



THE PRAYER CLOSET

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES

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In *The New Yorker* magazine, Mark Danner tells the story of a young girl from El Mozote. This young girl is a Christian. Because she is a Christian, she is singled out for persecution by the authorities. She has been arrested and is at the mercy of the soldiers. The soldiers repeatedly rape her throughout the afternoon. The soldiers are amazed at this young girl. The other women they had raped had cried and screamed as if they had never known a man; this girl had sung hymns through the whole ordeal. This incites the soldiers to shoot her in the chest. Even after they had done this, this young girl continues to sing hymns. As she lay there, the blood flowing from her chest, she keeps singing about the Lord Jesus Christ. She is weaker than before, but still singing. The soldiers are stunned. They stand over her, watching her and pointing at her. Now they were tired of this game and shot her in the chest again. Yet, she still sings about the Lord Jesus Christ. The soldiers' wonder had now turned to fear. Finally, they took out their machetes and hacked through her neck. At last, the singing stopped.

This story is simply one among the thousands that are being reported from across the world. The persecution of Christians is one of the most gruesome, but most neglected stories of contemporary suffering in our world today. Millions of American Christians go to church, pray, and read their Bibles each week, totally unaware of the fact that Christians in other parts of the world suffer brutal torture, arrest, imprisonment, and even death because they follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Their homes and communities are looted and destroyed simply because they are Christians.

Few Americans know that Christians today are the most persecuted religious group in the world and that persecution is intensifying (Nina Shea, *Pulse*, Volume 32, No.3). Eleven countries continue to practice systematic persecution of Christians: China, Pakistan, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, and Uzbekistan. Although these countries contain a small sample of the Christians victimized throughout the world for their faith, they represent some of the worst, if not **the** worst, oppressors of Christianity in the world.

The examples of Christian persecution in the world is heartbreakingly plentiful. The list of actions against Christians reads like an alphabet of cruelty: amputation, bombing, crucifixion, displacement, flogging, kidnapping, murder, prison, rape, slavery, and torture. The brutal treatment of Christians across the world is mind-boggling. Yet, the evidence that this is happening mounts each day.

Some examples of Christian persecution across the world are:

-In Sudan, the Muslim government has made it a crime to convert to Christianity. Thousands of children have been snatched from Christian families and sold as slaves to buyers from Sudan, Libya, and other Islamic countries. Christian children are sold for ten to fifteen dollars as slaves. Thousands of Christian women have been raped; others have been sold as servants or to be a part of harems;

-In Pakistan, Christians have been driven from their villages by Muslim mobs, their possessions looted, their homes and churches destroyed. Christians are forbidden from sharing their faith. The nation has a blasphemy law that forbids anyone to speak against the prophet Mohammed. To do this is to face the death penalty;

HAVING TROUBLE WITH PRAYER?

As you read this newsletter, it is my hope and prayer that you are stirred and motivated to pray and spend time with God. The goal of this newsletter is to lead people into deeper fellowship with God by helping people to pray more effectively and consistently. Yet, it is necessary that I remind you of two basic truths concerning prayer.

First, the only people who can pray and have fellowship with God are those who have a personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ. The privilege of prayer belongs only to those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ by faith and repentance. God becomes your Father only when you turn from your sin and to Christ in true faith (**Galatians 3:26**)! It is impossible to know God or pray to God unless you have turned from your sin and surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ in true faith (**John 1:18; 5:37-38; 14-6, 10-11, 24**).

If you have never done this, your prayers are dead and useless. You must acknowledge your sin to God (**Exodus 20:1-20; Romans 3:9-20, 23**). You have failed to do what God commands and you have done what God forbids. Therefore, you are guilty, condemned, and headed to an eternity in hell. Yet, God has sent His son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners (**John 1:29; 3:16-19; Acts 4:12**). You must turn from your sinful, selfish lifestyle to Jesus Christ, trusting Him as your Savior and surrendering to Him as your Lord and Master (**Luke 13:1-3; Romans 10:9-10**). The problem in your prayer life may be that you have never come to know God in a personal relationship. It is only when you know God through Jesus Christ that you can truly pray and have fellowship with God.

Second, you must be pursuing a holy life to have a powerful prayer life. You may be thinking, "I know I am a Christian. Yet, my prayers seem so lifeless and dead." When teaching how to pray, the Lord Jesus declares to pray to your Father "who is in heaven." The Lord Jesus Christ is emphasizing the fact that your Father is a holy and sovereign God. Those who enter into His presence must be dealing with the sin in their lives. You cannot be complacent with wind and expect to have power in prayer. You cannot go for days without confessing personal sin and expect God to honor and answer your prayers.

The Bible says in Psalm 66:18, "**If I regard iniquity (sin) in my heart, the Lord will not hear.**" You cannot harbor or cherish sin in your life and at the same time expect to have power in prayer. **START READING PSALM 15 ON A DAILY BASIS!! BE DILIGENT TO CONFESS YOUR SINS DAILY!** Ask God to reveal your sin to you. Confess that sin and forsake it (**1 John 1:9**).

-In Iran, four prominent pastors were kidnapped and assassinated in the last few years. Many Christians have been arrested and tortured. Others have lost their homes, jobs, and businesses. Christian schools have been closed or taken over by the Muslims;

-In Vietnam, Christians are constantly in danger of being arrested and having their possessions confiscated by the government;

-In North Korea, Christians are forced to meet secretly in private homes. They have no access to Bibles or religious materials;

-In China, the government continues to seize church property and Bibles. There are more Christians in prison or under detention in China than any other country in the world. Christians are sent to labor camps for "re-education" in Communist beliefs;

-In the Comoro Islands, all public witness by Christians is forbidden and believers are not allowed to meet openly;

-In Iran, all open Christian witness is strictly forbidden. The government sends spies among believers in order to monitor the activities of Christian groups. Believers are also discriminated against in education, employment, and property ownership. In the last five years, several pastors have been murdered;

-In Egypt, Christians are treated as second-class citizens, being denied political representation and discriminated against in employment. The government uses an 1856 Ottoman Empire law to keep any church from being built, repaired, or even repainted without the permission of Egypt's president. Christians are also susceptible to attacks by Muslim extremists.

The brutal treatment of Christians across the world is shocking. Yet, there is something that is even more shocking than this. It is the silence of American Christians. It is the indifference of the American Christians to the suffering and persecution of her brothers and sisters across the world. Christians are being persecuted in record numbers while the church in America remains silent. **More Christians have died for their faith in this century alone than in the previous nineteen centuries combined.** Yet, American Christians are still silent and unconcerned about these brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ.

American Christians must take the lead in breaking the silence concerning Christian persecution. **IF WE WILL NOT SPEAK OUT, NO ONE WILL!!** We can no longer be silent to the condition of thousands of Christians around the world who are suffering and dying because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We can no longer remain indifferent to the horrible and brutal treatment of Christians across the world. The time to act is now! We must passionately pray and work for an end to the suffering being inflicted on our brothers and sisters in Christ. American Christians have turned their back on their responsibility to deal with the persecution of Christians.

The American government has totally neglected the issue of Christian persecution across the world. The State Department knows that Christian persecution is going on in Communist and Islamic countries. But because of other foreign policy concerns and economic issues, they choose to look the other way. American political leaders have refused to acknowledge Christian persecution across the world. It is only recently that some in Washington have grudgingly acknowledged this persecution.

In early 1996, U.S. Ambassador Jim Sasser was never briefed by the State Department about the existence of, much less the persecution suffered by, the millions of house-church Christians in China.

Yet, he was well-versed in the persecution suffered by Tibetan Buddhists, student democracy activists, and other Chinese groups. When asked about the persecution of millions of Chinese Christians who attend underground house churches, Sasser responded, "What's a house church?" (Meeting of Ambassador Jim Sasser with human rights nongovernmental organizations, reported by Nina Shea of The Freedom House, January 24, 1996).

The United States has largely closed its doors to Christians fleeing for their lives from persecution. Christians who seek asylum in America from the threats and danger of their persecutors are repeatedly deported. They are refused asylum and help by the United States. They are returned to the very people who are seeking to destroy them. Reporter Michael Horowitz has stated, "Immigration lawyers tell me that it's easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than to get an asylum claim satisfied for a Christian who has escaped persecution."

It is time for American Christians to respond to the persecution of her brothers and sisters across the world. It is time for American Christians to demand that the government change its foreign policy and immigration laws concerning persecuted Christians. This is a crucial issue. It cannot be ignored or neglected. Persecution is evil. It is a sin on the part of the persecutors. This sin must be exposed and denounced by American Christians.

The Biblical Basis For Action Against Persecution

It is the Christian's responsibility and duty to speak out and act against the persecution of other Christians. To fail to speak out and act is a sin. The Bible reveals that the Christian has the responsibility, even duty, to speak and act when other Christians are persecuted and killed because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I talk with other believers, I am often amazed at the indifference that they have toward this subject. This may be your attitude. Yet, I want you to understand that your failure to speak out and act against the persecution of Christians is a sin before God. You will answer to God for your failure in this area. The Bible reveals numerous reasons why Christians are to speak out and take action against the persecution of Christians.

The first reason that you must speak out and act is because persecution is an attack on the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel. When Jesus Christ confronted Saul of Tarsus, He said, "Saul, Saul, why are You persecuting Me?" Saul had been harassing and killing Christians. Yet, Jesus Christ declares that Saul had been attacking Him. The Lord Jesus Christ reveals that Saul had been attempting to destroy Him and His gospel. The church is the **BODY** of Christ. When Christian are attacked, it is really an attempt to destroy the Lord Jesus Christ and His message.

How can any Christian be indifferent when evil people are attempting to stamp out the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel? How can someone profess to know and love Christ and then sit back when He is being blasphemed and His gospel is under attack? This is why persecution is such an evil and why it must be opposed. It is an attempt to attack Christ and His gospel. The persecutors are actually trying to get rid of Jesus Christ and His Word.

Another reason why you must speak out and act is because these Christians are your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The Word of God states in **1 Corinthians 12:13**, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized **into one body**-where Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free-and have **all been made to drink into one Spirit.**" All believers make up the one family of God. It does not matter where believers are from-Mississippi, Texas, Russia, Iran, China, Sudan, Nigeria-all believers belong to the universal church, the body of Christ. Regardless of where a believer is located, that believer is connected to a family of believers all over the world.

GAINING DISCERNMENT WORKSHEET

This worksheet has been developed in order to help you think biblically about the decision or problem that you are facing. This means that you will be able to look at your decision or problem from the perspective of God's Word. As you seek to see how the Bible speaks to your decision or problem, ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in your study and to give you understanding. He is your divine Teacher and can guide you into the understanding of the Word along with its application. Set down on paper the pros and cons of the situation. Set down the reasons, the possibilities, and problems of one decision in contrast to another. As you examine the Scripture and these issues, you will often find your mind drawn in one direction or another. As time passes, you will begin to feel the weight of one course of action rather than the other. Ask God to confirm this by His peace (**Colossians 3:15**).

- (1) Does God give a direct command concerning this decision or problem?
Is there a specific command in the Word of God that shows you what to do?
In the Ten Commandments? In the Sermon on the Mount? Other teachings of Christ? In the letters of the New Testament?
- (2) Does God give a specific prohibition concerning this decision or problem?
In the Word of God, God often declares what is displeasing and unacceptable in His sight. In other words, does God forbid you to do this? Has God declared that this is not something that He wants you to do or to be a part of your life?
- (3) What principles can be found in the Word of God that speak to this problem or decision. The Bible gives principles that can help you in making decisions and facing problems. You need to search the Word to see if there are basic principles that will help you.
- (4) Are there specific examples in the Word that speak to your situation?
The Bible is a record of God's people and of their walk with Him. Many times these saints faced similar problems and decisions that you may be facing. An example of of this would be the life of David and the Psalms.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SEEKING GOD'S GUIDANCE?

- (1) **Is this scriptural?** *No action which is contrary to the Word of God is acceptable or legitimate for the child of God!*
- (2) **Will this strengthen my relationship to Jesus Christ and enable me to grow as a child of God?** *No action which leads you away from Jesus Christ and pursuing Him in a personal relationship is acceptable or legitimate for the Christian!*
- (3) **Will this consume my time, my energy, and my money so that nothing is left for God or family (1 Corinthians 6:12)?** *The Christian must not allow himself to be enslaved by anything that will not allow the freedom to serve God and build the family!*
- (4) **Can you take Christ there and look Him in the face without shame?** *Whenever a Christian pursues a course of action, he takes Christ with him.*
- (5) **Will this benefit others?** *A Christian must make decisions in light of helping and serving others.*
- (6) **Is this going to benefit my family? Will my family be drawn closer to God through this?** *Every decision that is made is going to affect others; this is especially true when it comes to one's family.*
- (7) **Is this going to glorify God?** *The Christian's top priority is to do what is going to bring the greatest glory to God.*
- (8) **Is this going to hinder or help my witness for Jesus Christ?** *A Christian is a witness; It can be a powerful witness or it can be a useless or harmful witness depending on the decisions that a Christian makes.*

It is time that we come to understand that believers all over the world are our brothers and sisters in Christ. **WE MAY HAVE DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND DIFFERENT CULTURES, YET WE SHARE THE SAME HOPE, THE SAME CALLING, THE SAME SPIRIT, THE SAME LORD, THE SAME FAITH, THE SAME BAPTISM, AND THE SAME GOD AND FATHER (EPHESIANS 4:4-6)!!** The Lord Jesus Christ has died for them just as much as He has for American Christians and has made us one body through His blood and righteousness.

When you hear of believers in other parts of the world being persecuted, you must remember that these are your brothers and sisters who are being persecuted. A believer in Sudan or China is just as much your brother or sister as the believers which you are going to church with **right now!** You have the same Father and are part of the same family as they are. For this reason, you must **speak out and act.**

A third reason you must speak out and act against Christian persecution is because all Christians are to suffer or rejoice with their fellow Christians. The Word of God states in **1 Corinthians 12:26**, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." When a member of the body of Christ suffers, the whole body is to suffer with that one member. When members of the body of Christ are suffering for the faith, we are to sympathize with them and share in their suffering. As stated earlier, we are connected in one family. When they suffer, we are to suffer. We are to share their pain and do everything that is possible to minister to them in their suffering.

The Bible states in **Hebrews 13:3**, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also." This verse is often used to declare the responsibility of Christians to minister to those in prison. It is true that we are to declare the gospel and minister to those who are jailed in prisons across this country. Yet, that is not the correct interpretation of this verse. The writer of Hebrews is commanding that Christians remember and minister to "other Christians" who have been imprisoned or mistreated because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to notice the phrase "**since you yourselves are in the body also.**" Because these believers are in the same body, they are to remember and minister to their brothers and sisters who have been imprisoned or mistreated because of their faith in Jesus Christ. The same is true of believers today.

This remembrance and ministry is not to be casual or half-hearted. The writer of Hebrews states that we should remember these believers "**as if chained with them.**" We are to speak out and act as if we were imprisoned with them or are suffering the same mistreatment. There is no excuse for a Christian to ignore or neglect the persecution of Christians. This is God's demand of every believer. This is God's command. You are accountable to be obedient to this command.

Galatians 6:2 gives another reason why believers must speak out and act against the persecution of Christians. The Bible states there, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Christians are to help each other bear their burdens. Our brothers and sisters across the world are bearing the heavy burden of persecution for their faith. God's desire and demand of us is to help these believers bear this burden. We are to speak out and act in order to help these believers. To fail to do this is to be obedient to Jesus Christ and His Word.

A final reason for speaking out and acting against the persecution of Christians is found in **Obadiah 10-11**. The Word of God says there, "For your violence against your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side-in the day that strangers carried captive his forces, when foreigners entered the gates and cast lots for Jerusalem-even you were one of them." The entire book of Obadiah is devoted to a message of judgment against the nation of Edom (v.4). The reason that God would judge Edom is due to the fact that they sat back as foreign armies destroyed and plundered Jerusalem. They did nothing to help their "brothers" when they were attacked and destroyed.

If we do not speak out and act today, their fate will become ours! If we do not speak up for those who are being persecuted and murdered by godless and lawless criminals, is it possible that such

hate will grow unchecked until it is at our own doorstep? The answer is yes. If we do not stand today, we will face the same evil in our own land. God's judgment for our indifference and neglect will be to give us into the hands of those who will persecute and attempt to destroy us.

Why Have Christians Failed To Speak Out and Act In Behalf of Persecuted Christians Across the World?

The silence and indifference of American Christians is stunning and totally inexcusable. Yet, there are reasons why American Christians have failed to speak out and act in behalf of our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ. One reason for the silence of American Christians is a lack of information. Many believers in America are simply unaware that Christians are being brutally tortured, persecuted, and murdered across the world. Most Westerners are shocked to learn that believers are being persecuted across the world. The persecution of Christians is ignored by secular media. It is not considered as being important enough to be covered. Both religious and mainstream press simply refuse to cover these subjects. At the same time, these persecuted Christians often will not tell their own stories. For them persecution is just a fact of life as a Christian. Many will not tell their own story for fear of more severe persecution.

Yet, there are more and more organizations that are declaring the fact of persecution. They are telling the stories of these persecuted Christians who cannot speak. Christians in America can no longer hide behind the excuse that they did not know. This is true of you at this moment. The conditions of your brothers and sisters around the world is now being made known to you. Now, it is time for you to speak out and act.

Another reason for the silence concerning persecution is the fear of the loss of missionary ministry. If your being able to minister in a country depends on being able to get permission to work in the country from the government, you will be less likely to speak out about the government's persecution. Many missions organizations have made an intentional decision to maintain silence about persecution or to simply gloss over it in order to stay in the country and work. This is a sensitive issue. Yet, American believers must speak out and act. We must demand that our government do everything that is possible to pressure these governments to cease the persecution and murder of Christians.

Some have argued that the blood of the martyrs (Christians who die for their faith) waters the seeds of the church. This is a line from *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. This statement basically means that the church has grown stronger and advanced when Christians have endured persecution and laid down their lives for Jesus Christ. It is true that Christians dying for the faith have strengthened and grown the church throughout Christian history. Yet, it has to be remembered that in some cases, such as in many parts of the Muslim world, Christian communities are rapidly vanishing because they are being systematically hunted down and murdered.

It must also be remembered that there is a time to die for Christ, but also a time to live for Christ. There is a time to suffer and there is a time to resist that suffering. Reg Reimer, director of World Evangelical Fellowship's Department of Church and Society, points to biblical stories that describe how the apostle Paul responded to persecution. He states, "Sometimes he fled; sometimes he suffered and endured; but sometimes he resisted, such as when he used his Roman citizenship to appeal to the charges against him. He used every legal means that he had in order not to suffer."

Many believers are silent and unconcerned about the persecution of Christians around the world due to the fact that they believe that this is the fate of Christians. When confronted about this evil, their response is, "Well, that is simply the price that you pay for being a Christian." **They use this line of thinking as an excuse to do nothing!** This line of thinking is simply a way to dodge one's responsibility to take a stand, speak out, and act against Christian persecution. If your child was carried away by the

authorities to be sold as a slave for ten dollars, would you calmly sit back and say, "Well, that's just the price you pay for following Jesus Christ?" If your husband, wife, mother, or father were being beaten to death by soldiers, would you serenely stand back and say, "Well, that's just the price you pay for following Jesus Christ?"

In **Acts 12**, Herod had Peter arrested and imprisoned. His intention was to execute Peter in order to please the Jews. When this took place, what did the church do? Did the other believers sit back and say, "Well, that's the price you pay for following Jesus.?" The Bible reveals the church began to pray; they plead with God for Peter's safety and release. In **Acts 12:5**, the Word of God states, "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." When Peter was imprisoned, these believers did not ignore the situation; they did not turn their back on Peter. They took action!

I have had individuals to tell me that persecution is a fact of life for Christians. For this reason, it is useless to speak out and act against the persecution of Christians. I agree that Christians are going to face persecution. The Lord Jesus Christ has assured His people of this (**John 16:33**). Yet, this should not in any way hinder believers from acting and speaking out for their persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

In **John 12:8**, the Lord Jesus Christ states, "For the poor you have with you always, but Me You do not have always." The Lord Jesus Christ states that there will always be poor people. It is a fact of life that there will always be poor people in the world. Does this mean that believers are under no obligation to help and minister to the poor? In **Matthew 25:33-37**, the Lord Jesus Christ declares that a true Christian attempts to help the poor. He states that true believers feed, clothe, and minister to the poor. The continual presence of the poor does not excuse believers from seeking to help and minister to them. In the same way, the fact of persecution does not in any way excuse believers from attempting to minister and help brothers and sisters in the Lord who are persecuted.

What Can You Do To Speak Out And Act Against Christian Persecution?

At this point, you may be wondering, "I want to speak out and act against the persecution of my brothers and sisters in Christ. But what can I do? I'm only one person." There are definite steps that you can take to help and minister to your persecuted brothers and sisters.

The first step is to stay informed. Now that you have been made aware of this evil, stay aware of the situations that are facing Christians across the world. You can do this by contacting the following organizations. They will put you on their mailing list and will send you information about the persecution of Christians across the world.

Voice of the Martyrs
P.O. Box 443
Bartlesville, OK 74005

Open Doors With Brother Andrew
P.O. Box 27000
Santa Ana, CA 92799

Institute On Religion and Democracy
1521 16th Street NW, Suite 300
Washington, D.C. 20036

International Christian Concern
2020 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
#941
Washington, D.C. 20006

Next, write to the President and to your Congressmen and Senators. Ask them to do everything possible to protect and defend the rights of Christians who are being persecuted. When you write to them, ask them to work for the following reforms:

-The public condemnation of Christian persecution and showing greater concern for persecuted Christians by the President and all appropriate branches of his administration;

-Greater accuracy of reporting by the State Department Human Rights Bureau. This is to ensure that its annual reports and other publications accurately reflect the situation facing Christians. Ask for the elimination of any possibility of the "option of silence" on the Bureau's part when it comes to the reporting of the condition of persecuted Christians;

-The appointing of a special presidential advisor for religious liberty;

-Change in the ways in which the Immigration and Naturalization Service treats the petitions of escapees from anti-Christian persecution;

-The termination of non-humanitarian foreign assistance to governments of countries that fail to take vigorous action to end anti-Christian or other religious persecution.

You must speak out; you must make your voice heard!

Third, you can write to believers who are in prison. This is a powerful way to "remember their chains." When Christians in prison receive letters, they take great comfort in the fact that other believers remember them and are praying for them. Write to The Voice of the Martyrs and request the address list of Christian prisoners. They will provide you with a list of believers that you can write and encourage as they suffer and pay the ultimate price for the sake of Christ and His gospel.

Finally, you must pray. Your persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ should be a continual prayer concern. It is your responsibility as a believer to pray for those believers who are suffering for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Millions of believers are being persecuted and killed because of their stand for Jesus Christ. It is your privilege and responsibility to intercede for these believers. The following prayer list has been developed as a guide to help you pray for your persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ.

- (1) **Pray that God would protect them from Satan and the instruments that he chooses to use to persecute them (2 Thessalonians 2:2-3);**
- (2) **Pray that the Word of God would conquer the hearts of the people and their persecutors (2 Thessalonians 3:1);**
- (3) **Pray that God will open a door for the Word so that they can boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ (Colossians 4:3);**
- (4) **Pray that they will be faithful to Jesus Christ and His gospel whether in life or death (Philippians 1:20);**
- (5) **Pray that the Lord will strengthen them with all the power of His glorious might so that they might be steadfast and abound with joyous patience (Colossians 1:11);**
- (6) **Pray that God would change the hearts of those who are in opposition to the Christian faith in the government, whether in that country or in the United States (Proverbs 21:1);**

Advancing the Kingdom

Beginning with this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, I will be adding a section titled "Advancing the Kingdom." In this section, I will feature a nation of the world which you can plead with God to conquer with His gospel and bring under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God is the reign of Jesus Christ in the hearts of men. This reign advances when men and women surrender their lives to Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. It is your responsibility to pray for this kingdom to advance, bringing men and women from every nation of the earth to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ teaches believers in **Matthew 6:10** that they are to pray for the coming of the kingdom and that the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. One of the ways you can do this is to pray for people to surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the preaching of the gospel.

In this section, you will be given basic information about the country and the condition of the church in that country. You will also be given specific prayer requests to pray for that country and your brothers and sisters that live there and serve there. I am going to begin with the nations that persecute and murder Christians. We will start with the worst offenders. Please pray through the prayer list given in this issue for the believers who are in this country. **If you will pray and believe God, your prayers can make a difference! You can make a difference in your world for Jesus Christ!**

SUDAN

Sudan is Africa's largest country. This nation was declared an Islamic Republic in 1983. The Muslim government has declared a *jihad*, or a holy war, against all non-Muslims, especially Christians. One of the Islamic leaders, Omar Hassan al-Turabi, has stated that anyone who opposes Islam "has no future" in Sudan. Sudan's leaders proudly boast that they are the leaders of the Islamic Revolution in Africa.

There has been persecution of the church over much of the past 40 years, but much more since 1985. This persecution includes the bombing of Sunday church services, destruction of churches and Christian villages, assassination of pastors and leaders, and mass crucifixions of professing Christians. The property of Christians is destroyed and their lands are seized and given to Arabs. The Christians in Sudan are destitute and are largely dependent on the aid that rarely reaches them.

In spite of the severe persecution, the church has been growing. Many new churches are springing up. The Presbyterian and Anglican churches of Sudan have been experiencing revival. These believers have demonstrated great faith and joy in hazardous times. Yet, they need our support and prayers. You can pray the following for the believers in Sudan and for their nation:

- (1) **Pray that Satan's stronghold on this nation will be broken;**
- (2) **Pray for a fair and lasting peace in the nation** (There has been civil war in this nation. Over a million people have died, the economy is destroyed, and the people are divided);
- (3) **Pray that God will raise up godly, Spirit-filled leadership for the church in Sudan** (There are so many new converts that there is not enough leadership for the church. These new converts are not mature enough for leadership positions.);
- (4) **Pray that the Christians in Sudan will demonstrate a love and concern for other believers that goes deeper than ethnic and racial divisions;**
- (5) **Pray for the reopening of the land to missionaries and outside help** (Since 1990, Christian missionaries have been expelled and refused visas to enter the country. Pray that outside help will be

allowed to enter so that help can be given to the battered church to repair the immense emotional and physical damage to lives and property and to train a new generation of believers.);

(6) **Pray that God will enable Bible translators to prepare and then distribute Bibles in the languages of the various groups of Sudan** (Pray especially for the newly formed Sudan Bible Translation and Literacy Association.).

Praying The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:7 Blessed Are The Merciful

God of heaven and earth, You are merciful. It is because of Your mercy that I am not consumed. Your compassion does not fail. Your mercy is fresh and new every morning. You, O Lord, are good and your mercy is everlasting. Father, You are gracious and full of compassion. Your mercy is great above the heavens. The earth is full of Your mercy. Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord.

I praise You and thank You that You have had mercy on me. I know that I did not deserve Your mercy. I did not merit any mercy from me. I know that You freely gave this to me of Your own will and purpose. I was guilty and condemned before You. I had no hope. I deserved eternal condemnation and wrath. Yet, You, Father of mercies and God of compassion, You granted mercy to me by saving me through Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. You forgave me of all my sin. You adopted me into Your family. You have blessed me with all spiritual blessings in Christ. In Your mercy, You saved me. Even now, you sustain me through Your mercy. Your compassion flows into my life each day, moment-by-moment. I am assured that Your mercies are sure. Your mercy will endure for me for all eternity.

Since Your mercy has been granted to me, I ask now that You would enable me to be merciful to others. Cause Your compassion to flow through me to others. Grant that my life may be characterized by genuine compassion for each person that I come into contact with on a daily basis. Amen.

Genuine Prayer or Religious Ritual?

The Bible often presents contrasts to the reader: dead faith vs. living faith, good works vs. dead works, true prophets vs. false prophets. The same is true with prayer. In **Matthew 6**, the Lord Jesus Christ presents the difference between true prayer and a religious ritual. True prayer is fellowship with God the Father. It is getting alone in order to get with God. It is the believer going into the presence of God in order to spend time with God and to listen to him.

Yet, Jesus also declares that, what some people call "prayer," is really an empty religious ritual. He states in **Matthew 6:7**, "But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words." The Lord Jesus Christ states that stringing together phrases and clichés is not prayer, but an empty, dead religious ritual.

Are you genuinely praying or simply going through the motions of an empty religious ritual? William S. Plumer wrote, "We may as well not pray at all as offer our prayers in a lifeless manner." Is your praying simply stringing together phrases and clichés that you have picked up from others? It is time for believers to repent of lifeless praying. It is time for believers to turn away from simply going through the motions of an empty religious ritual that pleases the flesh but is ignored by God. We must remember and take to heart the words of J.H. Evans, "**Dealing in generalities is the death of prayer.**"

How can you turn away from going through the motions of prayer to genuine fellowship with God? It is to make your plea the same plea that the disciples made of Jesus Christ. In **Luke 11:1**, the

disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. Will you make that your continual plea? Will you right now begin to plead with God to teach you how to pray, how to have genuine fellowship with Him? Your greatest responsibility and privilege is to pray. Your Christian life depends on this. Prayer is your most important activity! Plead with God to teach you how to pray!

What Is The Church's Greatest Need?

"The prime need of the church is not men of money nor men of brains, but men of prayer." (E.M. Bounds)

Praying for God's Guidance

Are you in need of guidance from God? The Christian can trust that God is going to guide him or her. Each Christian can say as David did, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . . He leads me" (**Psalm 23:1-2**). Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of all believers. You can be assured that He will guide you and keep you. That is the task of a shepherd. It is the task which Jesus Christ Himself has undertaken because of His great love for His people.

Every child of God can receive guidance from God. There are definite steps that a believer can take in order to receive this guidance. The first step is to become increasingly familiar with and sensitive to the Word of God. The wonderful thing about God is that He is unchanging. His word is secure. He does not alter His mind. When you come to know God, His Word, and His ways, you can be sure that God will always be true to these. As you familiarize yourself with the Word of God and become sensitive to it, you learn to know His mind. As you grow in love for Him, you learn to be sensitive to how He will be thinking about your situation. There is much that is mysterious about the way God guides us. Yet, the Word of God provides a map for the believer to follow on the fulfillment of God's purpose for his or her life. David states, "Your word is a lamp to my feet a light to my path" (**Psalm 119:105**). Knowing God's Word enables you to know God's mind or thoughts about particular situations.

Another step that a believer takes in order to receive guidance is to pray for discernment from God. Knowing God's will is a matter of judgment. Guidance, knowing God's will for your life, is much more a matter of thinking than feeling. The believer should not say, "I felt led to do it," but, "I discerned this to be the will of God." The apostle Paul states in **Ephesians 5:17**, "therefore do not be unwise, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is."

This is why **Psalm 119:66** teaches you to pray, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments." You are to ask God for understanding in His Word and how to apply this in your life on a daily basis. God guides you as you learn to apply His word to your life. As you grow in your understanding of the Word and apply it to your life, you will learn to discern God's will for your life.

The following prayer is given as a guide to help you in praying for guidance. You can use this prayer as a guide to pray for yourself or for someone else who is in need of guidance from God.

Heavenly Father, The God who guides His people, I praise You and thank You that You have a purpose for _____ life. I praise You and thank You that You are guiding _____ in that purpose. Father, _____ am/is faced with (describe the problem, opportunity, or decision). **Lord God, I ask You to give _____ discernment in Your Word concerning this matter.** Father, _____ trust (s) in You with all _____ heart and _____ do/does not lean on _____ own understanding. In all _____ ways _____ acknowledge(s) You and _____ trust(s) that You will make _____ path straight in accordance with Your will in this matter. _____ want(s) to do Your will in this matter and to walk(s) in a manner that is worthy of You and pleasing to You. you are _____ God and _____ Master. _____ humble(s) _____ before You, pleading for Your guidance in this matter so that you may be glorified and honored. Amen.

The Beloved Unbeliever Network is a network of intercessors who pray for believers who have spouses that are not Christians. This network of intercessors pray daily for believers who are in this situation. These intercessors have been trained and are committed to praying for believers who find themselves in this type of marriage. If you would like to be added to this prayer list or if you know of someone who is in the situation and would like to place them on this prayer list, please contact Dr. Kevin Meador. Please provide the following information:

Name of the family members
Church affiliation
Any special requests

Any information that is submitted will be kept in strict confidence and the privacy of the individuals will be protected.



THE PRAYER CLOSET

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