

## **Module 8**

### **“Thy Kingdom Come” The Ministry of Prayer, Fasting & Intercession**







## Module 8: “Thy Kingdom Come” The Ministry of Prayer, Fasting & Intercession

*“A man is no bigger than his prayer life, or as Murray M’Cheyne is reputed to have said, ‘What a man is on his knees before God, that he is - and nothing more.’ In that coming day when the hearts of men are revealed, a day which is now nearer than when we first believed, there will be some ‘big men’ who will appear very small, and some we had thought small will appear as spiritual giants. How different are spiritual values when God takes them from the balances of human judgment and weighs them on the balances of the sanctuary.”<sup>81</sup>*

*“God’s intense longing to bless seems in some sense to be graciously limited by His dependence on the intercession that rises from the earth. He seeks to rouse the spirit of intercession that He may be able to bestow His blessing on mankind. God regards intercession as the highest expression of His people’s readiness to receive and to yield themselves wholly to the working of His almighty power.” Andrew Murray, *The Secret of Intercession**

*“Prayer does not prepare us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.” Oswald Chambers*

### While Others Slept

While others slept, he rose to pray. It was not the first time he had risen in the early morning hours to pray, nor would it be his last. The birth of a Church and the future of a nation demanded nothing less. So with only the stars and the angels as his witnesses, he wrestled with God over the future of his beloved but troubled nation. One of the sources of his nation’s problems, Mary Queen of Scotland, had once remarked that she feared the prayers of this man more than she feared all the armies of Europe. If she could have witnessed his intercessions this night, her worst fears would have been confirmed, for here, alone beneath the stars, was a man who knew how to wrestle with God . . . and prevail.

*“Great God,” cried John Knox, “Give me Scotland, or I shall die.”*

The mantle of intercession that rested upon John Knox would one day be picked up and carried by his associate and son-in-law, John Welch, who would marry his daughter, Elizabeth. Welch became widely known for his personal commitment to fasting and prayer, and for the significant amount of time he spent in personal prayer, often as much as eight hours a day. He also became known for tremendous spiritual power which seemed the outward result of his fervent intercessions. On more than one occasion his wife, Elizabeth, would awaken to an empty bed and find her husband praying alone in the cold night air of their garden, praying *“with great force & fervency, mixed and accompanied with floods of tears,”*<sup>82</sup> crying out, *“Lord, wilt Thou not grant me Scotland?”* She would remember the times she had heard her father, John Knox, pray with a similar burden on his heart, *“Great God, give me Scotland, or I shall die.”* And how many times had she heard her husband wonder aloud how a Christian could lie in bed all night never rising to watch and pray.

Such are the wrestlings and intercessions of those whom God has used over the centuries, and continues to use today, to bring revival and to change the course of nations and of history. Throughout the history of His people, whenever God has intended to move in great spiritual power, He has always raised up people to carry the burden of prayer, fasting and intercession for what He intended to do. Such intercessors have always been the secret heralds of a coming visitation. One such herald was Seth Joshua of Wales. Seth Joshua was one of the men greatly used of God during the Welsh Revival of 1904. But God was at work in his life long before the revival broke out. Years after the revival, Seth Joshua’s son, Dr. Peter Joshua, told a story about missing (“mitching”) school one day and going to a local park to play.<sup>83</sup> Suddenly he spotted his father walking in the park. Hiding in some bushes he watched as his father walked by:

*“As he came near I was frightened as I heard that he was crying (something I thought never my Dad would ever do) and as he went by he was saying, ‘Please God, give me Wales’, and kept saying this as long as I could hear him. After a while I ran back home, and while I had to explain to mother that I had mitched school, I asked her what was wrong with Dad, and told her that I had heard him crying and saying ‘Give me Wales.’ She ruffled her hair and said, ‘You’ll understand one day.’ God never gave Wales to my Dad, although he gave him many souls, but one day when he was preaching when he made an appeal Evan Roberts was the only one who stood to his feet and trusted the Saviour. God never gave Wales to my Dad, but he gave Wales to Evan Roberts.”*

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<sup>81</sup> Arthur Wallis, *Pray In The Spirit* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1993) page 9.

<sup>82</sup> Fleming, *Fulfilling Of The Scripture*, p. 423.

<sup>83</sup> This anecdote is related in a letter in the possession of Mr. Meurig Thomas of Llangeler, Dyfed. A copy is in the Evangelical Library of Wales at Bridgend, quoted by Brynmor P. Jones, *Voices From The Welsh Revival 1904-1905* (Evangelical Press of Wales: Bridgend, 1995), page 16.

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### “Thy Kingdom Come”

Do you know how to pray? The phrase *“Thy Kingdom Come”* is part of perhaps the most famous prayer in all of history, known to us as “The Lord’s Prayer.” When terrorists bombed the London subway system in mid-2005, survivors told stories of hearing other survivors reciting The Lord’s Prayer in the midst of the horror. What we refer to as The Lord’s Prayer was Jesus’ response to a simple request on the part of His disciples, *“And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray . . .’”* (Luke 11:1) As good Jews, the disciples knew about prayer. They had grown up with it in their homes and in the synagogue all their lives. But when they saw and heard Jesus pray, they knew something was different. What Jesus modeled in prayer was very different from what they were accustomed to, so they asked Him to teach them how to pray.

There is much talk today about prayer. It is even “fashionable” to call oneself an “intercessor.” You can take video classes on prayer. You can subscribe to magazines dedicated to prayer. You can join internet-based prayer organizations, or attend workshops about turning your house into a “lighthouse of prayer.” But if we are to see heaven moved and our neighborhoods transformed, prayer must be more than a book, class, workshop, magazine, conference or program. Prayer (along with fasting) must become a personal priority, a discipline in our personal lives and the life breath of our house churches. Our house churches must become houses of prayer (or better yet, *Safe Houses of Hope & Prayer!*)

I believe that the greatest work of the Church on earth is intercession. And the true measure of any church (house church or otherwise), like that of a man (or woman), is the measure of the time spent in prayer and intercession before the Throne of Grace. Intercessory prayer is the life-breath of the Church. It precedes evangelism, missions, works of kindness and all other worthwhile activities. It is the God-appointed means of calling down His power and His blessings upon the Church and the world, and has been the necessary forerunner of every great revival, renewal and awakening in the history of the Church. A Christian or a Church that does not pray and intercede is like a body that does not breathe. Sooner or later its life will be in doubt.

Every believer prays, but not all believers persevere and prevail in prayer the way the disciples saw Jesus pray. So, when Jesus taught them to pray in Luke 11:1ff he taught them to pray “audaciously,” *“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs”* (Luke 11:8). The Greek word translated “persistence” in this verse (*anaideia*) carries the sense of “recklessness” or “shamelessness”, hence, “audacity”. Then, in Luke 18:1 Jesus reminded them of the importance of persevering in prayer, *“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.”* As a result, the early church learned and applied that lesson. Meeting in the upper room in Acts 1:14 they *“were continually devoting (i.e., persevering) themselves to prayer.”* Not only must we learn to pray, but we must learn to pray persistently and audaciously

Reliable studies that have been conducted regarding the devotional habits of pastors indicate that the average traditional church pastor spends ***an average of 22 minutes per day in prayer***. I went through four years of Seminary training, even serving on the adjunct faculty of the Seminary, without ever taking a single course, workshop or seminar on the importance of fasting and prayer for successful ministry. So, it should therefore come as no surprise that most contemporary church ministry looks and acts like little more than the sum total of its human parts (or as a visitor to an American church recently observed, *“It’s amazing what you people can accomplish without the Holy Spirit!”*). If our house church ministries are to prosper and to grow long-term, then they must represent more than the sum of men’s best efforts. ***We must learn to fast and to pray and to intercede, or we will fail.***

In Chapter 2 (*“The New Engines of Change”*) of his book ***Mega Shift***, Jim Rutz identifies several “engines of change” in the worldwide move of God through house churches. These “engines of change” which God is using around the world to build His Kingdom include Intercessory Prayer (#1), On-Site Prayer (#7) and Fasting (#8).<sup>84</sup> But all of the various new expressions of prayer and intercession which he describes (prayer journeys, prayer battles, covering-prayer stations, prayer walks), and which we need to practice in our house church ministries, have one thing in common. They all assume that individual Christians are spending significant time (more than 22 minutes per day!) alone in prayer, fasting and intercession with God. Do you really want to go into strategic level spiritual warfare and prayer battle for your neighborhood or community without already having spent significant time alone with God in prayer & fasting & personal repentance?

If we want our house churches to be vessels and channels for the River of God’s Spirit as it begins to flow in our day; if we want our house churches to be places where the Kingdom Presence and Power of God dwell, and where all of the gifts of His Spirit operate with the result that believers are built up in their faith, unbelievers are redeemed, and the Kingdom of God grows in peace, righteousness and power, then we must become a people who devote themselves to prayer, fasting and intercession.

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<sup>84</sup>Jim Rutz, ***Mega Shift: Igniting Spiritual Power*** (Colorado Springs: Empowerment Press, 2005), Chapter 2.

## Praying The Price of Fasting & Prayer For Revival

*“A . . . more weighty reason for fasting is that it is an help to prayer; particularly when we set apart large portions of time for private prayer. Then especially it is that God is often pleased to lift up the souls of his servants above all the things of earth, and sometimes to rapt them up, as it were, into the third heaven.”<sup>85</sup>*

Seasons of great spiritual revival and renewal always come at a price, and that price almost always includes a personal commitment to disciplined fasting and prayer.<sup>86</sup> To put this issue differently, let me re-phrase it as a question: *“What is it that you want God to do in your life, in your family, in your house church ministry; and what price are you willing to pay to see Him do that?”* There is a price to be paid for God’s moving in great power. And that price is greater than spending 22 minutes per day in prayer. John Knox understood that price as he labored to give birth to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. John Wesley understood the price of spiritual power. He fasted two days every week, and in his *“Rules for the United Societies”* he encouraged every Methodist to set aside every Friday for fasting and prayer.

The Presbyterian Church of 1857 understood this price. On the eve of the Great Manhattan Prayer Revival of 1857 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church noted the price required for a great movement of God’s Spirit:

*“Another and the last evidence, that we cite, of an increasing vigor and efficiency in our denomination is, the intense longing, breathed through all the Narratives for a general, glorious outpouring of the Spirit. The past year has not been one which may be characterized as a year of revivals, although many churches in many Presbyteries have been greatly quickened, and some have been favored with spiritual influences of extraordinary power. . . . This longing for revivals we cannot but consider a cheering indication of the noblest life. Next to a state of actual revival is the sense of its need, and **the struggle to attain it at any sacrifice of treasure, toil, or time.** We trust that the period is not distant, when this state of actual, general, glorious revival shall be ours; when the Church, ‘seeking the Lord God by prayer and supplications, **with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes,**’ shall find the annual record of her progress a blessed realization . . . .”<sup>87</sup>*

Throughout history, desperate believers seeking God for a fresh spiritual outpouring and revival have always resorted to fasting and prayer. What is the relationship between fasting and prayer? This question is not as easily answered as we might think on first glance. For example, in the book of Esther we find one of the most powerful examples of fasting in all of Scripture, resulting in deliverance from total destruction for the Jewish people. Yet there are no instances of prayer in the entire book! It would appear that, just as one can pray without fasting, so too, one can fast (successfully and powerfully) without praying! **Please Note:** *My point here is not an encouragement to fast without praying nor to minimize the importance of prayer, but to underscore the intense intercessory nature of genuine fasting.*

Why is fasting such a powerful prayer tool? I believe there are several Biblical reasons why fasting & prayer are so effective and powerful, but let me share just a few which I have personally discovered. *First*, I believe that fasting represents a sacrificial act of worship on our part before God’s Throne of Grace. In other words, fasting is a form of worship which costs us something. For this reason it becomes a sacrifice which pleases God and empowers us to pray audaciously before His throne with an expectation (but not a presumption) that our God will both hear and answer. *Second*, fasting is a biblically appointed expression of humility and repentance before God. And Scripture reminds us that God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. *Third*, when we fast God honors the attitude and intent of our hearts. His Spirit searches our spirit, interceding with groanings too deep for words (Romans 8:26 & 27). God knows the secret unspoken reasons and motivations for our outward fasting, and He honors them as we fast “unto Him.” *Fourth*, I believe that fasting (done with the proper attitude towards God) is itself a form of intercession, and the fasting saint is an interceding saint in the eyes of God. And our God is One who loves intercessors and intercession so much that He seeks them out.

I believe that fasting, when combined with fervent prayer, is the Christian’s most powerful form of intercessory prayer. When we fast and pray for individuals or situations, God often places us in the unique position of an intercessor. In this position God enables us to identify with the person or circumstance (often described as the giving of a “burden” to pray). He then grants us to enter into and share the agony felt by that person. And finally He gives us the spiritual authority to pray life-changing “prophetic” prayers into that person’s life or into that particular circumstance.

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<sup>85</sup> Wesley, Sermon 27, page 600.

<sup>86</sup>In Appendix A of this workbook we have included an excellent article by Dr. Stuart Robinson entitled **“Praying The Price of Revival”** which I would encourage you to read as a personal encouragement in your prayer life regarding revival and spiritual renewal.

<sup>87</sup> **Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America with an Appendix**, 1857, page 418.

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Fasting, when combined with prayer, is the most powerful form of intercession available to the believer. The fasting and praying believer is one who, like Daniel, has *“set (his) face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting . . .”* (Daniel 9:2-3). This is serious, powerful, intercessory praying. Derek Prince has well described such times, *“In the prayer life of each one of us there comes a time when we have to “set our face.” From that moment onward, no discouragement, no distraction, no opposition will be allowed to hold us back, until we have obtained the full assurance of an answer to which God’s Word gives us title.”*<sup>88</sup>

### Fasting & Seeking God With A Whole Heart

A frequently quoted Old Testament passage regarding prayer is found in Jeremiah 29:12-13, *“Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek me and find Me, when you search for me with all your heart.”* One question that is seldom asked (or answered) by those who quote this verse is, *“What does it mean to seek God with all of our heart?”* If our goal in prayer is to “find” God and His answers to our prayers, then answering this question is critical, since the promise is based upon our seeking Him with all of our heart. It should come as no surprise that there is a relationship between seeking God with all our heart in prayer and seeking Him through fasting. It can be seen in Joel 2:12, *“Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning . . .”* Here, returning to the Lord “with all your heart” is connected directly with fasting. Put differently, *to seek God by means of prayer with fasting is to seek Him with all of our hearts.* And when a man (or woman) does this he achieves the attention of Heaven for his prayers. Arthur Wallis agrees and observes<sup>89</sup>:

*“When a man is willing to set aside the legitimate appetites of the body to concentrate on the work of praying, he is demonstrating that he means business, that he is seeking with all his heart, and will not let God go until He answers.”*

### A Personal Journey Into Intercession

I always hesitate to share personal stories of how God brings people into places of intercession. Such stories can seem self-serving. And my study of great revivals throughout the history of the church has taught me that people like John Knox, John Welch, Seth Joshua, Evan Roberts and the vast majority of saints whose prayers for revival God powerfully answered, were private people who did not parade around the church calling themselves “intercessors.” Rather, they were simply private men who fasted, wept and prayed, privately and fervently. It was often not until after their deaths that people learned the power of their personal prayer lives. God’s dealings with people are never for “show” but for “substance” (although He, Himself, occasionally places us on display as an encouragement to others). This is why Jesus admonished His disciples to give, fast and pray in secret, *“and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”* (See Matthew 6:1-6) We are to “perform” our spiritual lives for “an audience of One.” So it is with a certain degree of reluctance that I share my own personal journey into intercession, in the hope that it will encourage you and help you to understand what God may be doing in your own personal journey into the Kingdom of divine intercession.

Several years ago, through a series of events, God began to open up a ministry in my life of prayer, fasting and intercession for spiritual renewal and revival. It began (as best as I can determine) when I helped to lead a youth group mission trip to Mexico to build a home for a homeless family outside of Tecate, Mexico. Four days into the trip I sensed God saying that I was to fast for the remainder of our two week trip. And although I was not to eat, I was to keep to a “normal” work schedule just like everyone else on the trip (which meant working 10 hour days in 100+ degree heat, followed by team meetings and conducting a Vacation Bible School for the local kids). When I arrived home at the end of two weeks I found myself embarked on a journey of prayer and fasting which was beyond my control (which I have discovered is often the case when God pours out a fresh anointing and ignites a new gifting. It can be absolutely overwhelming, like riding a roller coaster which you have no ability to control!). I found myself spending hours at night weeping before God in prayer for revival in our city. He then led me to write a book on the Welsh Revival of 1904, and then to lead area wide workshops on fasting and prayer while writing a book of fasting. I was overwhelmed, and little did I know that my journey into intercession had only begun.

As my wife and I sought God about what was happening to us and for His purposes in our lives, we were invited to attend a conference in Anaheim, California, along with our pastor and four other people from our church. It was a wonderful week of receiving teaching, ministry, prayer and listening for God’s voice. During this time I was three weeks into a forty-day fast. On the final evening of the conference, as our group was leaving the auditorium, we paused in the lobby to have a group picture taken. Someone in our group stopped a woman (a total stranger) in the lobby, asked her if she would mind taking the picture and handed her a camera. As she agreed to take the picture she added, *“And when I’m done, I think the Lord has a word for those two,”* pointing to me and my wife. After taking the picture of our group this person approached me and my wife. She turned to my wife and said, *“I believe that God wants you to bless him (nodding toward me) and impart the*

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<sup>88</sup>Derek Prince, *Shaping History Through Prayer & Fasting* (Fleming H. Revell Company: Old Tappan, 1973), page 103.

<sup>89</sup>Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast*, p. 50.

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word to him. *There is more, but God will show it to you later.*” With those words she walked away, and we left the auditorium wondering what it was that God was doing.

What He was doing was opening a “season of the heart” which would last for the next three years. The week we returned home my wife began keeping a journal of God’s dealings during the times which followed, and at the end of three years it had reached almost five hundred type-written 8 ½ X 11 pages. God’s dealings with us were powerful, profound and humbling. Like Paul in Arabia, we seemed to disappear from the view of our Christian friends into a wilderness of God’s design where dross is burned away to purify metal, and where wood, hay and stubble are revealed for what they really are . . . worthless.

During these three years our vision of a ministry of prayer, fasting, and intercession for renewal and revival seemed to die. We experienced a business collapse, bankruptcy, the foreclosure of our home and what appeared to the outward observer to be a disastrous defeat. But God had a different agenda for this “season of the heart.” During this time He taught us to trust Him without fear or wavering by bringing us into circumstances that would cause our hearts to tremble and our resolve to waver with fear. There, alone in the midst of a battle field and surrounded by “enemies” on every side, He taught us to do battle against the Enemy of our souls with weapons of righteousness for the left hand and the right. He trained us to hear His voice in things great and small. He would awaken my wife in the middle of the night with a Scripture reference on her mind (the reference, not the verse). Not knowing the verse she would look up the reference and discover a verse that was exactly appropriate for what we were going through at that time. This happened not once or twice, but dozens of times, as God fulfilled His prophetic word spoken to us through a complete stranger, that Gale would impart His word to me. For nearly six months he gave us some three dozen significant dreams which He then spent the next two years teaching us to pray over and to watch Him fulfill. He taught us to pray for the needs of others and to rejoice in their answers, even when our own needs appeared to go unmet. He taught us to pray for daily provision, and to rejoice when the answers He sent took a form different from what we had hoped. He taught us to pray for the River of Ezekiel 47, that it would flow in greater power in our lives and in the life of the Church, because this River of the Spirit of God is the well-spring and source of all revival, whether personal and national. He taught us to pray without ceasing and to prevail over circumstances that we thought would destroy us. We learned that His fire purifies but does not consume, and that in a flood of great waters they will not overwhelm us, because He sets our feet upon a rock, making our footsteps firm. This was our “iron furnace of Egypt,” our “Arabia,” our “Season of the Heart.”

As of this writing, our journey into intercession, fasting and prayer for spiritual renewal and revival has been a ten-year journey which has led us into the house church movement and into what we believe will become God’s new channel for the coming outpouring of His Spirit in spiritual renewal, revival and community transformation. And this amazing journey into the Kingdom of God has led us to you, and to the writing of this House Church equipping workbook so that you can benefit from our journey.

### Consider A Fasting & Prayer Covenant

I want to challenge you to consider the power and significance of a fasting and prayer covenant in God’s plans and purposes for spiritual revival and renewal. Let me encourage you with an historical example, drawn from one of the greatest revivals in American history. In 1798 the Reverend James McGready moved from North Carolina to Logan County, Kentucky in order to pastor three small churches. McGready understood the role of dedicated fasting and prayer in seeking God’s blessing for the conversion of the lost and the encouragement of the Church. He challenged his congregations to enter into a covenant to set aside specific time every week to fast and pray for revival. Here is the covenant that they entered in to:

#### ***The Fasting Covenant of The Reverend James McGready***

*“When we consider the word and promises of a compassionate God, to the poor lost family of Adam, we find the strongest encouragement for Christians to pray in faith - to ask in the name of Jesus for the conversion of their fellow-men. None ever went to Christ, when on earth, with the case of their friends that were denied, and although the days of his humiliation are ended, yet for the encouragement of His people, he has left it on record, that when two or three agree upon earth, to ask in prayer, believing, it shall be done. Again whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. With these promises before us we feel encouraged to unite our supplications to a prayer-hearing God, for the out-pouring of his Spirit, that his people may be quickened and comforted, and that our children, and sinners generally, may be converted. Therefore, we bind ourselves to observe the third Saturday of each month, for one year, as **a day of fasting and prayer**, for the conversion of sinners in Logan County, and throughout the world. We also engage to spend one-half hour every Saturday evening, beginning at the setting of the sun, and one-half hour every Sabbath morning,*

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*at the rising of the sun, in pleading with God to revive His work.*<sup>90</sup>

McGready and his band of prayer warriors fasted & prayed for over two years. The result was that a great revival, known to historians as The Second Great Awakening, broke out in Logan County and swept all across the southeastern United States, resulting in the conversion of tens of thousands of unbelievers.

### **The Parousia Network Friday Fasting Covenant**

As a result of my own personal journey, we at The Parousia Network are committed to a ministry of personal fasting and prayer for one another, for God's working in the Network and for the coming of The River in power and renewal. To underscore the importance of fasting and to encourage others in their quest to fast and pray, I have written a devotional book (entitled **Not By Bread Alone: Daily Fasting Devotions For The Hungry of Heart**) which examines every occurrence of fasting in Scripture. The book offers a devotional on each passage, along with a personal devotional journal. In addition, we have established what we call our *Friday Fasting Covenant*. The goal of the *Friday Fasting Covenant* is to set aside one day per week (preferably Friday) to meditate on Scripture ("feed on the Word") and to pray for our families, for the churches that meet in our homes, for our neighborhoods, for the needs of those around us, for the ministry of The Parousia Network, and above all, to ask our Sovereign God to turn our house churches into the new channel where the River of His Spirit will be poured out and will flow in great power and blessing! If you would like to become a part of the *Friday Fasting Covenant* you can join by simply sending us a blank e-mail with "JOIN" in the subject line to [FastingCovenant@parousianetwork.com](mailto:FastingCovenant@parousianetwork.com).

### **God Looks For Intercessors**

*"On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have appointed watchmen; All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth."* (Isaiah 62:6-7)

I now understand, in a way I never did before, that God is searching for intercessors, people who are willing to become the vessels and channels for His Kingdom prayers for our generation. We see this aspect of God's heart in two passages:

*"And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede. . ."* (Isaiah 59:16).

*"And I searched for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one"* (Ezekiel 22:30).

These passages tell us something about the heart of God and about the calling of an intercessor. **First**, God is looking for and sovereignly raising up people who will intercede with Him on behalf of others, and He is astonished when no intercessors are to be found. Let me digress here for just a moment. We need to understand the difference between "need" and "calling." God is indeed looking for intercessors, but God does not need us (thereby implying some kind of deficiency in His nature). God has sovereignly chosen to use us. He looks for people to become intercessors who are willing to be empty vessels that He can fill with His Spirit and who will pray His Kingdom prayers and purposes in this world. As a result, our prayers become "effectual" not because they are ours, but because they are His. We are simply the vessels through whom the Spirit of God prays with groanings too deep for words. **Second**, an intercessor is someone who does two things: they "build up the wall" and they "stand in the gap". An intercessor is someone who sees a spiritual situation where a need exists; there is a "gap" in the wall. He (or she) responds first by "standing in the gap" in prayer and thereby preventing the situation from deteriorating further. But he (or she) also responds by helping to "build up the wall," thereby partnering with God in prayer to repair the damage that has already been done. Intercession is more than simple prayer, or even intensified prayer. Listen to Norman Grubb describe intercession as exemplified in the life of Rees Howells:

*"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."*<sup>91</sup>

An intercessor is someone who identifies with a situation, who agonizes over that situation, and to whom God grants authority to pray effectual prayers which change that situation for the Kingdom of God. The goal of our intercession is to

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<sup>90</sup>Covenant of Rev. James McGready. From James Smith, *History of the Christian Church, Including a History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (1835). Quoted in Catharine C. Cleveland, *The Great Revival In The West 1787-1805*. Copyright 1916 University of Chicago (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1959).

<sup>91</sup>Grubb, *Rees Howells Intercessor*, page 81.

become intercessory vessels through whom the Holy Spirit intercedes for the world according to the will of God. Arthur Wallis, in his excellent little book *Pray In The Spirit*, makes a distinction between the intercessory ministry of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit. Christ, he says, intercedes for us.<sup>92</sup> That is, we are the passive recipients of His intercessory prayers. But the Holy Spirit desires to intercede through us. He desires to use us as His willing instruments to intercede for the world, but He requires our co-operation. I believe that through the discipline of fasting, combined with prayer, we place ourselves in a uniquely powerful position to become the intercessory vessels for the intercessory ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### What Intercessors Believe

I believe that God is moving in our present generation to raise up an army of intercessors. He is raising up people who He has uniquely touched and anointed both to fast and to pray His kingdom purposes into the lives of men and women and into the affairs of nations. These are true intercessors believe in the power of intercessory prayer. What do they believe about prayer? Here are some of the beliefs that characterize God's army of true intercessors:



#### **True Intercessors believe:**

- that Jesus Christ has made intercessory prayer possible (John 14:6).
- that God hears and answers prayer (Jeremiah 33:3; Hebrews 11:6; Psalm 65:2).
- that Jesus Christ placed priority on prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 18:1).
- that Jesus Christ has taught us how to pray (Luke 11:1-10).
- that Jesus Christ prays and intercedes on our behalf (Luke 22:31-32; John 17:20; Hebrews 7:25).
- that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).
- in personal prayer (Matthew 6:5-15).
- in the partnership and power of united prayer (Matthew 18:18-20).
- in the need for persistence and prevailing in prayer (Daniel 6:10; Luke 11:5-13; Luke 18:1-8).
- in the practicality of prayer (Isaiah 40:28-31).
- in the power of prayer (Acts 12:5-7).
- in surrender in prayer (Psalm 62:8; Matthew 26:39).
- in the comprehensive coverage of prayer (Philippians 4:6; John 15:7).
- in corporate prayer (Acts 12:12).
- in meeting the conditions of prayer (John 15:7; Psalm 66:18; I John 3:22; 5:14-15; James 4:2-3).
- in the promises of prayer (Psalm 91:15; Luke 11:9-10; Jeremiah 33:3).
- in God's Word as the guide to prayer (Psalm 119:10-11; 2 Timothy 3:16).
- in the church is a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).
- in praying for others (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16).
- in praise and worship predominating prayer (Psalm 103:12; Psalm 145; Psalm 146:1-2; Acts 16:25).
- in fasting as a God-appointed means of aiding intercessory prayer.
- in prayer as a primary means to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 9:37-38; Acts 1:8).

### Suggestions For Revitalizing Our Prayer Time

Like the early Church in the book of Acts, we must make a commitment to persevere in prayer. I recently had a conversation with a person who attends a Post Modern, E-P-I-C mega-church in our area which has an average monthly attendance of around 7,000. He told me how he attended a recent prayer meeting and was saddened to discover that from a church of 7,000 people, only 40 showed up for prayer. While we may groan at that situation, when it comes to specific intentional prayer for our house church brethren, locally and around the world, are we really much better? When was the last time we spent intentional time praying for those "outside the box" of our own network? Why do we not pray more? Why do we not persevere in prayer? Why are our "prayer meetings" so poorly attended? Why are our prayer ministries so ineffective? What is it that hinders our prayers? What can we do to revitalize our times of prayer and intercession? The following are only a few ideas to stimulate our thinking and discussion in the Church.



**Spiritual Hindrances To Prayer:** There are many reasons why we do not pray more, or have a more effective ministry of prayer and intercession. A list of these reasons should include, but not be limited to the following:



**Spiritual Warfare** - We have an enemy who does not want us to pray, and in order to prevent prayer he engages in warfare against the saints. The last thing Satan wants to see is Christians humbling themselves with fasting before the Throne of Grace in fervent intercession. The warfare that the enemy uses against praying saints can range from simple things that irritate (sleepiness, unclean thoughts, worrisome distractions, unexpected interruptions, "I don't feel like praying tonight," etc.) to more serious demonic

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<sup>92</sup>Arthur Wallis, *Pray In The Spirit* (Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1993).

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oppressions.

- ⇒ **Traditions of Men** - How God has blessed particular ways of doing things in the past can become a hindrance to new blessings He wants to release in the present. Long established “prayer chains” or “prayer meetings” (long established but poorly attended) may need to give way to small groups of intercessors who meet in homes or other convenient places for prayer.
- ⇒ **Pride** - I Peter 5:5 warns us that God is opposed to the proud. There is no place for pride before the Throne of Grace.
- ⇒ **Unconfessed Sin and Unforgiveness** - If we consciously harbor unconfessed sin in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers.
- ⇒ **Unbelief** - Faith is the key that opens all of God’s blessings to His people, for “*without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). Notice that we must not simply believe that God exists, but we must believe that He actively rewards (i.e., answers) those who seek Him in prayer. Most of us believe that we should pray (it is the “Christian” thing to do), but we don’t really believe that God answers every prayer. This is unbelief.
- ⇒ **Dry eyes; lack of heart-felt fervor** - While we should not wait upon or depend upon emotions before praying, there should come a point in the prayer life of every believer when prayer becomes both a passion towards God, and a compassion towards men. We need to ask God to break our hearts over the things that break His heart.
- ⇒ **Impatience (unwillingness to wait before the Lord)** - The Psalmist, David, declared, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry” (Psalm 40:1). A significant aspect of true intercession is the discipline of waiting upon God.
- ⇒ **Disinterest in His Will** - This is usually expressed in terms such as MY church, MY ministry, My \_\_\_\_\_. We must continually remind ourselves and one another that the purpose of prayer is not to tell God what it is that we want, but to discover what He wants. While part of intercession is making our needs known to Him (Philippians 4:6), a much more significant part of intercession is asking God to change our will and to give us His will.



**Mechanical Hindrances To Effectual Prayer:** In addition to spiritual hindrances to effective prayer, there are also practical or mechanical hindrances (which the enemy can also use, thereby creating a spiritual crisis over some mundane issue). Such Mechanical Hindrances can include:

- ⇒ **Prayer Request Time** - this often becomes an opportunity for extended times of visiting (or gossiping) instead of time for prayer.
- ⇒ **Rushing Into His Presence** - God is not in a hurry, nor should we be hurried in His presence.
- ⇒ **Eloquent Prayers and Monologs** - Prayer time is not a time for preaching, lecturing or any thing other than talking with God. People should be reminded that neither the length nor the volume of a prayer has anything to do with its power before God. Long and loud prayers do not impress God, and they can be downright irritating to His people.
- ⇒ **Failure To Pray In One Accord** - Prayer time is not a time for pursuing one’s personal “agenda” under the guise of praying. The calling of an intercessor is to pursue God’s kingdom purposes, whatever they may be. Unity in prayer comes when believers agree to seek God’s will rather than our own purposes.
- ⇒ **Intolerance of Silence and Failure to Listen Before Praying** - In prayer, silence is listening and silence is intimacy. Many people fear silence during prayer because they confuse “silence” with “emptiness.” In reality, it is when we are silent before God that He has opportunity to speak to us. And He has opportunity to speak because silence is intimacy. Someone who is comfortable with silence during prayer is usually a person who has discovered intimacy with God.



**Suggestions For Effectual Corporate Praying:** The first suggestion for effectual corporate or group prayer is to

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find people who have a burden, desire or anointing to pray. All Christians have the privilege to pray, and Scripture encourages us to “Pray without ceasing.” But there are Christians whom God has touched and called to pray. Sometimes He calls us to pray by “squeezing” our circumstances until we cry out. At other times he simply pours out His Spirit of intercession in someone’s life and calls them to a ministry of prayer. But the beginnings of an effectual ministry of intercession are found in bringing together individuals who have a desire to pray. This “coming together” of intercessors may be in corporate “prayer meetings” at church, or it may be in small groups in private homes. Whatever the “format” or “venue” prayer is not a “program” or a “meeting.” Prayer is God’s people gathering together to seek God’s presence. Here are a few ideas for more effective “group” or “corporate” praying:

- ⇒ **Be alert to the enemy tactics that foil prayer time** - Intercessory prayer in the name of Jesus is the most powerful tool we as believers have against the schemes of the Enemy, and he knows it. It should come as no surprise that he will do everything in his power to foil our times of personal and corporate prayer. Pastor Ron Dunn describes the significance of such prayer this way, *“Prayer is not a religious exercise - it is a human necessity.”* He adds: *“Prayer means that I never have to say, ‘There’s nothing I can do.’ I can always do something. . . I discovered that prayer is the secret weapon of the kingdom of God It is like a missile that can be fired toward any spot on earth, travel undetected at the speed of thought, and hit its target every time. . . Satan has no defense against this weapon; he does not have an anti-prayer missile... We do not pray by default - because there’s nothing else we can do. We pray because it’s the best thing we can do.”*
- ⇒ **Make prayer time a priority** - Prayer cannot be “haphazard.” It should be at a regular place and at a regular time. In the world of hectic schedules and competing time commitments, prayer must become a conscious choice. We choose it above other possible activities because we recognize its priority.
- ⇒ **Arrive “prayed up”** - If you have not spent extended time in prayer alone, your effectiveness in group prayer will be limited. Effective public intercessors are people who are also effective private intercessors. I do not believe that we should have people lead in public prayer who do not spend considerable time in private prayer (my point here has to do with *leading* corporate prayer, not with *participating* in corporate prayer meetings).
- ⇒ **Pray in small groups** - Even in large corporate prayer gatherings, breaking into smaller prayer groups encourages intimacy and discourages anyone who might be tempted to “pray for effect” before larger crowds (yes, it does happen!). Small groups are also less threatening for to individuals who may be uncomfortable praying aloud before other people. Be sensitive and do not create an environment where participants who are not accustomed to praying aloud in a group setting will be embarrassed or intimidated.
- ⇒ **Limit prayer request time** - This can often turn into an unscheduled sharing time, with the majority of time spent sharing and visiting rather than praying. Allow sufficient time for everyone to share their most pressing concerns then conclude the request time by suggesting that if anyone remembers additional needs during the prayer time, they should feel free to pray for them.
- ⇒ **Take time to “draw nigh** - There is no need to “rush” into prayer. Be willing to be silent, praying for the Holy Spirit to come, to bestow His presence and to release His ministry of intercession.
- ⇒ **Enter into His courts with praise** - Don’t be afraid to sing as the Spirit leads. If someone is gifted to lead worship, allow them to lead the group in a few songs of worship and praise.
- ⇒ **Examine your own heart before Him** - Silently confront and confess the sins of your own heart as the Holy Spirit reveals them to you, claiming the promise of 1 John 1:9.
- ⇒ **Keep your prayers brief & focused** - Intercede for prayer needs item by item, as the Holy Spirit leads, keeping your prayers brief and focused, allowing others the blessing of praying!. Be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He leads and guides your prayer time, bringing additional thoughts and needs to mind.
- ⇒ **Ask HOW to pray before praying.** Use silence to listen to the Holy Spirit for direction to pray in keeping with His will.
- ⇒ **Welcome silence** - Welcome periods of silence as times when the Holy Spirit can speak to your heart as you rest in His presence.

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- ⇒ **Be prepared to spend time in prayer, worship and waiting before Him.** Do not rush your agenda, and do not be in a hurry to “get done.” I have seen small group prayer times go for three hours with no one wanting to leave.
- ⇒ **Remember the relationship between fasting and prayer** - “Fasting is designed to make prayer mount up as on eagles’ wings. It is intended to usher the suppliant into the audience chamber of the King and to extend to him the golden sceptre. It may be expected to drive back the oppressing powers of darkness and loosen their hold on the prayer objective. It is calculated to give an edge to a man’s intercessions and power to his petitions. Heaven is ready to bend its ear to listen when someone prays with fasting.”<sup>93</sup>

### Conclusion

God is raising up a new generation of intercessors and teaching and anointing them to pray Kingdom prayers. Are you one of them? God wants intercessors and is always looking for individuals who are willing to stand in the gap on behalf of people and circumstances in intercessory prayer. He is looking for individuals who are willing to exercise the personal discipline to spend prolonged times of isolation alone with Him, fasting and praying for His Kingdom purposes in the lives of men. He is looking for people willing to become the vessels for intercession by the Holy Spirit. This is the discipline, the devotion and the calling of divine intercession in the Kingdom of God.

### Prayer of Application

*Heavenly Father, make me an intercessor. Teach me to fast, to pray and to intercede. Build in me the disciplines of devotion and of solitude to spend time alone with you in prayer. Send the River of the Spirit of God to flow through me in greater power for intercession. Make me a vessel through which the Holy Spirit can intercede for those around me. Send your Holy Spirit into my prayer life to inspire the desires and longings of my heart, to quicken my mind and my heart to your Kingdom purposes, to give me your prayers for others, and to pray those prayers through me. In the powerful name of Jesus Christ, my Intercessor. Amen.*



*Let the River flow . . . and allow the Holy Spirit to pray His Kingdom prayers through you!*

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<sup>93</sup> Wallis, *God’s Chosen Fast*, p

## A “Prayer, Fasting & Intercession” Reading List

Bounds, E. M. *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds On Prayer: Experiencing The Wonders of God Through Prayer*. Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2004.

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\_\_\_\_\_. *Pray In The Spirit*. Fort Washington: Christian Literature Crusade, 1993.

**Who Are You Praying For?**

The following prayer suggestions are offered to help stimulate your “consideration” (remember *katanoeo*?) and prayer for particular people in your house church. List the names of people under the prayer that you are praying for them. When this list becomes too confining, begin your own “open prayer list” using the pages that follow.

1. Lord, I pray that You would draw these people to yourself (John 6:44):

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2. Lord, I pray that You would cause these people to seek to know You (Acts 17:27):

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3. Lord, I pray that You would cause these people hear and believe the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13):

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4. Lord, I ask You to prevent Satan from blinding these people to Your truth (2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 2:25-26):

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5. Lord, I ask the Holy Spirit to convict these people of their sin and their need for your salvation in Christ (John 16:8):

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6. Lord, I ask You to give me the opportunity, the courage and the right words to share the gospel with these people (Colossians 4:3-6; Ephesians 6:19-20):

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7. Lord, I ask You to send someone to share the gospel with these people (Matthew 9:37-38):

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8. Lord, I pray that the Holy Spirit would move in the lives of the following people, equipping, filling and empowering them for greater ministry in your Kingdom, and release your fresh giftings for effective service in their lives:

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