

# Draw Near 8

## Intercession, April 21

### Purpose

As we think of how to love people in this world, it is through the practice of intercessory prayer that we can have the greatest influence in the lives of the people around us. This lesson explores the reasons why that is true and explores various ways to practice intercession.

### Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed some devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let's share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

### Learning Experience

Introduction: What do you want to leave for your children/grandchildren? What do you want your life to leave behind?

George Buttrick (a preacher and theologian at Union, Vanderbilt, and Southern Baptist Seminary) says of Jesus concerning this subject, "Two signs of Jesus abide, though all else be ignored or forgotten—a prayer and a cross...These are His memorial: not a tombstone or a moneyed foundation, but a simple prayer and a gallows set against the daybreak."

Buttrick is pointing to the reality that Jesus left behind two important things for us. One, which most all people know, is the cross - and so many people wear it in some form or fashion. Just spend time counting the ones you see today.

The Second is a prayer - the Lord's Prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes how his followers are to live. And in the midst of it, in Matthew 6, he gives us a prayer. Many scholars and leading theologians, beyond just the common Christian, have pointed to the prayer and said you must know it and learn it well to be a Christian.

1. Let's take a moment and read through it: Matthew 6:9-13.
  1. The prayer is focused primarily on God's omnipotence and our impotence. God can still do everything, and we can do nothing. We are totally dependent on him for all things. It is the ultimate declaration of

dependence, the opposite of the independence our culture sometimes screams at us.

2. The first three lines are surrender to God: Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done.
  3. The next four lines are all supplication to God: daily bread, forgiveness, no temptation, deliverance from the evil one.
2. So how is it manifested in the prayer? Intercession is throughout the prayer because the prayer is based on the "our" from the first word, "Our Father in heaven..." This prayer is to be prayed in community, remembering the people around you. Essentially, the prayer closet given here is the widest one there could be - including your whole community.
1. What types of things should we therefore be praying for all these people? As we add people to our list to intercede why is it we are looking to add to our list? How will we decide what to pray for?
    1. We ask that others have the physical resources needed to survive and thrive today. "Give us this day our daily bread." This is a prayer asking for help for today and the sustenance for the day. As I write this, I have a friend whose mother has just been put into hospice. There is no real prayer for healing for her, but there can be a prayer for strength for him and his father. There are many things to pray even for her because she does have today.
    2. We ask that others have their sins, that separate them from God, removed, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." We not only talk to God about our own sin, we need to talk to God about the sin and hurting of other people. When someone confesses sin to you, or something they are struggling with to you, then you have the opportunity to pray with this for help from God.
    3. We ask that others do not have to endure times of trial, testing and suffering that tempt us to do evil. "And lead us not into temptation..." This is a reference to any trial, testing, or temptation we may have or others may have. It says here to "lead" us. Sometimes our prayer is for the church to not be led. Sometimes the prayer is for the family to not be led. So we have many things we can pray for.
    4. We beg God to protect neighbors and nations from the one who wants to bring down all people. "...but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus is the one biblical personality who mentions Satan the most. He took the Devil very seriously. So should we. Satan is out there working against us and against God at all times. We all have internal things that bring us down into sin. But there is also an external force

creating temptation as well. Be aware and in prayer for others about this.

2. As Marjorie Thompson says, "Intercession is the most concrete expression of the social dimension of prayer."
3. Douglas Steere says, "Intercession is the most intensely social act that the human being is capable of." Chris Altmann adds - "the most intense social act is not digging wells for the thirsty or feeding the hungry or healing the sick. It is praying for the people around us that we know."

At this point you need to be aware that people practice intercession in many different ways.

- Some choose to intercede by day of the week - so on Monday they pray for church members, Tuesday they pray for family members, Wednesday they pray for work, Thursday they pray for missionaries, etc.
- I know of one man who keeps a sheet of paper with him on which he writes down names of people who ask him to pray for them; and each day, as he prays he pulls out the sheet. He is diligent to update it and keep it down to one piece of paper to carry around, but I'm sure it is always full.
- Some intercede by time of day - praying in the morning for one group of people, at noon for another, and praying at supper for another.
- The point of sharing this with you is to give you ideas of how to begin your own prayer journal/list and begin interceding for others. We do offer a journal for sale for \$2 in The Gathering if you would like one for a prayer journal.

Some may already be doing much of what I am sharing, this is stuff they are quite familiar with. Let me share some alternate ways to intercede:

1. Intercession as Listening: When we are in intercession for another person, praying for their cancer or their arthritis or their good health, we are doing them a great service. But sometimes we pray for these things for many months or years. This is good, but to change this up is to stop and listen for God in reference to this prayer. Intercessory prayer is also about listening, being in conversation about another person with God. Maybe when it comes to praying for Aunt Susie's rheumatoid arthritis you need to first ask God - what should I pray for Aunt Susie? Then sit and wait and see where God takes you. Then pray for that.
2. Intercession as Flash Prayers: 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and Philippians 4:6 both talk about praying without ceasing. How can we do that? One way, is to practice what some call "Flash Prayers." Praying short and silent prayers for each person we see and interact with during the day. When you do something like this, your focus moves outward rather than inward. You

transform yourself from constantly being “me” centered into now being “others centered.” So when you are among people - in the Grocery Store, at Work, or at Church, pray for them. Pray for the lady behind the counter, pray for the worker in the clothing aisle or at Wal-Mart, and pray for the guy who cuts you off on the road.

3. Intercession as Countercultural Action: Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks of prayer, “You have heard that it was said, ‘love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” His concept here is not for you to pray imprecatory prayers for your enemies. No, he is talking about a community that not only loves each other, but loves people who don’t love them. So we show that, deep within ourselves, when we pray for people who are our enemy. Is there someone in your life - a relative, a former friend, a co-worker, a church member, that has offended or hurt you or is working against you? Pray for that person and for good in their life. James Bryan Smith suggests, if we can’t think of someone who fits that for us, to pray for our competitor. Pray for the success of our competitor against us. These things will challenge us in our faith and bring us nearer to God.

## **Practice**

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God’s approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.
2. This week you have a devotional on the back of the sermon outline. It has instructions on how to do intercession four times this week. Next week, as we come to class let’s talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!