

But I Have Prayed for You

Praying Beyond Simple Fix-it Prayers

By Steve Hawthorne



Can you recall the last time someone told you that he or she was praying for you? No doubt it was meant to reassure you. Telling people that you've prayed for them is a loving way of encouraging them or cheering them on.

Only once do we find Jesus telling someone that He had prayed for that person. And what He said about His prayer was not a reassuring platitude. Jesus was not offering up a simple fix-it prayer aimed to deal with obvious, right-now needs. Instead, His prayer focused on the precious value of God's purposes being accomplished, even in a maelstrom of evil.

Overriding Prayer

You know the setting. It was the upper room. Jesus was wrapping up the final meal with His disciples. He'd already washed their feet and offered the broken bread and the cup of the new covenant. Jesus was trying to prepare them for the devastating things that would happen within hours. But His friends somehow didn't get it. They couldn't imagine the catastrophe that was coming.

Even though everyone was listening in, Jesus speaks directly to Peter: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). This was not a warning or a threat. Jesus was not trying to coach Peter in ways to avoid tough circumstance or to evade opposition. It wasn't advance notice to help him prepare. There's no way to prepare to be threshed like grain by satanic evil powers. Jesus was showing the rationale and the hope of His prayer and God's mighty purpose in Peter's life.

Jesus uses some rather extreme language about Satan's intent that made it all but certain that disaster was about to befall them all. The word translated in English as "asked" is a forceful word that would better be translated as "demanded." It's clear that Satan had successfully obtained permission to wreak havoc. We shouldn't speculate on the details, but somehow Satan argued a case in the courts of heaven and came away with an authorization to do some damage. The image of sifting means that whatever can be ransacked, dismantled, and torn to pieces will be. The "you" is plural. Satan was going to demolish the entire fledgling community. But one by one, he would also shred their very souls.

And then came the words, "But I have prayed for you." This time the word for "you" is singular. Jesus narrowed His prayer just for Peter. Imagine Jesus looking you in the eye and saying those words, "But I have prayed for you." What Jesus prayed shows that He was focused on what mattered to one

person, but also the greater purposes of God. He prayed “that your faith may not fail.” This simple prayer was attached to a larger purpose: “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Jesus’ prayer may surprise you. Because Satan was involved, some would expect Jesus to pray “against” the enemy. But instead of undoing Satan’s plans or canceling his assignment or binding the enemy or breaking off the curse, or . . . you name it, Jesus simply prayed for something greater that would override, overcome, and overwhelm whatever Satan had plotted. It was a counter-suit in the courts of heaven.

This isn’t the only way to pray, of course. But it may be the simplest way to pray. What matters most about Jesus’ praying was not that He knew the schemes of the enemy. What matters most was that He was praying toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose.

What Jesus Prayed

Consider how Jesus’ prayer was focused beyond the crisis toward the fulfillment of God’s purpose. There are three parts to this prayer. Let’s consider them in reverse order to better see what Jesus was envisioning.

Life purpose in God’s greater purpose. The ultimate outcome was that Peter could be told, with prophetic confidence, to “strengthen your brothers.” Much earlier, Jesus had told Peter that the name Peter, which means “rock,” had something to do with his role in what Jesus would do to build the church. Peter’s faith in Jesus would somehow anchor the entire church on the rock-solid reality of Jesus.

God had purposed that Peter would be a foundation man—a fixture, a stable, resilient strength for many others. Thus, Jesus telling Peter to strengthen his brothers wasn’t just a nice idea. Being a strength for others was Peter’s life

purpose, which mattered tremendously in God's global purpose.

Stepping into fullness of purpose. "And when you have turned . . ." What did Jesus mean by turning? "Turning" is a simple word that means several things. It's a word that can refer to conversion. But an initial decision to follow Jesus is not what this is about. Turning describes Peter's choice to pivot away from living for himself and to step into a costly way of following Jesus into the mission God had for Peter. It's not something Jesus could do for Peter. He would have to choose.

I think this turning took place weeks later as recorded in John 21:15-22. To follow Jesus, to truly love Him, would mean Peter laying down his life for Jesus' sheep. Stepping into God's purpose means being changed. Faith relationship for purpose. The simple core of the prayer was "that your faith may not fail." Within hours Peter would fail in remarkable ways. But his trust in God would not fail. Later Peter would write that faith could come out like gold, "even though refined by fire" (1 Peter 1:7). He knew that Satan could be resisted, but only if someone could stand "firm in the faith." If faith held firm, then sufferings would not end up as a random acts of evil, but instead be transformed into acts of suffering with Christ, fulfilled along with "your brothers throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:9).

This is a clear reference to Jesus' prayer. Peter, even though unfaithful, would be sufficiently full of faith so that he would end up strengthening his brothers.

How We Can Pray Like Jesus

During what was obviously a crisis moment in Peter's life, Jesus prayed a greater prayer that can teach us how to pray beyond crisis in our own friends' lives.

Pray for people instead of merely praying about problems. When we only pray for circumstances to change, we can overlook

praying for people themselves to change. Of course, it's good to pray about obvious issues and needs. Focus your hope on what God is doing to make that person like Jesus.

I try to imagine God smiling as He looks on the person I'm praying for. And then I think about what God finds precious in his or her future. Invariably, in the light of God's love and the promises of God's Word, I can get a glimpse of who this person may become.

Pray for people instead of against the enemy. There's a time and place to directly contend with dark powers. But whatever you may pray for God to do against the enemy, do not fail to pray for people. Consider yourself to be a court-appointed attorney, arguing cases in God's court on behalf of others. Enter God's courtroom with confidence that whatever the accusations or plans of the enemy may be, God's purposes are greater. Ask God to do something that overrules by going beyond and above the schemes of evil powers.

Pray before and beyond crisis. You've got to pray before a crisis in order to pray beyond it. There may be no better way to love someone than to gaze into his or her destiny, to prize what he or she will become in God, and to cry out with jealousy for it all to come forth. Be vigilant. The Spirit of God loves to give you cues about what to pray, but there's a lot to be said for simply paying attention to the story that's unfolding. Anticipate what good things are on the way.

Pray with confidence in the midst of contingency. By "contingency" I mean that things could go either way. God was not going to force Peter to love and obey Him. Peter would have to pass the test by choosing to step into the fullness of God's purpose. Jesus said "when you have turned"; not "if you turn." So Jesus was confident that Peter eventually would make that turn toward God's purpose.

But how long would it be? Jesus had focused His vision on what

God had purposed for Peter. And you can do the same, for family and friends, as well as cities and peoples. Envision what God desires by reading what He's promised and accomplished in the Bible. Thanking God for what He's already done will clear your vision to see the unique life story that's unfolding for His glory.

May you soon say with faith and assurance to those around you: "But I have prayed for you."

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