

- (c) offers the most persuasive arguments he can think of,
- (d) shows the advantages of granting their request and the disadvantages of ignoring it, and
- (e) flatters him.

7) Agrippa granted their request (16.58–60).

Can we add anything to our previous list about intercession from this example? Just one:

- The intercessor helps the petitioner make his request by speaking for him. The request is the same no matter who makes it. The petitioner and intercessor are making the same request.

LESSONS FOR LIVING

1. Intercession is a prayer request made on behalf of others.
2. Intercession refers to petitions made in prayer, not to other aspects of prayer such as confession, praise, or thanksgiving.
3. Intercession is a ministry of persuading, not informing. It's persuading God to do something for others.
4. In outline form, intercession looks like this: (1) someone has a need, (2) you ask God to do something for them, and (3) you do everything you can to persuade God to provide their need.
5. Intercession expresses your love for others. You pray because you love them.
6. Intercession and the intercessory ministry of the Spirit go together. The Holy Spirit intercedes for others at the same time you intercede for them (Rom. 8:26–27). It's a joint petition; you're not praying alone. The Father hears two prayers at once, one from you and one from the Spirit.
7. The Spirit knows how to present your request in the most convincing manner. The request is not made in words. We pray in words; the Holy Spirit does not. He prays to the Father in 'wordless sighs' (Rom. 8:26).

8. Every request is accompanied with the Spirit's intercession. You don't have to ask Him to help—He helps automatically.

9. The intercessory ministry of the Spirit is necessary because we don't know how to pray as we should (Rom. 8:26). Our weakness is in the area of knowledge; we don't know how to present our requests persuasively to God. The Jews of Ionia, for instance, knew what they wanted but didn't know how—the best way—to ask the king for it. So Nicolas of Damascus made the request for them.

10. Our requests must be in keeping with God's will, otherwise the Spirit won't intercede for us (Rom. 8:27; cf. 1 John 5:14).

11. Carnality quenches the interceding ministry of the Spirit. God doesn't hear prayers offered in carnality (Psalm 66:18).

12. There's power in prayer; the Spirit's intercession is persuasive. God the Father won't deny a request made by God the Holy Spirit.

13. It's not your eloquence that persuades, but the Spirit's intercession.

14. Intercessory prayers are often found in the Bible (2 Cor. 13:7; Eph. 6:18–19; Col. 4:2–4; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 1:11–12; 3:1–2; Heb. 13:18–19; James 5:16).



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UNDERSTANDING INTERCESSION



And in the same way
 the Spirit
 also helps our weakness;
 for we do not know
 how to pray as we should,
 but the Spirit Himself
 intercedes for us
 with groanings too deep for words;
 and He who searches the hearts
 knows what the mind of the Spirit is,
 because He intercedes for the saints
 according to the will of God
 ~Romans 8:26–27~

What is intercession?

The verb ἐντυγχάνω (*entugchano*), often translated 'appeal to someone, make intercession,' occurs five times in the New Testament. It's used

- 1) of the Jews appealing to Festus to execute Paul (Acts 25:24),
- 2) of the Holy Spirit interceding for New Testament saints (Rom. 8:27),
- 3) of Jesus interceding for church age believers (Rom. 8:34),
- 4) of Elijah pleading "with God against Israel" (Rom. 11:2), and again
- 5) of Jesus interceding for church age believers (Heb. 7:25).

The meaning of the word is clear from its use in extra-biblical literature. Aristaeus, for instance, asks Ptolemy Philadelphus II to release the Jewish slaves in his kingdom.

Aristaeus... made up his mind to urge the king to set free the Jewish captives throughout his kingdom, and judging this to be a favourable moment for his request, he first spoke of it to the commanders of the bodyguard... and urged them to second his efforts in the matter on which he was about to petition (*entugchanein*) the king (Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.18).

Note the following:

- 1) Aristaeus was one of the king's closest friends (12.17).
- 2) The king respected him (12.17).
- 3) A problem exists: There were 120,000 Jewish slaves in Egypt (12.11).
- 4) Aristaeus asks the king to free them.
- 5) He got others to support him in his request. They felt the same way. Cf. 12.24–25.
- 6) He took the initiative on his own; the Jewish slaves did not ask him to intercede for them—to make this request on their behalf.
- 7) He makes his request on behalf of the Jewish slaves: "I ask these things on their behalf" (12.23).
- 8) His request is embedded in a speech (12.20–23). In the

speech he mentions all the reasons he can think of why the king should free the Jewish slaves.

- 9) He tries to persuade the king to free the slaves (12.25). When the king cites objections, they all presented reasons why he should free them (12.24–25).
- 10) He uses flattery, persuasive arguments, and entreaty to obtain his request.
- 11) The king granted the request (12.25–33).

What can we learn about intercession from this historical example?

- A problem exists that prompts the request.
- An intercessor speaks on someone's behalf to correct the problem.
- The intercessor asks whoever is in authority to solve the problem.
- He makes a request using flattery, persuasive arguments, and entreaty—a speech.
- He rallies support from others who think the same way. This adds up to multiple intercession. There's power in numbers.
- Personal qualities such as friendship and respect add a persuasive dimension to intercession.
- The intent is to persuade someone to give you what you ask for.

A second example is Nicolas of Damascus, who interceded for the Jews of Ionia.

All of those who are in distress, most mighty Agrippa, find it necessary to seek the protection of men who may be able to end the mistreatment which they suffer. The present petitioners (*entugchanousi*) also freely do so, having formerly often found you as receptive as they hoped, and now they ask not to be deprived of such favours by you who have granted them... (Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.31–32).

Note the following:

- 1) The Jews of Ionia were being mistreated by the civil authorities. Their rights were being violated.

- a) They were "not being allowed to observe their own laws" (16.27, 47).
- b) They were "being forced to appear in court on their holy days" (16.27, 45).
- c) "They had been deprived of the monies sent as offerings to Jerusalem" (16.28, 45).
- d) "They were being forced to participate in military service and civic duties and to spend their sacred monies for these things" (16.28).

2) King Herod appointed Nicolas of Damascus to intercede for the Jews of Ionia (16.29, "he assigned Nicolas, one of his friends, to speak in behalf of their rights"). He becomes their intercessor.

3) Nicolas spoke to Marcus Agrippa on their behalf (16.30, "Nicolas arose and spoke in behalf of the Jews"). His speech is recorded in 16.31–57.

4) The Jews are the ones making the request (*tois entugchanousi*); Nicolas helps them make the request by speaking to Agrippa for them. So, the petitioners and intercessor both have the same request. The request is the same no matter who makes it. The intercessor becomes a petitioner (16.47, "We therefore ask...").

5) Nicolas is better qualified to make the request than the Jews are.

- a) He's a friend of king Herod (16.29). Agrippa can't ignore that; to deny his request would be an insult to Herod. That puts pressure on him (16.60–61).
- b) He's used to this kind of thing. He understands legal procedure. He's used to dealing with kings and courts of law.
- c) He's eloquent. The Jews could never have made the request as eloquent or persuasive as he did.

6) Nicolas tries to persuade Agrippa to give the Jews their rights. He

- (a) points out how they have been mistreated,
- (b) mentions Agrippa's authority to correct the situation,