

## INTRODUCTION

A little girl asked her grandmother, "Grandmother, how old are you?" Her grandmother said, "Sweetheart, it's not nice to ask a woman her age." The next day the granddaughter said, "Grandmother, how much do you weigh?" The grandmother replied, "Honey, it's not polite to ask a woman how much she weighs."

The next day the granddaughter said, "Grandmother, you are 68 years old and you weigh 140 pounds." The grandmother was surprised. She said, "That's right, how did you know?" The granddaughter said, "You left your driver's license out on the table and I read it."

The grandmother said, "Well, aren't you the smart one?" The granddaughter said, "Yep. And I also saw on your license that you flunked sex." She was a little confused.

The believers in Thessalonica were confused and upset. Some angry Jews had forced Paul out town. He was still preaching, but he couldn't return to these people he loved. So he started the conclusion of his letter with a request that they pray for him.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5. "Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

This message is all about the importance of praying for other people. The theme of this passage teaches us an important lesson: **ASKING FOR PRAYER IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. IT'S A MARK OF DEPENDENCE.**

There was a time in my ministry that I tried to stay so positive and upbeat that if someone said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" I would have smiled and said, "Nope. Everything is great; I don't need anything." That was when I was young and dumb. I thought if I admitted I had a need it would show that I was weak. I AM weak. I need your prayers. I've since learned that anytime someone asks me what they can do for me, I always say, "Please pray for me."

Paul wasn't afraid to tell the church he needed them to pray for him. And he gave them some specific things to pray about. One of the factors that makes our praying so weak and ineffective is that we pray such generalized prayers.

The most effective intercessory prayer is targeted prayer. Consider this illustration. During the Vietnam War, U.S. forces employed carpet-bombing. Huge B-52s flying at 30,000 feet released hundreds of bombs over cities. Some of them might hit the target, some may miss—and there was the danger of collateral damage.

But do you recall the opening days of the First Gulf War against Iraq? Iraq had invaded Kuwait and Coalition forces gathered in Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait. At the time, Sadaam Hussein

bragged about having the fourth largest army in the world, with over 1 million troops. He boasted about his elite Imperial Guard. If attacked, he predicted it would be the mother of all battles.

In January of 1991, Operation Desert Storm was launched with Coalition aircraft flying sorties into Iraq. They had a new weapon the Iraqis had never seen before. These were laser-guided bombs and missiles called smart bombs. Soldiers on the ground or pilots in the air could designate a target with a laser, and the smart bomb would fly into that target. After the coalition forces flew several thousand sorties using smart bombs the ground war was launched. History records there was once a war named the 100 Year War, and some wars last 100 days. But the ground war of Operation Desert Storm lasted 100 hours. The Iraqi soldiers literally ran toward the enemy waving white flags of surrender.

That's a great illustration for prayer. Some people have a Vietnam War prayer life, they just pray in generalities, like carpet-bombing. They may say, "I'm praying for you." Or, "God bless my family." Some people pray so generally that they never know if God answers their prayer.

But there is a kind of intercessory prayer like Desert Storm praying. It employs laser-guided prayer requests. It sends God coordinates for very specific requests. In this passage Paul designates four laser targets for our prayers.

## 1. PRAY FOR GOD'S TRUTH TO SPREAD

Paul wrote, "Pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored." Paul was one of God's workers and he asked the church to pray for him. Those of us who serve the Lord here at Green Acres need your prayer. And we don't want carpet-bombing prayer; we need some laser-guided prayers, specific targets. Every Thursday morning at 6:30 up in our Upper Room Prayer Center, which is on the third floor of Crosswalk, the highest point on our campus, intercessors gather there to pray for me and the other members of our staff team. It's called our GAP prayer meeting. They aren't praying generally. Each week, we give them specific prayer requests for us. You're welcome to join them any Thursday morning to participate in laser-guided prayer for me and the other staff members. I know that I speak for all our staff members when I say, "Pray for us."

Paul asked the believers to specifically pray that he would continue to spread God's Word. The language literally means to pray that God's word will keep running ahead. It's the word, *trecho*, like our English word "trek." We're cheering for God's Word to win and to be crowned as a champion.

Paul spent much of his ministry in prison, but he had discovered that God's Word could not be kept behind bars. He wrote these words to Timothy. "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained." (2 Timothy 2:8-9)

Just think how God's Word has spread around the world. After the Resurrection of Jesus there were only eleven disciples. Then 120 believers were praying on the Day of Pentecost. Then there were 3,000 added to the church that first day. Later 5,000 believers were added.

We sometimes hear about the spread of Islam, and we should be concerned with it, but the truth is that Christianity is still the fastest-growing faith in the world. There are twice as many Christians as Muslims in the world and the gap is growing larger. Islam is mainly growing through reproduction—Muslims having large families. But Christianity is growing through conversion.

Today there are two billion people who confess Jesus as their Lord. But there are over seven billion people on the planet. That's one reason Green Acres is part the billion souls network, working with other Christians to win the next billion people to Christ.

You may be thinking, "If Christianity is growing, why don't we see it?" It's because, sadly, America has become a post-Christian nation. The growth of Christianity is occurring mainly in Africa and Asia. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only about 10% of Africans were Christians, today, it's around 50%. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were about 50,000 Christians in China. Today, there are 160,000 million—more Christians than are in America. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century only 2% of Koreans were Christians, today, in South Korea, 45% of the population follow Jesus, a higher percentage than in the U.S.

We need to continue to pray specifically that God's Word will spread through North America again. I'm praying specifically that God will save at least one million Americans over the next few weeks as we launch My Hope America with Billy Graham.

## **2. PRAY FOR PROTECTION FROM EVIL**

Paul's second laser-guided prayer request was, "Pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith." When Paul preached in Thessalonica, there was a mob of angry Jews who rioted and literally ran him out of town. He faced opposition everywhere he went. When he entered a town he didn't ask what kind of hotels they had, he asked what kind of jails they had!

Paul was beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked. He wrote that he was in danger of losing his life every day. In Acts 23 we read that there were 40 men who hated Paul so viciously that they took a vow that they weren't going to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. But believers were praying for him, and God delivered him from that mob.

Paul wrote many of his letters from prison. He wrote to the Philippians that their prayers along with the help of Jesus Christ would deliver him. He put their prayers right up there on the same level as the help of Jesus. When they prayed for imprisoned Christians, they didn't pray, "God help Paul to have a good day in prison." They didn't pray, "Lord, be with Peter in prison." They prayed, "God send an earthquake to release Paul and Silas." They prayed, "God send an angel and escort Peter out of jail right in front of the jailers." But if you don't believe God uses earthquakes and sends angels, you won't ask Him for those things.

In His model prayer Jesus taught us to pray, Jesus taught us to pray: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:13) When we memorized it in the King James, we prayed, "Deliver us from evil." But the language is clear that Jesus is talking about a malevolent being named Satan who is dead-set on opposing God and everyone and everything that is holy.

Christians around the world are facing severe persecution. I've visited with missionary families in Saudi Arabia who are aware of the danger. They realize they could be arrested and thrown in jail. Our own missionary, James, in Pakistan faces continual danger. As Southern Baptists, we support almost 5,000 full-time missionaries overseas. And over 50% of them are now in countries that are closed—that means they can't be there as missionaries. So, they're living there as teachers, doctors, and businesspeople sharing their faith. We need to pray for their protection: specifically.

A Sunday School class of children was writing letters to missionaries. The teacher explained that missionaries were very busy, so the children shouldn't be disappointed if the missionaries didn't write them back. So one little boy wrote, "Dr. Mr. Smith. I'm glad you are a missionary. I am praying for you. I am not expecting an answer." Are you like that? Praying generally for missionaries, but not expecting God to answer?

Even here in America, there are people out to oppose anyone who is standing up for Jesus Christ. Atheist and freedom-from-religion groups are trying to use the courts to muzzle the church.

We're involved in spiritual warfare. Angels and demons aren't just the name of a novel by Dan Brown. They're real. Even Christians sometimes think those are mythological beings like dragons, fairies, and vampires. Wake up! We need to be praying specifically for the safety of everyone involved in sharing the gospel.

### **3. PRAY FOR HEARTS TO OVERFLOW WITH GOD'S LOVE**

Paul not only asked them to pray specifically for him, he prayed specifically for them. He wrote, "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love." It's great to tell someone you're praying for them, but it's better to tell them WHAT you're asking God to do in their lives.

In the Bible, your heart isn't the fist-sized blood pump beating in your chest. The heart is the control center of your life. It's like Mission Control. When NASA was at its peak, the rockets were launched from Cape Canaveral, but the Mission Control was located at Johnson Space Center in Houston. That's why we all know those famous words from Apollo 13, "Houston, we've got a problem." Those astronauts admitted they had a problem they couldn't fix; they needed help. So the scientists at NASA sprang into action to find a solution.

That's why we talk about inviting Jesus into your heart. It's just a way of saying you're inviting Him to take over Mission Control of your life. We need Jesus there because we encounter problems in life. We have to say, "Jesus, we've got a problem." We can't fix these problems, so we trust Him to give us a solution.

In his first letter, Paul prayed this same prayer for the believers, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." (1 Thessalonians 3:12)

We need to show love to those in our family as well as those who God places in our lives. In tennis love is nothing, but in life, it's everything.

A lady was checking out in the grocery store. She opened her purse to pull out her wallet and the cashier noticed a television remote control. She said, "Do you always carry a remote control in your purse?" The lady responded, "No, but my husband refused to go shopping with me because there are three football games on. I figured taking his TV remote was the meanest thing I could do."

A heart that is full of love never asks, "What's the meanest thing I can do." It always asks, "What's the kindest thing I can do?" Your heart can only overflow with God's love if it is filled to the brim with His love.

Do you know of two believers who are estranged? To intercede means you stand between the two of them and bring them together. You might not have the opportunity to take one of them by the hand and place it in the hand of the other, but you can pray that their hearts will overflow with love for one another.

#### **4. PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO PERSEVERE IN CHRIST**

Paul prayed, "May the Lord direct your hearts into...Christ's perseverance." We need to pray for each other that we will persevere in Christ. Perseverance carries the idea of endurance in the midst of trials. It means to keep on running the race of faith even when you grow tired and weary. The writer of Hebrews uses this running metaphor for the Christian life. "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:1-3)

God has marked out a race for us. But this race isn't a 100-meter dash; it's an ultra-marathon. The only way we can finish the race is by keeping our eyes on Jesus. He is our example. Look at Jesus on the cross and see the shame and opposition He faced. Yet for the JOY He knew was ahead, He endured the cross. We face tough times, too. But none of us have been beaten and nailed to a cross. So, don't give up. Keep on running the race with patience.

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers wrote: "Perseverance means more than endurance—more than simply holding on until the end. A saint's life is in the hands of God like a bow and arrow in the hands of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, but our Lord continues to stretch and strain, and every once in a while the saint says, 'I can't take any more.' Yet God pays no attention; He goes on stretching until His purpose is in sight, and then He lets the arrow fly. Entrust yourself to God's hands. Is there something in your life for which you need perseverance right now? Maintain your intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through the perseverance of faith."

## CONCLUSION

There is great power in intercessory prayer. Are you praying for others?

Parents, I'm sure you pray for your children, but are you praying specifically? Grandparents, how are you praying for your grandchildren? Are you only asking for God to bless them? Let me give you a list of specific requests you should ask for your children. This list is adapted from one I found written by Bob Hostetler. Here are ten specific prayers for your children:

**1. Salvation** "Lord, let salvation spring up within my children, that they obtain the salvation that is in Jesus Christ." (2 Timothy 2:10)

**2. Growth** "I pray my children may grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18)

**3. Love** "Grant that my children may learn to live a life of love, through the Spirit who dwells in them." (Ephesians 5:2)

**4. Honesty and Integrity** "May integrity and honesty be their virtue and their protection." (Psalm 25:21)

**5. Self-control** "Father, help my children not be like many others around them, but let them alert and self-controlled in all they do." (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

**6. Mercy** "May my children always be merciful, just as their Heavenly Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36)

**7. Respect** "Father, grant that my children may show proper respect to everyone, as your Word commands." (1 Peter 2:17)

**8. Courage** "May my children always be strong and courageous." (Joshua 1:9)

**9. Purity** "Create in them a pure heart, O God, and let that purity be shown in their actions." (Psalm 51:10)

**10. Kindness** "Lord, may my children always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

## CONCLUSION

Prayer is a powerful spiritual weapon. Hudson Taylor was the founder of the China Inland Mission. He wasn't a great preacher or fundraiser. But he was a man of faith and prayer. On his first trip to China, he almost didn't make it. Here's how Hudson Taylor described what happened: "Our ship was becalmed and gradually drifting toward the coast of New Guinea. We could see savages on the shore. They had kindled a fire and were evidently expecting a good supper of shipwrecked Englishmen that night. When I was in medical school some of the other

students used to jeer at me because I was going among the heathen, who would enjoy a dish of 'cold missionary.' Well, it did look that night as if somebody was going to have a piece of hot missionary.

We had been becalmed for several days, with never a breeze, or sign of one. In a few minutes we would be among the coral reefs. Then we would be at the mercy of those savages, and they didn't look as if they had much mercy."

So Hudson Taylor suggested the Christians on board retire to their cabins and pray for God to send a wind immediately. Taylor said, "I went to my cabin, and I told the Lord that I was just on my way to China; that He had sent me; and that I couldn't get there if I was shipwrecked and killed. I was then going to ask Him for a breeze, but felt so confident about it that I went up on deck. There was the second officer—a very godless man. I went up to him and said, 'If I were you, I would let down the mainsail.' He said, 'What do you want me to let down the mainsail for?' I said, 'We have been praying for a breeze, and it is coming directly, and the sooner we are ready for it the better.' With an oath he said he would rather see a breeze than hear of one."

As he was speaking, I instinctively looked up, and noticed that one of the sails was quivering with the coming breeze. I said, 'My good man, there is a good breeze coming, and we had better be ready for it.' When the mate saw the sail moving, he went to work and soon the sailors were tramping over the deck. Before the sails were set a strong wind was down upon us, and we moved to safety." Later Hudson Taylor would reflect on this experience and write, "Thus God encouraged me, before I landed on China's shores, to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and expect that He would honor the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help which each emergency required."

There is great power in intercession. Are you only praying selfish, gimme', gimme', gimme' prayers? Will you make a commitment to start being an intercessor, praying for others? The Bible says Jesus is seated at the right hand of God and He ever lives to make intercession for us. You are never more like the Lord Jesus than when you are interceding for others. May God give us an army of prayer warriors who are directing laser-guided specific prayer requests to our mighty Heavenly Father!

## OUTLINE

THEME: ASKING FOR PRAYER IS NOT A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. IT'S A MARK OF DEPENDENCE.

### 1. PRAY FOR GOD'S TRUTH TO SPREAD

"This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained." 2 *Timothy* 2:8-9

### 2. PRAY FOR PROTECTION FROM EVIL

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." *Matthew* 6:13

### 3. PRAY FOR HEARTS TO OVERFLOW WITH GOD'S LOVE

"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else." 1 *Thessalonians* 3:12

### 4. PRAY FOR BELIEVERS TO PERSEVERE IN CHRIST

"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." *Hebrews* 12:1-3

## TEN SPECIFIC PRAYERS FOR YOUR CHILDREN (OR GRANDCHILDREN)

1. Salvation 2 *Timothy* 2:10
2. Growth 2 *Peter* 3:18
3. Love *Ephesians* 5:2
4. Honesty and Integrity *Psalms* 25:21
5. Self-control 1 *Thessalonians* 5:6
6. Mercy *Luke* 6:36
7. Respect 1 *Peter* 2:17
8. Courage *Joshua* 1:9
9. Purity *Psalms* 51:10
10. Kindness 1 *Thessalonians* 5:15

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes