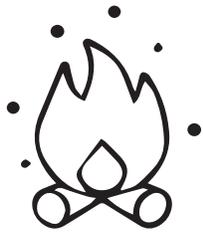


PART 3: INTERCESSION

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION



Read this Overview Together

Right now, we have real needs and real burdens for others. Some of us are sick, or vulnerable to getting sick, and need God's healing power and help to face the anxiety this brings. Many of us are anxious about the future, with uncertainty about our jobs, our retirement accounts, or being able to pay for our basic needs.

We are carrying significant burdens for our loved ones, our church family, and our friends and neighbors.

Jesus also cared deeply for His disciples and carried a huge burden for them. In John 17, Jesus knows that He is about to leave them and that they will face incredible pressure and suffering as they carry out the mission He has for them in a hostile world. So, what does He do with this burden? Jesus fervently prays to His Father and intercedes for them in prayer. He prays for their greatest need in the wake of His departure, that His Father would "keep them" and that they would be one as He is one with His Father.

The future of His disciples, and by extension His church, depended upon Jesus's intercession for them. But didn't the Father know that's what they needed without Jesus praying for it? Yes. Yet the Father used Jesus' intercession for them as the means through which He would act. It's not a stretch to say that God's "keeping" the disciples depended on Jesus' intercession for them. Even today, Jesus is interceding for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34); not merely as a symbolic gesture, but as the primary means through which the Father works to provide for us.

The 18th century theologian John Wesley wrote, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." While this statement could seem to overplay our power, it instead reveals how God graciously desires to work through the means of our prayers to accomplish His work. God doesn't have to work through our prayer, but in His grace, he does. He chooses to involve us in His action in the world. Prayer is the primary way we participate.

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MC Discussion Continued...

Our Father loves when His children come to Him in prayer with requests. Jesus shared that just as an earthly father loves to give good things to his children when they ask (Luke 11:11-13), our Heavenly Father loves to give good gifts to His children even more. The prime example being His gift of His own Spirit! We may be hesitant to bring our requests to our Father because we don't really think He wants to hear from us. Or, we think He has something bad to give us in return. Yet, this doesn't match reality. He invites us to bring our requests to Him and is not annoyed or burdened by our needs. When we come to Him, He's ready and eager to receive us and answer our requests.

When we become like Jesus, our intercessor, we will do what he did and intercede for others. We don't intercede in the exact way Jesus does, for we are not the "Great High Priest," but we are called specifically to pray for others. James commands Christians to "pray for one another, that you may be healed." (James 5:16) And Paul tells Timothy that "intercessions" must be made for all men (1 Tim. 2:1). When we intercede for others, we are being formed in the way of our great Intercessor, Jesus.

So, how do we intercede for others in prayer? Intercessory prayer begins with the posture of our heart. We must first yield our wills and relinquish control to our good Father. To this end, we must stop and listen to God before we start interceding for others. Richard Foster writes, "Listening to the Lord is the first thing, the second thing, and the third thing necessary for successful intercession. Listening to God is the necessary prelude to intercession. The prayer of guidance constantly precedes and surrounds the prayer of faith." (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 39) Just as Jesus prayed, "Let your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" before asking for daily bread; so we must also listen and ask the Father to align our hearts with His so that we know what to ask for.

Ruth Haley Barton helps us understand what this looks like in practice. She writes: "Intercessory prayer is not primarily about believing we know what someone else needs and then trying to tell God what the answer is. It is not about wrestling some result from God. Intercessory prayer is more about recognizing that we do not know how to pray for others--or ourselves for that matter--but the Holy Spirit knows. Since we understand that the Holy Spirit is already interceding for us before the throne of grace, we can bring a name or need,

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MC Discussion Continued...

express it simply and in the silence experience our own groaning and Holy Spirit's groaning for that person. We can listen for the prayer that is already being prayed for that person before the throne of grace, and without struggling hard to put things into words, we can enter into God's caring love for that person and wait with them and for them in God's presence. This is a wonderful way to release our burdens to God at the end of the workday." (Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 74)

We intercede for others, not because we know exactly what they need, but because we know that the Holy Spirit knows and we join with Him in praying for them. Rather than seeking to control the outcome through our prayer, true intercessory prayer actually helps us give up control to our loving Father. When you are burdened for the need of a friend, you can intercede for them rather than attempting to fix their situation through your well-worded prayer. If you're burdened for the hard heartedness of your child, you can intercede for them and give up control to the Father, knowing that He knows exactly what they need.

With this posture, there's no magic way to pray for others. Once we have relinquished control and acknowledged that only Jesus knows what they need, we are invited to bring our requests and burdens to our Father. Practically, it may be helpful to write down what you pray so that you can look back and see how God has answered these prayers. This is also a great opportunity to show your love for others. Ask your friends and family how you can pray for them and then pray for them. Don't just say you're going to pray for them, but stop and pray for them in that moment and then write down their need so that you can continue to pray for them. In the following individual exercise, we'll practice this using "prayer cards" as a tool for reminding ourselves to intercede for others. At the end of the day, practicing intercessory prayer will require discipline and we can't wait until we feel like doing it to pray.

Richard Foster writes, "We must never wait until we feel like praying before we pray for others. Prayer is like any other work; we may not feel like working, but once we have been at it for a bit, we begin to feel like working." (Foster, 45) When we intercede for others, we are formed to become more like our great Intercessor, Jesus. And in becoming more like Jesus, we become more whole and become the true selves we were created to be.

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MC Discussion Continued...

Questions for Missional Community Discussion

1. John Wesley said, "God does nothing but in answer to prayer." Is that hard for you to hear? Why do you think that is? Does your prayer practice line up with this?
2. Some of us may be more inclined toward listening to God in "contemplative prayer" (the kind of prayer we practiced in "silence & solitude") and some more towards bringing requests in "intercessory prayer." If you are inclined more towards one, why do you think that is? How might God be calling you to grow in praying like Jesus?
3. Do you wish you prayed more for others, but somehow don't seem to do it? If so, why do you think that is?
4. How can our "intercessory prayer" and requests actually be a way we avoid true intimacy with God (through praying for others and their needs instead of yourself) and seek to control God? How would you know if that's your motivation?
5. Have you ever seen God answer your prayers for others in amazing ways? What happened?

Practice Intercessory Prayer Together

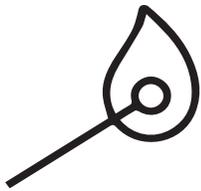
Using the prompts below, take time to pray together. This isn't just an exercise. Remember, God is with you. (Matt 18:20) Together you are going before the throne of our good Father who has all power and who loves to work through our prayers to do His work. Expect God to do something through this prayer!

1. Go around the room and ask if there's one thing that each person would like prayer for. Have someone designated to capture each request in some way that they can be shared with the group later. Decide who will pray for what when you begin praying together and work to ensure every request is prayed for.
2. One person should start by inviting the Holy Spirit to come and teach you all how to pray. Something like this: "Holy Spirit, help us know how to pray for these requests. You know what we need, help us to listen to You as we pray."
3. Spend a few minutes in silence. Spend a few moments "being with" the Father. Breathe in and breathe out, paying attention to your breath and praying with each inhale, "Our Father" and with each exhale, "You are in heaven."

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MC Discussion Continued...

4. Pray through the first part of the Lord's Prayer prayer together:
"Father, let your name be worshipped, Father, let your kingdom come, Father, let your will be done here and now as it is in heaven."
5. Pray for each specific request. Leave room and space for others to pray as the Spirit leads for each other's requests. You don't need to be "wordy." Sometimes, our wordiness in intercessory prayer can be our attempt to fix things or control them. Pray with faith and expectation, but pray knowing that the Spirit already knows what they need more than you. Pray with expectation that God uses our prayers to work in powerful ways.
6. Capture these requests and share them with the group so that they can add to a "prayer card" for intercessory prayer throughout the week (see below). Consider how you can encourage each other to pray, check in with each other, and see how God works as you commit to pray for one another.



INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: INTERCEDING FOR OTHERS

For this practice, you will need about 15-30 minutes in a quiet space where you can focus. Settle into a comfortable spot, minimize distractions (phone in airplane mode), and set a timer. Consider doing this exercise a few times throughout the week if possible.

Feel free to stretch it longer if you have the time.

Start by inviting the Holy Spirit to come and teach you how to pray. Something like this: "Holy Spirit, help me know who to pray for and how to pray for them. You know what I need and what others need, help me to listen to You as I pray."

Spend a few moments "being with" the Father in silence. Breathe in and breathe out, paying attention to your breath and praying with each inhale, "My Father" and with each exhale, "You are in heaven."

Pray through the first part of the Lord's Prayer:

Father, let your name be worshipped.

Father, let your kingdom come.

Father, let your will be done here and now as it is in heaven.

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Individual Practice Continued...

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind a specific person or circumstance He wants you to pray about. Ask Him how He wants you to pray and what He wants you to ask for. If you already have a circumstance or person you're burdened for, it's good to start there. God may have given you that burden already so that you would pray for them. Remember, your goal is not to control the situation or fix it, but to trust that only God is in control and to entrust the person or circumstance to Him.

Pray with confidence and boldness according to what the Spirit has shown you. You don't need to be "wordy." Sometimes, our wordiness in intercessory prayer can be our attempt to fix things or control them. Pray with faith and expectation, but pray knowing that the Spirit already knows what they need more than you. Ask God to increase your faith. Pray with expectation that God uses your prayers to work in powerful ways.

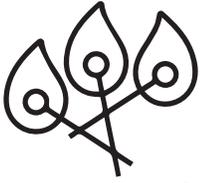
Add to your prayer card* whatever the Spirit has led you to pray for so that you can pause to pray throughout your day for this. Continue to stop and pray during the day. You might even consider setting an alarm on your phone for a specific time every day to pray for these requests.

Don't forget to stop and thank God when He answers prayer. Celebrate God's salvation and provision. Make sure to share with others what God has done and give Him glory! Keep a journal (analog or digital) of how God has answered prayer. This will strengthen your faith in the future as you look back on how God has worked.

**Prayer Cards: The goal is to have a tangible reminder that will help you pray for specific requests throughout your day. Many of us will find it most helpful to have a physical card we keep in a pocket, on a mirror, or in our car. Simple 3x5 cards work really well. Start a fresh card every week and find a rhythm that will help you stop and pay attention to these requests throughout your day. This can also be done through an application on your phone like Reminders or Evernote or in a recurring calendar reminder where you can update notes.*

DNA Reflection Questions on Next Page...

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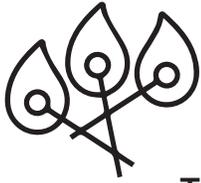


DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group. Reflect together on your experience of intercessory prayer. Let the conversation go wherever God leads, but here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. What was your experience in intercessory prayer like? What did you feel before praying, during prayer, and after prayer?
2. Was there anything that felt hard or burdensome about praying (or remembering to) in this way? If so, why do you think that is?
3. Did you see God answer your prayer in any specific way? (It's okay if not... sometimes we don't see God's answer or He invites us to pray for a long time before He does answer.)
4. Do you expect God to answer your prayer (not prayer in general, but your specific requests)? Why or why not?
5. How do you think God views you or thinks about you when you come to Him with requests? Do you think He's annoyed? Or burdened by you? Do you believe He doesn't really care?
6. If so, why do you think this is your default way of thinking about God when you approach Him in prayer? Is this true? What does the Gospel say about how God views you when you come to Him in prayer?
7. Take time to intercede for each other in prayer. Following the flow used in both the MC prayer time and the individual prayer practice, share requests and pray for each other.
8. How can you intercede for each other throughout the week? How can you help each other remember to stop and do this?

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PRACTICE WITH KIDS

This section can be used by parents or missional communities to help kids be formed through the practice of prayer.

The Main Idea: Praying for others is not about controlling God, it is about being with God and following His lead. When we pray for others in “intercessory prayer”, we get to join into the work that the Holy Spirit is already doing in their lives.

Something To Do

Have kids find a card or paper to write someone’s name on it. Take some time to sit with God and ask who He wants them to pray for this week. As they pray throughout the week, encourage the kids to keep track. For the younger kids, they can draw out their prayers and for the older kids, they can write them out. Keep it up in the house somewhere they will see it every day.

Questions for Kids

1. What did God reveal to you as you were praying?
2. What did you feel as you were praying for others?
3. Do you believe that God wants to partner with you in praying for others?
4. Have you ever seen God answer your prayers?
5. What is it like to be with God as you pray for others?