

The Life of the Intercessor

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Who is the man to whom God looks to stand in the Gap? Where are those through whom God lives to intercede? These are a people being called to a time such as this. The life of the intercessor is not his or her own. Their life is, first and foremost, dedicated to God and is available for whatever purposes He may determine. Beyond this, however, the intercessor is one who takes on the sufferings of others—individuals, or possibly even generations of individuals—for the purpose of facilitating God’s ultimate purpose for their lives. This is not an easy calling, and greatly misunderstood—often even by those who carry this assignment.

Possibly the primary reason that it is misunderstood is that we have been taught that intercession simply consists of prayer. We have been told that the intercessor is one who spends long hours in prayer, preferably on his or her knees, beseeching the Lord for His intervention in the life of an individual or situation. The longer we persevere in prayer, the more effective the intercession. If that prayer can be coupled with tears, it is even better. Intercession may, of course, involve hours of fervent prayer, but prayer—particularly supplicatory prayer where we come before God begging His intervention in the life of an individual or situation—is not the essence of intercession.

The word “intercede” comes directly from the Latin words *inter* which means “between,” and *cedere* which means “to go.” So then, to intercede is “to go between.” It suggests serving as a mediator between parties. One might intercede with a boss, for example, on behalf of a fellow worker who was harmed in some way in the work place. In so doing, they may even jeopardize their own job. One might also intercede by taking on the workload of a fellow worker if they are given impossible deadlines, or if they become sick and are not able to meet their quota. Intercession, then, carries the idea of standing in the gap on behalf of another person or persons. This is a much more accurate understanding of intercession than the much more commonly accepted understanding of “praying real hard.” Indeed, it is much more costly than that. Intercession involves the taking on of the burden, the pain, the suffering of another. Let us begin this consideration by looking at the lives of two intercessors in history.

Rees Howells¹

Rees Howells was an early twentieth century Welch missionary and founder of The Bible College of Wales. From a fairly young age, God had called him to a life of intercession. After spending some years in grueling battle with the Lord which resulted in his finally submitting his will to God’s will, the Lord began the process of emptying Rees Howells. He met a man who had been afflicted with meningitis, and in that condition had turned to alcohol and became an outcast in the community. Rees describes how the Lord gave him an intense love for this man, and he began spending more and more time with him, sacrificing for him, and ultimately seeing this man come to a place of victory. This was the first of many intercessory experiences that Rees Howells would encounter.

One of his most dramatic experiences in intercession involved a woman stricken with tuberculosis. As Rees was spending time (months) in prayer over this woman, he was reminded of the Romans 8 (vs. 26-27) passage, that the Holy Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. He came to the realization that this intercession takes place through His earthly temples. Rees

¹ More can be learned of the intercession of Rees Howells in the books *Rees Howells, Intercessor* by Norman Grubb (1952) and *The Intercession of Rees Howells* by Doris Ruscoe (1983).

knew that he must enter into the sufferings of this woman himself. As he submitted to the Lord for intercession over this woman, he himself took on all of the symptoms of her tuberculosis. After months of abiding prayer and taking on the symptoms of tuberculosis, Rees watched as this woman came to the point of death. It was then that the Lord said to him, *“The intercession that you made was for a tubercular. Now death has come. If she is to be delivered, accept death in her place tonight”* (Grubb, 1952, p. 93). Whew! What happened next has probably been experienced by many intercessors to some extent or another:

It was an awful night, for I had lost the face of God. That was the first night I went to bed without prayer, and I made up my mind not to go any further in this life of intercession...All that night I blamed myself that I had ever started it. It would have been better, I thought, if I had gone on in a life of faith and not touched this question of healing.

I got up the next morning, not intending to go to work, but I did not go on my knees—I could not face the Holy Spirit; I felt He was a stranger to me...

That evening the Holy Spirit spoke to me again. I shall never forget it. How sweet His voice was to me. He said, “you didn’t realize it was a privilege I offered you yesterday...You were offered a place among the martyrs”...

A martyr is one who has voluntarily shortened his life down here for the Savior’s sake, not merely one who dies in the course of duty; and the Lord showed me that I was to be among that number. I was afraid at first that I had forfeited my chance through my unwillingness the night before. I begged the Lord to forgive me, and I would gladly do what He asked me. I stepped into death—but there was no death there! I found that the Savior had drunk every drop of that cup for us (Grubb, 1952, pp. 93-94).

The tubercular woman did eventually die. When she learned that Rees Howells had been willing to die in her place, she asked the Lord to take her home, that

Rees was still needed here on earth. The Lord did take her home three months later. The Lord then told Rees that while He had accepted his intercession, His intention was for Rees to be a “living martyr.” Rees was to accept her death, and not to try to explain or defend the Lord in it. It looked like a failure, and certainly Rees Howells could not have understood it. But he trusted the Lord.

Rees Howells would go on to intercede for many other individuals and situations. Eventually, the Lord would lead him to start the Bible School of Wales. Here, during World War II, Rees, along with many of his students and faculty, were led to a prolonged period of intercessory prayer which was instrumental in thwarting Hitler’s forward march throughout Europe, and the course of history was changed. Howells had secured a position of spiritual authority through his years of faithful intercession. When this man spoke, God moved. Indeed, *God spoke through this man* and moved the world!

Jesus, the Ultimate Intercessor

When we hear it said that Jesus was the ultimate intercessor, the reference is usually to the fact that He paid the price for our sins. This is certainly the ultimate intercession that one could make, though the understanding of His intercession on the cross is often trivialized by modern day preachers. We will return to this aspect of Jesus’ intercession shortly.

Jesus’ intercession was demonstrated before His ministry even began during the forty days of temptation that He experienced. It was there in the wilderness that Jesus faced all the temptations that we face in His three encounters with the devil: the need for physical well-being; the lust for the treasures of the world; and the challenge to prove His position by throwing Himself off the pinnacle of the temple—in essence, to take into His own hands the proving of His worth. Let us be clear here—Satan did not come to Him with fork in hand and horns protruding, taunting Him as an external adversary, as a casual reading of that account in the context of the hyped image of Satan that our culture has created might lead us to believe. Oh no! The battle was being fought in Jesus’ mind. He was desperately hungry, and the thought of food presented a fierce challenge to Jesus. He knew who He was as the heir to all of the riches of the kingdom, and it must have been a

powerful temptation to take advantage of the shortcut that Satan was offering him in that dry, parched wilderness in which He found himself. We must know that Satan's offer of the kingdoms of the world posed an intense internal battle for our Lord. The scriptural account provides His ultimate victorious response, but it does not give us the details of the internal war that was waged within Him. But we can rest assured that there was one. Importantly, Jesus' victory did not merely represent His own personal victory that would qualify Him to receive the word, *this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased*. Jesus was experiencing the struggle that all of us face. He was interceding for us during these forty days, and in doing this He has gone before us as our forerunner in these struggles that we all encounter in one capacity or another.

We also see the intercession of Jesus in the incident in the temple when he overturned the tables of the money changers (John 2:13-17). Jesus was angry at the sight that He beheld there. Understand that this practice of selling animals for sacrifice was a long-held tradition in that day, and it was understood as a service provided for those who did not have animals of their own to bring for sacrifice. Those providing this service were, of course, profiteers, who were quite richly rewarded for their service. The text says that the disciples remembered that it was written, *The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up* (John 2:17). The Greek word here translated as "zeal" is *zēlos*, and is translated elsewhere in scripture as "indignation" and "jealousy." It suggests here an indignation on behalf of the temple of God. Jesus is taking on the very anger of God at the merchandizing that is taking place in His temple. This is not some fleshly anger that Jesus is experiencing—it is a holy anger, the righteous jealousy of His Father for the ultimate restoration of His temple. That temple is ultimately you and I and all of creation, of course. Jesus is, in this way, interceding on behalf of God Himself for the realization of His purposes in the cleansing and restoration of His creation (His temple). This is a deep mystery indeed.

The ultimate intercession of Jesus was that which took Him to Calvary. Whenever "the cross" is preached from pulpits today, the message usually is something to the effect that Jesus died for our sins, and that we must believe that fact and accept Him as savior. Quite typically, the new convert is then told that he or she is

now expected to live a life free of sin, and if they ever do slip into sin, they must go to God and seek forgiveness for the infraction. Jesus will then go before the Father and intercede for the wandering soul, much as a defense lawyer would go before a judge on behalf of his client. The intercession of Jesus on Calvary is thus reduced to a bearing of the burden for our wayward actions, taking on the penalty for sinful behavior because God is a just God Who must engage in retribution for the horrible offenses that have been committed against Him. Jesus is the scapegoat, bearing the penalty for our sin so that we don't have to.

This is a trivial, and even false view of Jesus' intercession on Golgotha's hill. Furthermore, it vilifies God Himself, making Him out to be a vengeful tyrant Who insists on retribution for even the slightest missteps of His creation. He will not be appeased unless a penalty has been paid for those missteps. Jesus is the one who paid for those wrongs committed. To add insult to injury, the one for whom the price for those sins has been paid must take it upon themselves to go to Jesus (or the Father Himself) and *ask* that the blood that Jesus shed that day be applied to his or her giving in to lust, greed, anger, or whatever sinful thought or deed they may have committed! If he or she fails to ask for it, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is of no effect. What an insult, and what a trivial understanding of the intercessory work that Jesus accomplished in full on the cross.

Jesus' intercession on Calvary was complete. Through His obedience that day, He achieved victory over sin once and for all. The intercession that Jesus experienced on the cross was not merely accepting the penalty for our sinful actions. Scripture says that he actually *became* sin: "*For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). In *becoming sin*, even though He knew no sin during His 33 years on earth, Jesus truly became our intercessor. Here, in the agony of the cross, He truly identified with us. He took on our very sinful nature. He *became* us, in our sinful state. His total obedience to the Father nailed that sinful nature to the cross. Sin itself has been done away with. We, who have all fallen short and have no righteousness of our own are now made God's righteousness. What a liberating reality!

But, you ask, why do I then struggle with sin? Why do we see so much evil in the world today? Ah, Jesus' intercession was not complete with His death on the cross and taking sin to the grave. On the third day, the stone was rolled away and Jesus emerged in resurrected life, complete with a glorified body. He would then ascend into the heavenly realm to be glorified with the Father. We will experience all of this. This is part of Jesus' intercession yet to be fully lived out in our experience. Jesus established the reality of sin abolished, bodies glorified, and ultimately ruling and reigning through His faithful intercession. That is *our* reality, and we will experience it in ever increasing fullness until that day when all tears are dried, and all fear is eradicated from the face of the earth; until that day when the lion shall lay down with the lamb. In the meantime, we who are a part of His body—and in particular, those of us through whom He will choose to intercede (those who have been called to a life of intercession)—participate with Him as intercessors bringing to pass the reality of His ultimate intercession in the lives and situations in which we find ourselves today.

Walking the Life of Intercession

The lives of these two men give us a sense of what it truly means to be an intercessor. It involves, first of all, ***identifying*** with the person or situation for which one is interceding. Rees Howells was so moved by compassion over the suffering that he encountered that he actually walked in the shoes of those for whom he was interceding. He would go without eating, in identification with the tramps who were hungry and without food. He took on the disease of the woman with tuberculosis. It is one thing to pray for an individual or situation, but it is quite another to actually take on the sickness or hunger of that person. The identification that is required of the intercessor may entail financial distress, emotional upheaval of various sorts or even the suffering of indignation by an unfaithful spouse as was the case, for example, with Hosea. Hosea was experiencing the grieving heart of Yahweh Himself, as Gomer represented unfaithful Israel. Yes, Hosea was sharing in the pain that God Himself was carrying! Indeed, whenever we intercede on behalf of another, we are interceding on behalf of God Himself, as He suffers with those who are suffering. The intercessor shares God's very heart regarding the person or situations for which he

or she is interceding. This requires truly identifying in one's very experience the pain or distress of that individual or circumstance.

Intercession is not a commitment that is to be taken lightly. It is costly. Intercession almost always involves a level of **agony**, as we groan in our spirits, often not even understanding why. We know that Paul had this experience:

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit [is], because He makes intercession for the saints according to [the will of] God. (Romans 8:26-27, NKJV).

Anyone who has read the life of Rees Howells or other intercessors readily recognizes the anguish that is part of the life of intercession. For many, this anguish involves experiencing extreme physical symptoms. Others are burdened with financial distress or the loss of reputation in the community for the sake of those individuals or situations for whom they are interceding. Whatever the circumstance, intercession virtually always involves an agony of the body and/or soul. At the heart of this anguish, of course, is the death of our own self life, a death voluntarily entered into on behalf of another.

We are certain that there are those reading these lines who have experienced the agony of intercession. Anyone, for example, who has experienced deep grief on behalf of a brother or sister who has been sorely wronged or experienced tragic loss, has, in that grief, been interceding on behalf of that brother or sister. They are sharing in the burden of that loss. There are those who experience emotional torment, including fear, despair or even anger with no apparent or logical reason for their distress. When we experience this emotional turmoil, it is easy to assume that there is something wrong with *us*, that we might have made some misstep along the way that needs to be repented of. It is certainly prudent that we search our hearts before the Lord on these matters. It may well be, however, that the upheaval that we are experiencing is the bearing of a burden on behalf of another—possibly someone whose name or face we do not even know. We are

living in a time of unprecedented chaos in the world, threatening the very future of the human race. People are responding to the uncertainty in the world in a myriad of ways: some through escaping into drug and alcohol addiction; others by throwing themselves into their work, or perhaps hedonistic pleasures of various sorts. Still others find that ending their lives is their only option. The Centers for Disease control (2024) report that the suicide rate has increased some 36 percent between 2000 and 2021, and the agency estimates that there is about one suicide death every 11 minutes in the United States. The heart of God aches deeply for the suffering and the torment we see all around us in this time. Many who are called to a life of intercession share in the suffering of a generation not knowing how to negotiate the terrain of a chaotic, uncertain world. God is using the suffering of these to ultimately free, and then reconcile the world to Himself.

Another aspect of intercession that makes it especially distressing is that it is quite typically a *hidden* experience, and cannot be shared with others; because of this, the intercessor is frequently not understood by friends and family. Most people, even in the church world, do not have a lens to understand what an intercessor may be going through. They are quick to recommend that he or she should consult a physician for the physical symptoms that they are experiencing. The intercessor experiencing mental anguish, irrational fear, depression or other emotional chaos as they walk in the shoes of another individual for purposes of their release, is most likely told that they need to see a good counsellor. They are often judged for some failing on their part when their finances collapse, when their marriage falls apart, or their children go astray. These are all situations that people experience, and need deliverance from, of course. The intercessor, however, has made his or her life available to God to walk in the very shoes of those in the grip of these circumstances. These are distressing circumstances that the intercessor has voluntarily taken on for purposes of freeing others. Because intercession is not understood by most, the experience of the intercessor is typically met with great misunderstanding at best and downright enmity at worst.

It is agonizing enough to take on the torment or anguish of another under any circumstance, made even more difficult when those near and dear to us act much like Job's friends who were looking for sin and missteps in his life as the cause of

his distress. The experience of such suffering becomes even more acute when **we** don't even know what or who it is that we are interceding for. It is one thing to intercede for another when we have knowledge of that for which we are interceding. Often, however, during the course of the battle, the intercessor does not have a clue for what or whom he or she is suffering—another aspect of its hiddenness. This is often necessary for intercession to truly be effective.

Furthermore, if we are to experience the depth of the agony of intercession, it will often be the case that we don't even know that we are interceding at the time that we are going through this travail! Only later does the Lord reveal the true nature and purpose of our suffering. As we endure the suffering and walk through it as though it were our own—for it really IS our own in our conscious experience—we are carrying that individual or situation through to the other side. This aspect of the hidden nature of intercession is, in many cases, the very thing that makes it effective in overcoming the strongholds in those for whom we are interceding. Until the purpose for which we are interceding has been revealed to us, all that we can do is endure the suffering, trusting that the Lord is accomplishing His purpose.

When the Lord does reveal His intercessory purpose for that which we are experiencing, we are then uniquely positioned to **take authority** over the specific stronghold in whoever's life or whatever situation for which we have been fighting. The Lord may reveal a particular individual or individuals who are experiencing the irrational fears that you have been feeling, not understanding why at the time. We have become convinced over the years that many of God's intercessors have gone through humiliating, even shameful experiences which appear to those on the outside as wanton acts of sin and depravity. This was a journey they did not understand and even questioned themselves as to their own motives. Yet, they knew they had not lost their faith, and they knew that they could do nothing else. They were unable, of course, to explain these acts in any way that would appear justifiable in the eyes of those under a law paradigm which has almost universally infected the church system today. God is using these individuals to break the curse of sin by shattering the bondage of the law in their lives on behalf of a people that He is calling forth in this hour. It is one thing to preach and teach freedom from the law; there is quite another level of authority

gained as one *walks* in that freedom, and from that place to proclaim it with the authority of heaven. Whatever circumstance that one walks through as an intercessor, his or her faithfulness in enduring the pain, shame or distress of that experience positions that dear saint to speak or act with divine authority over the power of darkness that has a stranglehold over the person or situation for whom he or she is interceding. This is the same standing that Jesus gained as our intercessor by taking on the shame of sin of all humanity as His own—ultimately taking Him to the cross.

There is, of course, an ***overcoming*** that is required on the part of the intercessor to gain the ground necessary for the deliverance of the one for whom he or she is interceding. There are no textbook instructions for how to overcome. It is a curriculum that is taught by the Great Professor Himself in the nitty gritty, day to day suffering that we experience in the agony of intercession. This is the process, whether our intercession takes on the form of emotional turmoil, financial distress, physical suffering, loss of standing in the community, or a myriad of other experiences.

The most natural response that one will have to the suffering entailed in intercession is to assume that there is something wrong with him or her, followed by a flurry of activity intended to correct the wrong. This might be followed with anger toward God for bringing these untoward circumstances into his or her life. Eventually, we come to a place of Sabbath rest, accepting that God is working something in and/or through us, even though we do not understand what that is. He is establishing us confidently in Him, and in the midst of the turmoil we are learning to walk and speak by *faith*, and not by sight or feeling. This is the grueling process of learning to overcome. God is always faithful to bring us to this place of ultimate victory. Our responsibility is simply to *endure*.

Conclusion

This article is written especially to those whom God has taken over to a life of intercession. While we believe that all who answer the call of God on their life will be given opportunities to intercede for others in one capacity or another, there are some for whom this is a focused calling in their life. The experiences and

circumstances that you encounter will be difficult and often hard to understand. The natural response will be to think that you are backsliding, even losing your faith when there seems to be no answer to your prayers for release.

The modern day church ill prepares one for this assignment. We are told by preachers and evangelists that Christ was the great intercessor, and all that we have to do is to accept what He did on our behalf. Easy peasy. Our entrance into the Kingdom was, of course, made possible by the intercessory sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. What modern day religion fails to understand, at least for the most part, is that we, as the body of Christ, are called to share in His sufferings. His work of reconciliation will ultimately be carried out by His body of called-out ones (His true *ecclesia*). That work of reconciliation will take many forms, some of which fit very comfortably within the contemporary church paradigm. There are those, for example, who are called to distribute food to the hungry or build houses for the poor. Others may be called to some form of evangelism. These are callings that the church today has more or less institutionalized, and those called to these endeavors are guided through predefined channels for carrying out these ministries. They are encouraged to join and volunteer with organizations that feed the hungry. Would-be pastors or evangelists are directed to denominational seminaries where they get credentialed and become agents for hire in the church systems of today.

God is now calling forth a people to a much more “undignified” calling.² True intercession falls into that category. The intercessor will not be understood most of the time as he or she literally takes on the sufferings of others. We are confident that some who are reading these lines have been called to a life of intercession in some capacity or another. You have experienced things that you have not understood, and have even become discouraged in your walk. Do not become faint-hearted. You may well be struggling on behalf of another. Know who you are in Christ and stand on those truths that He has revealed to you throughout your journey in Him. You are most blessed to be chosen to carry His heart in this way. He is trustworthy, and will carry you through to a place of

² See the article “[An Undignified Calling](http://www.wordforthebride.net)” in the Books and Articles page of www.wordforthebride.net.

overcoming victory—not only for you, but for that person or situation for whom you may be interceding!

The Lord has been and is now building a company of intercessors who must depend on one another to get the job of intercession done for a generation of people yet to come through times of tribulation. These intercessors may be in the blind as to the specifics of their mission, but the faith required is most pleasing to God. We leave you with the word He shared with us many years ago that we continue to hold onto today as we endure: “Unprecedented intercession for an unprecedented move of God.” May you be encouraged and strengthened in heart to finish your part with a larger body intercessors committed to the task of unprecedented intercession for our day and time. We stand with you!

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