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A Biblical Focus On Prayer - Part 5
Praying for Others

By Tal Davis

Every year between 1984 and 2017, Harvard University awarded its Harvard Foundation's Peter J. Gomes Humanitarian Award. It went to individuals whom the foundation deemed worthy because of their philanthropic support of various humanitarian causes. In 2017, its last prize went to singer Elton John. Other past honorees included Archbishop Desmond Tutu, designer Tommy Hilfiger, actor James Earl Jones, and singer Rihanna.

Most of us do not have the financial resources of an Elton John or other multi-millionaires who can give huge donations to their favorite causes (usually for a hefty tax exemption). Nonetheless, we all want to do something to help others and make the world a better place. Christians especially desire to lend assistance to needy people. However, giving money is not the only, or even the best, way to do so. Taking time to help a friend or visiting a shut-in can be a more valuable asset than any amount of money.

Perhaps the most important and effective way to help others is simply to pray for them. Not the sort of off-hand promise people often give, "I'll pray for you," but sincerely going to God on behalf of someone you know, or maybe don't know. Have you ever heard someone say, "I could feel your prayers when I was in the hospital?" Knowing someone is praying can encourage a person in a time of trouble more than any other thing we can do. Of course, we need to back it up with appropriate actions.

In this lesson we will learn from the Master Himself why intercessory prayer is necessary and

how it can be effective. As you read, think about persons you know who are in need of intercession. They may be facing illness, grief, financial problems, marital discord, troubled children, depression, or many other possible issues of life.

In this installment we continue our analysis of Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:8-13. To read Parts 1-4 go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/?s=prayer&id=29>. We have already studied the background of that passage. Jesus showed His disciples how to address God as Father, to honor His holy name, to pray His kingdom be realized both now and forever, and to pray that His will be done in their lives and in all the world. That passage is usually called "the Lord's Prayer." However, as we discussed before, a better passage for that title is actually John 17. In this article we will examine a portion of that prayer wherein the Lord intercedes to the Father for His disciples and for those to come later.

In his Gospel (chapters 13-16), John the Apostle records in detail the acts and words of Jesus as He prepared Himself and His disciples for the events that were about to occur in Jerusalem (His death and resurrection). The night before His arrest, Jesus ate the Passover meal, washed His disciples' feet, dismissed Judas, commanded the disciples to love one another, and predicted Peter's denials. He also lectured on the key issues they needed to know to carry on His ministry after He left them.

Jesus then turned from talking to the disciples, to talking about them to God (John 17). Here we see the Lord's intercession for His disciples and others (including us Christians today) as chronicled by the "disciple

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Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). So, in this installment we will continue to study Jesus' model prayer in Matthew, and examine in detail a major portion of His final prayer for His followers. We will discover how we, too, can pray on behalf of others. That is one essential way we can help others and live out Jesus' great commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

We see this is in three practical ways.

First, we should pray for the protection of others. Give us today our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11b)

11 I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by your name that you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I was protecting them by your name that you have given me. I guarded them and not one of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled. 13 Now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy completed in them. 14 I have given them your word. The world hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I am not praying that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17: 11-16)

Have you ever been really hungry or thirsty? When I was a youth playing sports (no, it was not in the Roman Coliseum) our coaches were very careful about rationing how much water we drank during practice and in games. They kept us hydrated, but in the 90 degree heat of Florida, we never felt satis-

fied. As for food, I can't think of any time when I worried about my next meal.

In ancient days, food was not as easy to come by as today. Most people were concerned about their daily meals. Of course, many people around the world, and even in America, go to bed hungry each night. For that reason, Jesus, in His model prayer, told His disciples that one of the primary subjects for petition was "our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11b). In this context, "daily bread" should be understood as meaning not just baked dough, but all foods necessary for daily sustenance (see: Mark 3:20; Acts 1:1; 2 Thess. 3:12; James 2:15). It suggests actually more than just that, but all physical needs for people to live each day: water; clothes; shelter; exercise; sleep; even fresh air. The word normally rendered here as "daily" (epiousios) is found no where else in Greek literature, and is a bit difficult to accurately translate. Scholars believe it can also be translated as "for tomorrow," "the coming day," or "necessary for existence."

Jesus' point is for His disciples to realize that all good things come from God. As He indicated in another context, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt. 6:33). This does not mean people should not work to earn a living. Jesus makes it clear that work is a responsibility, especially for those engaged in His ministry (vss. 34-35).

The other side of the application coin of this verse is that we must also pray for the basic necessities of others. As we look around, we see so many desperate situations of people living without the basics of life. In many countries famine and draught, brought on by war or natural disasters, cause immense suffering for men, women, and children. Christians should seek the help of God for those people.

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Our prayers, however, should never be in words only. Numerous Christian organizations make great efforts to provide relief in cases where the needs are great. Even in America, the land of plenty, food can sometimes be in short supply – especially in recent times of hurricanes, floods, or wild fires.

The other place in Scripture where we find an even more definite illustration of prayer is John 17. Anyone who carefully reads the four gospels quickly notices that John's is quite different from the other three. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the Synoptic ("one view") gospels because they present information and events that are generally similar. John's Gospel, however, is unique. It is written in a simple, but theologically rich, vocabulary. Its primary purpose is to reveal the reality of Jesus' divine identity as "the Word" (*ho logos*) made flesh (*sarx*) (vss. 1:1-14). It was also intended to invite people to receive Jesus as the Messiah: "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (vs. 20:31).

Early tradition ascribes the book to John, the Son of Zebedee, one of the twelve disciples and the brother of Peter and James. He wrote in Ephesus around A.D. 90. Interestingly, the author does not actually give his name in the text. However, he leaves us clever clues as to his identity. For one, he claims to be an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry and resurrection (vss. 1:14; 19:35; 21:24, 25).

Also, on several key occasions, he mentions the "beloved disciple" or "the one who Jesus loved." That unnamed character appears at the Last Supper reclining next to Jesus (vss. 13:23-25). He is at the cross where he is entrusted with the care of Jesus' mother, Mary (vss. 19:26-27). He runs with Peter to see the

empty tomb (vss. 20:2-9). And finally, he is nearby when Jesus restores Peter by the Sea of Tiberias (vss. 21:7-25). This unknown disciple ultimately identifies himself as the author (but not by name) in verse 21:24: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true." So how can we deduce the name of the author? "Elementary my dear Watson" – the disciple John is never mentioned by name anywhere in the book. So, who else could it be?

In Jesus prayer, recorded in John 17, He summarizes His own relationship with the Father and the relationship He desires the disciples to have with Himself and the Father. The prayer focuses on three separate objects of His entreaty. In the first section, Jesus prays for Himself (vss. 1-5). John says that after His speech to the disciples, Jesus "looked up to heaven" (literally, "lifted up His eyes") to pray. He asks the Father to glorify Him and His mission so He can glorify the Father. He states the purpose of His mission: "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent - Jesus Christ" (vss. 1-5). The second part is His prayer for His disciples (vss. 6-19). The third object of His petition is all believers who will come in the future (vss. 20-26).

In verses 11 and 12, He prays for the "Holy Father" (*hagios Pater*) to protect (or keep) His disciples. In this context "holy" means God's perfect and transcendent righteousness and His supernatural divine power.

Why does he pray this? Because in the first part of that verse, He anticipates soon departing from them and returning to His Father. He will "no longer be in the world" with them, but they must remain. He knows that the "world" will hate them just as it hated Him.

So Jesus intercedes knowing that only the power of God Himself ("by Your name") can provide the security needed for disciples to live in an increasingly hostile world. When Jesus was with them, He protected them, and none but Judas (the "son of perdition" or "destruction" - *apoleia*) fell away – which was foretold by Scripture (perhaps Psalm 41:9).

The goal of this protection is that "they may be as one as we are one." This kind of unity is comparable that of the Father and the Son. It does not result from councils, committees, or creeds. It comes from the common spiritual experience of being born-again and having a common mission. It is necessary as Christians engage the world.

Jesus then changes His tone somewhat in verse 13. He prays not only for the disciples' safety and unity, but that they will have joy. "Joy" (*chara*) refers to that happy state resulting from knowing and serving God. It is used more than 200 times in the Bible. It was characteristic of those who followed Jesus in the early church (Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3 16:34). For Jesus, joy means to experience the inward satisfaction of being in the Father's care, and having His approval for carrying out their task.

Jesus continues by saying He had entrusted them with the Father's "word" (*logos*). But with that privilege came the fact that the world would hate them. He says they are "not of the world" (*ek kosmou*) just as he was not. The preposition *ek* implies origin or source. Though they are still men, their worldview and actions were out of sync with those of the world. Jesus does not pray that they be removed from the world, that would obliterate their mission. Rather, He prayed that they would be protected from the attacks of the "evil one" (the devil or Satan).

Like Jesus, Christians should pray for believers' protection. As in Jesus' time, the world still opposes those who follow Him. We see this demonstrated in the more than 60 countries where Christians still face harsh persecution. According to the watchdog organization Open Doors, the worst offenders are North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Sudan. Even in America, Christian beliefs are under attack by secular forces wishing to impose their values on everyone.

In summary, we need to pray to God on behalf of others to provide what is needed for them to live each day. Also, Christians should pray for spiritual unity in the body of Christ, the church. Believers also need to pray for the physical safety and welfare of other Christians, especially those facing persecution and suffering.

Second, we should pray for the spiritual growth of others.

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 I sanctify myself for them, so that they also may be sanctified by the truth. (John 17: 17-19)

Jesus now turns the attention of His prayer from the protection of His followers to their spiritual advancement. He asks the father to "Sanctify them by the truth." To sanctify or consecrate (*hagiazō*) something or someone means to make it or her holy. In this case Jesus stresses the personal dimension of holiness as a consequence of being saved (justification). It is the on-going process of growing in one's faith toward being more like Christ (sanctification). Christians are set apart at conversion for the purpose of living holy lives in the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them.

Notice, however, what Jesus says is the key ingredient in that process: truth (*aletheia*). He says the Father's word is the basis of that truth. That word would be what was revealed to the prophets and written in the Bible. But this is not truth in merely a propositional sense, it is what Jesus had indicated was totally embodied in Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (vs. 14:6).

The reason for their sanctification is so they can effectively fulfill their mission just as Jesus had fulfilled His. This purpose is made clear when He prays, "As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (vs. 18). The term "world" (*kosmos*) is used several times by Jesus in His prayer. It is used 188 times in the New Testament in varying contexts. In some passages it refers to the whole of the created universe (Eph. 1:4). Other places it refers only to the earth and its human inhabitants (John 1:9; 3:16). It can also mean

the sum of human activity that is generally in opposition to the will of God. As John warned in his first letter, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). This is the usage of Jesus in this prayer. He had told His followers that the world is under the power of the "ruler (or prince) of this world," meaning Satan (John 12: 31; 14:30; 16:11).

"Sent" (*apostello*) is obviously a verb related to the noun "apostle" (*apostolos*). An Apostle, in one sense, refers only to those twelve who were eye-witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, and were authoritative leaders in the New Testament church (Acts 1:12-22- egs.: Peter; James; John; Matthew; et. al.). Paul was included in this number because of his experience seeing Jesus on the Damascus Road (1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1). In a broader sense, an apostle is anyone who is sent to share the gospel and is a respected leader (egs.: Barnabas [Acts 14:4,14]; James, Jesus' half-brother (1 Cor. 15:7); Apollos [1 Cor. 4:6-13]; Andronicus and Junias [Rom. 16:7]).

The Father sent Jesus into the world with authority. In the same way, He now sends the Apostles into the world, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20). Just as He proclaimed the message of God's love and forgiveness, now they are to proclaim the same good news. Likewise, just as He faced danger and death, they must encounter the same perils. Nonetheless, just as He will be victorious in His resurrection, they can expect the same.

Jesus concludes this part of His prayer with a dedication: "I sanctify myself (*hagiazō emautou*) for them." How does the Son of God sanctify Himself? He has set Himself apart for the specific task of dying as a sacrifice for mankind's sin. Thus Jesus prays that the disciples also will be set apart to meet the challenge of being in His service. They will proclaim the gospel, but must be willing to give their whole lives, even to the point of death. The heart of the matter here is that for Christians to be effective in accomplishing God's mission in a hostile world requires a deep and growing faith and a willingness to sacrifice.

Avery Willis (1934-2010) was one of the real heroes of the world mission effort in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As a young man he served for 14 years as an international missionary in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim nation. However, God called him back to the USA in the 1970s to design a curriculum of in-depth discipleship for missionaries, pastors, and laypeople. After much prayer and Bible study, Willis eventually developed and taught MasterLife, a progressive method of growth in six dimensions of spiritual living. It quickly became one of the world's finest discipling resources and is still widely used. Willis spent most of his last years as an executive of the Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board training missionaries in spiritual living, prayer, and creative evangelism. He was a man who took seriously Jesus example of praying for the spiritual lives of others.

Finally, we must pray for the unity of believers, a unity that points to Christ.

20 "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. 22 I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me. (John 17: 20-23)

Jesus now shifts again from interceding for His disciples to those who will be His followers in the future through their ministries. He says "I pray not only (*ou monon*) for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word." This indicates that Jesus certainly expected His disciples would succeed in their missions. Of course, they would first have to experience the despair and shame of their failures at the death of Jesus. Peter would deny the Lord three times as Jesus had predicted. Most of the others would go into hiding to avoid the same fate as Jesus. But Jesus foresaw that, after His resurrection, they would have their faith renewed and proceed to carry out their divine tasks.

So Jesus prays for the well-being of succeeding generations of new disciples who would hear the word and testimonies of His immediate disciples. The Good News was never intended to be the exclusive possession of the First Century church. When He prays for those who will "believe," He uses the word *pisteuo*. That is the verb form of the noun *pistis*, usually translated as "faith," meaning trust or devotion (see Eph. 2:8). Sometimes it is called "the faith" (*ho pistis*), referring to the content of the gospel (as in Jude 3 - "contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all"). However, that noun form is never found in John's Gospel. He quotes Jesus using the term as an action word to describe something being actively expressed by the believer.

The key to the future disciples' spiritual and missional success is their unity of purpose. Jesus prays, as He had for His first disciples at that time, for them to be as "one" (*heis*). Jesus knew the need for love and unity was essential as the church expanded and added more converts from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and interests. He was not speaking of some kind of organizational or institutional merger, but a personal unity like the one He had with the Father. It is also not uniformity. Just as the Father and the Son are one in essence but nonetheless separate in person and function, so are Christians. Each believer has his or her own personality and spiritual gifts.

The Apostle Paul explained this principle of unity in diversity using the analogy of the human body: "In the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another. According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts" (Rom. 12:5-6a). He also stated, using the Trinity as the model, "With patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope at your calling - *one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all*" (Eph. 4:2-5). (See also 1 Cor. 12.)

Jesus says, that in order for unity to exist He has given His followers the glory that the Father gave Him. That glory is derivative of the glory and love existing in the Godhead. The overall effect of this love and unity is for Jesus' followers, in every age, to be living testimonies to the unbelieving world: "that the world may know you have sent me."

Praying for others is a great privilege that God has bestowed on us as His people. We need to pray for those who lack the basic necessities of life or who are suffering in a time of turmoil. We should intercede for the protection of our brothers and sisters in Christ, that they can live holy lives and resist the attacks of Satan. And finally we should lift up all believers that they will grow in their faith and relationship with God. Whatever life brings, in good times or bad, we all need to pray for others, and we need others to pray for us.

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