

What is intercessory prayer?

'Intercession' is the practice of asking God's help, requesting that He intervene in the world He created. We can say such prayers in public or in private. They occupy a central place in our weekly Eucharistic services. They appear between the Creed and the Peace.

Public intercession can be difficult. Commonly, many such prayers are too specific: 'we pray for Joe Bloggs, son of John and Betty Bloggs, as he enters ward 12 of the Oldham General Hospital for his operation on a heart valve, at 10:15 on Friday 15th' Such prayers are unwise because:

1. Prayers in this mode presuppose that God does not know what is happening in His world and needs to be reminded.
2. All too frequently, broadcasting such excessive detail will breach the person's personal confidentiality.
3. But perhaps the worst problem is the idea it sponsors, that the greater the number of words, the greater the likelihood of God answering. Jesus himself addressed this last view when he warned against 'babbling like the pagans' in prayer, with too many words (Matt 6:7).

A moment's thought reveals why the power behind intercessory prayer does not lie in the actual words used, or even the sincerity of the person praying. If it was the words alone, then such prayers should more properly be called 'incantations' or even 'spells.' This observation becomes even more obvious when we realise how most people's intercessory prayers are in fact silent — maybe even wordless.

All biblical references to prayer stress that faith is important: for example, James 5:15 says that prayers 'offered in faith' are effective. He implies that prayers without faith are not effective. Again, this idea is prone to misconceptions: we are not being asked to believe more fervently, repeat more often, or strain more violently.

Actually, effective prayers accompany demonstrations of our faith. And the best way to show our faith is always the way we live, not the words we use in our

prayers. The poem 'Emerging' by R.S. Thomas (link below) makes this point very well.

There are many ways of praying intercessions. Words alone are never sufficient, whether said silently or spoken aloud. The person praying should always seek first to enter the presence of God: they 'recollect,' using the methods described in the June magazine.

Once the person praying is recollected and in communion with God —and only then—they should gently allow their request (s) to come before God. Some people find it useful to actually picture in their mind's eye the person or thing being prayed for, and then visualising God's healing love flowing into that person or situation, much like light streaming from the sun into a gloomy room. Later, with practise, it gradually becomes possible to know for whom or for what God wants us to pray because His presence becomes more intense, more intimate as our requests coincide with His will.

First, consciously enter the presence of God. Then, in your imagination, picture the person or situation needing God's help. In your mind, gently raise the person or thing or situation into the presence of God, bathing them in His love and care.

Exercises

Some of these links might be useful

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers/leading-prayer-through-intercessions>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intercession>

<https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/preparing-to-lead-intercessions-in-church>

Emerging by R.S. Thomas

<http://www.cymru2008.com/rst/pemerging.html>

