

Helpers in Prayer



David Wilkerson July 11, 2011

Often prayer is one of the most selfish areas of Christians' lives. Many of us have to admit that most of our prayers focus on our own needs.

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

According to Scripture, our own sweet communion with the Lord is not enough. Yes, prayer is the secret to spiritual growth. But if we go to the throne only for our personal edification and needs, we're being selfish. The Bible shows us that we cannot neglect to pray seriously for the dire needs all around us.

Our ministry recently heard from a precious elderly man in San Diego. This dear one 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. He has prayed for them for years now.

The man is a retired postal worker and he leads a very simple life. 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 repairs them to give 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.

I've been a man of prayer ever since I was called to preach at eight years of age. But this godly man puts me to shame. I have no list of needy people whom I pray for daily — but this servant of God just keeps praying.

I believe he is like the destitute widow who gave a mere pittance yet whose offering was worth many times more than the gifts of others. In fact, as I think of all the incredible evangelism that has reaped souls into God's kingdom, I am reminded it happens because 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 he was delivered from "near death" 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, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). The Greek word for "pressed" here means "heavily burdened, grievously crushed." Paul was saying, "Our crisis was so serious it was beyond my endurance. I thought it was the end for me."

He was consoled when Titus arrived, bringing him good news about his "beloved children" in Corinth. Paul writes, "(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" (7:6–7).

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" (2 Corinthians 1:10).

Paul says there was one other important factor in his deliverance: the powerful intercession of praying helpers. "You also helping together by prayer for us" (1:11). Paul was telling his readers, "Yes, I am confident God will deliver me. It is because you're helping it come to pass by praying."

You see, Paul recognized his desperate need of helpers in prayer. He knew full well that God would be his shield of protection to deliver him from every enemy.

Yet Paul also knew that Scripture says 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 — his own and those of praying helpers — that he was delivered "out of the mouth of the lion."

One of the greatest needs in the church today is this ministry of being a helper in prayer.

As devoted servants of the Lord we are continually in danger from the enemy. Our passion for Jesus enrages Satan, who continually plants all kinds of snares and traps for us.

One such danger is being taken very lightly in the church: the separation or divorce of Christian couples. I've been shocked by the scores of letters our ministry receives telling us of marriages in shambles. Every kind of reason is given for the turmoil in Christian homes: incompatibility, lack of communication, loss of affection, infidelity. In truth, it is about much more than these things. Behind it all is an attack from hell on 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 devoted Christians who have served God joyfully for years suddenly have no authority in their homes? They know all about God's covenant oath to be their strength and to destroy every satanic power that comes against them. So why is the devil prevailing?

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 one-time prayer. The only way to cast out such powerful strongholds is by sustained prayer and fasting.

Yet at times the church can be in a stupor regarding the power of prayer. Whenever many Christians face trouble, the last place they turn is to Jesus. Instead they turn to psychologists, counselors, books, friends — everywhere but to the Lord.

If you say your marriage is a wreck and you want it healed, I ask you: How much time do you spend shut into your prayer closet, storming heaven for your marriage? How many meals have you missed because you fast for healing with your spouse? How often have you cried out, "Father, 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. That is heresy! 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, about an "importunate widow" who kept demanding justice from a judge until she got it.
- God gave Ezekiel wonderful prophecies about Israel's restoration, promising 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 inquired 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 my word fulfilled. I will deliver, but first you must ask."

- God promised Daniel that after seventy years Israel would be restored. When Daniel saw the appointed year arrive, he could have waited in faith for God to fulfill his word. Instead Daniel 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 5:13–14).

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. What a wonderful image! It signifies Christ carrying us in his heart and presenting our needs to the Father. Yet it is also a picture of every Christian, a royal priesthood, carrying 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, "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). Likewise, he asked the Thessalonians, "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:25).

The Greek 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 for me and for the gospel."

When Paul was in prison, ready to lay down his life, he pled with the Philippian 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. So it is with every true minister of the gospel. Every pastor, preacher and evangelist needs helpers in prayer who will intercede for them continually.

I can assure you, I could not have written this if not for the helpers in prayer who stood with me over the years. I was reminded of this when 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, American evangelists were not well-liked. Everyone worried about that night's crusade, wondering, "Can it be done?" France is rampant with skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, unbelief. 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 brought 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 on that trip: Croatia, Romania and Poland. I prayed beforehand, "Lord, what should I say?" 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.

How many ministers might have avoided ruin if they had helpers in prayer?

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.

I feel a call from God to help these people 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 that helping prayer works! Scripture says when Peter was bound in jail, "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). God delivered Peter with a miracle through helping prayers.

Paul not only asked for prayer helpers but was a helper himself. He knew this 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, 3-4, 7).

Likewise, Paul wrote to the Romans, "God is my witness...that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Romans 1:9). The word "mention" 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, like Daniel, he doesn't quit until he sees God meet 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; you 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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