

# How a Family Prays for Each Other

Good morning everyone, it's great to see all of you again. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here at City Church. I'd love to get the chance to talk and get to know you a little bit if I haven't already. If you've recently started coming around or this is your first week, we are currently working our way through a series called "Church is a family." We've spent several weeks breaking down what exactly a "family" is according to scripture and how Jesus makes us family and some of the implications that follow. It's been an awesome series for me because, even though I sometimes feel like it's all information that I am aware of or have in my head, it's incredibly helpful for me to hear it in different perspectives or from different angles and it's a beautiful way for me to be reminded of the gospel.

Last week, Kent talked about the ever-so-lighthearted topic of fighting. He gave some really helpful tools on what it looks like for a family to fight well in light of the gospel and hopefully it was something that was practical and helpful for many of us. Today we are going to be taking a bit of a turn and talk about something that I feel gets overlooked far too often. From my perspective, today's topic is something we **talk about** a lot, but most of us don't **do** a lot. Today we are diving into how a family prays for one another. In the New Testament, there are over 50 instances of instructional commands that include the idea of "one another." Some of these include "encourage one another" or "bear one another's burdens" or "serve one another" or "love one another" with the occasional outlier of "greet one another with a holy kiss." With the exception of that last one (unless I'm just not around when that's going on), I really feel like our church family does an awesome job with most of the "one another" commands. But I think this one—praying for one another—is probably something that a lot of us (myself included) would say we could stand to grow in. For some of us, it could be that we say we struggle with prayer **in general**, or maybe we do pretty well with prayer, but praying for **other people in our church family** just isn't something we instinctively think about doing all that much. When you really start looking into it though, I think the command to "pray for one another" is more involved and more vital than a lot of people tend to think.

Now listen, I'm not just saying that this isn't happening at all. I can name several very specific manifestations of this going on consistently in our church family and I love it. But I want to spend a little bit of time today unpacking four main ways that scripture tells us

we should be praying for one another, then try to get specific on some ways we can practically dive into it in our day to day lives to grow it in as a family. Sound doable to you? Let's jump right in.

The "Christianese" phrase for praying for someone else is the idea of "intercessory prayer." Intercession is simply defined as "the action of intervening on behalf of another." So we are trying to take the model of the life of Jesus and how it was absolutely necessary for him to intervene on our behalf, and we should apply that to the way we approach our relationships with others. In light of the example set by Jesus and the relationship he made possible for us with God the father, we should be consistently going before God on behalf of other people. I heard one pastor say, "we should speak to God about our brother as much as we speak to our brother about God." I think it's incredibly important for us to recognize and acknowledge that it is God through the Holy Spirit who can grow and change people, and not our own efforts or abilities. When we clearly see it is His power and not our's that can truly move, I think it gives us a better perspective on praying for other people. So I need you to hear this: if it is true that it's the Holy Spirit and not us that has the ability to change people, praying for each other is both the outworking of that belief **and** a way to reset ourselves on that reality over and over again, such that we believe it more and more.

Now, I'd say that's a simple enough command, right? "Pray for other followers of Jesus." But sometimes I think that's so broad that it's almost unhelpful at a practical level. So I wanted to give you at least four categories of ways we can pray for each other. Four different ways or angles that we can take in our prayers for one another as followers of Jesus.

## Growth and Maturity

The first way we should be praying for other people according to scripture is praying for their growth and maturity. We see this clearly in the book of **Ephesians**. Look with me at **chapter 3** starting in verse 14:

*[14] For this reason I kneel before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. [16] I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, [18] may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people,*

*to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, [19] and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

So right here, we see a clear example of Paul writing the followers of Jesus in Ephesus and telling them he is actively going before God the father and lifting them up and asking God to help “strengthen [them] with power...to grasp how wide and how long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” Paul isn’t taking a back seat to other followers of Jesus’ growth and maturity. He doesn’t sit back and hope they’re growing or rely on or rest in the fact that he talked to them about Jesus a couple times and just assume they’ll be fine from there on. In fact, it’s the complete opposite. I mean, he’s in the middle of this entire letter of instruction and encouragement to the Ephesian church on **how** to grow in maturity, but he stops, not once, but twice — this is actually one of two prayers in the letter to the Ephesians — in the letter to pray that the Holy Spirit would make it all effective. I think that tells us even more about the importance of prayer. And you see it another time if you look just a couple chapters earlier in Ephesians 1 he says:

*“[16] I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him...”*

In my opinion, the fact that Paul says he does not cease in his prayer for others and their growth in understanding makes it pretty clear how important he thinks it is. I don’t know the last time I thought I needed to do something without ceasing and simultaneously didn’t think it was something significant. A quick example of this is the fact that I take showers every day. I do so because I believe it’s important. And also because my wife believes if you touch the sheets without showering you need to change them, and we only have but so many sheets. I feel like a lot of followers of Jesus look at their relationship with others and want to see growth and maturity happening, but end up getting bogged down in the thick of it because they want to make it happen themselves. I feel like a lot of you might be in that place where you so badly want to see someone take that next step in spiritual growth and maturity and you just feel exhausted and frustrated that it seems like you can’t quite get them to that place. Or you feel like you’ve used up all your words and ideas and they just don’t seem to be getting there. Have you ever had someone in your LifeGroup talk about something they’re struggling with, and you responded by talking through it with them, giving them the wisdom and truth you feel like they need and then find yourself going “why aren’t they changing!? I gave them all the

right information! They should be different now!” I won’t make you raise your hand because chances are the person you’re thinking about might be somewhere nearby. But have you ever felt something like that? That right there should be a reminder to **pray** for that person’s growth and maturity. Going before the Father on their behalf and praying that God would make our words to them effective. That he would use them to change that person. I wonder if the reason we so often find ourselves exhausted and frustrated is because we haven’t spent all that much time praying that God would make our words and encouragement effective in their lives. We see this example in scripture of going straight to the source of wisdom and growth and maturity and asking Him, on behalf of our brothers and sisters, to work in them through the power of the Spirit. The same Spirit that is responsible for changing the hearts of followers of Jesus and bringing us from death to life is the same Spirit we should be imploring to work and move in our brothers and sisters.

## Confessed Sin and Healing

The next area I see scripture highlight the need to pray for others is for their confession of sin and their healing. I get this idea straight out of **James** chapter **5** in **verse 16**:

*[16] Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

So you’ve probably heard us say a time or two that we think LifeGroup is an integral part of what we do as a church and as followers of Jesus. One of the key pieces of what we hope to see happen in the context of LifeGroup is this idea of confession. We’ve talked about it plenty so I’m not going to dive too deep into the idea of confession as a whole, but I do want to talk about a couple of aspects of it and how our prayers on behalf of others play directly into it.

I think we often hope confession is a natural outflowing of the Holy Spirit working in people’s lives, and many times it is and that’s a beautiful picture of the Spirit growing people to look more and more like Jesus. I also have seen people do a great job responding to confession from other followers of Jesus with ideas from the gospel and with words of truth and encouragement, and listen, that is fantastic. I always love hearing people do that in LifeGroup and hearing stories of it happening in other people’s groups. One thing I often wonder about though is if it stops there. Because the reality is that’s

only half the picture. Gospel truth and words are great, but without the power of the Holy Spirit making it move and weave it's way into people's hearts, it's not going to accomplish what it's meant to accomplish. **You could say the most accurate, truthful statements about the gospel and truth to someone that would fit directly into what they are experiencing, but if we don't ask the Holy Spirit to move and make it take root, there will not be the healing we long to see.**

Our understanding and knowledge of concepts is not going to be what changes hearts or provides healing. I've been in LifeGroup plenty of times and brought something up I was struggling with and had someone beautifully remind me of the gospel and my identity in Christ and then left not really feeling any different. That wasn't new information to me, I knew that going in. But I wasn't leaning on the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. I wasn't asking the Spirit to help; I wasn't taking it to the Lord and I wasn't seeing change.

I think what a lot of people need to hear is this: don't skip over the "pray for one another" part of the verse. I think a lot of people, myself included, functionally believe the verse in James 5 says "confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed." But that ignores almost half the sentence. Confession is part one. Prayer is part two. Sometimes it's easy to think in our culture that values authenticity, that **confession alone** is what brings healing. That once I'm honest and just get it off my chest, I'm good to go. But this passage doesn't say that. It says that confession + **prayer** equals healing. It is only the transformative work of the Holy Spirit that is going to do it. The Spirit is what ignites change in people's hearts. The Spirit is what takes the words and concepts and understanding of scripture and saturates people with the healing power of God. And that's exactly what the author is getting at here in James. He says to "pray for each other so that you may be healed." He doesn't say "just remind each other of things they already know and hope for the best." No, **we get to go before God the Father on behalf of our brothers and sisters and ask Him to cover them in the healing power that he offers.** And I think this connects directly to the next point.

### **Wisdom to Offer Them**

The third way I see the Bible prompting us to pray for other people is asking for wisdom to offer them. Like I said a second ago, there are plenty of times in LifeGroup where we may have words to say to people that are true and helpful and practical, but we need to pray and ask the Spirit to make those words take root and take on meaning and become

transformative in a person. There are also plenty of times in the same context when we have to go directly to the source of wisdom and truth to even have words to say.

This is going to be a purely hypothetical situation, so please don't point fingers or jump to thinking about a specific person or start staring someone down who's sitting in here today when I say this. Imagine with me you're sitting in LifeGroup and someone brings up something they're dealing with or processing through or starts confessing something they've been holding onto for a while and they're not sure what to do with it, and as soon as they're done pouring their heart out and letting people see the depths of what they're experiencing the room goes silent for a few seconds and then they get hit with the classic line... "huh." Now I know that's never happened to any of you, but just try to imagine it. Or maybe no one even manages to get that out and it's just silence. And sometimes when there's silence and nobody knows what to say, do we just wing it? Do we try to hit someone with an emotional or situational bandaid? Or do we pause, pray, and ask the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom? This is all purely a hypothetical situation though, I know nothing like that has EVER happened in any of our LifeGroups here at City Church. But you know, other places I'm sure it might go down like that.

I think [1 Corinthians 2](#) speaks directly into this idea, so take a look with me on the screen starting in [verse 12](#):

*[12] What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. [13] This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.*

Look at that phrase in verse 13: "not words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit." I don't know about you, but based on that verse, I really feel like "words taught by the Spirit" are most likely from the Spirit. Can anyone take a gander at how you think followers of Jesus get most things from or through the Spirit? I'll give you a hint: it's kind of similar to the way we get other things we don't already have. We ask.

It sounds pretty straightforward like that, but I know for me personally it doesn't happen all that naturally in the moment a lot of the time. My tendency is to want to fix things for people and to save them and my gut reaction is to swoop in and hit them with some clutch advice neatly packaged in a tweetable one-liner that I can pat myself on the back for later. But the wisdom and truth they need doesn't originate with me. Sure, God can

use me and you to deliver that wisdom, but it comes when we ask Him to speak it through us. We get to go to God in the moment through the Spirit and ask “what is it you have for them that I can say right now?” And listen, God absolutely can and does work through us in that way.

## Thanksgiving For Them

The last way I want to spend time today talking about how the Bible prompts us to pray for others is how we are to give thanksgiving for them. You can look throughout the New Testament at many of Paul’s letters and you will see over and over again how he opens his letters with some iteration of the phrase “I thank God for you.” One of the most obvious for me though is the book of [1 Thessalonians](#). The entire book is essentially Paul saying “great job guys, keep it up!” But it’s all framed around the idea of Paul saying he’s thanking and praising God for them. You can see it clearly in [chapter 1](#) starting in [verse 2](#):

*[2] We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.*

*[3] We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul jumps straight into it and what does he say he does to express his thanksgiving for these people? He continually mentions them in his prayers. I want everyone to take a second right now and think hard with me. Don’t answer out loud or raise your hand or anything, but try to think of the last time you prayed specifically thanking God for a person out of a spirit of genuine thanksgiving when that person was not present or did not know about it. And I don’t mean you prayed for them because they asked you to, and you started with “God, thanks for my brother \_\_\_\_\_” as a throwaway opening line. We all do that. I don’t know about you, but that’s pretty convicting for me most of the time. Honestly, when I was writing this I had the thought of “man, I’m not sure I’d want to hear that” but I felt like that meant someone else probably could afford to hear it too. I figured, “no use in just me being convicted if all of us could!”

So, I say all of this to bring to light something we can be doing to grow together as a family. I say it to remind you of the fact that what God is doing here among our church family is an incredible thing. God, in so many ways, is knitting us together as a church family. Some of us have relationships with other people in our LifeGroup or our church

family today, that we didn't even know were **possible** a year ago. We have close-knit relationships today that we didn't even know could exist. So it follows that periodically, we could be going to God with genuine gratitude for those relationships he has given us. Plus, if you don't think that thanking God regularly for other people is going to positively impact your relationship with them, you're crazy.

## **Application**

So we know praying for other followers of Jesus is a central part of what makes us family and grows us together, and we know it's something scripture prompts followers of Jesus to do, and we've spent some time this morning talking about four categorical ways of approaching the idea, so now what? What do we do with that right now? What do we do with it in a few days? Or a week, or a few months? What does this look like in the day to day real life we experience. I want to take the last few minutes to try to give some real, tangible examples of what this might look like to give you some tools to start implementing.

### **Set a Reminder**

I don't know about you, but when I want to start doing something regularly that I'm not already doing, I absolutely have to write it down and be a prominent reminder or it will never happen. For me, it has to be obvious and it has to be consistent. So for you it could look like setting up a recurring calendar reminder on your phone. Something that goes off and lets you know this is a good time to pray for someone in your LifeGroup. Set it up based on your daily schedule at a time you know you won't just always swipe it away. Maybe for you it looks like using part of your commute to pray specifically for someone. Maybe waiting just a few extra minutes before hitting "play" on the podcast in the car so you can thank God for someone in your life.

### **Keep a Log**

Or maybe the quick act of praying for someone is already pretty accessible for you, but the challenge is being consistent and persistent in your prayers. Maybe for you you need to start using some kind of prayer log or journal. I can give you a few people off the cuff in our church family that actively keep and update a spreadsheet of specific prayers for other people or things in our church family, and they consistently go back and update the spreadsheet when there are updates about that prayer, whether that's continuing in persistent prayer for the same thing or being able to thank God that He moved in the ways they were asking.



### Do It Immediately

It could also look specific in the moment for you. I've definitely been in LifeGroup before or hanging out with people in our church family and said "I'll be praying for you" and to be honest, there have been plenty of times where I completely forget that I said that. Sure, there are times when I don't forget, but it happens more than I'd like. So maybe we can start trying to actually do it instead of just say it. Maybe instead of saying "I'll pray for that" we can start saying "can I pray for that?" And then we do it. Right then. I know you may be thinking "I don't know about that one, I usually have somewhere to be or the conversation needs to move on," but I feel sure you can take 15 to 30 seconds and quickly pray for someone. I think the small, consistent actions are going to be what forms habits in us.

### Write It Down

Or maybe praying for someone then and there would legitimately not work. Maybe you're in LifeGroup and it's not the right time to jump in. Let me suggest this: take something with you to LifeGroup to write with and write on. Maybe don't use your phone so you don't end up just scrolling through instagram or twitter, but everyone is different. Take something to write on, and when someone brings something up they're struggling with or could use prayer for, you write it down. Then at the end of LifeGroup or later that night or week you can take it out and you can really pray for them.

The reason I want to try to give you examples and tools to start doing this is because I think it is so incredibly vital in the life of a follower of Jesus. This is what it looks like to be family together. As we close, I want to give some space to do this now...

### *Vision time*

So here's what I want to do right now. This morning I want us to get really specific and start applying it now. I want everyone to take some time to think through the people in your life or in your LifeGroup and pick someone that you think might need you to pray for their growth like it says in Ephesians 3. Or maybe there's someone who has talked to you about something they're struggling with or confessed in LifeGroup and take a couple minutes to pray for the Holy Spirit's continued work in growing them and healing them in what they're experiencing. Or if you're thinking "I don't really know that much that's going on in their lives because no one really opens up." Go ahead and pray for that. Pray for the Spirit's prompting in people to bring those things to light. Or maybe you're thinking of

someone that has recently brought something up and you just have no idea how to respond to them. You just feel lost or as if whatever you have to say won't help. Take it to the Father like it says in 1 Corinthians 2 and ask him for wisdom and for "Spirit-taught words" and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them through you in what they are experiencing. Or maybe right now, you just need to go before the Father in thanksgiving. To just thank God for the work He is doing in them and in you through the Spirit and the relationship he helps form. You can start practicing that right now. So I want to give some space for us to practice this.

...Let's pray