

“HOW TO PRAY FOR OTHERS” by Rom A. Pegram (2/2/20)

Today, folks, we're going to be wrapping up our series called 'Vertical: Communicating with God.' We've answered some questions like 'Why Pray?' and 'Is it OK to pray for yourself?' A couple weeks ago, we talked about *listening* to God—the receiving part of prayer. And today, maybe we saved the best 'til last. We're going to get into 'How to pray for others' ... so what's that all about?

One of Jesus' roles in our lives is that of an 'intercessor.' Do you know what that is? The Bible says this about Jesus (Rom. 8:34, NIV): "...Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Interceding, meaning intercession or intercessory prayer, is basically ... *praying for others*. It's standing before God on behalf of others. So, not only little Makhi Martin, but Jesus is also our intercessor in prayer. In a sense, you could say that Jesus, sitting now at the right hand of God the Father, is standing in the gap for all of us! And he's got our backs...

So, Jesus is *our* intercessor. When we pray for others, we're being Christ-like toward those we pray for, because that's what Jesus does for us. What we're demonstrating, by praying for others, is a very powerful, Christ-like thing! Let me begin today by mentioning some *benefits* of praying for others...

- *It's a way of loving others.* Christianity's not just about our relationship with God, is it? The first Great Commandment is: Love the Lord Your God. The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. That's what we're doing when we pray for others.
- *It's also a way we grow in our faith.* When we pray for others and see answers to prayer, it helps us grow in our faith. The Early Church (Acts 12) experienced this kind of growth and I'll talk about that in a few moments...
- *It's also a way that draws us closer to other people.* You can't pray for someone and *not* feel a personal connection to them! Have you ever prayed for someone who's in the military, maybe stationed overseas? Even with a great distance between you, you feel closer to that person if you've prayed for them...
- *Praying for others also makes the devil tremble!* Satan, the devil, the Enemy ... is a spiritual reality, for anyone who's a follower of Jesus. Jesus talks about this reality in scripture. And when we pray for others (act like Jesus in that way), the devil doesn't like it. What we're doing, when we pray for others, is to cooperate with God to have a positive impact on this world! The devil doesn't like it when we cooperate with God. These, however, are all benefits of acting Christ-like in this way—*praying for others*...

In 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul is writing to the young pastor, letting him know what God has led him to do. Listen: "Timothy, I thank God for you—the God I serve with a clear conscience, just as my ancestors did. Night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers." So, as we look at the idea, today, of praying for others, we can see this is a common action in scripture. What's it supposed to look like when we pray for others? Are you ready? Do you have your notes out? I've tried to catalog what the Bible says about praying for others under *three big headers* ... and here's the first:

PRAY FOR THEIR SAFETY. Praying for others means ... praying for their safety! According to scripture, it's a perfectly normal thing to pray for the safety of others; this could mean praying for their health, for tricky travel situations, or any number of things...

In Acts 12, in the Early Church, Peter found himself in prison. This is around the time of the second Easter—a year after Jesus' death & resurrection. The Early Church had been growing rapidly. As a matter of fact, it was growing so fast, King Herod moved his headquarters to Jerusalem just to keep a close eye on this emerging insurgence, as he would have called it.

During this time, Peter—leader of the Early Church—had been arrested by Herod and was facing impending death. He was to be beheaded the next day. So, we find Peter in prison. In V. 5 it says, “But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.” Now, always be ready for something anytime the storyline says ... ‘but.’ But what? *The church prayed very earnestly (fervently) for him!* The Greek word used here is ‘ektenós,’ meaning *intense* (prayer). They meant business through their prayers! They weren't just mumbling under their breath, ‘Oh God, please bless Peter.’ They were praying *intensely* for Peter! *They were praying for his safety...*

Folks, the Early Church was in peril. Let me tell you what happened next in Acts 12:6-25. The angel comes to the prison & wakes Peter up in the middle of the night. The angel finds Peter sleeping, even though he's to be beheaded the next day. Can you believe that? He's sleeping. His confidence in God is so great that he just lays down in his cell and goes to sleep, even guarded by 16 soldiers and wrapped in two sets of chains. He's asleep. The angel has to wake him up. Miraculously, the shackles and chains fall off. The angel tells him to grab his coat so they can get out of there. So, the doors open up, they go down a long hallway, through some other doors, and then they're out in the city street; Peter is free and the angel departs ... just like that. No other words are spoken at that point. The angel is just ... gone. And Peter's thinking, ‘It's a good thing I brought my coat, because this is one cool night!’

So, Peter continues on his way and remembers his friend John Mark has a church that meets in his mother Mary's house. He thought maybe they'd still be meeting, so he goes there. She lives in quite a large estate, surrounded by a fence, so Peter goes to the gate and knocks. A servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door (that wasn't just a 70s sitcom!). But when she heard Peter's voice, she got so excited she forgot to open the door and ran back inside to tell everyone—those praying for Peter—that he was there! “You're not going to believe this! Peter's at the gate!”

At first, they don't believe her; they thought it must be an angel. The Bible tells us she had to ‘constantly affirm’ it was Peter who was out there. So, she eventually goes back, unlocks the door, and lets Peter in. Peter explains he's got to go underground now, to be safe. Tell James (second in charge of the Church) and the others I'm okay.

Here's what happened: Herod woke up the next morning to discover ... *Peter was gone!* Yes, the guards were in trouble; most of you know how that goes. But Herod got so angry that this happened, he moved his headquarters out of Jerusalem back over to Caesarea by the (Mediterranean) Sea. And here's what happened when the Early

Church prayed: Peter was set free ... and the faith of the church was strengthened! Can you imagine being on your knees in prayer & immediately your prayers are answered? That's the power of the Church at prayer. So, we should pray for others safety—their good health, safe travel, overall protection, and so forth... Also:

PRAY FOR THEIR SIGNIFICANCE. This is kind of a catch-all term to cover several things I find in the Bible. It means you pray for someone's *Godly impact*—for their lives to make a *kingdom difference*—an eternal difference!

It's been said that *the greatest gift a parent can give their children is to lead them to know Jesus!* In other words, the greatest gift we can give our kids is connecting them with the eternal! Ephesians 1:16-20 are some of Paul's incredible words to the church at Ephesus. Listen: "I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, ¹⁷ asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. ¹⁸ I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. ¹⁹ I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. [*Let's read this last phrase together...*] This is the same mighty power ²⁰ that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."

When you pray for significance, here's what you're praying for. You're praying for God's resurrection [Easter] power to be evident in their life—'the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.' So, when you pray for someone's significance, you're praying that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will also be at work in their life. What, exactly, does that mean? Here it is...

When you pray for other's significance...

- You pray for them to grow closer to God... If someone says, 'Pray for me. I'm unhappy. I'm unfulfilled. I'm unsatisfied with my life,' you need to pray they grow closer to God. There's the only eternal answer...
- You pray for them to be used by God... For someone who says, 'My life is just not making a difference! I feel so insignificant at work,' you need to pray they will be used by God—that their life will have eternal significance.
- You pray for them to do God's will... For those who come to you and ask, 'Would you pray for me about this decision—who I should date, or about finances, or something to do with their career?' The right way to pray for them is for God's will to be revealed and lived out in their life...

Pray for their significance; we should want every life to count for God—especially those we love—our children, our spouses, and other family members. Finally, when we pray for others, we need to...

PRAY FOR THEIR SALVATION. Folks, if we don't see our loved ones come to know a connection with God (salvation) that will see them into eternity, we have a problem...

Look at Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:1-6 (TEV) with me, would you? "First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people; ² for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. ³ This is good and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself to redeem the whole human race. That was the proof at the right time that God wants everyone to be saved." We're to pray for others in this way, aren't we?

We're to pray for others ... to come to know Jesus, the only One who can bring God and human beings together. Someone once said, "The great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer." Are we praying for the eternal lives of our loved ones? Those we care about? Those God has placed on our hearts to lift up to him in prayer and to ask that somehow, before this life is over (and none of us knows when that will be), to connect that loved one with God through a faith in Jesus Christ? That's what connects people to eternity (John 14:6)...

Let me ask you a question, as I begin to wrap up today: You've probably had several people come to mind as we were talking about *praying for safety*. You probably had several come to mind as we talked about *praying for significance*. But who comes to your mind when we address *praying for ... salvation*? Who do you know, in your life, that doesn't yet have a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus (I always say 'yet' because I believe in the power of God; it's made me an optimist!)? So, who? Let me close with this simple illustration...

When our daughter, Rachel, moved from college down to Tennessee to begin her new life on her own, I did what any good father would do. I prayed for her safety ... *a lot!* And then I acted on it, too. We'd gotten her a used car for her college graduation; she was going to need that, being on her own and all. But I went over that car thoroughly. Checked the oil. Checked the tires. And everything else I could think of. That's what a good dad does...

That's also what a good Christian does. A good Christian prays for others. A good Christian does all they can to help others come to know Jesus *like we do* ... and then leaves the rest to God. What's our responsibility in all this?

D.L. Moody once said, "We are to work as if everything depended on us ... and pray as if everything depended on God." And I want to challenge you, as we wrap up this Vertical series ... to do the same. How can we move people toward a relationship with God through Jesus? Pray for them ... just like we've been talking about, but then *act on your prayers!* How? Invite them to a place where (2 THINGS) they can 1) hear more about Jesus ... and 2) experience a Body of Christ just like this one—to hang out at a place where they can love and be loved. People have a deep need for that these days. So, we can pray and we can invite; it's really not that complicated. But if we're

being obedient to what God's called us all to do, as followers of Christ, that's what we'll be doing...

Now, think of some names you can write down—between now and Easter, several weeks away. Or Palm Sunday, or Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday. We have a good variety of services we'll be doing. And I promise you, you'll be hearing about Jesus at every one of them. That's the best we have to offer ... and people need him. Pray over those names. Ask God who he wants you to invite to Easter this year. Pray about it ... then act on it—trusting God for the rest...