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Target Persons of Prayer - Part 2
Our Fellow Believers

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In the last installment of this three part series we began a discussion of prayer. Specifically, we asked, who should we target for our prayers? In the last section we indicated that Jesus, as recorded in John 17:1- 21, prayed before His crucifixion. We, therefore, asked, "If the Son of God needed to pray, how much more so do we?"

In that initial part one, we showed that the first person we need to pray for is ourselves! We showed that Jesus, just before His crucifixion, prayed for Himself (John 17:1-5). Believers need to pray for their own spiritual, physical, and emotional needs. By getting ourselves in close proximity to the Lord it prepares us to do intercessory prayer for others. Read Part one here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2023/07/target-persons-of-prayer-part-1-pray-for-yourself-tal-davis/>

In this second section we again look at how Jesus prayed in John 17. After Praying for His relationship with the Father, He prayed extensively for His disciples. So this installment focuses on our prayers for our fellow Christians. In the third and final part we will examine how and why we should pray for the unsaved lost.

So let's begin by examining just why we should pray for our fellow believers. We should pray for our fellow Christians because God expects it and Jesus did it.

As we said, after praying to the Father on His own behalf, Jesus turned to lifting up His disciples;

6 "I have revealed Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have followed Your word. 7 Now they have come to know that everything which You have given Me is from You; 8 for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. 9 I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but on the behalf of those whom You have given Me, because they are Yours; 10 and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them." (John 17: 6-10 NASB)

Note that Jesus acknowledges that the Father had given His disciples to Him (vs. 6, 9). He states that they had been faithful to His word and understood the source of all His teaching (v. 7-8). But note also that He says that, at this point, He is not praying "on behalf of the world" but only those whom the Father had given to Him. (v. 9-10)

Just as Jesus prayed for His disciples, as Christians, must pray for other Christians. Too often we get the order wrong. For instance, a lady kept a prayer list and prayed earnestly and daily for the people on it. However, occasionally she would take names off it. Her husband noticed and asked why she did that. She answered with a smile, "They got saved! They don't need our prayers any more."

I'm sure that lady was sincere in her prayers. But her understanding was totally counter to scriptural teaching. Many places tell us to pray for one another – our fellow Christians. Very few, however, say to pray for

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the lost (we will deal with that in the next installment).

Sometimes we take names off our lists when God says they need to be put on it the most: after they have made their decision for Christ. So yes, we need to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. But what are some things we need to pray on behalf of them? Jesus gives us some clues in His prayer for the disciples.

For one thing, we need to pray for God to keep them unified in His name (unlike Judas, "the son of perdition").

1 "I am no longer going to be in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, so that they may be one just as We are. 12 While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name, which You have given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled." (John 17: 11-12 NASB)

Unity in Christian groups is often difficult to maintain. We are all too familiar with churches who split over all sorts of differences, most of which are relatively trivial. You hear about churches dividing over things like worship styles and times, colors of new carpets, parking lots, etc. That's why Jesus says we need to pray for believers to be united in the essential matters of the faith. Certainly Christians will disagree on secondary issues of theology and ecclesiology, but we must stand together on the essential doctrines of the historic Christian faith. With the growing numbers of skeptics and false teachers leading people astray we must present a unified body "to contend for the faith which was

once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3 KJV)

We also need to pray for their safety and protection.

13 "But now I am coming to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. 14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." (John 17: 13-16 NASB)

Jesus prayed for the protection of His disciples. In His prayer Jesus asks the Father to protect His disciples from two specific things: the world and the devil. He mentions how the world will hate them because they are not "of the world" (v. 14). In this case, "the world" (cosmos) refers to this present evil system at work in the world. But note that He does not ask that the Father take them out of the world, but keep them safe from the "the evil one" while they remain in the world (v. 15). Why? Because they still had work to do.

The Apostle Peter likewise warns believers of the attacks of the devil.

7 Having cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you. 8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:7-8 NASB)

So the world and the devil are our spiritual enemies. But there is actually one more: the flesh.

In his first letter, John focuses on the third.

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the

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Father, but is from the world. (1 John 2:15-16 NASB)

"The flesh" (*sarx*), can mean our physical bodies. But, in this sense, it means the tendency we all have to follow our base and sinful desires. As Paul explains in his letter to the Romans:

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were brought to light by the Law, were at work in the parts of our body to bear fruit for death. (Romans 7:5 NASB)

He says that living in the flesh is directly contrary to living in the Spirit. *5 For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* (Romans 8:5-8 NASB)

The world and the devil are external enemies of Christians. The flesh is more internal. In any case, we need to pray for the protection of our fellow believers in all our spiritual battles.

Finally, we need to pray for our fellow believers to live holy lives. In His prayer, Jesus asks the Father to "sanctify" His disciples "in the truth." *17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."* (John 17: 17-19 NASB)

In this context "sanctify" (*hagiazó*) means to make holy, treat as holy, or set apart as holy. That is to make pure for God's special purposes. It seems we don't pray much for people

to be holy any more. I am not sure why. Maybe its because people just don't understand what it means to live a holy life. Let's face it, most Christians are anything but "holy." That's a shame, because throughout Scripture God's people are called to be sanctified for His purposes.

As Paul admonishes his Roman readers:

1 Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12 1-2 NASB)

Peter also calls on his readers to be holy.

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written: "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:14-16 NASB)

So we should pray for our fellow believers to be holy. Note that Jesus says that His disciples are sanctified through God's Truth (v. 17). That Truth is His Word. Therefore we should pray that our Christian friends should spend time in the Scriptures to learn the truths of God's Word. This is a key ingredient for sanctification. The Holy Spirit illuminates our minds to the meanings of Scriptures so we can apply them adequately to our lives.

To sum up this section, we simply say again, we need to make our fellow believers a target for our prayers. We should pray daily for our fellow Christians. Let me suggest several practical ways to do this. First, get a

membership list of your church. Each day pray for a dozen or more of them. When you get to the end, start over. If you have your own disciples, pray especially for them. You might ask, "Disciples? Who are my disciples? I don't have any disciples." You probably do even if you don't realize it. A disciple is a learner. So, do you teach Sunday school or a Bible study group (any age - preschool, children, youth, or adults)? They would be your disciples. Pray for each one by name. Do you have children or grandchildren? Do you teach school, coach a softball or basketball team, lead scouts, or whatever? Those are also your disciples and you need to pray for them, especially if they are believers.

But what if they are not Christians? In the next installment we will focus on the final and (contrary to the practice of the lady in the earlier illustration) probably the least targeted persons for our prayers – that is, the unsaved lost.

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