



Oct 25, 2020 - The Evidence of Intercession - Philippians 4:4-7

OPEN

This is a season of harvest and ingathering. It is a time of thankfulness. What blessings has God brought into your life?

Last weekend in Whonnock there was a giant pumpkin contest. The winning pumpkin was 197! Incidentally, Joanne is our church insurance agent!

Prayer often feels as unattainable as growing a giant gourd in our garden! But our passage of study today will offer a helpful perspective when it comes to intercessory prayer.

Paul wanted to help 1st Century Christians navigate the faith journey! And learning to intercede is essential equipment for the Christian in any age.

Please take note that intercession is especially linked to thanksgiving! As Colossians 4:2 tells us: *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of **thanksgiving**.”*

All of Philippians is predicated on the giving of thanks. Paul saw great answers to prayer in that city – from the initial embrace of the Gospel and a church planted in Lydia’s living room to his release from prison (see Acts 16:11-40).

In **Philippians 4:10-19** Paul outlined the way in which this church had been such a practical help to him. So, first let’s consider the command to **pray**. Then we will example a couple of **challenges** to prayer.

What fuels your praying? Is it desperation? Is it duty? Today we are going to consider the fact that thanksgiving must drive our prayer life. Take some time to read a call to intercession from our text, **Philippians 4:4-7**.

DIG

We might draw out this passage of Scripture in the following way:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, **rejoice!**⁵ Let your **gentle spirit** be known to all men. The Lord is near.⁶ **Be anxious for nothing**, but in everything **by prayer** and **supplication** with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the **peace of God**, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



To intercede there must be the correct environment...

There are three components to the right atmosphere for prayer and intercession. First, **consistent joy**. Second, **visible gentleness**. Third, **giving thanks**. These characteristics in our lives make the proper environment for intercession. Fear, guilt, obligation have no place! This means that we should examine how, when, and why we pray. Do we come to God with our prayer requests void of these character qualities?

To intercede there must be an exchange...

Next, we see that there is an exchange that takes place. We are commanded to exchange our **anxiety** for **God’s peace** is the result. In fact, Paul describes God’s peace as beyond understanding yet standing sentry over us!

Do we recognize how passionate God is to see us exchange our anxieties for His peace? Dallas Willard has written, *“Prayer is a matter of explicitly sharing with God my concerns about what he too is concerned about in my life. And of course, he is concerned about my concerns and, in particular, that my concerns should coincide with his. This is our walk together. Out of it I pray.”* (**The Divine Conspiracy**, Harper One, 1997, 243)

To intercede there must be proper execution...

How is this exchange executed or enacted? It takes place through prayer and supplication. We might say simply “petition” – making our requests made known to God. Notice the deliberate nature of this kind of asking. Of course, this is not because God lacks intimate knowledge of our need! Rather, this means by which God draws us deeper in our dependence upon Him. Prayer is as much about our growth as it is about God acts.

Now, when our prayers are concerned with the good of someone else, we call it **intercession**. As Paul wrote in II Corinthians 1:10-11, “*And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.*”

How do we apply this to our lives?

Remember – intercession is not a mathematical equation. It is not some kind of ritualized function – think of the countless candles being burned in certain churches! Intercession is not cold and mechanical but real and relational!

Reflecting on George Herbert’s notion that “prayer [is] the Churches banquet” Timothy Keller comments, “*Feasts were never mere feedings but a sign and means of acceptance and fellowship with the Host. Prayer is a nourishing friendship.*” (**Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God**, Penguin, 2014, 29)

Yet this relationship can become fuzzy, regardless of how wonderfully Jesus cares for us! Consider two roles.

- **Acting as His true children - Matthew 7:7-8**

These verses leave no doubt that to act as God’s true child we must ask of Him. Indeed, we are commanded to be intentional in asking. John Newton wrote, “*Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring. For His love and power are such, thou cans’t never ask too much.*”

James 4:2-3 suggests that some of our failure to ask God is not just spiritual laziness. It can also be a result of an unforgiving spirit, wrong motives, or broken relationships. Notice that Philippians 4:2-3 highlighted a dispute between two sisters in Christ. As children of God, if we are in conflict with one another, we cannot fulfill our true calling of calling upon God in prayer.

- **Receiving from our true Father - Matthew 7:9-11**

What is occurring when we question the value of prayer? We are in unbelief of our heavenly Father’s ways! Faith is expectant! (see Hebrews 11:6) We may also struggle to understand how God acts in response to the prayers and petitions of humans. Given His sovereign and divine rule over this earth this is a good question.

Yet we are urged to pray in faith, believing. About God answering our prayers, C. S. Lewis has written, “*God has retained a discretionary power of granting or refusing it. Except on that condition prayer would destroy us.*”

Dallas Willard urges that we recognize something essential when we intercede for another. We trust God “*not just because ‘fixing him’ is beyond you, but because it is good it should be beyond you.*” (Willard, 240)

REFLECT

Thanksgiving is especially connected to intercessory prayer.

Dallas Willard wrote, “*Prayer in the manner of Jesus will have incredible results, and thanksgiving will be a constant theme just because that his the reality of our relationship to God...we are thankful when we know we are living under the provisions of his bountiful hand.*” (Willard, 244).

Take some time to ponder your praying:

- *Does it reflect a heart of thanksgiving?*
- *Do you pray with Christ’s compassion for others?*
- *Do you pray as a trusting child to a Heavenly Father?*

This week’s HOME GROUP study passage:

Matthew 7:7-11