

Who Are You Praying For?

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

Copyright © 2011, Bill Couch. All rights reserved worldwide.
This material may be printed or copied for personal use only.

Let's be honest. Most of the time the focus of our prayers is for ourselves and our families and occasionally a few close friends. We pray about our needs and their needs. We pray for God's healing when someone is sick. We pray for God's guidance when a decision needs to be made. We pray for a job or a promotion or a raise. We pray for God's blessing and protection—especially when we are on a trip. Now there is nothing wrong with praying for those things. In fact, they are things we should pray about.

However, if that is the extent of our prayers, we are missing out on the greater power of prayer. The Bible encourages us to pray for many things. We are to pray for our governmental leaders. We are to pray for our fellow Christians who are being persecuted. We are to pray for those who are spreading the message of Jesus in remote parts of the world—our missionaries. We are to pray for the Kingdom of God to come on earth as in heaven. We are to pray against the evil forces in our world: like terrorism and slavery. I hope your prayer life is expanding beyond praying only for yourself and your family and friends.

Before you say “please,” let me encourage you to say “thank you” to God for all his blessings in your life!

This morning I want us to focus on the importance of praying faithfully and regularly for the persons around us who need to know and experience God's love. And to pray that God might open a door to use us to help others experience his love.

The Apostle Paul inspires us to look at the opportunities we have every day to share God's love. As the book of Acts comes to a close, Paul is under house arrest in Rome. He has been falsely accused by the religious leaders of creating insurrections in Jerusalem. Knowing he would probably not get a fair trial in Jerusalem, Paul requested a change of venue. He appealed his case to Caesar. When he arrived in Rome, the papers charging him had not arrived. He was placed under house arrest and rented a house at his own expense. A Roman soldier was assigned to guard him in the house. Paul and the soldier were chained together. Paul invited the Jewish leaders in Rome to come and hear the good news about Jesus. Many came and some received his message and believed in Christ. Others rejected the message. To them Paul gave these final words:

²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 28:28-31

Verse 31 is the final sentence of the book: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." This is not the end of Paul's story. After two years under house arrest, Paul was released and visited many of the churches he started throughout the Roman Empire. After four years he was arrested again and returned to Rome where he was executed by Emperor Nero. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, chooses to end the story with the words that Paul preached the Good News of Jesus Christ to everyone who came to see him. That is how Luke wanted Paul to be remembered. I wonder what the last words will be that someone will say about us? How do you want to be remembered? How will people remember you? Will you be remembered as one who had a successful and comfortable life? Or will you be remembered as someone who made a difference for other people?

God created us to join with him in his work of redeeming and restoring a broken world. One of the ways in which we do that is by helping those who are separated from God come to know and experience his love. How do we do that? It all begins with prayer. We pray faithfully and regularly for someone who needs to know and experience God's love.

Why pray for someone? First of all because lost persons matter to God. We see this throughout God's word. Jesus said, "I came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) In the parable of the Prodigal Son, we see the father (representing God) looking for his son to return. When he sees him afar off, he runs to meet him and welcomes him home. He says to the older brother: "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive

again; he was lost and is found.” And in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

We pray for persons to know and experience God’s love because his heart longs for a relationship with each of his children. If we know God and love God, then what matters to him matters to us. If we are not inviting others to experience God’s love, then we need to examine our own relationship with God. If we no longer care about what is on God’s heart, then we have drifted far from God. We need to seek his forgiveness and ask him to fill us anew with his presence and love to overflowing. We need to ask him to break our hearts with the things that break his heart.

We also pray for others to know and experience God’s love because we need to do for others what someone did for us. You are here today because you mattered enough to someone to pray for you and invite you to experience God’s love. Who was that person? Perhaps a parent, grandparent, brother or sister, friend, co-worker, Sunday school teacher or public school teacher. Your life was changed because someone cared enough for you to pray for you. When we remember that, it motivates us to want to pass on the love. We want to pray for someone who needs to know and experience God’s love, because someone prayed for us when we may not have even realized we were lost! Paul proclaimed the word of God with boldness and many came to know Jesus. You and I are here today, because of a chain of persons going all the way back to Paul, and Peter, and Phillip, and the other apostles and deacons who cared

enough to lead others to Jesus. Who was the last person in that chain for you?
For whom will be you be the last person in the chain?

We also pray for others to know and experience God's love because we remember what our lives were like before we knew God. What was going on in your life that made you recognize the need to give your life to God? Did you come to Christ because of a profound emptiness in your life? You knew something was missing. There had to be more to life than what you were experiencing. Did you come to Christ because your life was out of control? Perhaps your marriage or family was falling apart. Perhaps you were trapped by an addiction that was destroying your life. Perhaps you experienced the death of someone you loved and were overcome with grief. Perhaps you were at the end of your rope and did not know how to face life alone. I came to Christ because I was trapped on a treadmill of trying to be good enough to earn God's acceptance. If I could just be close to perfect, then others would accept me including God. But deep down, I knew I could never be good enough. Remember for a moment what your life was like before you knew Jesus. There is someone around you every day who is living in misery, emptiness and futility because they don't know Jesus.

Another reason you need to pray for someone to know and experience Jesus' love is because you need to experience the joy of knowing that God has used you to make an eternal difference in someone's life. You need to know that your life is counting for something of eternal significance—something bigger than

yourself. Will anyone remember you as the person who helped them know and experience God's love? If not, what are you living for?

We have plenty of reasons to pray for someone. Now who will you pray for? I want each of you this morning to ask the Holy Spirit to place on your heart the names of two persons to pray for—one person you know well and one person you don't know as well. First of all, who is someone you know well that you sense has not experienced God's love? This is not to judge this person as going to hell. That is not our job! Our job is to be sensitive to someone who we sense is facing life without God. We never hear them mention God—except maybe in taking his name in vain! We never hear them talking about their church home. We never hear them comment about praying for someone. Those people are around us: at work, in our neighborhood, at school, on the golf course or tennis court or workout facility, in our civic club or perhaps in our own families. Ask God to open your eyes to see someone you need to pray for. Who is experiencing life like you did before you knew Jesus? Ask the Holy Spirit to put that person on your heart.

Then pray for someone you don't know well. This may be someone you see regularly, and you don't know whether they are a believer or not. Perhaps someone who works the counter at the cleaners, or check out person at grocery store, or waiter at a restaurant or workout trainer. This is someone God has put in your life on a regular basis. We are going to do something this morning to help you remember to do this. We are going to invest in you because we believe this matters to God. In few moments the ushers are going to pass out the collection plates in the sanctuary and the offering baskets at LR Praise. They are going to

be full of \$1 bills. We are going to encourage you to take a \$1 out of the offering plate! Then in a few moments we are going to pray for God to put on our hearts someone we see regularly where we spend money: grocery store, the golf course, the cleaners, a restaurant. Then the next time you are at that place, spend this dollar as a part of your purchase if you pay cash. If you use a credit or debit card, then make a mental note of that purchase and that person. Leave this \$ in your wallet or purse as a reminder for you to pray for that person. Pray for God to open a door for you to inquire about their church home or their relationship with God.

Take out the prayer guide in your bulletin. As the choir sings, we are going to pass out the offering plates or baskets, and you will remove a dollar. Then ask God to help you identify the two persons you are to pray for every day. Someone you know well and someone you see regularly but don't know well. If a name comes to mind, write just their initials under number 1. If no names come, that is OK. Continue to pray each day for God to open your eyes to see those two persons, and he will. When you get the name, write their initials on the prayer guide. Regarding someone you see regularly but don't know well, remember to spend the dollar at their place of business if possible. Or keep it in your wallet as a prayer reminder. Fold it in some special way to differentiate it from the usual bills.

Will the ushers come forward? Let me pray as we begin to pass out the dollars and identify those persons we need to pray for.

PRAYER

FOLLOWING THE PRAYER, THE CHOIR SINGS THE ANTHEM AS USHERS PASS OUT OFFERING PLATES.

I hope you will find a way to pray for these two persons every day. I have five persons I'm praying for. I set an alarm on my phone for 1 pm every day to remind me to pray for these persons. You may add them to your prayer list or set an alarm on your watch or computer. Do whatever it takes to help you remember to pray for these persons daily.

How do you pray for these persons? To keep it simple pray for two things. These are found on your prayer guide. First pray that the Holy Spirit will be working in these persons' lives so that they become aware of their need for God. Now the Holy Spirit is always calling all of God's children to respond to God's love. He is already at work. By praying for this person you stand in the gap for them and release the Holy Spirit to work in an even more powerful way. Don't ask me why! It is a mystery. But God has chosen to release his power in response to our prayers. It is one of the ways he allows us to partner with him in his work of redeeming and restoring the world. Then pray this dangerous, but exciting prayer: "Lord, open the door for me to share my faith with this person. Use me in any way you choose to help this person know and experience your love. I'm available." You may be the only human link in the chain between these persons and God. Don't force open a door. Wait for God to open the door. Pray that you will not miss the open door. It is so easy to do when we are preoccupied with our own lives and problems to miss an open door. Be sensitive to hear when these persons may express a struggle or issue in their lives. Perhaps they are

going through a divorce, or struggling with the death of a loved one, or job loss, or just feeling empty and searching. These are open doors.

Let's take time now to pray for these two persons. Look at your prayer guide number 2A and B. If you know the names of your persons, pray for them by name. If you do not know their names, then pray for the ones that the Holy Spirit will put on your heart. Let's take a few moments to pray for these persons. (TIME OF SILENT PRAYER—TOTAL SILENCE. Bill will close this time with prayer.)

Now what do you do when God opens the door? In our scripture passage this morning Paul said that the Gentiles would listen. The Gentiles were not the "people of God." They had not yet experienced God's love. But many of them were ready to listen. When God opens the door, he has prepared the heart of the person to listen. Paul shared the good news with all those who came to visit him. He welcomed them. He invested his life talking and listening. Then he boldly invited them to open their hearts to God's love through Jesus.

When you sense an open door, ask God to give your boldness to take a risk. Tell them a little of your own experience with Jesus. Tell them how you have come to experience a presence in your life that gives you strength to face difficult times. Pray for sensitivity to know what to say. God will help you touch their lives. Your words are not the key. It is God's Spirit touching their spirit through you that is the key. Invest in these two persons lives. Listen to them. Care for them. Pray for them. When God opens the door, invite them to come to church or your small group or ministry. If they have expressed a particular need, you might invite them

to a group that would meet that need—like Divorce Care or Grief Support Group. As you pray for this person you will begin to hear of things that our church offers that might be helpful to them. They may not respond immediately, but don't give up. Keep praying and waiting.

To help prepare you to pray and share your faith we have several resources listed on the back of your prayer guide.

- Classes to help you learn how to pray effectively for others: Taught by Nan Leavell at 9:15 on Sunday mornings beginning, Oct 30 in fellowship hall
- Classes to help you learn to share your faith: Taught by Tim and Clarissa Hayes at 10:30 on Sunday mornings beginning,
- Suggested books (available in foyer?)
- Hot line: Call church office 794-4015, leave voice mail on extension 411. Or text your question to: (806) 853-7507

God is eager to use you for the most important thing in the world: helping another person come to know and experience his love. Are you willing to invest your life in praying and listening and when God opens the door invite this person to know and experience his love? It will be the most exciting experience for you life to know that God has used you to make an eternal difference in someone's life.