

## Prayer Reimagined

### *How Could You Upgrade Your Praying?*

Last week I was working on the sermon and a devotional I was hoping to publish, and I received a call from someone I had not talked with on the phone in a couple years. “I just called to pray for you”, the friend told me and then with great power in the Holy Spirit prayed for my anointing. As my friend prayed, I was filled with joy over the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power that came over me. My work was fruitful and I knew that Christ would guide me as I wrote. Why did this friend call me? I can only assume it was under the guidance of God. The effect of the prayer was dramatic as my outlook on the rest of the day became laser focused on Christ and His presence. Praying is not a religious exercise; it is a supernatural infusion of God into your life and those for whom you pray. Most people have no idea what God is leading them to do as the day moves along but you can. You can join Christ in what He has planned and how He wants to uplift those around you as well as yourself. Our Big Idea today is: Do not underestimate the power of God working in and through you if you are paying attention to Him and praying for those He puts in your life.

The verse we are focusing on is from Ephesians. **Through all prayer and supplication, praying ones, in every time in the Spirit, and into this, being vigilant ones in all perseverance and supplications concerning all the holy ones.** (Ephesians 6: 18) I noted in the previous message that there are six characteristics of the faithful follower of Jesus Christ and we looked at two of them then. Today we will consider two more of those characteristics. Characteristic three is Pay Attention Praying. Literally the Scripture calls it “being vigilant ones”. There is such a phenomenon known as predatory vigilance. This is where you are constantly looking for mistakes others make, for ways to criticize or demean. I find myself dismayed by what I see in the description of the woman caught in adultery. **At dawn he (Jesus) appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group...** (John 8: 2-3 NIV) The Greek text indicates that the woman (and what about the man) was caught in the very act of adultery. In other words, they had to have been actively watching for her since the sexual activity must have occurred in the very early morning hours before dawn. Who does that? Someone who is vigilant in a predatory fashion. I am convicted each time I come upon the account because I can think of times I have been on the watch for someone to mess up, to make a mistake, to embarrass themselves, to be wrong. Years ago, a leader in the church where I pastored came in the evening to the sanctuary after I had already left. I had on a poster board a large peace sign. I was going to use it as an illustration for a point I was going to make in the sermon. The fellow left me a note that the peace sign was a satanic symbol, and he was disgusted by me having it in the sanctuary. He told me in the note he and his family were not going to attend the worship service as a result. He did not bother to find out what I was going to do with the peace sign in the sermon; he simply condemned me outright. There are those who are predatory vigilant, but that is not the sort of vigilance we are describing. We are speaking of the vigilance that results in pay attention praying.

Pay attention praying is the deliberate attempt to watch for what God is doing and then join Him in it. Let me share an example from the Bible. After Stephen was executed by the Sanhedrin for his faith in Christ and very public preaching of the Gospel, persecution against the Christians in Jerusalem became horrendous and many believers fled to countries nearby. **Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.** (Acts 11: 19 NIV) This was the normative behavior of the Jewish Christians relocating. They found fellow Jews to provide the Gospel and that made sense. But there were some who were pay attention praying that realized God had a plan for the non-Jews in their new communities. As we see in the Scripture, there were other Jewish Christians who were clearly paying attention to God. **Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.** (Acts 11: 20-21 NIV) It takes effort on your part to practice pay attention praying. You have to have a passion for being led by God and the discipline to stay focused on Him leading you at any moment. Recently someone told me she knew how to deal with a relationship problem because of Scripture she just read. That is pay attention praying. It is aligning yourself with God in such a way that your mind is available for Him to lead. Pay attention praying is a level of praying that sees what others don't notice because you are paying attention to God.

The next characteristic of faithful followers of Christ is that they practice pointed praying. Notice that you are told to pray for "all the saints". That clearly is a point of emphasis that needs to be underscored. Why say you are to pray for all the saints and not just pray for anyone? Of course it is not just Christian people, which is what all the saints means, that God wants you to give attention for praying. Anyone and everyone are targets for your praying, but the underscored teaching here is to make sure you give plenty of attention to believers when you pray. Perhaps it is obvious to you why that would be but I think it needs to be stated the priority Christian believers or saints must have in your praying. The Christians are the foundation of change, the means by which the Kingdom of God in flesh and blood is established. It is how God is remaking the world. It isn't through great cities or high tech companies or educated policy makers or talented entertainers that the world will be made right. It is through Christian people like you and me that He builds honesty, kindness, generosity, wisdom and integrity. It is as you strengthen the saints by praying for them that they can be used by God to transform the world. If depression, bitterness, discouragement or even wavering faith hits any of the saints, it can be disastrous not just for them, but all those God wants to help, bless and transform through them.

Let me give an example and although I admit it is a most unusual example, it still helps underscore the concern. There was a widow named Tabitha who was as the Bible says, "always doing good and helping the poor." **In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.** (Acts 9: 36 NIV) What a great and crucial part of that community she was. But then Tabitha got sick and died and the loss of her to everyone was so devastating that messengers were sent to see if Peter could come and do something. It seems almost preposterous that they were hoping Peter would be able to raise Tabitha from the dead but there can be no other reason for them to beg him to come to Joppa. That is precisely what Peter did. He prayed for Tabitha to come back to life. And she did. I am not implying that you will have a ministry of praying for believers who die that they would return to life although that may be the case. What I am saying is that you can see that Tabitha was crucial to the well-being of those around her, especially the poor and many others. Each one who is born again, who has the Spirit of God living within can be just as critical to the world. The potential in them for good is unfathomable. If however they are grounded by troubles, heartache, materialism, waning faith or sin, they lose that potential for helping transform the world and all the good they can bring is lost also. Imagine a former Bible professor, now a drunk, stretched out on General Meyer Avenue in New Orleans. His clothes were rancid, he was unshaven, his body bloated, his eyes bloodshot, his marriage collapsing. He is tired of going to A.A. meetings, of trying to work the twelve steps, of praying. He had Christ but in a sense he didn't. Born again but living nothing like a Christian. Out of booze, in a panic, he found a five dollar bill in his pocket, staggered down to a convenience store and bought some cheap vodka, went back to where he had been sitting on the curb and passed out. Someone was praying for him. Someone was asking God to help one of His saints. At that moment, you might not have recognized him, but he was in fact to be, one of the most influential Christian authors of my generation. You never may know the impact of your praying for a saint, but this I will tell you, the good of your prayers is not lost on Christ and He will answer your prayers, and the world will be better for it. Out big Idea is long but of critical importance. Do not underestimate the power of God working in and through you if you are paying attention to Him and praying for those He puts in your life