

What is Intercession?

We know there are many kinds of prayer. *Devotional prayer* is our private, individual prayer relationship with Jesus.ⁱ *Prayer ministry* is praying for a person in person. Often this involves prayer for some type of healing, and it often involves laying on of hands as a gesture of our request that God would touch the person's need.ⁱⁱ *Petitionary prayer* is request-based prayer that happens alone or in groups. In petitionary prayer, we bring the requests of our heart to God and ask him to intervene.ⁱⁱⁱ *Intercession* is most often mistaken as simply "petitionary prayer for others." True intercession moves beyond petition.

Paradigm:

Intercessory prayer is mediating between God's purposes and feelings, and the condition of his creation. It always involves listening to God (through listening prayer, Scripture, community, and leadership) about his purposes, and it always involves observing the condition of God's mission on earth. It is best done in groups, and it often involves God's purposes being done in the people who are praying.^{iv}

Biblically, intercession is understood as **mediation**.^v A mediator must credibly identify with both sides. There is a back and forth dynamic in intercessory prayer, sometimes pictured as "standing in the gap" – we are paying attention to the reality in heaven and on earth. How does God care about the issues and feelings on all sides? Listening is key. Intercession always begins with listening, observing, asking, hearing. Intercessory prayer is drawn to the greatest tension – what is the heart of the issue? Paul tells us that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus are interceding for us.^{vi} Therefore, we can ask, "Lord, how are you praying for this? What are you doing here? How do you want us to pray?" Discernment is important, which is why interceding in groups is preferable. We need to rely on the Lord for both the target (what is the "on earth as it is in heaven" outcome we are seeking in prayer) and the strategy (how we are to pray or embody this longing).

Prerequisites:

- **Maturity.** Deal with your own issues first. It's not about you even though God is involving you to pray. Repent of your own frailties first. We want to get out of the way, so that we can focus on heaven and earth. If something does come up inside you (anger, sorrow, irritation, apathy, shame, even physical sensations) ask the Lord if this is for prayer – he may be granting you the grace to feel what others are feeling.
- **Humility.** You can't intercede from a place of superiority. Think of Moses, Daniel, or Nehemiah identifying with the sins of their people – it's not "their sins" but our sins. This is the opposite of patronizing, colonizing prayer. If you feel you're better than the people you are praying for, better to leave this for someone else.
- **Authority.** If we submitted to God, are in line with His purposes and in step with the Holy Spirit, we can pray with great authority and conviction until there is breakthrough. Our authority comes from the Lord since we are praying for things that He wants to do. This is a curious, but true, companion to the humility and agony of intercession.

What is Intercession?

Some practical principles:

1. Resistance – resist the lies.

Whatever lies and deceptions are at work (by various voices, internal as well as external) need to be called out and resisted in Jesus' name.

2. Insistence – call forth the truth.

In opposition to the lies, what is true about this person/situation/institution from God's point of view? Walter Wink talks about calling things back to their "divine vocation" – what is the purpose for which they were created, or what is God's intention for them. This can apply to people, systems, structures, organizations, places, etc.

3. Persistence – don't give up.

We give up far too easily. Keep praying until something shifts. This can happen during one intercession session or may take years of praying. Develop resilience like Anna and Simeon who waited in the Temple praying for many years to see the consolation of Israel.

What about spiritual warfare? Firstly, realize that in Jesus' view, it is the Kingdom of God that is on the front foot! And where the kingdom is advancing, there will be resistance and opposition. Don't be surprised. Don't be afraid – we have all authority and power in Jesus. Don't be moved. As Paul says, we are equipped with armor so that we can stand! (Eph. 6:10-20). Ask God how the schemes and strongholds of the enemy are to be defeated. Don't be distracted – keep the end goal in mind and keep praying until there is breakthrough.

"Intercessory prayer is spiritual defiance of what is in the name of what God has promised. Intercession visualizes an alternative future to the one apparently fated by the momentum of current forces. Prayer infuses the air of a time yet to be into the suffocating atmosphere of the present... History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being. If this is so, then intercession, far from being an escape from action, is a means of focusing for action and of creating action. By means of our intercessions we veritably cast fire upon the earth and trumpet the future into being." Walter Wink, The Powers That Be

For further reading:

- Mountain Rain by Eileen Crossman
- The Powers That Be by Walter Wink
- Lord, Teach Us to Pray by Dr. Gideon Andrew Thompson
- Becoming a Prayer Warrior by Elizabeth Alves

ⁱ John 15:1-11

ⁱⁱ James 5:14-18

ⁱⁱⁱ Philippians 4:6-7

^{iv} Definition by Jason Jensen, VP Spiritual Foundations for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

^v see Genesis 18:17-33, Nehemiah 1, Ezekiel 37:15-23, Daniel 9, and John 17 for some examples

^{vi} Romans 8:26-27, 34