

Personal Prayer

By Senior Pastor Prince Guneratnam

I would like to mention two things about the prayer of intercession. Firstly, it is a privilege to intercede or pray for others. James 5:13-16 says that we can call upon the elders when we need prayer. We should pray for one another. Secondly, it is a ministry not necessarily for a few. Some may be specifically called to this ministry of intercession, but we can all pray for one another. How would you like Paul the Apostle to say to you, "Pray for me."? But that is exactly what he said to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:25: "Brethren, pray for us."

Each of us has the tremendous opportunity to enter into this great the ministry of prayer. Sometimes, however, when we see the needs around us, we fail to realize that there is a need to pray for ourselves. We call this personal prayer. Some of us may even feel guilty when we begin to pray for ourselves, "Oh, Lord, bless me. Promote me." Do you know that personal prayer is important and that you need to stop to really take time to come before the Lord and talk to Him about yourself and your needs?

Let me give you some examples of personal prayers in the Bible. The publican in Luke 18:13 prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" He prayed a personal prayer and he went away, not feeling guilty that he had prayed for himself, but justified.

Psalm 51 was the personal prayer of David. Notice the personal pronouns he used in his prayer: "Have mercy on me," "I have sinned", "Wash me", "Create in me", and others.

Jesus Himself said that we can come to God with the desires of our hearts: "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7). We can say to him, "This is my desire; grant the desire of my heart, Lord."

Therefore, determine to pray and pray for yourself as well as for others. Seek the Lord for yourself and His will in your life. Seek God for his strength so that you might be successful and victorious. This is a great way to bear testimony of God's grace in your life.

Jabez prayed for himself

There is a beautiful story set among the verses on the genealogy of the family of Judah: "Now Jabez was more honourable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh, that you bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you keep me from evil, that I may cause no pain!" So God granted him what he requested (1 Chronicles 4:9-10).

This personal prayer of Jabez was effective, because he prayed with the right attitude and in the right spirit. Let us note a few things about Jabez's prayer.

Firstly, he acknowledged God when he called on the God of Israel. Calling on the "God of Israel" signifies three things:

1. He was coming to the God who made covenants with His people. Israel was a special race that God chose to make a covenant with. Do you know, when you come to God, you come to the One who makes and keeps promises? That was why Jabez said, "God of Israel".
2. The God of Israel was a living God. The other nations were heathen and they prayed to idols. But the people of Israel prayed to a living God. When you pray, you pray to a living God. He lives and hears our prayers.
3. God looked upon Israel like a father upon his children. So when Jabez prayed to the God of Israel, he was actually saying, "Oh, Father." God is our Father.

Now besides acknowledging God, Jabez prayed earnestly. Jabez "cried" before the Lord. Notice the emotions expressed in his prayer: "Oh, that you would bless me." There was an earnest, sincere cry from within him.

Are you earnest for God to touch you when you pray? So earnest that, like Jacob, you would wrestle for the blessing (Genesis 22:26). That shows you mean business and would not let go until God blesses you.

Jesus also tells us to persevere in our prayers. In Luke 11:5-10, there is the story of the friend who came at midnight, asking for bread. The message is that you should persevere until you obtain what you ask for. Luke 18:1-8 tells of the widow and the unjust judge. The widow bothered the latter until he had to give in to her request. Pray till the victory is yours.

Jabez prayed specifically, knowing exactly what he wanted. There are four characteristics about his prayer that we can pattern ours after.

I. He asked for God's blessings

In other words, he asked for God's grace. When he was born, his mother named him Jabez, meaning, "He will cause pain." We do not know if he had some kind of handicap or deformity. But we do know that he prayed, "In my becoming, Lord, bless me so that your grace will cause me to be triumphant."

Paul gave credit to God in what he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10 – "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but grace of God which was with me." Again in 2 Corinthians 9:8 Paul said, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, have an abundance for every good work."

Sometimes, our prayer should be for grace instead of deliverance.

II. He prayed, "Enlarge my territory"

We need to pray for growth. The trouble with many of us is that we are easily contented. We are satisfied by the growth of the church and the comforts that come from the blessings of God. We ask ourselves, "Why do we need a larger auditorium?" We can give good reason to remain where we are and sometimes be spiritual in our reasoning. But, we fail to see that we are only covering up lack of faith and our poor vision of God's plan and purpose. A believer must grow, so does the church. We must pray like Jabez: "Lord, enlarge my border." When the people of Israel came out of Egypt, they were willing to settle for less than what God had planned for them. But Moses and Joshua were determined to lead them into God's promised land. We must have the determination and the faith to enter into God's best for us as an individual and as a church.

III. He prayed for guidance: "That your hand would be with me"

How many of you know that you can be guided? Ezra had the hand of God upon him (Ezra 7:9). Psalm 37:23 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Jesus says, "He will go with us always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). He also said, "I will not leave you nor forsake you." We can and must pray for the Lord to go with us and lead us.

IV. He prayed for godliness: "Keep me from evil"

Do you know what causes pain? When sin is in the heart of man. Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed. Instead he went down to Joppa, in the opposite direction. Then a storm brewed up while he was sailing. As a result, this one man's disobedience brought trouble and suffering to a lot of people.

Sin in the heart of man brings painful experiences. It is also true the other way around; when you have Christ and you are walking in obedience, wherever you go, you bring the blessing of God with you. You can bring hope, peace and joy. In the same way, Jabez was saying that he did not want evil to fill his heart so that he would bring suffering. He wanted to bring hope, peace and joy and be like the healing balm of Gilead wherever there is pain and sorrow.

Now notice the conclusion. God granted Jabez what he requested. If his personal prayer had been selfish, God would not have granted it, would He?

It is true you must pray for your friends, the nation, your family and others, but you must pray for yourself too. Pray, "God, bless me, enlarge my territory, guide me and keep me from evil."

Finally, Jabez was said to be more honourable than all his brothers. What was his secret? Jabez knew how to pray. Do you want to be honourable in the sight of God? Pray and ask Him, and you will be honourable to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.