

A Gift of Love: Intercessory Prayer

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Date: 01 June 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Amen, church. We, as you know, live in Dublin, Ireland. And so we, before that, we were in England for 17 years. We've been in Ireland for a little over a year now.

And part of my responsibilities with the International Mission Board is I'm privileged to go and speak at churches, both in Europe and then all around the United States, to share a little bit about what God is doing in our part of the world.

And can I just say, from that experience of getting to speak at churches quite often, there is a sweet spirit in this church. There is just a sweet spirit in this church.

And that is not always the case. I don't mean in this church, I mean in other churches. That is not always the case. Sometimes I turn up at churches and I leave going, good Lord.

And sometimes I leave going, ah, good Lord, right? And this is the latter, not the former. So there's a sweet spirit in this place. And we know that's because of Jesus. Amen.

[1 : 0 5] And so when we are part of the family of God, when we're part of a local church, we have the great privilege of loving one another and serving one another.

And there are loads of ways that we can do that. God has given each of us different gifts and talents and abilities that we can use to serve Him and to serve the body. But one thing we see throughout Scripture, and particularly in the New Testament, is that one of the ways historically that the church expressed its love for one another, that the church served one another, was by praying for one another.

In fact, did you know that in our Bible, there are around 650 prayers in the Bible? Around 650 prayers. And when we look into the New Testament, what we see over and over again, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul, is Paul is clear that one way we love one another in the church is by praying for one another.

And so I want us to spend just a few moments in God's Word this morning looking at an example of one of these prayers that Paul provides and how you and I can learn from that and better pray for one another.

Now, let me say right up front that sometimes I think we over-spiritualize prayer. And what I mean by that is sometimes we think, oh, well, you know, prayers for those who are like the Green Berets of Christianity or for those who are super spiritual.

[2 : 3 6] And, you know, I could never do that. But the reality is intercessory prayer is a big fancy word. It simply means talking to God on behalf of other people. Talking to God on behalf of other people.

And let's just simplify prayer to mean that. That when we use the word prayer this morning, what we simply mean is you and I talking to our loving Father about other people that He loves and that we love.

And so with that in mind, I want to invite you to turn to the book of Philippians chapter 1. Philippians chapter 1, we'll begin in verse 1. And we're going to spend just a few moments looking at intercessory prayer and how we can use that as a way to express our love for one another.

Philippians chapter 1, beginning in verse 1. And the Apostle Paul writes this. He says, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[3 : 55] And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And now in verse 9, He tells us what His prayer is. He says, And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it's alive and true. And Lord, we pray in these next few moments as we study your word, we ask Holy Spirit that you would open our minds, give us understanding of your word.

We pray, Holy Spirit, that you would soften our hearts, that we would be changed and transformed by your word. And we humbly pray that you would be at work in and through your word, in us, your people, this morning.

For your glory and for our good, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So Paul, as we know, writes many letters to churches that we have in the New Testament.

[5 : 36] And there's something special about this letter to the church at Philippi. It's the only letter that he writes to a church that does not contain a rebuke. He's not writing to correct them of something.

In fact, the key word to the book of Philippians is joy. And he uses it over and over. This is a local church that has brought joy to him personally and to his ministry we see later.

And so Paul, it almost reads like a love letter, does it not? Where he just kind of gushes over them. Look at verse 7. He says, It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

Right? And he says, For God is my witness how I yearn for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus. He loves this church. And he says, This is my prayer for you.

And I want us to take just four very simple takeaways about how you and I can better pray for one another. Pray for our neighbors. Pray for those at work. Pray for those in our schools.

[6 : 35] Whoever it may be. How we can pray as an act of love for one another. Just four simple things. Number one, we see this. That like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in their love for Jesus.

Like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in their love for Jesus. Look at verse 9. He says, And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

He says, I'm praying that you'll love Jesus more and more. That you'll abound in your love for him. And it's a beautiful word here in the Greek. The word abound, it means to grow in excess.

To have more. To just pour out. Right? But he means this. It means in quantity and quality. Now think about that.

I want to love Jesus in quantity. Right? I want to love him more. Right? But I want to also love him better. And that's the idea here. That we're loving Jesus in quantity and quality.

[7 : 41] Now, how is that possible? Well, it's possible because the Bible says, Before we ever loved Jesus, He what? He first loved us. Before we ever loved Jesus, He first loved us.

Look at your neighbor and say, Jesus loves you. Go ahead. Tell them. Yeah? Now that didn't make anyone grouchy, did it? Right? We're all smiling.

There's something quite lovely about being reminded that we love Jesus because He first loved us. Before you took your first steps, Jesus loved you.

When you committed your last sin, Jesus still loved you. When you read your Bible really good for two and a half days in a row, He loved you. Are you with me? Think about this.

There's nothing you can do to make Jesus love you any less. And there's nothing you can do to make Jesus love you anymore. His love was fixed on you at Calvary.

[8 : 40] Amen? For greater love has no man than he lays down his life. Amen? Jesus loves you. Whether you're a prodigal or whether you're a priest, His love is fixed on you this morning.

And that releases us then to love Him. And we want to pray for one another that we'll grow in that love, that we'll love Jesus more and more each day.

Right? Do you remember the old gospel song, every day with Jesus is what? Sweeter than the day before. Right? We have a wedding coming up in our family in two weeks.

Is that right, Kayla? My daughter's here. Yep. It's still on as of this morning? Okay, good. Because a lot of it was non-refundable daughter. So that wedding is still on. And so we've been talking a lot about love around our house.

Everybody's in love right now around our house. Right? And I'd imagine it's quite funny to watch our daughter and her fiance around the house who are about to get married and to watch me and mom who have been married for over 30 years.

[9 : 46] And I'm hoping that we're still a bit giggly in love like they aren't. Are we? Yeah. It's okay. We're going to be married either way.

Amen. Right? I meant that in a good way, Christy, not like in a bad way. Right? Love. Right? But that is the goal, isn't it? Like, I don't want to max out after 10 years.

Like, I want to grow in my love. Right? And so when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, we want to grow in our love. So we want to pray for one another. Yeah, Lord, help me love you more tomorrow than I do today.

Lord, help me to understand more who you are, to see your beautiful face, to see you at work in creation, and help me to grow in my quantity and quality of my love for you.

What a beautiful thing to pray for one another. Amen? What a beautiful thing to pray for those 80 boys and girls who will be here tonight. Lord Jesus, would you be with these boys and girls, and would you be working in their heart that whether it happens this week or one day in the future, that they would love you with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.

[10 : 52] What a beautiful thing to pray for your boss, for your neighbor. Lord, I pray that they would grow to love you. We see, first of all, that like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in their love for Jesus.

But then secondly, we see this. Like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in their understanding of Jesus. I want to pray that others would grow to love Jesus more every day.

But I want to pray that each of us would grow in understanding who he is and understanding his word every day. Look what he says there at verse nine again. He says, And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

He said, I want you to grow in your love. But then he says, I want you to grow in your knowledge. It means to understand. To grow in your understanding of who Jesus is.

To grow in understanding of his word. I don't know if you've had this experience, but I was reading my Bible earlier this week and I came across a verse in the Bible and I just was convinced it was not there before.

[12:00] You ever just been reading something? You read something in your Bible and you're like, has that always been there? Like, when did they put that in? Because I've read the Bible several times. That feels new, right? And it just leaps off the page. Have you ever had the experience of reading your Bible and you read a verse that you've read a hundred times before, but it leaps off the page into your heart in a way that it never did before?

This book, this Bible is a living book. It's sharper than any two-edged sword, the Bible says. And we want to grow in our understanding of the word of God, of understanding who Jesus is.

But watch this. It's not just about head knowledge, right? It's not about learning facts and figures. You can, don't miss this, you can know all about Jesus and not know Jesus.

You can know all about heaven and never step foot into the place. See, it's not simply about knowing the information, but it's about knowing the man, Jesus Christ, right?

The Bible says that the demons believe and tremble. They understand, they know, right? So it's the difference between knowing information and knowing someone relationally.

[13:12] I know a lot about the King of England, right? His name's Charles, he's the third. I know a little bit about his mom. A couple of years ago, a friend of mine, we went to London for a celebration of the Royal Air Force.

And we were there and the Royal family came out on the balcony and we waved at them and they waved at us. I like to believe the Queen said, hey, there's Kenny. And they all waved down at me, right? I know a lot about the Royal family, but I don't know them.

See, I know a lot about King Charles, but I know King Jesus. I know about King Charles, but I know King Jesus.

Why? Because I spoke to him just this morning. He walks with me. He talks with me along life's narrow way. I know him.

Let me ask you, do you know Jesus or do you just know about Jesus? It's the difference between joy and sorrow, light and darkness, heaven and hell.

[14:16] Do you know him? What a beautiful thing to pray for one another. Lord, I pray that we might grow in our love for Jesus. Lord, we pray that we might grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and his word.

But then thirdly, we see this. That like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in their love, to grow in their understanding. But then thirdly, I can pray for others to grow in spiritual discernment.

To grow in spiritual discernment. Look back at your Bible. Look at verse nine again. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent.

We grow in knowledge, but we grow in discernment, spiritual discernment. Why? So that we may approve what is excellent. Discernment there literally means the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong.

The ability to choose between truth and error, right and wrong. And the reality is you and I know that we live in a world now where knowledge is accessible in ways it's never been accessible before.

[15 : 34] We have more access to knowledge instantly and yet knowledge and discernment are not the same things. Think of it this way. I had an old deacon tell me one time, he said, well, preacher, discernment simply means you can be really smart, but act really dumb.

Is that true? Right, knowledge is not discernment. It's been a couple of years ago now there in England. I was on eBay one night.

You should never be on eBay late at night. I'm on eBay and I see a set of world book encyclopedias from 1989 and I'm like, yes, I'll take those. Thank you very much.

And so I'll order them. They come to the house in these massive boxes. My family's like, what have you bought? And I'll pull out this set of world book encyclopedias from 1989 and I'm so proud of them.

I bought a special bookshelf to put in the garage. We put the encyclopedias in there and I'm so excited. And I have an unveiling of the encyclopedias. And so I call Christy, Kayla, and Max.

[16 : 35] I'm like, come out, the unveiling. And so they're like, do we have to? I'm like, yep. And so we all go into the garage and I'm like, there they are. And so our son Max says, well, what do they do?

What do they do? I said, well, give me the first word that comes to mind. First word. And he says, dog. And I said, all right. And so I go over and I pull out the D. And I flip and I flip and I get to the dog.

And just beaming with pride, I hand it to him. He looks at it. He scans the page. He closes it. He puts it back on the shelf. And he says, so it's like Google, but much slower.

I said, get in the house. You're not going to disrespect my encyclopedias. Just not going to do that, right? Now, think about this. For those of us of a certain age, if we wanted to learn something, we had to go to a library and pull out a book, did we not?

Or we had to talk to someone who knew about it. Now, though, in the palm of our hand, we have instant access to knowledge that was unthinkable 30 years ago.

[17 : 42] And yet, when it comes to making decisions, the world seems no better off. See, we need to pray for one another that we grow in our love for Jesus.

We grow in our understanding of his word. But watch this. It's not only understanding, but it's then taking what we know and applying it with the gospel. And that's spiritual discernment.

Sometimes it's easy to choose between good and bad. The harder decision is between good and best, right? And so discernment is, Lord, help us choose what is best.

Help us to know truth from error, right from wrong. I can't fathom what it's like being a high school student these days. I mean, I just can't. Middle school, even elementary school, being bombarded with the things, the online and social media and all the things, all the temptations.

And Lord, would you help this next generation not to simply grow in knowledge, but to grow in discernment that they would be able to choose between what is right, what is wrong, what is truth and what is error.

[18 : 46] Amen, church? And so we pray for one another to grow in love and understanding and spiritual discernment. But then lastly, we see this. Number four, that like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in holiness and purity.

Like Paul, I can pray for others to grow in holiness and in purity. Look what he says. He says, and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent.

Now watch this. And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

Paul says we want to grow in our love, our understanding, our discernment. But then lastly, we want to grow in holiness and purity, that we might be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

The choir opened our worship gathering this morning singing about the return of Jesus. And he is coming back. Listen, the Old Testament said he would come the first time and he did.

[19 : 58] The New Testament says he will come again and he will. Right? He will. And so when he returns, Lord, may you find us, your people, living lives that are pure and blameless at the day of Christ.

Now, I don't know about you, but I quickly know that the ability for me to live any day pure and blameless is a real challenge.

Right? It's a real challenge. So hear me. What we're not saying is work harder, do better. We're not saying that at all. But what we are saying is that the gospel at work in us and through us, through Christ, we can do all these things.

Amen? And so to be pure, to be holy, to be blameless, it's the work of God in us and through us as his people. But it's all connected, is it not?

As I love him more, I don't want to sin against him. Right? I don't want to give in to that temptation because I'm loving him and spending time with him. As I'm growing in my knowledge of scripture, I'm better equipped to fight off the temptations that come at me.

[21 : 06] And so, in fact, this word blameless in the Greek, it literally means to not trip up. To not trip up. Right? And we know that the Bible says that we have an enemy, the devil, and he has come to steal, kill, and destroy.

That he roams about like a lion, seeking whom he may devour. As we set out for school and for work and wherever it is we go, it is as if there are spiritual landmines all around us.

And it's like, Lord, would you guard us and would you give us the ability to not be tripped up? I don't know if you're like this, but maybe there's that sin that you've been struggling with for decades, maybe years, months, and you just feel hopeless.

Listen, don't give up because Jesus at work in you and through you is working to make you blameless and pure. And notice what he said earlier.

He said, he who began a good work in us is what? He's faithful to complete it. That's kind of the big picture, what Paul is saying here. He says in verse six, and I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 18] Right? It's frustrating to not be this person today. But praise God, hopefully we're not the people we used to be. Amen? We're not the people we used to be. And God is molding us and shaping us and forming us to be pure and to be blameless that we would not be tripped up.

It's God at work in his people. What an important prayer for one another. Lord, keep us holy. Lord, keep us sharp. The word holy means to be set aside, to be set apart and to be used.

I used to have an old, when we lived in America, I had an old snapper lawnmower. I don't even know if they make snappers anymore. I had this old snapper from like 1965. I loved it. And, but every spring I would have to take it to a local guy.

He would take all the belts off and he would oil it and he would try to sell me a new one. And I would say, is it broke? And he would say, no. And I'd say, fix it and give it back. And he would put a new blade on it and he would get it ready to be used.

Right? He would take it apart. He would clean it. He would prepare it to be used. That's really what the word holy means. It means that God takes us and he breaks us down.

[23 : 27] He cleans us. He does a work in us so that we then can be used for his glory and the good of the gospel. How do we pray for one another?

We pray that we would grow in our love. We would grow in our understanding, our spiritual discernment. But then we would grow in holiness. And I pray that, those things regularly for my kids.

So I'm laying in bed at night. If I can't sleep, I'll pray that. That's actually the acronym LUSH. L-U-S-H. When I think of a lush garden, I think of an English garden. There were amazing gardens where we lived in England.

Something that's healthy and growing and producing fruit. And what a lovely way to pray for one another. That we would be healthy and growing and producing fruit for the glory of Jesus.

When I think of praying for one another and loving one another this way, I think of Ms. Alma Gunner. Now, Ms. Alma Gunner was a member of the church that I pastored in the Raleigh-Durham area of North Carolina.

[24 : 28] We were there 13 years before we left to move overseas. And Ms. Alma shows up at the church office one day. She was about 75 at the time. She comes in and we're chatting.

And she says, Preacher, do we have an extra church directory anywhere? And I said, Well, I'm sure we do. Asked the secretary. I'm sure she can lay hands on one. And sure enough, she found one and gave it to Ms. Alma.

And I said, Well, Ms. Alma, tell me what's going on. Because aren't you having surgery tomorrow? And she said, Preacher, I am having surgery tomorrow. She said, But they've notified me that they can't put me to sleep for the surgery.

And so they're going to give me local anesthesia. I won't feel any pain, but I'll be awake the whole time. And the doctor told me that it's going to take about three hours. And I was thinking, Well, what am I going to do for three hours while they're cutting on me?

She said, And then I thought, I'm going to get a church directory and I'm going to pray for every person in the church while I have my surgery. She said, So I called my doctor and told him, Could they have an extra nurse in the operating room to hold the church directory for me?

[25 : 34] I said, Well, Ms. Alma, what did they say? She said, Well, they came back to me and said, Yes, but then my insurance would not cover it. I said, Okay, what are you going to do?

She said, That's what I'm going to do. And little Ms. Alma Gunner, 75 years old, laid on that operating table for three hours.

And she would periodically say, Turn the page. And there at Duke University Hospital, that nurse would turn the page. And by the time that surgery was over, Ms. Alma had prayed for about 600 people.

I think of Brother C.O. Smith. C.O. Smith was retired. He was in his 80s. And he invited me over for lunch and we had a sandwich. And he said, Preacher, have you ever been in my woodshop?

I said, No, I haven't. And so we went back. He had a woodshop behind his house. And he made chairs and benches and different things as a hobby. And we go in the woodshop. He cuts the lights on. And what immediately stood out was on every wall in the woodshop were names written on the wall.

[26 : 38] Not on paper, but literally written on the walls. And I said, Brother Smith, tell me about this. And he said, Well, I started that about 40 years ago. And whenever I meet somebody and I know they need prayer, I write their name on the wall.

He said, As I build my chairs and my benches, as I go from saw to saw, I pray over the names on the wall. He said, It takes me twice as long to make a bench, but a lot of people get prayed for.

How do we express our love for one another? Simply by talking to Jesus. Like Miss Alma, like Brother Smith. It's just talking to Jesus for one another. How? Why?

That we would grow in our love. That we would grow in our understanding, our spiritual discernment. That we would grow in holiness. All for the glory of Jesus and the good of the gospel. Amen, church?

Let me pray for us. Lord, we love you. We thank you for your words. And Lord, we thank you for this beautiful gift of prayer. It's not complicated.

[27 : 40] It's just simply talking to you, Jesus, about others. Lord, I pray that for each of us that you would renew in us a passion to pray.

Pray, Lord, that it wouldn't be driven by guilt. Not only by shame, but simply by our love for you and for those around us. Give us a renewed heart, a renewed passion, and a renewed discipline to pray for one another.

To pray for this church. For your glory and for the good of the gospel, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.