

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

HOW GOD CAN USE YOUR PRAYERS
TO MOVE HEAVEN AND EARTH

DUTCH SHEETS



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To the Sheets team—Ceci, my wife and best friend;
Sarah and Hannah, our two precious daughters;
and yours truly—lovingly dedicate this labor of love to Jesus.

“Thank You, Sir, for the price You paid and the
passion that still motivates You. You’re our Hero.
It is fun and a great honor to serve and represent
You on the earth. We look forward to many more
wonderful times and days with You!”

P.S. “We hope You like the book—we did it for You!”

Contents

- Acknowledgments 13
- Foreword by C. Peter Wagner 15
1. The Question Is . . . 19
The right answer begins with the right question.
 2. The Necessity of Prayer 27
God chose, from the time of the Creation, to work on the earth through humans, not independently from them.
 3. Re-Presenting Jesus 43
Intercession can be summarized as mediating, going between, pleading for another, representing one party to another.
 4. Meetings: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly 57
Intercessors meet with God; they also meet the powers of darkness.
 5. Cheek to Cheek 71
He put His tear-stained cheek next to ours and “bore” our punishment for sin.

6. No Trespassing 89
“No dumping allowed, Satan. Trespassers will be violated.”
7. Butterflies, Mice, Elephants and Bull’s-Eyes 107
The Holy Spirit empowers the Butterfly Anointing so that we don’t confuse the mice with the elephant.
8. Supernatural Childbirth 123
There is a prayer that births, bringing forth spiritual sons and daughters.
9. Pro Wrestlers 151
Step into the ring and face the powers of darkness.
10. Most High Man 177
The sin of pride, passed on from Lucifer to humans in the Garden, is what Satan uses to blind humanity.
11. The Lightning of God 201
We let the “Son” shine forth through us, directing His light to desired situations, allowing it to “strike the mark.”
12. The Substance of Prayer 217
You must release the power of God inside of you on a consistent basis.
13. Actions That Speak and Words That Perform 239
Our words or actions impact the heavenly realm, which then impacts the natural realm.
14. The Watchman Anointing 259
To the degree we are ignorant of our adversary, he will gain on us, prey on us and defraud us of what is ours.
- Discussion Leader’s Guide 287
- Notes 293
- Bibliography 301
- Scripture Index 305
- Subject Index 309

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Foreword

The modern prayer movement began around 1970. True, it had been burning brightly in Korea for some decades previously, but it was around 1970 that it started to spread worldwide. In recent years the expansion of the prayer movement has been exponential. Quality of prayer is increasing along with quantity of prayer. Flames of prayer are being lit in virtually every church movement on every continent. Pastors are giving prayer a higher priority, children are praying fervently and effectively, prayer movements and prayer ministries are proliferating, theological seminaries are introducing courses on prayer, and even secular magazines have been featuring cover stories about prayer.

I am one of those who has been deeply touched by the contemporary prayer movement. For a good bit of my ministry career, prayer was boring to me. Oh, I knew the Bible taught that we must pray and that God answers prayer. I also knew prayer was included as a normal part of the day-by-day routine of Christian individuals, families and churches. But I would look forward to a prayer meeting with about as much enthusiasm as I look forward to visiting the dentist. No longer!

It was the sovereign hand of God that drew me into what would become an intense involvement with the worldwide prayer movement back in 1987. Since then, I have researched prayer diligently. I have improved my personal prayer life greatly. I have taught prayer seminars and seminary courses on prayer. I helped to coordinate prayer activities for the A.D. 2000 Movement and I have written several books on prayer. The reason I mention these things is not to blow myself up as some sort of spiritual giant, which I am not. It is rather to display some credentials as a backdrop to a statement I am about to make.

As a professional scholar, I accept the responsibility of keeping abreast of the literature relating to prayer to the best of my ability. My personal library currently includes many shelves of books about prayer, and the number continues to increase rapidly. Looking over that section of my library, which I can see from where I am now sitting, I see no book that compares to this one written by my good friend Dutch Sheets.

I know every book has its own unique features. But *Intercessory Prayer* is in a category by itself. In my opinion, Dutch Sheets has provided, more than any other contemporary author, what could be considered the standard biblical theology for the world-wide prayer movement. I was thrilled as I first read page after page of solid biblical teaching about the many facets of prayer. As I did, I was pleasantly surprised to come across concept after concept that I had not considered before. Few things I have read have turned on more lights than *Intercessory Prayer*. Others have agreed with me, since the book has sold hundreds of thousands of copies.

It is a danger, I realize, to classify anything as “theology.” To many, reading theology is about as interesting as watching lawn bowling. But Dutch Sheets is one of those theologians who are also dynamic communicators. Instead of making simple things

complicated, like some theologians, he knows how to make complicated things simple.

Sunday after Sunday, Pastor Dutch preaches to hundreds in Freedom Church, one of Colorado Springs's most dynamic churches. As he does in his sermons, Dutch brings to life every point he makes through real life stories, some about his own experiences and some about the experiences of others. Every one of them shows how God can be glorified through the prayers of any believer.

If you want new power in your prayer life and in the prayer life of your group, you have the guidebook you need in your hands. Your prayers will have more power to the degree they have more substance. You will not read far before you realize you are absorbing some of the most substantial teaching about prayer available today. As I have done, you will thank God and thank Dutch Sheets for this outstanding book.

C. Peter Wagner
Presiding Apostle
International Coalition of Apostles

1

The Question Is . . .

No Hope

I knew the person I was going to pray for was very ill. What I didn't know was that she was comatose with a tracheostomy in her throat, a feeding tube in her stomach and had been in that condition for a year and a half. Seeing her for the first time was like expecting a prescription and receiving brain surgery. Her sister, who had asked me to visit this young lady, had not given me the whole story for fear I wouldn't go at all. She knew if she could just get me there once, I'd probably go back. She was right!

The doctors gave Diane (not her real name) no hope for living, let alone coming out of the coma. Even if she did regain consciousness, she would basically be a vegetable because of her extensive brain damage, or so the doctors believed.

Have you ever stood beside someone in this kind of condition and asked God for a miracle? To stand beside death and ask for life can be intimidating. It can also teach us a lot—about life,

about death, about ourselves and about our God. Especially when we stand beside the same person 60 to 70 times, for an hour or more each time, throughout the course of a year.

Confronted With the Unexpected

It didn't work out as I expected. Life rarely does, does it?

I expected the Lord to heal this young lady through our prayers in a dramatic, easy, quick way. After all, that's how it happened with Jesus.

- I didn't expect to invest three to four hours of my life each week for a year (including the travel time).
- I didn't expect humiliation and insults from the staff of the nursing home where she stayed.
- I didn't expect to cry so much.
- I didn't expect to be so bold at times.
- I didn't expect to be so intimidated at times.
- I didn't expect it to take so long.
- I didn't expect to learn so much!

The Miracle

Yes, God restored Diane! He healed her brain, the outer layer of which the doctors said had been totally destroyed by a virus. Every part of it was covered with infection. "No hope," they said.

The front page of the *Dayton Daily News* (not the real place or newspaper) read, "Woman Awake, Alive, Healthy After Two Years in Coma." The doctors called it a "medical miracle." "We have no explanation," they said, though they stopped short of giving God the glory.

It actually happened on a Saturday morning when she was all alone. Earlier that week Diane had been moved from the nursing home to a hospital for treatment of an infection. After administering more tests, the doctors determined her condition had grown worse and informed her family that she would probably die soon.

When Diane's sister relayed this information to me, I dashed off to the hospital.

Knowing comatose people can often hear and understand everything happening around them, I spoke much to her. As we later learned, because of the damage to her brain Diane was not hearing me. But on this Wednesday afternoon, I spoke to her as usual.

"This nightmare is almost over," I said with tears streaming down my face. "Nothing can keep us from receiving our miracle. Nothing!"

The memory is forever imprinted on my mind. As I exited the hospital weeping, I remember saying to myself again and again, "Nothing can keep us from our miracle. Nothing!"

It was not just a strong hope I had at this point but a great faith. I had turned to God many times throughout the course of that year asking Him if He had really sent me to this little girl. Each time I received His assurance: "I sent you. Don't quit."

The Power of Persistence

Now, I've been accused of being quite a stubborn fellow, and I suppose that's true. In fact, I've "stubborned" myself into a lot of trouble, including two major concussions playing football when a couple of fellows had more size and muscle behind their "stubborn" than I did.

Stubbornness, however, can be channeled into a righteous force called persistence or endurance. I've found it to be one

of the most important spiritual attributes of the Christian life. Charles Spurgeon said, “By perseverance the snail reached the ark.”¹

A lack of endurance is one of the greatest causes of defeat, especially in prayer. We don’t wait well. We’re into microwaving; God, on the other hand, is usually into marinating. So I persisted for a year, and as I did my faith grew until I knew deep inside we were going to win. My motto had become Galatians 6:9: “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.”

My persistence was rewarded when, three days after that Wednesday in the hospital, Diane woke up with full restoration to her brain. News about the miracle spread to other nations. In fact, the nursing home where she had stayed received inquiries from Europe wanting to know about her incredible recovery.

Every hour and every tear I had invested became worth the wait when I saw Diane awake and heard her speak the words, “Praise the Lord.”

What did I learn from that year-long endeavor? Much, plus a whole lot! And I’m still learning.

In “The Last Days Newsletter,” Leonard Ravenhill tells about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village who walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, “Were any great men born in this village?” The old man replied, “Nope, only babies.”²

I’ve learned that no one is born a prayer hero. They are shaped and refined on the practice field of life.

A Hollywood talent judge said of Fred Astaire, one of the top singers, dancers and actors of all time: “Can’t act. Can’t sing.

Can dance a little.”³ I’m sure Satan has passed his judgment on me at times in my life: “Can’t preach. Can’t lead. Can pray a little.” Thank God for His grace, patience and commitment to me. I’ve stumbled forward more than backward in life.

So Many Questions

From this and other prayer journeys—from failures as well as victories—from hundreds of hours of study, I’ve formed some thoughts to share with you. I believe they will answer many questions, such as:

- Is prayer really necessary? If so, why? Isn’t God sovereign? Doesn’t that mean He accomplishes what He wants, when He wants? If so, why pray?
- Is God’s will for a Christian automatically guaranteed or is it linked to prayer and other factors?
- Why does it often take so long to get a prayer answered? Why is persistence required? Jacob wrestled with God. Is that what we are to do in prayer? I don’t like the thought of wrestling with God, do you?
- What about prayer for the lost? How can I be more effective? I get a little frustrated trying to think of new ways to ask God to save people, don’t you? I thought He *wanted* to save them. Then why do I feel as though I’m trying to talk Him into it? Is there a better way? Do I ask for their salvation again and again or simply petition Him once and then just thank Him in faith?
- What about spiritual warfare? If Satan is defeated and Christ has all authority, shouldn’t we just forget about the devil? Does God bind the devil or do we?
- What exactly is intercessory prayer? And don’t just tell me it’s “standing in the gap.” Enough religious quotes

and spiritual jargon. I know the thought is taken from the Bible, but what does it mean?

- What about protection? Is everything that happens to me or my family simply allowed by God? Or is there something I need to do to procure our safety?
- How do we “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2)?
- Is there a right time for answers to prayer or does the timing depend on me?

Are you getting tired of all these questions? I know I am—so I’ll stop. You may even be tired of asking yourself some of them. I know I was. Many people stopped asking them long ago, and probably stopped praying, too.

Please don’t do that!

Keep asking! I’ve discovered that the right answer begins with the right question. I’ve also discovered that God is not offended by a sincere question. He won’t satisfy the skeptic and He is not pleased with unbelief, but He loves an honest seeker. Those who lack and ask for wisdom He does not rebuke (see Jas. 1:5). He is a good Dad. Will you pray this prayer with me?

Father, we need more understanding—not more knowledge. We have so much of it now that we are becoming confused. Yes, and even cynical at times because our knowledge has not always worked. In fact, Father, our Bibles often seem to contradict our experiences. We need some answers. We need a marriage of theology and experience.

We’ve been encouraged by the stories of other great prayer warriors—the praying Hydes, the David Brainerds, the Andrew Murrays and the apostle Pauls. But frankly, Lord, it gets a bit frustrating when our prayers don’t seem to work. And intimidating as well because we don’t know if we will ever be able to pray two to three hours a day, as

these great intercessors did. We need more than inspiration now. We need answers.

So, as Your disciples did, Lord, we say, “Teach us to pray.” We know it often requires hard work, but can’t it also be fun? We know there will be failures, but how about a few more successes? We know “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7), but couldn’t we see a few more victories? . . . Souls saved? . . . Healings?

We are tired of cloaking our ignorance in robes of blind obedience and calling it spirituality. We are tired of religious exercises that make us feel better for a while but bear little lasting fruit. We are tired of a form of godliness without the power.

Help us, please. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.