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FRUITFULNESS: THE PARTNERSHIP OF PRAYER

by Dan Trygg

In the last chapter, we saw prayer to be an expression of faith, a response to the Biblical picture of humanity in relationship to God. **On the one hand, prayer is the ultimate expression of our dependence upon God. It is the admission that we cannot deal with life by ourselves.** We cannot go through a day successfully without waiting upon God for guidance and power for living. Can there be a more pure expression of faith in the reality of our need than to cease all activity and in silence, in secret, to come before God in the expectation and appeal of prayer? Is there an action that more clearly and obviously portrays Jesus' comparison of the branch's dependence upon the Vine to the life of the believer than prayer?

On the other hand, prayer is an expression of faith in another important teaching of God's Word, i.e., that we play an important part in getting things done in this world by the impact of our involvement in prayer. Unless we believed that we make a difference, either to God or in our world, we would never be motivated to pray. **The sovereignty of God is never presented as a monolithic determinism in Scripture. God has privileged us with sharing the responsibility of the outpouring of His grace upon this world.** The assumption behind every passage on prayer is that our investment in prayer will bring about, by God's grace, changes in the outcome of certain events or His dealings with certain people. This is not because we manipulate God, or that there is any "power" in our prayers themselves. It is because God has given to us the high calling and privilege of being intercessors. It is a gift, an office which He has called us to by His grace. It has pleased Him to exalt us to have a place in the outworking of His kingdom. **Where we act on this privilege, the results can be dynamic. Where we ignore this office, the impact can be devastating.** This is not because *we* are anything, rather God has given us the privilege of asking Him to act. This brings glory to God by: (1.) revealing His benevolent desire and pleasure to exalt us as His children; (2.) causing His people to seek Him with a dependent heart for their various concerns; (3.) motivating His people to pursue maturity and the revealed qualifications for effectual praying; (4.) clarifying His power and concerned involvement in the lives of people through His answers to specific needs; and, (5.) generating praise and thanksgiving in response to His answers to particular requests.

Both sides of this place of human privilege and responsibility in prayer are presented to us in the book of Ezekiel. In 22:30,31, we find the tragic revelation that because there was no one to intercede, to "stand in the gap" before God for the land, its destruction would not be turned back (Cf. Isa. 50:1-3; 59:15-19; 63:5,6). We see, in this example, the tremendous potential impact that one person's prayers can have (Cf. I Kg. 17:1; Jas. 5:16-18). We see, also, that **God searches for individuals to intercede, to ask Him to act on behalf of His people.** There are times when, as in Jer. 7:16; 11:14, and Ezk. 14:12-23, the judgment for sin is already set in motion, and the intercession of the godly will only deliver themselves. The effective ministry of the intercessor, however, comes *before* the moral state of a nation sinks that low. **If a moral and spiritual decline is addressed early enough, a calling out to God for mercy and revival can be very effective in not only putting off judgment** (e.g., II Chr. 34:1-28), **but also in stimulating renewed spiritual interest among a wandering, ignorant people** (Isa. 63:15-64:7; cf. I Jn. 5:14-17). Thus, there is a responsibility to be a watchman, or sentry, who not only warns by the spoken word (Ezk. 3:16-21), but one who also waits before God in intercession on their behalf (Isa. 62:1-7).

The positive privilege for the intercessor is illustrated in Ezekiel 36:37,38. Without a doubt, **God is the One who is in control, yet He graciously condescends to allow His people to ask Him to increase their numbers.** We also see, in the New Testament, the value of interceding for ourselves and for others to be strengthened against sin (Lk. 22:40,46), and/or be

restored from its effects (Lk. 22:31,32; I Jn. 5:14-17). Glimpses into the apostle Paul's life of prayer open to us a wealth of possibilities, areas which he felt were under the influence of prayer. We find, as he intercedes for the people he writes to, examples of **prayer for growth in spiritual understanding in order to know God's will and be enabled to do it** (Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 1:15-22). We find **prayer for the abundant outflow and maturation of genuine love** among believers, and its resulting fruitfulness (I Thess. 3:11-13; Phil. 1:9-11). He mentions the need for intercession so that boldness and clarity of speech would be given in the sharing of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19,20; Col. 4:2-6). He thought that **even opportunities to share our faith come in answer to prayer** (Col. 4:2,3). He asks God to encourage and strengthen the hearts of His people for every good work and word (II Thess. 2:16,17). In fact, Paul's heart was in prayer, with the worship of joy and thanksgiving before God, always and in every circumstance. He, furthermore, saw that as God's will for us all (I Thess. 5:16-18; cf. I Sam. 12:23).

Father, thank You for the tremendous power which You have made available to us through prayer. The potential impact is immeasurable. Fill our hearts with a burden to pray for others. Remind us of our calling as intercessors in the various situations that confront us each day. O Father, make us men and women of prayer! Convince our hearts that the fervent prayer of the righteous does, indeed, accomplish much (Jas. 5:17). Grant unto us a fire of fervency in our souls that will not be quenched until we see the revival of Your people today, the manifestation of the Vine's goodness through the beauty and fruitfulness evident within His people. May the yearnings of our hearts toward that end become effectual appeals for life directed to the Vine, and not mere words of grumbling or complaint that produce nothing but discontent and division. Keep us abiding in You, Lord Jesus, for in You there is sweetness of spirit and fruitfulness in prayer, as in all of life.

FOR MEDITATION: Ephesians 6:18; Ezekiel 22:30.

"With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints..."

"And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one."

The Strength of Small Churches

"There is an interesting and surprising inverse relationship between the size and durability of American Protestant churches. Overall, the larger the church, the more fragile it is as an institution; and the smaller the church, the more durable it is. Because most churches are small, most churches endure.

"Larger churches tend to be pastor-centered. Since pastors are subject to illness, moral failure, bad judgment, waning popularity, and death, the large church can tumble down with them. Parishioners, who do not have other loyalties (to denomination or to close personal friendships, for example), can be quick to leave the large church and go elsewhere. Banks are well aware of this risk and often require pastors to sign long-term contracts and 'key man' life insurance policies before granting a church loan.

"Smaller churches tend to be close-knit, often based on family relationships. When everyone in the church is related, pastors may come and go, the building may burn, and the finances may slip -- but church members stay.

"If small means stable, does that mean churches should shrink to survive? ...The important issue is *purpose*. What has God called the church to do? Once that has been determined, the social realities of the church's size should be considered."

Abridged from [Dying for Change](#) by Leith Anderson (Bethany House Publishers: Minneapolis, 1990) Pp. 120, 121.