience? Jesus is entering his eternal work as Intercessor before the throne of God, and, as a result, we are enabled to pray for others with an entirely new authority... By ourselves we have no entrée to the court of heaven. It

¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, (New York: Harpor Collins Publishers, 1992) p. 191.

would be like ants speaking to humans.”² This is why every prayer offered to God is given in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus Christ is our mediator or intercessory who is constantly praying for each of us before a heavenly Father. Paul explains this principle using the words, “For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle,” (vv. 5-7).

Our Old Testament scripture also describes to us how the prophet, Jeremiah, is interceding to Almighty God on behalf of the nation of Israel. The Babylonian army is rapidly approaching with destruction in mind, but the people continue to hide in the shadows behind their walled cities, expecting God to rescue them once again, but still refusing to admit their sinful natures are the cause of the approaching judgment of God.

Jeremiah is speaking the very Words of God, sharing the Lord’s broken heart, and lamenting his unrepentant nation’s actions. Jeremiah records, “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick,” (Jer. 8:18) and “For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me,” (v. 21).

Using the words of Foster, an intercessory “self-giving prayer,” Jeremiah is personally lamenting for his unrepenting nation and expressing his agonizing grief for them with tears of remorse. He records his intercessory prayer, “O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!” (v 9:1). This is one reason Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because he knows what destruction is coming upon his people.

Jeremiah is weeping over Jerusalem and Israel in much the same manner as our Lord wept over Jerusalem shortly before his crucifixion, “As he (Jesus) came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God,’” (Luke 19:41-44).

As a pastor in ministry, I use many types of prayer, especially intercessory prayer. I would sincerely encourage you to learn the various types of prayer and use them daily if not hourly in your journey of faith. Prayer in the name of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, is the glorious avenue that connects us with our loving heavenly Father. Once we learn to enrich our loving communication with the triune God, we can then enhance our relationship with all those around us, even our enemies. In intercessory prayer, we take those we pray for to the very throne of Almighty God, allowing him to heal both them and us of all that separates us from Abba, Father.

May you be richly blessed in your own prayer life.

Pastor Larry

² IBID.....p 193.

