

The Privilege of Intercession

“Oh, that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleads for his neighbor!” Job 16:2

Apart from the time we spend in direct worship of God during prayer, intercessory prayer is perhaps the highest form of prayer since:

- Intercession is *not* self-serving.
- Intercession follows the example, which Christ has given to us.
- Intercession develops a Christ-like attitude within our hearts toward others.
- God is looking for someone to “stand in the gap” (Ezekiel 22:30-31).
- God is looking for “watchmen” on the walls (Isaiah 62:6).



Intercession—The New Testament Greek word translated as “intercession” is ENTEUXIS (*ént-yook-sis*), which was first a technical term used for approaching a king, (and so it was easily used for approaching God in prayer). It later came to refer to an interview with someone, during which the case of a third person is pleaded, whether positively or negatively. The Biblical use stresses making petition on behalf of someone else.

- The Old Testament Hebrew word is PAGA (*paw-gáh*), which means, “to impinge through importunity.” See Isaiah 62:6-7 and Lamentations 2:18-19. This concept is developed further in the New Testament when we are told to be persevering with our requests.

The Bible provides many examples of faithful intercessors. Here are some of those whose examples we can follow:

- Moses—Exodus 32:7-14, 31, 32; Deuteronomy 5:5
- Daniel—Daniel 9:3-19
- Ezra—Ezra 9:5-15
- Paul—Romans 9:1-3; 10:1
- Jesus—John 17:9, 20; Hebrews 7:25

Intercession is one of our duties as “priests unto God” (1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 1:6). The New Testament does not call for a closed, elite order of priests as was true in the Old Testament. Jesus has replaced the old priestly system and has become our Great High Priest (this is the central message of the Book of Hebrews). Our own priesthood is found only in and through the life we share in Christ. However, patterned after the Old Testament priesthood, **we are called** to worship God (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15; Romans 12:1), to have compassion for others (Exodus 28:29; 1 Thessalonians 2:8-11; Romans 15:16), and to **pray for others** (Exodus 28:9-12; Joel 2:17).

Our New Testament privilege is greater though, since we can daily go into the Holy of Holies—into the very presence of Almighty God—representing the needs of others (Hebrews 4:16). In ourselves, we are not perfect priests; our prayers may be incomplete or even wrong. But our Great High Priest, Jesus, is perfect. Through spiritual union, He will help us to intercede more effectively (see John 17:5).

Discovery Learning: Read the following groupings of passages and identify, both, who should be on our prayer list and the content of our prayer concerns for them:

1. Romans 1:9; Ephesians 6:18 _____
2. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 _____
3. Psalm 122:6; Jeremiah 29:7 _____
4. Matthew 9:38 _____
5. Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28; 23:34; Acts 7:59-60 _____
6. 2 Corinthians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Hebrews 13:17-18a _____
7. Acts 12:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:2-3 _____
8. Acts 28:8; James 5:16 _____
9. John 17:9, 11, 20-22 _____
10. 2 Chronicles 7:14; Daniel 9:2-3, 16-19 _____
11. Ephesians 6:19-20 _____
12. Romans 15:30-32; Colossians 4:3 _____
13. Ephesians 3:14-16; Colossians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:10 _____

Although intercession is so important for the Body of Christ, it is probably lacking more than any other discipline in Christian living (see Isaiah 59:16). Reasons for this may be that:

1. We may not be convinced that intercession makes a difference. However, Jesus taught that our prayers are very effective. Read John 14:12-14 and 15:7.
2. Intercession involves spiritual work that may “cramp our style.” Our flesh would rather do anything than pray, and especially for someone else. But, supposed inconvenience to our flesh brings great gain in our spirit. See Lamentations 3:48-50. Often “prayer warriors” are known to “travail in prayer” for the heavy burdens they sympathetically feel for others (Ezra 10:1; Jeremiah 13:17; 23:9; Luke 22:44; Philippians 3:18; Hebrews 5:7). Intercession may also include fasting (Ezra 10:6; Daniel 9:3-4; Jonah 3:5-10).
3. It may be hard to get enthused about someone else’s situation. Nevertheless, we *are* our “brother’s keeper,” and the highest service we can render to others is to pray for them.
4. We may not understand spiritual dynamics. If we do not take prayer seriously, we often quickly retreat when we face opposition. Remember that in the face of spiritual warfare, Jesus promised to pray for Peter (Luke 22:31-32).

The Discipline of Fasting

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:2-3)

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (Acts 14:23)



Fasting—The Old Testament Hebrew word for “a fast” or “fasting” is TSUWM (*tsoom*), meaning, “to cover over (the mouth),” implying a fast from food.

- The New Testament Greek word NESTEYO (*nace-tyoó-o*) is used for fasting; it literally means, “not to eat.”
- Fasting, then, means to deliberately turn from food or possibly from other personal appetites and enjoyments so that we may focus our full attention upon the Lord. Fasting may be practiced outside of spiritual purposes. But, when it is practiced as a spiritual discipline, Scripture shows us that it is always to be accompanied by prayer.

A Brief History of Fasting

The practice of fasting is not unique to Christianity. As a matter of fact, fasting is found in nearly every earthly culture as a religious duty or discipline. In ancient Judaism, fasting was practiced as a sign of humiliation, often being referred to as “afflicting the soul.” To further intensify this sign, Jews would often put on sackcloth (a course, loose cloth made of goat’s hair and used for mourning), as well as tear their garments and scatter ashes over their heads. For the Jews, personal and national fasts were often called during times of bereavement, acknowledgment of sin, hardship or to avert calamity. One official day of fasting—the Day of Atonement—was called for in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 23:27-29; Acts 27:9). As a rule, the Pharisees fasted twice each week.

The Bible tells us that faithful Jews and early Christians practiced fasting as an act of spiritual service and worship to God (Luke 2:37). History also tells us that early Christians commemorated Christ’s passion with half-day fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Discovery Learning: In order to better understand what the Bible directly says about fasting as a child of God, study the following selected passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament. Record what you find concerning the occasion for the fast and the type of fast. (Note that there are many other Biblical references to fasting not mentioned here.)

Fasting in the Old Testament:

- Exodus 34:27-29 _____

- 1 Samuel 7:3-8 _____

- 1 Kings 19:4-8 _____

- Ezra 10:6-11 _____

- Daniel 9:3; 10:2-14 _____

- Joel 2:12-17 _____

Fasting in the New Testament:

- Matthew 9:14-15 _____

- Luke 4:1-2 (and Matthew 4:1-2) _____

- Acts 9:1-9 _____

- Acts 10:30-33 _____

What does Scripture tell us will be accomplished through proper fasting?

Study Isaiah 58:3-12. In this passage God repudiates empty ritual, but gives promises to those who fast with a true heart before Him. Can you identify at least six blessings, which accompany a correct fast? _____

In fasting we may also gain:

1. Power for ministry and spiritual warfare—Esther 4:16; Matthew 17:14-21
2. Knowledge of the will and direction of the Lord—Acts 9:9-15
3. The commission of the Lord into service—Acts 13:3; 14:23

Is there Scriptural direction on how and when to fast? Yes, the Bible teaches that we should fast:

1. In secret, unto God, and not unto man—Matthew 6:16-18
2. Not with a sad countenance or facial gesture—Matthew 6:17
3. With humility before the Lord—Psalm 35:13
4. With proper attitudes and pure motives—Isaiah 58: 3-7
5. Whenever we are specifically led by the Holy Spirit to do so—Matthew 4:1-2
6. When we sense the need within our own lives; for instance, when we desire to grow closer to the Lord—Matthew 6:16-18
7. When the people of God are corporately called to fast—Joel 1:14; 2:15-16
8. For a defined period of time, which does not violate God’s prior instruction—1 Corinthians 7:5

❖ It should be noted that Jesus emphasized purity and honesty in our motives. When fasting simply as a religious exercise is not mixed with a true heart of faith then the act of fasting is abhorrent to God. See also Jeremiah 14:12 and Zechariah 7:5-6.

Are there different kinds of fasts? Yes, the following fasts are commonly practiced:

1. Regular fast: refraining from all food and drink, except water—Matthew 4:1-3
2. Complete fast: the same as a regular fast, but including water—Exodus 34:28 (Note the miracle, which God performed within Moses.)
3. Partial fast: refraining from a certain meal or restricting the intake of certain foods—Daniel 1:8-16
4. Liquid fast: partaking only of liquids, refraining from solid food for a determined period of time

Personal Reflection: From the above study on fasting, and from prior lessons, describe below what you believe is taking place **within the human spirit . . . what is spiritually taking place** when a proper fast is being practiced? _____
