

Prayer Foundations

Intercessory Prayer

(Distributed by *PrayingForRevival.net*)

Intercessory prayer happens when we shift the focus of our prayers from our own needs to the needs of others. Intercessory prayer is selfless prayer.

“If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. *Intercession is a way of loving others.*”
– Richard Foster, from the book *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home*

Intercession Originates With Jesus

The heart and ministry of Jesus is to intercede for others, bringing their need to the Father.

Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

– Hebrews 7:25

For Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

– Romans 8:34

Whenever we pray for others, we know that we are participating in this powerful ministry of Jesus.

Intercessory Prayer Is for Everyone

We have just seen that Jesus lives to intercede for people. The goal for everyone who follows Jesus is to become more like him. Thus it makes sense that as we grow to be more like Christ, we will gain more desire to pray for others.

And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

– 2 Corinthians 3:18

The Bible encourages all of us to pray for others.

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior

– 1 Timothy 2:1-3

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

– Ephesians 6:18

Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises. ...Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

– James 5:13, 16

If you find that you don't often think about praying for others, ask God to increase your love for others. The more we love people, the more we will want the best for them, and this will lead us to pray.

How to Pray

None of us can pray for everyone and everything. God will make it clear who and what you should intercede for. There are broad categories that fall under intercessory prayer:

- Your family members (immediate and extended)
- Your friends
- People in your place of work
- Your church (pastors/leaders, the people, the ministry work, the finances)
- Leaders (1 Timothy 2:2 specifically gives the importance of praying for our leaders)
- Your community/city
- Your nation and the world

Out of all the possibilities, make sure you are as specific as possible in your prayer requests to God. Love is directed at actual people, not generic groups. God's power causes tangible results in this world.

Lists Are Good!

It is a common strategy to keep a simple list of those people and things you want to pray for, and then pray for them daily. In this way you won't forget, and you can pray quickly and efficiently down your list.

Depending on how much time you have each day, your list will need to stay under a certain length. As your prayer items multiply, you can divide them into 2 lists, and alternate days. Many praying people end up with a weekly list and they pray for different people/things on each day of the week.

My weekly list has 1 short section labeled "Daily" followed by different lists for each day.

Keep a Prayer Journal

Another common strategy is to keep a prayer journal of items you are praying for, along with notes on when specific prayers were answered. The Journal acts as both a prayer list and a prayer record.

The Calendar Approach

Another idea for a too-large list is to use a notebook and divide it into 31 sections – one for each day of the month. In each numbered day section, write the names of family/friends who's birthday is on that number. (ie. if my child's birthday is on the 6th of March, and a close friend's birthday is on the 6th of June, both names would be in the section for day 6.) For each family member and friend, you can write any specific prayer requests after their name. In this way, you can pray through a larger list of people at least once a month.

A Less Structured Approach

If keeping lists and journals is difficult for you, then a less-structured approach can be used. One idea is to begin by praying for your immediate family members each day. Then simply ask the Lord to guide your prayers, and wait silently for people or situations to come to your mind. Pray for these people and situations. It may help you keep focus by playing quiet worship music in the background. It is common that God will place people on your mind for the purpose of praying for them.

Always Keep Your Word

This is important. We must maintain our honesty and integrity in praying for others.

If you tell someone you will pray for them, don't forget to pray for them!

When someone tells you about a struggle or a prayer request during a conversation, it may not always be practical to pray for them in that moment. Be careful. Don't get in a habit of saying "I will pray for you about that" but then forgetting the request as your day goes on.

Sometimes I will take 1 minute and note the request in my prayer list on my phone, or I will send myself a quick email with the request, so I will see it later. Often I will simply pray silently immediately after the conversation ends with the person. Remember, it doesn't take a long wordy prayer to have an impact; a short prayer in that moment is better than forgetting to pray!