7. Enter into God’s rest

This is probably the best kept secret of effective intercession. Intercessors who have depth and breadth and weight to their prayers are those who know how to rest in God’s presence. They know how to tap into that quiet, restful reservoir of God’s strength. “In quietness and confidence is your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). Learn to cease from striving as you pray, relying less and less on yourself and more and more on God. Try this: instead of praying for a long list of petitions every day, pray for specific requests on certain days of the week; for example, pray for family members on Monday, your church on Tuesday, missionaries on Thursday, etc. Be sure to reserve Wednesday just for praise. Nothing overcomes a mid-week slump like a surge of worship and praise!

Prayer Ventures is a Christ-centered, biblically-based ministry that offers retreats and resources to help people grow in prayer.

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2. Cleanse your heart

When you have come into the presence of God on behalf of another, you long for God to open the floodgates of His heart to bless, heal, or pour out His love and power on that person in some way. But in order for God’s love to flow through you unimpeded, your own heart needs to be free from sin. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart before God. Confess your sins honestly and accept the Lord’s cleansing and forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

3. Pray Scripture

Come with confidence to the throne of grace on behalf of your friend (Hebrews 4:16). One of the most powerful ways to intercede is to use the words of Scripture. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you a particular verse or passage in the Bible that might apply to the situation you are praying about. Personalize the words and turn them into a prayer. For example, “God did not give (Jane) a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7) or "(Jane) can do all things through Him who strengthens (her)" (Philippians 4:13).

4. Inquire of the Lord

When David needed guidance, the Bible tells us, he “inquired of the Lord” (II Samuel 5:17-20). You can do this too. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father always interceding (Romans 8:34). It is He who called you to prayer; it is He who gave you the burden for your loved one or friend; it is He who calls you into partnership with Him on behalf of that one. Ask Him how He is praying for the situation or that individual. Be still and listen. You will be surprised by what new insights are revealed.

5. Prayer and fasting

When you have a particularly challenging prayer assignment, try fasting while praying. “Fasting can bring breakthroughs in the spiritual realm that could never be had in any other way,” writes Richard Foster in Celebration of Discipline (Harper & Row, 1978). Bill Bright says, “The power of fasting as it relates to prayer is a spiritual atomic bomb.” Why does fasting add such power to prayer? Because fasting, abstaining from eating for a time, denies self. It is an act of humbling yourself, of opening yourself more fully to the Holy Spirit and letting Him pray through you. Bill Bright writes, “Jesus implied that all of His followers should fast (Matthew 6:16-18; 9:14-15). For Him it was a matter of when believers should fast, not if they would do it.” See Bill Bright’s handy reference guide: 7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting & Prayer (New Life Publications, 1995).

6. Partner with others in prayer

Prayer partnership is another seasoned secret that adds energy to prayer because it is based on a biblical principle: the power of agreement. “If two people agree on earth about anything they ask,” said Jesus, “it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19). Partnership is particularly effective when praying for a long-term request or complex problem. When one intercessor grows weary, another can encourage the other and help shoulder more of the burden. One may receive a spiritual insight that the other can confirm. One may have a spiritual gift that the other lacks. Partners complete each other. And when your request is answered, how exciting it is to praise God together!