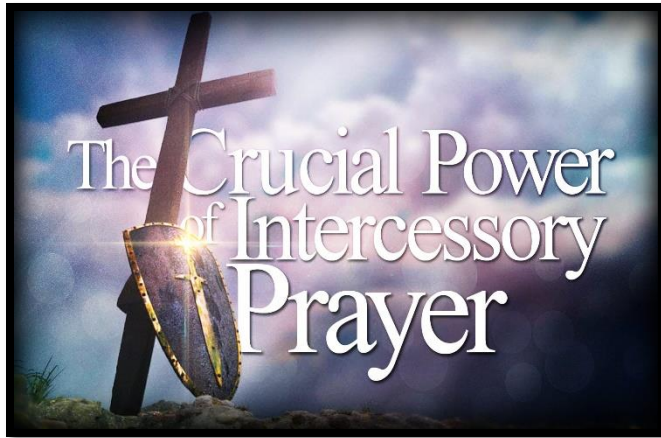


## Intercessory Prayer<sup>1</sup>

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

“A classic definition of Christian prayer is “an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.”<sup>2</sup> Prayer is accepting God’s invitation to draw nearer to Him (James 4:8) by upwardly and humbly approaching His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) with the assurance that the living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2) of those who believe in the Son will always



receive and can communicate with their loving Creator! Prayer is “life creating and life changing”<sup>3</sup> for it is in communion with the Potter that the rebellious, stony parts of one’s heart are constantly being transformed back into His glorious image and conformed to His will. While it is incredibly important to never stop asking God to plow furrows in one’s own heart, we must not forget our obligation to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40) by bringing their concerns before He who can do more than we can ask or imagine (Ephesians

3:20)! Prayer is not to be all about us lest it become a product of selfish ambition or vain conceit! Scripture states in humility we are to value others above ourselves by looking out for their interests (Philippians 2:3-4) both by doing good deeds for them that point to the Father (Matthew 5:16) and by asking for divine intervention on their behalf! Apostle Paul, for example, told the church of Ephesus that they were to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests (6:18). When we make our petitions to God on behalf of others, we are to do so with the understanding that while the “prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16) they are only granted when we ask according to God’s divine will for another (1 John 5:14)! The first part of the sermon is going to examine intercessory prayer of the Lord as our example to follow. The second part will define the neighbors we are to pray: the Lord’s people, the rulers of the land and yes even our enemies! And the final part of this sermon will focus on the crucial role the Holy Spirit has in forming the words of our prayers!

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the outline was taken from: Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Prayer,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1745.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. New York (NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 33.

## Intercessory Prayer of the Lord

Hebrews 7:25 states “Jesus is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to make intercession for them.” After Christ ascended into heaven and was “seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1) He return to the glory He once had before His incarnation (John 17:5). In heaven we are told that Christ is constantly defending His



own against the accusations of Satan that we are unworthy. In one sense Satan is right God is holy and every person is condemned before Him because of their sin (1 Peter 1:15-16; John 3:18).

However, even though the “powers of this dark world and spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12) bring accusations against believers they will not be successful in their condemnation of the saints because the Lamb who was slain before creation of the world is the believer’s advocate and perfect once and for all atonement for their sins (Revelation 13:8; Romans 8:31-39)!<sup>4</sup>

He who made Himself nothing

(Philippians 2:6) by taking on the nature of a suffering servant (Isaiah 53:1-9) has atoned for the wages of sin which is death (Romans 6:23). Believers are not eternally separated from God when they sin because the blood of the Lamb has forever purchased (1 Corinthians 6:20) their right to boldly approach His throne of grace as His children and heirs (Hebrews 4:16; Galatians 4:7)! I cannot help but think that Christ is still praying in heaven His last prayer before He was arrested that the “relationship between believers and the Father and Himself would be brought about through the ministry of the Holy Spirit” in perfect unity to His will (John 17:20-25).<sup>5</sup>

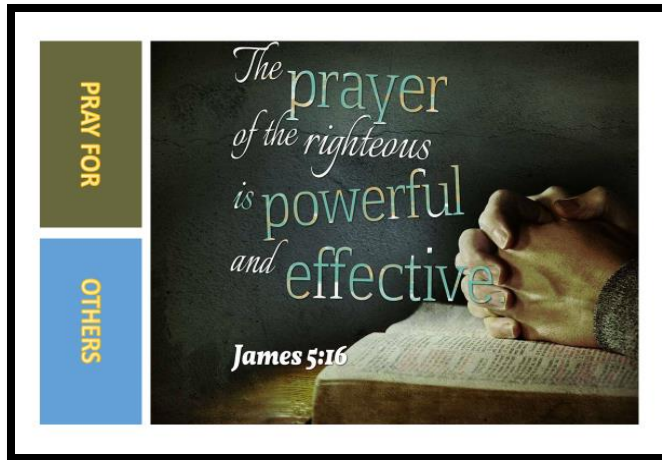
## Intercessory Prayer for Others

As Christ prayed for us, we too are to intercede on behalf of others. Scripture contains many examples of pleas made on behalf of others such as Moses plea to not destroy Israel after their sin of worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32), Elijah’s plea that God would send fire to burn up the altar so that his people might stop worshipping Baal and believe in God (1 Kings 18), Abraham’s plea that God would save Lot (Genesis 18), the centurion’s plea for healing for his servant (Matthew 8:5-13), the Canaanite woman’s plea to have her daughter cured of demon-possession (Matthew 15:21-28); and Apostle Paul’s prayers for the Ephesians (3:14-20), Philippians (1:9-11), and Colossians (1:9-12). We express our love for others by doing good

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, [Romans](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 283.

<sup>5</sup> Colin G. Kruse, [John: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 340.

deeds for one another but also by pleading with God to intervene in their lives. We are not to be anxious about anything but by prayer and petition with thanksgiving in our hearts we are to make



our requests to God with the assurance that they will be granted when asked in accordance with His will (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 John 5:14). While we are to pray for the financial, physical, and emotional well-being of others our primary focus of love for another ought to reflect a genuine desire for them to draw nearer to God! For example, Paul prayed that God might strengthen the church of Ephesus with power from His Spirit in their inner being so that they might grasp how wide and long, high, and deep is the love of Christ and be

filled to the measure of all the fullness of Him. Remember never stop praying for others with the assurance that the “prayers of a righteous person truly are powerful and effective” (James 5:16) for God still does miracles and good to those He loves (Romans 8:28)!

### Intercessory Prayer for Rulers

In his letter to Timothy Apostle Paul “urged” him that “petition, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people — for kings and all those in authority” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).



Since “heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool” (Isaiah 61:1-2) we can take great comfort in the fact that Christ exercises His “sovereignty over the top levels of earthly oversight!”<sup>6</sup> Since our leader’s position and power<sup>7</sup> comes directly from God believers are not only to submit to their rule but also pray for them (John 19:11; Romans 13:1-5). We are to pray that the leaders of this world will make decisions that not only promote “social, political, and economic stability conducive

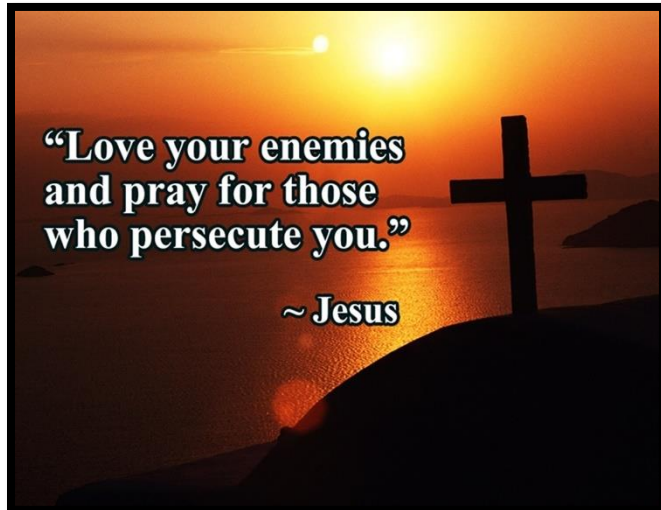
<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 148.

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 148.

to everyone's well-being"<sup>8</sup> but above all ones that rely on the wisdom from God rather than that of their own. While we can all point out many specks in our countries top leader's eyes such as their favorable stance on abortion, oppressive fiscal policies, favoritism of certain ethnic groups, or their outright rejection of God; this does not give us the right to reject the rule God gave them! Instead, we are to pray that they might change and become more like Jesus! Only when our leaders command us to break God's laws<sup>9</sup> do we have the right to disobey them (Acts 5:29)<sup>10</sup> but even then, not the right to curse but to continually love and pray for those created in God's image (James 3:10)! Those who submit and pray for their leaders will not only have a "clear conscience" (Romans 13:5) that they obeyed God in this matter but will also live peaceful and quiet lives (1 Timothy 2:2) as they continually let their light shine by demonstrating their love for one another.

### Intercessory Prayers for One's Enemies

If it was not difficult enough to pray for one's leaders in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus



tells us we are to love and pray for our enemies as well (Matthew 5:43-48)! Our love for one another is not contingent on the morality of others,<sup>11</sup> for who can see clearly with all those planks in one's own eyes (7:1-5), nor on whether they will love us in return or not (5:46),<sup>12</sup> but our love and prayer must be grounded in the same unconditional love Christ showed when He died once and for all, even for His enemies (Hebrews 10)! We are to open our arms wide like Christ and see all who God sends our way as our neighbors and as such love and pray for them so that we might imitate the Father who blesses both the righteous and evil

in this world (5:45). Believers demonstrate this world is not their home by refusing to hate but

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 149.

<sup>9</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "[Romans](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 136.

<sup>10</sup> Everett F. Harrison, "[Romans](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 136–137.

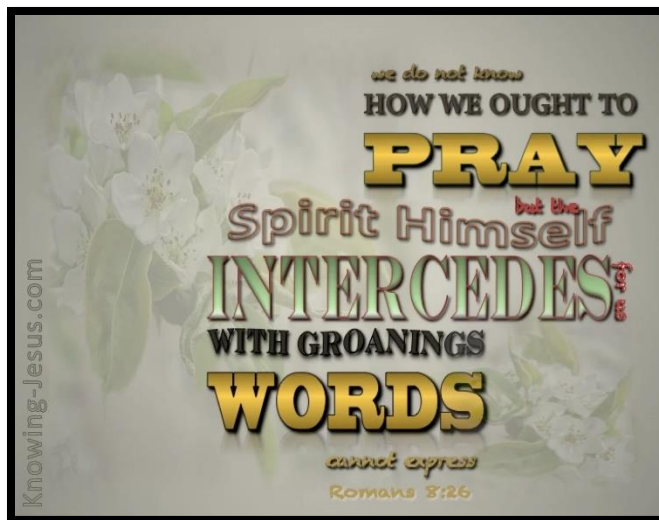
<sup>11</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 132.

<sup>12</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 50.

instead love everyone made in God's image (Genesis 1:26),<sup>13</sup> especially those who persecute them! If we only love those we see as "worthy" of our love, then Jesus says we are not loving any different than the most heinous of this world for even they have friends and family they love (5:47). Please note that love is not indifference, silent hatred or self-justified slanderous gossip of another person but is perfected when it is kind, does not boast, never tears down, keeps no records of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:4-6) but instead, in seeing others better than oneself (Philippians 2:3), never stops praying God would bless them and never stops looking for ways to do good unto them so that one might point to the grace, mercy and love of God the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16)!

## Receiving the Right Words to Pray

Since no one truly knows the motives, words, and deeds of another, discerning the right things to pray for someone else can be quite a daunting task! One has a hard enough time trying to understand the complexities of one's own motives but to investigate the soul of another and rightly judge their shortcomings and overall needs ... well only God could ever accomplish such a daunting task! So then why does God ask us to pray for others when we truly have no idea of



their true needs or even His will in their lives? Praise be to God that while we cannot see into the soul of another the Holy Spirit can! For example, when Jesus sent out the twelve disciples "like sheep among wolves" with the "authority to drive out demons and impure spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness," He told them to not worry about what they would say to governors and kings that would inevitably persecute them but instead in faith rely on the Spirit of the Father to provide them with insight into their hearts and the right words to speak both to them (Matthew 10:1-20) and to God on their behalf! The

very same Spirit who bears witness that we are children of God (Romans 8:16)<sup>14</sup> searches the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-16) and as such not only knows every word, thought, or deed the person has ever done (Psalms 139) but also the will of God for their lives! And even when we are "tongue-tied" by our sin we can be rest assured that merely kneeling in love to pray for another will never lead to silence for the Spirit promises to help us in our weakness by interceding in wordless groans (Romans 8:26)!

<sup>13</sup> Robert H. Mounce, [Matthew](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Roy A. Harrisville, [Romans](#), Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 127–128.

## Conclusion

When the Pharisees asked Jesus, what was the greatest commandment in the Law He responded that we are to love the Lord our God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind and are to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40). One of the best ways to express our love for God is through obedience and continual prayer that He would never stop plowing furrows of righteousness in our hearts! Lest our lives become a product of self-ambition or vain conceit, we are also called to express our love for our neighbors by doing good



deeds and praying for their needs. While is one thing to pray for those who will love us in return it is quite another to pray for those who are indifferent or even hate our very existence! It is humbling and extremely hard to hear Christ tell us that unless we love all people as He did on the cross with arms open wide then our love has not surpassed that even of the Pharisees or tax collectors! This means that while the all-encompassing, vote seeking, and often disingenuous policies of our leaders often offend us this does not mean we have a legitimate reason to

refuse to bring their concerns before their Creator! Knowing that Christ granted their power and position and died for them as well as us ought to compel us to pray that they will become born again (if they are not) and in doing so learn to rely on God's wisdom and make the right choices for those they lead. And if this was not difficult enough Christ commands us to love even those who hate and mistreat us! Our love and prayers are not to be based on our neighbor's lack of morality, as if we do not have many planks in our own eyes, but instead on obeying Christ's command to love and pray for those created in God's very own image! While we do not always know what to pray for concerning another, we are to rejoice that when we lack the wisdom and words to pray for another the Holy Spirit will help us in our weakness by interceding in wordless groans. Since the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective then may we obey Christ's command of love by continually asking Him to change and make right in His eyes both us and everyone else we meet!