

Unleashing God's Power On Earth

By Dave Butts

There are many types of prayer. Prayers of confession, praise, petition, spiritual warfare, and thanksgiving are just a few examples. But if there is one type of prayer that God seems to be bringing to the forefront in the current movement of prayer it is the prayer of intercession or intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is very simple. It's someone asking God to do something in a person's life, in the church, or in a certain situation. It is coming to God on behalf of someone else. It is, in some ways, the most selfless, giving sort of prayer. It is ultimately one of the greatest acts of love.

A good picture of intercession in Scripture is the parable that Jesus tells of the friend who came at midnight (Luke 11:5-8). A friend had been on a long trip and he comes at midnight to his friend's house. The traveler is very hungry, but his friend has no bread to give him. Being concerned for his hungry friend, the man goes next door at midnight and begins to shout and pound at the door for his neighbor to get up and give him some bread. The worst imaginable thing happens. His next door neighbor doesn't even come to the door, but just shouts out from his bed something like this: "Go away! I'm in bed, and my children are in bed. Go away and come back in the morning!" Instead of giving up, the man keeps on pounding and shouting until his next door neighbor gets up, grumbling I'm sure, and gives him the bread that he needs to feed his hungry friend.

Now I know Jesus tells that parable to teach us the power of persistence in prayer; to pray and never give up. But I want to suggest to you that this parable is also a perfect picture

of intercession. I had a friend who preached a sermon on this and he called it: The Friend in the Middle, in the Middle of the Night. There are three friends. One has a need...he is hungry. Another friend has the ability to meet that need...he has the bread. And then there is the friend in the middle who brings the two together. He goes to one on behalf of the other. It is a perfect picture of intercession. This is where God has placed every one of us. We are surrounded by a needy world...spiritual needs, emotional needs, physical needs... every kind of need. They are needs that you and I do not have the means to meet. But we know the One who does. And in prayer we are called to go to God on behalf of those around us. We are called to be intercessors. It is a powerful ministry to pray for others, and an awesome blessing to see God work in their lives.

I believe that God is calling the Church today to a whole new level of intercession. We are seeing God do amazing things around the world because we are learning to intercede for the lost. We are learning to intercede for whole nations. God has shown us clearly that prayer is the frontline strategy for reaching unreached people groups, for breaking down barriers to presenting the Gospel, and for planting churches. It is astonishing what God is doing as we obediently pray His will into the lives of others.

We need to understand that the importance of intercessory prayer can best be understood as the only ministry you can do today that is the current ministry of Jesus. Intercessory prayer is what Jesus is doing today: "...because He always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). It is astonishing to realize that Jesus is interceding for us...Jesus is praying for us.

There are a lot of things that Jesus used to do. Likely He used to build houses with His step-father, Joseph and to fish on the sea of Galilee. He died on a cross to save mankind. But the one ministry He is doing today is what He is asking us to

do with Him... intercession. To cry out for others, to share God's love in a way that releases God's power into people's lives.

One of the most difficult things for us to grab ahold of in intercessory prayer is the fact that it doesn't appear to be doing anything. If you bake a pie and take it to the neighbors, you are doing something. If you stand at the church door and pass out bulletins you are doing something. The hardest thing to get past when trying to understand intercessory prayer is that it somehow seems we aren't doing anything. Most of us want to do something for God.

The Scriptures teach us something amazing about the activity of intercessory prayer. Let's go back to Exodus 17:8-13, where the children of Israel had been released from their bondage in Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea. They are on their way to Mt. Sinai... a huge group of one to three million people moving south through the wilderness. On the way they are attacked by the warlike tribe of the Amalekites. The Amalekites were smaller in number, but they were experienced raiders. The Israelites were brickmakers who didn't have any bricks. They did, however, have a promising new general by the name of Joshua who pulled together some of the men, got them equipped with weapons, and trained them to ward off some of the raids of the Amalekites.

Finally, the time comes for a major battle. In the valley, the army of the Amalekites and the army of the Israelites go into battle with Joshua leading the way. But Joshua wasn't really the leader of the nation. Who was the leader of Israel? It was Moses. And Moses was nowhere to be seen in the valley. Instead, Moses was up on top of a mountain. He had the rod of God, a symbol of God's power, in his hands. And he took that rod and lifted it up to God. Upraised arms are always a symbol of prayer. That is literally what Paul wrote to Timothy: "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing" (1 Timothy 2:8).

With Moses' arms outstretched to God in prayer, an amazing thing happened. The Israelites, a group of untrained soldiers, begin to defeat the Amalekites – but only as long as Moses' arms are in the air. As soon as his arms get tired (remember that Moses is 80), and they come down, an astonishing thing happens – the battle begins to turn against Israel. Now the Amalekites are winning. What an old man does with his arms on top of the mountain shouldn't have any effect on the battle in the valley below. But it does in the kingdom of God. And what you and I do sitting in our homes and churches while praying for a village in India or China shouldn't seem to have any effect logically, but it does in the kingdom of God.

Let's go back to Moses for a minute. His arms are tired, and Israel is losing in the valley. What should the Israelites do? Should they get a new pastor? No. They bring in two other older men who lift up Moses' arms. Now, as Aaron and Hur stood around Moses and lifted up his arms, their arms are also lifted up! We have a prayer meeting going on! There are three men up on the mountain with lifted arms, praying together, and the battle is won for Israel.

We need to understand the truth of God's Word that is clearly apparent from the Old Testament through the New Testament, where Jesus is spending His time as an intercessor: there is nothing more powerful in the kingdom of God than intercessory prayer. God is calling His people to pray. All Christians are exhorted to pray for others and to watch God work in astonishing, astounding ways. Some people are better at it than others. There are some people whose main spiritual gift is intercession. But we are all called to be intercessors and to make a difference in the world through intercessory prayer.

Most of us do not look at ourselves as "world-changers." We do not see ourselves as having the power or influence to change the direction of nations. As Christians, however, we affirm the power of God to impact the nations. That power is released through the prayers of people just like you and me. Would you

make a commitment today to change your world? Take a step in prayer. Begin to pray more for the people around you, as well as for world leaders and the flow of world events. Bring the amazing power of God to bear upon this world and see what our awesome God will do!

–Dave Butts (1953-2022) was the president of Harvest Prayer Ministries, and the author of multiple books, articles and resources on prayer. Some of his books are [Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God](#), [The Giving Church](#), and [Prayer Ministry Volunteer Handbook](#) co-authored with his wife, Kim.

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