

The Sin of Not Praying for Others

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the critical duty of praying for others as an expression of love and obedience to God, highlighting the consequences of neglecting this responsibility.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 12:23, Matthew 7:7, Luke 6:28, Ephesians 6:18, Philippians 1:3-5, Colossians 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Hebrews 4:16, James 5:16

Topics: "Intercessory Prayer", "Duty of Love"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the critical duty of praying for others, illustrating that neglecting this responsibility is a sin against God. He reflects on Samuel's commitment to intercede for the people who had wronged him, highlighting that true love and friendship require us to pray for even those who have hurt us. Miller warns against the dangers of selfishness in prayer and the temptation to cease praying due to delayed answers or perceived unworthiness of others. He encourages believers to recognize the spiritual needs of those around them and to persist in prayer, as it is through intercession that God's blessings are often bestowed. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the importance of prayer in fostering genuine love and support for one another.

Transcript

There is a Scripture word which suggests to us in a striking way--the importance of praying for others. Samuel had been set aside by the people in their eagerness to have a king. For a moment their consciences were awakened to a sense of their sin; and they came to him, as they had done so often before, with a request that he would pray for them. His answer was: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord--in ceasing to pray for you."

Perhaps we are not accustomed to think of praying for others in just this way, as a duty, the omission of which is a sin against God. We think of it as a privilege--but scarcely as a part of love's solemn duty. We are in danger of narrowing our prayers to ourselves and our own wants. We think of our own sorrows and trials, our own duties, our own work, our own spiritual growth, and too often do not look out of the window upon our friend's rough path or sore struggle. But selfishness in praying is one of the worst forms of selfishness. If ever love reaches its best and purest, it ought to be when we are standing before God.

Or our ceasing to pray for our friends may be from lack of deep, earnest thought concerning them. We pray for them when they are sick or in sore trouble--but at other times that we do not realize that they need our prayers. Their needs or perils are not apparent to us. They seem to be happy. There is nothing of

which we are aware in their life, which appeals to our sympathy. We see only the surface, and are oblivious to their deeper necessities or dangers. We forget that they are souls with immortal needs; that they have enemies whom we cannot see, who are seeking their hurt continually; that in this vast, complex life there are a thousand influences touching them which tend to work them injury; that only the hand of Christ can safely lead them through this perilous life; that they are to live forever, and that they have interests which project into eternity. We are apt to forget that our bright, happy, gentle, attractive friends without Christ--are without true hope of heaven. We need to think of these deeper spiritual needs of those about us, lest we cease to pray for them, and so sin against God.

Another reason why some cease to pray for their friends, is that answers to prayers already offered in their behalf have been so long delayed. There are mothers, for example, who for weary years have been pleading for the salvation of children who still remain impenitent. In the unanswering of their supplications, they lose faith and hope, and their prayer languishes. The same is true of others prayers. Hearts fail in the long delays.

But deferred answers should not chill the warmth and earnestness of our asking. Delays are not refusals. God has his own time and way of granting our requests for others, as well as for ourselves. There are some blessings it takes a great while to prepare. They are like fruit which cannot ripen until their seasons comes, and to give them at once would only be to put into our hand that which is unripe and wholesome. There are purposes which God is working out in our friend's life through the sorrow, the loss, or the burden--which cannot be completed if our prayers are answered at once. It was more than twenty years before Jacob saw his prayers for his lost boy answered. We should not cease to pray because the answer tarries. Perhaps the coming of the blessing at last will depend upon our faithful continuance in prayer. If we faint, it will not come. It is a sad thing if deferred answers cause any of us to cease to pray for a careless friend. That is giving him up; and when we give him up, and cease to make supplication for him, what hope has he remaining? There are no other chains to bind him about the feet of God.

Another reason why some people cease to pray for those they have prayed for before, is something in these friends, or in their conduct, which has hurt or grieved them. There seemed such a reason in Samuel's case. He had given all his life to the interests of his people. He had spent all his years in serving them. It was good service too--service which brought incalculable blessing to the nation. Yet in his old age, when his hair had grown gray, he was set aside by the people he had served so loyally and so unselfishly. Samuel might have ceased now to pray for the people who had proved so ungrateful to him, and had treated him so unkindly; and he would have seemed to do right. They did not deserve to be longer loved and remembered in his prayers, he might have argued justly. Many men would have grown bitter against the people who had so treated them.

Instead of this, however, Samuel says he will not cease to pray for them; that it would be a sin against God for him to do this. No wrong treatment of him by them could absolve him from his duty of praying for them. Thus he exemplified the spirit of that love which found its complete revealing only in Christ.

Our duty of intercession is not limited to those who are kind and faithful to us. Any man can pray for those who are generous and loyal to him. But the sin of which Samuel spoke, was ceasing to pray for those who had treated him most unworthily. The lesson for us is no less wide in its reach. We may not strike from our prayer list, those who have treated us with injustice or bitterness. Our Lord commands us to pray for those who spitefully use us. We sin against God, if we cease to pray for the man who has harmed us and done us evil.

Why is it so important that we should pray for others? Why is it a sin to cease to pray for any? Why is prayer so important a duty? Have we a real obligation to pray for others? Friendship without prayer lacks a vital quality. There is no other duty of friendship which rests upon us with deeper obligation, than this of intercession. We know that we sin both against God and against our friend, when we cease to show him kindness in word and deed. No kindnesses shown in act are so important and so essential a part of friendship, as prayer for our friend.

Samuel said it would be a sin against the Lord--for him to cease praying for the people. It would be failing in a duty, and that is always a sin against God. We are to represent God in this world. He never ceases to love and care for his children. He is kind to the unthankful and the evil. He wants us to have the same spirit toward others that he has--to be always interested in them. For us to be indifferent to the good of any human being--is ungodlike. To cease to pray for any one is to fail in part of our duty.

Then, God has ordained that many of his blessings shall come to his children through prayer. He is ready to bestow upon them the favors of his love; but he would be inquired to do it for them. He says, "Ask, and you shall receive." That is, the gifts are within our reach--but they must be claimed; they wait to be sought. This is true of good things, both for ourselves and for others. We do not know how much we miss of the grace and help and fullness of life, which God has in store for us, simply because we do not ask more largely. When we cease to pray for ourselves, or when we ask only little things--we impoverish our life.

The same is true of prayer for others. God has blessings manifold for our children--blessings which he is eager to put into the lives; but we must ask him for them. If we do not, the blessing will not be bestowed, and the responsibility for their missing it will be ours. We have illustrations of this in the stores of Christ's healings. Fathers and mothers came with their sick children, and at first they could not be cured because the parents had not faith. No doubt in many homes today--children fail at least of fullest, richest blessing because of their parents' unbelief or small faith.

Then, what shall we say of the altogether prayerless homes, where fathers and mothers love their children deeply and tenderly, and yet bow no knee in supplication for them? What a sad, irreparable wrong they inflict upon their children's lives! For the world is very full of peril for young lives.

"Lord, we can trust you for our holy dead;

They, underneath the shadow of the tomb,

Have entered into peace; with bended head

We thank you for their rest, and for our lightened gloom.

But, Lord, our living! Who on stormy seas

Of sin and sorrow still are tempest-tossed!

Our dead have reached their haven; but for these,--

Teach us to trust you, Lord, for these, our loved and lost.

For these we make our passion-prayer at night;

For these we cry to you through the long day!"

The lesson is for all--as well as for parents. Prayer is God's ordained way of receiving blessings. God has comfort for men's sorrows; but you and I who see our friends in their grief must reach out our hands, and bring down the comfort by our intercession.

There is a Bible story of a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites. Moses was on a hill top, overlooking the conflict. While he held up his hands Israel prevailed; but when his hands grew weary and heavy, and sank down, the battle went against Israel. Our friends are in the valley in sore conflict. While our hands are lifted up in intercession, they are victorious; but if we cease to pray for them, they falter and fail.

We do not know how much the blessing and saving of others depend upon our praying for them. We do not know how often men's failures, defeats and falls--are due to our having ceased to pray for them. We stand between God and needy lives, and are bidden to give ourselves no rest--but to cry continually to him for those about us. The healing of the world is in our intercessory prayer.

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