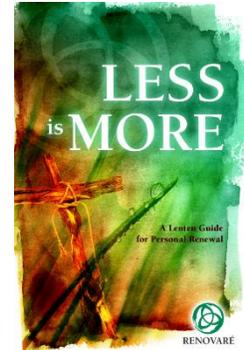


Less is More – Week Five

Intercession: Less Me/More Others

Lent 2023

This guide for group discussion is based on the Renovare resource, Less is More, written by Pastor Kai Nilsen with contributions from Richella Parham and Rachel Quan.



Opening Questions

- Who might have prayed for you, recently or when you were younger? How does it feel to know someone is praying for you?
- If you were able to try one of the faith practices last week, how did it go? What did you notice or experience? What about this practice could you continue to build into your life?

Opening Prayer

This responsive reading comes from the opening hymn for Wednesday worship.

One: Come and find the quiet center in the crowded life we lead,

All: Find the room for hope to enter, find the frame where we are freed:

One: Clear the chaos and the clutter, clear our eyes, that we can see

All: All the things that really matter, be at peace, and simply be. Amen.

Introduction:

Followers of Jesus know, deep in the marrow of their bones, they are bound to each other intimately, mysteriously, for the good of all. Intercessory prayer is the thread that binds us together.

Intercessory prayer gathers our concern for and delight in others, placing them foremost in our minds and hearts by lifting them to the mind and heart of God. We know that God is already aware of the need but the prayer of intercession weaves together our life with the life of God and the life of another person, connecting us to a power beyond our own and a depth of loving concern that we could not muster on our own power and initiative. Intercessory prayer lifts us out of ourselves and puts the care of another person at the center of our journey together with God. Less Me/More Others.

What Does the Bible Say?

Luke 18: 1-8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my accuser.' For a while he refused, but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- What does this say about our persistence in prayer?
- Do you ever wonder if your prayers are being heard? What is your response when that happens? Do you doubt God? Do you doubt prayer? Do you keep praying?
- Have you ever considered that a prayer of disbelief, of struggle, or doubt, is a prayer God wants to hear? What's your response to this idea?

What Do Others Say?

Our Guides

"If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving others.... When we move from petition to intercession we are shifting our center of gravity from our own needs to the needs and concerns of others. Intercessory prayer is selfless prayer, even self-giving prayer." -Richard Foster, Prayer

- Notice the intersection between love and intercessory prayer. Can you recall an experience when your love for someone was deepened as you held them in prayer?
- If, indeed, intercessory prayer is a way of loving others, what prayer habit can you build into your life so that you can love others more fully?

What Do Others Say?

Personal Reflections written by Pastor Kai Nilsen, Richella Parham and Rachel Quan

I had the opportunity to be in the presence of this remarkable man only a few times. Bill had built the foundations of his life and ministry on the power of prayer. His career was an overwhelming success by any external measure though you would never know as you engaged this humble man, sensing the internal strength of God's spirit and his spirit in concert. Prior to meeting him, his wife had died after a prolonged battle with cancer.

In an early conversation, I decided to take a risk. "Bill" I said, "You can choose not to respond if this is still too raw but I'd like to know how you dealt with the reality that your whole ministry was/is built on prayer and, my guess is, thousands of people were praying for your wife's healing, yet, she died."

A tear peered over the edge of his eyelid as he said, "I don't know. And I haven't fully come to grips with the why question. But, what I do know is that I have seen and experienced the power of healing prayer many times in my ministry. That it didn't happen for me in my wife's case is a mystery. All I know is that it is possible."

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- When you think about intercessory prayer, what are the questions that come up for you? What comfort does it bring?
- Have you experienced a time when your prayers were not answered in the way you hoped? How does Bill's response inform your response?
- How have you experienced the power of prayer?
- How has prayer shaped your relationship with someone else, maybe someone who prayed for you or someone you prayed for?
- How does intercessory prayer relate to the subtitle of this session, *Less Me/More Others?*
- For whom can you pray today? Share their first name or your relationship (my friend, my family member, my coworker...) with the group, if you feel comfortable.

Faith Practice: Intercession

Here are some ideas for practicing intercession:

- Make a list of people to pray for. Be specific. Commit to pray for them each day.
- As you listen to or read the news, pray specifically for someone impacted by community or world events.
- Throughout the week, as names of people come to mind, say a prayer for them or better yet, make contact with them and tell them their name came to mind. See where it goes.

- Visit the chalkboard in the Incarnation Chapel where people have written prayer concerns and pray or use the prayer concerns listed in the Sunday email announcements.

Closing Questions

- How have you experienced God's presence in this season?
- How has your connection with yourself or with others deepened as you've explored one or more of the faith practices?
- Which practice(s) will you continue to build into your life?

Faith Practice Questions:

- What do you think about this practice?
- What do you think is the core intention, or hope?
- What is helpful about the practice? What is challenging or difficult? What do you wonder about?
- What are some other ways to do this practice, keeping in mind the purpose?

Closing Prayer

Thank you for being part of this small group experience!

Creator God, you prepare a new way in the wilderness, and your grace waters our desert. Open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the extravagance of your love given to all through our Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and forever. Amen.

Come and Find the Quiet Center. Text: Shirley Erena Murray, (c) 1992 Hope Publishing Company. CCLI License #404667.

Less is More: A Lenten Guide for Personal Renewal by Nilsen, Kai, Richella Parham, & Rachel Quan. Renovare. 2013. www.renovare.org.

Prayer from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Prayer for Fifth Sunday in Lent, page 29). © 2006. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States.