

Teach Us to Pray

Lesson 8: Intercession: Praying for Others -- 1 Timothy 2:1–8; James 5:13–18

Somewhere, right now, a mother is on her knees for a child who has wandered far from God. She has been praying for years. There is no dramatic answer yet, no phone call, no homecoming. Just a name, lifted up again and again, carried into the presence of God by a love that will not quit. She may feel that her prayers vanish into the ceiling. But heaven says otherwise. That mother is doing one of the most powerful things a human being can do. She is interceding, standing in the gap between someone she loves and the God who alone can reach them.

Intercession is prayer turned outward. It is the holy work of carrying other people to God: the wandering child, the sick friend, the struggling marriage down the street, the leaders of our nation, the missionary across the world, the brother or sister sitting beside us in worship. Much of our praying naturally circles around ourselves and our own concerns. Intercession breaks that orbit. It takes the love God has put in our hearts for others and turns it into action by lifting them before the throne of grace.

Paul urges that prayers “be made for all people,” even for kings and those in authority, because God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” And there it is again, the great truth from earlier in our study: “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Our intercession joins the heartbeat of God himself, who longs for people to be saved. James adds that this kind of praying actually accomplishes something: “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” He points to Elijah, a man just like us, whose prayers held back the rain and called it down again.

That is where this lesson begins, with the staggering privilege of praying for others and the quiet faith that our prayers for them are not wasted breath. God has chosen to work through the prayers of his people. Read these verses slowly, and let them lift your eyes from your own list to the people God is calling you to carry to him.

Group Discussion: Most of us spend far more of our prayer time on our own needs than on others’. Why do you think intercession, praying seriously and persistently for other people, is so often neglected? What might change in our church and in our own hearts if we truly believed our prayers for others mattered to God?

Personal Reflection: Who is actually on your prayer list, and who is not? Are there people you find easy to pray for and others, perhaps those who have hurt you or those in authority you disagree with, that you rarely lift to God? What does the makeup of your intercession reveal about the reach of your love?

Read 1 Timothy 2:1–8; James 5:13–18

Study Questions

1. Paul urges “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Why does Paul make intercession for all people, including governing authorities, a priority for the church, and what does this teach us about the reach of Christian prayer?
2. Look honestly at who is, and is not, on your prayer list. Are there people, perhaps those who have wronged you or leaders you strongly disagree with, that you almost never pray for? What would it look like this week to begin interceding for someone you have left off your list?
3. Paul grounds intercession in God’s heart: he “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” for “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:4-5). How does God’s desire for all to be saved, and the truth that Christ alone is mediator, shape the way we pray for those who are lost?
4. It is easy to talk about evangelism and rarely pray for specific lost people by name. Who are the people in your life who do not know Christ, and what would it mean to begin praying for them regularly and specifically, asking God to draw them to himself?
5. James writes, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him... And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick” (James 5:14-15). What does this passage teach about praying for the sick, the role of the elders and the church family, and how should we understand “the prayer of faith” without turning it into a guarantee of healing on demand?
6. James says, “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). How well do you let other believers into your struggles so they can pray for you, and how faithfully do you pray for them? What keeps us from this kind of honest, mutual intercession?
7. James declares, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working,” and points to Elijah, “a man with a nature like ours,” whose prayers stopped and started the rain (James 5:16-18). What does this teach us about the real effectiveness of intercession, and how does Elijah’s example encourage ordinary believers that their prayers for others actually matter?
8. Many of us pray for others half-heartedly because we doubt it makes any difference. Where have you grown discouraged or slack in praying for someone, and how might James’s promise that a righteous person’s prayer “has great power” renew your persistence in interceding for them?
9. Paul writes, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Timothy 2:8), as he gives instruction about prayer in the gathered church. What does this verse teach about who leads public prayer in the assembly and about the holiness and unity required of those who pray, and how do we honor the New Testament pattern for the distinct roles of men and women in the assembly while affirming that every Christian, man and woman, is called to a rich life of intercession?

10. Look back across 1 Timothy 2:1-8 and James 5:13-18, with their call to pray for all people, their confidence in God's desire to save, and their assurance that the prayers of God's people have great power. Name one person or group you will commit to interceding for regularly, and one way this study is enlarging your prayers beyond yourself.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 6:18–20, praying at all times for all the saints, and for boldness in the gospel; Colossians 1:9-12, Paul's model prayer for the spiritual growth of others; Romans 10:1, Paul's heart's desire and prayer for the salvation of his people; Luke 22:31–32, Jesus interceding for Peter that his faith would not fail; 1 Samuel 12:23, refusing to sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for others.