

## A Brief Theology of Intercessory Prayer

Interceding or praying for another's well-being has its roots in the Old Testament. Abraham prayed that God would spare the city of Sodom where his nephew Lot and his family lived **Genesis 18: 16-33**. Moses on more than one occasion, as he was leading Israel out of Egypt into Canaan, prayed to God on their behalf because God wanted to destroy them **Exodus 32:7-14**. The Levitical high priest beginning with Aaron annually entered the holy of holies in the tabernacle and later the temple to offer sacrifice and intercessory prayer for the Israelites **Leviticus 16**. One of the most dramatic of the Old Testament narratives is the story of Esther, a Jewess, who interceded for her people before her husband-king. Throughout the history of Israel God raised up judges and prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others who pled Israel's and Judah's cause before God and warned them of God's judgment unless they repented.

The life of Jesus in the New Testament provides for us the best illustration of an intercessor. Not only does he tell us that we can pray to God for others and He will respond **Luke 18:1-8; John 14:13-14; John 15:7**, but he modeled intercession for his disciples and for us today **John 17**. The most encouraging truth we are given about Jesus interceding for us is he still does so **Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 7:23-25; Romans 8:31-34**. Perhaps Mark gives us the closest look at the power of intercession when Jesus forgives a paralyzed man's sins and physically heals him because of the acted out faith of his friends **Mark 2:1-12**.

There is even more, Not only does Jesus intercede for us, but also the Holy Spirit does as well **Romans 8:26-27**. Paul's writings continue the teaching of intercession. He wrote to Timothy that believers ought to pray for those who are in important positions of authority **1 Timothy 2:1-3**.

Jesus identified the greatest commandment as loving God with all of one's heart and he said the second greatest is loving one's neighbor as himself **Matthew 22:34-40**. Paul echoes Jesus when he wrote to the Philippians and encouraged them to not only look after their own interests, but others as well **Philippians 2:3-4**. What better way to demonstrate love and concern for those "neighbors" God has brought into our lives than by interceding for them on a regular basis.

Intercession is hard work. It means becoming involved in another's life because intercessory prayer does not stop with prayed words. Our intercession prepares the way for personal ministry to them. The greatest reason of all to pray for others is because God told us to do. He honors our obedience and it makes a difference in their lives and ultimately in ours **Matthew 7:7-11**.