PRAYING FOR OTHER PEOPLE
SESSION ONE
HOW TO PRAY FOR OTHER PEOPLE

When friends get together, they talk about their problems. Sometimes your friends will share with you about their own personal difficulties at work and at home. They may tell you about physical and emotional problems that they are having. They may also tell you about the problems of some family member or friend. When you hear about these problems, how should you respond? You will want to express concern for the other person and, if possible, try to help them. In some situations you may feel like that there is little that you can do except to lend the other person a listening ear. Listening to another person as he or she expresses their pain and grief is an important way to show your concern. This concern, however, should not end with listening. The concern should motive you to take some action on behalf of the other person. Christians refer to action on behalf of another person as ministry or service. How you act will depend on the other person’s need and your ability to help. There is, however, one thing that you can always do for other people. You can always pray.

Small Group Discussion
What are some things that you can pray about for people?

Prayer for other people should be an important part of your Christian life. When you pray for another person, you express your concern for the other person. You also express your belief that God loves the other person and that He is able to provide what the other person needs. Prayer for other people is called intercessory prayer. You can pray that God will save people, that He will forgive their sins, that He will heal them, and even that He will protect them from death. Because God loves the people that you pray for, He is concerned about every aspect of their lives. So you can pray for their psychological and physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. As you pray, you should keep in mind six principles that provide a basis for intercessory prayer.

1. Intercessory prayer is based on your own personal relationship with God. As a result of your faith in Jesus, you are a child of God (John 1:12). As God’s child, you have God’s Spirit in you which enables you to call God, “Father” (Romans 8:14-15). So when you talk to God on behalf of another person, you are like a child asking her daddy to help a friend, “Daddy, my friend is in trouble. Can you help her?” And since God loves you and also cares about your friend, God will do everything that He can do to help. God is the potential spiritual Father of every human being. In other words, every person either is now or one day may become a child of God. The only thing that is necessary to become a child of God is faith in Jesus. So when God looks at your friend who is in trouble, He not only cares for the person because he is your friend. God also loves the person as one of His own children. God longs to have a parent-child relationship with that person. So God’s answer to your prayer is an expression of this love and desire for relationship that is in God’s heart.

2. Intercessory prayer is based on God’s desire and God’s power to answer prayer. God desires to answer your prayers because of His love both for you and for the other person. “God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son” (John 3:16). God’s love which caused Him to give His Son also compels Him to answer prayer. God has power to answer your prayers because all of the power in the universe is available to Him. Jesus said, “All power in heaven and on earth has been
3. Intercessory prayer is based on God’s concern for every aspect of our lives. God is concerned for both the physical and spiritual well-being of people. God not only desires to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. God also desires for us to have a good life in the present world. God is faithful to provide for the needs of those who trust in Him. Yet, many people you know are either unwilling or unable to pray to God about their own needs. Think of your family and friends who do not know God. They are separated from God by their sins. Often they live as though there is no God. Because of God’s great love, compassion, and faithfulness, you have the opportunity to cry out to God on behalf of these people. You should ask God to provide for all of their needs.

4. Intercessory prayer is based on your willingness to submit to God’s will. On the night before He was crucified, Jesus asked God to spare Him from death on the cross. Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me,” then concluded His prayer, “Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:41). When you pray you should follow the example of Jesus. You tell God what you desire, but then you should submit your own desires to the will of God. You should pray as Jesus taught in the model prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

You may have a friend who is dying of cancer. More than anything, you desire for your friend to be healed. If this is the case you should plead with God to heal your friend, but you should willingly conclude your prayer with the words, “Father, your will be done.” Behind these words is the belief that God knows best. Whether your friend with cancer lives or dies, God is able to work through this situation to bring about His good purpose. The death itself is the result of a terrible disease which brings about great suffering for your friend. But even in this suffering, God is able to accomplish a good purpose. For example, if your friend is a Christian his death will result in him going to heaven to be with God. That is wonderful! But even if your friend is not a Christian, God may still use his death to help other people to realize their own mortality and to turn to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

5. Intercessory prayer is based upon your concern for other people. Not only is God concerned about those you pray for, but you are also concerned as well. You share the same concern as God. You love those whom God loves. So when you pray for other people God Himself is expressing His love through you. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:12). It is this concern for other people which motivates your prayer. Any need which brings about concern for another person is an appropriate basis for prayer. You may pray for such needs as a person’s spiritual salvation, healing, protection during travel, deliverance from a difficult situation, encouragement, or happiness. Since God is concerned for every aspect of the person’s life, you also should have the same concern.
6. Intercessory prayer will often result in other acts of service for God and good deeds towards other people. As you pray for the needs of other people, be aware that God may lead you to be a part of the solution to their problems. For example, when you pray for the salvation of your family and friends, God may lead you to tell them about Jesus. When you pray for the needs of the hungry, God may lead you to give them food or money. When you pray for the sick, God may lead you to visit them in order to give them encouragement. When you pray for the lonely, God may tell you that you need to become their friend. When you pray for the lost peoples of the world, God may lead you to go as a missionary.

Prayer is a call to action. God uses prayer to lead His people to know and to do His will. So as you pray for the needs of other people, say not only, “Father, your will be done,” but also, “Father, help me to do your will.”

Small Group Application
1. Divide into groups of two or three. Discuss issues that prevent you from praying for other people. These issues may include:
   (1) Your relationship with God is weak because of sin
   (2) You do not believe in God’s power to answer prayer
   (3) You do not believe that God loves you and other people
   (4) You are not willing to submit to God’s will
   (5) You are not concerned about other people
   (6) You are unwilling to serve other people
2. Have a prayer time. Confess to God those issues which have prevented you from praying for other people. Ask God to help you to overcome these issues. Participants may pray silently or aloud.
3. Each member of the group should share one personal prayer need. Conclude the session with a time of praying for each other.

Personal Application
Make a prayer list. You should include the names of at least five people and one or more needs for each person on your list. Pray for the needs of these people daily this week.
SESSION TWO
JESUS’ EXAMPLE OF PRAYER FOR US, PART ONE

Small Group Discussion
What did God teach you through the personal application last week?

While there are many examples of praying for other people in the Bible, the best example is Jesus himself. In John 17, Jesus prayed for not only for His disciples, but also for all Christians in every age to come. In John 17, Jesus prayed for you. This prayer is the best example of what intercessory prayer should be like. By learning about and following this example of Jesus, you will grow in your ability to pray for other people. Because of the importance of what this prayer teaches about praying for other people, we will divide our study of Jesus’ prayer into two sessions.

Small Group Discussion
1. Read John 17:1-5
2. What does Jesus pray for Himself?

On the night before Jesus crucified, He ate supper with His disciples. Following their meal together, Jesus comforted His disciples, taught them about the importance of their relationship with Him, and promised that after He returned to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. Jesus concluded this time of instruction with a prayer. This is the prayer in John 17.

Jesus’ prayer is based on His own unique relationship with God the Father. Jesus calls God, “Father” (John 17:1), and goes on to say that the Father has given Jesus authority over all people so that He may give eternal life to those the Father has given to Him (John 17:2).

In John 17, Jesus prays that His unique position of authority as the Son of God may be used to glorify God. The Son will glorify the Father by giving eternal life (John 17:2) to those who know both God the Father and Jesus Christ (John 17:3). In verse 3 the word “know” refers to personal knowledge that comes about as a result of personal relationship. He is talking about knowing Jesus and God in the same sense that we know our parents, our siblings, and our friends. This becomes clear when we consider other passages such as John 1:12, “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” and John 15:14 in which Jesus Himself says, “You are my friends if you do what I command.” Jesus came to earth with all of the authority of God in order to make it possible for us become His friends and God’s children.

Like Jesus, you should approach God as His child. Through the Holy Spirit working in your heart, you are able to cry out to God, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). As God’s child, you can approach your Father with confidence because He loves you. He wants to be glorified by accomplishing His will through you.

As you pray, please remember who is in charge. God does not exist for you. Rather, you exist for God. God created you to bring glory to Himself through you. It is when you pray as God’s child, seeking to help other people become God’s children, that your prayers for other people will become most effective.
Small Group Discussion
1. Read John 17:6-8
2. How do people come to know Jesus?

Jesus says that His followers accepted the Word of God and believed in Him. This is very important. The way in which people come to know Jesus is to hear and believe the Gospel.

Small Group Application
Pray that your family and friends, your co-workers, and even people that you do not know will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel, that their hearts will be open to its message, and that they will believe in Jesus as their own Lord and Savior.

Small Group Discussion
1. Read John 17:9-15
2. How are people protected from the evil one?

Jesus prays that God will protect his followers from the “evil one” (John 17:15), who is Satan. There are certain points at which Christians tend to be vulnerable to satanic attack. You will be more aware of how Satan works if you are aware of these points of attack. Jesus’ prayer suggests three major points at which Satan tends to attack Christians.

First, Jesus prays that “they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11). Jesus prays that there will be unity among Christians. The reason Jesus prays for unity here is that Satan tries to produce disagreement, discord, and division among Christians. The reason that Satan does this is that the message of Christianity is a message of love. Jesus said, “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). If Christians love one another, other people will be drawn to Christ as a result of their love. But if Christians dislike and even hate one another, then other people will be turned away from Christ.

Second, Jesus prays that “they may have the full measure of my joy within them” (John 17:13). Jesus prays that Christians will have joy because Satan does everything possible to cause fear, uncertainty, and discouragement.

Third, Jesus prays because “the world” hates those who believe in Him (John 17:13-14). The Bible teaches that the present world is ruled by Satan. Satan is the “prince of this world” (John 12:31). People who reject Jesus are following the leadership of Satan who also rejected Jesus. In many cases, these people will also reject Christians because of their commitment to follow Jesus. This is why Jesus said, “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

Perhaps you have been rejected by your family and friends because of your faith in Christ. While you are hurt by their rejection, you should not be surprised. Jesus said that His followers will be hated by the people of this world. In this case, you must
remember why they have rejected you. It is because they have been blinded to the truth of the Gospel by Satan. They do not know what it is like to experience God’s love and to receive His forgiveness of sin. They do not know what it is like to be a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17) as a result of faith in Jesus. They are still in bondage to selfishness, sin and death.

Small Group Discussion and Application
1. In which of these three ways has Satan attacked you and people you know?
2. Pray that God will protect those you know from the evil one. Pray that there will be love, unity and fellowship rather than envy, anger and division among Christians. Pray that those you know will experience the joy that results from faith in Jesus. Finally, pray that your family and friends, who are still under the control of the Satan, the prince of the world, will be set free by the power of the Gospel.

Personal Application
Write down the names of five lost people you know that you want to see become Christians. Pray for them everyday this week. Pray that God will protect them from Satan. Pray that they will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel. Pray that you will have the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.
SESSION THREE
JESUS’ EXAMPLE OF PRAYER FOR US, PART TWO

Small Group Discussion
1. What did God teach you through the personal application last week?
2. Read John 17:16-19
3. How does God sanctify us?

Sanctify means to become holy. You should not think that sanctification is the result of your own effort—that it is something you can do for God. While you must do your part by studying God’s Word and trying to apply it to your life, sanctification is really the result of God’s work in you. God sent His Son to provide you with forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God gave you the Gospel and then sent someone to share the Gospel with you so that you had the opportunity to hear and believe. God placed the Holy Spirit in your heart to prepare you to hear the message and respond in faith. Now, the Holy Spirit continues to work in your heart to help you to understand the Word of God and to apply it to your life. Jesus prays that His followers will be “sanctified” by the Word of God (John 17:17). Sanctification takes place when people are obedient to God’s Word. This is accomplished when they turn away from their former way of life before they became a Christian and follow Jesus.

Small Group Application and Discussion
1. Pray for the sanctification of people you know. Pray that those you know will be sanctified as they yield to the control of God’s Spirit. Pray that they will read and understand God’s Word and apply its truth to their lives.
2. Read John 17:24
3. When Jesus says that He wants Christians to be with Him and to share His glory, where is Jesus referring to?

Jesus is referring to a place called Heaven where Christians will one day be with Him. It is in heaven that your sanctification will be finished and you will share completely in Jesus’ glory. Jesus prays that you will finish the Christian life. This will not be easy. As we have seen, Satan will oppose you. Your family and friends may reject you. There will be disappointments and failures along the way. There will be difficulties to be overcome. If you try to complete this journey in your own strength, it will be impossible. But the good news is that you do have to rely only on your own strength. God’s Spirit will be with you to strengthen you, encourage you, and guide you. It is for the completion of the Christian life that you have these words of encouragement in God’s Word: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10).

Small Group Discussion and Application
1. Pray for those who need encouragement to finish the Christian life. Pray especially for those who face opposition and discouragement, and for those who are spiritually weak and need to grow stronger in their faith in Christ.
2. Read John 17:25-26
3. Why does Jesus want to lead us to God?
Jesus’ prayer ends where it begins, with the purpose of **evangelism**. He desires for people to **know God** in order that they may experience **God’s love** and the **presence of Christ** in their lives. There is life-changing power in the Gospel. It brings people into relationship with God and gives them new life. Their sins are forgiven and they receive eternal life. The Holy Spirit empowers them for both the present life in this world and eternal life in Heaven with God.

**Small Group Application**
Pray that God will give you the opportunity to make Him known to your friends and family. Pray that God will guide you to those people who are ready to receive the Gospel and believe in Jesus. Pray that when you meet them, you will know exactly what you should say. (If you need to learn more about how to talk with other people about Jesus, see the units, **Basic Witnessing** and **Relationship Evangelism**.)

**Personal Application**
1. Make a prayer list with the following categories. Write down the names of people you know who fit into each category.
   - (1) People who need to hear the Gospel and believe in Christ
   - (2) People who need protection from Satan
   - (3) People who need fellowship
   - (4) People who need joy
   - (5) People who need sanctification
   - (6) People who need encouragement in their Christian life
   - (7) People who need affirmation of their relationship with God
2. Take one of these categories each day. Pray for the names that are listed in that category on each day. In this way, you should pray through your whole prayer list about one time each week.

**Reflection**
1. What have you learned about praying for other people?
2. What questions do you still have about praying for other people?
3. What is your plan to share with other people what you have learned about praying for other people?