



Our Critical Responsibility

Ephesians 6:18b NIV

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Have You Thought About the Importance of Praying?

Prayer is such a notable part of nearly every religion that we sometimes give it less notice than we should when it comes to Christian living. You may not realize how crucial it is to pray for others in particular. The original Greek text literally calls for us to be “watchful ones.” Alert is similar in meaning, but not nearly as personal. You are called to pay attention to what is happening all around you so that you can enter into the spiritual battle between the Kingdom of God and Satan. Our kids make fun of me for at restaurants listening in on the conversations of others at nearby tables. They call it eavesdropping; but I prefer to describe it as caring about other people and the needs they have. That may not be exactly what we mean by paying attention to others, but it is close enough to what the Bible is describing when it says we are to be watchful ones. You are not to be a passive observer either, but rather an active fighter for the cause of others in their struggles with the terrible Enemy. There is another term in this short section that is found in the Greek wording. It is “perseverance. Perseverance implies hard work. You can’t take this lightly. It is not a casual endeavor; you simply must make this a priority. Souls are at stake and even if it is hard to keep doing your part, even if it feels like it is boring, you simply must make this a priority. It is paramount that you persevere in this task of praying for others.

When Job faced the attack of Satan and was left without his wealth, health, and children, he was devastated and wondered why after all the good he had done, God had turned on him. Three friends came and commiserated with him. They sat silently for days as Job mourned and suffered. Finally, his buddies felt the need to express their thoughts and with increasing fervency, indicated that the cause of his hardship was that he was a sinner and God was upset with Job. As the book concludes, God addresses Job directly and never accuses Job of any wrongdoing except for the lack of respect he shows for God in his complaints. However, the Lord had a stern rebuke for Job’s friends. He told them He was angry with them because they had not said the truth about Job, literally, “not spoken of me what is right”. The friends were to offer seven bulls and seven rams and sacrifice them as an offering. Before though, they were told to go to “my servant Job” and ask him to pray for them.

There are two interesting considerations here. The first is that Job’s friends were told that if Job prayed for them, the Lord said He would not deal with the friends according to their folly. We are never told what He might have done to them if Job didn’t pray, but it is clear that those friends needed Job’s prayers to avoid God’s judgment. This is an astounding revelation on prayer. God put in Job’s hands the fate of his friends. It was to be settled by praying. Why would God be so insistent that you become a persistent person of prayer if it doesn’t matter? It does matter. Your prayers impact others. How can this be explained why this is the case? This is beyond our reach! It simply must be accepted by you that your prayers change lives

and when you aren't paying attention and praying, that too changes lives. Job did pray and we are told that the Lord "accepted his prayers".

The second point is equally important for you. Up to this point, Job continued to be in pain. His suffering was still occurring, and his losses remained a terrible weight on his shoulders. After Job prayed for his friends, Job's circumstances changed for the better. The Bible makes this clear that God did not release Job from the terrors inflicted on him by Satan until after he prayed for his mean-hearted and judgmental friends. We are told that once he prayed for his friends, the Lord made Job prosperous and gave him twice as much as he had before. Praying for others impacts your life too! Does that mean that if you pray for a woman on the metro who looks discouraged, you will get a pay raise? Of course not...or maybe. It does mean though that the Lord rewards His people for faithful praying, and He will do that for you. There is an added benefit to praying for others. It takes your mind off your own problems and brings you back to God and the needs of the world. I have found a neat little trick that has helped me and could help you too. When I can't fall asleep because my mind is troubled, I will often begin to pray for each person that comes to mind. It is amazing how quickly I fall asleep. God blesses praying people with supernatural help that cannot be explained any other way except that He intervened on their behalf.

One of the great and courageous people of the Bible was the Queen Esther. She was chosen by one of the greatest emperors of the time to be his queen. Jewish by birth, Queen Esther hid her religion and nationality from the king and everyone else. Her uncle, who raised her, thought it would be best if she kept it to herself and so Esther did. However, when King Xerxes was convinced by his prime minister to initiate a pogrom of complete annihilation of the Jewish people because of the threat he insisted they posed to the national security, Esther was left with a tremendous dilemma. Rarely do we consider the tension within others as they face tough decisions. We take their struggles lightly but see our own as monumental. When word got out that the king had ordered the total destruction of all Jews, Esther's uncle sent her a message that she needed to go to the king and beg for mercy for the Jewish people. This scared Esther to death. The rule of the empire was that anyone who approached King Xerxes in the inner court without him summoning her would be put to death. Xerxes had thousands of other wives and he had not asked to see Esther in a month. There was great reason for Esther to fear going in to see the king without him calling for her. When she voiced her panic to Mordecai her uncle over the proposition of approaching the king without permission and asking him to save the Jewish people, Mordecai's reply back to her was uncompromising. **"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"** (Esther 4:13-14 NIV)

Esther quickly realized that it was her God-given duty to go to the king and ask for him to intervene for the cause of the Jews, but she was afraid. She did what you must do when you need help. She asked for prayer. She told her uncle to go out among the Jewish people and call for them to pray for God to see her through the task. Literally, she asked for the Jews to be gathered together and fast for her until the third day. The text does not say explicitly that they were to pray and ask God for help but that is precisely what was meant by the call to fast. Despite being the queen to the most powerful man of his time, Esther did not think she was too smart or capable to covet the prayers of her people. She was just like the Apostle Paul who several times in his letters asks churches to pray for him. Are you willing to humble yourself and ask a few friends you trust to pray for you? One of the greatest signs of friendship is when someone promises to pray for you. When you ask a brother or sister to go to God on your behalf, you are bestowing on that person a tremendous privilege. By doing so, you give permission to that one to enter into the great sanctuary of heaven with God and bless you with the Lord's blessing and mercy. It is a wonderful honor to pray for a family member, a co-worker, a fellow Christian. You and God get to meet together for the benefit of one of His children. You become like Abraham when you take up that honor, a spiritual giant.

The account of Abraham praying for the people of Sodom where his nephew lived is a moving record of compassion. The Lord told Abraham that He was going to destroy the town because of the terrible sins being committed there and Abraham asked God if He would destroy the city if fifty righteous people were living there. The Lord said He would spare the entire city if fifty righteous citizens could be found. Abraham then asked if the Lord would destroy Sodom if the number of righteous people was five less than that, forty-five. God said He would not destroy Sodom if forty-five righteous ones were in the town. Abraham worked his way down from forty-five to forty to thirty and down to ten, all in an effort to save the town from destruction. And each time as Abraham prayed, the Lord was kind enough to pay attention to Abraham's concern. Consider just how important you are to God! You have just as much of God's interest and consideration as you pray for the people in your spiritual care as did Abraham. God Himself in the Bible tells you to pray for "all the saints." What a great honor it is for you to do so! Christ pays attention to you and takes into consideration what you say. The battle is on with Satan. You are at the frontlines with all the saints and your greatest responsibility is to pray for everyone you can.