

Why Intercessory Prayer, if God Already Loves Us?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 13, 2010



What is the function of intercessory prayer, really? I could understand intercessory prayer much better when I used to believe Jesus was shielding me from God.

I used to pray for others in Jesus' name so that He would plead on our behalf to God any of our requests. Now that doesn't fit into my new paradigm that God is not judging and would never choose to inflict harm on me.

Why should I pray for someone to be healed from let's say cancer if God already wants their good, much more than I ever even could? Some have said that when I pray for someone to be healed and they're not healed it's just God's will. I don't buy that it would be "God's will" for them to not be healed because I don't think it's in God's character to ever plan for the emotional and physical anguish associated. If it is in His control to reduce harm and pain, why wouldn't He? Especially if the person needing healing and the person praying are Christians and it's not their rejection of Him that's creating a barrier from His healing and protection. I've also had people tell me that prayer is for me and to strengthen my connection to Him and not necessarily for God. Well, if I pray for God to heal someone and He doesn't, how would that in any way strengthen my

relationship with God? How could I have faith in a God that might reject my request for something that is in accordance with His plans for us according to the Bible (i.e. healing, employment, housing, transportation, healthy foods, peace, joy, etc)?

I have been praying for some of these things and so far His answer has been “no” or “not right now” to most of them. I can understand not receiving them if I’m not doing my part, but I feel like I’ve done all I can do and some of these things are out of my control completely.

Warm Regards, T

Thanks for your encouragement and positive feedback. Your response is exactly what we are trying to do, get people to think and reason for themselves so each person can come to know God for themselves!

So, what is the purpose of intercessory prayer, and prayer in general. First lets define prayer – what is it? As I understand prayer, it is simply conversation with God as with a friend. When Adam and Eve were talking with God face to face in the cool of the day, that was prayer. When we walk with Jesus by the sea of glass, that will be prayer. When David was angry and expressed this to God asking God to kill all his enemies, that was prayer. Prayer is open and honest communication from the heart to God.

What is the purpose of communication with God if God already knows all our thoughts before we even think them? Are we informing God of something He doesn’t already know? Then what’s the point? Relationship and development! Does a parent, sometimes, already know what a child is going to say before the child says it? Is there any benefit in the child speaking their thoughts to the parent? What is the benefit? Relationship and development! The child experiences the parent listening, caring, concerned, gains knowledge of a parent who cares, and loves them. This brings security and peace. And the child also develops the ability to think, communicate, comprehend, understand, be open, honest, overcome fear/insecurity etc.

If a child asks a parent for something the child is convinced is good for them, but the parent knows they are not ready to handle and will only injure, what does a loving parent do? Does the requests of the child work to create love and interest in the heart of the parent for the child? Of course not, but the child grows closer to the parent through the experience and learns more of the parents values and character.

We are in darkness. We are constantly working to know God more fully. Prayer is a process of coming into connection with the divine, of opening our hearts and minds to the movement of the Holy Spirit, “listening” to what God has to tell us. In so doing we are learning of Him.

When I was in residency one of my colleague’s mother was dying of breast cancer. My colleague prayed for her mother’s healing, but her mother died. Later she told me initially this was hard for her to understand, until she realized that God was more merciful toward her mother than she was. She said God allowed her mother to pass beyond temptation, pain, and disease and her mother would never have to suffer again. She said she realized her mother’s healing was an eternal healing, not a mere temporal one. Some might call this rationalization, I believe it strikes a point – God looks beyond our comprehension to realities we are unaware of and takes all of these multiplicities into consideration when answering our prayers always acting in our best interest.

God never wants any of His children to suffer, you are absolutely right about this. Then why does He not heal everyone or deliver us from every difficulty we face? Because God's focus, while concerned with every little thing in our lives even the number of hairs on our heads, is ultimately focused on our eternal healing, and not just ours, but everyone else's as well.

Once one of us has come back into a saving relationship with Him He seeks to develop our characters more fully to be like His and also use us to reach others. Sometimes, and I emphasize sometimes, when Satan attacks one of God's children God does not prevent the attack (Job, Stephen etc.) but God supplies grace for them to handle the attack. Why this approach?

First, because God is love and love requires freedom. If God were to use His power to stop the exercise of individual freedom and the consequences to such, then we would all live in a make believe world with pretended freedom. And secondly, as evidence to those who don't know God, to bring them to God.

I had a patient who died of esophageal cancer. During his final months we had many conversations. He initially struggled wondering why God didn't heal him. He was married, had three children, why would God not heal him to be there as a Christian father for his kids? But he trusted God with his life and despite his painful decline remained upbeat, cheerful, caring for others and before his death saw both his brother and sister, who had left the church, rededicated their lives to God. They said they saw a peace in their brother that they didn't have from all the pleasures of the world. My patient told me that if it took him going through this experience to reach his brother and sister for eternity he was glad to do it.

I don't believe God brought cancer on my patient. I do believe God had the power to heal the cancer. But I also believe God knows our hearts (my patient's heart wanted his brother and sister in heaven) and even more God knows the future impact of how events turn out. Therefore, when we trust Him He can use what appear to be harmful to bring about good – eternal good.

But there is another aspect for the purpose of prayer, particularly here on earth now, and that has to do with the Great Controversy. God was accused of being a power monger. His character and reputation were misrepresented, and are still being misrepresented today. Only God knows our inmost thoughts, ideas and the future. Only God knows what we are going to think before we think it. Angels and humans have to wait and see what a person says or does before we can know what is in the heart.

If God were to simply act on our thoughts, before we think them, several problems. First it doesn't give us the opportunity for growth, in character, in wisdom, in trust and knowledge and love of God. It is by leaving us the opportunity to wrestle with problems that we grow and when we wrestle with God at our side we grow in love with Him.

But further, by praying and communicating with God we refute Satan's allegations that God abuses His power and reveal that God is acting in accord with the requests of His children and not simply pushing His way upon others. Thus Satan's lies are exposed as false.

What intercessory prayer is not: it is not the process of persuading an unloving god to be a loving one, a disinterested god to be interested, an uncompassionate deity to be compassionate.

If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus,

who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Romans 8:31-34.

Why do we pray? Because we love our heavenly Father and ultimately really enjoy spending time with Him!