

## Prayer and Friendship:

As Jim and Lois Anderson return from Russia, Jim asked me (Kelley Johnson) to contribute this article on prayer before we leave for Africa. Jola, Isaac and I will be ministering in Yaoundé, Cameroon where we will be seeing, learning from and serving with Jeff and Sheryl Brown with ReachGlobal (previously planting pastor of Grace Cmty Church in Olivia, MN) and with Efi and Mindy Tembon with CABTAL/SIL. While there, Jola and I have been asked to lead the annual CABTAL staff retreat where I will be teaching on Prayer and Sabbath-rest. We will end our trip with a short visit in Paris with Scott and Christiane Smith with CNA (Channel North Africa). During this trip, much of our ministry time will be devoted to building healthy relationships with these dear servants and getting to know those they work with.

Ministry is all about healthy relationships. First and foremost is our relationship with God, then our relationships with our spouse, our family, our church, our coworkers and, last but not least, the lost. From a pastoral care perspective, a key health-maintaining relationship is that of a close friend who knows and understands us for who we are and loves us in spite of it! These are the closest of friends and the ones we all need in ministry to keep us sharp (Proverbs 27:17). An integral part of the health of these special relationships is praying with and for each other.

In preparation for teaching on prayer in Cameroon, I have been reading D. A. Carson's wonderful book "*A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and his Prayers*."<sup>1</sup> In the fourth chapter of the book, a chapter on intercessory prayer, Carson shares some of the prayers of Paul and how we can learn to pray for other believers, especially our friends in ministry. Four key points can be pulled from Carson's teaching.

### 1) Prayers of Thanksgiving:

First, as we have seen in many of the prayer acronyms (ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication; PRAY: Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield; etc...), we are to pray with thanksgiving. But in Paul's prayers, while he occasionally thanked God for meeting the material needs of ministry, he more often thanked God for spiritual growth he saw in people. An example of this can be found seen in Ephesians 1:15-16:

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. (Ephesians 1:15-16, NIV)

In this passage, Paul thanks the Lord for the faith and love of the Ephesian Church, a prayer that not only brings glory to God but also brings a blessing of encouragement to the Ephesian believers. This encouragement to future growth was reinforced and directed by the rest of Paul's prayer.

### 2) Prayers for Additional Growth:

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<sup>1</sup> A special thanks to Rev. Tom Starkjohn of Harvest Community Church, Winsted, MN, for suggesting this book. Tom is a friend, the leader of our License Discussion Group, and a pastor to this pastor!

Second, we see Paul interceding with the Lord for additional spiritual growth and maturity to come. Returning to the Ephesians 1 passage, we clearly see Paul's request:

<sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. <sup>18</sup> I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, <sup>20</sup> which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. (Ephesians 1:17-21, NIV)

We see Paul make a similar request for the Thessalonian church when he prays that they would be counted worthy of God's calling on them (2 Thess. 11-12). Clearly the spiritual growth of these churches was at the forefront of Paul's thinking. That is because this is what is best for them.

### 3) Submission to God's Definition of Best:

Carson then brings out a third key to effective intercession, the submission of those for whom we pray to God's definition of best. Here he stresses the importance of looking at the prayers in Scripture as we strive to define what God's best really looks like, adding, "Just as Scripture must reform our beliefs about God, our dealings with others, our fundamental values, so too must it shape our praying."<sup>2</sup> I have heard it said recently, though the source escapes me, that God loves to hear His words coming from our mouths. If this is true, then what better tool to use in praying for others than the divine, inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. These words come from the heart of God and can transform the hearts of men toward holiness.

### 4) Self-Examination is Required:

Lastly, Carson brings us to a sometimes painful but necessary requirement for effective intercessory prayer, that of personal examination, confession and repentance. To illustrate this, we can go to a prayer of Paul's mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:

<sup>7</sup> To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. <sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7-10, NIV)

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992, 75

Here we see Paul confess and accept his own weakness in order that the glory of Christ may show forth. Carson says that this type of confession is critical not only for us to pray without conceit and bitterness but also that our unconfessed sin does not block our prayers (Isaiah 59:1-2).

So, as we pray for our friends in ministry, let us reflect on these four points, using them as a path to follow:

- ✦ Pray with thanksgiving, looking at the growth of our friend.
- ✦ Pray for additional spiritual growth, both as a prayer and as directed encouragement.
- ✦ Pray Scripture, allowing it to define what is best.
- ✦ Confess and repent so that prayers we lift are not hindered.

With these four thoughts in mind and with the help of the Holy Spirit we can effectively pray for our friends in ministry. In an earlier chapter of his book, Carson reflects on a piece of Puritan wisdom: Pray until you pray!<sup>3</sup> This means pray with persistency, with honesty, with confession, and with God's best in mind for the person you are praying for. Pray on, dear brothers! Pray on!

In Christ,

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992, 35-36