

TEACH US TO PRAY THROUGH INTERCESSION

February 22, 2015

By Pastor Stan

Matthew 6:9-13

<p class="NoSpacing">**PASTOR STAN WEESE**

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<p class="NoSpacing">**INTRO.**

-- Some times important things are hidden in plain sight. For example, the logos of some familiar companies have messages hidden in their logo:

Wendy's (the girl's collar is the word "Mom")

Baskin Robbins (contains the number 31)

Milwaukee Brewers (the glove and ball are also an "m" and a "b")

Amazon (the arrow goes from "a" to "z")

FedEx (hidden in the "Ex" is an arrow)

-- The idea of hiding something in plain sight didn't originate with modern corporations. It's as old as the Lord's Prayer. There's something important that's hidden in plain sight in the Lord's Prayer. We've been studying the Lord's Prayer since the beginning of the year, and my guess is that most of us never noticed it. More than that, all of us have prayed the Lord's Prayer countless times without consciously paying attention to what is hidden in it. I say "hidden" not so much because I think that Jesus was hiding this aspect of the Lord's Prayer. I'm quite confident, in fact, that Jesus didn't intend this part of the Lord's Prayer to be hidden. Rather, it is hidden because most of us simply don't notice it or pay much attention to it, even though it occurs repeatedly throughout the prayer. Let's read the prayer once more.

Matthew 6:9-13

-- So what is it that's hidden in plain sight here? The fact that all of the pronouns in the prayer are plural. The prayer uses the words "we," "our" and "us" instead of "I," "my" and "me." What that means is that when you pray the Lord's Prayer you aren't praying for yourself - at least not for yourself alone.

-- In using the plural pronouns, Jesus is emphasizing to us two critical aspects of prayer that we usually pay little attention to. But if we are going to pray the way Jesus is instructing us to pray in the Lord's Prayer, we must value and practice both of these.

I. Corporate Prayer: Praying Together

-- The first aspect of prayer that Jesus is emphasizing in using the words "our" and "us" is corporate praying - praying together.

A. Our Corporate Faith

-- The Christian faith is a corporate faith. What I mean by that is this: no one can be a completely individualistic, isolated Christian. When you believe in Christ, you are united to all other believers.

1. The Universal Church

-- Theologians call this the "Universal Church" - all those who at any time and in any place trust in Christ as Savior and Lord.

-- I sometimes hear people say something like, "I love Jesus, but I don't want anything to do with the church." While I understand that there may be disillusionment and hurt underneath that statement, I also know that it almost always indicates an immaturity or ignorance in the person's understanding of what it means to be a Christian. For one thing, every believer is automatically part of a church - the universal church.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slave or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

-- The New Testament uses the image of a body to describe the universal church. The idea is that when Jesus was on earth He took on a human body through which He did His ministry. Now that Jesus has returned to Heaven He continues to do His ministry on earth through another body - the body of

the Church, and all believers are part of that body.

2. The Local Church

-- But most of the time when the Bible uses the word "church" it is referring to another aspect of the church - the local church. The local church is believers who actually gather together to worship and serve God. The New Testament uses the image of a family to describe the church.

Ephesians 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God

-- Everywhere that Paul went on his missionary travels he started local churches.

Many of the books in the NT are actually letters written by Paul to those churches, and Paul repeatedly addresses the believers as "brothers" and "sisters." Those who are part of the universal church also need to be part of a local church - and that's every believer.

B. The Application to Prayer

1. So let's come back to the Lord's Prayer with all this about the church in mind. When Jesus uses the plural terms "we," "our" and "us," He is indicating that believers are joined together as one body and connected to one another like a spiritual family; therefore, we ought to pray together. Of course, we need to pray privately, in our own personal lives, but there also needs to be times when we get together to pray with other believers.

2. In a sermon on this passage Dr. John Piper points out that throughout the book of Acts we find the church praying together.

-- Look at the description of the early church in the second chapter.

Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **⁴³** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

-- In chapter 4 Peter and John have been arrested and ordered not to preach about Jesus any more. When Peter and John were released they told the other believers what had happened - and what did they do? They prayed.

Acts 4:24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

And they went on to pray for boldness to preach the Gospel. And what happened?

v. 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness

-- In chapter 12 Peter is arrested and placed under a secure guard, and what did the church do? It got together and prayed.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church

And what happened? God sent an angel to deliver Peter out of the prison at the very time the church was gathered in a home praying for him.

-- And we could keep on going through Acts seeing time after time when believers get together to pray.

II. Intercessory Prayer: Praying for One Another

-- So when Jesus uses the plural pronouns ("we," "our" and "us") He is emphasizing the importance of corporate prayer (praying together), and there is a second aspect of prayer that He is also emphasizing - intercessory prayer, praying for one another.

Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

A. For the Universal Church

-- Praying for all the Lord's people means praying for believers in the Universal Church, believers we don't know, have never met. We need to pray for believers who are being severely persecuted around the world. The 21 men who were beheaded by ISIS militants on a beach in Libya were Egyptians, that's true, but that isn't why they were beheaded. They were slaughtered because they were Christians, members of the Coptic Church, which was founded by Saint Mark in the first century. Throughout Syria and Iraq ISIS Muslims are destroying Christian communities that date back hundreds of years. We need to pray for believers in Nigeria who are being driven from their homes by the Islamic group named Boko Haram. That group has also ambushed and burned Christians as they worshipped in their churches on Sunday mornings.

Open Doors International estimates that nearly 100 million Christians are being persecuted worldwide. We need to pray for them

B. For the Local Church

1. We need also to be interceding in prayer for believers in the local church, for one another here at North Center. I mentioned earlier that many of the NT books are letters written by Paul to the churches he started on his missionary trips. In most of those letters Paul talks about how he prays for the believers in those churches.

Ephesians 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers

Philippians 1:3-4 I thank my God in all remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy

Colossians 1:3, 9 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you ... **9** And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

2. Paul also repeatedly asks the believers in these churches to be interceding in prayer for him.

2 Corinthians 1:11 You also must help us in prayer

Colossians 4:2-4 Continue steadfastly in prayer ... pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ,

C. Why?

-- So why are we called on to pray for one another? After all, God already knows the needs, and He could act to meet those needs without our prayers. The reason we are to pray is that God has ordained to act through our prayers and in response to our prayers. Why God has ordained this only He knows all the reasons, but there are at least two of those reasons occur to me:

1. God has ordained intercessory prayer (for us to pray for one another) to remind of, emphasize, and strengthen our connectedness to one another, and

2. God has ordained for us to pray for one another to allow us to participate in His great works. God could act apart from us, without us; but He has chosen to work through prayer so that we are involved in what He does. What an awesome privilege!

CONCLUSION

Andrew Murray was a South African pastor in the 1800s who had a great vision and passion for prayer and wrote many books on prayer. In one of those books, *The Ministry of Intercession*, Murray issues a powerful call for us to become intercessors:

"God still waits and wonders in our day why there are not more intercessors. He still wonders why all His children do not give themselves to this highest and holiest work and why many of those who do so, do not engage in it more intensely and perseveringly ... He longs to dispense larger blessings. He longs to reveal His power and glory as God, His saving love, more abundantly. He seeks intercessors in larger number, in greater power, to prepare the way of the Lord. He seeks them. Where could He seek them but in His Church?"