

Making Intercession

1 Timothy 2:1-6. (Reading from New King James Version)

“Therefore I exhort first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

Paul’s letter to Timothy is pastoral and written specifically for the Church. The words “supplications”, “prayers” and “intercession” used by the Apostle Paul is almost synonymous and cannot be distinguished precisely. What is prominent is the giving of thanks to God.

The Greek term ‘proseuchai’ means prayer and is a generic word for every kind of prayer. The Greek term ‘enteuxeis’ can mean intercession or supplication that is entreating boldly before a superior. In the biblical context it is entreating Yahweh on behalf of others or for our specific needs.

The root of all prayer is the giving of thanks to God, not just because our petitions are answered, but as a celebration of praise exalting God for His “hesed” – divine providence, unfailing love, goodness and mercy towards us.

Here again, we note, there is no prescribed form of prayer, rather Paul is calling us to first and foremost worship God and then to plead not just for ourselves but on behalf of all people – many of whom are in desperate need of our prayers.

Our Lord Jesus in giving us a pattern for prayer begins with “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name”. In the Old Testament at various times and places, particular names were accorded to Yahweh (Gen. 22:14; Ex 15:26, 17:5; Jud.6:24; 1 Sam.1:3; Ps.23:1; Jer. 23:6; Ezek. 48:35). Even these names cannot fully express the greatness of God!

In response to Moses’ enquiry, Yahweh revealed Himself as “I Am that I Am” (Hebrew “Ani Hu” Greek equivalent “Ego Eimi” Exodus 3:13-14; John 8:28). Whilst we call affectionately on God as our Father, yet this bond of love and familiarity must be approached with deep reverence, adoration and obedience.

To hallow God’s name is to revere and fear Him. It is not the scary terrifying kind of fear. It is a fear that comes from acknowledging His Holiness and having the wisdom that seeks not to grieve Him. The Psalmist tells us that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10). Wisdom comes from God and is revealed in the Word. Godly fear brings about immeasurable peace and joy!

There is every reason to praise and give thanks to the great “I AM”. The psalmist explains the reason why. Praises and thanks are ascribed to the LORD for “His merciful kindness” (Psalm 117: 1-2;

118:1). The LORD is praised and thanks is given as Redeemer (Psalm 100); as Creator and Ruler of history (Psalm 33, 104, 111, 145, 146, 147, 150).

The first prayer in the Bible may be found in Genesis 4:26. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Cain's descendants turned away from God and the family's progressive fall into sin is represented by Lamech his great great grandson. Adam and Eve must have been in immense sorrow, but Yahweh in His great mercy blessed them with a son named Seth (means settled).

Seth named his son Enoch in recognition, and to signify human weakness and thereon "These men began to call on the name of the LORD." Yahweh kept His promise to give a seed to destroy the Serpent (Genesis 3:15). It was through Seth's lineage that Christ descended.

The first intercessory prayer is that of Abraham, when he boldly pleaded with Yahweh on behalf of Sodom & Gomorrah and Lot was spared (Genesis 18:22-32). Moses interceded for the Israelites when she was steeped in sin (Ex 32:11-13; 31-32).

We are called to pray for those in authority. It is very difficult to even try to comprehend, what it is like for Christians who are persecuted and even murdered for their faith, in countries that oppose Christianity. Even now in the UK to some extent Christians are being marginalised.

Certain of our laws which were previously based on Christian principles are being eroded. Christians are being compelled to submit to these changes. We must pray unceasingly for our government and that of the wider world, so we may freely spread the Good News, lead peaceful lives and to be able to live out our faith fearlessly.

Intercessory prayers are powerful and releases endless blessings. Often we have heard and witnessed people being saved or healed by the faithful prayers of parents and or of the saints. Let us plead unceasingly and believe our prayers are heard according to God's perfect will. Be it for the salvation of the lost, physical or spiritual healing or both, for our various ministries and certainly for the provision of material needs.

Our Lord Jesus' prayer is not for believers to be taken out of this world, but to be kept from evil (John 17:15). Our purpose in this world is to take the truth of the Gospel message to the ends of the earth for the salvation of many! Not just by words, but to live out our lives as shining lights in this darkened world, by our love, compassion and mercy towards our fellowmen (1 Thess. 5:5).

We are not alone in our struggles - the Holy Spirit, our personal Counsellor, helps us to pray in our weaknesses. He makes intercession for us that we may pray not according to our lowly thinking, but according to the will of God (John 14: 16; Rom. 8:26-27). In heaven sitting at the right hand of God, Christ Himself intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:34).

As Stephen lay dying he interceded for his murderers (Acts 7:60). Jesus commands us to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:28). So too, rather than condemn, we should pray on behalf of those who have hurt us that they may find peace and joy in our LORD.

By God's grace, I was able to not only forgive, but to pray over a period of time for the salvation of the person who murdered my son. Our Lord Jesus in our time of deep sorrow carried us into the safety of His love, peace and healing. There are times when we fail to comprehend particular situations. What is crucial for us, is the necessity to fully trust and be highly dependent on Christ, no matter where we stand at this point and time.

God's will is revealed throughout the Scriptures. God's message uttered by the prophet Jeremiah is as follows: " For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope...search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29: 11- 14 see also Matt. 7:7).

Being a Christian does not mean we will have no trials, temptations or opposition. On the contrary, at times, we seem to face more trials and opposition than the average worldly person. As difficult as it may seem, we need to stay focussed on the LORD, we are to rejoice always, pray without ceasing and to "bless the Lord at all times" (Ps 34:1 see also Ps 121; Eph. 5:20; 2 Thess. 16-18,). Your adversary hates it!

The Apostle Paul, begged his fellow Christians in Rome to pray for and with him. He needed intercessory prayers for the provision of material things for the Jerusalem Christians, for deliverance from the hostility of unbelievers and perhaps even that of some Jewish Christians and for his ongoing travel plans. At the same time Paul committed his desires to the will of God (Rom 15:30-32). Paul's prayer and request for intercession, was for the sole purpose of blessings others and in doing so, God's Name is glorified.

Here again, we see another pattern for intercessory prayer. Let us for example, pray for those who are in poverty; for our brothers and sisters who are being condemned in various countries around the world for their faith; for the field workers who have left the safety of their homes ministering in war ravaged countries and for the sick deprived of medical care, even though God has abundantly provided. Even in advanced countries like the United States many are turned away from hospitals, because they cannot afford treatment!

In all of this, one can clearly understand how important it is for us to intercede for rulers and government all over the world. We need to pray more for others than ourselves, and in doing so, an abundance of blessings is released from heaven. On a personal level, we need to search our motives and desires when praying for blessings. Seek guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Let us also consider together with our intercessions, some form of action by making a small sacrifice. Perhaps foregoing that little bit of luxury to give to the poor and needy. Using some of our leisure time to share and support the lonely. Make time to join secular communities and by your actions humbly demonstrate the love of God who willingly gave His life as a ransom! (Phil.2: 3-8). A holy and love-filled (agape) life magnifies God's Name.

Let us pray for each other that we may boldly live and declare our faith. Not by religiosity , but by stepping out of our 'holy huddles', self-centred 'busyness', self-pity and comfort zones with actions of Godly love toward all peoples. These actions will not only speak louder than words, but is life changing and joyous both for the giver and recipient as many have testified!

Let us humbly thank the LORD for His grace and mercy in redeeming us sinners, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Almighty God, we praise and worship You. We give thanks and rejoice for the gift of prayer, bless us with understanding according to Your Word. Strengthened our hearts and minds that we may comfort those in need, uphold the weak, and to be patient with all. That we may seek all that is good and worthy, so as to glorify your Name in all that we say and do. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.