

PRINCIPLES OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

If God is already infinitely loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful, why do we need to pray for others?

WHY PRAY FOR OTHERS?

Since God is already involved in everyone's life for their good, isn't He already doing everything that needs to be done? While we may never understand all the issues involved, the following principles about intercessory prayer do seem clear:

A. Intercession is our Lord's plan and command for us.

1. Jesus calls us to intercession. (Luke 11:1-13)
 - a. Jesus teaches the disciples to intercede in the Lord's prayer. (Luke 11:1-4)
 - b. He stresses the importance of persistent intercession in the parable of the persistent friend. (Luke 11:5-8)
 - c. He promises it will be effective: "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Luke 11:9, 10)
 - d. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will be given "to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:11-13)
2. Jesus Himself interceded for others.
 - a. He was often found in prayer. (Mark 1:35; Luke 11:1)
 - b. He interceded much for his followers. (John 17:6-26)
3. Prophets also confirm it is God's plan.
 - a. Apostle Paul: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. . . . For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior." (1 Tim. 2:1-3)
 - b. James: "You do not have because you do not ask." (James 4:2)
 - c. Ellen White: "Ministering angels are waiting about the throne to instantly obey the mandate of Jesus Christ to answer every prayer offered in earnest, living faith." (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 377)

B. Intercession opens doors in the Great Controversy to release God's power. He has limited Himself in some ways to our prayers.

1. "It is part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask." (*The Great Controversy*, p. 525)
2. "Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before His strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles. (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 346)
3. "Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 362)

C. Intercessory prayer changes me in positive ways. It intensifies my desire for the things prayed for and opens my mind to the prompting and communications of the Holy Spirit.

1. "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 93)

D. Intercessory prayer works. Taste and see!

1. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 John 5:14, 15)

E. Okay, the Lord has called us to intercede. But how?

HOW TO PRAY FOR OTHERS: PRACTICAL STEPS

A. Pray in faith, following the ABCs of prayer: Ask, Believe, Claim.

1. Claim His promises: "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:4)
2. Give thanks in advance of seeing the answer.
 - a. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6, 7)
 - b. "For the pardon of sin, for the Holy Spirit, for a Christlike temper, for wisdom and strength to do His work, for any gift that He has promised, we may ask; then we are to believe that we receive, and return thanks to God that we have received. We need look for no outward evidence of the blessing. The gift is in the promise, and we may go about our work assured that what God has promised He is able to perform, and that the gift, which we already possess, will be realized when we need it most." (*Education*, p. 258)
 - c. "We do not pray any too much, but we are too sparing of giving thanks. If the lovingkindness of God called forth more thanksgiving and praise, we would have far more power in prayer." (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 317)

B. Unite with others in intercession for greater power.

1. "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matt. 18:19, 20)
2. Use short sentence prayers or "conversational prayer" when interceding in a group for better interest level and ministry to each other.

C. Be specific with requests and record the answers.

1. A prayer journal or prayer list helps memory and strengthens our faith as answers come. Write the requests down and record the answers as they come.

D. Be persistent and don't give up.

1. "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." (Col. 4:2)
2. "Perseverance in prayer has been made a condition of receiving. We must pray always if we would grow in faith and experience." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 97)
3. "Jacob prevailed because he was persevering and determined. His experience testifies to the power of importunate prayer. It is now that we are to learn this lesson of prevailing prayer, of unyielding faith. The greatest victories to the church of Christ or to the individual Christian are not those that are gained by talent or education, by wealth or the favor of men. They are those victories that are gained in the audience chamber with God, when earnest, agonizing faith lays hold upon the mighty arm of power." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 203)

E. Take time for heart searching, confession, and obedience.

1. "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight." (1 John 3:20-22)

F. Prioritize your personal time with God

1. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." (John 15:7)

G. Trust God—He always answers, but sometimes He says "No" or "Wait."

1. Consider the definition of true faith found in Daniel 3:17, 18. The three Hebrews vowed to follow God even if He did not deliver them from the fiery furnace.
2. If God really wanted to punish us, He'd answer all our prayers with "yes."
3. "When we do not receive the very things we ask for, at the time we ask, we are still to believe that the Lord hears, and that He will answer our prayers. We are so erring and short-sighted that we sometimes ask for things that would not be a blessing to us, and our heavenly Father in love answers our prayers by giving us that which will be for our highest good—that which we ourselves would desire if with vision divinely enlightened we could see all things as they really are. When our prayers seem not to be answered, we are to cling to the promise; for the time of answering will surely come, and we shall receive the blessing we need most. . . . God is too wise to err, and too good to withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly. Then do not fear to trust Him, even though you do not see the immediate answer to your prayers. Rely upon His sure promise, 'Ask, and it shall be given you' (Matthew 7:7)." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 96)