

# Helping by Prayer

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of praying for others, as it brings divine power to bear in helping and blessing them, and is a vital element of friendship.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28, Philippians 1:3, 1 Timothy 2:1, James 5:16

**Topics:** "The Power of Prayer", "Intercession for Others"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the vital role of prayer in helping others, asserting that it is one of life's highest duties. He highlights that prayer is not just a wish but a powerful means of invoking God's help for those we care about, including friends and even enemies. Miller warns against the dangers of neglecting prayer, equating it to a sin against both our friends and God, and stresses that true love must include intercession for all, regardless of their treatment towards us. He encourages believers to pray for everyone, as prayer is a reflection of God's love and grace. Ultimately, Miller calls for a commitment to pray for others, especially those who may have wronged us, as a demonstration of Christ-like love.

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## Transcript

We are taught to pray for others. This is one of life's highest and plainest duties. Paul exhorts that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men. James exhorts us to pray for one another, adding that "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Thus prayer is put down among the active, working forces of the world, one of the ways in which we can do good to others. It avails much in its working.

When we think of it carefully--we shall find that there really is no way in which we can do so much for others--as by praying for them. Prayer is not merely a heart sigh, an expression of well-wishing--it lays hold upon the hand of God and brings divine power to bear in helping and blessing those for whom we make intercession. There always are things which we can do for others with our own hands--we mock God when we try to put our duties off on Him--but there are many things which we can do only by prayer.

Friendship is precious and sacred--but friendship that does not pray lacks a vital element. It leaves God out. A Christian young woman is loved by a man who laughs at prayer, and laughs at her because she believes in prayer. Is it any wonder that the young woman hesitates to entrust her life, with all the interests of her future, to one who, though she believes him to be true, honorable and worthy--yet cannot give her the help that can come only through a true friend's prayers? Earth's sweetest flowers need heaven's dew--to make them perfect in beauty and fragrance. Earth's best things are incomplete without heaven's

benedictions. Love needs divine strength and grace to make it complete. An old writer said, "Pray for whom you love; you will never have any comfort of his friendship for whom you do not pray."

"Pray for whom you love." Nothing else you may do for your friend, can possibly mean so much. Our hands are awkward and unskillful. Ofttimes even in our best-meant efforts, we only hurt the life we try to heal with our touch. At the best, we are poor bunglers in helping others. We have no skill or wisdom to help in the deepest ways. We do the wrong thing. We lift away burdens--it were better our friends should carry longer; for our burdens do not fall by accident upon our shoulders; they are God's gifts and bring blessings. We make the path easy--when it were better it had been left rough. We hurry some providence to get the blessing to our friend sooner, and in doing this give him fruit yet unripe, which can only do him harm. It were better for him to wait longer and get the fruit mellow and ripe.

How glad we should be, that we can put our friends into God's hands when they have sorrows and need comforting; or are in difficulties, longing for deliverance; or have hard questions which they do not know how to answer. It has been said that wrong advice has wrecked destinies. As experience increases and we learn more of the seriousness of living--we shrink more and more, if we are wise, from giving advice. How do we know what our friends ought to do in this perplexity; which of two ways is the better way for them to take; how can they meet this emergency most wisely; whether they ought to accept or decline this friendship that is offered to them? We think of our friends in their troubles, sympathize with them, and wish we could relieve them; but how do we know that relief from trouble would be best for them? We desire to take away the cross they are bearing--how do we know that we would not be proving their worst enemy if we did? The cross is meant not to crush--but to lift. Almost the only safe thing our love can do--is to ask God to do what he knows to be the best things for those he loves. Not to pray for them--but to try instead to do our own kindnesses for them--is to put our poor, ignorant, blundering help--instead of God's wise and perfect help!

Failing to pray for our friends--is therefore a sin against them. It is also a sin against God. The law of love requires us to think of others and to do as much for them--as we would do for ourselves. "You shall love your neighbor--as yourself." We understand this of deeds of kindness. But prayer is one of the duties of love--and we sin against our brother when we fail to pray for him. The mother who does for her child all that the tenderest human love can do--and yet never prays for him, never seeks for him divine protection, guidance, and blessing--is surely both wronging her child and sinning against God.

The duty of praying for others is clearly taught by Christ himself. It is woven into the whole of what is known as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is addressed to "Our Father," not "My Father." It is not a prayer which we are to offer for ourselves alone. We may use it when we are alone--but we are not to think only of ourselves. We are to pray also for our Father's other children. "Give us this day our daily bread." We are not to think only of our own need--that would be most unchristian selfishness; we are to think of others as well. We are always in danger of narrowing our petitions to ourselves, and our own needs--while others' needs are crowded out. The last place in the world for selfishness, is when we are bowing before God in prayer. Love should always then be at its best.

It is not enough to pray for our friends. Jesus teaches us that we are to love our enemies, and be kind to those who are unkind to us. "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" Matthew 5:46-47. The same teaching applies to prayer. It is not enough to pray for those who are grateful and kind to us, who pray for us, who do things for us. We may pray also for

those who treat us badly.

There is much ingratitude in the world. After the greatest kindness shown by us, running sometimes through years, those who have received help from us, may forget everything we have done, and return only neglect and even wrong for all our love and service of past years. What is our Christian duty to those who may thus have requited our kindness with unkindness? Have we a right to resent the evil we have received? Does the injustice done to us free us from the duty of love to those who have done the injustice? May we cease to pray for them?

When met by such an experience of ingratitude, Samuel said to the people of Israel, that he would be sinning against God if he ceased to pray for them, after they had been so ungrateful to him. This question may become real and practical any day to any of us. We may be treated unjustly by one to whom we have been a faithful friend for years. Will that absolve us from being kind any longer to the ungrateful person? No! Christian love is not to be affected by any treatment it may receive from others. The true patriot is to be loyal to his country--even though the country has been ungrateful to him. The Christian in his private relations is never to let his heart become embittered--by any injustice done to him.

Sometimes beside the brackish sea, you will find a spring of water gushing up, as sweet as any that bursts from the hillside. When the tide is low you dip up its clear water and drink it and it refreshes you. A few hours later you come again and find the tide covering the place, its bitter waters rolling over the spring; but in a little while you pass again, and now the tide has rolled out to sea. You find the spring again and its clear streams are pouring up as sweet as before, without a trace of the brackishness of the sea in which the spring has been enfolded so long. So should it be with the love of the Christian heart. No wrong, no ingratitude, no cruelty, should ever embitter it. We should never cease to pray for others, because they have been unkind to us. We have a very definite word of our Master's on this matter. Jesus knew that our hearts are apt to grow bitter against those who do not love us, and to show resentment to those who do us harm, and so he gave this commandment: "But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" He gave the reason, too, "that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven." That is the way our Father loves--he loves his enemies, he blesses those who curse him, he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Therefore if anyone is harming us--that is the very person Christ especially commands us to pray for today!

When you kneel at the close of the day to pray, and when you name in intercession those who have shown you kindness, number with them--all who during the day may have been unkind, any who have injured you or who have spoken falsely or bitterly of you. "Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who despitefully use you, and persecute you."

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