

“A PLEA FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER”
Philippians 1:3-9
Chapel Message
May 5, 2004

INTRODUCTION

Thursday, May 6th, is the National Day of Prayer.

At noon tomorrow, millions of Americans across the nation will unite on their knees at noon to pray for our troops, our leaders, and our nation. I urge each one of you to participate.

- I ask the faculty members to pause at noon and lead your students in prayer.

- I encourage each of you wherever you are on campus to pause at noon for a time of prayer.

I am concerned that this campus community participate in some manner in this day of prayer for our government, media, education, churches and families. As far back as 1774, there is a record of government leaders calling for a day of intercession.

As much as I want you to pray for our national leadership – and I really do – I plea for each one of you – faculty, staff and student – to intercede in prayer throughout the day tomorrow for your university leadership. And our campus community.

- * Many on this campus are in urgent need of prayer.

- * Will you be one tomorrow who intercedes before God and prays for the MVNU leadership, faculty and staff and our students? I plea with you to spend some time tomorrow in intercessory prayer for our campus community.

A. J. Gossip was a great Scottish preacher. One day he asked a devout and discerning layman a question, “What part of the worship service is most helpful for you?”

The man’s answer left no doubt. For him, and many others, the supreme moment of the service was the intercessory prayer – the time the pastor intercedes for his people before God.

In the local churches I pastored, I tried to visualize and symbolize this “priestly” role of intercessory prayer by moving to the congregational side of the altar, and, with a mike in my hand so my congregation could hear, bring their petitions to God in intercessory prayer.

After prayer, I would speak from behind the pulpit, and assume the “prophet” (or prophetic) role of pastor in presenting God’s Word to the people. Times have changed and even the limited time we have allocated for our chapel services inhibit us from this extended times of intercessory prayer in our chapel services.

This sermon, from my heart, is a pastoral sermon to my people – my congregation – for whom I seek to provide spiritual leadership in and through my role as university president.

- a. A “prophetic” role is required at times. I must “speak the truth in love” at times when not everyone involved believes that love has been shown. Often times, I must make decisions involving honest differences between good and godly people
- b. But far more often, the “priestly” function or responsibility is exercised, and I pray for you.

Rather frequently, I travel in my mind’s eye from building to building on campus, and pray for students, faculty and staff members, who work, teach or live in specific buildings.

- c. As we anticipate a day of intercessory prayer, I want to share with you three insights from Philippians 1:3-9 regarding intercessory prayer, especially as you intercede for our university leadership and campus community.

INSIGHT I: Paul prays as a friend for friends.

- A. He sets the tone of his letter in the opening sentences. He does not set out his credentials as he does with other New Testament books: The apostle prays as a friend for friends.

- B. What causes the Apostle to intercede in prayer for the believers in Philippi?
Was it a crisis in their lives?

Usually this is why we intercede in prayer for people, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. We want to support them when they are in need. But there was no insurmountable problem facing the believers.

The answer to our question may surprise you.

- C. Paul intercedes in prayer for them because they are partners, or co-workers, in spreading the good news of the gospel. (v.5)

Because of their common tasks in Kingdom work Paul prays for them.

Because of their mutual assignments Paul lifts them up in prayer.

Paul: “God has gifted me, and placed me here. And you pray for me in my assignment. Also God has gifted you, and placed you in Philippi. And I will pray for you in your assignment.”

- * He does not rejoice so much for what they have done,
- * He prays for them because of who they are – partners in the work of Christ.
- * What a profound reason for interceding in prayer for your Christian friends.

* Paul was in Rome in jail; they were in Philippi. Yet, Paul viewed them as partners in Christian ministry of serving others in Jesus' name! What a profound thought!

D. Also, he intercedes in prayer for them because they are recipients of the undeserving grace of God in their lives.

They have all experienced the transforming power of God in their lives.

They share together the grace of God. The chorus we sing to graduates at the Baccalaureate service is definitely Paul in thought:

Grace to you
Grace to you
May grace abound
In all you do.
Grace to do the
Will of the Father,
Grace, grace to you.

It's all about grace ... extended by a Holy God to you and to me!

And this affirmation overwhelms Paul.

He bursts forth in gratitude. He rejoices because God's grace floods their lives.

E. There are other reasons why we should intercede in prayer for believers.

But these two reason should not be neglected:

- * We pray for one another because we are partners in spreading the good news.
- * We pray for each other because we are recipients of God's great grace in our lives.

If we could really believe this...and function in our individual roles and assignments in light of these reasons...what a difference it would make on our campus! We pray for those who are different from us, who have different gifts, talents and abilities, believing that God can use them as well as us, and that they, like you, have been blessed beyond measure by the Grace of God. What a profound thought.

INSIGHT II: Something happens when individuals, congregations or Christian universities pray this way.

A. Paul in Philippians 1:19 states: Because you pray something happens to the person for whom you are praying. (READ Philippians 1:19)

“Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

“Through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Christ,” what I do will turn out for good.

“Through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Christ,” God will use my words/actions for His Kingdom.

“Through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Christ,” adverse circumstances will be used to give witness of the Kingdom of God.

B. I have long believed in the subjective nature of prayer (“I am changed”)

Yet, I have difficulty believing in the objective nature of prayer. In ways known only by the Sovereign God, the Holy One uses my prayers to make a difference in the lives of others.

And He uses your prayers to make a difference in the lives of others.

C. According to Paul, in Philippians 1:19, that is exactly what happens in the lives of others when we pray for them. God, in ways known only to Him, uses our prayers in the lives of others as we intercede for them.

D. The “Parable of the Persistent Widow” in Luke 18:1-8, reminds us of the need to be persistent in prayer. The parable vividly reminds us of the dynamic relationship between incredible faith and persistent, intercessory prayer.

E. And James, in Chapter 5:16 affirms, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person availeth much!”

- * We do not have to have our theology of prayer fully worked out before we persist in prayer for incredible results...in ourselves and in the lives of others.

INSIGHT III: Paul instructs his friends on how to pray for him. .

A. Look closely at Colossians 4:2-4 (Another “Prison Epistle).

- * Paul instructs the Christians at Colosse to “devote themselves to prayer...and pray for us...”
- * Listen carefully to the instructions he gives to his friends: (remember, he is in a Roman jail – and in chains!)
 - * Pray that “doors will open for our message”
 - * Pray that “I will proclaim the message clearly!”

B. Paul could have asked his friends to pray for his material needs and concerns. This thought could be appropriate.

Get me out of here.

I want better food.

The guards expect too much.

I don't have the freedom I need and deserve!

- * However, he asks the Christians to pray for his ministry effectiveness.
This was his priority!

C. Imagine for a moment I am writing a letter to you. I want you to pray for me:

In my letter to you I ask you to pray for me in my assignment at MVNU. If I am consistent with Paul's priority concern for ministry effectiveness, how would I ask you to pray for me?

I would have to ask you to pray that God would make me, shape me, discipline me, use me and fill me.

The old chorus characterizes Paul's instructions to people praying for him:

Spirit of the Living God,
Fall fresh on me,
Spirit of the Living God,
Fall fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me,
Fill me, use me.
Spirit of the Living God,
Fall fresh on me.

D. I would ask you to pray for me that I would increasingly ask different questions about issues I face on a daily basis. From why me? And what if...? to "What can I learn? And "How can I change?"

E. More specifically, even as I know there are financial and material needs before us on campus, I would not place priority focus on them. Rather, I would urge you to pray for me that

* Christian values, as outlined in our values document and on the web entitled For This We Stand, will increasingly be reflected in me through what I say and what I do.

* I would urge you to pray for me that Christian Character qualities as outlined in II Peter 1:5-9 will increasingly be reflected in me in my attitude and behavior before others.

* And, I would urge you to pray for me that Divine wisdom and understanding will increasingly be reflected in me through the decisions I make.

F For another moment, imagine you are writing a letter to your Christian family and friends. If you are consistent with Paul's priority prayer request for ministry effectiveness, how would you guide others to pray for you?

* Would you ask others to pray that Christian values, Christian character qualities, and divine wisdom and understanding be increasingly reflected in what you say and what you do? What would be the focus of your prayer requests?

- * Would you also be so bold to ask others to pray for you to increasingly change the focus of your concerns from “Why me?” or “What if?” to “What can I learn?” and “How can I change?”
- * For Paul, material and financial needs were appropriate. However, ministry effectiveness was his priority concern.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, let me share with you a method of praying for others I learned from an elderly Korean church leader. This method may assist us tomorrow in praying for others – and ourselves – as we shift the focus of our prayers from “help me” and “give me” to “mold me” and “make me.”

A. The method is called “finger praying.”

- * **Thumb** – pray for those closest to you – immediate family, extended family, and closest friends. We seek God’s blessing on their specific ministry of service in Jesus’ name exactly where God has “placed” them.
- * **“Pointer” finger** – pray for those who point the way for you – pastors, teachers, college president. Pray that the quality of their spirit will increasingly reflect the Christ who indwells within them.

- * **Middle finger** – the tallest finger – pray for those in authority over you. Pray that those in authority over us exercise their power in a manner consistent with the high calling and responsibility you have given them.

- * **Weak finger** – pray for the poor, disenfranchised, the ill. Pray that God will enable them, in their present situation, to reflect the Character of Christ and be strengthened with grace, mercy and healing.

- * **Little finger** – don't forget to pray for yourself. Pray that by Grace alone, God will focus your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. Because “on Christ, the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”

B. Intercessory prayer for one another.

I urge you – plead with you – to mark tomorrow's National Day of Prayer as a Day of Intercessory Prayer for our nation, and specifically for our university. Leadership and campus family.

- * Because as believers we are partners in ministry (Don't let others rob us of this conviction.)

- * Because as believers we are recipients of God's amazing grace (Don't let the circumstances around you deny you of this reality.)

C. Choose to believe your prayers will make a difference in the lives of those for whom you pray.

D. And pray for ministry effectiveness – in your university leadership, in others, and yourself, so that:

* Distinctively Christian values ...

* Character qualities of the Spirit ...

* Divine wisdom and understanding...

will increasingly be reflected in us through what we say and what we do on this campus.

“Holy God, spare us from becoming generic Christians. Forgive us of the sin of prayerlessness and faithlessness. We repent of our sin and seek your gracious forgiveness. Heal us, restore us, and renew us especially as we spend quality time in prayer with you, we humbly pray. Amen”

CHORUS:

Spirit of the Living God,

Fall fresh on me,

Spirit of the Living God,

Fall fresh on me.

Melt me, mold me,

Fill me, use me.

Spirit of the Living God,

Fall fresh on me.