

Intercessory Prayer



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Anglican Fellowship of Prayer (Canada)

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Intercessory Prayer (Praying for others and ourselves)

Intercessory prayer generally refers to the aid which Jesus extends as mediator between God and humankind. When we “pray for others” we have a particular sense that *Christ is our Advocate*. Our prayers and praises are acceptable to God through Christ’s intercessions. (*1 John 2:1, Heb. 4:14-16*) The Apostle Paul reveals that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as we pray. (*Rom. 8:26-27*)

The goal of intercessory prayer is a closer and deeper fellowship with Jesus as Lord, as Saviour and as Brother. The basis of intercessory prayer is scriptural and experiential. It is grounded in the central truth of the Christian faith: death and resurrection, dying to self and living in Christ, suffering and rejoicing, despair and hope, and above all and through all, having **FAITH AND HOPE**. *The dynamic* of intercessory prayer is to bring before God, in the power of the Spirit, with Jesus as Mediator and Advocate, those persons and concerns which we feel bidden to hold in prayer. This *dynamic* may be carried out in public or private, corporately or individually, formally or informally.

We can offer Intercessions to God all through our waking day.

While we work, study or play we can pray for those who are around us, holding them and their needs in God's healing grace. Many Christians who have seen their situation as routine and boring have had their attitudes transformed as a result of intercessory prayer. (*Luke 5:4-11*) Suddenly the environment of the workplace, home or play area becomes a field of opportunity for witness and service for God.

Intercessions are to be thoughtful and timely

*"The heart of Christ in the heart of the Christian is the vital centre of practical Christianity, the living foundation of all its healing agencies" (Creative Prayer, E. Herman, P. 110). **That heart is formed in us by prayer.** It may be a noble motive which drives us to work harder for the good of others. We may even wish to do good for God. Yet these things we do can distance us from God. If the heart of our good works is trust in our own effort then our intercessory requests become erratic in presentation. The result is the deterioration of our relationship with God and it can end in a cry of despair. The spiritual wisdom of the centuries distilled from Scripture and from the lives of the Saints always commends us to 'draw closer to God'.*

"But strive first for the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all things will be given to you as well." (Matt. 6:33)

The great needs of the people pressed upon Jesus from all sides yet scripture reveals that He never allowed them to drown His personal need of fellowship with God. *"...many crowds would gather to hear him and be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray." (Luke 5:15-16)*

It has been known from the day of Pentecost that there needs to be a time when play and work are set aside and we are with God in concentrated prayer and study. Again in the life of Jesus, His followers find their example (*Matt. 14:13*). The time each day will vary according to our individual disposition and the particular environment of our pilgrimage.

Do not be disheartened, continue to exercise your Faith

'I prayed with all my heart that my child would be healed and she died'. We can substitute sister, brother, parent, spouse or friend, but the sense of loss and defeat is common to the experience of many Christians. We ask the question, 'O God, why?' Our sense of forsakenness is always upheld in Jesus' cry from the Cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" (Matt. 27:46)*

We are not always given answers or reasons. Christ's cry of 'God-forsakenness' was answered by the Resurrection. Our feelings of being forsaken by God when we experience the death of a loved-one will be healed by the resurrected Jesus.

We recall Jesus' reappearance to the disciples after the Resurrection. He carried the scars of the Cross in His glorified body. The memory of His suffering was there but it was a healed memory. Some answers are given to us very clearly in specific time and space and others will only be understood in Resurrection time, that is, eternity with God. **Faith, to be faith, has to have its testing time** and often follows the cry from the heart, 'O God, why?' or 'O God, how? How will I live through this?'



Include forgiveness in your Intercessions

Systems and techniques have been very helpful to hosts of Christians. Yet we must bear in mind that **our moral and spiritual condition as a framework for our life of prayer is of primary importance**. If we are going to intercede for someone, first we must take the Lord's teaching seriously when He said, *"So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first to be reconciled, and then come and offer your gift"*. (Matt. 5:23, 24) It is only when we are right with God and our neighbour to the degree he or she will let us (Romans 12:18), that we are enabled to pray with a free heart.

Intercession needs to be personal.

Our prayers need the intensity born from the womb of God's grace working in our lives. Draw near in faith, dare to pray to God for the sick, the disturbed, those who have fallen away, those who do not know God.

We are called to lose our life with Christ (*Matt. 10:39*). We can become so taken up with the fallenness and despair of the world that we lose ourselves to that instead. In the words of a hymn, "*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full on His wondrous face*", not on the misery and suffering. The person and the situation have been entrusted to His healing power. Remember that the vision of the Cross weighed down with Jesus' spiritual and physical suffering has the glow of the resurrection as background.

Pray specifically

God sometimes invites you to play a part in the solution. God may reveal that you spend time with the person for whom you pray. In a visit by telephone or in person, each of you will experience a mutual blessing. Out of your acceptance and love in the Spirit, you may be given the opportunity and privilege to share the love of Jesus Christ with that person. You thus become the channel of Christ's compassion, light and healing love.

Intercessory prayer is a risk!



It leads us into a new commitment and involvement in areas where we might not have gone by choice. It contributes to our horizon of new adventure. **It prods us to deeper spiritual growth.** The Christian who is regularly involved with God in daily sessions of intercessory prayer will never be bored with life.

Thanksgiving

The companion of intercessory prayer is thanksgiving. When we thank God regularly for answers to prayer, the practical result is new zeal for intercession. Evil overcome is a cause for rejoicing in heaven and on earth. Beautiful communion between the soul and God is our reward for prayers answered in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When we continually give thanks to God for His benefits we become more and more aware of God at work in others around us. Thus our communion with our neighbour is deepened. We understand and appreciate him or her better.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes of the lovely marriage of thanksgiving and intercession, *“I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers . . .”* (Phil. 1:3-4) If we are not too proud to say ‘please’ we need not be too proud to say ‘thank you’. We do forget! In times of distress we think of God and cry for help, but when help comes and the crisis passes, we are inclined to think that we had made too much of the event. We might think that it was good luck or our clever management that saw us through. Only one of the ten lepers came back to thank Jesus for healing! (Luke 17:15-16).

Thanksgiving completes the process whereby we ask a favour of God, for ourselves or for someone else, and in due time receive it.

Frustration and Trust

We might feel frustrated over what we perceive to be our lack of method, organization or even sensitivity in the way we manage our intercessory prayer life from day to day.



TAKE HEART, be encouraged, ‘Pray as you can, not as you can’t!’. *“ . . . the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words . . . We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:26-28)

It is the intention of our heart that matters to the Lord. We place our concerns and requests before the Lord in the best way we know how and then trust in Him. Rhythm and organization will come in due time through **practice**, quickly for some and more slowly for others. Most of us are on a journey of discovering a rich and deeply meaningful intercessory prayer life, acceptable to God.

With the poet Tennyson, take courage that:

*“More things are wrought by prayer
than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
that nourish a blind life within the brain,
if, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”*

Helpful Hints

- † Some Christians keep a daily list of names and concerns. As the needs are met by God's grace they note the date.
- † A daily routine is very helpful to many. The Book of Common Prayer or the Book of Alternate Services, offers direction. Read books on prayer. You will be surprised at the beautiful insights which will enrich your day and move you to deeper communion with the Lord.
- † **PRAY! Learning by yourself, or in a group, about prayer must never replace its practice.**

(The biblical quotes are taken from the New Revised Standard Version)



For further information or pamphlets please contact your Diocesan Prayer representative or the Resources Coordinator for A.F.P. Canada.

Internet Web Site: www.anglicanprayer.org.

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