

Watto is a blokey block [Slide 1] with a great gift of encouragement. He has such a passion to encourage others, especially blokes, that a few years ago he wrote a book called, *Every bloke's a champion, even you!* The first chapter is about the power of turbocharged words. In this chapter, he relates the following story.

My grandmother lived into her nineties, a powerful old matriarch and maverick who wore tangerine socks!

One day she pushed the wrong number on her speed dial and got my phone by mistake. 'Oh darling,' she said, 'I thought I was talking to Dorothy. You're a wonderful boy. I just want you to know that I pray for you every day. God bless you Ian.' And she put the phone down.

I ran into the bedroom and jumped on the bed and cried like a little boy. Yes, I'm a big sook and that's the way I react when I feel really emotional all of a sudden! The part deep inside of me was so joyful, because it hit me: *Here's my dear grandmother, this old lady with impaired vision who a lot of people probably think is a bit eccentric, and she prays for every family member by name every day. No wonder I've got such a fantastic life.* She call a wrong number by accident, **but her words turbocharged my day.** (pp. 9-10)

How amazing it was for Watto to know that he was so important to his grandma, that he was being prayed for, ... every day, ... by name.

In the gospels we read how Jesus also prayed for children, [Slide 2]

¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could [bless] them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." (Matthew 19:13-14, NLT)

Today I want to share with you a vision the Grow Team have had ever since our first coaching session. As a congregation we have contact with quite a number of children. Many of you do a great job of taking an interest in these children. We want to take this one step further. [Slide 3] We want to have people regularly praying for the children and parents of our congregation.

As you may be aware, this is one of the roles of the baptismal sponsors or godparents. They promise to pray for the person and take an interest in them. This is an important responsibility. And some people take this promise more seriously than others. Yet like most things, this is something that, as humans, we can wax and wane in at times.

But it's not just the godparents who make a promise. At the end of the right of baptism we are given a directive as a congregation.

[Slide 4]

Members and disciples of Temora Lutheran Community Church, ... I ask you to pray for them and be a good example to them.

So today I want to conclude our prayer series by asking, [Slide 5] 'What does it look like to pray for others?' And, 'How we can become serious about praying for the children and families in our congregation?'

Intercession

[Slide 6] So let's talk about praying for others. The term, "Intercession" can sound big and scary. But it's simply a fancy word to say 'praying for others'. So, for example, if you were to pray something like, "Dear God, please heal Uncle Bill, who is not feeling too well." – You have just prayed a prayer of intercession! You are being an intercessor.

Wow. How easy was that? Who thought a scary term like 'intercessory prayer' could be that simple. You could think of it like having a cup of coffee with your best friend and updating them on the news about your family. Praying for others is as simple as talking to the Father about the people in your life.

So why would we pray for others anyway? Because the bible tells us to. When we pray for others, we are living out what Jesus does for us. John 17 records Jesus praying for his disciples and for us. [Slide 7]

Holy Father, ... protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. ...

¹⁵ I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. ... ¹⁷ Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. (John 17:11-17, NLT)

We can pray for others because [Slide 8] sometimes people don't know what or how to pray. This might be because they don't know God, they don't know that they can talk to him, or they don't know how to talk to him. In this situation, we can discuss their needs with the Father, on their behalf.

It could also be that they may not feel inclined to talk to him at the moment. This could be for various reasons. For example, some may be finding things tough, or they are going through a period of doubts. So they are having trouble trusting in the Father at the moment.

They could also be going through a really difficult time and are just exhausted from praying. They have run out of words, energy, or both. So in each of these situations, we can stand in the gap. We can pray on their behalf.

Another reason to pray for others is because it is one way we can help, love and serve each other and those around us. As our theme verse says,

² Share each other's burdens, ... ³ If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important. Galatians 6:2-3 (NLT)

When we pray for someone else, we are saying that they are really important and special to us. That they mean a lot to us. People are often blown away when they hear that we bother to

take the time to pray to the Father about them. That we would actually bother our God with them, shows that we really value them.

That means we don't need to be a mighty prayer warrior to intercede for others. Whenever you pray for someone else, you are interceding for them.

What to pray for

So what should we pray for when we pray for others? [Slide 9] Well, we can go back to last week's sermon. We can pray with IMPACT. A healthy prayer life:

- *I*ncludes a
- *M*ixture of
- *P*raising
- *A*sking
- *C*onfessing, and
- *T*hanksgiving

Another thing we can do is ask them. I often ask people, "Is there anything in particular you would like to thank God for or ask him for?" Then I listen carefully to what they say and make sure I pray for that. Sometimes the points are obvious from the conversation that we've just had. At other times it can be surprising what people list. We might think they want to be spared from a particular situation, but they may ask instead for strength to endure in the situation they are in. At other times they may actually raise an issue we hadn't even discussed.

Now, [Slide 10] we can pray for them in silence or in private. And our prayers may be just as effective. God hears us just the same. But when we pray out loud the other person can hear too. We pray aloud for their sake – which can be a great gift. It reassures them that we are actually praying for them. Otherwise we may say that we will pray for them, but they are left wondering if we actually will.

And there is no limit to how we can pray. We can pray in person or over the phone. We can also send them the words we're praying however you communicate. I've sent prayers via an email, text message, Facebook comment, private message, letter and greeting card. This prayer is also prayed twice. It is prayed as we are writing it, and prayed again as they read it.

Who to pray for

[Slide 11] Now there's a lot of people in this world. We don't have time to pray for everyone. So how do we prioritise and decide who to pray for? Who should be our focus?

I find it helpful to consider our position and calling. What's called our station and vocation. For example, I'm a husband, a father, a brother, a son, an uncle, a baptismal sponsor or godparent, a pastor, and a member of this community. I can pray for all the people I am in relationship with. That is my wife, my son, my brothers and in-laws, my mother, my nieces and nephews, my baptismal children, my congregation and my community.

We can combine this with the IMPACT prayers discussed last week. That means we can thank and praise God for them and our relationship with them. We can ask God for things on their behalf and ask him to improve our relationship with them. There may also be a sin we want to confess in regard to our relationship with them.

The 5-finger prayer

Another way to think about who to pray for is to use what's called **[Slide 12]** the 5-finger-prayer. It helps us pray by thinking about the various aspects of our life.

Put your hands up in front of you in a praying pose. Let's now go through the five digits, starting with the thumb.

Thumb - Closest

[Slide 13] We can start by praying for those who are closest to us. That is usually our family and friends. If someone is important to you, why not pray for them?

Pointer Finger - Guide

[Slide 14] The next digit is known as the pointer finger. We remember those who point the way or guide us in life. This could include teachers, pastors, coaches, mentors etc.

Tall finger - Leaders

[Slide 15] The next finger is usually the tallest. This reminds us to remember those in leadership. Paul writes to Timothy, [Slide 16]

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. ² Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.³ This is good and pleases God our Saviour,⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4, NLT)

Paul tells us to pray for our Government. Why? So we can live peaceful, quiet lives. But what if we don't like the Government. – Well, let's remember two things. Firstly, Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies. Secondly, when Paul was writing this, Christianity was illegal. Christians were actually being persecuted by their Government. But Paul tells Timothy to pray for them anyway. He tells Timothy that the government really need our prayers if there is any hope of us living peaceful, quiet lives.

So our tall finger reminds us to pray for civil leaders like our queen, our government, our local council. We can pray for leaders in our church, like the ministry team, or the leaders of a community group we are involved with.

This finger also reminds us to pray for those we are in authority over. Recently I read a quote, [Slide 17]

“Leadership is not about being in charge. It is about caring for those in our charge.” (Simon Sinek)

One way we do that is to pray for those we are called to care for.

As we pray, [Slide 18] we might also confess and repent of ways we have disrespected those in authority. We can also confess to the

Father ways in which we have neglected those we are called to care for.

Weakest finger

[Slide 19] The next finger is often considered the weakest. This is because of the tendons joining it to the fingers beside it. It is hard to move the ring finger without moving one of the fingers on either side. This reminds us to pray for those who are weak, who are sick or unwell.

Little finger

Now most times that I've heard this model of prayer explained, [Slide 20] people have used the little finger to remind us to pray for ourselves last. Now this troubles me, because too many Christians have a low view of self. I don't have time to go into this today, but I will share another insight.

When we were discussing this model of prayer in a recent confirmation workshop, Taleah asked, "So when do we pray for our enemies?"

What a great question. [Slide 21] So the little finger reminds us of our enemies. It reminds us to pray either for those who make us feel small, or for those that we consider too small to bother with.

5-finger IMPACT prayers

So now we have a matrix of IMPACT prayer points along the top, combined with five different types of people in our life along the side. And if you still happen to run out of ideas of who and what to pray for, you can always start again.

Praying for local families long-term

[Slide 22] As I alluded to at the start, as a congregation we would like to be praying for every family in our congregation. Children and parents face many challenges these days. We want to go into bat for them. We want to support them on their journey. We would love to have 3-5 adults or homes praying for each family with children – including those families we don't see regularly.

So today we have two forms for you to consider. [Slide 23] If you have children in your family, we are asking you to prayerfully consider who will you ask to pray for your family. We would like you to approach those people and ask them if they would pray for member(s) of your family.

Secondly, we want to be realistic. We don't expect every family to do this, especially those who have less contact with the congregation. Yet we don't want to leave them out. So to achieve our goal, [Slide 24] we are asking everyone to consider, how many families you think you could sustainably pray for long-term and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you in choosing who to pray for.

In summary, Jesus stands in the gap and prays for you and me. May we stand in the gap and pray for others in our life and pray for our relationship with them. What's more, may we be a church that prays for its families and the journey they are travelling.