



Conversation with God – Part 8
Job 42:10
GCSP – 01/24/2009

God, in His Word, tells us over and over again that we, as Christians, are to love one another. He tells us that an unbelieving world will know that we are Christians, and thus be attracted to the gospel message, because of our love for one another; which on the flipside of that thought means that unbelievers will not know we are Christians when we choose to not love one another as we should.

So, for the umpteenth time I ask, what is the opposite of love? – Selfishness. How does love and selfishness fit into our study on prayer? – When the overwhelming bulk of our prayers are on our own behalf.

Tonight our focus is going to be on intercessory prayer; praying for the needs of others. Let me say up front that there is absolutely nothing wrong with praying for yourself. I could take you to several passages of Scripture that teach us to do just that, but there are more passages that either show us by example or command us to pray for others.

Even the Disciple's prayer, or the Lord's Prayer as it is more commonly known, is very clear in teaching us to pray for others. "***Our Father...give us this day our daily bread...forgive us our debts...lead us not into temptation.***"

We have the example of Abraham as he prayed that God would not destroy Sodom if even a handful of righteous men could be found. Moses prayed on behalf of the stiff-necked Children of Israel time after time, with the most passionate of these intercessory prayers when he tells God if He will not forgive Israel to blot his own name out of His book.

The prophet Samuel says in **1 Samuel 12:23**, "**Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.**" And while it was one of the duties of a prophet to pray for the people he is called to watch over, this verse strongly implies that we are in sin when we do not pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

King Hezekiah prayed for the people when the Assyrians were about to attack. Elijah prayed for others on numerous occasions. Jeremiah prayed constantly with tears over his nation. Ezra, Nehemiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Hosea, Stephen, Peter, Paul, and on and on it goes. We have example after example to prove our love for one another by petitioning God in intercessory prayer on the behalf of family, nations, believers, and unbelievers.

Our ultimate example is obviously Jesus Christ, as He is our ultimate example in all things. The entire 17th chapter of the Gospel of John is an intercessory prayer on behalf of His disciples and on behalf of you and me and every other person who ever comes to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Job**.

Job 42:10

Let's pray.

We all know the basics of the story of Job. Three times God says Job was a man who was "**blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.**" Job was blessed by God with wealth and children. Satan then challenges God to allow him to attack Job in order to prove that the only reason for Job's righteousness was the blessings God had bestowed upon him. The Bible simply says that God allowed Satan to attack Job, with limits as to what he could do.

Job refused to curse God in the midst of his anguish as he watched his children die, watched his wealth vanish, and endured physical pain as his health disappeared. Job also endured his grieving wife who tried to get Job to curse God and die, and then he had to endure the accusations of his "friends" who spend 33 chapters trying to figure out what horrible sins Job must have committed for God to afflict him so. God rebukes Job's friends for their foolishness and lack of understanding as to what was going on in **42:7-8**.

In the course of time Job does sin in his questioning of God and he does admit he allowed his fears to get the better of him, but he quickly repented in God's presence. And after this season of suffering had run its course and accomplished its divine purposes, the Bible says, "**The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends.**"

There is power in intercessory prayer.

Hold your place in **Job** and turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **James**.

James 5:16

According to this verse, what is a prerequisite for being healed? – Confession of your sins to one another and intercessory prayer. There are passages that teach us to pray for our own healing, there are passages that teach us to fast for our own healing, but this verse tells us to confess our sins to other Christians and pray for other Christians if we desire healing.

So who benefits from intercessory prayer? The one who is being prayed for and the one who prays receives the benefit. When we enlarge our hearts and pray for the people of God we will receive the blessing as much as the one for whom we pray.

Job received his health back, twice as many children, and twice as much wealth when he prayed for his friends. The Bible doesn't say he received these things after he confessed his fears, or repented of his sins, or any other such thing, but he received these things when he prayed for his friends.

How powerful is this verse when you truly think it through. We can debate many things in the Book of Job but we cannot debate the power of intercessory prayer - "**The Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends.**"

But even if there were no personal benefit, we are commanded to pray on the behalf of others. We are told to pray for the pastors and leaders of the church, we are told to

pray for those who are in positions of power in our government, we are told to pray for those who are sick, we are told to pray for the poor, we are told to pray for missionaries, we are told to pray for unbelievers, we are told to pray for the nations, we are told to pray for our spouses and children, and we are even told to pray for our enemies and for those who persecute us. So regardless of any personal benefit and blessing we are commanded to pray for others.

Stephen prayed for those who were stoning him to death and Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him. Paul prays and/or tells of his prayers on behalf of his brothers and sisters in Christ in every one of his epistles. We see the disciples of Christ united in prayer for others on several occasions in the Book of **Acts**. We see saints who are already in heaven engaging in intercessory prayer in the Book of **Revelation**.

But even if we had no examples in Scripture and even if we did not have the many commands to pray in the Scripture, would not the love of Christ in our hearts compel us to pray for others? The Spirit of Christ that dwells within us is a Spirit of love is it not? And a Spirit of love would not allow us to only be selfish in our prayers.

There are times when you and I are walking in the flesh and not walking in the Spirit when our thoughts become self-centered. We get to feeling neglected and underappreciated as we allow Satan and his demons to influence our thinking. Our thoughts turn to satisfying our own needs and we look at our own situation and ignore the needs of others. We become like Nabal who refuses to help David and his men from his wealth but instead hoards all things to himself. And beloved when our prayers are too heavy on the side of self, we are in essence hoarding the riches of heaven to ourselves; riches that are more than sufficient to take care of the needs of every person on this earth and beyond.

When you are in the midst of these kinds of pity parties and these times of allowing the flesh to get the upper hand in your life, turn to intercessory prayer. Ask the Lord to forgive your selfishness and get about the task of praying for others. Set aside the things that are weighing on your mind and come boldly before the throne of grace to petition the needs of those around you.

Connie and I had a friend in the Chicago area who said when you are feeling down and depressed, do something nice for someone else, it will always lift your spirits as much or more than the spirits of the one you encouraged. It's the same with intercessory prayer. You can't continue to think negative thoughts and you can't continue to dwell on your sour mood or depressing circumstances while your mind is fixed on asking God to bless others. And if it is Satan and his demons that are attacking you and influencing your thoughts, intercessory prayer will make them flee from your presence.

How pleased must the Master be when you express your concern for your brothers and sisters instead of always filling His ears with your own needs and wants? Won't He be ever more apt to bless you along with blessing the objects of your prayers?

When the Lord told Solomon to ask him for whatever he desired and it would be granted, Solomon asked for wisdom so he could rule Israel well. The Lord was so pleased that Solomon asked for something on behalf of the people instead of riches for

himself, He gave Solomon the wisdom he asked for along with great wealth and peace for the duration of his reign over Israel.

Spurgeon says, "It is utterly impossible that you should have a large measure of grace unless it prompts you to use your influence for others. If your soul has grace at all and you are not a mighty intercessor, that grace must be as a grain of mustard seed – a shriveled and puny thing. You have enough grace to float your soul clear from the quicksand, but you have no deep floods of grace or else you would carry a rich cargo of the needs of others up to the throne of God. And you would bring back for them rich blessings that they might not have obtained without you. If you are like an angel with your foot upon the golden ladder that reaches to heaven, if you are ascending and descending, know that you will ascend with other's prayers and descend with other's blessings, for it is impossible for a mature saint to live or pray for himself alone."

Intercessory prayers have stopped plagues, removed darkness, caused the earth to stop spinning, drove away frogs and locusts, stopped thunder and lightning, stayed God's avenging hand, brought souls to Christ, healed diseases, and fed thousands.

Why is not our very first thought to pray for the needs of others instead of trying to figure out an answer to the problem on our own? Why do we first bring the needs and problems others face to the resources of our minds instead of the resources of heaven?

Are there people in your life that you have given up on? Are there brothers and sisters who have fallen into prolonged periods of sin that you have left for dead? We do that you know. We are so very quick to turn our brothers and sisters over to Satan, smugly imagining that they will get what they deserve. Is that not the time we should be pleading all the more for them? Shouldn't our petitions be increased instead of forsaken when a brother or sister is outside of the protection of the church and exposed to the full force of Satan's schemes? Do you pray for the soldier who is at home serving on base more so than the soldier separated from his battalion on the battlefield in enemy territory?

Never give up on those you may consider to be spiritually dead, for we serve a God who has raised others from the dead on multiple occasions.

So who do we pray for in such a manner as we have been discussing?

Job prayed for his offending friends. Job prayed for the very ones who have spent days accusing him of wrongdoing. Job prayed for the ones who thought him to be a selfish sinner while God calls him a man who is "**blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.**" Job prayed for those who maligned his motives.

I have never had to endure what Job endured in such magnitude and concentration. I know what it's like to lose a child and I know what it's like to lose money, but not to the extent that Job did. I also know what it is like to have people I considered to be friends to misconstrue and attack my motives. I was appalled and angered, for how in the world could anyone know my motives? And then how could they accuse me of things based on their false assumptions? If God ever told Satan that I was blameless and upright, which

I doubt, I definitely was not so during this trial. It took me a long time before I began to pray for those who had attacked my character.

Pray for those who are argumentative with you. The reason this world now has umpteen thousand different denominations and the reason so many churches have split over the years is we become so easily offended when someone doesn't agree with our theology. Instead of lifting our argumentative brother or sister up to the Lord we just argue and eventually split company with them. As I already mentioned, there is much in the Book of Job that could be argued over. Some believe that Job brought these attacks of Satan upon himself because of his fears. I don't agree with that. I feel that is reading into the account to support a certain theology, but if you believe along those lines then pray for me as I should also for you.

As the pastor of this church I get it from both sides of many issues. One person believes this about a topic I have preached and another believes that. At times people are in full agreement with something I preached while at the same time others have a bone to pick with me. I try my best to only preach the truth of God's Word as the Holy Spirit leads me into that truth, which is why I am continually asserting for all of us to BELIEVE WHAT WE READ IN THE SCRIPTURES INSTEAD OF READING WHAT WE BELIEVE, but that's not always good enough and I am obviously not infallible; but neither are you.

So what's the answer? Do we storm out of the church or Bible study spitting and snorting because the pastor said something you don't agree with? Or do you lift the pastor up in prayer asking God to reveal to him or to you the truth about the passage?

You should also pray for your proud friends. The pride of several of Job's friends comes shining through in this book. Eliphaz and Bildad were very proud as they looked down and talked down to Job on several occasions.

We all have friends who succumb to the sin of pride, and if you are having a hard time thinking of one you can start by looking at the friend you see in the mirror. But how often do you catch someone sharing something that happened in their life and it comes across as something prideful? It happens in our Bible studies all the time. In an effort to add to the discussion sometimes stories are told that have very little to do with the subject at hand and very much to do with showing how spiritual the story teller is. I have caught myself doing this at times.

When that happens do your thoughts go to intercessory prayer or do your thoughts go to disgust and ill-feelings toward the story teller?

Or maybe there are people in your life that you know look down at you for whatever reason. Maybe you come from vastly different backgrounds. Maybe you have a nasty habit that is viewed as some horrible sin by others who do not share in that habit. Maybe you dress differently, eat differently, act differently, run in different social circles, and don't keep their house as clean or tidy, or any one of a million other differences; whatever the reason you know that some look down at you.

Do you pray for them or do you just accuse them in your mind of being proud?

Pray for your proud friends. Pray for your proud brothers and sisters. Pray that God would cure them of that sin. Your anger won't change them. Your disdain or disgust will not cure them. Your ignoring them and withholding your smiles toward them will not cure them. Your avoiding them will not cure them. Pray for them and keep praying for them until God changes their heart, or your heart, or both.

Also pray for those who cannot pray for themselves. What do I mean by that?

Back up a few verses and let's read.

Job 42:7-9

Because of the sins of Job's friends in misunderstanding what was happening in this confrontation between God and Satan, God was not accepting their prayers.

Many of us have friends and family members who are so far out of God's will that their prayers will not be heard. When sin is in control the first work is repentance not prayer. They first have to turn away from their sin before their prayers can be heard. Scripture even says if a husband is not treating his wife as he should his prayers will not be heard. So pray for those who cannot be heard.

Once again, go back with me in your Bibles to the Book of **James**.

James 5:14-15

Part of the implication here is that the one who is sick is in such a weakened state spiritually and physically that he cannot pray for himself in an effective manner. This is why the passage commands that the one who is sick should call on the elders to anoint him with oil and pray on his behalf. The faithful prayers offered on his behalf will then restore his health and bring forgiveness of sins that may have been committed by the one who is sick; further implying that this kind of sickness is brought on by sin.

This kind of intercessory prayer also refers to those who do not yet know Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Think of all the countless hours of prayers that are offered up by those who do not know Jesus as Lord. Think of the religious systems in this world where people pray all the time but have no relationship with God because they have rejected His Son and thus His only plan of salvation. Think of the countless hours wasted by these folks who do not realize that their prayers go unheard and thus unanswered.

Intercessory prayer must include a healthy dose of praying for the lost. As I mentioned a few sermons ago, we can't be praying for revival if we do not have compassion for the lost. We can't pray for the Lord to add to our church if we do not at the same time pray for lost souls to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. We can't expect God to fill this building or the one going up across the highway if we are not praying for God to save the people of this valley. We really can't even be supporting missions in a proper way if we are not also praying that souls will be drawn to the Lord through the ministry of the missions we support.

We must be about the business of praying on behalf of those who cannot pray.

Do you pray for others as you should? I confess to you right here and now that I don't. My prayers are all too often filled with my own needs and desires more so than other's. So I ask you to pray for me as I commit to pray for you. You may have thought you were hearing a sermon that was exhorting you tonight but I admit that it has first been exhorting me.

How best can you repay the debt to those who prayed you into the kingdom? Someone did you know. Yes, I know that the Bible teaches that we were chosen by God unto salvation, but somehow God uses the prayers of others to accomplish this. Someone, or a whole bunch of someone's prayed for you before you came to salvation. If not for intercessory prayer who knows where you could be tonight? If not for intercessory prayer it is likely your life would be completely different than it is right now. If not for intercessory prayer...

So I ask, who are you praying for? Who of those who have offended you are you praying for? Who of those who have argued with you are you praying for? Who of those who struggle with pride are you praying for? Who of those who look down on you are you praying for? Who of those who are so deep in the clutches of sin are you praying for? Who amongst the lost are you praying for?

If you couldn't answer some or all of those questions immediately, join me in prayer.

Let's pray.