

PRAYER

A Practical Guide to Getting God's Direction

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BAAL HAMON PUBLISHERS

AKURE

LONDON

NEW YORK

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ISBN-13: 978-1-9999266-0-1

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Prayer of Lament

*As much as we don't like it,
suffering can strengthen us, if
we turn to God in prayer.*

Nothing tests our faith more than human suffering. Suffering challenges our understanding of God. When we think of God as being a fairy godmother, a genie, or Santa Claus, our faith in these images gets tested. When we think that putting our faith in God will make us rich, healthy, and we will be now living a maintenance free life, suffering will challenge our faith. We begin to question whether or not there is even a God in times of trouble. At best we begin to think that God has caused all of my troubles - *God is a bully looking to inflict pain on me.* Another question that arises is, "Why didn't God prevent this horrible thing from happening?"

Reasons for Suffering

Here are reasons why people suffer:

1. *We are part of a fallen humanity.*
2. *We suffer by our own volition. It is hard for us to admit this; it is easier just to blame God or someone else.*
3. *We suffer because of someone else's actions.*
4. *We suffer as a result of natural disasters.*
5. *We suffer from illnesses and injury.*
6. *Sometimes there is no explanation for why we suffer. This was the case of the Biblical story of Job.*

Does God cause suffering? There are recorded instances in the Bible where God brought punishment to his people. This was disciplinary action. God's people were not worshiping and honoring him in life. The punishment was to bring people to repentance. When people say, "God has brought suffering upon me." I have to ask the question, "Is there something you need to repent of?" There are no Biblical stories or events of God bringing punishment upon people from sadistic motivations. When we worship God and obey his commandments, then God blesses us. When we fail to do this, then God does bring punishment. As we repent of our sins, God will be loving and gracious to forgive. We must remember, "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime." (Psalm 30:5)

The Grief Process

When bad things happen to us, we go through a grief process. Grief is a healing process we go through when we lose something. When a special person we love dies, we go through a grief process. When we lose a physical capacity, a job, or a possession that we value, we go through a grief process.

Some of the emotions of grief are shock, anger, sadness, and depression. As we allow ourselves to go through this process, we come to a place of healing. We know when we are healed when we can say, "I don't like what has happened. There will always be a sorrow, but life will go on in a good way." If we fail to grieve, life will not go on in a good way, and our grief will take the form of negativity, bitterness, and even abusiveness.

When suffering comes, if we have formed an image of God that is a house of cards, when the winds of adversity blow, our faith in God falls apart. Before Jesus' arrest, all of Jesus disciples betrayed him. They lost their faith in their God, and who Jesus was for them. They thought Jesus was going to be a strong governmental or military might, who would drive out the Romans, rather than a suffering servant who would die on a cross. Like the disciples, losing one's faith is a grief.

Strength in Weakness

As we live a prayerful life, God grants us wisdom to make good decisions that prevents much heartache from happening. God gives peace in the midst of trouble. God will often prevent bad things from happening. God will spare us from going through those awful times in life,

but other times he will let us go through them. Adversity strengthens us. We will never grow strong if we do not go through times of struggle. As we pray during these times, God is with us. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble." (Psalm 46:1) When we trust in God, he will make us stronger, wiser, and more compassionate.

The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, about a weakness he had. He referred to it as being a "Thorn in his flesh". He asked God repeatedly to remove this thorn, but Jesus said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." This weakness made him humble to always find his strength in God. His weakness became his strength, because God was his strength.



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I injured my leg many years ago playing football. This injury has made my leg weak. I prayed many times that God would heal it, but he never did. Instead, as I prayed, God was encouraging me, and strengthening me.

I have been able to run many marathons, including the Boston Marathon. God used my weakness to make me strong. If it hadn't been for that injury, I probably would have never set out to accomplish those running goals. God has used this chronic weakness to strengthen me in so many other ways as well. God can make our lives strong and productive even with chronic pain and illness.

When a runner runs against the wind, he becomes a stronger runner. When a swimmer swims against the current, she becomes a stronger swimmer. A butterfly's wings become strong to fly only as a result of wrestling to get out of its cocoon. As much as we don't like it, suffering can strengthen us, if we turn to God in prayer.

It is important in times of suffering not to judge and define God, ourselves, and life in a moment or event; but rather, over the course of time. We may not see God working in the moment. That is why we walk by faith. We trust that God is with us, and working in ways that we cannot ever imagine, to bring his strength. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8)

Jesus Brings Healing

"He himself bore our wounds you have been healed." (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24) It was from Jesus' deep wounds that God's healing comes for us. Some of the most compassionate and caring people that I know have gone through some of the most painful experiences in life. Some of the most hardened and bitter people that I know have gone through terrible times of suffering. The hot water that softens a bean is also the hot water that

hardens an egg. Suffering and pain come to all people in various ways and levels. The questions that often get asked during these times are: "Why?" "How?" "What?" These questions are a progression as people work through the difficult times in their lives. We pray "Why?" when we do not understand. We pray "How?" as we wonder how God is going to help us. We pray "What?" as we use our suffering for the purposes of ministry.

Prayer of Why?

The prayer of "Why?" is the human cry to God when we are hurting. When we feel powerless in our pain, we do not know what to do, except crying out to God. Psalm 22:1, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" These were the words that Jesus cried from the cross, as he was suffering in excruciating pain. As we read the entire Psalm 22, it describes vividly a person who is suffering on a cross. This psalm was prophetic, written a thousand years before Jesus death.



God gives peace in the midst of trouble. God will often prevent bad things from happening ... but other times he will let us go through them.



The prayer of "Why?" is an honest prayer. We are praying a real emotion of anger to God. In these moments we need a cathartic release, and a good way of doing that is praying our anger to God. When we are honest before God then we can begin the healing process. The prayer of "Why?" is a lack of understanding. This circumstance makes no sense. It defies all common reasoning and logic, it is unjust, and I have lost all power and control over the situation.



Adversity strengthens us. We will never grow strong if we do not go through times of struggle. . . when we trust in God, he will make us stronger, wiser, and more compassionate.



We are part of a fallen humanity. As we read the story of the fall in Genesis 3:1-7, the devil tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. He placed the forbidden tree in the Garden as a choice for them to make. God created Adam and Eve (Humanity) to be in relationship with him, but God wants that relationship to be based on a mutual love. God does not want a

relationship based on control, manipulation, or coercion any more than any of us. God doesn't want to be a controlling puppeteer. When loving someone, there is the risk that the person will not reciprocate that love. That was the loving risk that God needed to take.

The Devil gave the temptation that they would be God if they ate the fruit. This was humanity's fall from God. Humanity chose to live as one's own god, rather than to live in the loving relationship with God, the Father. The first commandment ultimately is: "Do not be God!"

The original sin of humanity is to be God. The attitude of humanity before God is one of saying, "I am god! I don't need anyone, including God to tell me what to do!" We claim to be autonomous, knowing what is right and good for us.

The second attitude is judgment. Humanity now knows what is best for the world and others, so we will try to exercise power over others. We will also be critical of others when they have shown less than perfection according to our personal standards that we would have for them. Humanity now sets itself on the judgment seat to condemn the moral ideals and actions of others, but also self-justifies through what humanity defines as being the good standard of the moral good.

The third attitude is one of contention. This attitude shows greed, dominance, and is willing to show violent force to exercise its will.

The fourth attitude is one of blame. Humanity made the choice to separate from God, but yet when something bad happens, the blame is placed on God.

Even though we messed-up, in our twisted thinking, we blame God for it. God did not eat the forbidden fruit, humanity did! This blame turns to anger. We become bitter toward God, and finally that leads to cursing God. Humanity's sinful condition views itself as perfect and God has messed-up. In actuality, sin has brought consequences, suffering, and death.

All of these attitudes are also societal. We suffer not only as individuals, but also as a society. The community suffers and asks the question "Why?" The community cries: Why war? Why racism? Why injustice? Why oppression? Why greed? Society as a whole suffers the consequences of systemic sin.

The Prayer of How?

The question of "Why", becomes a question of "How"? How does God help in times of trouble? God helps us by showing his mercy. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (Romans 9:15) God shows his mercy by sending Jesus to die on a cross for us. God loves all people, but how does he love us? "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) God's love and mercy are shown to all people through the cross of Jesus. The one side of the cross stands for injustice, pain, trouble, sin, and death; while the other side of the cross represents resurrection, forgiveness, healing and life. It is by Jesus wounds that we are healed.

In the midst of our suffering, where is God? God is on the cross, taking on the pain, suffering, and all the

things that don't make sense about our broken world. God is working through the church. When the World Trade Center was attacked on September 11, 2001, people asked where is God in the midst of this evil event? There were two steel girders that formed a cross in the midst of the debris. That became the focal point of rescuers and mourners. The cross always stands before us in the midst of life and tragedy. It is at the cross where God meets humanity. The cross stands as the truth of our fallen humanity, and the truth of God's love and sacrifice. It is out of the ashes of death, that new life comes. "This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life." (Ezekiel 37:5) Job said, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." (Job 19:26-26) God brings resurrection and new life, out of suffering and death. Jesus Christ who suffered and died on the cross is risen from the dead. We pray that the resurrection life of Jesus, we bring new life for us in the midst of tragedy.

The church is to carry the cross of Jesus. We enter into the dark valleys of life, and we bring the healing and hope of Jesus. As a church, we work to carry each other's burdens. Mark 2:1-12, is recorded the story of four men carrying their paralytic friend to Jesus. They recognized that Jesus could heal their friend. The church is a friend of people. We gather to provide resources for people in times of trouble. Many hands make for light work. So many people can carry us through the difficult times of life. God is working through the vocations of

compassionate people. Cross-bearing Christians are not concerned about God providing a life of wealth and pleasure for us, but rather having God inspire us to be self-sacrificing people who are looking to give our lives away for the sake of God and others. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25)

God has given us the stewardship of caring, healing, and binding up the broken. God brings healing and peace to our lives. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness from the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1)

The church is the loving presence of Jesus in the world, working to alleviate human suffering of war, of hunger, of greed, of injustice, of racism, of oppression, and of sickness. The church is praying, and God is empowering the church to action. The church is the body of Christ, being the hands, the feet, the eyes, the ears, and the mouth of God's loving compassion. One of the fallacies of religion is, "God will not give you more than you can handle." This is a reference to 1 Corinthians 10:13. This is Paul addressing temptation. As far as pain and suffering, people do bear more than what they can handle, and that is one reason why God has given us the church, so that we can bear one another's burdens.



It is important in times of suffering not to judge and define God, ourselves, and life in a moment or event; but rather, over the course of time. We may not see God working in the moment.



Three things that we must ascertain as we face distressful situations. We must remember that, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble." (Psalm 46:10) With this in mind we always:

- 1) *Identify the problem.*
- 2) *Understand what options we have in confronting the problem.*
- 3) *Know, when choosing an option, what resources we have in exercising the option.*

When we live for the purposes of God, God uses all the circumstances of our lives to bring forth his goodness. King David wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4) God goes with us to the deepest and darkest

valleys of our lives. It is even at these times, the light of Jesus shines.

What Does God Plan?

Even though it was not God's will and plan for humanity to fall to sin, God works his redemptive salvation in our lives. God took the most horrific historical event, the crucifixion of Jesus, and has brought forth the greatest moment in the world's history, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Humanity meant evil in crucifying Jesus, but God has used it for good. God is always bringing new life to us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) God does this because of his amazing love and grace for us. We pray that God is working in the suffering of our world to bring healing and peace.



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What is God doing through our time of suffering? He is building us up, "...suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." (Romans 5:3-4) God gives us three strengths during times of suffering. When God gives us perseverance, we can endure times of suffering. A godly attitude will help us have a right perspective on things. When we have hope, we have reason to continue in life. God builds up Christian character, and that is strength for life.

When Jesus healed the leper, he said, "Your faith has made you well." (Luke 17:19) It wasn't the healing that made him well; it was his faith that made him well. Faith in Jesus makes us complete before God. Jesus precious blood is the complete reconciliation for our sins before God. When people come to faith, it is like putting gasoline on a pilot flame. The person ignites with a passion for God. They are able to use the pains of their difficult life situations and show compassionate love toward others. I have known people with spinal cord injuries, who now minister encouragement to others who have experienced similar injuries. I have known people who have suffered deep grief, but now minister comfort to others who are grieving. I have known people who are recovering from addictions, who are now ministering to others who struggle with addictions. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for

the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" (Revelation 21:1-4) John received this vision of the church on earth, as it is in heaven. In heaven, there will be no death, no suffering, no mourning, no greed, no injustice, no racism, and no hunger. God's vision for his church on earth is a heavenly one. Just as we will dwell with God in heaven, God wants to dwell with us on this earth. The church must continue to pray for this vision to be our world's reality.



***The trials of life will always reveal
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When we pray, the Holy Spirit is
forging a character that will
withstand the tests of life.***



Turning Negatives into Positives

Negative or bad things happen in life. This is inevitable. The question is, "What do we do with it?" We can use the bad things that happen in life, and develop a bitter attitude toward God and others. Negative energy is energy, and we can use it for destructive ends. The alternative is taking this energy and using it for constructive purposes. Jesus took the negative energy of the cross to build up his church on earth.

In my personal life, I have used negative energy to fuel my marathon running or for ministry projects. It is important to take the negative energy of bad things that have happened and channel it into positive/godly purposes.

St. Peter writes, "These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7) Fire can either consume or it will refine. Peter refers to our faith as being more precious than gold. God can use those difficult times in our lives, so that our faith being tested by fire will not be consumed, but rather refined to the praise, glory and honor of God.

The trials of life will always reveal our true attitudes and character. Our whole person will be challenged. When we pray, the Holy Spirit is forging a character that will withstand the tests of life.

The prayer of lament is cathartic. Four things about a prayer of lament:

- 1) *We vent our negative emotions to God.*
- 2) *We remember God's goodness in our lives. Jesus died for us.*
- 3) *We receive the joy of God's presence in the Holy Spirit.*
- 4) *We worship God in thanksgiving and praise for all his goodness. The Lament Psalms have this form of movement.*

QUESTIONS

1. When did you experience a major trial in life?
2. What emotions did you experience with the trials?
3. How do trials make you bitter or make you stronger?
4. Explain your prayer of why?
5. What are the attitudes of original sin?
6. Explain your prayer of how?
7. What did God plan in your trial?
8. What three strengths does God give us in suffering?
9. What vision does God give to the world?
10. How can you take negative energy and use it for something positive?

Prayers of Intercession

***Intercessory prayers are
prayers of love, looking
outside of self, being
concerned for the greater
whole.***

I will hear so many people say, "I believe in the power of prayer." These are people who have dedicated their lives to God, and see God working in their prayer lives. They can give so many testimonies of how God is working daily in their prayer lives.

These people are also connected spiritually with other Christian believers who pray. They have a spiritual synergy where they are praying for each other, and together, they can testify to the power of God working through their prayers.

I was working as a hospital chaplain, when one day I went to the nurses' desk to say hello to the charge nurse. She was normally a very mild mannered woman. Before I could even say hello, she said, "Pastor Jeff, pray

for our patients!" I could hear her sad frustration as they had some patients die on her floor that day. She conveyed to me the urgent need to be praying for others, imploring God to intervene in a critical time of need.

I know a retired pastor who prays for over 700 people every day. He starts praying early in the morning, and finishes at midday. His calling is to be an intercessor of prayer for so many people. I have heard people say in their old age, "I can't do much for people anymore, other than to pray for them." Praying for them is the most important thing. In doing this we are calling upon God to be engaged with all those people we are concerned about.

Prayers of intercession are prayers for other people. These are prayers of love for the church, the community, and our neighbors. Intercessory prayers are prayers of love, looking outside of self, being concerned for the greater whole.

R. J. was a little boy whose parents were no nonsense people. They were very serious about all of their dealings, even going to church. R. J. on the other hand was a bit of a character and one day while the family was worshiping in church, R. J. started to act up. It didn't take long for his father to take him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes and started carrying him down the center isle out of church. As this was happening, R. J. pleaded with the other worshippers, "Pray for me guys, pray for me!" It is good that R. J. has a community of believers that would pray for him at this time as well as all times. As Christians, we are a community of believers that support one another as we pray for each other.

As the church, we are the body of Christ, unified in Jesus Christ. As the church, we can say with conviction, "I am they, and they are me." We have a mutual oneness in the bonding of Jesus unifying love.



***The beauty of the church is that
together we can witness and
celebrate the wonder of God working
in our lives.***



Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) Jesus is the life come down from heaven. He brings spiritual life to each one of us, just like a vine brings life to its branches. Branches are plural, meaning that we are a community of believers that are connected to Jesus as the church. Jesus gives us life to commune together. Jesus once again stresses the relationship that God has with us. He uses the word "remain", to show that we are connected to God and to one another as a community. As Jesus is in the father, so Jesus is in us, and we are in the Father. As the Holy Spirit dwells in us, God is in us. As the church, we are living branches that are healthy, forgiving, working together, strong together, and bearing spiritual

fruit together, for the kingdom of God.

God blesses us with the salvation of Jesus Christ, as we hear the Word and receive the Holy Sacraments of baptism and communion. We remain in God as we pray. Prayer is the communication that allows us to remain in God and one another in a spiritual unity.

The Power of a Praying Community

We are the body of Christ. We gather at his banqueting table to receive Holy Communion. We eat of the same bread and drink of the same cup. Together, we are bonded as one body, united to God and each other. This is the spiritual bond of God that unites us in a heavenly union. Together, we receive the salvation life of God, and we are united as God's children. We are bonded in this spiritual union in Jesus.

I will hear believers say, "I can be a Christian apart from the church." When a Christian is a "Lone Pine", he misses out on the beauty of being connected to the Christian community. Lone Christians do not share in the joy of being together, nor do they have the concern for those who gather. The Holy Spirit is working in the faith community, being the network of spiritual connectedness. There have been many times when someone will call me saying, "I was praying and God laid it upon my heart to call you, sensing that there is something wrong." Sure enough, something was wrong. That is the power of prayer, working through the Christian church. God intended for all believers to come together to be the church.

I will not go golfing by myself, because I'm afraid

the time I do is when I will hit a hole-in-one. As I go to the clubhouse to share my good news with excitement, who will believe me? I wouldn't have a witness. The beauty of the church is that together we can witness and celebrate the wonder of God working in our lives. The church together can rejoice and have faith strengthened. When Jesus arose from the dead, he appeared to many people, so many witnessed his risen presence. One time he appeared to over 500 people. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Thomas, one of Jesus disciples separated himself from the rest of the disciples. When the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas was absent. (John 20:24) He missed out in the exciting celebration the others witnessed. When Thomas rejoined the disciples, it was then he too experienced the joy and celebration of the risen Christ. (John 20:28) When we gather for worship, it is a celebration of the risen Jesus. We don't want to miss out on what God is doing in and through his church.

As we watch the night sky, we can see the stars that are permanently in their places. This would allow sailors to navigate the ocean on a clear night. Once in a while, one can see a meteor shoot across the sky. Meteors are unpredictable, but spectacular. God uses the steadfastness of his Word to be a constant for us. As we pray, God guides us in life, much like the stars with the sailors. Once in a while, we will have a supernatural God moment that is spectacular. It is a miracle that takes place in our lives. These moments are unpredictable, but special when they happen.

So often people think that God only works through

the meteor events of life. They think that God works only through the supernatural, while God has nothing to do with the natural. When something supernatural happens we give God credit, but when the ordinary happens, we give other things credit. We must remember that God is working through the natural order of things. God is working through his steadfast Word to give us, sustain us, and guide us in life.



Prayer is not a mechanism of trying to control God or the person that we are praying for, but rather, it is asking that God's will and discernment may happen to others as it happens to us.



As a community of faith, God uses the church to continue his work in this world. I have heard many Christians say, "God does miracles." They see God only working through miracles, supernatural events. God does miracles, but we must also realize that God works through his natural created order. In prayer, God activates the church and uses the stewardship of humanity to bring healing to the sick, homes for the homeless, comfort to the lonely, food for the hungry, and

relief to those devastated by natural disasters. God has blessed the church with various gifts and talents to be the working body of Christ in the world. (1 Corinthians 12:6) Just as a mechanic has a toolbox to go about his work, so God has the church to go about his. We are the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouth of Jesus body on earth. Some Christians are working on the front lines, while everyone else is praying for, encouraging them, and equipping them, to fulfill the work that God has planned for us to do.

The Apostle Peter wrote, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) God has called the church out of the darkness of death, and into his light of salvation. Jesus who was rejected by humanity has become the foundation of the church. God's people, who have been rejected by the world, have become God's very own elect.

We are called to pray for each other. Sometimes I wonder why we are to pray for each other, when God who is all knowing, knows the needs of people better than we know them. Am I to pray for John Doe down the street to alert God that he has a need, and then tell God how to fix John? I'm sure that God is very much aware of John Doe's needs and what needs to happen.

The church is a spiritual network of God's people. God works through the church. It isn't so much our alerting God to John Doe's problems, but it is God bringing us to a compassionate awareness of what is happening. God is making his church active in love. As

God is concerned about John Doe, he calls upon the church, inspires them, and empowers them to be active in ministering to John. As the church, we are continually calling upon God to provide all that we need: wisdom, love, patience, and resources as we minister to him. We pray to God, as we are partners with God in ministry.

God works through people in creation and also in salvation. God has always left a part for humanity to play in creation and life. This is the stewardship that God has given to humanity. God has blessed humanity with the seeds, soil, rain, and sunshine, but yet has given the part for the farmer to plant the seeds and harvest them. God has given to us healing, but has left the part for the physician to bind the wounds. God has given to us materials, but gives the part for the builder to construct infrastructure. God has given us wisdom, but has given the part for the teacher to instruct people.

As Christians, we share in our mutual rejoicing and suffering. When one rejoices, we all rejoice, and when one suffers we all suffer. (1 Corinthians 12:26) So it is with the church, God did not entrust his work for the angels, but rather to his people. God has blessed the church with the stewardship of his Word and Sacraments, calling followers, instructing others in the faith, and the Christian ministry in the world.

John Doe is a member of the body of Christ. We are together the body of Christ. When John hurts, we all hurt, and when he rejoices, we all rejoice. We are one with John, and he is one with us. When our right hand hurts, our whole body hurts. As a bonded community, we pray. As we pray, those bonds get stronger and stronger,

and we experience the presence of God who brings healing.

Jesus prayed for others, and he calls us to pray. How God works through our prayers is a mystery of our faith. As people are praying for others, we can see the hand of God working in their lives. I can feel the affect that prayer has on my life when people are praying for me. I can feel the Holy Spirit coming over me, changing my attitude, my mind, and also the direction of how God wants me to go. Prayer is not a mechanism of trying to control God or the person that we are praying for, but rather, it is asking that God's will and discernment may happen to others as it happens to us.

When we pray, we are asking God in his infinite love, wisdom, and mercy to use each of us and all of us to be the answer to prayers as well. We pray to God for answers to prayers, but indeed God will often prompt us to be the answer to other people's prayers as well. "Dear children, let us not love with words, or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Prayers always lead to action. A praying community recognizes its mutual love for one another. A praying community has compassion to serve the hurting. A praying community recognizes the importance of each person's contributions to the whole. A praying community recognizes our strength is in each other.

Jesus' Intercessory Prayer

When we pray for others, we are standing in the gap with them. Jesus is the one who stands in the gap between God and humanity. Sin separates us from God.

There is an abyss that we cannot go across. We cannot reach God through good works, knowledge, social status, or ethnicity. It is God who comes to us in Jesus Christ. It is through his suffering and death that this chasm has been bridged. We now have access to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1-2)

A priest is someone who stands in the gap and pleads on behalf of someone. In John 17, we hear Jesus high priestly prayer. Jesus prays for three things:

The first thing that Jesus prays for is unity. He wants his church to be one with him. The Devil wants to come and divide us, but it is God's desire to bring us together in unity.

The second thing that Jesus prays for is protection from the evil one. The Devil comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

The third thing Jesus prays for is to sanctify us in the truth. Sanctification is to be made holy. God is holy and he makes us holy. "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 2:16) Holy means, to be consecrated in his blood, set apart for his purposes.

As Jesus prayed this prayer on behalf of the believers, so we pray for the believers to be one in the Holy Spirit. We ask God to protect us from the Devil's temptations to destroy our lives. We ask God to fill our lives with the Holy Spirit, so that we may grow in our faith

in God. As we read in 1 Peter 2:5, we are to be the “holy priesthood” of believers, praying for each other.

I once ran a race that was 16.2 miles long. The race had a slogan that was a math equation: $10 + 10 = 16.2$ miles. How is that possible? If you add ten English miles and 10 kilometers (6.2 miles), it adds up to be 16.2 miles. Sometimes in life, we may not always understand God’s work and plan. This is why we live by faith. We trust in God who knows the whole picture of life, from beginning to end. We don’t always know why we are to pray for others, and we may even try to outthink God; but we are called in the mystery of faith to pray for others.



When we pray, we are asking God in his infinite love, wisdom, and mercy to use each of us and all of us to be the answer to prayers as well.



Paul's Seven Reasons for Intercessory Prayer

As we read in Colossians 1:9-12, Paul is praying for the believers. He prays for a number of things, and these should be the petitions that we pray on behalf of others.

1. *We pray that God's will be done.* That is one of the keys of prayer. We don't pray that "My will be done", but rather we pray that "God's will be done". We are not asking God to fit into our reasoning, but rather we pray that we can always fit into God's purposes and plans.

2. *We pray that God will bless the believers with spiritual gifts.* As we live in God's plan as the community of believers, we pray that God will bless us with the spiritual gifts to serve in his church. We pray for the Holy Spirit to fill our lives, and that God will give us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Praying that God's will be done, and for the Holy Spirit to enter our hearts is key to being the church, the community of believers.

3. *We pray that God will grant us the wisdom to lead us into the right resources to help the church.* In Matthew 9:1-2, we hear of people carrying their paralytic friend to Jesus. As I mentioned above concerning the stewardship of creation and salvation, God is working through people to provide help in need.

4. *We pray that God will be glorified in our lives.* As Jesus healed a blind man in John 9, there was a

debate about whose sins brought blindness to this man, he or his parents? Jesus said, "Neither, but rather that God maybe glorified in the healing." Jesus said, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8) We pray that we bring honor to God in all that we do in our lives.

5. *We pray that God will send labors into the world's vineyard to bear fruit.* Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:37-38) The fruit that Christians produce are: A) Virtues- such as, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) B) Good works (Colossians 1:10) and C) Bringing people to salvation. (Hebrews 13:15)

6. *We pray that God will grant each believer strength and patience in times of suffering.* Jesus said, "Those who endure to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22) Suffering comes to all people, and it is a test of our faith. As Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:7, "These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." Fire can either consume or it can refine. In times of suffering, God can use this as a refiner's fire to purify and strengthen the believer's faith that is more precious than gold.

7. *We pray for compassion.* Jesus shows compassion for the hurting. It is out of the cross that Jesus poured out his blood for us. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Some of the most compassionate people are those who have suffered the most. It is from Jesus wounds that we are healed. (1 Peter 2:24) God took the most tragic event in the history of the world, Jesus crucifixion, and has turned it into the salvation for humanity. It is out of our wounds, that we can show compassion and healing for others.

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Hebrew 13:20-21)

A community of believers that prays together stays together. A church that prays for each other is a loving church. The Holy Spirit is moving through the prayers of the people, strengthening and bonding people through Jesus love. "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." (1 Corinthians 13:6)

I was visiting with a married couple who had gone through major problems. The problems almost brought a divorce. What saved their marriage was prayer. They started praying for each other, and with each other. Their whole attitude changed. Their fighting words were changed to praying words. Praying to God turned their marriage around completely. Instead of cursing, they

were now praising God. They said, "Here are three key points: 1. Have Jesus as your Lord and Savior. 2. Be into God's Word, because the Bible gives answers to all problems, if you are willing to study and search. 3. Spend time in prayer." This is good advice for couples, but they pertain to any relationships that we may have. Those who pray together, stay together.

St. James writes, "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The power of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:13-16)

Prayers of intercession are to bring glory to God, as we see God doing his wonderful works in the lives of other people.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to be connected to a community of faith?
2. Who is the vine, and who are the branches?
3. What does Jesus want us to produce?
4. Why is it important to pray for each other?

5. What is the mystery of intercessory prayer?
6. How does God activate the church through prayer?
7. What three things did Jesus pray for in his High Priestly Prayer?
8. What are the seven things Paul encourages the church to pray for?
9. What is the strength of a righteous person's prayer?
10. Who are you praying for?