
Helpers in Prayer

By David Wilkerson

October 4, 1999 Prayer is often one of the most selfish areas of Christians' lives. When you think about it, most of our prayers focus on our own needs. The two main subjects of our intercession are our own spiritual growth and the needs of our families and friends.

Occasionally, we may reach beyond our own narrow concerns and pray for others. Yet usually when we say, "I'll pray for you," we don't do it. Or, we pray for them once and then quickly forget about their need.

Recently I've been examining my own prayer life in light of the scriptures. And I've been convicted about the narrowness and limitations of my own praying. Like most believers, I spend much of my prayer time seeking the Lord about my walk with him. I cry out to him to be made holy, to have dominion over sin, to become Christ-like, to receive guidance for life, to have his anointing on my ministry. And I enjoy sweet communion with him, quietly worshipping him and being refreshed in his presence.

I also intercede daily for my family. I ask the Lord to protect my children from the schemes of the devil - to make my sons like oaks planted by the river of God, to make my daughters polished stones in his palace, and to make all my grandchildren lovers of Jesus. I pray too for the concerns of our church body. I intercede for individuals who are in crisis and for the many missionaries and ministries we support.

You might say, "That's all commendable, Brother Dave. It's comforting to know you're shut in with the Lord, communing with him and praying for all those needs."

But according to God's word, sweet communion is not enough. Yes, it is the secret to spiritual growth. And we can have no greater experience on earth. But if we go to the throne only for our personal edification and needs, we're being selfish. We simply cannot neglect praying seriously for the dire needs all around us.

Our ministry recently heard from a precious elderly man in San Diego. This dear saint said God had prompted him to pray for me daily, and he asked if he could put me on his prayer list. Apparently, the recipients of this man's intercession include a long list of widows, poor people, ministers and unsaved people. And he has prayed for them for years now.

The man is a retired postal worker, and he leads a very simple life, living on just one meal a day. He spends his time doing good deeds for others and communing with the Lord all day long. He drives around the city picking up old furniture and other items cast aside as junk, and he repairs them and gives them to widows and the poor. He also shops and runs errands for shut-ins, fixes their plumbing, and helps meet their other needs.

The whole time this man does these good works, he prays without ceasing, faithfully interceding for everyone on his list. In fact, he crosses off their names only when they die.

Now, I've been a man of prayer ever since I was called to preach at eight years of age. But even with all the fervent praying I've done throughout the years, this godly man puts me to shame. I have no list of needy people whom I pray for daily, as he does. Usually, I pray for someone once or twice and move on. But he just keeps praying.

I believe this man's reward in glory will be much greater than mine. He's like the destitute widow who gave a mere pittance, but whose offering was worth many times more than the gifts of others. As I think about all the souls God has allowed evangelists to reap into the kingdom, I immediately think of the incredible helping prayers of people like this man.

This message is all about how to develop that kind of blessed prayer life - to truly become a "helper in prayer."

Paul Says Emphatically He Was Delivered From "Near Death" Troubles - Not By His Faith, But Through the Prayers of "Helpers." "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, in so much that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). The Greek word for "pressed" in this passage means, "heavily burdened, grievously crushed." Paul was telling these saints, "Our crisis was so serious, it almost crushed me horribly. It was beyond my endurance, more than I could take. I thought it was the end for me."

When Paul says he was so burdened down that he despaired of life, we can know he truly was at rock bottom. In other passages, he downplays his sufferings. You may recall how he simply shook off a poisonous snake that had attached itself to his hand. He was also shipwrecked three times - yet he mentions this fact only in passing, to make a point. Paul was beaten, robbed, stoned, jailed - yet through it all he never complained.

In this passage, however, the apostle was at a point of total exhaustion of some kind. I believe this "trouble" he endured was mental anguish. We can't know exactly what Paul's trouble was - but 2 Corinthians 7:5 gives us a hint: "When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."

I believe Paul was referring to pain caused by the sheep he ministered to. False teachers had risen up in Corinth and tried to turn the people against him. Now Paul feared his flock would reject his message and follow men who didn't have their interest at heart.

He was consoled when Titus arrived, bringing him good news about his "beloved children" in Corinth. Paul writes, "Nevertheless God...comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more" (verses 6-7).

Many believers today suffer as Paul did. Their greatest anguish is mental, caused by ill treatment from those they've loved and helped the most. We see this reflected in many of David's psalms. He grieved over friends who turned against him without cause, people he'd fed and provided for at his own expense.

I've felt this kind of anguish in my life. At times, the words of people I've loved and helped have felt like knives in my back. I can say with David, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Psalm 55:21). In such troubled times, I've most needed "helping prayers."

In the Midst of His Troubles, Paul Learned Great Lessons. The most significant lesson Paul learned in his anguish was that he had to turn to the Lord and his covenant promises. He knew he could no longer trust in his own flesh, abilities or willpower. He writes, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Corinthians

1:9).

Paul's trial had brought him to the end of his endurance. He knew he didn't have any strength left to fight the powers of darkness. So he sentenced his own flesh to death. And God marvelously delivered him: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (verse 10).

How was Paul delivered? Several things were involved: First, he was a mighty man of prayer. And second, he had great confidence in the Lord. Paul knew God would uphold his covenant promises. He could say, "Just as the Lord has delivered me in the past, he's at work delivering me from this present trial. From now until the day I die, I'll be living under his delivering power."

Like Paul, we also are allowed to endure troubled times, so that we'll die to our reliance on human ability. The Lord permits us to be crushed, made helpless and weak, in an effort to convince us we can't defeat the enemy by any fleshly efforts.

Yet, as we compare our lives to Paul's, we may be tempted to think, "I'll never experience the kind of deliverance this man enjoyed. He was well-educated in the scriptures. He received great revelations from the Lord about Jesus, the gospel, the New Covenant. He even went to the heavenlies.

"And Paul ministered in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost. He single-handedly shook cities and nations. He couldn't be killed by the devil, even after stonings, mob attacks, three shipwrecks. God even used him to raise the dead. This man was one of God's most anointed servants in all of history. He had it together spiritually."

Not so, according to Paul. The apostle tells us there was one other important factor in his deliverance: the powerful intercession of praying helpers. "Ye also helping together by prayer for us..." (verse 11). Paul was saying, "I'm confident God will deliver me. And you're helping that come to pass by praying."

You might wonder, "Why would Paul need anyone's help through prayer? He had such strong faith, such incredible power with God, his own prayers ought to have been enough to see him through."

No, not at all. Paul recognized his desperate need of "helpers in prayer." Here was a man who knew full well that his salvation was totally of the Lord...that God was faithful to keep his covenant promises...that the Lord would be God to him, his shield of protection, his deliverer from every enemy. Yet Paul also knew that God had ordained prayer as his "subordinate means of deliverance."

According to the Bible, prayer and deliverance are inseparable. God tells us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (91:15).

Paul knew it was through prayers - both his own and those of praying helpers - that he was delivered "out of the mouth of the lion." He boasted, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom..." (2 Timothy 4:18). He's telling us, "I've been delivered - and I'll continue to be preserved, until Jesus comes - because the church of Jesus Christ is praying for me."

One of the Greatest Needs in the Body of Christ Today Is This Ministry of Being a Prayer Helper. As devoted servants of the Lord, we're constantly in danger from the enemy. Our uncompromised love for Jesus is a threat to all of hell. We can't undertake any holy work without Satan planting all kinds of

snare and traps for us.

One such danger is being taken very lightly in the church. That danger is the separation or divorce of Christian couples. I'm absolutely shocked by the scores of calls and letters our ministry receives telling us of marriages in shambles.

A marriage counselor in the south I know called me in dismay recently. She said, "Everywhere I turn in our church, couples are breaking up. Almost every friend of mine is divorcing or talking about it. It's a literal plague in the body of Christ right now."

I hear every kind of reason given for the turmoil in Christian homes: incompatibility, lack of communication, loss of affection, infidelity. But in truth, it's about much more than that. Behind it all is an attack from hell against God's saints.

Broken homes among non-Christians is no mystery. But among the righteous, all such turmoil has a cause. Think about it - how can dedicated Christians who have sat under godly preaching for years suddenly have no authority in their homes? They know full well God's covenant oath to be their strength. They know he promises to destroy every satanic power that comes against them. So, why is the devil prevailing? Why is their marriage under constant threat?

I believe it's because one or both partners have opened the door to a satanic delusion. They've allowed some compromise in their lives, or they've become spiritually lazy. And now an enraged devil has gained a stronghold in their hearts and home.

If you're under such an attack, you should be asking what the disciples asked: "Master, why couldn't we cast out those demons?" Jesus answered that certain demonic bondages won't respond to the laying on of hands or a halfhearted, one-time prayer. Such strongholds are so deeply entrenched, the only way to cast them out is by sustained prayer and fasting.

Yet the church today is in a stupor regarding the power of prayer. A veil has fallen over the eyes of millions. And now, whenever they face trouble, the last place they turn is to Jesus. They've abandoned the secret closet. And instead they've turned to psychology, counselors, books, friends - everywhere but to the Lord.

If you say your marriage is a wreck and you want it healed, I have to ask you - how much time do you spend shut in with God? How many times have you turned off your TV for an hour just to sit before Jesus and unburden your soul? How many meals have you missed so you could fast for your marriage? How often have you cried out, "Father, I can't handle this. You have to move on our behalf. Do whatever it takes to heal us."

Some Bible teachers claim it's unbelief for us to ask God for the same request over and over. No - that's damnable heresy. And it has weakened the faith of multitudes. God commands us to ask, seek, fast - to cry out in effectual, earnest supplication.

From the very beginning, true servants have turned God's promises into prayers:

- Jesus knew his father had promised all things to him before the foundation of the world - yet Christ still spent hours praying for God's will to be done on earth. He even told a parable illustrating

persistence in prayer. It involved an "importunate widow" who kept demanding justice from a judge until she got it.

- God gave Ezekiel wonderful prophecies about Israel's restoration, promising that the nation's ruins would become as the Garden of Eden. Yet the Lord said his word would not be fulfilled without prayer: "...I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them..." (Ezekiel 36:37). In other words: "I've made you a promise - but I want you to pray it to pass. Seek me with all your heart, until you see it fulfilled. I will deliver - but first you must ask."

- God promised Daniel that after seventy years Israel would be restored. And when Daniel saw the appointed year arrive, he could have waited in faith for God to fulfill his word. But instead, that godly man fell on his face and prayed for two weeks - until he saw the Lord bring everything to pass.

God Commands Us to Pray for One Another (See James 5:14-16). In the Old Testament, Israel's priest carried on his breastplate the names of all the tribes of Israel. This signified that the people's needs were continually on the priest's heart in prayer. To Christians today, this provides a wonderful image of Christ carrying us in his heart and presenting our needs to the father. Moreover, every Christian today is a priest unto the Lord. And we're always to carry the needs of others in our hearts.

Paul was so conscious of his need for the prayers of the saints, he pleaded for "prayer helpers" everywhere. He begged the Romans, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered..." (Romans 15:30-31). And he asked the Thessalonians, "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

In Greek, the word for "strive" here means to "struggle with me as a partner in prayer; wrestle for me in prayer." Paul wasn't asking for a quick mention to the throne. He was pleading, "Fight for me in prayer. Do spiritual battle, both for my sake and the sake of the gospel."

When Paul was in prison, ready to lay down his life, he pled with the Philippians for their prayers: "I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). Paul knew he was a marked man - that Satan's hordes were bent on destroying him. And so it is with every true minister of the gospel. Every pastor, preacher and evangelist needs helpers in prayer who will intercede for him continually.

I can assure you, I wouldn't be writing this today if not for the helpers in prayer who have stood with me over the years. I was reminded of this recently while I was in Europe to conduct ministers' conferences and nightly crusades. The entire time, God's Spirit made me aware I was being carried by the prayers of a multitude of people.

In Nice, France, Americans are not well-liked, particularly American evangelists. Everyone worried about that night's crusade, wondering, "Can it be done?" France is rampant with skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, unbelief. And the kind of meeting we planned to hold had never been attempted.

When the time came, however, thousands gathered. Yet that's when I began to feel helpless. I didn't

know what to preach. No message I'd outlined seemed to fit. My interpreter and I had reviewed some notes beforehand, but I wasn't sure they were right for the meeting. I warned him, "I'm not sure what I'm going to say."

When I stepped up to the podium, however, the Spirit fell on me powerfully. I sensed the prayers of thousands of saints supporting me. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost filled my mouth. I preached for forty minutes, and the entire time you could hear a pin drop. When I finished, I simply said, "If you need Jesus, please come forward." Hundreds of people leapt to their feet in response.

The same thing happened in all the other countries where we ministered - Croatia, Romania, Poland, everywhere. I prayed beforehand, "Lord, what should I say?" And each time, the Spirit whispered to me, "People are praying." I'm convinced the power of prayer was the driving force behind the many salvations we witnessed on that trip.

Here's how the power of helping prayer brought sweet deliverance in our congregation recently: Teresa Conlon, the wife of our associate pastor, was driving with her parents in Maine recently when suddenly a moose wandered onto the road. Their car struck the animal, and it came flying through the windshield. The car was totaled - but, praise God, all three passengers walked away without a scratch.

When I mentioned this news at our next worship service, I was approached by a dedicated intercessor from our congregation. The woman trembled as she told me, "Pastor, the night before the accident, the Holy Ghost burdened me to intercede for Brother Conlon's wife. I was led to pray for her protection and deliverance from the foul play of Satan. I didn't know anything about the accident, until you mentioned it just now."

When you take on the ministry of helping in prayer, God will literally wake you up to the burdens of others. And he'll marvelously lead you in prayer for them.

How Many Ministers Might Have Been Delivered From Ruin If They'd Had Helpers In Prayer Striving for Their Deliverance? I recently wrote about a pastor's wife who left a pitiful message on our ministry's answering service. She said in very slurred speech, "Brother Dave, thousands of preachers' wives out there drink in secret to cover their pain. That's what I do. I drink to dull the ache." Other ministers' wives write of their failing marriages or their husbands' addictions to internet pornography.

Beloved, these are the people I am now helping in prayer. I pray for ministers and their families, because I know they need it more than anybody. I don't write off anyone's request anymore. I've learned firsthand - helping prayer works. Scripture says that when the apostle Peter was bound in jail, "...prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). And God delivered Peter with a miracle.

Paul not only asked for prayer helpers, but was a helper himself. He knew it was part of his calling as a minister of the gospel. He wrote to the Philippians, "...to all the saints...with the bishops and deacons...I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy...because I have you in my heart" (Philippians 1:1-7).

Paul also wrote to the Romans, "To all that be in Rome...God is my witness...that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Romans 1:7, 9). The word "mention" here means, "I recite your name and needs to the Lord." In short, Paul didn't ask others to undertake something he

wasn't willing to do himself.

Are you aware of a brother or sister whose marriage is in turmoil? If so, what do you do about it? Do you merely tell others, "What a shame - they're about to break up." Or, do you bring up their names to the Lord and strive for them in prayer?

Like the precious elderly saint in San Diego, a true prayer helper is one who prays without ceasing for the needs of others. He doesn't pray for them just once and then stop. No, he intercedes day after day. And he doesn't quit until God meets the need.

Do you desire this ministry of being a helper in prayer? If you don't know anyone with a need, start by praying for all Christian marriages and all of God's saints. Your prayers don't have to be long. Simply state your request, and trust God to hear you.

This was illustrated for me once when I was sick in bed. One of my grandsons came in and announced, "Papa, I'm going to pray for you." My little helper laid his hand on my head and prayed, "Jesus, make him all better." I smiled and thanked him. But he just kept looking at me. Finally, he said, "You're healed. Get up." So I did get up - and I was healed. His prayer of faith brought me to my feet.

Mighty deliverances take place when God's saints seek him diligently with childlike faith for their brothers' and sisters' needs. I end here by recalling Paul's moving testimony:

"We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 1:9-11).

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