

Chapter 12.

What Is an Intercessor?

The central truth which the Holy Ghost gradually revealed to Mr. Howells and which was the mainspring of his whole life's ministry was that of intercession. The Spirit can be seen leading him into this in all His dealings with him, from the time He took full possession of him in the Llandrindod Convention until, in his dealings with the tubercular woman, the meaning of intercession became fully clear. From then onward the Spirit was constantly leading him both to gain new positions as an intercessor and to reveal the precious truths he had learned to others able to bear them. It will be useful, therefore, to stop a moment and to look a little more carefully into what is meant by being an intercessor.

That God seeks intercessors but seldom finds them is plain from the pain of His exclamation through Isaiah: "He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor"; and His protest of disappointment through Ezekiel: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land . . . but I found none."

Perhaps believers in general have regarded intercession as just some form of rather intensified prayer. It is, so long as there is great emphasis on the word "intensified"; for there are three things to be seen in an intercessor which are not necessarily found in ordinary prayer: identification, agony and authority.

The identification of the intercessor with the ones for whom he intercedes is perfectly seen in the Saviour. Of Him it was said that He poured out His soul unto death; and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and *made intercession* for the transgressors. As the Divine Intercessor, interceding for a lost world, He drained the cup of our lost condition to its last drop, He "tasted death for every man." To do that, in the fullest possible sense, He sat where we sit. By taking our nature upon Himself, by learning obedience through the things which

He suffered, by being tempted in all points like as we are, by becoming poor for our sakes, and finally by being made sin for us, He gained the position in which, with the fullest authority as the Captain of our salvation made perfect through sufferings, and the fullest understanding of all we go through, He can ever live to make intercession for us, and by effective pleadings with the Father “is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.” Identification is thus the first law of the intercessor. He pleads effectively because he gives his life for those he pleads for; he is their genuine representative; he has submerged his self-interest in their needs and sufferings, and as far as possible has literally taken their place.

There is another Intercessor, and in Him we see the agony of this ministry; for He, the Holy Spirit, “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” This One, the only present Intercessor on earth, has no hearts upon which He can lay His burdens, and no bodies through which He can suffer and work, except the hearts and bodies of those who are His dwelling place. Through them He does His intercessory work on earth, and they become intercessors by reason of the Intercessor within them. It is real life to which He calls them, the very kind of life, in lesser measure, which the Saviour Himself lived on earth.

But before He can lead a chosen vessel into such a life of intercession He first has to deal to the bottom with all that is natural. Love of money, personal ambition, natural affection for parents and loved ones, the appetites of the body, the love of life itself, all that makes even a converted man live unto himself, for his own comfort or advantage, for his own advancement, even for his own circle of friends, has to go to the cross. It is no theoretical death but a real crucifixion with Christ, such as only the Holy Ghost Himself can make actual in the experience of His servant. Both as a crisis and process, Paul’s testimony must be made ours: “I have been and still am crucified with Christ.” The self must be released from itself to become the agent of the Holy Ghost.

As crucifixion proceeds, intercession begins. By inner burdens, by calls to outward obediences, the Spirit begins to live His own life of love and sacrifice for a lost world through His cleansed channel. We see it in Rees Howells’ life. We see it at its greatest height in the Scriptures. Watch Moses, the young intercessor, leaving the palace by free choice to identify himself with his slave-brethren. See him accompanying them through “the waste and howling wilderness.” See him reach the very summit of intercession when the wrath of God was upon them for their idolatry and their destruction was imminent. It is not his body he now offers for them as intercessor but his immortal soul: “If Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy Book”; and he actually called this “making an atonement” for them.

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See the Apostle Paul, the greatest man of the new dispensation as Moses was of the old. For years his body, through the Holy Ghost, is a living sacrifice that the Gentiles might have the gospel; finally, his immortal soul is offered on the altar. The very one who was just rejoicing with the Romans that nothing could separate him and them from the love of God (Rom. 8) says a moment later, the Spirit bearing him witness, that he could wish himself “accursed [separated] from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9).

This is the intercessor in action. When the Holy Ghost really lives His life in a chosen vessel there is no limit to the extremes to which He will take him in His passion to warn and save the lost. Isaiah, that aristocrat, had to go “naked and barefoot” for three years as a warning to Israel. We can hardly credit such a thing! Hosea had to marry a harlot, to show his people that the heavenly Husband was willing to take back His adulterous bride. Jeremiah was not allowed to marry, as a warning to Israel against the terrors and tragedies of captivity. Ezekiel was not allowed to shed one tear for the death of his wife, “the desire of his eyes.” And so the list might be continued. Every greatly used instrument of God has been, in his measure, an intercessor: Wesley for backsliding England; Booth for the down-and-outs; Hudson Taylor for China; C. T. Studd for the unevangelised world.

But intercession is more than the Spirit sharing His groanings with us and living His life of sacrifice for the world through us. It is the Spirit gaining His ends of abundant grace. If the intercessor knows identification and agony, he also knows authority. It is the law of the grain of wheat and the harvest: “If it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

Intercession is not substitution for sin. There has only ever been one substitute for a world of sinners: Jesus the Son of God. But intercession so identifies the intercessor with the sufferer that it gives him a prevailing place with God. He moves God. He even causes Him to change His mind. He gains his objective, or rather the Spirit gains it through him. Thus Moses, by intercession, became the Saviour of Israel and prevented their destruction; and we can have little doubt that Paul’s supreme act of intercession for God’s chosen people resulted in the great revelation given him at that time of worldwide evangelisation and the final salvation of Israel (Romans 10 and 11), and is enabling God to bring it about.

Mr. Howells would often speak of “the gained position of intercession,” and the truth of it is obvious on many occasions in his life. It is a fact of experience. The price is paid, the obedience is fulfilled, the inner wrestlings

and groanings take their full course, and then “the word of the Lord comes.” The weak channel is clothed with authority by the Holy Ghost and can speak the word of deliverance. “Greater works” are done. Not only this, but a new position in grace is gained and maintained, although even then that grace can only be appropriated and applied in each instance under the guidance of the Spirit.

Mr. Howells used to speak of it, in Mr. Müller’s phrases, as entering “the grace of faith,” in contrast to receiving “the gifts of faith.” What he meant was that, when we pray in a normal way, we may hope that God of His goodness will give us the thing. If He does, we rejoice; it is His gift to us; but we have no power or authority to say that we can always get that same answer at any time. Such are the gifts of faith. But when an intercessor has gained the place of intercession in a certain realm, then he has entered into “the grace of faith”; along that special line the measureless sea of God’s grace is open to him. That is the gained place of intercession.

Mr. Howells referred to George Müller’s experience. Mr. Müller had never gained a place of intercession over sickness, but on one occasion God raised up a sick person for whom he had prayed. On another occasion he prayed for another sick person, but there was no healing. Mr. Müller, however, said that this was not a failure in prayer because he had never gained a place of intercession over sickness, and therefore the answer to the first prayer was merely “a gift of faith,” which would not necessarily be repeated. On the other hand, he had gained a place of intercession for the orphans. He was always ready to be the first sufferer on their behalf; if there was enough food for all except one, he would be the one to go without; and in this realm of supply, God held him responsible to see that the needs were always met, for the doors of God’s Treasury had been permanently opened to him, and he could take as much as he needed.

Pastor Blumhardt of Germany, on the other hand, was a man who had gained a place of intercession for the sick. In his first struggles with evil spirits it took him more than eighteen months of prayer and fasting before he gained the final victory. Complaints were lodged against him of neglecting his work as a minister and devoting himself to the healing of the sick, but he said the Lord had given the parable of the friend at midnight and the three loaves and, though unworthy, he was going on knocking.

Pastor Blumhardt prayed through, and God did open. Not only were hundreds blessed, but he raised a standard for the church. After the final victory he gained such ease of access to the Throne that often, when letters came asking for prayer for sick people, after just looking up for a single moment he could find God’s will as to whether they were to be healed or not. The sufferings of others became so painful to him that he was pleading for them as if for himself. That was intercession!