



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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PRAYING FOR THE HARDENED

What is the intercessor's most formidable challenge? It is praying for the hardened person. You know the type. Maybe you're praying for someone like that now. This person has no interest in the things of God. This person loves his or her lifestyle more pursuing God and His will. This person is determined to have nothing to do with God and His Word. The list of characteristics could go on and on. But, the bottom line is that this person is hardened to God and is determined to do anything but surrender to Him.

Praying for a hardened person drains you. You have to keep praying even when you see no change. You continue even when the person seems to get deeper into sin and farther away from God. You know the consequences if this person does not turn to God in surrender and repentance. You are standing in the gap between God and this hardened person. This is the heavy price that must be paid in order to pray for the hardened person.

Praying for the hardened person requires a commitment to pray for the long haul. God is sometimes pleased to immediately answer and deal with a person in this condition. Yet, sometimes it is a process over a period of time. It is a matter of praying through the layers of hardness until you get to the heart of the problem. Patience and persistence must characterize the intercessor that will stand in the gap for this type of person.

Are you praying for hardened people? Maybe you are discouraged. Maybe you are tired. Maybe you are just ready to give up. You have prayed and prayed but this person or persons remain

hardened in their rebellion against God. It seems as if there is no hope in your case. If this is the case, you need to look at the prayer life of Moses.

The prayer life of Moses provides us with an excellent example of praying for hardened people. Moses dealt with and prayed for the hardened and often rebellious people of Israel. He offered agonizing and broken intercession for disobedient people. His example suggests some lessons that we must consider in praying for the hardened. These are lessons that will aid you when confronted with the formidable challenge of praying for a hardened person.

Do not limit your intercession. (Exodus 8-10)

The first lesson that Moses' prayer life presents is that you should not limit your intercession. I mean by this that you should not fail to have hope for the most hardened of individuals. As an intercessor, you should not feel that anyone is beyond the grace and power of God. Regardless of how long and how deep in sin and rebellion a person has been, God can still speak to and transform that person.

Pharaoh is a classic example of a hardened person. He refused to let Israel leave Egypt to worship the Lord in the wilderness. The Word of God states in **Exodus 10:3**, "So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, 'Thus says the

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LORD God of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go that they may serve me.” Pharaoh had heard the Word of God. He along with the Egyptians had experienced plagues sent by God. Each one was designed to cause Pharaoh to repent. Yet, in spite of all this, he stubbornly hardened his heart toward God and His Word. He refused to humble himself before the Lord.

On four occasions, however, Pharaoh asked Moses to pray for him. The first time came after the plague of the frogs (**Exodus 8:8-15**). Moses prayed, but Pharaoh hardened his heart. The plague of the insects provoked Pharaoh again to ask for Moses’ intercession (**Exodus 8:30-32**). Moses once again prayed, but Pharaoh hardened his heart.

At this point, most of us would have been ready to give up on Pharaoh. The plague of hail ruined the crops of Egypt. Once more Pharaoh wanted Moses to pray, “And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the LORD, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay here no longer’” (**Exodus 9:27-28**). Moses discerned Pharaoh’s hypocrisy and told him, “I know that you will not yet fear the LORD God” (**Exodus 9:30**). Yet, even this did not stop Moses from praying for Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s hypocrisy and hardness of heart did not prevent him from interceding for him (**Exodus 9:33-35**).

The fourth and final time that Moses prayed for Pharaoh is found in **Exodus 10:16-20**. Pharaoh again asks Moses to pray for him. Moses does and Pharaoh once again hardens his heart. In this passage, something unique happens, “But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let them go” (**Exodus 10:27**). This text says that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. Previously, the Word of God declares that Pharaoh had hardened his own heart. Because Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his own heart, the Lord gave him up to his own depravity. Pharaoh had hardened his heart so much that God gave him over to his own hardness of heart. Yet, Moses still prayed for him.

The Bible does teach that God gives people over to their own depravity and hardness of heart (**Romans 1:18-32**). When a person continues to harden his or her heart to God and His Word, God

will harden that person’s heart beyond salvation. Yet, who of us is sufficient to know when this takes place? Who knows when this happens in the life of an individual? This is something that only God knows. It is not our responsibility to determine if a person’s heart has been hardened beyond salvation. It is our responsibility to pour ourselves out in intercession for those who are hardened. It is our responsibility to plead and wrestle with God for that person. As long as that person’s heart beats and there is breath in his or her body, there is hope. As long as the person is this side of the grave, we must pray fervently for him or her.

Have you ever heard someone say, “It’s useless to pray for him. He’ll never become a Christian.” What an insult to God! What a lack of confidence in the power of prayer! The first and most basic lesson of praying for hardened people is that you do not limit your intercession. You do not decide who is beyond the grace and the power of God. You don’t write people off because they are hardened and rebellious toward God and His Word.

If you are praying for a hardened person, don’t give up! Don’t lose hope! You are praying to the God of power and mercy. The only time to lose hope is when you stop praying. As long as you are pleading, there is hope for genuine change in this person’s life.

Focus on the glory of God (Numbers 14)

The second lesson that we can learn about praying for the hardened person is to focus on the glory of God. The glory of God must be your primary motivation in praying for this type of person. You should pray for this person because God is going to be glorified through the transformation of this person. God’s glory can keep you motivated to pray regardless of the circumstances. God loves to glorify Himself. When your motivation to pray is God’s glory, He will pour out His strength, hope, and power on you.

In **Numbers 14**, God’s people were grumbling against Him. They had heard the report of the spies concerning the land (**Numbers 13**). Rather than listening to Joshua and Caleb, the people listened to the unbelieving report of ten of

the spies. They did not believe that God could enable them to take the land in spite of the obstacles. They accused God of leading them into the promised land in order to destroy them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victim?" (**Numbers 14:2-3**).

In the midst of all this, God speaks to Moses, "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." (**Numbers 14:11-12**). The people of Israel had been a source of endless heartache to Moses with their unbelief, grumbling, and rebellion. And now they were at his mercy. With one nod, he could rid himself of the sons of Israel forever. He could become a great and mighty nation.

How does Moses respond? He prays that God will forgive the people of Israel for their unbelief, rebellion, and murmuring (**Numbers 14:13-20**). Moses knew that the people did not deserve forgiveness. Because of this, he did not base his plea on any goodness in them. He argued that if God wiped out the people of Israel, the other nations would not understand. They would say that God was not able to bring them into the promised land. They would say that the Lord was like all the other gods that they worshipped. They would declare that God was not able to accomplish His purposes. This would not bring glory to God. It would not reflect well on His divine reputation among the nations. God answered by forgiving the people.

When God told Moses that He was about to destroy the people of Israel, it was a test. It was a test to see what was most important to him—the glory of God or selfish ambition. Moses passed the test by focusing on God's glory and not his own ambition. He asked God to deliver the people so that God might be honored. He pled with God to forgive the people for the sake of His own glory and reputation.

This is perhaps the greatest lesson that an intercessor can ever learn. It stands true as you pray for the hardened person. But, it applies to all intercession. The glory of God must be the primary

motivation for prayer. We pray so that God will be glorified in our lives and the lives of others. We seek Him in behalf of others so that God can change them and receive the glory for it. There are a variety of motivations for intercession—love, wanting to see a person delivered, not wanting a person to be harmed, wanting relationships restored. Yet, the primary motivation is to see God glorified when He touches and changes the person.

You can be motivated by a variety of reasons to intercede for the hardened person. Yet, praying for the hardened person requires that you focus on the glory of God. When the glory of God is your primary motivation, it will anchor your intercession. It will give you the ability to persevere in prayer. God will grant you strength and hope to continue. If your desire is to glorify and honor God, He will bless and empower your praying. God shows Himself strong to those who desire to glorify Him. Our intercession must be characterized by these words, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory and honor, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (**Psalm 115:1**).

Be willing to be part of the answer (Exodus 32)

One of the darkest moments in Israel's history is when they constructed a golden calf and worshipped it as God. When Moses did not return immediately, the people demanded that Aaron make them a god that they could worship (**Exodus 32:1-6**). They declared that the golden calf was the true God who had delivered them from Egypt.

God responded with righteous anger towards the idolatry of the people of Israel. They had disregarded His miracles. They had trampled on His mercy. They had despised His grace that delivered them from out of Egypt. They formed an idol to replace Him and His glory. God says to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation" (**Exodus 32:9-10**).

Once again, Moses intercedes for the stubborn and rebellious Israelites (**Exodus 32:11-14**). Moses does not make excuses for their sin. He calls their idolatry a “great” sin (**Exodus 32:30**). He cries out to God to forgive the people of this great sin. With reckless abandon, he begs God to blot his name out of the book of life so that Israel might be forgiven. He is asking God to take his life rather than the lives of Israelites. Instead of punishing the Israelites, Moses pleads with God to punish him, even to take his life, so that Israel would be forgiven.

In this action, we see the sacrificial love of Moses. He was willing to give his own life for the people of Israel. He interceded for them; yet, he was willing to do whatever it took to restore them to a right relationship with God. This is essential when praying for anyone, but especially the hardened person. There must be a combination of intercession and a willingness to act in light of your praying. Fervent prayer and sacrificial love go hand-in-hand (**Romans 9:1-3**).

When you pray for someone, you must be willing to be part of the answer. There are times when you will not be able to do anything but pray. When you are dealing with a hardened person, he or she may be unwilling to listen to you or receive ministry from you. You may have to rely on other believers to reach him or her. This may happen.

Yet, you must determine to do whatever it takes to see this person repent and turn to God. You must prepare yourself to make sacrifices for this person. When you pray for this person, it must be combined with sacrificial love—a love that is willing to do anything to see this person transformed by the power and love of God. You must be willing to talk with and minister to this person. You must be ready to sacrifice your time, your energy, and your love to see this person’s spiritual need met.

Realize that your intercession is significant (Numbers 11)

In **Numbers 11**, the people of Israel have once again set themselves up for the judgment of

God. The Word of God declares, “Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused” (**Numbers 11:1a**). The text does not mention what they were complaining about. Apparently they had nothing better to do than whine and complain about God.

Because of this rebellion on their part, God sent fire into the camp to consume some of them, “So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp” (**Numbers 11:1b**). The fire broke out at the edge of the camp and would have made its way to the center of the camp. But, the people cried out and Moses prayed, “Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched” (**Numbers 11:2**). When Moses prayed, the fire stopped. His intercession delivered these people from judgment and certain death.

Moses’ praying made the difference in this situation. **Psalm 106:23** emphasizes this truth, “Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.” Your praying can make the difference too! When you pray for people, especially those who are hardened, do not lose sight of the power of intercession. Your praying is not a useless, powerless activity. It is a mighty instrument that God uses to deliver rebellious people.

Remember that you are standing in the gap between a holy God and sinful, rebellious people. You are the only barrier between that person and God’s judgment. You are the only defense between that person and the awful consequences of rebellion toward God. You are the only hope that this person has. Praying for hardened people is a matter of life and eternity.

Frustration and discouragement can quickly settle into your heart and mind when you are praying for someone. When you feel that your praying is having little effect, it can weigh your heart down. It can fill your mind with doubt about prayer and God’s willingness to answer. Yet, look at the example of Moses. He prayed and God had mercy on these people. Your intercession is significant. It is not useless or powerless. It can make a difference, even in the most hardened and rebellious person’s life.

Moses stood in the gap and God delivered these people. You have the same privilege. I know what you're thinking, "Yeah, but that was Moses' and I'm not Moses." The Word of God says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (**James 5:17-18**).

When you read about the prayer lives of the biblical characters, understand that they were people like you and me. As the Word says, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. The same is true for Moses. Moses believed God and prayed. You can share in this same privilege. You have this same opportunity. Your intercession is significant. It can make a difference in time and for all of eternity. You can be used of God to deliver people from their rebellion and hardness of heart.

Ask God to raise up other believers who will minister to this person (Numbers 27:16-17)

In **Numbers 27**, Moses is near the end of his life. In one of his final meetings with the Lord, Moses again prays for the people of Israel. What does Moses ask for these people? The Word of God states, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd" (**Numbers 26:16-17**).

Moses asks God to raise up someone who will care for the people of Israel. He pleads with God to give them a man who will have a heart for them—a man who will intercede for them. Moses knew all too well how rebellious and hardened these people could be. He prays that God will raise up someone who will love them, pray for them, and lead them.

When you pray for hardened people, ask God to raise up someone who can minister to them. Many times the hardened people that we pray for are family members or friends. When this is the

case, they will not listen. They will not receive any type of ministry from you. They are turned-off by anything that you try to say or do.

In this situation, you can pray for God to raise up believers who will minister to this person. Ask Him to send believers into this person's life that can have a positive and powerful impact in his or her life. God's people are varied and have different gifts. There are believers in the kingdom who can gain a hearing with this person even when you cannot. Plead with God to send those people into this person's life.

Plead that Jesus Christ will transform this person (Numbers 21)

In **Numbers 21**, the people of Israel complain about God's provisions. They are sick and tired of the food that God was giving them. They missed and longed for Egypt (**Numbers 21:4-5**). God sent fiery serpents into their midst in order to punish and deal with their rebellion toward Him (**Numbers 21:6**). People were dying from the bite of these poisonous snakes.

The people plead with Moses to pray for them, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us" (**Moses 21:7**). One cry from these rebels and Moses went to his knees. Moses prayed for the people and received specific instructions from the Lord, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live" (**Numbers 21:8**). When the people looked at the serpent in faith, they would be delivered from death.

The Lord Jesus Christ saw in that bronze serpent an illustration of himself dying on the cross. He says, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:14-15**). Just as looking to the serpent in faith brought deliverance, so salvation comes to the person who trusts in Jesus who hung on the cross of Calvary.

What lesson can we learn about intercession from this event of Moses' prayer life? It is that God