
Learning how to

talk to God

from the great prayers of the Bible

Please Pray for Me

1 Timothy 2:1

Lake Arrowhead Church, Waleska, Georgia

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PLEASE PRAY FOR ME

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When something great happens, we want to tell somebody. When something terrible happens, we *have* to tell somebody. That's why Romans 12:15 is so true to life. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn."

When a crisis hits, when we receive bad news, when we get the breath knocked out of us, we look for help. We look for someone to tell, someone to bear the burden, and for someone to pray for us.

That's what happened many years ago when I received a call in the middle of the night from the neo-natal intensive care unit in Fairfax, Virginia. It was my friend Joe. His wife had just delivered a baby prematurely and things did not look good. The baby had serious heart complications. I arrived at the hospital at about 3:00 in the morning and met Joe. We suited up and went into the NICU unit, and Joe introduced me to his newborn son Gary, who weighed less than 3 pounds. It was a heavy moment, not just because I stood with Joe beside Gary's crib, but because I stood in a NICU unit lined with a dozen other steel cribs, each holding a premature or sick newborn barely hanging on to life.¹ The NICU waiting room is not like any other waiting room. Young parents sit with dazed looks, their anticipated moment of joy turned into a dreaded moment of fear.

That night we prayed. For hours we prayed. I joined them in asking for a miracle. Someone has said that prayer is often standing beside death and asking for life.² That's exactly what it felt like. Gary lived, and after multiple heart surgeries through the years, is now an adult with a family of his own. And I believe prayer had something to do with it. I believe God did something the night Joe called me and said, "Please pray for me."

Also a few years ago, I received a call from Linda, who frantically said, "Please pray for me!" Her husband, a good friend Ray and elder at our church, had a heart attack and stroke. It was a shock because he was too young for this to happen. I rushed to the cardiac ICU to be with Linda and to pray for Ray. That day turned into two weeks. Day after day and hour after hour, we prayed, we believed, and we pleaded for God to heal Ray. Again, prayer is often standing beside death and asking for life. But after two weeks of praying, Ray died.

In both cases, a close friend called and said, "Please pray for me." In both cases, our prayers were filled with desperation and faith. Yet, one lived, and one died. How can I explain two different outcomes? I can't. But I can say what I believe. I believe God is sovereign and in control of everything that happens in the universe and everything that happens in our lives. And I believe He is good. I believe God loves us and cares about us. And I believe prayer makes a difference.

The majestic creator of the universe has invited us to talk to Him. Prayer is the wonderful gift of experiencing a relationship with God and having a conversation with Him. The invitation to pray proves how much God loves us and cares about us. It's the way we cry out to Him for help anytime about anything. And it really makes a difference because He promises to listen and He promises to act.

And if you believe that, the next time a crisis hits your life, you're going to pick up the phone and call someone and say, ***"Please pray for me!"*** If your doctor gives you a devastating diagnosis, if someone in your family is in an accident, if a crisis hits your life, you're going to call someone and say, "Please pray for me!"

And the reason we pray? The promises of God.

- The Lord said, "Call to Me and I will answer you" (Jeremiah 33:3, NAS).
- Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7, NAS).
- He said, "Ask me anything in my name, and I will do it!" (John 14:14, NLT).
- The Bible says, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16, NAS). Or as another version reads, "When a believing person prays, great things happen" (NCV).

This morning, we're going to talk about praying for other people. It's called intercession. ***Intercession is believing enough and caring enough to pray, believing enough and caring enough to take someone's need to God and to speak someone's name to God.***

PRIORITY OF INTERCESSION

There are hundreds of examples of intercession in the Bible. Yet there is one verse that summarizes it best – 1 Timothy 2:1. Paul said to Timothy ...

- "First of all, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people" (1 Timothy 2:1, NAS).
- "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them. Intercede on their behalf" (1 Timothy 2:1, NLT).
- "The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know" (1 Timothy 2:1, MSG).

The New Testament is clear that we are to "pray for one another" (James 5:16, NAS). Even Old Testament prophet Samuel said, "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you" (1 Samuel 12:23, NIV).

From the beginning of time, God has chosen "to work on earth *through* humans."³ God works through people just like you and me. More specifically, God works through the prayers of people just like you and me. The Bible is clear. Intercession is meant to be a priority. Paul said to Timothy, "I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people." Prayer is meant to be a priority in the church, in the body of Christ, in the family of God. But it will only be a priority if we believe it. We've got to believe the promises of God. So the first ingredient for effective, intercessory prayer is faith.

The second ingredient to effective, intercessory prayer is compassion. Intercession is praying for people who need God's help. "Pray for all people. Ask God to help them," Paul said to Timothy (NLT). People all around us need God's help. People in this room need God's help. Your neighbors need God's help. Members in your family need God's help. There are countless people around you every day who need God's help.

Matthew 9 describes Jesus' compassion for people. "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. ***Seeing the crowds, He felt compassion for them***, because they were distressed and downcast" (Matthew 9:35-36, NAS).

We might ask, why can't people just pray for themselves? Why do we need to pray for someone else's problems? Because we are one body, we are a family. And the "one another" verses in the New Testament tell us how we're to treat each other. "Love one another ... serve one another ... be patient with one another ... bear each other's burdens ... forgive each other ... comfort one another ... and pray for one another."⁴ If you care about someone and love someone, you will pray for them.

Compassion leads to intercession. "Seeing the crowds," seeing the people, Jesus "felt compassion." Compassion comes from a Latin word which means to suffer with, to empathize and sympathize.⁵ It literally refers to a gut reaction, to being moved in our inward parts, being moved in our hearts. It is this moving within our spirits that compels us to pray for people who need God's help. Again, as members of the body of Christ, we are to "rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15, NIV).

The Bible tells us to pray for each other. So ***intercession is believing enough and caring enough to pray, believing enough and caring enough to take someone's need to God and to speak someone's name to God.***

The NIV version of 1 Timothy 2:1 strings together four synonyms to make Paul's point. Let "requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone." Those are four different types of prayers, but I want to take a deeper look at the word "intercession."⁶

Intercession is bringing two things together. Intercession is the convergence, or the meeting, of two things. It's the convergence of a person's need and God's power. As we pray, we stand between the two. Intercession is meeting with God asking Him to meet someone's need.

Again, ***intercession is believing enough and caring enough to pray, believing enough and caring enough to take someone's need to God and to speak someone's name to God.***

In heaven, before the throne of God, the book of Revelation describes 24 elders falling down before the Lamb, each "holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Revelation 5:8, NAS). "The smoke of the incense" represents "the prayers of the saints" going up to God (Revelation 8:3-4, NAS). When we intercede for others, our prayers are like burning incense going up to God. And the Bible says this is pleasing to Him and moves Him to act.

AN EXAMPLE OF INTERCESSION

One of the most dramatic examples of intercession is recorded in Acts 12, when a group of believers prayed for Peter.

¹About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. ²He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. ³When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter ... ⁴Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover (and execute him as well). ⁵***But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.***

⁶The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. ⁷Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals" ... ⁹So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. ¹⁰They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and it opened all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. ¹¹Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord sent his angel and saved me from Herod!"

¹²When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary ... ***where many were gathered for prayer.*** ¹³He knocked at the door, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. ¹⁴When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" ¹⁵"You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." ¹⁶Meanwhile, Peter kept knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed ... ¹⁷and he told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. (Acts 12:1-17, NLT)

First of all, let's admit part of this story is funny. Peter's knocking at the door. The young girl tells everyone Peter is at the door, and they say she's crazy. Then they say it must be an angel. And let's admit part of this story is ironic. "While Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him." They were praying for Peter to be released, and he's knocking at the door, and they don't believe it!

But what does this story teach us? It teaches us the power of intercession. Peter faced a death sentence. The people were praying for Peter's life. They prayed "very earnestly." And what did their prayers accomplish? A miracle. Because they prayed, the Lord sent an angel. Because they prayed, chains fell off, prison doors were unlocked, and an iron gate opened. Because they prayed, Peter escaped execution! When God's children come together, unite their hearts around a need, and appeal to Him for help, God is moved to act in incredible and supernatural ways.

APPLICATIONS FOR INTERCESSION

Paul was clear in his letter to Timothy. Intercession is meant to be a priority.

- “First of all, I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people” (1 Timothy 2:1, NAS).
- “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them. Intercede on their behalf” (1 Timothy 2:1, NLT).
- “The first thing I want you to do is pray. Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know” (1 Timothy 2:1, MSG).

So what does this mean for us today?

Application #1 – ***Because someone you know needs God’s help, become an intercessor for others.*** One of the best intercessors I’ve ever known was the youth pastor at our church in Roswell. Mike knew how to pray. And he carried in the back pocket of his jeans a stack of Polaroid photos of 300 students in his ministry wrapped with a big rubber band. And during the week, Mike would pray through that stack of photos, praying for each student by name. That’s intercession.

The best intercessors possess two characteristics – faith and compassion. Believing in God so much and caring about people so much that they pray.

If you believe in God as you say, I challenge you to exercise your faith by praying bold prayers on behalf of those who need God’s help. Become an intercessor, believing enough and caring enough to ...

pray for your husband, asking God to help him and encourage him

pray for your wife, asking God to meet her needs, to support her, and to bless her

pray for your young children, asking God to protect them and grow them

pray for your adult children, asking God to guide them spiritually

pray for your grandchildren, asking God to prepare them for the world

pray for your neighbors and co-workers, asking God to show Himself to them

pray for the needs of your Christian friends, asking Him to meet their needs

pray for the salvation of your unbelieving friends, asking God to help them see their need for Jesus Christ

Paul told Timothy to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:2, ESV). We are to pray for our country and our leaders, asking the Lord to grant wisdom and blessing

Oh, and one more ... pray for your enemies. Yes, Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44, ESV).

Everyone you know and love, in some way, needs God's help, so be quick to pray for others. Become an intercessor for other people.

Application #2 – ***Because you need God's help, ask someone to become an intercessor for you.*** Paul did not hesitate to ask others to pray for him. In his letter to the Romans, he said, "I urge you, brothers ... join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Romans 15:30, NIV). In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul said, "Brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored" (2 Thessalonians 3:1, NIV).

Don't let pride keep you from saying four simple words – "Please pray for me." Men, find another man whom you trust and will answer the phone at 2:00 in the morning and pray for you. Ladies, find another woman you can call at any hour and ask, "Please pray for me." Don't let pride keep you from sharing your burdens. Because you need God's help, call someone and say, "Please pray for me."

When you entered this morning, you received a 3x5 card and a pen. I want you to take a moment and jot down your most urgent prayer request. Don't put your name on it. Keep it anonymous. Notice the heading, "Please pray for me ..." Like me, you have a long list of prayer requests for people you care about. But this morning, this is about you. "Please pray for me ... to have wisdom ... to have patience ... to endure ... to grow ..." Describe the situation you're facing. Describe the need you have. Jot down your prayer request, and in a few moments, we're going to collect your cards.

Now, we're going to redistribute the cards. Those on this side of the church will be given to friends on the other side of the church and vice versa. As you take a card from the basket, you now have in your hand a prayer request from another person in this church. Someone with whom you worship every week. A brother or sister in our church family. This is what they are asking God to do in their life. So in the spirit of intercession, you are now responsible to pray for them. As Paul said to Timothy, "I urge you ... to pray" for them. "Ask God to help them. Intercede on their behalf" (1 Timothy 2:1, NLT). Even though you do not know their name, God does. So this week, become an intercessor and pray for them.

Misty is going to come and sing a song called "In Jesus' Name." Praying in Jesus' name is not some magical phrase, where if we say it, we get what we want. We pray in Jesus' name because we have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus and saved by the name of Jesus. We pray in Jesus' name because His name opens the door of heaven giving us access to God and giving us the privilege of praying to Him. And we pray in Jesus' name, because He is the only one who can help. The song Misty is about to sing is a prayer of intercession. It's a woman's heart for her friend. It's a woman going to God on behalf of her friend. And that's what intercession is. Believing enough and caring enough to take someone's need to God.

NOTES

¹ There are 108 cribs in the NICU unit at the hospital in Falls Church, Virginia.

² Dutch Sheets, *Intercessory Prayer* (Ventura, CA: Regal, a division of Gospel Light, 1996), page 15.

³ Ibid., page 28.

⁴ See John 13:34, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:2, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, James 5:16.

⁵ The Greek word for “compassion” in Matthew 9 is *εσπλαγγνισθε* (*esplagknisthe*).

⁶ The Greek word for “intercession” in 1 Timothy 2:1 is *ἐντευξις* (*enteuzis*) in noun form and in the verbal form *ἐντυγχάνω* (*entugchano*). Intercession, or convergence, is what happens the moment an arrow hits a target. It’s what happens the moment a runner wins a race. It’s what happens the moment a baby is born. It’s what happens the moment a light is shined on an object. It’s pursuing and then obtaining. The Hebrew word for intercession is *paga*. It was used in the context of war, referring to the clash between opposing forces. Surely, our prayers for blessings are in direct opposition to Satan’s attempts to destroy. The Hebrew idea is that clash, that conflict. Spiritual warfare is implied. We enter into a spiritual battle every time we pray. See also 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:12.