

Our Father: The Necessity and Wonder of Prayer Part Nine – The Most Powerful Question

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I. The Most Powerful Question

The most powerful questions you can ask another person are: “Can I pray for you?” and “Can you pray for me?”

Most powerful? Is that a bit of an overstatement?

I don't think so. Because it's to ask someone to go with you into the very presence of the Almighty, All-Powerful One. To ask someone, “Can I pray for you?” is to say, ‘I will walk arm in arm with you to the throne of the One who hold everything together moment by moment – and the One who loves us.’

“After Jesus said this, he looked up toward heaven and prayed: Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” – John 17:1

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe through that message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” – John 17:20-21

II. The Work of Prayer

Jesus is now our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-5:10).

Jesus is both the sacrifice, and the priest that offers that sacrifice – of himself (Heb 9:11-12). His finished work means that the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant is no longer necessary. Jesus is the one who ‘brings us to the Father’ – to be our ultimate bridge-builder.

Peter picks up on a saying from Exodus and says to the whole community of Jesus followers, that together, “...[we] are a...royal priesthood, a holy nation...” (1 Peter 2:9).

Pontifex (Latin) = Bridge Builder

The whole church, all of us together, function in this ‘priestly,’ bridge-building way. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have a *pontifex* ministry – you are a bridge builder.

We are a ‘priestly people’ for the world around us. We represent God and His ways to our neighbours. It's our ‘missional’ task. We live in a way that is set apart, distinct from the way society is organized against God and His ways, in order to show our neighbours the truth about God.

We continue to have this 'bridge-building' function with and for each other.

'Standing in the Gap' is our priestly-work prayer. We all have the responsibility of bringing people before the living God - to bridge the gap.

"Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should." – Ephesians 6:19-20

III. What Are the Barriers to Our Ministry of Prayer?

1) The Spiritual-Factor

Jesus teaches us to pray "...[d]eliver us from the evil one." – Matthew 6:13b

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." – Ephesians 6:12

C.S. Lewis, in his creative tale *The Screwtape Letters*¹ imagines a series of letters between a chief demon, Uncle Screwtape, and his underling nephew, Wormwood. In this case, God is described as the Enemy, and the subject is a believer who has recently come back to his faith in Jesus as an adult.

So, Uncle Screwtape writes:

"Whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself [that is, to God in prayer] we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest way is to turn their gaze away from Him toward themselves." (Chapter 4, *The Screwtape Letters*).

2) The Social-Factor

Self-Consciousness:

If I ask, "Can I pray for you?" we might worry - what if I look dumb/sound dumb? Or what if my praying just sounds weak or shallow?

But what is that? That **self-consciousness** is very real. It is also, let's be honest, a pride thing. It's putting my discomfort ahead of the good of the other. It's depriving my priestly ministry to someone else, because it's not super cozy.

¹ Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters*. William Collins, 2012.

Vulnerability:

There's this legitimate **vulnerability** to asking, "Can you pray for me?" I think for some of us, asking for prayer is like admitting, "I need help." We come off as weak – and being perceived as needy. So, "I'm good," - Two thumbs up.

Prayer, with others, requires humility.

Praying together is putting our arms around each other and coming into the presence of the Almighty One who loves us.

3) The "Disappointment-with-God" Factor

What if I pray for someone to be healed, but they aren't? What if I pray that they find a good job, but they don't?

When we pray something *always* happens. Maybe not immediately. Maybe not in a way we can see. But God is working. He's always working.

There are several ways we try and live out this prayer ministry as a church. Our weekly prayer list in the bulletin - bring it home and pray it. Send in your prayer requests for us to share.

We have a prayer chain. Want more info and to be included on that, or have a prayer request? Send it to info@summitdrive.com.

On Sunday morning we have a small group that gather for prayer at 8 am in the Coffee Room. Come and join this group that meets ahead of our services. Our Life Groups are also a place for prayer.

IV. How Do We Pray for Someone?

1. *Praying well starts with listening well.*

If someone is sharing something meaningful, our first ministry to them is to listen well. Pay close attention. Nod to show you're tracking. That is a beautiful, priestly ministry already!

Listen well to their trouble; listen to their heart. The Spirit will often help us discern the concern that's *under* the concern as well. You can just let that the concerns and themes you hear become what you take to the Father.

2. Praying well isn't pushy.

If someone is sharing something important with me, I will often just ask, "Hey, would you like me to pray for you about that right now? No worries if not. I can add it to my prayer list for later, if you'd prefer; but, I'd love to pray for you now if you'd like?"

3. Praying well honours a trust.

Confidentiality matters - Like a lot. We might not want to share something that is deeply personal in prayer, because what if it becomes a matter of gossip? A key rule in praying with others is the same as the rules for any counsellor, pastor or doctor - unless it concerns harm to self or harm to others, it stays right here. It doesn't go any farther, unless there is permission to share it farther.

4. Praying well is short and simple.

Keep your prayers simple and short. Prayer is not a time to show off how smart or eloquent you are (my guess is this is not the problem for most of us). God hears our simplest prayers prayed with a sincere heart.

Simple and honest:

"Lord Jesus, you know my friend through and through and love them deeply. We bring this request to you" (and then ask for what they need and pray about what's on their heart. Then close with a simple statement of trust). "In the name of Jesus we ask it. Amen."

Or

The Structure of the Lord's Prayer:

It starts by coming to God in praise: "*Our Father...your name be honoured.*"

Then aligning ourselves with His Name, His kingdom, His will, "*Lord, we want what You want for us today.*"

Then it's about asking for what we need. Trusting God together.

Or, if it's for an area of addiction or sin, to help the person look to God for forgiveness, and assurance - asking for protection from the evil one.

Life Group Discussion

Open Up

Why do you think some people get really excited about praying with and for others? Why does it terrify others?

What about you? How do you feel about the idea of asking: Can you pray for me? Can I pray for you?

Dig In

1. **Read John 17:20-26.** In John's Gospel, the last thing Jesus does before he is arrested and crucified is to pray for his disciples. We are given incredible insight into Jesus' heart for us here. In this section, Jesus is praying for his disciples and then for all of us who will become his followers.
 - a. What stands out to you about what he pray for us?
 - b. How does Jesus set an example for you in your priestly ministry of prayer for others?

2. In the message we looked at three common reasons why people feel reticent to pray with others (the spiritual factor, the social factor, and the disappointment factor).
 - a. Have you felt these personally?
 - b. What has helped you push past these – if you have? What might help you push past them going forward if it's still a struggle?

3. Each week we encourage our Life Groups to pray for the needs of the group because we believe this is part of what it means to be God's people. Set aside a few extra minutes this week to pray for each other, practicing the four points above on "How to pray for others."
 - a. Maybe you don't often pray out loud in your group. Maybe take a step to do that tonight. Perhaps you ask, "Can I pray for you?" - and then do it!
 - b. Maybe you're the type of person who doesn't like to ask for prayer. Challenge yourself to say, "Can you pray for me?" - and let others do that for you.