

**Even the Dogs Eat the Crumbs: Intercessory Prayer; Mark 7:24-30**  
0444-0447

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And from there, he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon, and he entered a house and did not want anyone to know. Yet he could not be hidden. But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth, and she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

And he said to her, Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she answered him, Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he said to her, For this statement you may go your way. The demon has left your daughter.

And she went home and found the child lying in bed.

So she comes to us today as not only an illustration of saving faith and not only an illustration of God's purpose in affliction, but she comes to us as this great and powerful illustration of intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer, most of us probably can recognize that. We know that the scriptures speak to us of a number of different types of prayers, prayers of supplication, prayers of thanksgiving, prayer, prayers of adoration, prayers of petition, prayers of confession and repentance and other types of prayers.

And one of the types of prayers that the scripture teaches us about is something called intercessory prayer. Now, when we speak of these different types of prayers, we don't mean so much to say that when we kneel before God and we are preparing to pray to him, we then say to ourself, I think I'll pray an intercessory prayer now, or I think I'll pray a prayer of thanksgiving now and rather our prayers are Conglomerations of different aspects or different types or different categories different ways of petitioning the Lord And so among these as we mentioned is this type of prayer called intercessory prayer now intercessory prayer We can see it in the title there intercede So intercessory prayer is just simply interceding before God on behalf of another going before God to plead that he would act on behalf of another, that he would bestow some good or some mercy or some blessing to another, and he would do so in response to our request that he would do that.

That's intercessory prayer. So this woman is an illustration for us of intercessory prayer. Now, we might want to be Perhaps tempted to think well, she's not praying. She's just talking to Jesus and she's making this request of Jesus But in reality she is praying to God But she's just doing it in the sense that God is physically present right before her in the form of the second person of the Trinity so whenever we see those who come to Jesus with requests and they come to Jesus Perhaps with repentance or, or intercessor, intercessory requests such as this.

We should regard that as prayer, even though Jesus is right there before them. Prayer does not mean that we communicate with God while He's absent from us physically. Prayer is that we communicate with God. So she's communicating with Jesus. She's communicating with the

second person of the Trinity. And her purpose for communication is to intercede or to ask God for some blessing or some mercy.

On behalf of her little daughter. And so she is for us this example of intercessory prayer. Now we know that she's an example. Or actually we could say one of the premium examples, one of the prime examples of intercessory prayer in the scriptures. We know this because from Matthew's account in Matthew 15, Jesus will respond to her at the end, end of that interchange with her, and he'll say to her verse, 28 from Matthew chapter 15.

Then Jesus answered to her, oh woman, great. Is your faith. Be it done to you as you desire. So last week we made note of the fact that Jesus says, great is your faith, indicating for us that here is an example, an illustration of saving faith, genuine faith. He follows that up with this other statement, be it done to you as you desire.

In other words, your will be done. Name another person in scripture whom Jesus says to them, your will be done, other than the Father. This is the only example of Jesus saying to a person what you desire. Let it be done for you. Such an overwhelming, startling statement from Jesus indicates for us that He wants us to see her, the way that she comes to Him, the way that she pleads with Him, the substance of her requests, everything about this.

Jesus wants us to see her as an illustration, as an example, as a teaching illustration for intercessory prayer. So as such, she is one of a number of examples in the scriptures of intercessory prayer. Let's call it this, let's call it prevailing intercessory prayer. By prevailing, we just mean a prayer that is Victorious in its goals that succeeds in its goals that that realizes the thing asked for that's that's what we could call prevailing intercessory prayer She is an example of prevailing intercessory prayer and she stands among some others that are also wonderful examples for us of intercessory prayer the first of those anybody know what the first example the the foundational if you will example of intercessory prayer Would be our Lord in John 17 as he prays for his church for his people as he intercedes for his people so Jesus And John chapter 17 spends that entire chapter and beyond petitioning the Father with requests for his people.

We could take some time, in fact, we could take weeks and dissect John chapter 17 and learn much about Jesus requests for his people, but we'll skip over that. We'll just recognize that Jesus is the primary example for The intercessor for the prevailing intercessor who goes before the Father on behalf of others to ask that some mercy or some blessing might be given to another.

But aside from Jesus, we also find a number of other examples of prevailing intercessory prayer. We can think of, first of all, of the example of Abraham, back from Genesis chapter 17. We know the story there in Genesis 17, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, along with two angels, comes to Abraham's tent, and they share a meal together, and after that meal, God is going to send the two angels on to their next destination, which is...

Sodom and Gomorrah for the purpose of destruction. And we know in that chapter 17 of Genesis, how Abraham pleads with God. In fact, dickers with God, bargains with God, if you will, to say, God, far be it from you to destroy the land. And what if there's 50 righteous people there? Would you still destroy it if there's 50?

And then 40, and then 30, and then 20, this back and forth with God. God, and you see how he's pleading with God on behalf of others, specifically the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, but I

guess in particular, his nephew Lot and Lot's family, which Abraham, of course, knows that he's living there. So Abraham is pleading to God on behalf of another.

And we know that the answer to that prayer was, yes, Abraham, eventually, if there's even 10 there. I'll spare it even for 10, which God, of course, does not spare the city, but He does spare Lot and his two daughters and his wife, who looked back and was turned to salt. But nevertheless, God does spare Lot and his daughters and his wife.

So that would be a great example for us to turn to, to look to one who pleads before God on the behalf of another. We also could think of Moses. Moses in places like Exodus 32 or numerous times. In the book of Numbers or numerous times even in the book of Exodus in which the same story sort of repeats itself over and over it's on it's like it's on repeat and the story goes like this the people grumble they complain they're tired of the food they're tired of the water they're tired of walking they're tired of this they're tired of that and they begin complaining about God and complaining about Moses God hears this and God is angry and he's going to destroy them and Moses goes before God on their behalf to say, "No God, don't destroy this people even when God says to Moses, listen, they are complaining against you."

They are rebelling against you Let me destroy them and make a new nation from you Moses still goes before God and pleads on their behalf that God would forgive and that God would be patient with them so a couple of examples there of intercessory prayer. We could also see another example in the life of Elijah.

Remember the life of Elijah as we turn to James's book there at the end of James in chapter 5 when James says to us that this point that he wants to make, he wants to illustrate this point that that the fervent, devoted, dedicated prayer of one who is righteous before God, one who has been made righteous before God, that fervent prayer is effective.

God hears that, and God responds to that, and to make his point, James then says, take for an illustration, Elijah, who prayed, and then the heavens were shut up, and then prayed once again, and the rains fell. So, particularly his prayer that the rains would return, we can see that also as an example of prevailing intercessory prayer on behalf of others.

Then we could turn to the New Testament, and we could see a It's a wonderful example, and we'll return to this later on in the message this morning, but we can find a wonderful example in the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul, who is the Scripture's example of the praying man, because there are more prayers in the scriptures by Paul by far than anyone else.

In fact, anyone, all the others put together, it seems like 43 prayers in the New Testament are recorded from Paul. And in the great majority of those words that Paul is praying and those epistles that he's writing, the great majority of those words are prayers. For other people, just think of his prayer in Romans chapter nine when he says, Oh, that it could be me instead of them.

That was, that was separated from the grace of God, that I could be separated from the grace of God on their behalf. And again and again and again, we see this example of Paul as a praying person, particularly praying for others, praying for the church. But let's now return to this woman whom Jesus wants to set aside for us as an example of.

intercessory prayer and let's spend a few moments just observing her prayer, how she came to Jesus, and what can we learn by the way in which she comes to Jesus, how can that inform our habit, our practice of praying for others. So as we begin to look at her account here, first of all, we want to notice that she comes to Jesus with this request for her little daughter, for her precious daughter.

And we want to make note of the fact that her request stares reality in the face. She looks open eyed at the reality of what she is here to ask Jesus to do. She comes to Jesus and she says, My daughter is demonized. She is possessed of demons, literally in Matthew's gospel, she says she is severely demonized.

So notice how the woman did not come to Jesus, saying to Jesus, listen, can you help my daughter? She acts kind of weird sometimes, she's, she's got some social problems. Sometimes she scares her friends. Sometimes she says some, some really disturbing things. Sometimes she can be really cruel to her little brother.

And we're kind of worried about her. We're worried that something might not, just might not be right about her. Instead, she comes to Jesus completely honest and completely forthright to say, My daughter is demonized. She's severely demonized. She doesn't lessen it. She doesn't try to negate the reality of it.

She doesn't try to hide it with euphemisms. Instead, she embraces the truth with what drives her to Jesus. Imagine the social stigma that probably existed with a demonized daughter. How did your daughter get demonized? What sort of household do you have that you allowed a demon to come into your daughter?

What sort of mother are you? What sort of influences did you allow Your daughter to come in contact with imagine the stigma that would have gone along with that. But instead of hiding behind that and trying to come to Jesus with the request that words it in some way, that's just not quite as abrasive or harsh as the reality really is.

She instead comes to Jesus and says, My daughter is severely demonized. Stigma be damned. My daughter is demonized, and I'm here to plead with you that you would help, that you would cast the demon out. So in reality, she says to Jesus exactly what the problem is, and she confronts it, and she pleads that Jesus would help her.

Some of us, perhaps, need to pray to the Lord on behalf of others. Embracing that same tactic, some of us, perhaps as we pray for our loved ones, perhaps we need to face reality and instead of going before God to say, God, I just wish that little Johnny or I just wish that little Mary, I just wish that you'd make them more spiritually excited about you.

I just wish that you would invigorate their faith and get them excited. Instead, some of us need to come before the Lord and say, little Johnny is lost. Little Mary is damned to hell unless you interact in her heart. She made a profession when she was eight, and for the last 23 years, she's showed zero spiritual fruit.

And she's given no reason for us to believe that she's part of the family of God. And so, Lord, I just plead that you would act on her heart to save her. But instead, especially with loved ones,

Sometimes that reality can be hard to face. Sometimes we would rather think of it as, Lord, we just really wish that you would invigorate their faith and get them excited about their faith.

And perhaps the prayer that God wants to hear from us is that my precious loved one is lost. My precious loved one needs a radical interaction from the Spirit of God to bring conviction of their sin and a radical regeneration into their heart. Perhaps that's the prayer that God would most like to hear on the lips of those who are interceding for them.

Look with me in your notes at chapter John, 1 John 1, verses 8 and 9. Now, 1 John 1, in these verses, John is speaking about how we go before the Lord for our own requests, for our own sins. But nevertheless, the same principle, the same point that John's going to make applies in the same way when we pray for others.

John says this, he says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If we come before God and we say, God, we really don't have sin, or really, I guess more like how we would be tempted to pray would be to minimize our sin. Lord, just forgive me, Lord, for that. For that thought, that little thought that crossed my mind today.

Forgive me, Lord, that little thought, you know, I don't, I really, I wasn't lusting, but I just had that little thought pop in my head. Forgive me of that, Lord. John says, if that's the way you come to the Lord, you're, first of all, deceiving yourself. Then he goes on to say, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us.

of our sins. Not if we come before him with this little minimalistic idea, this little euphemistic way of describing the sin and we say, Lord, just forgive me of that little, that little errant thought. Instead, John says, come before the Lord and say to him, forgive me for lusting in my heart for that woman or for that man.

Cleanse me of those unclean thoughts. Confess that sin. Then John says, He is faithful and just to forgive us of that sin. Does the same principle not also apply when we go before the Lord on behalf of others? God doesn't need to hear our minimalistic descriptions. He doesn't need to hear our euphemistic descriptions.

He wants us to come before Him facing the reality of our deep need of the one whom we are praying for, of their deep need for God's action in their life. So first of all, he comes, she comes to him, Jesus, my daughter is severely demonized. Secondly, notice how she comes to him with the full engagement of her heart.

Her heart is fully engaged. with the need of her daughter. If anything, the story comes across to us as a powerful illustration of a mother whose heart is absolutely broken over the spiritual need of her daughter. And so on the one hand, it's easy to see, well, that's a mother praying for her daughter. Of course she's going to have her heart fully engaged in pleading for this woman.

And while that may be true, or pleading for her daughter, and while that may be true, what God wants us to see by Jesus pointing out to us. May be done as you desire by pointing that out. God wants us to see not the the genetic bond between a mother and a father He wants us to see the illustration of one who is interceding And prevailing in that intercession before the Lord.

And she comes to the Lord, firstly, with an honest assessment of the need. Secondly, with a heart that's fully engaged as she just pleads with the Lord. You can just tell, we don't need to walk back through the passage to see that, do we? That her heart is fully engaged. She's fully engaged. She's fully committed to giving everything she possibly can to plead that Jesus would act on behalf of her daughter.

So intercessory prayer that prevails before the Lord is prayer in which we go before the Lord with our heart. Fully burdened for the one whom we are praying for. Look at 1 Peter 3 and verse 7. In this passage, Peter says this. He says, Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

So let's work through that verse backwards, right? Peter says this, he says, Live with your spouses, live with your wives in an understanding way so that there won't be this hindrance to your prayers. So if we go backwards and we look and we say, A hindrance to our prayers. In order to avoid the hindrance to the prayers, in order for the prayer to be heard, one thing we must be careful to avoid is this non understanding, this hardness of heart, this callousness.

Toward a spouse, toward the wife, or to put it another way, a disengagement of the heart. Peter says you should steer clear of that, so that among other things, your prayers will be heard. Do you see the connection? Peter says a hardness of heart, a callousness of heart, should lead you to expect that God won't hear your prayers.

So going backwards from that, we see that Peter's saying the same thing here. The engagement of the heart. When you pray for others in an intercessory manner, then just like this woman coming before Jesus, God wants to see an engagement of the heart. He wants to see your heart burdened with the one that you're praying for.

He doesn't want to just hear words lifted up. Words and phrases lifted up with a heart that's sort of disengaged. Maybe thinking in the back of your mind, you're sure it would be nice if God would do this in this other person's life. But I do have my own problems. I do have my own life. You know, I've got my own things to worry about.

I know I'm supposed to pray for others, and that's what I'm doing now. But my heart is really burdened with my own troubles. God seeks for His children to come before Him with hearts that are heavily burdened for the needs of those that they are praying for. Look at Romans chapter 10 and verse 1. Look at Paul's heart here.

He says, Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer To God for them, meaning his ethnic brethren, his Jewish brethren, my heart's desire is that they may be saved. You hear Paul's heart there. He's saying my heart is fully engaged in this request. My heart is fully engaged with my ethnic cousins, my ethnic brothers and sisters.

So she comes to him with this heart that's fully engaged over the desperate need of her daughter, but also she comes to him with a sense of Of identification, the one whom she pleads for the woman, the mother identifies with the daughter to such a degree that literally it becomes like the, the request for the daughter is also the request for the mother because she's so closely identified with her looking in Matthew's account.

This will make sense once we look here in Matthew's account. What we read in Matthew's account two times is this, the woman comes before Jesus, and if we look in verse. 22, And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came and was crying, Have mercy on, and if you're in Matthew, the next word is, me. Have mercy on me.

And then there's this little interchange between the two. And then eventually she came and knelt before him saying, Lord, help me. Lord help me. Do you see how the need for deliverance for her daughter became her need? She's so closely identified with that that she could say, Lord, help me. Again, on one hand, that's easy to understand.

This is a mother praying for her daughter. But that's not what God wants us to see in this passage. As holding her up as an illustration of prevailing intercessory prayer, God wants us to see that aspect. That in coming before Him and pleading for her daughter, The need is so close to her heart, so close to her soul that it's as though she's asking for Jesus to help her.

The connection, the bond, the need is so great that she comes before him in that way. Engaging Jesus on behalf of her daughter and pleading with him as though she were pleading for her own needs. Romans chapter 9 and verse 3. Paul says, For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.

You hear Paul's identification with his lost Jewish brethren? He says, If I could make this exchange, I would exchange my life in Christ for theirs. Or think of Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 3. Brothers, remember those in prison as though you were in prison with them. Now, when the writer to the Hebrews says, Remember those in prison, then what he's not saying is, Have thoughts of those in prison cross your mind.

Just don't forget about those in prison. Just remember them, don't forget about them there. That's not what the writer's saying. He's saying, when he says remember those in prison, he's saying remember them in prayer. Go before the Lord, praying for those in prison as if you were in prison with them. Do you think that you would pray more fervently if you were the one behind bars?

Do you think that your prayers would be more earnest and more heartfelt if you were the one behind bars? And that's what the writer is saying. When you take them before the Lord in prayer, do it as if you are the one. Who is behind those prison bars yourself? So her identification, she's got this heart burden.

She identifies so closely with her daughter that she asked Jesus to help and she can even say just help me, have mercy on me. She also comes to Jesus with this. Open eyed, realistic evaluation of the severity of the problem. And then lastly, she comes before Jesus with this resolute conviction that Christ will hear and Christ will act.

So in the story, one thing that comes across quite plain and quite clear is that she will not be told no. Jesus... Jesus has this little interchange. He pretends to not want to answer her. He says to the disciples, with her right there in front of him, he says, You know, I was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and yet she will not be deterred.

Because her belief in those three realities, those three things, that Jesus is able to help, Jesus is willing to help, and Jesus will make himself accessible to her. Her belief in those three things is so

resolute that even though Jesus She is, in a sense, putting on a show that he's not interested in helping her.

That doesn't deter her. She comes with this resolute conviction that God will help her, that Jesus will help her. It reminds me of blind Bartimaeus. Remember blind Bartimaeus in the story as Jesus is leaving out of Jericho there and there's this blind Bartimaeus fellow, he's coming and he says, Son of David, have mercy on me.

And all the people around him are saying, shut up, shut up, quiet. But he won't shut up. Son of David, have mercy. Quiet, quiet. Son of David. He just gets louder and louder. Son of David, have mercy on me. The same type of thing. And she comes to Jesus. She, just like Jacob in the Old Testament, will not be turned away.

Look at Romans chapter 4 and verse 21. Fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. Or look with me at James chapter 1, verses 6 and 7. Let him not, let him, I'm sorry, let him ask in faith with no doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. So James here is not specifically talking about Intercessory requests. He's just talking about prayer in general, but his point is still just as applicable when he says When you come before the Lord and ask of the Lord, if you ask with a double heart, if you ask with a doubting heart, not fully convinced that He is willing and able to help, then James says, you're wasting your time.

He's not going to. Now, brothers and sisters, I mean, that's something that I can fall prey to just as easily as anyone else in the room, if not more so. Just a spirit of cynicism, just a spirit to say, you know, I've come with this request for... I've come with this request many times before, and I can fall prey to that as well, but our scriptures say to us, do not allow yourself to fall prey to that spirit of unbelief, the spirit of doubt, in which you begin to doubt That the Lord is actually willing and able to help with the request that you bring to him on behalf of another.

So these, these are the ways that she comes to Jesus with this resolute belief, with this resolute faith, with a heart that's fully engaged, fully burdened, heavily burdened for the one that she prays for, with an identification with the one who is in need, and with a full realization and a full admittance.

of the reality of the need that she's bringing. So now let's just look briefly at the substance of what she comes to Jesus with. The substance of her prevailing intercessory prayer. First of all, her prayer was very bold and very direct, wasn't it? She didn't come to Jesus beating around the bush. She didn't come to Jesus all sort of hymning and hawing.

She didn't come to Jesus and sort of want to engage Him. with this other question over here and this other thing and this sort of maybe just get eventually get around. You know what? I've got this daughter at home. And now that we kind of got to know each other a little bit, let me sort of tell you about her.

She doesn't do that at all. She comes very bold, very direct. She's like the opposite of Abraham. Remember Abraham in Genesis 23? Remember that story of Abraham when Sarah dies? And



Abraham, who was the heir of the promised land? who owned no land at all, has to actually buy some land to bury his wife in.

And so he comes to the Hittites there in Genesis 23. And remember, this is a whole chapter. back and forth, hymn and hawain, in this, this cult, that was the culture of the day, this eastern culture of that day, that, that was how things were done. Abraham comes to the Hittites and he says, I need some land, I need a field and a cave to bury my wife in.

And the Hittites respond to say, Oh, we'll give you the field. Just take it. But we're neighbors. Between neighbors, what's one field? Take the field and bury your dead. And Abraham says, No, no, no. I won't do that. I'll pay for the field. No, no, no. We won't take your money. What is this between neighbors? Just take the field that you want and bury your dead there.

No, no, no. I must... And it goes back and forth numerous times. And eventually... The Hittites say or Abraham keeps saying just name your price name your price eventually the Hittites say what's a field that's worth? 400 shekels between friends and that was the price that was the naming of the price because that's how things were done in that culture you just

This woman is the opposite of that. She comes to Jesus. Jesus. Right away. Right off the, right off the bat. Nobody standing around there had any doubt what the woman wanted from Jesus. Her daughter was possessed of demons, and she comes to him directly and boldly, right up front with this request. Secondly, her prayer, of course, was persistent.

If anything, her prayer was persistent. She wouldn't be turned away. Now, when Jesus speaks to us of effective, prevailing prayer, I wonder if we can recognize what the characteristic of prayer is. of prevailing prayer that Jesus most consistently emphasizes. Anybody know? What aspect of prayer does Jesus seem to want to emphasize most frequently?

The aspect of prayer that Jesus seems to return to And desiring to emphasize that aspect is the aspect of persistence. That seems to be what Jesus wants to communicate most effectively about prayer, is the aspect of persistent prayer. He tells the parable of the man who has some friends that show up late at night, and he's got to give them a place to stay, but he doesn't have enough bread for them, so he goes to his friend, knocks on the door, and says, you know, can you get up and give me some bread, I've got some...

Some people that came over late, and I don't have enough bread for them. And the guy says, we're already in bed. Me and my daughters and my family were already in the bed. Go away and come back again later. But he won't. He keeps on knocking and knocking. And Jesus finally says, because of his persistence, He finally gets out of bed opens the door and gives him the bread or the other parable that Jesus tells about the wicked judge The wicked judge who there's this widow who's been treated unjustly She comes before the wicked judge saying give me justice.

Give me justice. He won't hear her He won't give her justice, but she keeps on coming and coming. Finally. The judge says this woman won't leave me alone I'm gonna give her justice just so she won't keep coming back. Jesus tells both of those parables to teach the lesson of persistence in prayer. Now, here's the important thing to see about both of those parables.

Jesus does not tell those parables for us to compare them to God. Jesus isn't comparing the friend who won't get out of bed to God. He's not comparing the unjust judge to God. Instead,

he's contrasting and he makes that plain. He goes on to say, if this unjust judge will eventually give her justice, how much more will your father speedily give you justice?

Or if this friend didn't want to get up out of bed to help you, but he eventually does because you keep knocking, how much more will your father come to your aid? All right, so his point there is to contrast the Father, not to say that God's like that, you just gotta keep on asking and asking and asking.

His, his point is to contrast it, but nevertheless, he also wants to emphasize the necessity of persistence in prayer. And so this seems important to our Lord. That those who would pray with her would pray in a persistent manner and this woman is anything if not is nothing if not persistent. So seeing that let's now after having talked for a little bit about how she comes to Jesus. The way that she comes to Jesus how this manner of coming to Jesus should be seen as an example for us. We've seen the how let's think for just a minute about the The what?

Because we've talked about how we come to God and how this woman shows us to come to God on behalf of others. But we haven't yet talked about what we come to God on behalf of others for. And that's what I want to spend the remainder of our time just thinking through what the scriptures teach us. about the needs that we take to the Father on behalf of others.

So, first of all, just recognize that this sounds really basic, really simple, and probably most of us in the room will say, okay, yeah, we understand that. But the first thing still needs to be said, the first thing is this, to make sure that we are bringing others to the Lord in prayer. And doesn't that sound basic and simple?

Yeah, we all know that. But also, don't we all need to hear that as well? Don't we all need to hear? Remember that not only are we expected to take one another to the Lord in prayer, but we are even told that we sin against the Lord when we don't. Remember the words of Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 12, verse 23, when Samuel says, far be it from me, far be it from me that I would sin against the Lord by lying to you.

That's not what he says. Far be it from me that I would sin against the Lord by blaspheming his name. He says, Far be it from me that I would sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you by failing to pray for you. Samuel says to us quite plainly, I sin against the Lord when I fail to pray for God's people.

And brothers and sisters, that's a powerful lesson that we must take into today, that we sin against the Lord by failing to take one another to the Lord in prayer. If you look around the room and you see all the faces in the room, all the faces in the room that particularly are covenant members of the Disciples Fellowship, you should see faces that you regularly take to God in prayer.

That's what you should see in the room. Not just the loved ones that are your biological family, or not just your close loved ones, or not even those who are the closest of your friends, but all of those who are the body. Should be the object of regular prayers that you take before the Lord. In fact, this is one of the things that we covenant together with, with one another in our church covenant.

Let me read it to us once again. We will not, I'm sorry, we will endeavor to bring up such as may be at any time under our care, the nurture and the admonition of the Lord and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends. We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear one another's burdens and sorrows.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. We will walk together in brotherly love as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require. So all of us have covenanted together to take one another to the Lord in prayer.

And as we take one another to the Lord in prayer, this is our guideline. Not just words to say, Oh Lord, I just want to bring to you the needs of, of this brother, of this sister. I just want to bring you to the need. Like this woman came to Jesus with a heart that was burned, with a heart that was heavy.

With an identification so close that she could say, Lord, have mercy on me. That's how we are to take one another before the Lord. Some of you in the room have had the experience of having me say to you, brother or sister, I've seen this, I've noticed this. I've noticed this, that I seem to see is going on.

And I just want you to know that I'm praying for you. And usually the response that I get from that sort of thing is. Wow, it's so nice to know that we have a pastor that prays for us. Listen, you should have every member of the body praying for you in exactly the same way as you pray for them. As you take these needs before the Lord, this mandate.

Of intercessory prayer, in which we are told, not only can you take these requests to the Lord, but you must take these requests to the Lord. So, we see that, we see that it's helpful just to be told, once again, Yes, we must be praying for others in the body, for one another, for loved ones. We must be taking them before the Lord.

But what do we ask? What do we take to the Lord? When we pray for others, be it others in the body, or just others in our life, What do we tend to pray for? What are those requests that we tend to take to the Lord? Isn't it true that just like our prayers for ourself, isn't it true that the bulk of our prayers for others tend to be consumed with small prayers?

Isn't that true? Prayers that are requests for the external, for the outward, for the surgery that's coming up. For the job that someone may be looking for for the difficulty in this job situation or for the difficulty in this home situation for or for this loved one that's in the hospital or these tests that are coming up.

or this or that or whatever it may be, or, or safe travels from here to there. Doesn't that seem, tend to consume our prayers for one another? I know it consumes the requests that are lifted up. Like, for example, at the conclusion of this service, as we say, pray for this brother, pray for this sister in this way, and this thing's going on.

Doesn't that tend to consume us as these outward sort of external things? Now, we are commanded in Scripture to pray. For all those things, right? For circumstances, for external

circumstances. Jesus tells us, He's, when He teaches us how to pray, He says, Pray like this, give us this day our daily bread. So Jesus teaches us to pray for external things, for external needs.

But when we think about the example of praying for others that the Scripture gives to us, again, there is no more prolific example than the example of the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul records some 43 prayers in the New Testament. Do you know how many of those prayers were for the circumstances of those he prayed for?

None.

43 prayers. Numerous, numerous sentences of prayer. And none of them were prayers that God would change the circumstances of anyone that He prayed for. With one small possible exception, Paul prayed on several occasions that God would grant that he would be able to go to a certain church and strengthen their faith by being with them.

If you want to consider that a change in circumstances, that might be an exception. I don't really think that's an exception. I still think that was still a spiritual prayer. So Paul prayed prolifically for the church. And his prayers were consumed with requests. None of which were requests for circumstances.

Now, if Paul were here today, he would be the first one to say to us, Well, I'm not saying that we're not supposed to pray for circumstances, because it was Paul himself Who would say in the letter to the Philippians that in all things by prayer and supplication lift all these things up to God and the peace of God which passes understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

So it's Paul himself who said pray in all things. It's also Paul who would say at the end of that letter to the Philippians that I know that my God will meet all your needs according to his riches and grace in Christ Jesus. And the meeting of the needs that he confesses there, we shouldn't take that to mean that Paul only means the meeting of spiritual needs.

Philippians, because the entire letter of Philippians was a letter that was occasioned by the Philippians meeting his circumstantial needs. So we shouldn't say that when he says, my God will meet all your needs according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus, he's not saying just your spiritual needs.

So Paul himself would say, of course, we're to pray for external circumstances. We are right to take that before God. However, the weight, the weight of the. Two examples of prayers that were given, gives clear weight to the requests that are not circumstantial, that are not exterior, that are not outward, that are spiritual.

That are not requests for the natural man, but requests for the spiritual man. So why is it That we tend to be so consumed with praying for externals. Why do you think that is? I think there's at least two reasons why requests for external circumstances tend to dominate our prayers, particularly our prayers for other people.

I think the first reason that external circumstances tend to dominate is because, well, quite frankly, that's the easiest prayer to pray. Isn't it far easier to pray that God would give traveling

mercies to someone traveling from A to B? Isn't that far easier to pray? Isn't it far easier to pray for successful surgery?

Or for a healing? Or for the return of health? Isn't that far easier to pray than to pray for a deep spiritual matter? Praying for a spiritual matter is spiritual work that can only be done by the power of the Spirit. And nothing the Spirit does in you is effortless. When the Spirit, once you're converted, once conversion has come to you, nothing the Spirit does in you is effortless on your part.

And so therefore, to wrestle with God with requests that aren't exterior and circumstantial, that is hard spiritual work. You know, even people who hate God can wish that other people have safe travels. Even people who hate God can wish that people have successful surgeries. That's not hard. Even people that don't know God can do that.

You know, I recently read a book by Tim Keller called Prayer. In that book, he cites a couple of statistics that might be alarming to you. He says that 43 percent of atheists confess to praying. 43 percent of atheists say that they pray occasionally. I find that stunning. They pray. Who do you pray to? What are you praying for?

Who do you think is hearing you if you're an atheist? But nevertheless, 43 percent of people who believe there is no God will still say that they pray. They can still pray for a successful surgery, and that presents no theological problem for them whatsoever. They can still pray that you would be healed from that broken bone.

So you see, those types of prayers, while they are necessary, while God expects them... Well, they are required for your godliness as you pray for others. If you were to pray for others in spiritual, in spiritual manners while neglecting the external circumstances, then you'd be just like James, who says, you know, what good is it, what good is it when somebody comes and, and they're in desperate need and you say, Oh, go and be filled and be warmed and then you don't meet their need.

That's the same thing to say, Well, I'll pray for your spiritual needs only, but I'll ignore your circumstantial needs. Now, we don't do that either, but that is to say that wrestling with God over spiritual concerns, wrestling with God with the hard heartedness of a loved one, wrestling with God over the, the spiritual frustration that you sense a brother or sister is experiencing, wrestling with God over, over perhaps the doubts that you sense that a brother is having.

Those are far more difficult prayers to pray. And so I think that that's why. External circumstances tend to dominate our prayers because they're easier. Secondly, I think they dominate because the answers to those prayers are much more readily seen. When you pray for traveling mercies, well, you can see God answer that prayer in an hour or two, can't you?

When you pray that God would grant a successful surgery or a good doctor's report, you can see the answer for that pretty soon. But when you pray, That a sister or a brother would be empowered by the Spirit to submit their lives to the Lord more fully, to kill this sin in their life, to be made more like Christ.

Those are prayers that take years and decades and lifetimes to ever realize the answer for them. And prayers that are answered in the long term are harder to consistently pray. than prayers that

are answered in the short term, aren't they? So I think that's why our prayers often are dominated by the circumstantial.

But let's look to Paul's model and let's say, Lord, we want to be people who pray in proportion to how you show us to pray. We don't neglect the circumstantial needs of others, but nevertheless, we want our prayers to be properly proportionate to what you show us in your word. And how does Paul pray? How does Paul pray for the church?

How does Paul pray for other believers? Well, the ways in which Paul prays for brothers and sisters are legion. They are myriad. And so while it's impossible, unless we took a lot of time, it's impossible for us to completely cover all the ways that Paul prays for the church. Nevertheless, we can make some attempt to maybe see some categories and see some patterns.

And take that as an example for us and ask the Lord in prayer, Lord, grant, equip, enable me that I might pray for my brothers and sisters like this. So the first thing that Paul takes to the Lord on behalf of others is Paul asks God for a greater, sharper, and more precise spiritual insight. On their part, Paul prays that those who are his brothers and sisters, those who are part of this church over here, or that church over there, Paul prays, grant them sharper perception, greater insight to your truth, to your reality, greater understanding of your nature.

Look at Ephesians chapter 1 verses 15 through 18. Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you. Remembering you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

What are the riches of his inglorious inheritance in the saints? In other words, you hear what he's saying, Lord, grant this request. Grant the request that they would have eyes that are sharpened to the glorious blessing of being in Christ, the glorious inheritance that is laid up for them, the glorious reality of having their identity hidden in the identity of Christ.

Or two chapters later in Ephesians 3, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

You hear his heart request here. Grant them spiritual vision, grant them spiritual understanding that they may comprehend the riches of being in Christ. Now, let's take that back and let's plug that back into the woman's prayer. The woman comes before Jesus being under no illusion of what ails her daughter, coming to Jesus forthrightly to say, this is the problem.

And then her heart is so burdened and so heavy and she's so identifies with her daughter that she says, have mercy on me now to go before the Lord with that prayer for others is hard work. That's not a prayer that comes easy. That's not a prayer that you just spout off to go before the Lord with the heart that is genuinely burdened.

For the loved ones in your life and pleading with him, Lord, is it as if I need to see you more. Let him see you. Let her see you. And my request is so heartfelt that it is as though I need this. That is a spiritually strenuous prayer. Look at another way in which Paul takes loved ones, brothers and sisters, before the Lord.

He prays for an increasing spiritual wisdom, which would lead to a life of increasing holiness. There's so much overlap between these, but we're doing our best to at least break them down into manageable chunks. An increasing spiritual wisdom leading to a life of increasing holiness. Look at his words to the Colossians.

And so from the day we heard, We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. I pray that their spiritual wisdom, which is a gift from you, would be abundantly given to them, to the end that, to the result that, they would then Walk in ways that are pleasing to you, that their lives would be practically holy, that their lives would be holy in a real intangible way.

Grant them spiritual understanding that will be evidenced by outward holiness in their life. Take that prayer before the Lord on behalf of someone else. Being so burdened that your heart is heavy like this woman's. And you'll see what a strenuous work. This type of prayer is. He prays that their spiritual wisdom would increase.

He also prays for their increasing and deepening love for one another. Look at Philippians chapter 1 verses 9 through 11. It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. I pray that you love one another. And with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent and be, 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.

I pray that you who already love each other would love one another more and more so that in your love for one another, you may approve what is excellent. And approving what is excellent, so be pure for the day, pure and blameless for the day of Christ. There's so much there. We could, we could unpack that for the rest of the morning, but there's so much there.

He prays that their love for one another would deepen and become richer. He's burdened with a burden like the woman coming before Jesus. Just crying out to God, God, it is my heartfelt desire that these Philippians would love each other more. They don't hate each other. You've read the book of Philippians.

They don't hate each other. They're having some problems. But it is a letter written to a church that is loving and joyful. And yet Paul is so burdened that they would love each other more. He also prays that they would increase in deepening love for one another to the Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians chapter 3.

Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another. And for all as we do for you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

He also prays for the granting of spiritual fellowship. This is, as we said earlier, the one request that might border on a request for circumstances because He does pray, Lord, that You would grant that I could go to them and be with them. But I really don't see that as a circumstantial request. I still see that as a spiritual request.

He says, of the Thessalonians, he says, For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before God, as we pray most earnestly, most earnestly, night and day, that we may see you face to face, and supply what is lacking in your faith. You know, we who have all the opportunity to gather together twice a week, and even more, And we see brothers and sisters on such a regular basis as we should, as we need to.

For us, the need to be with brothers and sisters can become muted, dull. It can become black and white instead of the vivid color that Paul sees it. Instead of the sharp, piercing need, Paul sees a deep need to be with these people. He sees a deep need to fellowship with them, to strengthen their faith by fellowship.

We take that for granted, don't we? Our time of table fellowship before our services, we take that for granted. It's often, skipped on, and it's often treated as that which is secondary to the life of the church. But Paul saw that as a need so sharp. In his words, earnestly, night and day, I pray that I could come to you, and we could fellowship.

Romans 19 verses 9 and 10 for God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit and the gospel of his son that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers asking that somehow by God's will I may at last succeed in coming to you hear the heartfelt need there Romans I need to see you I need to come to you pray earnestly that God would grant that I can get there So these are some of the needs that he prays for.

But he also prays a consistent prayer. And that consistent prayer is that their lives, the lives of the ones for whom he prays would be lives that outwardly bring glory to Christ. On the part of those who witness their lives, that those who see you may see you and give God glory and honor to Christ.

Look at his prayer to the Thessalonians at that second Thessalonians chapter one. To this end, we always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you or Romans chapter 15 made the God of endurance and encouragement Grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord with Christ Jesus that together You may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus God, I earnestly pray, I earnestly pray with a prayer that burdens my heart in ways that are equivalent to this woman who has the demon possessed little precious daughter.

I pray with such ferventness of prayer that you would create a spirit of unity and harmony among them that is so strong and so prevalent that those who see them would glorify you, that your life would bring glory by the way that they live. others that we could see. But then lastly, we wanna see, just see the, the most consistent thing that Paul prays.

And we've seen it in every prayer. Nearly every time he records a prayer, the most consistent thing that he prays is thankfulness. He thanks for the, for the Thessalonians, he thanks God that



their faith is growing. Second Thessalonians one, we ought always to give thanks to God for you brothers, as it is, right, because your faith is growing abundantly.

And the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Your faith is growing, your love for one another is growing, and that makes me thankful to see that. Or for the Ephesians, he's thankful that they love the brethren well. Look at chapter 1, again. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Or, he's thankful for the Philippians partnership in the Gospel. Chapter 1, verses 3 through 5. 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 your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. Or to the Corinthians, for the Corinthians, he's thankful that they have been gifted for the glory of Jesus Christ.

He says, I give thanks for my God always for you because of the grace of God. That was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in Him, in all speech, in all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any gift. As you wait for the revealing of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I'm thankful, says Paul, that God has gifted you so richly with spiritual giftings because that is all for the glory of Christ.

Or for the Romans, he's thankful that their faith is a means of spreading the gospel there in Rome. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you. Because your faith is proclaimed in all the world or the Thessalonians is thankful that your faith is working and that working faith that faith that is evidencing itself and works is a steadfast hope for them.

He says, we give thanks to God always for all of you constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering for our God before our God and father, your work of faith and labor. Of love and steadfast of hope, and the Lord Jesus Christ and many others that we could point to. Paul above all would go before God with a heart burdened to thank God deeply and sincerely for the brothers and the sisters of the churches, and as he is thankful for them.

He's thankful for all these ways that God is working in them and doing the spiritual labor in their lives. So one of the prayers that we are to pray and this. Not for others, but for ourselves. As we pray for ourselves, one of the ways that we should train our souls to pray is this. God, show me how you are working in the lives of my brothers and sisters.

Show me. Let me see the work that you're doing. Let me perceive that. Give me eyes to see what you are doing in the lives of my brothers and sisters so that I may thank you for it and so that I may encourage them. Do you know that's what biblical encouragement is? So often we get biblical encouragement wrong.

So often we know that we're supposed to encourage one another. But so often we see biblical encouragement as just simply the same thing as worldly encouragement, just with a little Christian language attached to it. Worldly encouragement, the way that the world encourages one another, is not the way the scriptures teach us to encourage one another.

The world encourages one another like this. You can do it. You got it in you. I know you can do it. You're better than that. You can succeed. That's how the world encourages. So often,

Christians will attempt to encourage one another in similar ways, and that encouragement falls far, far short of what biblical encouragement is.

Biblical encouragement is not saying to your brothers and sisters, You can do this. Biblical encouragement is saying to your brothers and sisters, God has brought you up into a place where you can't do this. But I see him in you. I see God in you. I see him working in you. I see him doing this in you. That is biblical encouragement.

To have a brother or sister say to you, I perceive God's work in you doing this. If the Spirit of Christ lives in you, then to hear those words from a brother and sister. is infinitely more encouraging than you can do it. Especially when you know deep down you can't. Especially when you know deep down that what they're seeing as ability is really just you faking it.

It's really just an act that you're putting on. Because deep down, that's really what all of us want to do. We want to put on an act to show others that we're capable that we can do it, and that worldly encouragement comes along to feed the act. To nourish the act, biblical encouragement comes along and says, put away the act because God has brought you to a place, intentionally brought you to a place where you can't do what he's requiring of you.

But nevertheless, I see him in you and I see him doing this in you. That is biblical encouragement. But to give that encouragement, we have to have eyes that see it. And that's the prayer to pray for ourselves, Lord, let me see in my brothers and my sisters what you're doing. Let me see the growth that you're bringing.

Let me see the faith that is steadfast. Let me see the witness that's going forth. Let me see the obedience that's increasing. Show that to me so that I can thank you and praise you for that. And so that I can encourage them on to more of the same. So let us be, as Paul showed us so adeptly, and as this woman showed us so keenly, let us be people that go before our Lord with a similar type of burden.

Burden for one another, and not primarily for one another's circumstances, but burden for one another's spiritual life. Only in that are we truly being the church. Only in praying for one another in that way are we truly living like the New Testament church is to live.