# The Ministry of Prayer

*"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you."* 1 Samuel 12:23, ESV

Could failing to pray for someone actually be a failure to serve them?

Samuel apparently thought so.

Israel had sinned against God by demanding a king. When the people recognized the seriousness of what they had done, they pleaded with Samuel, *"Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die."* Samuel assured them of God's faithfulness, but then he made a remarkable statement. He considered ceasing to pray for them a sin against the LORD.

Prayer was part of Samuel's ministry to God's people.

It was also part of the ministry of Epaphras. Paul told the Colossians that Epaphras was *"always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God."* Colossians 4:12, ESV

Notice Paul's language. Epaphras was *struggling on their behalf*.

He was doing something for them.

Ministry is often thought of as something visible. Someone preaches a sermon, teaches a class, visits the sick, serves in the nursery, prepares a meal, or welcomes people at the church door. Those are certainly ministries. But there is another ministry that may take place in a quiet room where no one else sees it.

Someone prays.

An elderly Christian may sit at home with a church directory and bring members of the congregation before the Lord one by one. A grandmother may pray for grandchildren living hundreds of miles away. A church member may pray for the pastor while he stands in the pulpit. Someone may awaken during the night and pray for a brother or sister facing a crisis.

Distance does not prevent the ministry of prayer.

Neither does physical limitation.

There may come a day when the hands can no longer serve as they once did, the feet can no longer go where they once went, and the voice can no longer teach as it once taught. But the Christian can still come before the throne of grace on behalf of another.

Paul repeatedly did exactly that. He told the Ephesians, *"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father."* Ephesians 3:14, ESV. He told the Philippians, *"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more."* Philippians 1:9, ESV. His ministry to those churches did not end when he was separated from them. He continued serving them through prayer.

And prayer is not meaningful merely because another person feels supported by knowing someone is praying. Prayer matters because God hears prayer.

Scripture invites believers to *"draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* Hebrews 4:16, ESV

Intercession brings the needs of another person before the God who is able to answer.

The person being prayed for may never know.

There may be no committee appointment, no ministry schedule, and no recognition. No one may ever say thank you.

But God heard.

And someone was served.

Prayer is not merely preparation for ministry.

Prayer itself is ministry.

Just a thought.

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