



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting

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PRAYING IN A CRISIS

How do you seek God when you are in the midst of a crisis? Every believer will face crisis moments. You will encounter those times when your faith is tested. Following Jesus does not mean that you are exempt from suffering. It does not mean that your life will be crisis free. The Bible openly declares this truth, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (**James 1:2**). The Bible does not say **if** you will face trials; it says **when you face trials**. God wants you to know that you will experience these times in your life.

These crisis moments can be triggered by a variety of events. It might be the death of a loved one. It might be marital or family problems. It might be church problems. You may be struggling at work. It could even be that your blood pressure is up and that your bank account is down. You will experience those times when you don't know what to do. You run the gamut of emotions—fear, doubt, anger, despair. Your faith in your Father is being tested.

It is in these times that God calls you to seek Him. The believer should seek God on a daily basis. Prayer should characterize your lifestyle. Yet, in these crisis moments, you should intensify your praying. You should forsake any attempts to depend on yourself or to look for a fleshly answer to these experiences.

The prayer life of Jehoshaphat provides you with an example of how to seek God in a crisis. Jehoshaphat was the fourth king of Judah who

reigned in the ninth century B.C. In **2 Chronicles 20**, he experiences a crisis. He does not know what he could or what he should do. But, he seeks the Lord. His example of prayer will hopefully give you insight on how to seek God when you experience times like this. His example reveals five basic truths about seeking God in the midst of a crisis:

Realize your helplessness.

The opening verses of **2 Chronicles 20** set the stage, "It happened after this that the people of Moab with the people of Ammon, and others with them besides the Ammonites, came to battle against Jehoshaphat. Then some came and told Jehoshaphat, saying, 'A great multitude is coming against you from the beyond the sea, from Syria; and they are in Hazazon Tamar' (which is En Gedi)." (**vv.1-2**). The text does not indicate why these other nations decided to attack Jehoshaphat. All the text says is that the odds were three against one. Three nations were coming to attack one man, Jehoshaphat. They formed a "great multitude". That phrase occurs three times in this chapter. And it left the king shivering for fear of his life, "And Jehoshaphat feared" (**v.3**).

Jehoshaphat realized his helplessness in the midst of this crisis. Fear gripped him because he knew that he could not stand against this united force. This great multitude was more than he could

Dr. Kevin Meador, 595 Stratton Road, Decatur, MS 39327 (601) 635-2180

Email: prayercloset_1998@yahoo.com

OUR WEB PAGES: www.prayerclosetministries.org - www.kingdompraying.com

handle. He openly declares this to the Lord, "For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us" (2 Chronicles 20:12). He recognized that he was helpless in this midst of this crisis. He acknowledged that he could not deal with this situation on his own.

This sense of helplessness compelled him to pray, "And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (2 Chronicles 20:3). He prayed because of his helplessness. And he didn't mouth a surface prayer. He prayed with intensity in this crisis. The text says that he "set himself to seek the Lord". He then proclaimed a fast. This fasting would only intensify his praying. He poured his heart out to God because He knew that only God could help.

The root of this intense praying is his helplessness. That is why it is crucial to realize your helplessness in the midst of a crisis. The acknowledgment of your helplessness will drive you to pray. It will motivate you to seek the Lord and depend on Him for His strength, His solutions, and His direction. Helplessness is not a hindrance to prayer. It is actually a help to seeking God. Let your helplessness drive you to seek God. Realize that you cannot handle the crises of your life and that you must pray if you are to face them and grow through them.

A crisis is like a magnifying glass. A magnifying glass increases the apparent size of an object so that you can see it better. It enlarges your view of an object so that you can gain a better understanding of it. A crisis does this in your life. It enlarges your view of your helplessness. It helps you clearly see your need for God. It vividly points out your helplessness that exists daily and not just in the crisis moments of life.

When a crisis shows you your helplessness, let it drive you into God's presence. Use it as a motivation to cry out intensely for God's grace, power, mercy, and help. Allow your helplessness to move you to a deeper, more fervent and faithful prayer life.

Commit yourself to seeking the Lord.

When Jehoshaphat learned that this great multitude was coming to attack, he could have immediately begun making plans. He could have

started mobilizing the army of Judah. He could have sent ambassadors to other nations for help. But, he did none of those things. He began by seeking the Lord.

The text says that he "set himself to seek the LORD". This indicates intensity in prayer. But, at the same time, it indicates perseverance. He determined to seek the Lord until he received an answer from the Lord. He committed himself to seek the Lord in the midst of the crisis. He was going to pray and wait on the Lord. He confessed that he did not know what to do, "For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do" (2 Chronicles 20:12a). Yet, he then states his commitment, "But our eyes are upon You" (2 Chronicles 20:12b). He was committed to praying and waiting on God in the midst of the crisis.

Our response to a crisis is often to find a solution. It is to try and work it out on our own. It is to relieve the pain. It is to work out the problem in our own strength and wisdom. Sometimes our pride moves us to think that we can handle the crisis. Sometimes our desperation motivates us to try and deal with the crisis on our own.

Yet, your first response to a crisis should be to commit yourself to seeking the Lord. The commitment of your heart must be, "Lord, I don't know what to do, but my eyes are fixed on You." Your commitment must be to pray and wait on the Lord. There are times that God will answer you immediately in the midst of a crisis. Yet, there are other times when God's answer comes after a time or unfolds over a period of time. We live in an age of fast food, drive-through banking, and instant communication. We are used to instant gratification. Yet, as a child of God, you will be required to seek Him and wait on Him and His timing. Sometimes you will have to seek Him intensely and wait for Him. Jesus said not only to ask, but also to seek and knock (Matthew 7:7).

There are going to be times in life when you will not know what to do. What do you tell a father whose son is in rebellion toward God and hates everything that his father believes and loves? What do you tell a young woman whose husband has told her that he doesn't love her anymore and the marriage is ending? These are extreme examples but they illustrate the point. There are times when you will have no idea what to do or what to say. You will not know what the next step is. It is at

these times that you realize that you are at the mercy of God. You are reminded that you must look to Him in prayer and wait on Him. These words are not superficial cosmetics that cover and ignore the pain and problem. These words are spiritual counsel from God's eternal Word.

I realize that saying, "Commit yourself to seeking the Lord and wait on Him" sounds trite, even empty. This is especially true when you are hurting and don't know what to do. Yet, what else can you do? Who else can you turn to? It is God alone who can strengthen you. It is God alone who can sustain you by His grace. It is God alone who has the power to help you and provide answers. He is your God, your Rock and your Refuge. That is why you must turn to Him and wait on Him. When the crises of life come and challenge you, commit yourself to seeking the Lord. Wait on Him for the answers and solutions that you need.

If you will do this, it will not only help you but others also. When you commit yourself to seeking the Lord in the midst of a crisis, you provide a powerful example for others. When the people of Judah saw Jehoshaphat's example, they "gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD" (2 Chronicles 20:4). The people followed Jehoshaphat in seeking the Lord in the midst of this crisis. Notice that the verse emphasizes that the people asked help from the Lord and that they came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord after seeing Jehoshaphat's example. His seeking attitude rubbed off on the people.

When you seek God in the midst of a crisis, you provide a powerful example for others to follow. Both fear and faith are contagious. When you show fear in the midst of a crisis, it will adversely affect those around you. They will be more likely to exhibit fear and doubt. Yet, if you will seek the Lord and stand strong in faith, it will motivate others to do the same. It will be a source of encouragement for others to seek the Lord and wait on Him. Committing yourself to seek the Lord in a crisis not only anchors you, but it also encourages those around you.

Focus on God's character.

In verses five through twelve, Jehoshaphat stood before the men, women, and children of Judah

and led them in prayer. In this prayer, he pled with God to help and deliver the nation from the great multitude that was coming against them. As he prayed, he focused on God's character. He pled with God on the basis of who He was. Jehoshaphat exalted and concentrated on these aspects of God's character:

His sovereignty over the nations: "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations?" (2 Chronicles 20:6). He rejoices that God is not a faraway God but the ruler of the nations on earth.

His almighty power: "And in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chronicles 20:6). Jehoshaphat exalts the power of God because He knew His enemies could not stand against this power.

His faithfulness to His promises: Jehoshaphat reminds God of two promises. He asks God to be faithful to these promises. The first promise is, "Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?" (2 Chronicles 20:7). If the nations coming against Judah conquered them, the ownership of the land would change hands. This would annul the divine promise. Jehoshaphat pleads with God not to let this promise to Abraham fail. The second promise is, "And they dwell in it, and have built a sanctuary in it for Your name, saying, 'If disaster comes upon us—sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine—we will stand before this temple and in Your presence (for Your name is in this temple), and cry out to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save'" (2 Chronicles 20:8-9). Jehoshaphat is quoting from Solomon's dedication prayer after the temple had been built. In this prayer a promise had been given of protection from the same kind of danger Jehoshaphat and the people were facing. He reminds God of this promise and claimed it in prayer (vv.10-11). God loves to be cornered with His promises. We honor Him when we take His promises seriously and expect Him to fulfill them.

His greatness: "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know

what to do, but our eyes are upon You?" (2 **Chronicles 20:12**). This is a stunning statement in light of 2 **Chronicles 17**. In that chapter, we are told that Jehoshaphat had one million, six hundred thousand men in his army. Jehoshaphat is exalting God's greatness. His confidence is not in the power of man but in the greatness of God.

Jehoshaphat provides a powerful example of how to pray in the midst of a crisis. He concentrated on the character of God. He did explain the situation that he was facing. He did confess his helplessness to the Lord. Yet, he primarily concentrated on God's character. His prayer is filled with the exaltation of God. The character of God consumed him and his praying in this crisis.

When you face the crises of life, focus on God's character. Let yourself be immersed in who He is. **Psalm 9:10** says, "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You." Knowing God's name means understanding His character. The name of God represents all that God is. When you understand who He is, it will enable you to trust Him. It will enable you to stand strong in the midst of whatever you face. That is why **Proverbs 18:10** says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe."

In the midst of a crisis, concentrate on who God is. Let your prayers be consumed with His power, love, and sovereignty. Corner Him with His promises and expect them to be fulfilled. Gaze on His greatness more than on the crisis. Pray that God will deepen your understanding of and your experience of His character in the midst of the crisis.

Be obedient to God's leading.

God answered Jehoshaphat's prayer for help. His command was clear, "Listen, all you of Judah, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's. Tomorrow go down against them. They will surely come up by the Ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the brook before the Wilderness of Jeruel. You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation

of the LORD" (2 **Chronicles 20:15-17**). God promised victory if they would trust in Him and stand firm. Jehoshaphat confessed that he did not know what to do. God now gave him specific instructions. And this is exactly what he and the people did (2 **Chronicles 20:20-24**). Because they obeyed God, they experienced victory. They experienced victory because they sought God, listened to Him, and obeyed Him.

When you seek God in a crisis, listen to His leadings. He may grant you specific insight in what you are to do. He may reveal a plan of action that you must take in the midst of your struggle. He might point out specific promises that you are to claim and expect Him to fulfill. The key is to listen and obey God in the way that he is leading you.

There will be times when God does not give specific insight or leading. What do you do then? In times like this, you must be faithful to do what you know. Stay in the Word of God. Continue to enter God's presence and seek Him. Ask other believers to pray for you. Keep on worshipping God and fellowshiping with other believers of your church. Strive to obey God in all that you know. It is better to obey God in faith than to disobey God because of your feelings. In the midst of a crisis, strive to obey God as He has taught you and as He is leading you.

Understand whose crisis it is.

Jehoshaphat was facing an overwhelming enemy. This great multitude was more than he could handle. Yet, God revealed to Jehoshaphat that this was not his battle, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 **Chronicles 20:15**). Jehoshaphat did not have to give in to fear or discouragement. This battle belonged to God. He was going to fight it. Jehoshaphat and the people had to stand firm in faith and trust in God, "Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed, tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you" (2 **Chronicles 20:17**).

Did you notice in these two verses what God emphasized to Jehoshaphat? He reminded him twice, "Do not fear or be dismayed." When God spoke through His prophet, He declares to