

Ten Things to Pray For

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Introduction.

- A. The Bible tells us that God wants us to pray. Indeed, we are supposed to pray so much that we can be said to pray without ceasing. However, sometimes we aren't quite sure what to pray for. This isn't always true. When my wife and I sit down to dinner and she looks at me expectantly, I gather that I'm supposed to bless the food.
- B. The rest of the time, though, it's not quite so apparent what we should be praying for. At least in my life, this too often leads to what I call the Santa Claus prayer syndrome. You all know what I'm talking about: every mall in the country at Christmastime has some fat guy who dresses up in a red suit and claims to be Santa Claus, and parents can bring their kids to tell Santa what's on their wish list—for a nominal fee, of course. The kid sits on Santa's lap and tells Santa, "I want a Bionicle and I want a Harry Potter DVD and I want a gun I can shoot my sister with," and so on, until the kid's two minutes are up and it's time for the photo.
- C. I, at least, feel sometimes like I treat my prayer time with God too much like those five minutes on Santa's knee. I spend an awful lot of time praying for stuff for me. Now, this is not necessarily a bad thing. For instance, I certainly prayed that God would help me to do a good job preaching this sermon this evening. However, I just can't shake the feeling that God wants my prayer life to be about more than just me.
- D. Thankfully, this is a place where the Bible helps all of us out. In God's word, there is an entire category of prayers called intercessions, and these are the prayers we offer on behalf of someone else. These intercessions are quite common. Indeed, the godly men of the Bible spent far more time making intercession in their prayers than they did praying for themselves. If this example is any guide, our prayer lives ought to be filled not with prayers for ourselves, but prayers for others. To help us do this, let's look at ten examples of intercessory prayers in the Bible, ten things to pray for.

I. Intercession in Earthly Matters.

- A. First, let's look at some things we can pray for in the earthly realm, things without an explicit spiritual topic. At the head of this list comes the prayers we should offer for our **GOVERNMENT**. Paul discusses this in 1 Timothy 2:1-2. He makes clear that we should offer prayers for all who are in authority. There are a couple things to note about this:
 1. First, the "all" here is significant. There are many Christians who have a great interest in politics, and that's a fine thing, but it can expose us to the temptation to pray for the guy in office only when he's the guy we wanted there in the first place. That's not what God expects. Instead, look at the example of Paul. If he followed his own teaching, which I'm sure he did, Paul prayed for the Roman emperor who would order Paul's execution. We need to pray for the authorities whether we like them or not.
 2. Second, this passage tells us why we should pray: so that we can be allowed to practice our faith without being disturbed by anyone, and this reminds us of an important application. I'm not normally a big fan of obeying bumper stickers, but when I'm behind someone with one of those "Pray For Our Troops" magnets on the back of his car, I do exactly that. Regardless of how we may feel about the war in Iraq, we need to remember that the men and women of our armed forces are committed to defending our liberty to worship God, and for that we should be both thankful and prayerful.
- B. Also, as Christians, we should also make an effort to pray for the **SICK**. We see Paul doing this in Acts 28:8. Certainly, we do not have the power that Paul had, to heal by simply laying hands on a person, but we can follow his example in praying for the sick around us. This is important, not just for the prayer itself, but for the love it shows to others. Let me tell you a story about Piper and Toni, some friends of mine from back in Texas. Several years ago, both of them were members of a denomination, but they had some Christian friends. One day, their baby daughter India fell seriously ill. Piper and Toni's Christian friends found out about it and asked the entire congregation at Dowlen Road to pray for India. They did, and that so impressed Piper that he began visiting. Within a year, both Piper and Toni were baptized, and it all started with a prayer for the sick. Let's remember, friends, to be generous with our prayers.
- C. Lastly, in the earthly realm we should also pray for our **ENEMIES**. Consider the words of Jesus in Luke 6:28. In some ways, prayers like these are the ultimate expression of the love of God in our lives. They require us to take people whom we do not naturally love, who perhaps do not deserve our love, and bring us to express love for them anyway. Now, most of us don't have people in our lives we would consider our enemies, but it is certainly legitimate to think of the people who bring us irritation or inconvenience and pray for them too. For example, the next time we're driving along and the guy in front of us is driving like he's brain-dead, let's not get mad at him. Let's not lay on the horn. Let's pray for him instead—he probably needs it, and so do we.

II. Intercession in Spiritual Matters.

- A. In addition to these things, there are a number of intercessions we can offer that are explicitly spiritual, like the prayers we offer for **OTHER CHRISTIANS**. Look at the example of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:16-17. Now, it's important for us to offer prayers for the physical needs of our brethren, but it's even more important for us to pray

for them in the spiritual realm. There is so much to pray for! Some of the most beautiful and powerful passages in the entire Bible are the prayers that Jesus and Paul offer for the church and those who are a part of it. We need to have the heart that they had. We need to be so devoted to the souls of our brethren that we know what they need and remember to pray for it. We need to be so concerned about the church here that we remember it daily to God so that through this body and each of its members, God will be glorified.

- B. Prayers like this are especially significant when we see a **CHRISTIAN WHO HAS SINNED**. Let's look at John's words on the subject in 1 John 5:16. This verse tells us so much about the way we need to be.
1. Much of the time, we suffer from the delusion that our battles with sin need to be solitary. We look around at all of the other Christians we go to church with, we assume that such good, godly people would never struggle with temptation, and so we conceal our own struggles lest all the other Christians look down on us. None of us want to look weak, so we hide. Brethren, if we want to fulfill the potential of this verse, that cannot happen. It paints a picture of Christians who know each other's spiritual lives inside and out, and we can only share in that vision if we are willing to help and to be helped.
 2. This verse points out how powerful our prayers can be. We can play an important role in our brethren being forgiven. As long as they are willing at all to try to serve God, we can help them to be right with Him again. How can we neglect to pray for such a vital cause?
- C. As we remember to pray for weak Christians, we also need to remember to pray for those who are outside of the church. We need to remember to pray for the **LOST**. We see Paul's prayer for Israel in Romans 10:1-2. Paul was so deeply distressed about their spiritual state that he prayed for them constantly. We should do the same, especially for the lost who are dear to us. This is important for two reasons.
1. First, although each person makes his own decision about salvation, it may well be that God will answer our prayer by bringing about circumstances that will cause a more favorable response.
 2. Second, our prayer motivates us to answer our own prayers by renewing our efforts to help the lost. Many of us have family members who are not right with God, and if we've been Christians for any length of time, we've probably discussed the issue over and over again. I have an older brother who isn't a Christian, and who hasn't been going to church for more than 20 years, and yes, my parents have been around the block with him, and I've been around the block with him, and sometimes I doubt whether he will ever be saved. But when I pray for him, it gives me the courage to keep trying, and that's all any of us can do. We can keep praying, we can keep speaking the truth in love, and we can keep trusting God.
- D. Our concern for the lost leads us logically into our next item to pray for: **DOORS FOR THE WORD**. Paul urges the Colossians to pray for exactly this in Colossians 4:3-4. There are so many ways we can apply this passage.
1. First, we can follow it by praying for gospel preachers, and this gospel preacher will take all the prayers he can get. I want to be a fisher of men, not a keeper of the aquarium. I want to save the lost. Please pray for me. Pray that opportunities may abound in the work here, that I will have wisdom to recognize those opportunities and courage to take advantage of them. Furthermore, I am quite certain that all the other gospel preachers whom we support feel the same way. Pray for all of us, so that we can do God's work.
 2. However, this isn't just a preacher thing. All of us need doors for the word so that all of us can fulfill God's commandment to preach the gospel. That doesn't mean that we all need to preach on a street corner somewhere, but it does mean that we need chances to do God's work in our lives, and we should pray for them.
- E. Similarly, we ought also to pray for workers to reach the lost. We see Jesus encouraging His disciples to pray for **WORKERS** in Luke 10:1-2, and the same need exists today. There are so many today who need to hear the word of the Lord, and so few who are willing to teach it. On the level of the brotherhood, many congregations today have great difficulty finding a worthy man to preach for them. Even within many local churches, a similar problem exists. Because the Lord's church is set up so that everyone is supposed to be involved, everyone needs to be involved. There are all sorts of different jobs, both public and private, that contribute to the work of the church. Everything from teaching Bible classes to visiting the sick is a labor that must be done, a work that needs a worker. Let us all pray for workers in the fields of the Lord, and let us also be willing to work.
- F. In addition to all of these things, we should also pray for the Lord's **KINGDOM** to come. We see this taught in Jesus' model prayer in Matthew 6:9-10. Now, there is a sense in which this prayer has been answered. After all, the kingdom of God did come with power on the day of Pentecost, nearly 2000 years ago. However, the kingdom continues to come today, whenever another human heart accepts the dominion of Jesus. Indeed, the kingdom continues to come within each one of us, as we daily give more of our lives over to Him and order our actions more and more in accordance with His will, and those are things we should certainly pray for.
- G. Finally, the last item in our list of things to pray for is the **RETURN OF CHRIST**. We see the apostle Paul praying for this in 1 Corinthians 16:22. I, at least, find this a challenging thing to pray for sometimes. There have been times in my life when I've been completely sick of Earth and wanted the Lord to come back right then and there, but these days, things are going better for me. A lot of the time, if I don't watch myself, I find myself thinking that the return of Jesus is OK in an abstract sense, but I don't really want Him to come back right now. I want Him to wait on that, because I've still got things to do. We can't have that attitude. If we truly love Jesus more than anything else, we will want Him to come back to earth as soon as can possibly be, and we will be praying for it. Paul was able to pray for the imminent return of Jesus because he didn't have anything in this life to hold him back. We need to be the same way. We need to have God as our first love.

Conclusion. Prayer is valuable, but it is only available to Christians. If you would like to become a Christian, now's the time.