

The heart of the intercessor. November conference, 2010

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19)

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jer 31:33)

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" (Mk 7:17-23)

What kind of heart does an intercessor have to have? Let's take a look at a prophet's heart, which is very similar.

1.Intense loneliness – Elijah at Horeb. 1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."

The prophetic experience is intensely lonely, and so is the intercessory one. Men cannot accompany us in these lonely places. In Gethsemane, Jesus left his friends at the gate. In these lonely places we often feel isolated, unloved, unsupported and desperate. Many have echoed Elijah's cry to die rather than to be left like this – like a piece of rag

hanging from a tree, twisting in the wind. And it is intense - a pain that almost hurts. Jeremiah describes his ministry like this -

But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. (19:29)

If we look at Hannah, we can see the isolation in her agonising prayer:-

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." (1 Sam 1:9-11)

This loneliness, perhaps better described as "being alone," is hard, but it sharpens up our understanding, and purifies our intercession. Ultimately, we are never really alone, being surrounded by a great crown of witnesses (Hebs 12). It's just that they are not earthly witnesses!

It is natural for us to want human company. That is part of what defines us as humans. This is a difficulty for the intercessory heart. We can have friends and companions, but they must not be allowed to distract from the aloneness, so necessary to our calling. Jesus left his companions at the entrance to Gethsemane. But he also went back to them and allowed them to continue with him.

There is a balance here, between aloneness and companionship, which will constantly need checking. Too much aloneness, and we become detached from the very earthly situations we are interceding for. Too much companionship, and when Gethsemane calls, we too will stay at the entrance, or drag into the aloneness those who cannot endure it.

Aloneness is a necessity, and it is also part of our gifting.

2. Living with the rejection of what we know to be true.

After they put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they went to the king in the courtyard and reported everything to him. The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. Instead, the king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them.(Jer 36: 20-26)

What a painful experience for Jeremiah. The scroll was very important to him, yet Jehoiakim treated it, and Jeremiah, with contempt.

Sadly, this is a common experience for all Christian ministries. We often find that things we hold as precious, ***things we have dug out of the spiritual ground by agonising prayer and spiritual work, are ignored, dismissed, or ridiculed by God's people.*** And in the process, we are ridiculed too, are made to feel irrelevant and small. How do we handle this?

The intercessor must look to Calvary. There was the culmination of thousands of years of preparation by God, and the willingness of Jesus to be obedient, even to death, out of love for us. This event was and is much more precious than Jeremiah's scroll. Yet most people walked past without taking any notice. Having our work rejected is the price we pay for being in the service of the Lord. But we have to look deeper for our strength.

Those who ignored or rejected the cross were exposing their hearts. If we exercise pure holy ministry, then the reaction of people to us will not be an indictment of us, but an exposing of their hearts and motives before the Lord. It is essential that we accept that we will be rejected. It is also essential that we do not take it personally. This is the hardest thing of all.

3. The servant nature of our character.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Mark 8:34)

"Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' " (Luke 17:7-10)

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.(John 13:1-5)

The servant heart is essential for the intercessor. This prevents us getting too big in our own eyes, keeps us perfectly in line with Jesus, and enables him to reveal many things to us, knowing that we will not get proud or arrogant. What is this heart:-

1. A qualification, not an option - “if”

We have to realise from the start that the servant heart is not an option. There is no choice. Jesus made this clear when he said **“If anyone would follow me.”** This is what we have to do – it’s as central to our heart as breathing is to our lives.

2. A hard path

The servant heart is the hard path. Being arrogant, proud, complacent, self-satisfied - these are easy, because this is the unrepentant human heart. But to be a servant is tough. Take a look at the servant songs in Isaiah, (Isaiah 42:1. 49:1. 52.13); Gethsemane.(Mark 14:32-42); Song of obedience. (Phil 2:6-8)

3. No guarantees, no reward

Being a servant offers no guarantees of success. Servants function on the level of obedience being sufficient reward. Mary gets this right:-

“I am the Lord's servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” (Luke 1:38)

We must also consider the parable of the servant:-

“Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'”

4. Washing the feet.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer

clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:2-5)

Jesus demonstrated for all of us exactly what it mean to be a servant. If we want intercessor hearts, then we too have to be willing to have a “foot –washing” attitude.

5. We will suffer for being a servant.

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”- (Hebrews 12:2)

Nothing in the Kingdom is ever easy. Some people think that taking the path of prayer is opting out of the struggle. The truth is much clearer - the path of prayer *is* the struggle - and the very hardest of struggles. We have to overcome our self-will (Luke 18: 9-14), and our humanity. (Romans 7:29)

6. Fight to win.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

We struggle to win. This looks so obvious, but it easily gets forgotten in the heat of the battle. We may be hard pressed on every side, close to despair, even at the point of death. But we are not going to quit, because we fight to win, and having won, we win again, and again and again. This has to be part of our nature. The enemy is never ever going to win, because he is a loser. Victory is ours!

4. Suffering

Jeremiah gives us a very clear idea of the inner struggle in the life of the heart of God's servants.

11:18, 12:6, The plot to kill him. See his agony here:-

*You are always righteous, O Lord,
when I bring a case before you.
Yet I would speak with you about your justice:
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live at ease?
You have planted them, and they have taken root;
they grow and bear fruit.
You are always on their lips
but far from their hearts.
Yet you know me, O Lord;
you see me and test my thoughts about you.
Drag them off like sheep to be butchered!
Set them apart for the day of slaughter!
How long will the land lie parched
and the grass in every field be withered?
Because those who live in it are wicked,
the animals and birds have perished.
Moreover, the people are saying,
"He will not see what happens to us."*

15:10-21, The cry of his heart

*Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth,
a man with whom the whole land strives and contends!
I have neither lent nor borrowed,
yet everyone curses me.*

17:14-18, "Heal me Lord"

*Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed;
save me and I will be saved,
for you are the one I praise.
They keep saying to me,
"Where is the word of the Lord ?*

*Let it now be fulfilled!"
I have not run away from being your shepherd;
you know I have not desired the day of despair.
What passes my lips is open before you.
Do not be a terror to me;
you are my refuge in the day of disaster.
Let my persecutors be put to shame,
but keep me from shame;
let them be terrified,
but keep me from terror.
Bring on them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction.*

18:18-23, "Listen Lord"

*They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of
the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor
the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues
and pay no attention to anything he says."
Listen to me, O Lord;
hear what my accusers are saying!
Should good be repaid with evil?
Yet they have dug a pit for me.
Remember that I stood before you
and spoke in their behalf
to turn your wrath away from them.
So give their children over to famine;
hand them over to the power of the sword.
Let their wives be made childless and widows;
let their men be put to death,
their young men slain by the sword in battle.
Let a cry be heard from their houses
when you suddenly bring invaders against them,
for they have dug a pit to capture me
and have hidden snares for my feet.
But you know, O Lord,
all their plots to kill me.
Do not forgive their crimes
or blot out their sins from your sight.*

*Let them be overthrown before you;
deal with them in the time of your anger.*

20:7-18 "Holding in the fire"

*O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived ;
you overpowered me and prevailed.
I am ridiculed all day long;
everyone mocks me.
Whenever I speak, I cry out
proclaiming violence and destruction.
So the word of the Lord has brought me
insult and reproach all day long.
But if I say, "I will not mention him
or speak any more in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot.*

In these passages, Jeremiah shares with us his "soul struggle", his "anguished conversations" with God about his relationship with him, his mission and his misgivings about sticking with his call. In an age when leaders are advised to present themselves as strong and in charge, it is truly a gift to have one of Israel's greatest prophets speak to us with such vulnerability. His heart is our heart.

4. Vision of glory

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3)*

"But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. " (Acts 7:55)

The intercessor spends his/her time in the heavenly places, where we are surrounded by the glory of the Lord. This gives us a new perspective on the issues we face, and courage to press on. What do we see?

*Holiness	Isa 6:1-5
*Worship	Revelation 4 and 5
*Purity	No unclean thing. Rev 21
*Power	2 Chron 7:14
*Hope	Revelation 22:20. ("Amen. Come Lord Jesus.)

5. Awareness of own weakness.

For Peter, the path from "You are the Christ" to "I never knew him" and to "Simon Peter do you love me" was a hard one. Eventually he could write "If you are standing take heed that you do not fall." It was a long painful journey of discovery - which Apostle Paul also emphasised - "We have this treasure in clay pots"

It doesn't have to wreck us - as it did Saul. "When we are weak, then we are strong!" God works through and with us in our weakness. Knowing them means we can protect against them.

What areas might we need to consider as lamps?

Pride	("I thank you father" Luke 18: 9-13)
Arrogance	(Rich farmer. Luke 12:16-21)
Self	(Struggle for obedience Phil 2: 5-12)
Sexuality	(David and Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 11)
Despair/giving up	(Do not lose heart. 2 Cor 4)
Unbelief.	(Zachariah. Luke 1:18)
Love of money	(Matt 6:24)
Fear	(Disciples: Mark 4:38)

6. Awareness of the deceptions and schemes of the enemy.

a) Gethsemane:

This is the hardest battle of all to win. (See “Drawing Strength from Gethsemane.”)

b) “Methodia”

The enemy has method. (Ephesians 6:11)

And it’s all the old classics - doubt, fear, tiredness, sickness, failure, seduction, other people, money, greed, despair.

We have to have hearts which are totally aware of these strategies. We do well to remember Peter’s warning:-

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. (1 Peter 5: 8-9)

At the same time, we are the victors:-

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

7. Tender heart

Over 40 years of ministry, I have noticed that one of the dangers we face is becoming cynical and hard hearted. We don’t intend to be like this, but the constant struggle, the disappointments, the things which fail, the apparent triumphs of the enemy - they all tend to harden our hearts. But intercessors cannot let this happen. We have to have tender hearts. Here are some examples:-

Hannah – **pleading:**

*In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.
(1 Samuel 1:10)*

Jesus – **loving**

Jesus looked at him and loved him. (Mark 10:21)

Jesus - **grieving** for Jerusalem

*“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”
(Matt 23:37)*

Heaven – **Rejoicing**

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. (Luke 15:7)

How do we maintain a tender heart? The writer of Hebrews points the way for us:-

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1-2)

8. Obedient

Perhaps this should have been first! If the intercessor is not obedient to the call of God, in whatever form, then how can we possibly pray at this level? To help us, we are not the first to be asked for a high level of commitment:-

Abraham: The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

"I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."

So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; (Gen 12:1-3)

Paul: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil 1:21)

Obedience is one of the traits of our intercessory character which the enemy hates. For the obedient heart so closely resembles the heart of Jesus, which was the heart which destroyed the enemy and his plans.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34

9. Prayerful heart

This should be self evident! To help us get our prayer heart in order, we need to study some of the prayers of the Bible:-

Hannah: 1 Samuel 1

Solomon: 2 Chronicles chapters 6 and 7

That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon answered God, "You have shown great kindness to David my father and have made me king in his place. Now, Lord God, let your promise to my father David be confirmed, for you have made me king over a people who are as numerous as the dust of the earth. ¹⁰ Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have." (2 Chron 1:7-12)

Jesus: John 17

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent

them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

10. Brave heart

Intercessors must not lack courage. Nehemiah and Apostle Paul had it, and we must also have it.

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

The king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."

Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. (Nehemiah 1)

After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island." (Acts 27: 21-26)

How do we strengthen that character so that we can bear the burden of the call?

a) Look back at the saving acts of God in history and in our lives

Joshua's stones (Josh 4:6) Last Supper. Our own lives.

This gives us courage

b) Get at the depth of the promises of Jesus. Og/Sihon Numbers 21:34. Matthew 28:20. Shipwreck Acts 27:22.

The deeper we go into the promises, the stronger our character.

c) Allow the testing of our character. See the life of Peter. He went from being used by the enemy ("get behind me Satan"), to denying Jesus, ("I never knew him.") to the difficult discussion about feeding the sheep to being a leader in the Church. It was a long hard road.

This process strengthened his character, so he could bear the burden of leadership. Jesus needed no such testing - his character was strong enough. (Phil 2: Temptation stories: Gethsemane.) We must seek after the same character. For this to happen, the testing must come.

e) Meditate on the sufferings of Calvary

f) Live in the triumph of resurrection

g) Don't overlook our own personal needs for prayer, study, worship, growth and good fellowship.

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