

# Explorers in Prayer – Lesson Nine Notes

## The Place of Intercession in Prayer - Praying out of a heart of love

### *Our prayers reflect our capacity to love...*

Last week we looked at the role of *faith* in intercessory prayer, but what tends to be less considered is the role of *love* in intercessory prayer. Our course book (Richard Foster's *Prayer: finding the heart's true home*) begins and ends with the centrality of love in prayer. On page one he quotes St Augustine who says, "True, whole prayer is nothing but love." On the last page he reminds us of Jesus' conversation with Simon Peter (John 21) where Jesus asks Simon Peter three times, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" before giving Peter his instructions. Foster organises his book so that the reader is drawn inward and upward before moving out in service to God. I have done something similar in this course by focussing first on how we go deeper into our relationship with God in prayer before directing our prayers in the service of others through intercession. Both our relationship with God and our desire to serve others should have love at its centre. Jesus says in Matthew 22: 37-40, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." So our heart should be the starting place for our prayers. See how Jesus draws this link between our heart and the words we pray in Luke 6: 45 "Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." So all prayer comes from the heart, and godly, powerful and effective prayer will overflow from a heart of love.

In Matthew 4: 4 Jesus says, "It is written: 'People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" In fact the whole of creation came out of the mouth of God. It came out of an overflow of God's love. It began in God's heart – his desire to create beings who were wonderful, whom he would love, and who would choose to love him back. Then out of that great love came the word which God spoke and the universe was created. That word was God's prayer, and such was the power of that prayer that vast amounts of matter (enough to create the galaxies and the stars) exploded into existence in the smallest instant. If you want to know how much power there is in prayer, just reflect on that for a moment!

Then, two thousand years ago, the Word became flesh, and Jesus walked the earth doing things in exactly the same way – out of the overflow of his heart of compassion, he spoke...

In Matthew 14: 14 it says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."

Before praying for a miracle of provision which led to over four thousand people being fed by seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Matthew 15), Jesus says in verse 32, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

When two blind men came to Jesus to ask for their sight, it says in Matthew 20: 34, “Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.”

When a man with leprosy begged Jesus to heal him, in Mark 1: 41 it says, “Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man”, and he was healed.

What’s truly amazing is the fact that God wants us to do exactly the same as Jesus did all those years ago...to speak power filled prayers for healing; for the blessing and salvation of souls. Over the weeks of this course we have looked at different things that prevent this from happening, and this week the problem is our lack of love. James sums it up in James 4: 1-3, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

This is strong language, and so perhaps this makes us feel like it is not relevant to us, but in the wider scale of things our ability to really love as God does, in a self sacrificing sort of way, is actually pretty limited. Paul writes in Romans 5: 7-8 about how God’s love for us reveals itself through his self sacrifice, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

When we learn to love like this our intercession changes. We self sacrifice our own desires for God’s. A great intercessor is not one who can get what they want from God through prayer, but one who can get what God wants through prayer. So firstly, Intercession is about talking to God about those things God wants us to talk to him about. But this does not mean that we are just supposed to say whatever we think God wants to hear. God brings the issues to our attention that he wants us to talk to him about, but then he wants to hear our hearts prayer on the issue. If our prayer is spoken out of a heart of love then that will be a prayer which speaks to God’s own heart.

God does not want us to be ‘sophisticated adults’ carefully picking the words we should use when we pray so that we say the right things. He wants us to be people from whom the right words flow naturally from our hearts. We cannot separate who we are from our ability to pray.

### *Our prayers change as we grow...*

In one sense prayer is a very simple thing. Once a child has learned to speak they can communicate with anyone who can hear and speak the same language. Yet a conversation between two children is going to be very different to that between two adults. As people grow up their conversation changes because they as people change. Their conversation reflects where they are in life. When I worked in a hostel for homeless people, I sometimes met people who, it seemed, used coarse language in almost every sentence. I found it painful to listen to, but when they were amongst their peers it was quite natural for them to talk this way. What we say reveals something of where we are at! An innocent child will quite naturally speak the truth. A sophisticated adult may well have learnt how to hide the truth through the manipulation of their words. As I have quoted before, Jesus said in Matthew 18: 3, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

So from little children we can learn what it is to have hearts that love, to be truthful and innocent. But there is something else we can learn from children as well. We can learn to be bold in our prayers. A child who knows they are loved will feel free to ask for whatever is on their hearts. In the same way we can be bold in asking our heavenly father for specific things he has placed on our hearts. So before we pray for someone we first need to listen to our own hearts and allow our compassion guide us into praying bold and specific prayers.

In class we learnt a prayer song. If you want to you can download the tune, words and music from the Prayer Eleven website.

Throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity people have been singing prayers to God. Again, this is to do with the link between our hearts and our words. Music comes from the heart of the song writer and touches the hearts of those who hear it or sing it. This prayer song came out of my heart as I prayer walked in the town where I lived. The words and tune are simple, and intended to be repeated over and over again.

### Home work

From the book *God's Smuggler* - pages 74 - 77. After Brother Andrew had become a Christian, he decided that God was calling him to become a missionary, so he enrolled at the W.E.C. Missionary Training College in Glasgow, Scotland.

He writes, "The first semester sped by. Mornings we spent in the classrooms studying systematic theology, homiletics, world religions, linguistics - the type of courses taught in any seminary. In the afternoon we worked at practical skills: bricklaying, plumbing, carpentry, first aid, tropical hygiene, motor repair. For several weeks all of us, girls as well as boys, worked at the Ford factory in London, learning how to take a car apart and put it together. In addition to these standard trades, we were taught to build huts out of palm fronds and how to make mud jars that would hold water.

And meanwhile we took turns in the kitchen and the laundry and the garden. No one was exempt. One of the students was a doctor, a German woman, and I used to watch her scouring garbage pails as though she were preparing a room for surgery.

The weeks past so fast that soon it came time for me to head out on the first of several training trips in evangelism. "You're going to like this, Andy," said Mr Dinnen. "It's an exercise in trust. The rules are simple. Each student on your team is given a one-pound banknote. With that you go on a missionary tour through Scotland. You're expected to pay your own transportation, your own lodging, your food, any advertising you want to do, the renting of halls, providing refreshments-

"All on a one-pound note?"

"Worse than that. When you get back to school after four weeks, you're expected to pay back the pound!" I laughed. "Sounds like we'll be passing the hat all the time."

"Oh, you're not allowed to take up collections! Never. You're not to mention money at your meetings. All of your needs have got to be provided without any manipulation on your part - or the experiment is a failure."

I was a member of a team of five boys. Later when I tried to reconstruct where our funds came from during those four weeks, it was hard to. It seemed that what we needed was always just there. Sometimes a letter would arrive from one of the boys' parents with a

little money. Sometimes we would get a cheque in the mail from a church we had visited days or weeks earlier. The notes that came with these gifts were always interesting. "I know you don't need money or you would have mentioned it," someone would write. "But God just wouldn't let me get to sleep tonight until I put this in an envelope for you."

Contributions frequently came in the form of produce. In one little town in the highlands of Scotland we were given six hundred eggs. We had eggs for breakfast, eggs for lunch, eggs as hors d'oeuvres before a dinner of eggs with an egg-white meringue dessert. It was weeks before we could look a chicken in the eye.

But money or produce, we stuck fast to two rules: we never mentioned a need aloud, and we gave away a tithe of whatever came to us as soon as we got it - within twenty-four hours if possible.

Another team that set out from school at the same time as we did was not so strict about tithing. They set aside their ten percent all right, but they didn't give it away immediately, 'in case we run into an emergency'. Of course they had emergencies! So did we, every day. But they ended their month owing money to hotels, lecture halls, and markets all over Scotland, while we came back to school almost ten pounds ahead. Fast as we could give money away, God was always swifter, and we ended with money to send the W.E.C. work overseas.

There were times before the end of the tour, however, when it looked as though the experiment was failing. One week-end we were holding meetings in Edinburgh. We had attracted a large group of young people the first day and were casting about for a way to get them to come back the next. Suddenly, without consulting anyone, one of the team members stood up and made an announcement. "Before the meeting tomorrow evening," he said, "we'd like you all to have tea with us here. Four o'clock. How many think they can make it?" A couple of dozen hands went up and we were committed. At first, instead of being delighted, the rest of us were horrified. All of us knew that we had no tea, no cake, no bread and butter, and exactly five cups. Nor did we have any money to buy these things: our last penny had gone to rent the hall. This was going to be a real test of God's care. And for a while it looked as though He was going to provide everything through the young people themselves. After the meeting several of them came forward and said they would like to help. One offered milk; another, half a pound of tea; another, sugar. One girl even offered to bring dishes. Our tea was rapidly taking shape. But there was one thing still missing - the cake. Without cake, these Scottish boys and girls wouldn't consider tea tea.

So that night in our evening prayer time, we put the matter before God. "Lord we've got ourselves into a spot. From somewhere we've got to get a cake. Will you help us?"

That night as we rolled up in our blankets on the floor of the hall, we played guessing games: How was God going to give us that cake? Among the five of us, we guessed everything imaginable - or so we thought. Morning arrived. We half expected a heavenly messenger to come to our door bearing a cake. But no one came. The morning mail arrived. We ripped open the two letters, hoping for money. There was none. A woman from a nearby church came by to see if she could help. "Cake" was on the tip of all our tongues, but we swallowed the word and shook our heads. "Everything," we assured her, "is in God's hands."

The tea had been announced for four o'clock in the afternoon. At three the tables were set, but still we had no cake. Three-thirty came. We put on water to boil. Three-forty-five. And then the doorbell rang. All of us together ran to the big front entrance, and there was the postman. "Got something for you that feels like a food package." He handed the box to one of the boys. "The delivery day is over, actually," he said, "but I hate to leave a perishable package overnight."

We thanked him profusely, and the minute he closed the door the boy solemnly handed me the box. "It's for you, Andrew. From Mrs William Hopkins in London." I took the package and carefully unwrapped it. Off came the twine. Off came the brown outside paper. Inside, there was no note - only a large white box. Deep in my soul I knew that I could afford the drama of lifting the lid slowly. As I did, there, in perfect condition, to be admired by five sets of wondering eyes, was an enormous, glistening, moist, chocolate cake."

Notice that the faith exercise was not a success for everyone who took part, but it was a success for those who genuinely relied on God.

Read Matthew 10: 5 - 8 Jesus sends out the twelve "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: "The kingdom of heaven is near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.'"

To heal the sick, etc., the disciples had to be comfortable with publicly and boldly praying for people....

**Individual Exercise:** Each day spend the 15 minutes thinking about the people you are most likely to meet that day and asking God to give you someone to pray for. By this I mean actually asking someone if you can pray for them out loud, there and then! Like the exercise that Brother Andrew did, this exercise is intended to take you right outside your comfort zone! Here are two thoughts you may find helpful: 1) No one has ever declined an offer by me to pray for them, and they always seem to have appreciated it when I have. 2) Some people who have done this exercise have found it helpful to tell people they are doing a course on prayer, and have to do this exercise, so would they mind being prayed for in this way?

The key thing is to keep praying for a God-given opportunity to pray for someone in this way, and then try to be sensitive to the moment. Unless you're exceptional, you may only get one or two chances to pray for someone during the week, but see how you get on. Those who have done it have returned the following week with wonderful stories to tell about how God has used their prayers.

Read chapters 15 & 17 of the course book.

**Prayer Triplet Exercise:** Share prayer needs for other people and pray for them. You might like to invite someone from outside the course to come and be prayed for, or visit someone to pray for them.

George Mueller – *Persevere on prayer*

Pastor Charles R. Parsons in an hour's interview with George Mueller towards the close of his life asked him if he spent much time on his knees.

"Hours every day. But I live in the spirit of prayer; I pray as I walk, when I lie down, and when I rise. And the answers are always coming. Tens of thousands of times my prayers have been answered. When once I am persuaded a thing is right, I go on praying for it until the end comes. I never give up!"

"In answer to my prayers, thousands of souls have been saved," he went on. "I shall meet tens of thousands of them in Heaven."

There was another pause. I made no remark and he continued: "The great point is to never give up until the answer comes. I have been praying every day for fifty-two years for two men, sons of a friend of my youth. They are not converted yet, but they will be! How can it be otherwise? There is the unchanging promise of Jehovah, and on that I rest. The great fault of the children of God is that they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere. If they desire anything of God's glory, they should pray until they get it.

"Oh, how good, kind, gracious, and condescending is the One with whom we have to do! He has given me, unworthy as I am, immeasurably above all I have asked or thought! I am only a poor, frail, sinful man, but He has heard my prayers tens of thousands of times and used me as the means of bringing tens of thousands of souls into the way of truth in this and other lands. These unworthy lips have proclaimed salvation to great multitudes, and very many people have believed unto eternal life."

"Seek to depend entirely on God for everything," he answered. "Put yourself and your work into His hands. When thinking of any new undertaking, ask, Is this agreeable to the mind of God? Is it for His glory? If it is not for His glory, it is not for your good, and you must have nothing to do with it. Mind that! Having settled that a certain course is for the glory of God, begin it in His name and continue in it to the end. Undertake it in prayer and faith, and never give up!"

"And do not regard iniquity in your heart. If you do, the Lord will not hear you. Keep that before you always. Then trust in God. Depend only on Him. Wait on Him. Believe on Him. Expect great things from Him. Faint not if the blessing tarries. And above all, rely only on the merits of our adorable Lord and Saviour, so that according to them and to nothing of your own, the prayers you offer and the work you do will be accepted."