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Sermon Transcript

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The Power of Intercessory Prayer

I would like to call your attention to **II Timothy 4**, if we can open up our Bibles on the Sabbath day; and I would like to draw your attention to a Christian that was really in need. He needed people to be there for him, with him, for some of the situations that he was going through. He had done so much for so many, many people in so many congregations; but at the end of his life, he makes a startling declaration in II Timothy 4, **verse 16**. Paul, the apostle, speaking, as he is about to die, says:

II Tim. 4:16 - *At my first defense, no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged unto them.*

Incredible as it may seem, nobody was there pulling for the apostle Paul, perhaps when he needed it the most. It is interesting and, perhaps, more telling as we can go to other translations. In the *NIV*, it says that "No one came to my support, *{repeating}* no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me." In the *Revised Standard* version, it says that "No one took part." Here was, what shall we say, an old man, one of God's senior citizens, a faithful servant; and nobody was, in the human sense, there for him toward the end of his life.

It is very interesting in thinking about this *{subject}* of being alone, how a branch of the United States armed forces never has one of its members alone. In the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps motto is simply this: *Semper fi*. I'm sure that we have some--I was going to say, "former"

Marines--they say, "Once Marine, always Marine." But "semper fi" from the Latin simply means, "always faithful." "Always faithful," to recognize that in the Marine Corps you never leave a buddy alone. The Marine Corps, whether in the advance or in the retreat, never leaves a member of its company on the field, dead or alive. There is a tremendous buddy system, which is an incredible support and esprit de corps that the Marine Corps has.

With that thought in mind, looking at the example of the apostle Paul, speaking of a physical army of combat, let's ask ourselves a question: Can God's people be any less? Can we possibly leave a buddy, a brother, a sister, a member of God's Church, a loved one, alone at very, very important times of life, when more than ever we need to reach out

to them? Jesus Christ's answer to this *{is found}* in **John 15**, if you will come with me, please. John 15, **verse 13**, and let's notice some of Christ's final instruction on that evening in which He was taken. In John 15, verse 13, it says:

John 15:13-14 - *Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. He says, You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.*

So Jesus Christ said that no one has greater love than to lay one's life down for another. With that thought in mind and recognizing that that thought will come to us, probably even as we leave this service today, into this week, into this month, into your own family's life, we all at times have great decisions to make, don't we, friends? The great decision about laying down our life for another individual.

I'd like to share a story with you. Perhaps I have shared this before in Eagle Rock or southern California; but every time I read it, it is extremely poignant. It's called, "The Great Decision."

There was a little boy who was told by his doctor that he could save his sister's life by giving her some blood. The six year old girl was near death, a victim of disease from which the boy had made a marvelous recovery just a couple of years before. Her only chance for restoration was a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the illness. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was, after all, the ideal donor.

"Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?" asked the doctor. Interestingly, the boy hesitated. His lower lip now had started to tremble, and then he smiled and said, "Sure, doc, I'll give my blood for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the operating room-- Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and the picture of health. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As his blood siphoned into Mary's veins, one could almost see new life come into her very tired little body. The ordeal was almost over when Johnny's brave little voice broke the silence. "Say, Doc, when do I die?" And it was only then that the doctor realized what had actually occurred and why Johnny's moment of hesitation, why the trembling of the lip, and what this had all been earlier. Little Johnny actually thought that in giving his blood, he was going to give up his life. In that brief moment, he made the great decision.

Jesus Christ said that no man has greater love than to lay down his life for his brother. Sometimes it may be easier to lay down your life all at once for someone that you know or love than to lay it down moment by moment, day by day, need by need, act by act. Perhaps, laying down our lives is, after all, the great acid test of Christianity as to whether or not we will persevere for a brother and a sister or a family member in prayer.

Many of us, if asked the question, would rise to the fore, in the sense, shall we say, go to the foot of the cross and bear the load, momentarily and on the spot. But there are also times, as we notice in the Bible, that we are not simply to go to the top of the moment or the critical decision. There are times when we have to carry a cross. Perhaps no greater example than Simon of Cyrene, a man who, in a very needful moment of Jesus Christ, stepped out, was called, and bore the weight of the mission and of the calling, not of being savior, but bearing the brunt of the wood to get it up to the mountain when it was most needed for somebody else.

What I would like to talk to you all about this afternoon, friends, here in Eagle Rock, is our carrying a cross for others when they can no longer carry it on their own. All of us, all of us, don't we, know people that are either spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically, financially, maritally, personally burdened; and maybe they no longer have words, no longer have strength, no longer have the means to be able to take the petition to God. That is where you and I come in as members of the family to be able, in intercessory prayer before God, to mention their name, to mention their need, and really recognize, brethren, that that truly is a part of our calling. So this afternoon I want to, in this second part of a two-part series, bring to you, share with you the power of persistent, intercessory prayer for others. Hopefully, it will be an invitation into the process if you have never experienced it, never been a part of it, or perhaps never recognized the importance of it. I hope that in a few brief minutes and with, perhaps, many scriptures to ignite the reality of our calling, as Jesus Christ said, to be there for other people, and, in that sense, to use a little Latin, "Semper fi," to always be faithful to those that we have the opportunity to pray for.

Perhaps there is no better example to look at, to understand, than the very example of Jesus Christ Himself. How often in His earthly ministry and in His heavenly ministry He practiced and did intercessory prayer for others, whether individually or collectively for the Church as a whole.

Come with me, if you would, to **Luke 22, verse 31**, and let's notice in an individual sense where Jesus Christ intervenes at a personal level and, through intercessory prayer, works with an individual.

Luke 22:31-32 - *And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon!" speaking of Peter, "Indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail..."*

When you look at that scripture and you kind of hit the pause button for a moment, you recognize that here is an individual name, a person, a man's name (it could be a woman's name) that Jesus Christ literally petitioned our Father to give Peter what he needed. I read that and I look at that and I marvel to think that that is what Jesus Christ did, setting us an example at times to go before our Father and to pray for individuals, maybe, when they can no longer pray on their own. Here is Peter, certainly at a very trying time in his life, maybe a weak time in his life. Jesus Christ even knew that maybe in the very near future

he was going to stumble, he was going to turn away from Him; but He said, "Peter, when you return..." He knew the future and brought the future to

Peter--not only the future but the reality of His love and a concern that He brought before God in prayer, a need.

Now, that is individual. Let's look at it collectively, please. Let's go to **John 17**. John 17 we often have said is the true "Lord's prayer," if we can use that phrase. Matthew 6 is certainly a very important outline of how to pray. It is very meaningful; but in John 17, we actually capture within the essence of an entire chapter Jesus praying for others. In **John 17:20**, again, we will notice an example of intercessory prayer not only for an individual at that time, but recognizing the need of others that were yet to come in the future.

John 17:20-21 - *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

I often smile when I look at this verse, recognizing that, in a sense, this is not only prayer, but this is prophecy, that Jesus Christ was recognizing that there were going to be those that were going to come in the future that, more than ever, needed unity in the home, in the truth, and that Jesus Christ, when everything was about to be taken away from Him, had His mind on others. Very interesting. But He not only has done that in pastoring in His earthly ministry. Let's go to **I John 2, verse 1**. Now let's see what one of His functions is even this day and in the future. I John 2, verse 1, if you will come with me, please.

I John 2:1 - *My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with our Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

It is very interesting when you look at the word, "advocate." In other translations, it may say, "succourer." The word, "advocate," is one who advocates. Literally, it could be translated, "one who stands up." One who stands up. Or "one who pleads the cause." Oftentimes in our day and age, we think of this as being, perhaps, a lawyer; or if we are in a part of the British Commonwealth system, a barrister.

It says that Jesus Christ stands up, He pleads the cause. Whenever you think of Jesus Christ standing up, I cannot help thinking of Stephen when he was being stoned, needing strength, needing encouragement, that beautiful section of the book of Acts where it says that the clouds of heaven were rolled back. There was Jesus Christ standing, and he {*Stephen*} could see that. It shows the activity of Christ's heavenly ministry for those that are following Him, that, in a sense, He is standing, He is leaning, He is up, He is advocating, He is pulling for people. He recognizes the names, the needs, the future of everybody that follows Him. It is very interesting.

Now, with that thought, let's go to **Hebrews 7**. Hebrews 7 is an interesting section, again, describing what Jesus Christ does. Hebrews 7, **verse 24**. I'm giving you a number of scriptures to begin with, brethren, to build up to a point, to focus on the Apostle of our faith and our High Priest and His example and what He does to show the reality and the need for intercessory prayer. In Hebrews 7, verse 24:

Heb. 7:24-25 - *But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since, now notice, please, He always lives to make intercession for them.*

That is what Christ does. That is His function. That is why He lives. He is not only our Savior, but He also fulfills a dual role as our High Priest. Just as the high priest of old in Israel went through the Holy of Holies and interceded when nobody else could go through the veil, even as we can today go through that veil; nonetheless, Jesus is there, even now, making intercession, always. Now, if He is always doing this, may I ask you a question and you fill in the blank. He is the Savior. We emulate Him and follow His footsteps. He is, after all, as it says in **Hebrews 3:1**, our High Priest. We are, in that sense, training to be kings; and priests, and what do priests do? Priests make intercession. They pray, they talk, they think of others, they move when others cannot talk or think or move and intercede on their behalf.

With that thought in mind, come with me to **Hebrews 13**, a very interesting set of scriptures. I'll tell you why this is important, friends. The Church, around 65-66 A.D., was going through a crisis. The second generation, third generation of Christianity had now come up. There were a lot of concerns about those that, perhaps, had been there in the very initial Jerusalem Church, and things were not going according to Hoyle or anybody else. Jesus Christ had not returned. The apostles were dying, if not all dead, other than perhaps John. The Romans were beginning to gather and bring forces into the land, and it just didn't seem like a lot was right. People were beginning to break faith and break confidence. It even says that they were, as you will study later on in the interactive Bible study, moving back toward dead things. They were worrying about themselves and what was in it for them. They became isolationist; they became self-filled. They could get no further than their own nose or their own life, and they began to think that maybe this is our lot. Now, stay with me, please. Let's look at Hebrews 13, if I can find it here. It shows what the author of the book of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 13:1-3 - *Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them--those who are mistreated--since you yourselves are in the body also.*

It is very interesting that the cure, the antidote, the solution for selfishness and for fear was to think about others, to get your mind off of yourself. What the author of the book of Hebrews is saying, "Forge yourself, chain yourself, shackle yourself with the needs of another human being that is in . Partner with them as if you are going through it yourself."

Now, that is difficult and that is a challenge, not only for the moment, but to be persistent and consistent in it.

I don't know how many of you remember the movie, *The Defiant Ones*, back in the 50's, starred Tony Curtis and Sidney Pottier, a white man and a black man in the 50's in the South. They were chained together. They were going to a penitentiary, and they hopped the proverbial "train to freedom." Some of you may remember that. Fantastic movie. Go to Blockbuster tonight! But it's interesting because once they got off, they immediately, rather than recognizing that they were chained together, here is the black man and the white guy together in the South at that time, and, you know what? They are wanting to go both ways. They are breaking that chain even though it is very much intact. When you see the movie, if you would...now I'm going to give you a rating--it's a good movie. This is pre-60's; it's good for the kids, too. But to recognize God is telling us, in that sense, not to go separate ways but to stay together, chained, with people that have problems. Problems with health, as we pray for Leon's mother this afternoon...hi, Leon, didn't see you back there, didn't know you were here in person...pray for people that are going through marital challenges, teenage challenges, job challenges, emotional challenges, Church challenges, doubt challenges, that we are to bond with them and say, "I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to pray for you."

How often do we get together in the aisles of Church or over somebody's dinner table or we're on the phone and, you know, as family, because that's kind of what we are--brothers and sisters, and "{*babble, babble*}, did you {*babble, babble*} and did you {*babble, babble*} and did you know all of this?" And we keep on listening and we are hearing about worries and we are hearing about cares, rather than saying, "Have you prayed about this?" You know, somebody saying, going on and on about how they are having difficulty with an individual. They are having a challenge with somebody. They are having a challenge with the job; and have we just said, not in a perfunctory, kind of self-righteous, namby-pamby way, but just in a very direct, sincere way, "Have you prayed about this? I'm going to join you in prayer about this, and we are going to chain up, we're going to hook up, we're going to shackle up together, and we are going to go to God for answers," because the answers come only from Him. Why do I say this, friends of Eagle Rock? Because we need to grow in the Body of Christ. We need to grow in the Church. We need to grow in our congregation. We need to grow in the Spirit. We need to grow in prayer; and if we have this confidence and this faith, recognizing the example of Jesus Christ Himself, and we follow that example in faith and in confidence, brethren, we, more than ever, take on the role of the Church of God, the people of God.

When I first came to you as your pastor, nearly a year ago now, the one thing that I stated to you in my introductory letter was that I wanted to see my hometown church, the Los Angeles/Pasadena area, be a house of prayer, {*repeating*} a house of prayer. Why is that important to you and to me? That's not my term. That's Jesus Christ's term. When He was in the Temple, He said, "My Father's house is to be a house of prayer." The Church is the household of God. It is the walking, talking, living timbre of the people of God that compose the temple of God. In **I Corinthians 3:17**, the temple that is referred to there in

the Greek is *naos*. That is talking about the inner sanctuary of the temple--not the court of the Gentiles, not the court of the women, not the court of Israel, not the temple mount. It is specifically saying that "My people are to make up the sanctuary." What happened to the sanctuary of the temple on the day of Atonement as the high priest annually went through that veil, and he prayed the prayer of intercession for the people of Israel. Are you with me? Do you understand? That is a role that we take on today, brethren. Not the role of Christ, the High Priest; but in that sense, as followers, following that example, praying for one another in confidence and sticking to it, praying for others.

Even when we pray for others, sometimes it kind of comes back to us. It reminds me of the story of the young girl who heard, probably, a sermon like I'm giving right now. She got down on her knees. She recognized she wasn't supposed to put out her wish list or wanting list or to pray for herself, so she got down and said, "God, I know I'm not supposed to pray for myself and I'm only supposed to pray for others and I know I'm only a young single girl and I have a lot of needs. I'm not going to pray for myself. I think I'll just pray for my mother. Dear God, would you please send her a wonderful son-in-law."

Now, friends in Eagle Rock, we've got to do a little bit better than that, don't we? We've got to have stick-to-it-iveness, and we have to have persistence in what we do. We have to, in a sense, have a little dogged determination sometimes when we do not see the answers directly in front of us. Most importantly, I just encourage you that we need to communicate to God in prayer, not in minutes, but in movement and motion of sincerity toward Him.

So often you look at the psalms of David, which are really the prayers of David; and it is always interesting. Let's begin turning over there. Come with me, please. Let's do it together. As you open the book of Psalms, you can't help but say that these are not really politically correct. David sometimes was either on sugar blues or manic depressive or just out of it, maybe hadn't prayed for a long time and, boy, he comes to God all at once. But the one thing that he does, brethren, is he keeps on coming back and sharing everything with God. Sometimes his good attitude, sometimes his bad attitudes, sometimes his non-attitude. Let's notice in **Psalm 17:1**, not necessarily politically correct and maybe even very, very human--and that's sometimes how our intercessory prayers are going to be, whether as a congregation or individually, just as we are praying for Mrs. Eileen Sexton. I don't know God's total will for Leon's mother; but, you know, I have a mother. I love my Mom and I know Leon loves his mother, and that's another human being that has hopes and dreams and children. No matter how old we are, we always want to go on and on a little bit, like Hezekiah; and so all I can do is approach that humanly and say, "God, hear this. You know what the facts are. Humanly we would like Mrs. Sexton immediately to be healed. It is in Your hands."

Let's notice how David handled it.

Ps. 17:1 - *Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry...so David says it's a just cause.*

Verse 6 - *I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; incline Your ear to me, and come on, listen to my speech.* Not necessarily all of my righteousness. I haven't figured it all out right now, God, but at least hear the prayer that I offer to you.

Psalm 55, a little bit further over, let's continue to build upon the example of David. In Psalm 55, in **verse 1**, it says:

Ps. 55:1 - *Give ear to my prayer, O God, and don't hide Yourself from my supplication.*

What is a supplication? Let's answer that for a moment; otherwise, it's just a Latin word. Supplication is a "supply load." That's where we get the word "supply." Supplication moves beyond, shall we say, ritual prayer or prayer by list. Supplication is where you go before God, one on one, pleading a cause, an activity, just as we prayed during the announcement period for Mrs. Sexton. That is supplication. That's a one-on-one need to God from your vantage point, recognizing again, as a human being, we are limited, we are subjective, we are inside the goldfish bowl. We do not see everything, but God already knows that. He knows we're in the little fishbowl. He knows we are limited, but He also wants to hear about our needs and our concern toward others.

Let's look at one other verse in **Psalm 119**, if you will come with me just a little bit further. Let's eavesdrop, in that sense, on David, and hear a little bit more what he says here. In Psalm 119, **verse 57**:

Ps. 119:57-58 - *You are my portion, O Lord; I have said that I would keep Your words. I entreated Your favor with [all of my heart] my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word.*

So in all of this, brethren, as we have kind of, for a moment, eavesdropped in the middle of our Bible, in the middle of David's prayers, we see that God desires wholeheartedness and perseverance as keystones to communication with Him. But it is not only from a shepherd, it's not only from a king. We notice other examples in the Bible. Come with me to **Luke 18**, if you would, please. We can talk about kings, but God has a special spot in His heart for widows. Certainly Jesus Christ did. Let's notice the example of the persistent widow. One of our favorite stories in the Bible, isn't it? Luke 18, **verse 1**:

Luke 18:1 - *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*

Now, there are two things in that one verse. Please stay with me.

Number one, He said, "Men always, always ought to pray." Remember what Jesus is doing in His heavenly ministry? It says that He lives always to pray. So we are always to pray; but Christ, as the Son of man, knowing what possibly could happen, says this, "and don't lose heart." Why does He say that? Because we can. And then He states this wonderful example:

Verse 2 - "...*There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man,*" so just think of Judge Judy. How would you like to appear in her court? You don't give that gal any lip, do you? Excuse me, Her Honor any lip. So you think about coming up against Judge Judy, if you've ever seen it. I've seen it about three times, but I've recognized the fourth time might make me quiver, so I turned it off. She kind of scowls and looks at you and just kind of reams you out like a beloved aunt. Notice what it says here:

Verses 3-8 "...*'Get justice for me from my adversary.'* And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, *'Though I do not fear God nor regard man...'*" Oh, wow, how'd you like to go before a judge like that? "*Yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*" Then the Lord said, "*Hear what the unjust judge said.*" Now, let's listen to it. "*And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily...*"

Can you imagine this persistent widow? All of my life and all of my time in the ministry, I have dealt with many, many widows. That's how I actually started in church work, dealing with all of the widows of Pasadena; and some of you are still here, and so am I. And to recognize this widow, but this widow did something that sometimes you and I do not do in dealing and directing our intercessory prayer to God. For Jesus said in **Matthew 7, verse 7**: "Ask...seek...and knock." We have to immediately grow in this. We have petitioned God in behalf of Mrs. Eilene Sexton. I have prayed about it here with you, and we all said, "Amen" to it, "So be it," but now we've got to use the example of Eilene Sexton and the example of the persistent widow because sometimes we just hear a name mentioned in services and that is it. Over and out, ten-four, good buddy. But what Christ was saying in asking and seeking and knocking, in prayer, sometimes we knock like this: *{very faint sound of knocking}*. Now, the way the persistent widow did it was like this: *{very loud pounding}*, kept on coming at the judge like that; and no wonder, just like you are saying, "Webber, knock it off right now!" the judge said, "OK, that is enough. I've got the point. I hear you."

You've been instructed by God. You've had a name and a life placed before us today as we do at other times. Now it is really up to you and God's Spirit prompting and working with you, what you will do with the example that we have just played out before you.

It is interesting sometimes that answers don't come immediately. Come with me to **Matthew 15**, if you would. But we should not equate no answer for no answer at all. It may just simply be delayed, and that is why God loves to see a persistent prayer of intercession. The very word "persist" comes from a Latin root which means "to stand up, to hold the ground, to be there." *Semper fi*, "always faithful" for the need that has come before us. In **Matthew 15, verse 21**, let's notice an example here. It says:

Matt. 15:21-28 - *Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him,*

saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" (Remember, two times.) But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord," (this is the third appeal, now), "Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire..."

The prayer of a righteous person does avail much; and sometimes a righteous person, for one reason or another, with what they are going through, may not be able to pray for himself at that time. Those that are clouded by despair, those that are clouded by sickness, those that are, perhaps, clouded by mental confusion, sometimes those that don't even know that they need God's intervention, don't even know that there is a need, that we need to be there, brethren, for them.

Let's go to **Matthew 20, verse 34**, because we do this, brethren, as we take the challenge of prayer, it is not only going to shape God's viewpoint, but more so you. There will be people that will get in your way. There will be faith-busters. There will be people at times say, "Why does the Eagle Rock church, why does the Garden Grove church pray so much?" We need to pray more, not less! Prayer, brethren, is the heart of the Church.

Earlier I skipped over it, but in **Acts 12, verse 12**, when Peter himself was chained in prison, notice what happened. When he got out of prison, one of the reasons why he got out of prison is that the entire church was in the house of Mary, the sister of Barnabas; and they were praying collectively for his release. Praying as a congregation, praying individually, is throughout the Bible.

Matthew 20 and verse 34, let's please notice, a couple of men that were seeking healing from Jesus Christ. Actually, let's pick up in **verse 29**:

Matt. 20:29-34 - *Now as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed Him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" Then the multitude warned them that they should be quiet...here were individuals supplicating God, praying to God, talking to God, God in the flesh, as it were, through Jesus Christ; and they were told basically, in Greek, "Shut up. Be quiet." But they cried out all the more, saying, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!" So Jesus stood still and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes...*

I want to use another wonderful example of showing you the power of intercessory prayer. **Luke 7**, come with me, please. Luke 7, starting in **verse 1**. It is the story of the centurion who came and talked to Christ about the needs of his servant. Praying and

talking are really the same thing, are they not, when we talk to God, our Father, through the name of His Son, Jesus Christ? That's what prayer is.

Luke 7:1-10 - *Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum, and a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. Doesn't that sound a little bit like I John? Remember what an advocate is? One who what? Pleads the cause, stands up when, perhaps, others cannot for themselves. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." Then Jesus went with them, and when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go here,' and he goes there...'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does that." When Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.*

In this account, it does not say that the servant was even a Christian. That may be an assumption. We also know that, perhaps, the servant himself had not asked for prayer; but here was a man of God, a man of the legion, a centurion, who pleaded the cause for an individual; and he was healed. I can tell you personally of many examples of when a name has been mentioned in Church, and either God's people have been asked to go home and pray about it or we have prayed about it here in Church. It is interesting sometimes on a Saturday night or the next Sunday, somebody will call me and tell me an amazing report that it seems even at that time that a healing began to take place. I know of an individual that recently collapsed on the parking lot of Garden Grove, had a stroke and had a heart attack at the same time, just dropped down; and we prayed about it right there. An elder went out and anointed him, but then we prayed about it in the congregation; and you know what? That individual is still well. Not only a stroke but a heart attack. Called a double dipper, a double header--but God is bigger than that, and God intervened. I think that's exciting, isn't it, when we think about those things.

Now, let's take it a step further as we begin to conclude. We have talked a lot about people that, perhaps, need prayers because they are sick. We also need to consider something that Jesus Christ told us to do, brethren, when it comes to intercessory prayer. It is easy to pray for people that are sick, people that are hurting, but what about intercessory prayer for people that have hurt you? People that don't like you! Let's talk about that for a moment. **Matthew 5, verse 44**, come with me, please. Powerful instruction by Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. He said:

Matt. 5:44-45 - *But I say to you, and you put in your name, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and now, notice, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven...*

Let's understand the equation and the syntax of this scripture. In order to be the sons of our Father that is in heaven, this is what we must do: love our enemy, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, but also we are to pray for them. One amazing thing about Jesus Christ is that He did practice what He preached. Come with me, if you would, to **Luke 23, verse 34**. Here He was, being crucified. Romans, the religious community that had persecuted Him, were down below. Here was a man that had just literally had nails driven through His hands and feet, hung up on a piece of wood, and, kaboomed, into the ground, probably just jarring and jolting Him, knowing He was going to die, looking at those that were putting Him to death, and notice how He delivered, as only He could:

Luke 23:34 - *Then Jesus, praying to God, said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

We are to pray, brethren, for those who spitefully use us. Sometimes we have nothing that we can do but be driven to our knees, recognizing that we do not have the answers, and rather than fight the person, rather than talk about the person, pray for the person, an option that humanly we do not think of, other than God's Spirit leading us to that. Why is this so important, brethren, in praying for others, whether they be sick, whether they be enemies, whether they be people that we do not even know? Come with me to **I Samuel 12**, if you would, please. Let's notice a very interesting scripture. Maybe we have never looked at I Samuel 12...I Samuel 12, **verse 20**:

I Sam. 12:20-23 - *Then Samuel said to the people, "Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Remember, don't lose heart. And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing. For the Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you..."*

For an individual who is a follower of God to cease to pray where there is a need and where there are God's people, it can be a sin. The New Testament picks up this thought where it says, "To him who knows to do good and does it not, it is sin." So brethren, let's understand something as we are here. When we come to Church, we gain knowledge; and as we gain knowledge, we have a responsibility to act upon it and to understand that the reason why God is giving us this responsibility, giving this opportunity, is so that we can grow, because when we pray, when we *{are on}* our knees in prayer for somebody else, it not only changes God's mind--it also, brethren, changes our life.

Remember the example of Abraham? Remember, he started to intercede on behalf of his nephew, Lot? And remember how, over a period of time--and sometimes we have to go before God in intercessory prayer over a period of time--he went from 50 to 40 to 30 to 20 in his talk with God? What is it about Christians that we want to make 2 + 2 not equal 4? Prayer allows us to understand reality, to understand where God is going, and what He is about. It separates needs from wants; and He alone, then, as we approach Him, is the ultimate arbiter of justice and mercy. And then we need to understand that our prayers have been answered.

It reminds me of the story, one last story, about a man who was an atheist. This guy was not only an atheist, but he owned a brewery. Can you believe that? And not only that, but the brewery was next to a Bible-totin', Bible-believin', non-drinkin' church. Well, that Bible-totin', Bible-believin', non-drinkin' church did not appreciate having the brewery next to them, and so they prayed to God to do something about it. Guess what? The brewery was struck by lightning, and it burned down. Beyond that, guess what happened? The atheist owner of the brewery took the church to court. But the judge said, "This is the strangest case that has ever been brought to me, that I've ever had." He said, "Here is an atheist that believes in God, and here is a church that prayed and won't take responsibility for it."

Now, friends of Eagle Rock, when we have a high privilege of following Jesus Christ, the Great Intercessor, we have to take responsibility for our prayers and go out and meet them, even if they do not always come immediately. There are times that God will not answer immediately, number 1, perhaps, to deepen our insight into what is really needed; number 2, perhaps, to broaden our appreciation for when the answers do come; and, number 3, perhaps, to allow us to mature so that when those answers do come, we can use them more wisely.

Let's conclude this series on prayer, brethren, by turning to **Proverbs 16, verse 3**, one of the beautiful verses that just leap out of the book of Proverbs to encourage us, to instruct us, in so many avenues and responsibilities in the Christian calling. In Proverbs 16 and verse 3, we simply notice this...let's start in **verse 1** after all:

Prov. 16:1-3 *The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but it is the Lord, the Eternal, that weighs the spirits.* Now notice the encouragement and our responsibility: *Commit your works to the Lord...* we commit our family, we commit our life, we commit the needs and the pleas of people at times that cannot do that for themselves in heartfelt, persistent, consistent intercessory prayer. It says, "Commit your works to the Lord." That is our responsibility; but as God gives us responsibility, notice how He meets, then, that need. It says, *Your thoughts, your thoughts, will be established.*

Let's you and me, as fellow Christians here in Eagle Rock, California, in this Church of God, let's each and every one of us, men and women and teens, young adults and old, together forge and bond in the need and in the care of intercessory prayer. Let's step

forward after these couple of sermons that I have shared with you on prayer, and let's be a committee of one to certainly create through God's Spirit and God's love, this congregation being a house of prayer.