

Prayer Does Make A Difference

Prayer for the Saints

Martin G. Collins

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Some of you may have seen the article regarding prayer in hospitals that had been written by a doctor who found that when patients were prayed for, they seemed to improve more quickly. He was a doctor who would actually pray for them as well. He had no association with any church. He just offered prayer in his way to whoever he thought might have been up there, and the people seemed to improve. He did it a lot, and that was certainly quantity of prayer, but what about the quality of prayer? Was it really the quality that God needed to react to such a thing?

It has been found in other studies that people actually react psychologically to certain things that help them to heal faster, so maybe it was just the suggestion that they were being prayed for that had an effect. But whether God was involved in that or not, very few, if any of the people, changed their lives following that.

A primary test of our lives as Christians and saints is the amount of quality time we give to prayer. I say quality time because quantity is secondary to quality. You are very familiar with the parable of the two men who went to pray.

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Prayer is far more than an action or quantity of words; it is an attitude of reliance on God. This parable infers that this Pharisee prayed often, but obviously in this prayer he lacked sincerity and humility—he had quantity without quality.

We know that a stable and happy family depends, at least in part, on spending what we call "quality time" with our children. What we mean by this is that when we spend time

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with our children, it should be time that enhances and strengthens our relationship with each other. It is time well spent because it helps our children develop and mature while reinforcing the assurance and security that the family has to offer.

Sometimes this time is formal, such as with the classes that are taught by parents who home school, and sometimes this time is informal, such as meaningful discussions at meals or in undistracted conversation.

When something is done with quality, there is a degree of excellence about it. It has value and it produces good fruit. God valued the prayer of the tax collector because it was offered in humility. In contrast, the Pharisee prayed only to exalt himself, and there was no value in it and no quality in it.

Prayer is a Christian responsibility, but it is much more than a duty. It should be a joy. It should be the genuine expression of godly love in humility. Obviously, it is to be done for others.

In his letter to the Ephesian members of the church of God, the apostle Paul spends most of his time expounding doctrine, and teaches spiritual principles which guide us individually and the church as a whole. It is significant that as he comes to the end of his letter he is concerned with prayer for one another.

What are we to pray for? We should be watching for opportunities to pray for others. It is a question of being aware of what others need. We cannot just throw prayers up in vain if we do not know or understand what they are going through or what their needs are.

Ephesians 6:18-20 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Verse 18 is part of the section dealing with the Christian armor in verses 10-19. Parts of that armor, such as the shield, the helmet, and the breastplate, are basically for defense. They protect against the attacks by the enemy. But the armor Paul describes in verses 17 and 18 is not for defense. Using the "sword of the Spirit" (verse 17) and "prayer" (verse 18), we are to go on the offensive—to attack—against the powers of darkness. Prayer has a power about it.

Paul is writing to people who are involved in spiritual conflict and battle. He tells us that unless we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," even the spiritual armor itself will be of little or no value to us. We must constantly be in touch with the Father. Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother. We have to go regularly into the presence of God and thank Him that we are His people. It is not something to be taken for granted.

We were talking in the car on the way here about an individual that came to visit a few years back from overseas. When he left, he was so pleased and so appreciative of being here with us that he left with tears in his eyes. We come and we go, week after week, and I think we do not always appreciate what we have as much as he was able to with only having it once in many years.

Before we come with petitions and requests, there should be thanksgiving, praise, honor, and respect. We all know what it is to receive benefit from being in the presence of God. The more quality time we spend in His presence, the stronger we will become and our service will be more effective.

Paul tells us to be "watchful to this end with all perseverance," never allowing ourselves to shrink back, but always waiting in the presence of God, speaking to the Father, making known our concerns and problems, and taking our requests to Him.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

By prayer and supplication we have access to the peace of God. We all need more peace in our lives. We should never get into that state where we are filled with anxiety and are on edge, where we do not know what to do and we are almost beside ourselves. So, if we find ourselves passing through an unusually trying and difficult period in our lives, we have to increase the amount and intensity of our prayers. For any Christian that should be more than understood that this is the route that we take. But often we get so wrapped up in our difficulties and our trials and we forget to even ask for anointing when we are sick.

We have to remind ourselves that we are not as alone as we feel, that we are God's people, and that we are Christian soldiers of the army of God having put on the armor of God, as we read in Ephesians 6:

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

I wanted to read that to give you the whole context of one of the main scriptures here in the sermon. We see that prayer alone is not enough. It has to be according to the will of God, and we must put on these things. We have to study the word of God, and we have to prepare ourselves to develop the faith of Jesus Christ within us.

As long as we belong to God, we are entitled to look to Him for all our needs. He is all-powerful and blesses with abundance from His unlimited resources. As we continue our daily fight against Satan and spiritual powers, we have to make sure that we are renewed in spiritual strength. We have to be renewed daily, and the main way that we do that is through prayer. Just praying once a day is not enough. No matter how bad yesterday may have been, we can be renewed in strength, power, hope and faith today. The apostle Paul advises us to go to God constantly, and to pray in this way for ourselves. But that is not the main emphasis in what he tells us here.

The main emphasis is on prayer for others, also known as "intercessory prayer." We do pray for ourselves, but we do not stop there. Paul says, ". . . watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"—for all the saints, not just one or two.

Paul has written his letter to the Ephesians and at the end he urges them to pray for themselves and for one another because we are all engaged in the same fight. Remember this is in the context of the armor of God. We are on the same side. We have the same leader. Jude says we are partakers of a "common salvation." Salvation is not only private and personal; it is a common salvation.

And along with that, we are facing a common enemy; generally speaking, we are all bothered by the same problems. Life is difficult in the same way. We are constantly resisting Satan, the world, and our own human nature. The pressure can be tremendous. As things decline in the world itself then pressures are becoming greater and greater as each day passes.

We go to the store and there are holiday decorations and music during the holiday season. We turn on the radio and the words to an otherwise nice melody bother us. We turn on the TV and people are lying and immoral and brutal. We read a novel and there are crass words and perverse lifestyles. We drive down a road and there are porn shops with risqué signs. We walk through a mall and are accosted by vendors selling their wares, most of which are needless and useless.

We go to buy a car and the seller does not stop lying to us and trying to take advantage of us through the whole ordeal. We walk down a city street and we are fearful for our lives, especially in other countries. There was a gentleman, perhaps in his 30's or 40's, who was shot and stabbed just walking down the street in Johannesburg. He attends the United Church of God, and trying the best that he can to obey God and do what He wants. But God does allow those things to happen to us at times.

All this affects us by somewhat numbing us to the workings of this ungodly society. Even though our guard is up, resisting and avoiding it is exhausting. We must have renewal of strength on a daily basis. We should be praying not only for ourselves, but for God to strengthen all the saints.

Remember Paul said, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Paul emphasizes there that we cannot do it ourselves. Human strength is not enough. We find that out in this world as we are bombarded by these things.

This is one of the reasons why Sabbath services are so important. Satan would like us to think that religion is exclusively personal and that we are involved in it alone. If we allow him to influence us, we sit alone feeling sorry for ourselves imagining that we are having a harder time of it than others. We commiserate with ourselves, we feel sorry for ourselves, and we become more and more depressed as we dwell on what is happening to us. So just praying for ourselves is actually an imbalance in a Christian.

To have the right perspective, we have to realize, as the apostle Paul says:

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

We all need help and we all need each other's prayers. We are not alone in this; every saint must go through this suffering in varying degrees.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

I Corinthians 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

We are all in this together. The apostle Paul emphasizes here that we all share the same salvation. We are confronted generally with the same sufferings and challenges and temptations. The prayers of the saints have always made a difference. God's word is filled with amazing examples of how God answered the prayers of His people. The following are a few examples of this:

1. Abraham prayed for Abimelech and God healed Abimelech's family and servants (Genesis 20:17-18).
2. Moses moved God to change His mind about destroying ancient Israel (Exodus 32:9-14).
3. David stayed close to God through prayer and was made king over God's people (I Samuel 13:13-14; 15:28; 16:11-13).
4. Daniel prayed himself out of a human lion's den into a real one, and then prayed himself out (Daniel 6:4-5, 10, 23).
5. Daniel's three young associates, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, prayed to God and were delivered after being cast into a fiery furnace heated seven times hotter than normal. God even joined them inside the furnace (Daniel 3:14-30).

All these situations were helped to have positive outcomes because of faithful prayer. Prayer for one another does work. The apostle James highlights one person's example of prayer especially valuable for us today. It is the example of Elijah.

James 5:16-18 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James says that Elijah was a mere man, with the same natural tendencies and frailties as other men, and because of this his case is one which should encourage all of us today, knowing that he was just like us. James describes an instance of the effectiveness and value of prayer, and not an illustration of the power of a prophet. Elijah prayed earnestly, which in the original Greek is literally, "He prayed with prayer." This is a Hebraism to represent that he prayed earnestly, sincerely, and humbly.

It may help to understand some of the things that were transpiring during Elijah's life when he made his appearance. Ahab had taken Jezebel, a Canaanite woman and daughter of Ethbaal, for his wife. Ahab had a weak and spineless character. He allowed Jezebel to establish the Phoenician worship on a grand scale in Israel.

The priests and prophets of Baal were appointed in large numbers. The prophets of God were persecuted and slain, or only escaped by being hid in caves. It seemed that any remaining remnants of the true religion were about to disappear. Jezebel had also induced Ahab to issue orders for the violent death of all the prophets of God, who since the expulsion of the Levites, had been the only firm support of the original true religion of the Israelites.

God performed fourteen separate miracles for Elijah, one after the other; and still, at times, Elijah acted as if he did not know God. The story is set against the backdrop of normal human frailty. Elijah needed sleep, food, shelter, and clothing. Let us briefly go over the fourteen miracles from chapters 17-19 of the Book of 1 Kings:

1. Elijah proclaimed to King Ahab three and one-half years of drought, and it came to pass

(I Kings 17:1).

2. Elijah was sustained on bread and flesh by ravens (verses 2-6).
3. God sustained Elijah and the widow and her son on meal and oil (verses 8-16).
4. After Elijah prayed about the widow's deceased son, God revived the boy (verses 17-24). In chapter 18, King Ahab instructed his house governor, Obadiah, to search with him for Elijah. The king wanted relief from the devastating drought. That helped set the stage for God, through Elijah, to turn the hearts of the people back to Him (I Kings 18:1-29).
5. God glorified Himself, after a short prayer from Elijah, by consuming with fire the burnt sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust and the water in the trench. Elijah took advantage of the situation by instructing the repentant Israelites to help him slay eight hundred and fifty pagan prophets (verses 30-40).
6. This is the other miracle that James mentions in James 5:16-18. Elijah prayed again, and the rains came (verses 41-45).
7. The older Elijah outran King Ahab's royal steeds to Jezreel, a distance of about sixteen miles (verse 46).

In chapter 19, Jezebel enters the picture in a primary role by threatening Elijah with death (verse 2). Notice what verse 3 reveals about Elijah's mental state:

I Kings 19:3 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

So he was high-tailing it out of there, and no matter how much faith the man had at that time, it seemed best to him to just get out of town. Elijah feared for his life. He was not always the epitome of the faithful man. He was like us, and there were times when he was just plain scared. God inspired James to write that, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours" (James 5:17).

We are all made humanly alike, and God works through weak human instruments to show Himself powerful through us, the saints, and that is exactly what He did with Elijah. Sometimes He allowed Elijah to be fearful and even faithless at times, so that He could show His power and glory through this man and work these miracles.

Remember what the apostle Paul said God's answer to him was about the thorn in the flesh:

II Corinthians 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul saw very clearly the reason that God allowed him to have that thorn in the flesh was basically to keep him humble. Christ's spiritual strength and God's glory can be seen clearly through what they can do with frail human beings. Paul and Elijah were men with physical strength and human nature. Their spiritual power and strength came from God, while their physical strength often failed them. Human physical strength is not enough to fight the wiles of Satan.

8-9. I am grouping together miracles eight and nine because they are identical. Twice God supernaturally provided food for Elijah to eat, as well as an angel to tell Elijah to eat it (I Kings 19:4-8).

10. Elijah "went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb [Sinai], the mountain of God" (verse 8). Forty is the number of trial and testing. That food was made to last him and give him the strength that he needed for forty days and forty nights.

Elijah was about to receive his final exam from God, which was probably hurried by his flight from Jezebel. Running from Jezebel, the future ruling queen, exposed his momentary lack of faith in God, which evidently resulted from Elijah's growing idea of self-importance. That is why God had to allow this man to go through the things that he did, to humble him, so He could rid him of his self-importance.

Now, I think it is important to note what Elijah did know. He had the five books of Moses, and he was very well aware that God had warned Israel not to forget Him. But that is exactly what those ancient Israelites did, and that is what Elijah had to deal with. Here is God speaking to the children of Israel:

Deuteronomy 8:10-20 When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the **LOORD** your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the **LOORD** your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the **LOORD** your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end—then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the **LOORD** your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the **LOORD** your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the **LOORD** destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the **LOORD** your God.

This is just like what people in this nation say today. Elijah knew what the ancient Israelites had forgotten, that they were to be humble, remember God, obey Him, and submit to Him.

For a short time, Elijah's vision was blurred. He forgot who performed these marvelous miracles through him. That is why Elijah presumptuously avoided God's penetrating questions that followed.

I Kings 19:9-10 And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the **LOORD** came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" So he said, "I have been very zealous for

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the LOORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

God did not argue with Elijah, but instructed him to stand on the mount. Because God loved him, He intended to pass by, hoping, in His mercy, to clear Elijah's foggy brain.

11-13. I Kings 19:11-12 Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LOORD." And behold, the LOORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LOORD, but the LOORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LOORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LOORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

These are the miracles eleven, twelve and thirteen. These phenomenon—the strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire—each constitute a separate miracle. Then, God repeated His question asking Elijah why he was there. It may be that Elijah was embarrassed, or his pride had blinded him, but he answered God with the same answer as before.

I Kings 19:13-14 So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LOORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

Again, God did not argue with Elijah. He simply directed Elijah to go anoint Hazael as the king of Syria, Jehu as the king of Israel and Elisha as prophet in his own office. These three would finish the commission God effectively started through Elijah.

I Kings 19:15-17 Then the LOORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will

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kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill.

This was a test for Elijah on how he would handle it. He thought he was the only one left to "defend" God and he seems to have become vain about it. So God was basically replacing him. Often Elijah had great faith, but sometimes he failed because he was exactly what James said that he was. He was a man who had human nature.

This fourteenth miracle helps show God's thoroughness by setting up the leaders He wanted, and had seven thousand faithful Israelites to support them. Elijah did not always realize it, but, through all of this, God had total control and His plan was moving forward, even though Elijah thought he was alone. Maybe many of the seven thousand were praying for him because he was a well-known figure in the country.

I Kings 19:18 Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.

Elijah had no idea that God had worked with these seven thousand to begin restoring His ways to Israel. He really did not have a clue that there were others, and he did not know that there were others praying for him, which I am sure there were, because if they were faithful they were certainly sending up their prayers to God on his behalf.

God was seeing to it that the people of Israel would be protected by two political leaders, Hazael and Jehu, and the religious leader, Elisha. Elijah's faithful prayers were being answered throughout this, even though at times he was not faithful. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." It says earlier in this context that he was a faithful man and he had kept God's word through youth. God does cut us some slack. He does allow us to be unfaithful at times. Those faithful prayers that he offered up really counted. He is known as a faithful man generally for his life, but he had those setbacks. Elijah's prayers were answered because he obeyed God; he kept His commandments, and asked according to God's will.

I John 5:14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

We have to study God's word to know His will.

II Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Elijah's prayers were answered because he was obedient and he believed and trusted in God. Although he had some moments of weakness, Elijah had a high calling and he had work to do, and that work required lots of prayer. We have a similar high calling which means we have to design our prayers to serve God's plan and a major part of it is that we are to serve one another. One of the most effective ways we have in serving one another is in the prayers that we offer up.

Our fellowship is with God and it is advanced and promoted through prayer. Our motive should be to draw closer to Him. By drawing closer to God we are able to more effectively pray for others. Isaiah 58:9 informs us, "Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'" That is a guarantee. Our prayers do make a great difference.

As Elijah did, the moment we realize that others are involved and are experiencing exactly the same trials, we immediately feel a sense of release; we also feel that we can stand up again and face the enemy. We do not know how many there are in the world today that are true Christians, true members of the Church of God, but there are probably far more that we realize.

Paul tells us to make supplication always for all of the other saints because we are engaged in the same battle and conflict.

Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

We have to realize that while the battle we are involved in not only affects us and all the saints, ultimately it is not our battle, but God's battle. We find this message emphasized in a clear and dramatic way in the story of Jehoshaphat in the Old Testament. The enemy was confronting him, and Jehoshaphat and the children of Israel were in terrible trouble. They had no idea what to do. But the command that came to them by the Spirit of the Lord through Jahaziel was this:

II Chronicles 20:15 "Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the Lord to you: 'Do not

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be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's."

This is what he told them about a physical enemy, and it is even truer about our spiritual enemy, "for the battle is not yours, but God's." Our trouble is that we always tend to view our problems in a personal and subjective manner. I think about my problems, my anxiety, my fears, and my hopes. The result is that I become entirely self-centered and introspective, and so I have already defeated myself if this is my attitude.

What we have to realize is that what happens to us as individuals, and what happens to us all together, is but an incident in a battle in a realm much larger than ours. The reality of it all is that although we are in this battle with evil, ultimately it is God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ who are engaged in this battle on our behalf. It is a battle with spiritual powers, and those powers are only available through God the Father and Jesus Christ.

The only spiritual power we have to fight such a formidable enemy is the power that we receive from God through His Spirit. We cannot fight a cosmic battle with human means. The more we think of it in these terms, and the less we think of it in terms of ourselves and our personal situation, the better off we are, because it puts us in the right perspective and in an attitude of humility. We realize how puny, small and frail that we really are, and we are going up against a being who is millions of years old, or billions of years old. How old is Satan? We do not know for sure, but he quite experienced in what he does.

Yes, we have our responsibility to resist and overcome sin, Satan, the world, and our own human nature. That is the real conflict. In Ephesians 6, Paul emphasizes that the more we realize that we are involved in this battle with Satan, the stronger spiritually we are to fight him because our awareness produces resistance. God helps those who resist; He cannot do much with a bump on a log.

I remember Mr. Armstrong saying he would rather have someone that he had to hold down rather than light a fire under. That is very true when you are trying to accomplish something. You know the familiar saying, "God helps those who help themselves."

It is very similar to when a country goes to war. It is not a private war. There are always those politicians who want the citizens to think war is private. But in reality, it is the concern of the whole country involved, because whether they like it or not, everyone is dragged along and is expected to support the war effort of a nation.

It is the same in the spiritual realm. We are members of one side of this spiritual conflict. All saints are in exactly the same army. We are comrades at arms in spiritual armor. This is why Paul emphasizes that we must pray for all saints because we are all in this together.

Because "we are members one of another," it follows that the failure of any one of us is bound to affect the entire campaign. The enemy is always trying to find weaknesses in our line of battle. Satan is constantly probing for weak points to insert his stealth insurgents. So then failure, at any point, is going to affect the whole line, the whole army. For this reason, Paul tells us to make supplications for all saints.

It is very important that we always think in terms of the church. We are not only individuals. We are members of the church which is the Body of Christ. Our spiritual conflict is not only a personal war. We cannot think of it without the others involved as well because we are a unit. It is also wrong from this standpoint: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself" (Romans 14:7).

If any one Christian fails or falls, every one of us suffers eventually and inevitably because we are all members of the one Body. We are all in this one army. We are all parts of this one line. Failure at any one point means that the whole line will be involved, and readjustments by God will have to take place. Those readjustments are not always smooth. We can see some of that in our past association where the church strayed from the doctrines that God had set down and the line began to disintegrate and God had to reorganize the line; actually God allowed that line to disintegrate.

It is actually foolish not to pray for the saints. Nothing happens to them without affecting us individually. This is why Paul tells us to remember the whole line of battle, which means we cannot be constantly looking at and concentrating on ourselves. We have to consider the whole situation, and pray that everyone is strengthened in his position. Not only do we have to stand, but our fellow saints have to stand with us.

A major way of avoiding discouragement in ourselves is to pray that all the other saints may stand in order that we, and they, may be involved as God's great plan moves forward. This is the way to have the assurance that we belong to a righteous and powerful army that will be victorious.

The apostle Paul says this is to be done "with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Some saints are in situations of especially difficult trials. Stress and strain are taking their toll on everyone. Anxiety is eroding away their health. How often do we think of them personally, with regard to their specific trial or battle?

Sometimes we reason that we are having this or that problem and Satan is attacking us and we are distracted from praying for the other saints. At times like these we have to, in our mind's eye, put ourselves into the situation of some of these other people and walk a mile in their shoes.

Prayer does make a difference. It does help. People have foolishly asked, "If God knows everything, what is the point of praying?" That is a common question from people in the world. But it is God Himself who commands us to pray. Paul writes of being delivered from suffering by God and that prayer helped:

II Corinthians 1:8-11 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many

The apostle Paul put a lot of weight on the prayers of the brethren and felt that it was a major source of help to him. God could do it all without us, but He has chosen to do it in us and through us. He blesses His people through the instrumentality of prayer. So we are encouraged to pray, we are urged to be persistent, and to persevere in supplication for all saints.

We are given the great privilege of praying for God's ministers, of holding them up before God, of asking God to look on them and to bless them, knowing that God is willing and ready to hear us. Prayer is the sovereign remedy for many of the ills and diseases of the mind and heart that tend to set us all back. It is the primary remedy for despondent self-concern. It is self that causes most of our troubles.

We sit thinking of ourselves and what is going to happen to us. We fret over what the effect of something will be on us. We turn in on ourselves and pity ourselves; we feel sorry for ourselves and spend too much time commiserating with ourselves.

One of the best ways of getting rid of such a condition is to pray for other people. We have to lift up our heads, look away from ourselves, realize the whole situation, and as we do this we will forget ourselves. It is impossible to stay angry at someone who you

are genuinely and humbly praying for.

When you feel that you are in a kind of whirlpool, and you cannot seem to forget yourself, when you are sorry for yourself and feeling that you are having an unusually hard time with everything against you and almost enough pressure and frustration to drive you to despair, one of the best remedies is to sit down and say, "What about so and so? What about this person, what about that person, what about brethren in dangerous areas?" Think of people in specific terms rather than generalities. We can pray for members in the church in a general way, but the way to find out what to pray for is to get to know one another.

The solution is to get down on your knees and pray for them, and when you get up you will find that you have forgotten yourself. Apart from all the other reasons, it is a wise thing psychologically to pray for all saints. You will find that in praying for them you are solving your own problems and securing release. I mention that psychological aspect to it because of what I mentioned in the introduction to the sermon about the doctor writing the article in the hospital. There is that psychological side to it. But that is not the important part. The important part is that it actually moves God to do things. We are going to read the following scripture again.

Ephesians 6:18-20 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The greater the Christian, the more he realizes his dependence on the prayers of others. Paul asks, "and for me." He wants the other saints to also pray for him. Here Paul, an apostle of God, a spiritual giant of the church, is asking these people to pray for him. But this is also the man who went to Corinth "in weakness, and in fear and much trembling." So no matter how faithful a human being is, a human being still has moments of weakness, even the great patriarchs and other saints of the Bible

Paul was not self-confident, but he knew what he was doing, he knew whom he was representing, and he knew the power that was against him. He did sometimes fear that at some point he might fail in fulfilling his commission that God had given to him.

Paul is very specific in what he wants the brethren to pray for him and for the ministry. He gives them clear instruction. He says, "and for me, that utterance may be given to

me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

When Paul wrote these words he was a prisoner (an "ambassador in chains"), but he does not ask them to pray that he may be set free from prison. He was a sick man, but he does not ask them to pray that he might be healed. Paul never primarily considered himself. He was always thinking of others.

Paul is not making a purely personal or humanly reasoned request of them. His focus was always on preaching the gospel and teaching God's way of life. His desire was that the saints would pray for the preaching of the gospel, and the spreading of the fact of the coming kingdom of God.

Paul is concerned about having the power and freedom of speech when he had an opportunity to speak. Remember, the apostle Paul was not a good natural speaker. Some people at Corinth had taunted him, saying, "His presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."

Apollos was the orator; Paul was not. So he urged these Christians to pray for him that God would give him bold speech and put the right words in his mouth, so that when he got the opportunity to say something, he would have the God-given words to say. It is amazing to see this vigorous man of God realize his own deficiencies and imperfections and ask the Ephesians to pray for him that he may be able to speak freely, fluently, without stammering and stumbling.

Paul specifically emphasizes the word "boldly." He asks, "that I may open my mouth boldly;" and he repeats, "that in it I may speak boldly" in verses 19 and 20. By boldly, Paul means freely, frankly, that nothing be kept back. He wanted to be able to speak about the gospel comprehensively, without shrinking back or watering it down so as not to offend his critics. Most people do not want to displease others—Paul did not either.

He did not want to have to worry about being so careful that he endlessly modified and softened it. He wanted to be delivered from qualifying every word he spoke as he preached the gospel.

Generally speaking, we live in an age of being overly diplomatic. We are all so concerned about self-esteem, we are all so concerned about being "scholarly" and not causing offense, and we are all so afraid of dogmatism and absolutism. In education today, the truth is ignored and facts are discarded so that information is more palatable.

We do not pray today that ministers may necessarily speak "boldly," and we prefer that they speak with global diplomacy. People today are fearful of seeming too dogmatic, too emphatic, or too absolute. If a minister is not careful—endless qualifications will make his message indefinite, uncertain, and confusing.

In mainstream Christianity, the result is that people do not really know what the gospel is. What is said at the beginning is often taken back at the end. They are so afraid of offending people that they tend to hold back the truth. God is not the author of confusion. That is what this type of speech causes.

Paul's request for prayers that he speak boldly was a request for God to strengthen him to be honest and true. He wanted them to pray that he may deliver the message that had been delivered to him, and that he would not be concerned about anything but to please God and to be faithful to His Word.

Paul says "pray that I may be delivered from the fear of man, and of the learning of man and his supposed wisdom." When he went to Corinth, the philosophers laughed at him and mocked him. They ridiculed him for always saying the same thing, for his simple gospel message. He did not argue with them or reason out their "great" philosophies with them; so they called him a fool. Paul's answer was, "[Alright,] I have become a fool for Christ's sake."

Any man who preaches the simple gospel will be criticized by the sophisticated and highly educated. They think of God's truth as primitive and simple because of their blindness in believing in evolution (and other false beliefs especially coming on to the scene today), which requires that they assume that human beings are evolving into something improved—something greater.

And so, because of their "raised" intelligence, they foolishly reason that they are above all things associated with God. In reality, man is degenerating into perverse primitive beings without any knowledge of their Creator.

We all must pray for the ministers of God. Do we really understand what happens every time one of God's ministers gives a sermon? He is a frail human being, weak, and yet called of God to be His representative and to promote the truth of God.

Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States, had many severe challenges and trials during his life, especially during his presidency. Through experience, he learned this about prayer:

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I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had absolutely no other place to go.

It is God who spiritually strengthens a person. There is no other place to go for this! Paul knew this, and asked the saints to pray for him, as also, all saints should pray for the inspiration of the ministers of God. If you do not think that you got anything out of the message that the minister just gave, you probably did not pray for him. If you did pray for the minister, then you should get something out of the message.

You see, the inspiration of the minister's message is two-fold: God inspires both the speaking and the hearing. Both are necessary for spiritual understanding and benefit.

Ephesians 4:11-15 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

Here, Paul has already qualified what he meant later in Ephesians 6:20, where he wrote, "that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." In verse 15, he said, "speaking the truth in love." Paul did not want to be all steel and no velvet. He did not want to boldly and needlessly offend people. He wanted to preach the truth boldly, but treat people gently. The apostle Paul knew his own weaknesses, his own tendencies, and the frailty of human nature, and so he asked the Ephesian Christians to pray for him.

Now, more than ever, all the saints should be praying for all ministers of God and for each other.

Pray that we may be delivered from a spirit of compromise. Pray that we may not be guided by diplomacy or expediency, and pray that we may be delivered from fear for ourselves. Pray that the truth will come first, that we may speak with boldness, and yet have hearts full of love and mercy and compassion.

Paul encourages us to pray with all perseverance and supplication in the Spirit for all

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saints and for all ministers of God, whatever the circumstances and conditions that they may speak the mystery of Christ boldly, as they ought to speak.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Our lives are composed of segments of time. Are we willing to lay down some of that time for others? Are we willing to spend time bringing about, through prayer, divine intervention in the lives of others? Or is there still doubt that it would really make any difference at all if we prayed?

Prayer does make a difference. This is where faith comes in. We, by our own human strength, are not capable of blessing, healing, delivering or granting understanding, faith or any other spiritual gift. Even Jesus, as a human, acknowledged, "I can of Myself do nothing"(John 5:30). But after He was resurrected He declared, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

God wants to know what we will do with the supernatural power we will receive when we become spirit beings. Will it be for the good of others? That is what God wants to find out while we are still human. That is why we have to develop the habit of looking out for the welfare of others, which includes praying for one another. God's loving nature must become part of our character if, in the resurrection, we want to be given direct control of that power so that we may benefit others.

If we are obedient and submissive to our Father in heaven, we have access to that power now, through prayer, when we ask according to God's will. Remember, the principle of praying for others works both ways. If you have a need, instead of just praying about it yourself, ask others to pray about it.

James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

The effective, fervent prayer for others is not wasted effort. Such unselfish prayers please God and He responds to them. All the power of the Sovereign God of the Universe is ready to be used if need be. And all the saints have access to it through prayer.