

## Various Types Of Prayer

'The earnest (insistent, fervent, heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous person achieves much (is powerfully effective)' (James 5:16). There are different prayers for different occasions and for different needs.

**Prayer without asking. Having fellowship with the Lord.** We can offer prayers and ask for nothing at all, but spend time in the Lord's presence just connecting with Him. Jesus sometimes spent all night praying (Luke 6:12). When we sit in His presence, we are still in an attitude of prayer but instead of asking, we are listening. Many times the Lord has a word of encouragement for us, sometimes He wants to teach us about something in the Bible, sometimes He wants to speak to us about serving Him and what to do next, or to give us an instruction. Sometimes He wants to explain why we need to wait for the answer to a particular prayer or He may want to touch on a little sin, but if we never just sit and listen, then we will never hear His voice. Listening to God without asking for anything is more important than serving Him or continually speaking to Him. Mary used to sit and listen while Martha chose to serve without listening, and Jesus said Mary had the best part of the fellowship with Him (Luke 10:39 to 42). It is hard to have a two-way conversation when only one person speaks. We need to heed, but to heed we need to first hear. Mature Christians usually hear from the Lord but young Christians often do not. We are likened to sheep. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice. I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27). Sheep hear and obey, but lambs do not. Lambs hear the voice of the shepherd but follow the ewe. The Middle Eastern shepherd calls his sheep and they obey. He leads the flock, he goes before the flock and they follow him. He calls each individual sheep by name. Jesus is this kind of Shepherd. 'When the shepherd brings his sheep outside, he walks on before them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice' (John 10:4). Sometimes hearing from God can be difficult. Listening to and hearing from God is scriptural and essential.

**Prayer with thanksgiving.** When we pray, we are to always give thanks for all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Thanksgiving and praise are requirements for entering into God's presence (Psalm 100:4). We need to focus on God and not on irritations, discouragement and self, if we are to hear and receive from God, and we need to have a thankful heart for our prayer to be successful. One key to peace of mind is to be thankful (Philippians 4:6 & 7). If we come to God with a kind of 'shopping list' of desired items, we need to be careful to have a list of things to thank Him for, and we must enter into thanks and praise first, before we begin asking. Jesus always began prayer by giving thanks and the apostles followed His example. Giving thanks can release the greatest miracles. When Jesus fed the 5,000 men plus women and children, a total of more than 10,000 people, He first gave thanks (John 6:11). It is not recorded Jesus prayed about the food, it is written He gave thanks, and He is our example. Jesus gave thanks before raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:41). Jesus did not specifically pray about raising Lazarus, He gave thanks. Jesus healed ten lepers of their terrible disease (Luke 17:12 to 19). He noticed only one of the ten lepers returned to give thanks. Nine were healed of the disease of leprosy, but the one who returned to give thanks was made whole, or in other words, the dreadful effects of the leprosy had disappeared and he was saved from eternal death too, something the other nine missed out on. The difference was giving thanks. In our own lives, we need to give thanks for blessings already received.

**Prayer of repentance** that encourages personal holiness. 'If we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). We need to look to Jesus for guidance, not to other people, because the Lord wants to teach us individually. We need to make a conscious decision to ask the Holy Spirit for help, because we cannot be holy or righteous by ourselves. He gives us the power to overcome sin. If we are to live a continuously righteous life, we need to continually confess sin and be forgiven. Once we repent and are forgiven, we need to put whatever sin we have committed behind us and not think about it nor mention it again. 'One thing I do, I forget what lies behind and press forward to what lies ahead' (Philippians 3:13). When we take a 'sin skeleton' out of a cupboard it begins to get 'flesh and bones' and it begins to take on an appearance. As we focus on it, we begin to see ourself as a sinner again, not as one who has been forgiven. Condemnation of self can cause us to stumble, so we need to let the past go and walk in forgiveness. 'There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus' (Romans 8:1).

**Prayer of petition.** That is specific prayer for a specific thing; a definite request. 'By prayer and petition with thanksgiving, continue to make your desires known to God, and the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus' (Philippians 4:6 & 7). With every prayer of petition, we need to offer thanks. Petitions are usually prayers for people or situations that affect us directly. The prayer could be for the salvation of a spouse, in which case we would thank God we have a spouse. The prayer could be for a larger vehicle to accommodate a new baby, so we would thank the Lord for the new child. That is prayer with thanksgiving. If we delight ourselves in the Lord, He will give us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4).

**Prayer of desperation.** There are certain times when God will not intervene until we come to the point of absolute desperation. That is what salvation is. Salvation is taking advantage of the only hope we have of escaping from hell. There is no other way of escape and if we do not take His way, we are lost. God waits until we meet His conditions (Isaiah 30:18 & 19). He is waiting to hear the sound of our cry. In Hebrew this word means a desperate call for help, not weepy tears. If we read about Jonah the prophet in the book of Jonah, we read how God wanted him to go Nineveh and preach to the people there. Back then, Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. God told Jonah to go East, but instead of obeying God, he went West. From the moment Jonah ran away from God, every step he took was a step downwards. He went down to Joppa, then down into the ship, then he went down from the ship into the depths of the sea. After spending three days in the belly of a large fish the Lord had prepared, he cried out to God in absolute desperation (Jonah 2:1 to 10). At first nothing in Jonah's circumstances changed until Jonah changed the way he prayed. Verse 9 says he gave a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and then the Lord spoke to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah up onto dry land. It was not praying and crying out that changed Jonah's circumstances, it was thanks. If you are in a difficult situation and have cried out to God and have prayed with all your heart, try thanking Him in advance for the answer you are hoping for and expecting to receive.

**Prayer involving God's timing.** In Jonah's dire situation, his prayer was answered almost immediately. If the Lord had not answered his cries for help, Jonah would have died and the job set before him would not have been carried out, so that was a life or death situation. When our lives are not at risk, thanking the Lord does not always bring immediate results. If we are waiting on God for an answer to prayer, sometimes we need to wait for His timing, no matter how much we pray, cry, thank, plead and sigh. Sarah had to wait until she was 90 before the Lord allowed her to have her first baby. In those days a girl was marriageable age long before she was 20, but even if Sarah was married at that age, she still waited 70 adult years for Isaac! In fact Sarah waited so long, she had gone beyond believing it possible, and laughed when she heard the angel tell Abraham, Sarah would have a baby (Genesis 18:10 to 12). Even after Isaac was born, Sarah could hardly believe it (Genesis 21:6 & 7). Sometimes we need to wait years and more years before the Lord will answer our prayers, petitions and intercessions, both for ourselves and for other people. Other times we need to realise God will never, ever override a person's own free will. If we are praying for the salvation of a family member for example, that person has to want to come to God. We can pray in desperation until we turn blue, but if that person stubbornly refuses salvation, then even God Himself will not force them. It has to be their choice. All we can do is keep praying, hoping and thanking. Sometimes we have to stop asking and start trusting God in the situation, and let it go.

**Prayer with faith.** The principle is, faith without works is useless. The 'works' here, is our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (James 2:17). Faith must be accompanied by action and that action can sometimes be thanks, or it can be a task. Thanking God is the simplest way of expressing our faith in Him. When we pray without thanking God, it is faith without works. We only need a tiny bit of faith. 'For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed ... nothing will be impossible to you' (Matthew 17:20). 'The prayer of faith will heal those who are sick' (James 5:15). The task here may be the laying on of hands. If we need employment, we first pray in faith then go out and look. If we lose our wallet, we pray in faith for the Lord to help us locate it, then we would return to the place where we last saw it. Just asking for employment or asking for the return of our wallet in faith is useless unless we do the necessary 'work' by seeking.

**Prayer with the right motives and the right attitude.** 'You ask and do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives' (James 4:3). Praying with selfish motives will get us nowhere. For example, if we ask the Lord for something fancy just so we can keep up with the neighbours, it is likely we will not receive it. If we pray with the wrong attitude to God, He will not hear us. 'Jesus offered up definite, special petitions and supplications with tears ... and He was heard because of His reverence before God' (Hebrews 5:7). We need to have an uncomplaining attitude and scripture has some solemn warnings about grumbling. 'Do all things without grumbling and complaining so you may show yourselves blameless, innocent children of God' (Philippians 2:14 & 15). If we are to be real children of God, blameless and pure, we will have to learn to do everything without complaining. All the things that happened to Israel was recorded as examples for us. 'We should not tempt the Lord as some of them did – and were killed by snakes. Nor grumble as some of them did and were killed by the destroying angel. All these things ... were written to admonish us for right action' (1 Corinthians 10:9 to 11). What the Lord did to punish the grumblers, the Lord may do to us. We are not to grumble and complain if we want answers to our prayers.

**Aggressive prayer.** That is praying day and night with fasting. 'She did not leave the temple enclosure, but was worshipping night and day with fasting and prayer' (Luke 2:37). This elderly lady named Anna, denied herself both sleep and food and was rewarded by being able to see the Salvation of Israel. When Jesus died and rose again, He triumphed over everything that was lost by the actions of Adam. Our battle was won by Jesus when He disarmed the principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15). When we pray aggressively, we need to pray with reverence to God, yet with strong aggression, using the name of Jesus, speaking firmly

through the mouth. Just as Jesus always spoke firmly and audibly, so must we. We cannot pray aggressively by just thinking about it. Jesus said sometimes we need to pray and fast before a prayer will be answered (Matthew 17:21). There are people who think shouting is aggressive prayer. If it works for them and shouting gets results by building their faith, so be it, but shouting at God is not really necessary. If we follow the examples of Jesus, He spoke audibly, He spoke simply, He got straight to the point, He did not pray long endless prayers, He spoke with authority, He prayed with the right attitude and it always worked.

**Praying within God's will.** We must always pray within the will of God. If we pray in the will of God, we know already our prayer has been heard and answered. 'This is the confidence we have in Him, if we ask anything according to His will (in agreement with His plans) He listens to us. If we know He listens to us whatever we ask, we know we have the requests made to Him' (1 John 5:14 & 15). That is if we are seeking His will. If we pray, no matter how honourably, out of God's will, we will never see the answer. If we are praying out of the will of God, then it really does not matter how much we believe for something, it will not happen. That also includes prayers of a busybody. For example, we may know of two lovely young people in the church whom we think would be perfect for each other, and so we pray for them to be married. If it is not the will of God for those two people to be together, then we are praying incorrectly. That is a 'busybody' prayer, because it is none of our business who marries whom.

**Harmonising in the Spirit can be a powerful weapon in prayer.** 'I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about whatever they may ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. Whenever two or three are gathered together in My name, I am in the midst of them' (Matthew 18:19 & 20). When Jesus said, 'If two of you agree', He meant harmony in the spirit, not intellectual agreement. 'All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God' (Romans 8:14). Believers who are led by the Holy Spirit can gather together in His name. The exercise of spiritual authority depends on the leading of the Holy Spirit and being in complete harmony with one another and with the Lord. If there is discord among those gathered, or if they are believing for something that is not in the will of God, their prayers will not have the power needed to 'move mountains'.

**Prayers for binding and loosing.** We need first to understand exactly what that means. Binding can mean to literally tie or bind up, or it can mean to declare unlawful or improper. 'Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth is loosed in heaven' (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). The moment it is bound on earth, it is bound in heaven. When it is loosed or released on earth, it is immediately released in heaven. To put this more fully we could say, 'Whatever we declare to be improper, and therefore forbid on earth, is already forbidden in heaven. Whatever we declare to be proper and permit on earth, is already permitted in heaven'. Binding and loosing covers any situation we can think of. If some are still unsure about binding and loosing, here is an example of how those prayers can be used. We will speak about a hypothetical violent, unsaved husband, we will call Joe. His wife could pray, "Lord, I bind that violent spirit in Joe, and I loose Joe into the Kingdom of God." So the violent spirit (not Joe) is declared unlawful, is not permitted to continue and is bound and thus made inactive; then Joe is declared lawful and is permitted or loosed into the joy of salvation. The wife's prayer of binding and loosing results in Joe being delivered and born-again into heaven.

The other binding means to tie up. 'How can a person enter a strong man's house and carry off his goods without first binding the strong man? Then he may plunder his house' (Matthew 12:29). 'When the strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his belongings are safe, but when One stronger than he attacks and conquers him, He robs him of his whole armour on which he had relied and divides the spoils' (Luke 11:21 & 22). When Jesus died and rose again, He defeated the 'strong man' and took from the devil all the armour on which he had relied, leaving the devil an unarmed enemy. As Christians, we now have the armour and Jesus divided the spoils. Jesus took everything the devil had to use against us, and Jesus handed it all to us and now we have authority over the devil. However, we have to use what Jesus has given us, and sometimes that calls for us to first bind the strongman. Our prayers are good but will sometimes not be effective unless we first bind the strongman. We cannot take away his goods until we have bound him and we need to learn how to bind him. Jesus is the One Who defeated the devil – all we have to do is administer that defeat. When God gives us the responsibility of ministry, we may need to deal with the strongman, which is the devil's delegated representative to watch over the devil's interests in any given situation. We are dependent on a word of knowledge – a revelation from God, to tell us what strongman is holding each person captive. One example of this is found in Daniel chapter 10. The evil Prince of Persia and the Prince of Greece represented the interests of those two empires. Before the answer to Daniel could come, the strongman over Persia had to be overcome by the angel and Michael, the heavenly Prince (or guardian) of Israel (Daniel 10:13, 20 & 21). There was no way around the Prince of Persia, he had to be defeated. Just as the strongman over ancient Persia had to be defeated, so too does the strongman over more modern nations.

Every race, people and area have their own 'strongman'. Just look at the negative influence coming from Hollywood and the movie studios there. Almost every modern movie has violence, witchcraft, murder or illicit sex woven within its theme. That is unquestionably an evil strongman. The Christians who live in that area should bind the strongman, take authority and pray against those movies that are negatively influencing our youth and therefore our world for the worse. If we look at the high infant mortality, the alcoholism, the awful illnesses, the violence and the seeming hopelessness of some Australian Aborigines, American and Canadian Indians, Africans, Hispanics, New Zealand Maoris, New Guinea natives, Haitians and other native tribes around the world, we can see a strongman working amongst them to keep them oppressed, sick and dying young. Christians need to pray for these people, bind the strongman in their nations or areas, and reach out and show the people God's love. They need to hear the Gospel and know they can have the hope of salvation. Jesus died for them too. Some of these tribes still engage in ancestor worship and have witchdoctors, which are a form of witchcraft, something God hates. If these tribes would turn to God, stop their ancestor worship and other forms of witchcraft, they would be stronger, healthier, joyful and have the hope of salvation. God loves the people, but hates their sin. Their practices are what God calls wicked, and some tribes have been forced from their lands because of their wickedness. 'It is because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord is dispossessing them ... because of the wickedness of these nations, the Lord our God is driving them out' (Deuteronomy 9:4 & 5). Those nations written about in Deuteronomy were involved in witchcraft, idol worship and other evil practices and were driven from their lands as a result. The evil power behind the mafia, triads, freemasons, motorcycle gangs, atheistic communist countries etc, reveals they each have their own 'strongman' that needs to be bound and overcome, then we can reap the 'spoils' of seeing them born-again and loosed into the Kingdom of God. People are merely the playthings or puppets of these evil, invisible strongmen, but once we realise that and take authority over them, cut the strings, then we have total victory. Once the strongman is really dealt with, in all of the above situations, we can walk in and take hold of the people by their hands and lead them into the Kingdom.

There is **specific, directed, persistent prayers** given by the Holy Spirit. There are times when the Lord Himself will ask us to pray for a specific individual or situation. Sometimes the Lord will use the most mundane item to achieve a victorious result. 'The Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the spear in your hand toward Ai, for I will give the city into your hand'." The outstretched spear had no military significance at all, it was wholly spiritual. Joshua pointed the spear from the onset of the battle until the victory had been totally won (Joshua 8:18 to 26). That was persistent, unwavering directed prayer. We also need to pray specifically and directly towards the problem. Be specific and unwavering and do not give up till you have won the battle. If we win the victory in the spiritual realm, it will be worked out in the natural. It is useless to pray vaguely, "God bless all our missionaries." We need to pray specifically for each missionary by name until they return from the mission field. Or, "Bless our leadership, Lord." That is no good either. Our church leaders all have names, as do their spouses. We need to pray for each person, by name, who is in leadership in our home church. They are in the 'front lines' in the battle for souls, and need to be upheld constantly in prayer. After all, if it were not for the leadership, we would not have a church! It is God Who chooses our leaders. He puts them in the position they are in and we need to accept God's choice and sovereignty. The responsibility of Christians is to pray for their governments in all levels, but we need to ask the Lord to give us the prayer that is His will. If we have an unrighteous person in government, we can pray for the Lord to put down an unrighteous Member of Parliament and lift up one more righteous, because God is the Judge (Psalm 75:7). He sets up and removes kings (Daniel 2:21). 'He who walks uprightly walks securely, but he who perverts the way will be found out' (Proverbs 10:9). We need to pray specifically, by name for each person we pray for and not be vague.

Here is one true example of specific, directed, persistent prayer. 'Who shut up the sea when it broke forth ... and marked it for My boundary ... and said, "Thus far shall you come and no further, and here will you be stayed"' (Job 38:8, 10 & 11). Many years ago, committed men of God prayed this prayer to halt the spread of communism around the world. Communism halted and fell. We can pray this prayer, with aggression and persistence, to stop the spread of Islam and terrorism around the world. Let us now pray for the spirit of Islam to be bound around the world, and the poor people who are deceived by that spirit to be loosed into the Kingdom of God. Jesus died for them too. They need hope. 'O Lord, thus far and no further, will the spread of Islam go. We bind the spirit of Islam in the mighty name of Jesus, and loose those lost souls into the Kingdom of God, for Your glory. Amen'. Let us persistently pray this prayer until we see results and the evil spread of Islam is in decline. It happened with communism and it can happen with false religions too.

For those who feel as though God is not answering their prayers, there are a few things we have to consider when praying. (1) Have we met all God's conditions; is our life right with God; is there sin lurking there in secret; have we been obedient? (2) Have we considered the possibility our prayer may not be God's will? Only when we pray in God's will, are our prayers answered.

- (3) Is God trying to use that situation to purify us and make us ready for the Kingdom of God? That means He will answer our prayer – after He has dealt with something deep in our lives.
- (4) Is God's timing involved? Our prayers may be spot on, but the timing may be out.
- (5) Is our prayer selfish? We will not have selfish or carnal prayers answered.
- (6) Is our attitude to God right? If we berate Him for not answering our prayers when we want them answered, He will certainly make us wait longer. Plus, we must never grumble.
- (7) Do we have unforgiveness in our hearts? God will withhold prayer if there is any unforgiveness.
- (8) For the men. If you are violent or unkind towards your wife, that will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3:7).
- (9) We have to obey God – He does not have to obey us. We are here to serve Him – He is not there to serve us.

For counsellors. When people come to you with problems, do not feel sorry for them. Feel empathy and compassion, but not pity or sympathy. Compassion and sympathy are very different. Sympathy says, 'Ohh, poor you'. Compassion says, 'I will have mercy when you submit to God and change'. Counsellors need to counsel from nothing but the Bible, so it would be better to toss out all the books on psychology and the like, and speak the Word of God into their lives. The Bible is alive and like a two edged sword. Hours are wasted trying to counsel people who are not willing to change. The Holy Spirit is our Counsellor and our Comforter, and we need to show people how to tap into the Water of Life that flows from God above. God will not intervene and answer prayer until He sees His people yield to Him. No one can deliver us from the hand of God when He is disciplining us. We have to come to the point of total submission and He is absolutely in control. For example, there may be an area of sin in their lives that only God knows about and they need to submit to God, then the Holy Spirit will put His finger on that area and the person will be delivered. 'If I by the Spirit of God ...' (Matthew 12:28). 'If I by the Finger of God ...' (Luke 11:20). That tells us the Finger of God is the Spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit touches something in our lives, He puts his finger right on the spot where the sin is. Once that is dealt with, prayers are answered.

**Prayer of intercession.** Intercession is prayer for another person. One example is prayer for an innocent person to be released from prison, after being convicted of a crime she did not commit. We may never meet the person, but God knows who they are. Another example is prayer for a new Christian in the church, who is rather rough around the edges and has no idea how to behave like a Christian. When we are praying for someone, we should never point out their faults to God, but thank God for them before we pray. Only then, will we see a change in their lives and behaviour. The Holy Spirit constantly makes intercession for us (Romans 8:26 & 27). Jesus also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). We are told to make intercession for others (1 Timothy 2:1). Intercession is not casual prayer. It is often accompanied with deep weeping on behalf of the person we are praying for. We sometimes feel as though we have a heavy burden on our shoulders and that will not lift until we have 'broken through' into the heavenly realm for that person. There are times when we feel what they are feeling; their distress, their anguish or their sorrow but these feelings are normal for the intercessor, and only by praying and interceding for them, can we receive relief. The first time this happens, we can feel a little bit confused and wonder what is going on. Once we have prayed through the problem, the heavy feeling usually turns to a sense of elation and relief, then all we need to do is faithfully wait to see the outcome of our prayers. Sometimes the answer comes quickly, sometimes it takes years.

The ministry of intercession is the highest and most powerful ministry open to any Christian. These prayers are not only deep prayers uttered on behalf of people for healing and other problems, they can also bring about change in personal circumstances, changes in our area, city or nation, and can hold back God's divine judgement. Intercessory prayer solves problems that cannot be solved in any other way; problems of individuals, families and of whole nations. In Hebrew, the word intercession means 'to come in between'. An intercessor comes in between God and the problems of mankind. Like a mediator, he stands before God on behalf of others.

'If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer offered in this place' (2 Chronicles 7:14). Sometimes intercessors can save a city or a nation by standing before the Lord on behalf of that place. Intercessors are people who are close to the heart of God. Four excellent examples of intercessors are Abraham, Moses, Daniel and Esther. God will do nothing until he reveals His secrets to His prophets (Amos 3:7) and Abraham was a prophet, so God revealed His plans regarding Sodom and Gomorrah to him. Abraham was so concerned the Lord would judge the righteous along with the unrighteous, he interceded on behalf of the cities. If we study all of Genesis chapter 18 (there is too much to put in here), we will read some important aspects of the intercessor. 'Abraham was still standing before the Lord then he came close to the Lord'. Abraham was intimately acquainted with the Lord and was called God's friend. Abraham was reverently talking with God, not praying, but discussing the situation with Him. We need to notice the boldness of Abraham, but with a

deeply reverent attitude. He was actually challenging God's righteousness and he was not afraid to speak out and say what was on his heart. Abraham had a deep conviction of God's justice – both to punish the wicked and not to deal with the righteous the same as the wicked.

We need to see God respond to the prayers of His servants when we are interceding for others. God does not brush us aside but He listens. We have a wonderful privilege to be able to speak to God like this, on behalf of other people. After much research, we estimate there were at least 10,000 people living in the immediate area surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah. We need to study Genesis 18:23 to 32 to read exactly how Abraham interceded for these people. If we look at this in ratio, we can see for approximately 10,000 people, if there were only ten righteous people, God would spare all the rest of them. So we can see, one righteous person can ward off judgement for one thousand. Only 1% of the population need to be praying people, to stop God's judgement on the whole nation. We are not talking about mere churchgoers, we mean righteous, holy, genuine, dedicated, upright, Spirit-filled believers. We can protect our communities and bring God's favour to our neighbours, just by being righteous, just by being there and by praying for our area. Any Christian in any country can pray for their nation. Our presence can cause God to hold back His righteous judgement from an entire community, city or nation.

Passivity and indifference in the face of evil, is sinful. 'Any person who knows what is the right thing to do but does not do it, to him it is sin' (James 4:17). One example of this is, if our government wants to pass a law that is contrary to scripture and evil in the sight of God, and we know that law is about to be passed and we act passively, and do not pray against that law being passed and do not do all we can to stop it, then that becomes sin. Another example is; if we suspect a man in our neighbourhood is a paedophile, and we do not pray against that man's sin and pray for the protection of the local children and do not do all we can to stop the situation continuing, that is sin. If we do know of this extreme wickedness and can report a paedophile to the authorities, then we must. A third example is; if we hear of an 'expo' to promote witchcraft and magic coming to our area, and we do not pray against it and do not do all we can to stop it, that is sin because we are passively condoning the sins of witchcraft and magic, which are abominations to the Lord our God. There are many other examples of passive sin.

Moses interceded for Israel when he was on top of Mount Sinai, communing with God and receiving the revelation of God's purpose and plan for Israel. If we study all of Exodus chapter 32, we can read how Moses interceded for Israel. Neither the Lord nor Moses wanted responsibility for the people at this point in time. Both the Lord and Moses were so angry with Israel, they disowned them. The Lord said to Moses, "Your people, whom you have brought out of Egypt" (verse 7) and later Moses said to the Lord, "Why does Your wrath blaze against Your people whom You have brought forth out of the land of Egypt" (verse 11). God Himself was going to destroy the whole nation of Israel (verse 10). This exchange would be comical if it was not so serious. If it were not for Moses being bold enough to speak firmly to the Lord and remind Him of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we would not have the Jews with us at all! I wonder if anyone has thought of that fact? Moses interceded for them and caused God to change His mind (verse 14). God said, "Let Me alone" (verse 10). Meaning, if Moses stepped aside God would act on His wrath, but as long as Moses stood before the Lord, God would not act. That is the job of the intercessor – to stand in the gap between God and man. Just having the presence of the intercessor there is enough to stop God's wrath. Imagine Almighty God saying, "Let Me alone" but the marvellous thing about Moses was – he would not let God alone to destroy Israel – he stayed there and held on, pleading for the people. By that one act, Moses saved a whole nation – he saved the Jews, and from them, came our salvation. That is the power of intercession. Moses and Aaron became intercessors together. When the Lord sought to destroy all the Israelites once again, Aaron had changed from being the problem when he made the golden calf (Exodus 32:1 to 6), to becoming an intercessor who was part of the solution (Numbers 16:45 to 48).

We need to study the whole of the Book of Daniel to see the fullness of how Daniel interceded and repented on behalf of Israel, with dramatic results. Daniel got down on his knees and prayed three times every day. There was a decree written making it illegal for people to pray to anyone but King Darius, but Daniel would not give up his prayers even if it meant death, and he was thrown to the lions but God delivered him. Daniel was not only a man of great prayers; he was a man who knew the scriptures and understood prophecy. Our direction for our intercessory prayers should always come from the scriptures. Daniel was third ruler (or third in line from the top) in the kingdom of the Persian Empire (Daniel 5:29). He realised the seventy years of exile from Jerusalem had almost run their course and it was time for God to restore Jerusalem to the Jewish people once again. Daniel responded to this revelation with the correct action. The prophecy read, 'The nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years, then when the seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation for their iniquity ... When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you and keep My promise to you, causing you to return to Jerusalem' (Jeremiah 25:11 & 12; 29:10). Daniel fasted and sought the Lord, wearing sackcloth and ashes. We can also repent on behalf of our nation. Daniel was a very righteous man and there is no record of sin in his life, yet he repeatedly said,

"We have sinned. We have done this wrong and that wrong ... Our sins and iniquities ... Confessing my sin and the sin of my people." He could have been self-righteous and said, "Israel has sinned. They have done this and that wrong," but he was humble enough to include himself in that prayer of repentance for Israel. Daniel fasted for three weeks before an answer came.

Queen Esther interceded for the Jews when they were about to be massacred. We need to study the whole Book of Esther to understand fully the situation they were in. Esther lived in another phase during the Persian Empire, years after Daniel. She was an orphan who had been adopted and raised by her much older cousin, Mordecai. When Queen Vashti of the Persian Empire refused to obey the king (Ahasuerus), he divorced Vashti and married Esther. When the Jews heard of the impending slaughter of their people, Mordecai told Esther she had risen to become queen for just a time as this; that is to save the Jews (Esther 4:13 & 14). Esther told all the Jews to pray and fast for her (Esther 4:16). Esther could have lost her life when she approached the king (Esther 4:11), but she was an intercessor undo death just like Daniel was. Esther survived as did all the Jews and the man who wanted to kill all the Jews was hanged. The Jews were saved because Esther interceded on behalf of her people (Esther 7:4 to 10).

Christians are a kingdom of priests and have come to a 'royal' position (1 Peter 2:9) and have been saved for this time in our history. We cannot turn away from our responsibilities or be indifferent or passive in our prayer life. We need to identify ourselves with the people in our nation, whatever nation we live in, because how can we escape if there is a catastrophe, just like there was going to be for the Jews in Esther's time? (Esther 4:13 & 14). We need to identify ourselves with God's purposes and take up the prayer burden, fasting, kneeling before the Lord or doing whatever is needed to secure an answer and receive mercy from God. Just like Daniel, Esther knew she needed support through fasting and others praying with her, and for her. Just like Esther went into the inner court, so we too need to come into the inner court where the Lord's presence is. Esther's intercession saved the Jewish nation, just like Moses did. When Esther went into the king, she did not go as a beggar. She wore her royal robes and that boldness pleased the king (Esther 5:1 & 2). We also need to recognise who we are in God's Kingdom. We are not beggars, but kings and priests (Revelation 5:10) who can be bold before God as long as our consciences are clear (1 John 3:21). God has elevated us to that position. We are not to grovel, but we must intercede with absolute reverence in our attitude towards our Lord, and we need to pray in line with the will of God.

When we pray, we need to be humble, not self-righteous. Jesus gave an example of the Pharisee who went to the temple and prayed, "God I thank you I'm not like the rest of men ... or even like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I gain."

The tax collector stood at a distance and would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his chest saying, "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner that I am." Jesus said the tax collector went home forgiven and justified (Luke 18:11 to 14). The prayer that reaches the heart of God is not the prayer of the Pharisee, but of the man who humbles himself and admits his sin and says, 'We have sinned', because we are all sinners who need saving, and are saved solely by the grace and mercy of God. Just as God dislikes self-righteousness, God equally hates flattery. It is the same as lying and insincerity. 'They flattered Him with their mouths and lied to Him with their tongues, for their hearts were not sincere, neither were they faithful to His covenant' (Psalm 78:36 & 37).

Here are a few scriptural guidelines to help those who feel God is calling them into the ministry of intercession. We must have a deep intimacy with God. We need to be close enough to God so we can talk face to face like friends, in the way Moses and Jesus did (Exodus 33:11). We need to have a clear conscience and boldness (1 John 3:21). We must stand (or kneel) before God, but either way, we need to be in His presence, close to Him (Genesis 18:22 & 23; Daniel 6:10). We need to almost challenge God to plead our case before Him (Genesis 18:23 to 33; Exodus 32:10 to 13). We need to have a conviction of God's absolute justice (Genesis 18:23). We need a concern for the glory of God above our own glory, desires, ambitions and interests like Moses had. God promised to make him a great nation, but Moses completely ignored those words and pleaded for the Jews and he did not leave the presence of God until God changed His mind (Exodus 32:14). We need to have complete dedication to the task like Daniel did (Daniel 6:10). We need a willingness to identify with those for whom we are interceding (Daniel 9:5 to 20). We cannot be self-righteous or proud. We must humble ourselves because the Lord resists the proud (James 4:6) and if He is resisting the proud, then logically, He will resist their prayers. Only when we have met all His conditions, will the Lord will hear us (2 Chronicles 7:14). We must be willing to pray through a crisis until we receive an answer from the Lord. We must pray and not stop praying until we have a breakthrough and we can see for ourselves the answer has come. Imagine if Moses or Esther stopped interceding half way through the plight of the Jews! God said salvation was to come via the Jews (John 4:22). Jesus was Jewish so without the Jews, how would we have our salvation? That is how important intercessors are to mankind.

Amen and God bless you.

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