

INTERCESSION

As you study the words the Bible uses to describe prayer, you see that there are different aspects of prayer. Sometimes prayer takes the form of praise. You just spend time thanking God for who He is and what He does. At other times, you ask Him for things that you need in your life. Then there is the issue of confession-of asking God to forgive your sins. One of the most neglected aspects of prayer is called intercession. Intercession is asking God to do for other people what you know you could never do for them.

Intercession is standing in the gap for others. In mountain climbing lingo it is holding the ropes. In ancient deep sea diving with the steel tanks it is to stand guard manning the oxygen pumps. Intercession is pleading a cause of another.

S.D. Gordon wrote, "The greatest thing you can do for God and man is to pray. You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed."

Andrew Murray said, "We must begin to believe that God, in the mystery of prayer, has entrusted us with a force that can move the heavenly world, and can bring its power down to earth."

John Knox constantly carried the burden for his land. Night after night he prayed on the wooden floor. When his wife pleaded with him to get some sleep, he answered, "How can I sleep when my land is not saved?" Knox would pray all night in agonizing tones, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!" God shook Scotland by his prayers.

John Hyde was called the Apostle of Intercession of India. He often cried out, "Father, give me these souls or I die!" He alternated in agony of intercession and joyous praise, receiving tremendous answers to prayer and by the end of his missionary service was averaging more than four souls a day, largely won through prayer.

1. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS A SELFLESS THING

So much of our praying revolves around ourselves. It is about what I want and need. It is so that things will be better for me. There is absolutely nothing wrong about praying for our needs. That's what God tells us to do. But there is also something very right about praying for other people. God calls us to minister to other people, but we can't do that very well as long as we are consumed with self. Praying for others is a call away from self.

2. INTERCESSORY PRAYER REQUIRES LISTENING TO GOD

Intercession, in its truest form, is not us praying for something that we think to be important. It is our praying for someone who God has put in our hearts to pray for. In other words, God has a burden about someone, and He transfers that burden to our hearts so that we can pray for that person. If God is burdened about something, why doesn't He just do something about it? God has chosen to work through the prayers of His people. When we pray for someone and God answers, it brings glory to God. It strengthens our faith, and it creates a closeness in our hearts for the one we are praying for. The first part of interceding for other people is to listen to the burden God is placing on our hearts concerning them. In Genesis 18, we see God making a surprise visit to Abraham.

Genesis 18:1-3, "The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground."

One of these men was actually an appearance of God. Sometimes in the Old Testament, God would take on some kind of visible expression. For example, we know that God later appeared to Moses as a flame that would not burn out in the burning bush of Exodus 3. When there was fire, smoke and thunder on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 that was also a visible representation of God. Such appearances are usually called "theophanies." On the other hand, sometimes the visible appearance of God was in human form, usually represented by what is known as the "angel of the Lord." Such was the case here. God appeared in human form along with 2 angels who were also in human form for the purpose of sharing what God was going to do with Abraham.

Genesis 18:10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

Genesis 18:22, "The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD."

Does God still speak to His people? Absolutely. Most of the time, God is going to use His Word to speak to you, but He can speak through anything. Charles Stanley relates the story about how, early on in his life, God spoke powerfully to him through a cleaning woman. It may be that God will use a fellow employee or a wife, a husband, child or a song, or He may use a trial or a blessing. God is not limited as to how He gets your attention. What can we do to hear God?

a) DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Abraham was the friend of God. One of the blessings of having a true friend is the fact that you can share things with your friend that you would not share with other people. The same is true with God. Everything else being equal, God shares more of His secrets with those who are closest to Him.

Psalm 25:14 says, "The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them."

That is an awesome verse. How would you like it if the Lord were to confide in you? That's what He did with Abraham. God shares His secrets with people who have made it their purpose in life to know Him deeply.

b) BE SENSITIVE

You need to be sensitive because God's voice can be easily missed. Have you ever been so involved in something that you didn't hear someone who was talking to you? Maybe you were thinking very deeply about something, or maybe you were really into a television program. Whatever the case, someone in the room was talking to you, and you were totally unaware of what they were saying. If you are not careful, you can be so consumed with what you are doing in the busyness of life that you miss what God is saying to you

c) BE READY

Be ready because God's timing is unpredictable. God may break into the flow of your life when you least expect Him to do so with a truth that will change your life if you will receive and apply it. That's the way it was in biblical times, and that's the way it is today.

3. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS A FAITH BUILDER

Abraham had been waiting for nearly 25 years for the son the Lord promised him, and by this time he probably needed some encouragement, and that's what God gave.

Genesis 18:9 "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. 10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which

was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing."

It is likely that at this point Sarah did not know who these men were. All she knew was that she had waited all these years for a son, and now that she is past the physical ability to have a child, some guy comes along out of nowhere and announces that she will have a child in a year. She must have thought this guy must be crazy! God answers with one of the most important questions that can be asked. It is a question that all of us ask repeatedly throughout our lives.

Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."

From time to time, we all ask that question- Is anything too hard for the LORD?" You may have asked it this week. Can God really meet my material needs? Can He really meet my emotional needs? This verse is one of the mountain peak verses of the Bible. It's like Matt 19:26 where Jesus said "with God all things are possible." The songwriter wrote, "Got any rivers you think are uncrossable? Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible." That's good news, because every one of us are going to experience obstacles in our lives that seem to be impossible.

It was certainly that way with Abraham. To have a son in his old age would have been impossible. Why did God make Abraham and Sarah wait so long for a son? Why did God wait until they were so old?

If Abraham and Sarah would have had a child earlier in life, there would have been no miracle. People have children all the time. On the other hand, at their age it would take an act of God to give them a biological child. That's what happened, and we are remembering that miracle even down to this day.

When God wants to teach you life-long lessons that you will never forget, He many times will allow you to exhaust all of your resources before He moves in to answer your prayers. It is in those hopeless times when you have tried it all and nothing has worked that God moves in and easily does what we could not have done in a million years. That's how great faith is built. God wants us to understand that He is not limited by the things that limit you.

4. INTERCESSORY PRAYER IS A DEMANDING THING

True intercessory prayer is not something you do lightly. It requires real devotion, time and effort. Genesis 18:16- tells us the story of how God told Abraham about His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Those 2 cities were filled with wickedness. If you know the story, you know that Abraham prayed that God would not destroy the cities if there were found in those cities 50 righteous people. Then he asked God to not destroy

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the cities if 45 righteous people were found. Abraham continued to reduce the number until he got to 10, and God agreed every time.

That story tells us that intercessory prayer is not mentioning something in prayer and then going on to something else. Many times it involves a struggle in our faith. It requires continuing to pray because we believe something to be for God's glory.

The New Testament gives us the example of a man named Epaphras.

Colossians 4:12 says, "Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."

This man was always pouring his heart in prayer for the Christians in Colosse. Not only that, he was "wrestling" in prayer for them. That man knew how to pray for others.

When we ask someone to pray for us, most of the time we don't realize what we are asking. When we say, "I'll pray for you, we usually have no idea what we are saying.

In April 19, 1742, David Brainerd, missionary to American Indians, wrote in his diary: "I set apart this day for fasting and prayer to prepare me for the ministry. In the forenoon, I felt a power of intercession for immortal souls. In the afternoon, God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that I was quite wet with sweat, though in the shade and the cool wind. My soul was drawn out very much for the world: I gasped for multitudes of souls. I think I had more enlargement for sinners than for the children of God, though I felt as if I could spend my life in cries for both."

Intercessory prayer is a demanding thing, and it changes lives and situations far more than we know.

Exodus 17:8-13 tells the story of Moses' intercession. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites, Joshua led the armies of Israel, and Moses went up on a hill to pray. As long as Moses was praying, the Israelites were winning. When Moses stopped praying, the enemy began winning.

I wonder how often that is true in the lives of people around us. As long as you are praying, they are defeating the enemy. It is when we stop praying that they begin losing the battle. Moses prayer was just as vital to victory as Joshua's fighting. Not everyone can be a Joshua, but everyone can be a Moses. Everyone can intercede for others.