



A COMMUNITY OF PRAYER

Lessons 5 to 12

Church as a Community of Prayer 5

Take Time to Contemplate on God and His Word

*“Be still and know that I am God.”
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46: 10).*

Prayer draws us close to God so that we can know Him more and enjoy being in His presence. Time in His holy presence should comfort, refresh, revitalize and strengthen us. Our Lord Himself promised in Matt 11: 28; “Come to Me, all who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

However, for many of us our prayer times are far from restful because we spend our time lamenting about our problems or complaining about those who disappoint or hurt us. We often emerge from our prayer times feeling more miserable or stressed.

How we wish our prayer experience can be like that of the psalmist who cried out in Psalm 84: 1-2; “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.”

The psalmist declared that those who dwell in God’s house and whose hearts long to be with God would find refuge and comfort. He said even the sparrows find a home and the swallows build their nests at God’s altar (Psalm 84: 3). In the bible, the sparrow symbolizes something of little value; one can buy sparrows for a few cents in the market while the swallow is a symbol of restlessness, always flying here and there from dawn to sunset. For those who feel worthless, the psalmist assured them that they would feel loved in God’s presence. Though they might be useless and worthless to the world, to God they are precious. And for those who are anxious and restless, like the swallows, they would find peace and rest.

What is the secret of the psalmist’s joy and confidence? Simply, his attention was focused solely on God and not on himself or his needs. He praised God that He is the living God, the Lord of Hosts, “my King and my God” (Psalm 84:3b).

In prayer our focus should be on God and His word. Spend time to contemplate, that is, to think deeply and at length, about who is this God we trust. Look up at the heavens and the stars and ask; "Is anything impossible to the One who created the heavens and the earth?" Prayer that refreshes us starts and ends with contemplation; reflecting on God's steadfast love, power and sovereignty.

Dr. James Houston in *The Transforming Power of Prayer* believed that contemplative prayer draws us close to God and results in renewed faith and a greater awareness of His love and power. Houston said; "To walk the contemplative road is to recognize that Christ alone can satisfy our longings; everything else is empty in comparison."

Contemplative prayer is to draw close to God because we want to have a more intimate experience of Him; it is not to come to Him just to get our problems solved. Houston reiterated that the contemplative experience of God will open us to a desire for Him and introduces us to new concepts about who He is. Those who know God in such deep ways will willingly give up whatever stands in the way of that relationship and readily make every change within ourselves to keep this oneness with our heavenly Father.

In the last 31 years I had fought 2 different types of cancer three times. Contemplating on what the bible said about God and His promises in my prayer times gave me the strength to rise above my health problems. I also spent much time contemplating on the Cross; it assures me of God's amazing love and power.

God's word reminds me that our Lord will not cast anyone aside, no matter how worthless he / she may be; "a bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not quench..." (Matt 12: 20). Psalm 23: 4 assures me that I am never alone and that God is with me in my dark moments; "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." Isaiah 40 is another of my favorite passages; it gives me hope for it describes how great and mighty our Lord is and before Him my cancers are like pimples, there is nothing He cannot do.

The more time we spend contemplating on God and His word, the more we are awed by His power and love. The person who knows God intimately and experiences His love deeply stands on solid ground. Nothing, no storm, nor discouragement, nor life's many stresses can shake him / her. The experience of being loved and treasured by the Almighty will bring healing to his / her wounded soul and give him / her the strength to face life's many battles.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 84

Contemplation Quietens our Hearts

1. What did the psalmist say about dwelling in God's presence (1-3, 10) and who are the blessed (4-5, 12)? Share what it is like for you to be in God's presence or how your prayer times have impacted your life and faith.
2. God is everything to the psalmist; his focus was on who God is. How did the psalmist describe God and address Him? How would you describe God and which of His attributes mean the most to you?
3. It is often difficult to be still before the Lord because of external and inner distractions. Share what you do to quieten your heart and mind and not be disturbed in your prayer times. Which bible verse or passage has encouraged and comforted you in your time of contemplation?
4. Why is contemplative prayer important?
5. End with 5-10 minute of silence for each to contemplate on Psalm 84. Before closing in prayer, the group may want to sing or listen to the song "Be Still".

Be Still

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, The Holy One, is here.
Come bow before Him now, with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground.
Be still for the presence of the Lord, The Holy One, is here.

Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.
He burns with holy fire, with splendor He is crowned.
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!
Be still for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him, in faith, receive from Him.
Be still for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

Music & words: David J. Evans

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 6

Take Time to Adore God for Who He Is

“It is not the body's posture, but the heart's attitude that counts when we pray.”
– Billy Graham

Prayer is to approach God with a heart of praise and adoration. To be able to come into the presence of God Most High anytime and anywhere is a great privilege which we should not take lightly. We should jealously guard our ‘one-to-one’ time with our heavenly Father and ensure that nothing distracts us so that we may know Him more & adore Him.

Someone said the prayer of adoration is to come before God and set our gaze solely on Him. We ask for nothing but to know Him. We seek nothing but to praise Him. We focus on nothing but His glory, His holiness and love.

Adoration is to be awed by God’s glorious majesty and to love God for Himself. We cannot adore Him if we hardly know anything about Him. We also cannot adore our God except when our minds are free from distraction and our hearts are still to contemplate on who He is.

Unfortunately, in our busy and noisy life numerous things, people and activities fight for our time and attention. Many obstacles also stand in our way of knowing and adoring the awesome God.

Obstacles to Adoration

One key obstruction to adoration of God is pride. We see what we have as the result of our efforts & our capability instead of God’s grace and blessing on our lives. We are blind to His bountiful love and mighty acts. We need to ask ourselves honestly who do we truly adore: God or Me? For us to see God’s glory, He must increase and we must decrease.

C.S. Lewis also identified other things that can keep us from adoration of God. One key obstacle is inattention. We are so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that we miss seeing the loving hand of God in our lives. Lewis said that it is not just the rat race of success and acquiring things that traps us but the legitimate demands of family, school, work and even church ministries that take our attention away from God. We cannot adore God when our attention is not on Him but on so many other things and people.

Lewis also listed greed as another obstacle to adoration of God. Instead of thanking God for His blessings we are never satisfied and we want more and more. Our addiction for more destroys our ability to appreciate God's blessings and to adore His goodness. Lewis suggested that lingering over a rose or a verse of Scripture – smelling, tasting, chewing, drinking it all in – that will lead to adoration. Unfortunately, instead of enjoying the blessings we already have, we demand more blessings – whether we enjoy them or not.

A prayerful heart is a quiet heart, a heart that seeks after God, a heart that knows Him and adores Him. Contemplation and adoration is a discipline; an act of the will. We can begin by taking our eyes off the mobile to look and to enjoy God's creation; the heavens, the stars, the seas, the trees, the flowers, the butterfly and all that God has created. For some of us, we may also need to remove our earphones so that we can hear the oceans, the birds, the animals, and the still small voice of God. To have a heart of adoration we need to be free of distractions and to give our full attention to God.

Our prayers should always be times of praise and adoration. We can use a psalm, a hymn or a song of adoration to praise God for who He is. Praise Him also for the things He has done in our lives and His mercies shown to us.

All praise and adoration should be given to our great and sovereign Lord. Our spirits are lifted up when we see God in His glory, when we hear His voice and remember what He has done for unworthy sinners, like you and me. Pray that the Holy Spirit will open not only our eyes but our hearts to see His glory and to know His wondrous love.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 145

God Deserves All Our Praise and Adoration

1. Praise flows naturally out of a heart of love and adoration; we praise who and what we adore. What are some reasons why many believers fail to adore God as much as they should? What is your major obstacle to having a heart of adoration?

2. In Psalm 145 what did David say he would do (vv. 1-6, 21)? Why is God worthy of all our praise and adoration?

Psalm 145: 3 – 7

Psalm 145: 8 – 9; 13b – 20

Psalm 145: 11 – 13

3. What attributes of God do you adore? What are some of His mighty deeds and acts of love you can see in your life?
4. Why is it important to have a heart of praise and adoration? How will it change who we are and our perspectives of life and people?
5. Close this session with a time of praise and adoration of who God is and what He has done. You / the group may want to set aside time to go for a personal or group silent retreat to spend unhurried time with God and to enjoy His creation and His presence.

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Church as a Community of Prayer 7

Confession from the Heart is the Cornerstone of Prayer

“Admission of wrongdoing is not an admission of weakness, but a sign of strength.”

Confession is Essential

When we do what is wrong, rarely do we turn to God immediately in repentance. It is common to blame others for our misdeeds. We blame the world, blame the other party, blame our parents or blame the devil for making us do what we ought not to do. We are likely also to defend or justify our sinful behavior, claiming that biblical mandates are irrelevant or out of date in the 21st century.

The problem with sin is it grows, it is like a cancerous cell that soon grows into a tumor and eventually destroys our spiritual health and faith. Sin also separates us from God. When we sin, the most difficult place to be in is God’s presence. Sin, not dealt with, will soon estrange us from God.

The prayer of confession, one that is sincere & coming from the heart, forces us to stop justifying our wrongs and admit to our failings. Confession fuels repentance and opens the dialogue between God and us about our wrongdoing. Through confession we experience God’s grace, realizing that our Father knows what we have done, how we’ve failed, but will forgive us and restore us again to oneness with Him.

Frederick Buechner said, “To confess your sins to God, is not to tell Him anything He doesn’t already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you and God. When you confess them, your confession becomes the bridge to God.”

Confession requires us to put away pride and be humble to face up to our wrongdoings and to ask God for His mercy. Admitting that we have sinned and asking for God’s grace is not easy but it reestablishes our relationship with God and reminds us of His boundless love.

Dudley Delffs in *The Prayer-Centered Life* said that the importance of confession in prayer cannot be underestimated. Confession is the cornerstone of communication with God. It is where we reestablish the connection we so desperately long for. After confession there's a restored confidence and renewed passion to praise and adore Him.

Delffs emphasized that confession must be a conscious part of our prayer life. We need to confess our sins and renew our sense of God's grace daily. The prayer of confession is not something to be postponed; it should be a daily exercise. It is also the first step to repentance.

The Effect of Confession

There's a cause-effect relationship between confession and repentance. *Confess* means 'to admit, to tell.' *Repent* means 'to turn, to change course.' True confession must include a willingness to turn from our wrongdoings.

True confession comes from a heart that wants to be right with God. We no longer want to fulfill our selfish impulses but to live to please our Father. Confession and repentance are two sides of the same coin.

Delffs said that repentance is a change of mind leading to a change in direction. It is like driving down a one-way street and suddenly you notice that all the traffic is heading toward you. You're faced with a choice: You can continue to proceed in the wrong direction and suffer the consequences or you can acknowledge your mistake, make a U-turn, and start heading in the right direction.

Acknowledging that you are going in the wrong direction is not good enough. You must want to make a U-turn and begin to travel in the right direction. The prayer of true confession must lead to repentance; a changing of ways, from the wide and easy way that leads to destruction to the narrow way that leads to eternal life (Matt 7: 13-14).

Our pride often keeps us from confessing and from changing our behavior. But unless we are ready to recognize our sins, and confess them and to turn away, our sins will forever separate us from God. They will enslave us and soon stifle whatever spiritual life there is in us.

Although God's grace is the *basis* for salvation, repentance is the *channel* through which God's grace is received. Repentance is the prerequisite for receiving God's forgiveness while the prayer of Confession is the first step to repentance.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 51

Confession is the Cornerstone of Our Communication with God

1. Why is confession essential? What will God do when we confess (1 John 1: 8-9)?
2. Sin is putting self before God and before others. What are some examples of sin mentioned in the following? Which of these are you guilty of?

Prov. 6: 16-19

Prov. 10: 19

Prov. 14: 21

Prov. 21: 4

Matt 5: 21-22

Mark 7: 21-23

James 4: 17

Jude 1: 14b-16

3. What did David ask God to do about his sin in Psalm 51? (Count and name the verbs).
4. David's prayer of confession (Psalm 51) reflects his humility and intimate relationship with God. He knows who God is. David:
 - Knows God to be _____ (1).
God will not _____ (17).
 - Appeals to God to _____ (10)
and to _____ (12).

He also appeals to Him not to _____
_____ (11).

5. Frederick Buechner says that sins are “the abyss between you and God” while “confession is the bridge to God.” Share a time when you did something that you should not have done. How did this affect your relationship with God and how did you come back to God?
6. End the session with a time of reflection and confession. For those in a group be quiet for 5 minutes. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your hearts and show you the areas in your life that are not right with God. You may want to quietly confess to God in your heart and ask Him to free you from the bondage to this sin. End the time by reading Psalm 51 and pray the Prayer of Confession together.

Prayer of Confession

*Here in the presence of Almighty God, I kneel in silence,
And with penitent and obedient heart confess my sins,
So that I may obtain forgiveness by your infinite goodness and mercy.*

*Most merciful God,
I confess that I have sinned against you
In thought, word and deed,
By what I have done,
And by what I have left undone.
I have not loved you with my whole heart;
I have not loved my neighbors as myself.
I am truly sorry and I humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
Have mercy on me and forgive me;
That I may delight in your will,
And walk in your ways,
To the glory of your Name. Amen.
(Book of Common Prayer)*

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 8

The Prayer of Thanksgiving Comes from a Heart that Trusts

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

(1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Our daily prayers should be times of thanksgiving for what God has done and for who He is. Paul exhorted us to have a thankful heart in all situations. This means we are to give thanks to God in good times as well as in bad times. *All* circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable, are to be occasions for thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is not a natural virtue, especially for those who are never satisfied and who want more and more. But as God’s children we need to cultivate the virtues of being contented and appreciative of what we have.

In his gospel, Luke recorded the story of ten lepers who were healed by Christ (Luke. 17: 11-19). All ten cried out to be healed, all ten actually experienced Christ’s healing powers, but only *one* came back to Jesus to thank Him. How prone we are to be like the other nine, quick to ask for God’s help but forgetful to give Him thanks.

However, there are times when truly it is difficult for us to give thanks. How can we have a thankful heart when we are unfairly treated? What is there to thank God if someone we love is diagnosed with terminal illness or when we discover our spouse has been unfaithful?

Wang Ming Dao, the Chinese Protestant pastor and evangelist imprisoned for his faith from 1955-1980, shared in his devotional book “Day by Day” that; “The times in our lives that are marked by adversity provide the opportunities for us believers to learn to trust in God. Therefore, we should refuse to be despondent. On the contrary, we should rejoice and be glad, giving thanks for God’s grace at a time of adversity as much as at any other time.”

Jerry Bridges in his book *Trusting God* emphasized that for those who seek to please and honor God, giving thanks in all circumstances is not an option. It is a virtue expected of us.

To be able to give thanks to God in all circumstances requires us to have resolute faith; that is, to trust in His sovereignty and faithfulness, regardless of how we feel. It requires us to have an in spite of faith; to believe in God's power, wisdom and love in spite of our circumstances. We give thanks because we believe God is at work in all situations for our good, though we may not understand what good can possibly come out of the adversity.

To give thanks to God in all circumstances does not mean we thank Him for the misfortune in our lives. It is to thank Him for the good that He will bring out of that difficult situation through His sovereign power and love.

In the last 31 years I had to deal with unending health problems caused by the cancers and the side effects of the treatment. The treatment for one of the cancers had resulted in partial loss of vision, loss of hearing, loss of ability to swallow among other things. I am also put on medication for life, without which the body will either drift into a coma or will go into shock and I will find myself in heaven within 24 hours. Honestly, I cannot thank God for the cancers nor the list of health challenges I have to cope with daily. But I thank Him for being with me all these years, for giving me strength and peace, and for teaching me how to rise above my problems. He has also used the trials to shape me and to heal me of soul wounds. Most of all, God has taught me what it means to trust and to love Him and to live for eternity.

During these difficult years, God reminds me many times to have a heart of thanksgiving, to give thanks for each new day and to be thankful for what I have and what I can still do. Most of all, I am thankful to God for His immeasurable love. Indeed; "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness." (Lam 3: 22-23)

A thankful heart is a heart that trusts God and the result of thanksgiving is peace and joy. When our prayers are times of thanksgiving, we come away feeling at peace and rejoicing in spite of our problems. Someone said, "Worry is the darkroom in which negatives can develop" while "Thanksgiving is the soil for peace and joy to grow." To have a heart of peace and joy, we need to cultivate the habit of thanking God daily for the many blessings He has showered on us. Most of all, we need to thank God for who He is and for loving unworthy sinners like us.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 118

God Deserves all our Praise and Thanksgiving

1. Most of us are not in the habit of thanking people for what they do, e.g. our loved ones, the maid, the pastor, the church staff, those who helped in the various church ministries, etc. What are some reasons why we don't see the need to thank them for their efforts? Do you give thanks to God daily? If not, why?
2. Psalm 118 starts and ends with a call to God's people to give thanks to God. How did the Psalmist extol God? For what was he thankful?

vv. 1-4

vv. 5-7

vv. 8-9

vv. 13-14

vv. 27-28

3. By what power/authority did the Psalmist overcome his enemies and problems (vv. 10-12; 15-16)? How would you describe the Psalmist's relationship with God, especially in vv. 19-29? Share a time when God had also delivered you from a difficult or hopeless situation.
4. Why is it important to have a heart of thanksgiving? We often lament / complain about things that we don't have or can't do rather than to give thanks to God for the things we have and can still do. Share with the group 5 things / people you want to thank God for.
5. End with a time of thanksgiving prayer; each person to give thanks to God for who He is and what He has done. End the session by either singing or listening to the beautiful song "Count Your Blessings".

Count Your Blessings

*When upon life's billow you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

*Count your blessings
Name them one by one
Count your blessings
See what God hath done
Count your blessings
Name them one by one
Count your many blessings
See what God hath done.*

*Are you burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, every doubt will fly,
And you will keep singing as the days go by.*

*So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be disheartened, God is over all.
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.*

(Edwin O. Excell & Johnson Oatman, Jr.)

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 9

Prayer Strengthens Our Faith in God & His Promises

“To live without prayer is ultimately to disbelieve in God and to lose the most important human values, such as faith, hope and love.” – Dr James Houston

The bible is full of promises of God’s blessings of peace, love, joy, care & protection, especially for those who belonged to Him. However, many of us struggle with doubt and unbelief wondering, “Are these promises for me?” We ask in our hearts, “Does God care? Can He help me? If God loves me why doesn’t He answer my prayer?”

The power to believe a promise depends on our trust in the one who makes the promise. Faith in God and faith in His promises are closely connected. For us to believe God’s promises we need to first trust Him. If we don’t trust Him, how can we trust what He has promised? And we can only trust God if we know Him and have an intimate relationship with Him.

Prayer, therefore, is the lifeline of our faith. Just as we die when we stop breathing; our spiritual life also dies when we stop praying. Without prayer there is no relationship with God, so what faith do we have then? The type of relationship and faith we have in God depends on how often we pray, how we pray and what we pray about.

Unfortunately, many of God’s children see prayer as the means of extracting good gifts from heaven. We have a ‘bless me and give me’ spirituality and our focus is on the gifts rather than on the Giver. When we do not get what we ask for, we give up on God and some even walk out of their faith.

Authentic faith is to love God for Himself and to focus solely on Him other than on the things promised or the things we want. Look to God, hold on to Him, and let Him take possession of our heart and life. Whoever knows and trusts God finds it easy to trust that He will give us what He has promised.

Andrew Murray in *“With Christ in the School of Prayer”* said a heart devoted to God will pray in faith, believing that the heavenly Father will not withhold anything good from him. Faith in God fosters faith in His promises, including the promise of an answer to prayer. Andrew Murray emphasized that faith needs a life of prayer for it to grow to its fullest. There can be no true prayer without faith; some measure of faith must precede prayer. And yet prayer is also the way to more faith; we can’t grow in faith except through much prayer.

It is in prayer, in the presence of the living God that faith increases. It is in the adoring worship of God – the waiting on Him and for Him to reveal Himself – that the capacity to know and trust God will be developed.

Prayers should not be rushed; we need to give ourselves time to contemplate, to adore, to give Him thanks and praise, to listen to His voice and to experience His loving presence. Prayer that seeks to know God and to draw close to Him will deepen our faith in Him and His promises. It is in prayer, in direct, honest, humble, trusting communication with God, that faith will become strong in us. Men and women of strong faith are always men and women of much prayer.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Luke 11: 5 – 13

To Pray in Faith is to have Total Trust in God

1. How does prayer strengthen our faith and what is the connection between faith in God and faith in His promises? When you pray do you focus more on the Giver or the gifts? If the way we pray indicate the type of faith we have, what does your prayer life tell you about the depth and condition of your faith?
2. All our prayers are heard by God but not all prayers are answered. What may be some possible reasons why prayers are not answered?
3. What do the following teach us about how we should & should not pray?

John 15: 7

John 16: 23-24

Jas 4: 2-3

1 John 5: 14-15

4. In Jesus' parable in Luke 11: 5-13, why did the person in need go to the friend at midnight? Why did the friend eventually grant the person's request (11: 5-8)? What did Jesus encourage His disciples to do when praying (9-10)?
5. How is God similar and at the same time different from our earthly fathers? What does He give to those who seek Him (11: 13)? How should we approach God?
6. Pray that every believer in the church will have a fresh encounter with the Lord, be faithful in prayer and to trust the Lord and His promises. Pray that they will be people of faith who will pray in faith.

Prayer of an Unknown Soldier

*I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked God for health, that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among men, most richly blessed.*

"Prayer of an Unknown Soldier," quoted in Austin Pryor, "Trusting God to Answer Our Prayers." Crosswalk.com.

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 10

Intercession: Our High Calling & Responsibility

“An intercessor is one who is in such vital contact with God and with his fellowmen that he is like a live wire closing the gap between the saving power of God and the sinful men who have been cut off from that power.” - Hannah Hurnard

A community of prayer is a community of believers who eagerly seek to be in God’s presence so that they may know Him intimately and hear what is on His heart. What do you think would be the primary concern on God’s heart other than the faithfulness of His people? The salvation of those who are still lost!

Research and surveys have shown that in the last 100 years only 1/3 of the world’s population professed to be Christians. Included in this group were those who claimed to be baptized believers but who did not see the need to belong to a church and those who might be in church but who didn’t even believe in the resurrection of Christ.

Every year billions or 2/3 of the world’s population perish eternally. Among them are our neighbors, our friends and our loved ones. This must have grieved God’s heart and our hearts also. So, what can we do that unbelievers may know the saving grace of our Lord? We can start by praying for them!

In the expansion of God’s Kingdom nothing is more important than intercessory prayer. Andrew Murray, author of several books on Prayer, said; “God rules the world and His Church through the prayers of His people. That God should have made the expansion of His Kingdom to such a large extent dependent on the faithfulness of His people in prayer is a stupendous mystery and yet an absolute certainty. God calls for intercessors; in His grace He has made His work dependent on them. He waits for them.”

Murray believed that the lack of intercession for the unsaved is one of the chief reasons why people are not coming to faith in Christ. Our outreach events and activities though important are powerless without prayer; without the power of God. Only God’s Spirit can break down the walls of resistance in unbelieving hearts and bring life to those who are spiritually dead.

So, who are to intercede?

Intercession is not the responsibility of a few chosen 'prayer warriors' but every believer's responsibility. One of the most challenging teachings in the New Testament is the priesthood of all believers. Every believer is called by God to be a priest (1 Peter 2: 5, 9), to come before Him on behalf of others and to bring before Him their needs; for healing, for comfort, for growing in maturity, for forgiveness, for eternal life, etc.

Intercession is not an option; it is a responsibility, a high calling and a privilege for all who belong to Christ. Every believer is called to join Christ to intercede for the world and for the Church.

The intercessor holds an important place in God's Kingdom work. He / she hears what is on God's heart, shares His concern and prays down His power to give sight to those who are spiritually blind and to set free those in bondage (Luke 4: 18).

Intercessory prayer is a call to God for help, knowing that what is impossible with man is possible with God. And every believer regardless of age, spiritual maturity or intellectual level can cry out to God for help. He hears all prayers!

God taught me the power of prayer when I was a young believer. My husband was a second-generation Christian and in the first 30 years of his life, he was a Christian in name but not in his heart. Though he faithfully attended church every Sunday, the preaching, the reading of Scriptures, the worship and the prayers had no impact on His life. He was baptized as an infant and confirmed in his teens but he knew nothing about God and had no relationship with Him. He never read the bible; didn't even own one. He was more secular than biblical in mindset and values. Work was number one in his life and took up all his time. A friend once asked my husband whether he knew where he would be if he were to die then. My husband's honest response was; "Don't know."

I was deeply concerned for his lack of spiritual life and faith and decided to pray for him daily. I remember literally going on my knees every day to pray that he would have an encounter with Jesus. I prayed that God would be number 1 in my husband's heart and that he would live his life for God alone. I not only prayed for his conversion, I released him to God asking Him to help my husband to become the kind of man God wanted him to be.

Praise the Lord, one Sunday during the worship service, the guest speaker who was an evangelist shared a simple gospel message and gave an altar call. I was surprised when my husband went up to invite Jesus into his heart. He was born-again and that encounter with Jesus was the beginning of a journey of

transformation that finally led to his leaving his job to serve God full-time 20 years later.

Our Lord is calling each one of us to join Him in intercession. Andrew Murray said; "Time spent in prayer will yield more than that given to work. Prayer alone gives work its worth and its success. Prayer opens the way for God Himself to do His work in us and through us. Let our chief work as God's messengers be intercession; in it we secure the presence and power of God to go with us." Amen.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: 1 Timothy 2: 1-8

Joining the Lord in Prayer

1. Why is intercession important and who are called to be intercessors? Who do you normally pray for and what do we need to guard against when interceding for others publicly, e.g. in the cell group?
2. What did Paul urge Timothy to do (1)? Who especially are we to pray for and why is it important to pray for them (2)? What are some of the things we can pray for this group of people?
3. What did Paul say is the primary concern on God's heart (4-6)? God's heart must be very grieved seeing that 2/3 of the world's population perished eternally in the last century. What should the church do to ensure that more will come to faith?
4. Think of 3 people in your immediate circle of contacts who have yet to believe in Jesus. What is stopping them from knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord? How would you pray for them that they may come to faith?

Name _____

What is stopping him/her? _____
How would you pray? _____

Name _____
What is stopping him/her? _____
How would you pray? _____

Name _____
What is stopping him/her? _____
How would you pray? _____

5. End the session with a time of intercession for:
- World leaders especially those in China, North Korea and United States.
 - Our government and those in institutions of learning which form the mind and character of the next generation.
 - Those in leadership in the Diocese; the Bishop, clergy, church staff and lay leaders.
 - Pray for the 'Celebration of Hope' evangelistic event in 2019 that God's Name will be lifted high in this nation. Pray that every believer will be zealous in bringing the gospel to all people, all nations and to the ends of the world.

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 11

Growing in Grace and Selflessness through Intercession

“Jesus prayed for His enemies and we do not even pray for our friends.”

– Johann Arndt

There Jesus hangs on the Cross – silent. His pallid lips begin to move. – Is He crying for pity? No. What then? Is He pronouncing punishment on His enemies; those who put Him on the cross? No. He is praying; praying for His enemies – *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* (Lk. 23: 34)

This first of the seven sayings of our Lord on the Cross presents Him in the attitude of prayer. How significant! How instructive! His public ministry had opened with prayer (Lk. 3: 21), and here we see it closing in prayer. Surely, He has left us an example! No longer can His hands minister to the sick, for they are nailed to the Cross. No longer can His feet carry Him on works of mercy, for they are fastened to the Cross. No longer can He engage in teaching the disciples for all have fled. What then can He do now? Jesus Prays! What a lesson for us!

Perhaps these lines may be read by those who are old or sick and no longer able to work actively in the Lord’s vineyard. Possibly in days gone by, you were a teacher, you were a leader, a Sunday-school teacher, but now you are bed-ridden. So, what can you do? Pray! Perhaps you will accomplish more by praying than by all your past active service. If you are tempted to disparage such a ministry remember your Savior. Jesus prayed, prayed for others, prayed for sinners, prayed for His enemies, even in His last hours.

There are many things Jesus could have done to those who put Him on the Cross. He could have uttered curses on them. He could have let loose the thunderbolts of righteous wrath and kill them. He could have caused the earth to open and swallow them up into the Pit. But no. Though subjected to unspeakable shame, though suffering excruciating pain, though despised, rejected, hated, nevertheless, Jesus cries, *“Father, forgive them.”* This is the triumph of redeeming love!

In praying for His enemies not only did Christ set before us a perfect example of how we should treat those who wrong and hate us, but He also taught us never to regard anyone as beyond the reach of prayer. If Christ prayed for His murderers then surely, we can pray now for our enemies, the people whom we hate the most.

Does it seem a waste of time for you to continue praying for that man, that woman, that wayward child of yours? Does their case seem to become more hopeless every day? Does it look as though they had gotten beyond the reach of Divine mercy? Perhaps that person you have prayed for so long has been ensnared by the devil; or he may now be a blatant infidel, in a word, an open enemy of Christ. Remember the Cross; Christ prayed for His enemies. Learn then not to look on anyone as beyond the reach of prayer.

Since that prayer on the Cross, our Lord has been interceding for those who are blinded by sin that they may know God's grace and forgiveness. Christ has prayed for you and me long before we believed in Him. Let us learn from His example. Let us too make intercession for our enemies. Let us intercede for those who remain alienated from God. Pray in faith for the salvation of lost sinners.

(The above is adapted from *The Seven Sayings of the Savior on the Cross* by Arthur Pink.)

Postscript

Intercession is an expression of grace and selflessness. It is grace that prompts us to stand before God on behalf of others and to shift our focus from our own needs to the needs of others. As we petition God regarding the needs of others, we learn what it means to be selfless and compassionate. In intercession we learn to carry each other's burden and be other-centered rather than self-focused.

Let's pray not only for those we love and like, pray also for those we dislike or even hate. Like our Lord, pray for our enemies; don't write anybody off. Release them to the Lord and pray that they may know God's grace and forgiveness.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Luke 23: 13-25; 32-38 & Deut. 9: 18-20; 25-29

Expressing Tough Love Through Intercession

1. What were some of the pain and injustices Jesus had suffered? What does Jesus' first saying on the Cross teach you about intercession?

2. Is there 'an enemy' you need to intercede for? How / what would you pray for him / her? (The questions here are for personal reflection and prayer, not for sharing at the cell group. If you need to talk to someone about the wrong done to you, speak privately to a church staff / pastor or your cell leader.)
3. Like Jesus who interceded for the unfaithful Jews and religious leaders on the Cross, other men of God had also come before God to ask for mercy and forgiveness on behalf of His people, e.g. Moses.
 - What was Israel's sin and what did God want to do?
 - What did Moses do when God wanted to punish Israel (Deut. 9: 18-20; 25-29)?
 - What type of Christian behavior or Church's practice disappoint you the most and how should you pray for the people involved?
4. Intercession is an expression of tough love and a means to learn grace and selflessness. We should pray for people we don't know, people we don't like or even detest. What would you pray for the following (choose three)?
 - The school bully or the wayward youth.
 - The boss who to you is the 'devil in disguise'.
 - The unfaithful spouse.
 - The church leader who disappoints you by his conduct.
 - The terrorists who burned churches and beheaded Christians.
5. We love because God first loves us. End the time to pray for yourself that God will fill your heart with His love, that the Spirit will give you grace to love others, even the most unlovable.

A Prayer of Surrender

LORD!

*Make me an instrument of thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
Seek to be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

NOTES

Church as a Community of Prayer 12

Communal Prayer: The Church on Her Knees

“The church that is not jealously protected by mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspected corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray.”

- A. W. Tozer

Jesus, referring to Isaiah’s prophecy, declared, “My house shall be a house of prayer” (Isa 56: 7; Luke 19: 46). I would love to see our churches become houses of prayer. I know you would, too. All too often, however, they are places for everything and anything except prayer. I say this with sorrow, for I believe it saddens the heart of God. True, we need to have our programs and activities and our committee meetings and our self-help groups and our worship services, but if the fire is not hot at the center, these things are only ashes in hands.

A student of mine, Jung-Oh Suh – a Korean pastor on a study sabbatical – learned of my research on prayer and brought me a newspaper article that describes the story of the Myong-Song Presbyterian Church, in the south-eastern part of Seoul. The Korean churches are well-known for their early morning prayer meetings, but even so this story is unusual.

This is a group that began about ten years ago with forty people, and today twelve thousand gather each morning for three prayer meetings – at 4am, 5am, & 6am. Jung-Oh explained to me that they must shut the doors at 4am to begin the first service, and so if people arrive a little late, they must wait until the 5am meeting. Then he added, “This is a problem in my country because it gets cold in the winter! So, everyone brings a little pot of tea or coffee to keep warm while they wait for the next prayer service.” The scene of people queuing to go into the churches to pray is typical of Korean corporate, intercessory prayer meetings.

There are indications that in the 21st Century the greatest prayer movement in living memory is already under way. In much smaller but still significant ways the story of Myong-Song Presbyterian Church can be repeated many times over.

One congregation I know has forty prayer meetings per week involving a total of a thousand people. I am acquainted with churches in which anywhere from 15% to 24% of the congregation are engaged in corporate, intercessory prayer weekly. I have met with national prayer leaders, and none of them has seen anything like what is now beginning to occur. It is too early to tell how significant this new awakening towards prayer will be, but the signs are encouraging.

It is God's desire to bring individuals and families into saving faith. It is God's desire to bring people off addictions to drugs, sex, money, status. It is God's desire to deliver people from racism, sexism, materialism and consumerism. It is God's desire to harvest cities, bringing whole communities into Gospel faithfulness. The church prayer meeting is a crucial means for the fulfillment of these yearnings in the heart of God.

Jesus has promised to be present in great power whenever the community of faith is gathered in His Name to pray (Matt 18: 20). When there is faith, hope and love found in any given community, the blessings are multiplied, and our corporate intercessory prayer meetings will be where revival begins.

(Adapted from *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* by Richard Foster.)

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: John 17: 9-26

Interceding for the Church

1. While some enjoy praying with other Christians, others may find it a terrifying experience. What are some difficulties you / others have encountered praying in a group? How can group (cell / church) prayer meetings be less threatening to those who are afraid to pray with others?
2. List the seven areas Jesus prayed His Father would do for those who believe in Him; His disciples as well as future believers (vv. 11-15; 17, 19-24, 26)?
3. What does Jesus mean when He asked the Father to sanctify the believers in the truth or in the word (17, 19)? How can the church facilitate the sanctification of the believers in God's truth'?
4. Jesus also asked the Father to protect believers from the evil one. What are some of the devil's ploys to lure us away from God?

5. Jesus prayed repeatedly for unity amongst His followers. What are the things that can divide the local church community? What is one thing you can do to strengthen the community life in the church e.g. helping the homebound, the new-comers, other members to integrate with one another in the church?
6. Using some of the items Jesus prayed for in John 17, pray for the Church; the local parish, the Diocese, the Church in Singapore and worldwide.

For Reflection

C. H. Spurgeon reminded his students; *"It may scarcely be needful to commend to you the sweet benefits of private devotion, and yet I cannot forbear. To you, as the ambassadors of God, the mercy seat of God has a virtue beyond all estimate; the more familiar you are with the court of heaven the better shall you discharge your heavenly trust. Among all the formative influences which go to make up a man / woman honored of God in the ministry, I know of none mightier than his own familiarity with the mercy-seat... All our libraries and studies are nothing compared with our prayer closets."*

We are all ambassadors of Christ. All our acts of religious piety, all our activity in the church will come to nothing if we do not have a relationship with God. Like all relationships, the relationship we have with God is dynamic; it deepens as we seek to know Him more each day, as we meditate on His truths and as we bring to Him the needs of others.

There is no greater privilege than the freedom to come before the Great Jehovah any time of the day. Therefore, it is tragic that many who claim to believe in God would see this communion with their Father a chore. No wonder there are so many Christian casualties in the world today. No wonder so many churches are empty or lifeless and no wonder the Christian faith is so unattractive to those without God! Unless we are ready to recognize the impoverishment of our inner posture and take positive steps to strengthen our relationship with God through devoted prayer, the Church will continue to be a poor witness in the world!

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