

# Intercessory Prayer

A Catechism for

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Does God really listen to all these petitions?

Yes. God created us to live *in relationship* with God and thus, cherishes any time that we turn to God to speak the desires of our heart and to seek God's wisdom and mercy. God, as the Source, Guide, and Goal of our being, waits with eager longing for us to return 'home.'

### 2. What good does it do?

It changes God. God is *not* Immutable. In scripture God is clearly able to change God's mind and God's way of dealing with the world. Our petitions *matter*. Karl Barth — "God does not act the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence upon God's actions, even upon God's existence."

[Scripture: Genesis 8:20-21, 18:22-33; Jonah 3:10; Luke 11:7; Exodus 32:12; Matthew 15:21-28; Revelation 8:1-5]

It changes the thing/person prayed for. If you're of the type of person who wants empirical evidence of this see Dr. Larry Dossey's book *Healing Words: the power of prayer and practice of medicine* on this subject. Even without the work of Dr. Dossey Christians have long known about the power of prayer to redeem.

It changes the pray-er. See chapter six of *Praying for Friends and Enemies* by Jane E. Vennard. There she suggests that the Pray-er is effected in the following ways:

**Becoming God Centered** - By our constant return to God in intercessory prayer we lower the threshold of our own resistance to God's presence and thus are drawn into the healing love of God more completely.

**Discovering Compassion** - In allowing the needs of our sisters and brothers with us while we come before God we slowly learn from God what it is "to suffer with," another which is what *Compassion* means literally. We are safe there to fully enter into the suffering of others and share their burdens.

**Developing Patience** - We learn to pray and wait with patience for God to act on God's terms and in God's time.

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God.*

*We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay.*

*We should like to skip the intermediate stage.*

*We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.*

*Yet it is the law of all progress that is made by passing through some stages of instability and That may take a very long time.*

*And so I think it is with you.*

*Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.  
Let them shape themselves without undue haste.  
Do not try to force them on as though you could  
be today what time - that is to say, grace - and  
circumstances acting on your own good will,  
will make you tomorrow.*

*Only God could say what this new Spirit gradually  
forming in you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing  
that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of  
feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.*

*Above all, trust in the slow work of God,  
our Loving vinedresser. Amen.*

Trust in the Slow Work of God  
Pierre Teilhard De Chardin - My underlining

**Growing in Gratitude** - We discover the joyful surprises of our world and of our life as we speak to God about the desires of our hearts.

**3. How do I keep this from becoming a ‘laundry list’ which I simply read through?**

Seek the compassionate heart. “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires that we be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

[from *Compassion A Reflection on the Christian Life* by Nouwen et al]

**4. Does the faith of the pray-er effect the outcome of the prayer?**

The value of a petition is in no way related to the faith of the one offering it. It is enough for us to lift the petition before God from whatever height or depth in which we find our self. Scripture only records a few rare occasions when God indicates that one cannot be heard because of one’s sins. [Indeed, I can think of only one such place. The Book of Job 42:7-9]

**5. Should I pray specifics or ask that ‘Your will’ be done?**

Vennard notes that the Apostle Paul, “. . . does not ask God to get, persuade, seduce, demand, or threaten [those for whom he prayed] to *do* anything in particular.” And then later, “Paul responds to God in prayer and then leaves the outcome to God.” [p.13]

## HOWEVER

It should be noted that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, the psalmists, and Jesus *all ask* God for rather specific things.

Perhaps the best course is to do what Jesus does in his petition in the garden and pray *both* ways, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.” [Luke 22:42]

### 6. **How do I pray when I don’t know what is best?**

Allow that God knows best and offer up your petition seeking clarity and wisdom for yourself.

### 7. **What if I’m asked to pray for an outcome which I personally think is either unwise or unfaithful?**

Either:

A. Say that you won’t or can’t pray for that.

OR

B. Accept the petition and offer it on behalf of the other. You may add a personal petition for God to be at work in both your heart and the heart of the one seeking your help in prayer.

### 8. **How do I pray with someone in my presence?**

This will be easier to do if you have been fully present with the person and have listened attentively to their concern. Do not be preoccupied with eloquence here. Simply ask God to intercede and help.

General hints about praying in public.

† When calling people to prayer say something like “Let us pray,” rather than “shall we pray.” You don’t really want to take a vote about it.

† Aim your prayer to God’s ears and not so much to the ears of people present.

† God likes the voice given to you, not one sprinkled with “holy water.”

† Beware of the words “we just.” These should not be repeated with frequency in a prayer.

† Do not pray publicly what you do not believe privately.

† “Thee” and “You” do not belong in the same prayer.

† Avoid needless repetitions of the name of the Deity.  
(example: “Father we ask you, Father, to hear our prayers Father, because, Father, we...”)

† “Gather” the petitions from the person(s) with you and “offer” them to God on their behalf.

## Some Practical Ideas for Intercessory Prayers

### **Find a Place -**

- A space in Time
- A place where you can ‘go into your closet to pray.’

### **General Intercession -**

- Use this form or develop your own along this pattern:

*Gracious God, I pray . . .*

*...for all those I love*

*...for all those who are hard to pray for*

*...for all who are ill*

*...for all who grieve*

*...for all who have been forgotten*

*May they find comfort in your loving presence. Amen.*

[quoted from p. 64 *Intercessory Prayer Praying for Friends and Enemies*, Vennard]

### **Intercession for Specific People -**

- “. . . begin with simple words of invocation. Then, in your mind’s eye, visualize the person for whom you are praying. See the person as clearly as possible, both in motion and at rest . . .  
    . Speak the words of your petition aloud in your heart.”  
[Chapt. 7 - Vennard]
- You can imagine the person for whom you are praying being lifted up and placed in God’s presence. Allow this image to then take its own shape as it moves from your thinking and into your heart. Maybe God is embracing them, or weeping with them. After some time gently let go of the image and end your prayers or attend to the next petition entrusted to you.
- When praying down a list of persons you might standardize the prayer by initiating each new person or concern with “God I commend into your care...”

### **Being a Compassionate Observer -**

- This is simply remaining silent and observing the events and people around you. As you discern that the conversation of board members in a meeting are no longer interacting respectfully - you lift the moment up for God’s attention. This is done without any outward sign by you that you are in intercessory prayer. This same idea can be used at home where people are at odds, or in a church meeting where those present have begun to

stumble over their various foibles and are not bearing with one another in Christlike ways.

## **Notes made from reading *Ten Commandments of Intercession* published by Presentation Ministries in Cincinnati, OH.**

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF INTERCESSION (I will edit these to suit me. I cannot use *some* of what is presented in this little tract. I find *some* of the commandments problematic but I'll use what seems helpful - PHL)

So, the PHL-version might be something like:

- 1) “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27**

As with all true Christian disciplines - the barometer by which we determine if we are “doing it right” is this; do I love God more as a result? And, do I love my neighbors as God loves them as a result?” Intercessory prayer when prayed well will eventuate in greater love for God and greater compassion for all of those others (both those easy to love and those we suffer).

- 2) You shall have God choose each member of an intercessory prayer group. ???**  
Not sure this is one I currently need in my teaching.

- 3) You shall not intercede without first listening for God.**  
Good advice here! We *begin* by listening to/for God. Our prayer life must be as much silence before God as it is talking to/at God.

- 4) You shall be as specific as possible.**  
I've written on this elsewhere. Specificity is good - as long as it is asked in a posture of trust and humble expectancy that even if we cannot see the outcome we desire, that God is doing something good.

- 5) You shall have expectant faith.**  
See #4.

- 6) You shall love your enemies.**  
We are aiming to come to a place where we can love others as Christ loves them.

- 7) You shall pray your intercessions in humility and trust of God.**  
See 4 above.

- 8) **You shall pray in a disciplined way - not easily allowing yourself to grow weary in doing this good work.**
- 9) **You shall not be too rigid in your practice of intercessory prayer.**
- 10) **You shall let this prayer form reshape you by God's grace.**

Though we often imagine that our intercessory prayers are meant to summon God's intervention in changing the circumstances of *others*, it is also often the case that *we are re-made* in the process of seeking the redemption of those for whom we pray.