



Week 8: Have A Little Talk With Jesus

Learning The Language of Prayer

Welcome to our eighth week together as we explore the deep and transformative practice of standing in the gap for others through prayer. This week, we journey into the sacred ministry of intercessory and protective prayer, learning to speak not only for ourselves but also on behalf of those God has placed on our hearts.



Protective & Intercessory Prayer

Standing in the Gap

John 17

Jesus' High Priestly Prayer shows us the model of intercession, as Christ stands between heaven and earth, lifting up those entrusted to divine care.

1 Timothy 2:1

Paul's letter urges the early church to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings for everyone, establishing prayer as a foundational practice.

Tonight, we examine what it means to carry others before the throne of grace, to stand in the gap with compassion and spiritual authority, and to participate in the ongoing work of Christ's intercession for the world.

Opening Our Hearts

Opening Hymn

"Somebody Prayed for Me"

This beloved hymn reminds us of the faithful saints who covered us in prayer before we even knew we needed it. Their intercession created spiritual pathways for God's grace to flow into our lives.

As we sing and pray together, we join the great cloud of witnesses who have faithfully carried others before God. We honor the prayer warriors who came before us and commit ourselves to continuing this sacred ministry for the generations coming after us.

Opening Prayer

"Lord, thank you for those who prayed for us. Teach us to stand in the gap for others."

We begin by acknowledging the prayers that brought us to this moment and asking God to shape us into faithful intercessors.

Biblical Foundation

God's Call to Intercession

1 Timothy 2:1 (NRSVUE)

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone."

Paul establishes intercession as a primary spiritual practice, not an afterthought. The early church was built on a foundation of believers praying for one another and for the world.

John 17:9 (NRSVUE)

"I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours."

Jesus models specific, focused intercession. Christ prays with intimacy and authority for those the Father has entrusted to divine care, showing us the personal nature of true intercession.

These scriptures reveal that intercessory prayer is not optional for followers of Christ but central to our calling. We are invited into the very work of Christ, who "always lives to make intercession" for us (Hebrews 7:25). When we pray for others, we participate in something ancient, holy, and eternally significant.

Richard Foster's Wisdom

Praying God's Heart for Others

Intercession Defined

Foster teaches that intercession means praying *God's heart* for others, not our agenda. It requires us to align our desires with divine purposes and surrender our need to control outcomes.

Christ's Priestly Work

"We share in Christ's priestly work when we intercede." This is not presumption but participation in the ongoing ministry of Jesus, who stands between God and humanity.

Listening & Compassion

True intercession requires listening to the Holy Spirit and feeling compassion for those we pray for. It's not about control or manipulation, but about love expressed through spiritual solidarity.

Foster's insight challenges us to move beyond simple petition into a deeper dimension of prayer. When we intercede, we're not trying to convince God to care about someone; we're joining God who already cares deeply. We're learning to see people as God sees them and to desire for them what God desires. This transforms prayer from a shopping list into a sacred conversation where we align our hearts with heaven's purposes.

Howard Thurman's Vision

The Ministry of Presence

"The true prayer for another begins when we carry them in the quiet of our hearts."

Beyond Magic Words

Thurman reminds us that intercession is not about saying the right formula or manipulating spiritual forces. It's about spiritual solidarity, carrying another person's burdens in the sanctuary of our own hearts.

When we truly intercede, we create space within ourselves for another's pain, hope, and need. We become a dwelling place for their concerns, holding them before God even when words fail us.

Thurman's mystical understanding of prayer invites us into a contemplative approach to intercession. It's not about the volume of our words but the depth of our presence. When we hold someone in the quiet of our hearts, we create sacred space where God can work in ways beyond our understanding.

Empathy as Channel

Our empathy, our ability to feel with and for another person, becomes a channel for God's grace. The Spirit uses our compassion as a conduit through which divine love flows.

This is why intercession often changes the pray-er as much as the prayed-for. When we make room in our hearts for others, God enlarges our capacity for love and transforms our perspective.

James Cone's Prophetic Voice

Protective Prayer & Liberation

1

Prayer as Protection

"Praying for our people has always been a form of protection." Throughout African American history, prayer has been spiritual armor in a dangerous world.

2

Prayer as Resistance

To pray for the oppressed is to resist their destruction. Intercession becomes an act of defiance against forces that seek to harm, diminish, or destroy God's beloved children.

3

Generational Intercession

Black mothers' and grandmothers' prayers were armor for a dangerous world. Their intercessions created spiritual shields around children facing brutality and injustice.

Cone's liberation theology reveals intercession as more than personal piety; it's political and prophetic. When we pray for those facing oppression, marginalization, or violence, we declare that their lives matter to God and should matter to the world. We stand with them in spiritual solidarity, and sometimes that solidarity must lead us from our knees to our feet, from prayer closets to prophetic action. Protective prayer has always been part of the Black church's resistance to evil and its commitment to survival, dignity, and freedom.

Biblical Witnesses

Stories of Standing in the Gap

Moses Intercedes

Exodus 32:11-14 (NRSVUE)

Moses stood between God's righteous anger and Israel's rebellion, pleading for mercy. His intercession changed the course of history, demonstrating the power of one person standing in the gap.

Job Prays for Friends

Job 42:10 (NRSVUE)

"And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends." Even after his friends failed him, Job interceded for them, and his own restoration came through that act of grace.

Jesus Prays for Peter

Luke 22:32 (NRSVUE)

"But I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail." Jesus interceded for Peter before Peter even knew he would need it, covering him with prayer in advance of his crisis.

These biblical examples show us that intercession is woven throughout salvation history. From the earliest days of God's covenant people, faithful believers have stood between heaven and earth, pleading for mercy, protection, and transformation. Their prayers changed outcomes, saved lives, and shaped the story of redemption.

The Nature of Protective Prayer

Four Essential Elements



Identification

Entering into another's need means more than acknowledging it from a distance. We must allow ourselves to be touched by their situation, to feel the weight of their burden, to stand where they stand.



Empathy

Feeling what they feel requires emotional and spiritual openness. The Holy Spirit gives us the capacity to share in another's sorrow, fear, or hope, making their concerns our own.



Intercession

Lifting them before God is the sacred act of bringing another person into the throne room of grace. We present them to God, not because God doesn't know their need, but because we participate in divine care.



Action

Sometimes becoming the answer means God uses our prayers to convict us to act. True intercession may lead us from petition to participation, from asking God to intervening ourselves as God's agents.

These four elements work together to create authentic intercessory prayer. We cannot skip identification and jump straight to petition. We cannot claim empathy without allowing it to move us. And we must always remain open to the possibility that God's answer to our prayer might be, "You go. You be my hands and feet. You be the answer you're praying for."

African American Witness

A Legacy of Protective Prayer



Mothers of the Church

The "mothers of the church" have always served as intercessors and prayer warriors, covering the body of Christ with their faithful prayers. These women, often dressed in white, carried the spiritual authority that comes from years of faithful communion with God. They knew how to pray through, how to hold on, and how to believe God for the impossible.



Hush Harbor Intercession

In secret meeting places during slavery, our ancestors cried out: "*Lord, set my children free.*" These prayers, whispered in hidden clearings and behind closed doors, were acts of resistance and faith. They believed freedom would come, and they prayed it into existence across generations.



Modern Echoes

Today we still hear: "I'm praying a hedge of protection around you." This language, drawn from Job 1:10, continues the tradition of protective prayer. We speak spiritual covering over our children, our communities, and our vulnerable ones, believing that prayer creates a barrier against harm.

The African American church has always understood the power of intercessory and protective prayer because our survival has depended on it. Prayer was often the only weapon we had against violence, injustice, and systemic evil. Our prayer tradition is rich, deep, and tested by fire. We come from people who knew how to pray down heaven, who believed that what they couldn't change with their hands, God could change with divine power in response to their prayers.

Pitfalls & Growth

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Manipulation Through Prayer:** Trying to control others by praying "Lord, make them do what I want." This turns intercession into spiritual manipulation rather than genuine care.
- **Neglecting Ourselves:** Forgetting our own needs in constant intercession for others. We cannot pour from an empty cup, and God cares about our wellbeing too.
- **Taking Credit:** Believing our prayers "worked" because of our spiritual prowess rather than God's grace and timing.
- **Sharing Private Information:** Using prayer requests as gossip, violating trust under the guise of "sharing for prayer."

Growing in intercessory prayer means learning from our mistakes and allowing the Holy Spirit to refine our motives and methods. The goal is always love, never control. The focus is always God's will, never our agenda. And the result should always be transformation in us as much as in those we pray for.

Paths to Growth

- **Mutual Transformation:** Intercession transforms both the prayed-for and the pray-er. We grow in compassion, perspective, and spiritual maturity.
- **Listening First:** Learning to hear God's heart before speaking our requests, aligning our prayers with divine purposes.
- **Maintaining Boundaries:** Understanding that we intercede without taking responsibility for outcomes or trying to control others' choices.
- **Sustained Faithfulness:** Developing the discipline to keep praying even when we don't see immediate results.

A Word from Richard Foster

"Intercession is a way of loving others. To move into the prayer of intercession is to see people and situations as God sees them."

This profound insight captures the heart of intercessory prayer. When we truly intercede for someone, we're not just reciting their name in a list; we're learning to love them as God loves them. We're asking for our vision to be transformed so we can see past their faults, failures, and frustrations to the beloved child of God that they truly are.

Intercession changes our perspective on people who annoy us, challenge us, or even hurt us. It's hard to maintain anger or judgment toward someone you're faithfully praying for. As we bring them before God's throne, the Holy Spirit softens our hearts, opens our eyes, and gives us glimpses of who they are becoming in Christ.

This is why intercession is so powerful, not just for those we pray for but for our own spiritual formation. It cultivates humility, compassion, patience, and faith. It teaches us to trust God's timing and methods. It reminds us that we are all works in progress, all in need of grace, all dependent on the prayers of others. When we stand in the gap for someone else, we remember that others have stood in the gap for us.

Discussion Questions

Reflecting Together

1

Personal Testimony

Who first prayed for you, and what difference did it make?

Take a moment to remember the people who covered you in prayer, perhaps before you even knew Christ. How did their intercession shape your spiritual journey? What would be different about your life if no one had ever prayed for you?

2

Transformation Through Prayer

How does interceding for someone change how you see them?

Reflect on a time when praying for someone, especially someone difficult, transformed your relationship with them. What shifts in your heart when you consistently bring someone before God? How does intercession break down walls and build bridges?

3

Community Application

What does 'protective prayer' look like in our community context?

Consider the specific challenges facing our community. Who are the vulnerable ones who need spiritual covering? What would it mean for us to pray a hedge of protection around our young people, our elders, those facing injustice? How can we move from individual intercession to corporate protective prayer?

Take time with these questions in your small groups. Share stories, listen deeply, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak through one another's testimonies and insights.

Practice Exercise

Standing in the Gap Together

01

Choose a Focus

In your small groups, prayerfully choose one person, one family, or one issue to cover in prayer tonight. This could be someone in the group, a church member facing a challenge, a community need, or a justice issue weighing on your hearts.

03

Corporate Prayer

Have one person pray aloud on behalf of the group, gathering up all the silent prayers and speaking them before God. Let this prayer be both specific and trusting, both honest and hopeful.

As you practice this exercise, pay attention to what happens in your own heart. Notice how intercession creates unity, deepens compassion, and strengthens faith. This is not just an exercise; it's a spiritual discipline that can transform both individuals and communities when practiced consistently.

02

Silent Intercession

Take two minutes of silent prayer, allowing each person to listen to the Holy Spirit and intercede individually. Let God show you what to pray. Feel the weight of what you're carrying before the throne of grace.

04

Closing Unity

End together with: *"Lord, make us instruments of your peace."* This reminds us that intercessory prayer often leads to action, that we may be called to become part of the answer we're praying for.

Memory Verse & Key Takeaway

Memory Verse

1 Timothy 2:1 (NRSVUE)

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone."

Key Takeaway

-  Intercessory and protective prayer are acts of love and resistance, standing in the gap with compassion and power.

As we close this week's study, remember that you stand in a long line of faithful intercessors. From Moses to the mothers of the church, from Jesus himself to the grandmothers who prayed us into existence, we are part of a great tradition of standing in the gap. When you pray for others, you participate in the ongoing work of Christ, who "always lives to make intercession" for us.

May you grow in this sacred ministry. May you learn to see people as God sees them. May your empathy become a channel for divine grace. And may your prayers, joined with the prayers of the saints throughout the ages, create hedges of protection, pathways of blessing, and openings for God's transforming power in the lives of those you love.

Go forth this week committed to standing in the gap for someone. Let your intercession be both a prayer and a presence. And trust that when you pray, heaven moves in ways you may never fully see or understand. Amen.