

**FAMILY MATTERS 8: PRAYER MATTERS**  
**Colossians 1:9-12; James 5:13-16 (AFBC 7/10/16)**

Randy Frazee, the author of a book called The Connecting Church, has a son who was born with only one hand. He tells the story of how, in a Sunday School class, his son's teacher was talking with the children about the church; and to illustrate her point she folded her hands together and said, "Here's the church, here's the steeple; open the doors and see all the people."

Sunday School teachers have been doing that since I was a child. But this time, the teacher asked the children to do it along with her--not thinking until it was too late that Frazee's son wouldn't be able to do it—with just one hand.

Before she could do anything about it, though, the boy sitting next to his son reached out his hand and said, "Let's do it together." The two boys joined their hands together to make the church, the steeple, and then the people. Needless to say, the old children's illustration took on fresh new meaning that day.

"Family Matters!" This has been our theme for eight weeks now. We are not alone on this earth, we are together—for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health—we are in this together. So if we're no good at being together, we've got a real mess on our hands!

This is why "Prayer Matters." Is there anything that connects us to each other so powerfully as PRAYING for each other? "The family that prays together, stays together..." Okay, there are exceptions. But prayer is a tremendous resource for doing family, and church, and community well.

**1. PRAYER:** Think for a moment about the privilege of prayer.

There's something about being created in the image of God that makes it possible for us--even with all our limitations--to commune with the One who made us, to bring before Him our own needs and wants, along with those of others. God, in fact, invites us--He urges us to do so—to come before Him in prayer.

Now, I say this, recognizing that anyone who thinks deeply about prayer finds it to be a difficult subject—perhaps even troubling. When we begin to question *if* and *how* and *why* our prayers

somehow affect *God*, we may not arrive at any completely satisfying answers.

Who are we to try to tell the Lord of heaven and earth to alter in some way what He intends to do? If you believe, as some Christians do, that God's will is **always** done, then it seems absurd for us to try to change it!

But maybe God's will is **not** always done. I have no doubt God has a will for my life and yours, for this church and others, for this world in which we live. And I believe that finding God's will and following it is best—that God only wants what's best for us all.

But I also believe that God has given to us the freedom to resist His will. Much of what God sees in my life and yours, in this church and others, and in this world He made must be frustrating to Him because surely it's not going according to His perfect will!

If you haven't thought about these issues, I encourage you to reflect more deeply upon your faith and what you believe and practice. At the same time, I need to warn you that you're not likely to find all the answers—they're not all spelled out for us in Scripture--so we must continue to walk by faith and not by sight.

What we do know is that Jesus prayed. He made prayer a priority in His life. Jesus prayed for others, and He prayed for Himself. He taught us to pray. And although this is never fully explained, we're also told to pray for one another.

**2. PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER:** Let's look now at a couple of places in the Bible where we find this. We'll turn first to James 5, and then Colossians 1. In **James 5:13-16**, we are told specifically to "pray for one another."

**13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 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.**

Now, there are things in this passage that raise questions for us—  
anointing the sick with oil, for instance.

Since oil was used as a medicine in that day, many believe this means that Christians should see prayer and medical science as working together to bring about healing.

Others see the oil as a reminder of God's presence. In the Catholic church, this is part holy unction, the last rites for those who are near death.

We'll not be able to resolve this today. What I want you to see is that when people are suffering, when they are ill, and when they have fallen into obvious sin, we're to pray for them. We're to pray for ourselves and one another, and we're to ask others to pray for us.

Most of our praying focuses on what?--the needs of the sick, the bereaved, and those who are suffering or in trouble for other reasons. When we call out our prayer requests in Sunday School or at Wednesday services, most of them are about people who are suffering in one of these ways.

So, what effect do our prayers have on God in His relationship with those who are sick? Are some healed because of our prayers--who would not have been healed but for our prayers?

James says so, if our prayers are offered in faith. But surely James knew people who had been prayed for--in faith-- who didn't survive, just as we must painfully acknowledge this today.

That's why I say there's much about prayer that we don't understand. What we do need to understand as Christians, though, is this: God's word tells us to pray for one another. Our model for living is Jesus... and He prayed!

When there's sickness, when there's bereavement, when there's sadness and trouble of whatever kind, we are to pray for one another. It's our responsibility as Christians to pray.

Sometimes our prayers lead to something unexpected. I believe this is one of the reasons we're told to pray for one another. In the process of praying for each other, we may feel impressed to do something in addition to praying.

Perhaps there's some other ministry we feel compelled to do. I've learned that those urges need to be acted on--that God's Spirit will impress on us something He wants us to do for the person we're praying for, and we shouldn't dismiss those nudgings of the Spirit.

Act on them, and you'll probably discover why God wanted you to do it. Fail to act, and you may also learn why God put this ministry on your mind; but by then, it may be too late to respond.

I promise you, I've experienced this both ways in my own life, and I know many of you have as well. Be sensitive to those urgings of the Spirit that come to you when your thoughts and prayers are focused on someone else. Those promptings of the Spirit are always there for a reason.

Now, sometimes we not only pray *for* one another, but we have the privilege of praying *with* one another in those difficult times. It may be in a hospital room, a Sunday School classroom, or a friend's living room.

In these sacred moments, ask yourself what the other person might be feeling, what's likely to be their greatest concerns or deepest hurts. Also, don't be afraid to ask them what they would like for you to pray about.

Some of my greatest insights into the needs of others have come when I've asked them what they would like for me to pray about. This kind of sensitivity adds meaning to our prayers for each other.

**3. GOING DEEPER IN PRAYER:** Now I want us to go a bit deeper into this matter of praying for one another. Let's turn our attention to an example of praying for others found in the Bible.

In the first chapter of Colossians, the Apostle Paul describes his prayers for his fellow believers. It gives us some wonderful insight into how this great man of faith prayed for others:

**Colossians 1:9-12--For this reason we also, since the day we heard it (*meaning, Paul had heard of their faithfulness to Christ and His church*), do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful**

**in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.**

Did you follow that? Paul shares with us his prayer list for the Colossians. I wonder--when was the last time we prayed like this for a brother or sister in the Lord?

Have we ever prayed like this for our children...or our spouse? This goes much deeper, friends, than the emergency prayers we offer up for one another in times of sickness and sadness. Maybe God is trying to tell us here that our prayers need to go deeper. Let's look at what this passage says:

**A. Pray for one another to KNOW GOD'S WILL.** In verse 9, Paul prays that **"you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."**

No mention here of the sick, or those who've lost loved ones, or those with financial problems, or those who need help with their marriages or children. Are those valid prayer concerns? Of course—but they're not the only ones.

This is a prayer for God to change someone before they have to face those kinds of problems. In fact, this whole section is about taking us deeper in our relationship with God so that we will be prepared for whatever life brings our way.

It is God's will that we receive Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. It's God's will that we grow in this relationship, becoming wise in spiritual matters.

As we mature in Christ, so many things take care of themselves—because we now have wisdom and spiritual understanding to discern God's will. Let's continue:

**B. Pray for one another to LIVE GOD-PLEASING LIVES.** Paul prays in verse 10 **"that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him..."**

We might as well admit it: we are more apt to pray for someone when we know their lives have not been pleasing to God. Some

Christians are much too religious to gossip about others—instead, they just share prayer requests in public places!

The Tempter does not want our lives to be pleasing to God. He does want us to have an effective witness in this world for Jesus Christ. He certainly doesn't want any of us to experience the abundant life the Lord promises.

God's power is infinitely greater than the power of sin. But sin's power is greater than yours and mine. We need God's power to overcome sin's power so we can live faithful lives. Pray for this in your own life and pray for this in the lives of your spouse and children and your brothers and sisters at church as well.

**C. Pray for one another to LIVE PRODUCTIVE LIVES.** Next in verse ten it says, "**being fruitful in every good work...**"

When was the last time we prayed and asked God to help someone we know and love be fruitful and productive? That's what Paul prayed for when he remembered the the church at Colosse.

In John 15, Jesus said, "**I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit...**"

This is Christ's will for us. Surely Paul had this in mind when he added "fruitfulness" to his prayer list for the Colossians. Do we pray for one another and do we pray for our church that we would be fruitful in our service to the Lord?

Fruitfulness comes in many different forms, but all of us need to be able to point to something and say this is how God is bearing fruit through my life, my witness and service for Him. God wants us to desire this and pray for this in our own lives and in the lives of each other.

**D. Pray also that we would LIVE GROWING LIVES.** Verse ten ends with Paul praying that they would be "**increasing in the knowledge of God**"--knowing God better, loving God more, day after day.

You remember when we used to sing, "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before. Every day with Jesus, I love him more and more."

Maybe we find the thought of knowing God better a little frightening. Maybe it means that God will know you and me better, and we're not sure He'll like what He sees.

But God already knows and understands us through and through--there's no place to hide--yet He still loves us and forgives us. This is His message to us in Christ Jesus. So there's wonderful incentive to get to know this kind of God better—to make this desire part of our prayers for one another—that we grow in Him.

**E. Pray for one another to LIVE ENDURING LIVES.** Finally, in verse 11, Paul prays for the Colossians that they would be **"strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy."**

Paul ends his prayer list with this—that his brothers and sisters in Christ would experience the supernatural power of God in their lives, the kind of power that produces "patience and longsuffering with joy."

This is not a prayer that they would be exempt from the hardships of life, but that they would be filled with God's strength... so they could endure them.

That's quite a prayer list! And none of it will come about in my life or yours apart from God's strength. Pray for this in your own life. And let us also pray for this in the lives of one another—because "Prayer Matters!"

Yes, we should pray for each other in times of sickness and sadness and stress of whatever kind. But we should also go deeper in our prayers—praying...

- 1) ...that we would know God's will;
- 2) that our lives would be pleasing in His sight;
- 3) that we would be fruitful and productive in His Kingdom;
- 4) that we would grow in our knowledge of God;
- 5) and that He would strengthen us by His "glorious power," enabling us to endure—whatever life throws at us—that we would be strong and endure... for the glory of God. Amen.