

The Safety Net

National Church Growth Research Center

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“Intercession As Prayer”

Dear ones,

There’s hardly any facet of prayer that is more captivating to me than “intercession.”

When I went to the *Change the World School of Prayer* twenty-nine years ago I was already practiced at intercession. But my intercession was primarily for my family members, and was altogether for people I knew. But my, how that has changed!

Oh, I don’t pray for my family members and others that I know any less. I’m sure I pray for them even more. But I have learned that, as a child of God, one destined for the throne, I can speak to my Heavenly Father about anyone on earth and be heard!

Much of our intercession seems to involve those that are ailing physically. In most churches, if you ask for prayer requests, you’ll be bombarded with the names of people who are sick. We pray for the seriously ill, and for those who are traveling. Perhaps that shows that we don’t pray for people unless we feel they face circumstances that are beyond our control.

I get a bit amused by public prayers that sound more like announcements to God, rather than prayers to Him. “Lord, be with brother Smith who is having surgery tomorrow at 8 a.m. He’s in room 202 at Providence Hospital.” Maybe we’re not talking to God at all, but to other listeners.

And there are some intercessory prayers for “the missionaries,” and the “ministering servants,” and those who are “in the military.”

We may even pray for “the leaders of our land” because scripture tells us to pray for “kings and those who are in authority.”

All these needs are real and the intentions are good. But there is the danger of praying without believing. Remember the early Christians who were praying for Peter to get out of jail? When God sprung him miraculously as an answer to prayer, he came to the prayer meeting and knocked on the locked door. The people wouldn’t let him in. He said, “Let me in. It’s Peter!” And some unbelieving soul may have said, “Couldn’t be. You’re in jail. We’re praying for you.”

After the prayer meeting in Sacramento I came home with a new interest in intercession. Our family was already having daily devotionals with Bible study and prayer. We started praying, not only for “the leaders of our land,” but for the President, the Governor, the Justices of the Supreme Court (by name), and the one hundred members of the U. S. Senate, also by name. We had to go to the library to get the names. But we did that, and started praying for them.

We wrote letters to all the Senators telling us we were praying for them. We didn't tell them how to vote; we just told them we were a Christian family in Sacramento and that we appreciated their efforts and the difficulty of their job. We told them we were praying for them. We also sent them a Bible correspondence course with a patriotic theme. It was called: "Let Freedom Ring."

I remember the day we dropped all those 100 fat letters in the corner mailbox. Extra postage, with a prayer for each Senator as the letters were dropped in the box. I also remember walking home and thinking, "This is a good thing for our family to be doing." I confess now that I didn't expect much to happen.

About three days later the phone rang early in the morning. It was long distance. The voice on the other end said, "Mr. Shotwell?" "This is Senator John Glenn of Ohio. I just wanted to call and thank your family for praying for me. I need your prayers. I've been in combat and I've been in space, but those are child's play up to being in the Senate. I need God's help daily. Thank you."

I was flabbergasted! Senator Glenn then asked me to send more copies of the Bible course for all the members of his staff. He said he had read it and been helped by it.

Then the letters started coming! Real letters. Real signatures. From real Senators! One was an 8 page handwritten letter from Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina. A very genuine letter came from Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and another from Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, and still another from Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana. Senator Bayh wanted us to pray specifically for his wife who had cancer. We got letters from almost forty!

We were also praying for the Governor of California, Gov. Jerry Brown. Afterwards I got a call from his office inviting me to a breakfast. I later had the privilege of baptizing one of his bodyguards into Christ. The Sheriff of Sacramento Co. came to our congregation and dedicated his life to Christ. And none of this happened until we started praying for these people by name!

Believing that this was working, we went back to the library and got the names of all the presidents, kings, dictators, and other heads of state of countries throughout the world. At that time, before the breakup of the Soviet Union, there were only 210 nations in the world. So we broke them up and started covering seven countries a day, praying for the heads of state, by name, one day each month. In 1978 that included names like Enver Hoxha of Albania. He boasted that Albania was the most atheistic country in the world. Bibles were non-existent, he said. A priest was executed for baptizing a baby. But we started praying for him. He was later defeated and then he died! We now have Christian churches throughout Albania.

Another person we prayed for was Idi Amin in Uganda. What a butcher! What do you pray for for him? We prayed for him, and he was overthrown!

Other leaders have made good decisions and doors have opened for the gospel. Work in countries like Kenya, and Ethiopia, and India have blossomed. I know of many, many Muslims who have come to Christ through the prayers of others.

When we started praying for international leaders, we had not only never heard of most of the leaders, we had never heard of some of the countries! On the list of countries from the library we found the nation of "Fernando Poo." We didn't know where it was but we began praying for it anyway. Within weeks we heard an announcement that Brother Juan Monroy of Spain was preaching the gospel on international radio in Spanish

and had had a lot of response from the little island nation of Fernando Poo, off the horn of W. Africa. He had gone there to preach and there had been many baptisms!

I wouldn't say that our prayers caused these things to happen. But they didn't hurt!

I have continued these intercessions for national and international leaders for these 29 years. There have been lots of changes. On my list I pencil in the names of leaders. The nations have even changed.

I've had a special heart for China. Twenty-nine years ago I began praying for the provinces of China. 30 of them, at one a day each month. Now, not only do I know of millions of Christians in underground churches in China, but I also have a dear young Chinese sister. She's right here in Oregon, preparing to go back and assist her people in knowing Christ. I would have never known her if it weren't for God answering my prayer. I also pray for her parents, and other relatives. One is a General in the Red Army. I have talked to him by phone and consider him a friend. Who knows what God will do with him?

Well, I could go on about praying for people in other nations. But I want to tell you about some other ways for intercessory prayer.

When I go to the grocery store, and am at the checkout stand, I am usually faced with those horrible tabloids that are giving exposés of movie and TV personalities. You know the type. I don't like those things. I have never bought one, and I've never read one. But I look at them while I'm checking out, and I pray for the people who are featured on the covers! I can't tell you how many times I've prayed for Paris Hilton, Michael Jackson, and Madonna! Do any good? Doesn't hurt.

Why criticize ANYONE, if you can pray for him or her?

I pray for my enemies. Daily. And I have some.

I don't read a daily newspaper, but when I see one, I pray everyone and everything on the front page. I pray for those in each story I read: those on Wall Street, those in Congress, those in accidents, etc. I've prayed a lot recently about the ex-governor of New York and his successor, their families, and the women who brought about the change. Does it help? Doesn't hurt!

My prayer list is pretty long. I don't linger on most names, but God knows them all better than I. It goes without saying that I pray for my kids and grandkids, my congregation, and the people that I know through Safety Net on a daily basis, and sometimes hourly.

I am reluctant to tell you all this. I'm not trying to beat my own drum as a prayer-warrior. I've told you that I'm a novice, not an expert. But I felt the need to give some specifics because I wanted to inspire you to be an active intercessor yourself. Anyone can do this. You don't have to be a scholar to pray. Or a public speaker. You simply have to be a child of God. God, a loving and approachable Father, listens to His children. I sometimes wonder how much good doesn't take place, because God's children don't pray?

The following words are written in the front of my New Testament. I didn't write them, and don't know who did. But truer words were never spoken:

*There's no weapon half so mighty, as the Intercessor's bear,
Nor a broader field of service, than the ministry of prayer.*

Don't gripe about politicians, the media, people in religious error. . . pray for them. Don't worry about the youth, or the sinful, or the poor. . . pray for them.

Be an Intercessor!

If you don't have a prayer list, start one today. Start with something you can carry in your pocket or purse. Go to journals and ledgers later.

And continue to pray for those you know. Start there.

But then venture into the unknown territory of those you don't know. Get specific. You'll be wonderfully blessed. And you'll also have answers!

Yours in Christ,

Silas