



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

Equipping & Encouraging Believers  
In Prayer

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ISSUE 1

## THE MARTHA COMPLEX

Do you have "The Martha Complex?" You may be wondering, "What in the world is The Martha Complex?" It is the attitude that activity is more important than prayer. It is the mindset that working for God is superior to pleading with and waiting on God. A person has the Martha Complex when he or she allows activity for God to replace spending time with God. It is substituting labor for God in the place of time with Him. The person with the Martha Complex says, "I may not spend much time in prayer but at least I'm busy doing many things for the Lord."

In **Luke 10:38-42**, Jesus Christ visits Martha and Mary. Martha is worrying over the big dinner that she is preparing for Jesus. She is busy and occupied with getting everything ready. She then notices that Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. Mary is listening to what Jesus is teaching. Martha goes to Jesus and complains to Him about Mary, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me" (**Luke 10:40**). She is upset that all Mary is doing is sitting at the feet of Jesus.

Jesus offers Martha a loving but firm rebuke, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (**Luke 10:41-42**). Jesus is declaring that Mary is doing what is truly needed—sitting at His feet listening to Him and adoring Him. Martha's activities were not as important as spending time with Jesus.

I can identify with Martha. You probably can too. I'm guilty of having the Martha Complex. I've been so busy laboring for God that I've failed to spend time with Him. In my study, I have a sign on my desk that says, "You can be so busy doing the work of the Lord that you forget the Lord of the work." That sign is a stark reminder of the danger of the Martha Complex. It is way of remembering that nothing substitutes for prayer—spending time with my God and Father.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine the Martha Complex. We will look at the roots of this problem. We will also make suggestions on how to deal with it. It is my hope and prayer that you will have a fresh desire to spend time with God along with have the proper attitude concerning prayer and labor for God.

### The Roots Of The Martha Complex

Where does this attitude come from? How can one develop this mindset? The Martha Complex flows out of three basic misconceptions.

**Misconception #1: Activity for God is a legitimate substitute for spending time with God.**

It is unfortunate but believers often feel that you can make a trade between prayer and activity. The attitude is that, if you're busy for God, then

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don't worry about your lack of prayer. Your busyness for God will make up for a lack of prayer. Because you're busy for the Lord, you don't have to be concerned about spending time with God. Your labor for God will substitute for your lack of time before God in prayer.

Sometimes believers feel that if they go to church, give, serve on some committees, and participate in the activities of the church, this will make up for their lack of prayer. In a recent meeting, I was looking over the bulletin of the church. To be honest, I became exhausted just reading about everything that they had going on in the church. It was amazing how much activity they had planned. I asked the pastor when they made time for prayer. I inquired about the place of prayer in the church. He looked at me dumbfounded. He never gave me answer to those questions. You see, activity had become an acceptable substitute for prayer. All their activities had replaced seeking God through prayer.

We must come back to the truth that activity will never substitute for prayer. You cannot do anything for God if you are not spending time before Him in prayer. Prayer is the believer's communication with God. It is his or her lifeline to all that God is and all that God has. There is no possible way that one can serve God if one is not making time with God. One cannot do anything of eternal value apart from spending time with God. A person's labor for the Lord will be wholly ineffective apart from prayer. This is why Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (**John 15:5**). You must spend time with God in order to do anything for God. If your labors for the Lord are going to have impact, they must be saturated with prayer.

**Misconception #2: Activity for the Lord is more important than prayer.**

Unfortunately this is the attitude of some believers. People might not be willing to admit this, but actions speak louder than words. The lack of prayer in our lives and churches is testimony to the fact that we believe that there are greater priorities than prayer. It is viewed as an attachment, an appendage to the believer's life. It is much more important to be doing something for the Lord than

to spend time with the Lord. Prayer is viewed as secondary rather than as the priority of the believer's life.

In our eyes, the measure of a Christian is how much he or she does for the Lord. If a person is busy in the church, we feel that this person is a "good" Christian. Those who tirelessly serve the Lord enamor people. In order to be a good Christian, one has to be in church every time the doors are open, serve on all the committees, take part in every event, and on and on. Everyone can see how busy you are; nobody can see how much you pray. Therefore, the emphasis is on doing rather than praying. This is why prayer is pushed to the side and seen as a lesser priority.

We must return to the truth that God longs for a relationship with believers. This relationship takes precedence in your life. Nothing is more important than your relationship to God. It is to be preeminent. At the same time, the church's priority is to pray (**1 Timothy 2:1-2**).

God desires your obedience. He does want you to serve Him. But, He yearns for these things to flow out of your communication with Him. ~~These things must be the result of your spending time with Him.~~

At the same time, we must realize that we cannot earn or merit anything from God. We are made right with God solely through faith in Jesus Christ (**Galatians 2:16-21**). There is nothing that you can add to the finished work of Jesus Christ. We should pray and serve Him out of love for Him and a desire to please Him and not from a motive of attempting to earn anything or prove how "good" of a Christian we are.

**Misconception #3: Activity for the Lord is more demanding than prayer.**

Sometimes believers feel that activity for the Lord is more demanding than prayer. And, for this reason, that makes it more important than prayer. However, the opposite is true. Prayer is a spiritual service to God and others that costs you and changes you.

Being active in your church may be inconvenient at times. It may require you to change your schedule. It might cause you give up other activities or events. You can take part in all the activities of your church and still stay the same.

You can go through the motions of service and not be transformed.

Yet, prayer is different in that you must deny yourself and seek God. True prayer requires the sacrifice of yourself. It means yielding your will to God's will. It is pleading His promises and waiting on Him. It is earnestly confessing your sin and repenting. It is being still and silent before Him. Prayer calls for you to change. It brings about transformation and renewal.

We must return to the truth that true prayer transforms us. It is not our activity that changes us. It is our time before the Lord that makes us different and then enables us to go out and bless and minister to others. Prayer prepares you to minister by changing you at the core of your being. No outward service or activity will touch you in the inmost part of your being like spending time alone with God. It is only as you yield yourself to God in prayer that you will be made ready to serve God and bless others.

## Overcoming The Martha Complex

How can a believer overcome the Martha Complex? How can you confront and overcome this mindset that hinders your prayer life? The following are some suggestions on how you can face and overcome this danger to your prayer life.

➤ *Keep in mind that God desires a relationship with you.* God longs to have a relationship with you. The purpose of His salvation is that you might pursue Him in an authentic relationship, "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (**John 17:3, NLT**). In **Matthew 6:6**, Jesus declares that the Father yearns for you to spend time with Him. God wants you to slow down and focus on Him. You are to cultivate your relationship with Him. This means taking the time to pray and immersing yourself in His Word. It is impossible to develop an authentic relationship with God if your life is filled with activity. Your Father is interested in developing a relationship with you.

- *Receive the gentle but firm rebuke of Jesus.* Read this text over and over again. Meditate on its words. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart. Ask yourself the question, "Who am I more like—Mary or Martha?"
- *Understand that prayer is the channel through which God works in your life.* It is through prayer that God releases His blessings into your life. It is through prayer that He works in your life and through your life. Apart from prayer, you are cut off from the richness of His character and blessings. Prayer is the key to receiving all that God is and has. To fail to pray is to forsake the God-ordained way of receiving from your powerful and wise heavenly Father.
- *The "I need You" Prayer.* In the past couple of months, the Holy Spirit has been leading me to confess my need of God. The way that I have been doing this is by praying what I call the "I need You" prayer. I pray this continually throughout the day. I confess my need of God in whatever I face in the day—"I need You this morning," "I need You for this meeting," "I need You during this phone call," "I need You as I run today," "I need You as I study." This causes me to focus on my need of Him. It also leads me to take time with Him instead of hastily rushing through my day. It helps me to strike at the self-sufficiency that plagues my heart.
- *Confess the sin of prayerlessness.* Prayerlessness is a sin. It is rebellion against God. **Colossians 4:2** reveals that the believer is to be devoted to prayer. The believer is to be fervent in seeking God. When we fail to do this, it is sin. Confess your sin of prayerlessness. As you confess this sin, plead for grace to forsake it. Use your confession of sin as an opportunity to cry out to God for help in carrying out His command to be fervent and devoted to prayer.
- *Ask the Holy Spirit to create within you a passion for prayer.* The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of supplication (**Zechariah 12:10**). He is the One who enables you to pray. Call on Him to create within you a burning, unceasing passion to seek the Lord in prayer. Plead with Him to remove anything from your life that might hinder you from experiencing this passion for prayer. Pray that the Spirit of fire will burn away anything that is keeping you from prayer

and that He will kindle the flame of passion to pray in your heart.

- *Find an accountability partner.* Find another believer that will hold you accountable concerning prayer. This accountability partner can help you and encourage you to stay faithful in prayer. You can confess your weaknesses and discouragement concerning prayer to this person. This partner can pray for you and with you. This person can also ask you the hard questions that will help you to stay focused and to not develop the Martha Complex.
- *Pray that John 15:5 will become a living reality in your life.* A lack of prayer means a lack of dependence on God. It is only as you grow in your dependence on God that prayer will become preeminent in your life. **John 15:5** states our need to depend on God. It is impossible to bear fruit for God apart from this abiding. Plead that the Spirit of God will burn this truth in your heart. Ask that **John 15:5** will be true of your life.
- *Schedule appointments with your Father.* **Matthew 6:6-8** reveals our need to make time with our Father. You are to get alone and to get with God. This means making time for Him. You must be intentional about spending time with God. If you do not plan to spend time with Him, you will not. If you wait until you have time to spend with Him, you will not have any time. You must commit yourself to carve out space in your day for Him. Determine that you will spend time with Him. Schedule daily appointments with Him.
- *Use every opportunity that you can to pray.* Make prayer a moment-by-moment experience. Pray throughout all the activities of your day. Use everything that you face to talk with God. Let all the activities of your day to prompt you to pray.
- *Ask God to strip you of self-sufficiency.* The root of the Martha Complex is self-sufficiency. Let's face it: we don't pray because we don't feel that we need God's help. We might not be willing to admit it openly. But that is the attitude that fuels prayerlessness. That is what leads us to place prayer as a lesser priority in our lives. Plead with God to strip you of your self-sufficiency. Ask that He would show you your need of Him. Pray that you will come to

the place of brokenness where you see that prayer is an utter necessity.

- *Plead that you will see the limitless power of God available through prayer.* The power of God is released through prayer. The life-changing, almighty power of God flows into our lives and situations when we pray. This is why prayer is so crucial. The impossible becomes possible when you seek God (**Jeremiah 32:17**). This is why prayer must be the priority in our lives. It has to be preeminent over our service and labor for the Lord. Prayer grants life and power to our service and labor for the Lord. We must remember that when we work, we work. Yet, when we pray, God works. Plead that you will learn this valuable principle. Ask that you will see that the power of God is unleashed through prayer. Pray that you will not be content with what you can do in the flesh but will only be content with what God can do when you pray and labor for him.
- *Have a "Martha Complex Page" in your prayer journal.* In my prayer journal, I have what I call a "Martha Complex Page." On this page, I have recorded some Scripture prayers to help me face and confront prayerlessness. These Scripture prayers are designed to keep me from developing this attitude. On a regular basis, I go to this page and pray through these Scripture prayers. You might consider using these prayers for yourself. Or you could develop your own from them. The crucial issue is to be on your guard against this attitude. The following are the Scripture prayers that I have on that page:

O God, I ask that I would desire You above all other persons. I pray that I would not love or desire anything in this life above You. You are my God and my Desire. You are the strength of my heart. You are mine forever. I plead that my relationship to You would be the single most important part of my life (**Psalms 73:25-26**).

Living God, I pray that nothing in my life would take the place of my spending time with You. Deliver me from exalting anything above You and my time with You. Set me free from believing that activity can substitute for prayer. Grant me the spirit of Mary—a willingness to be

with You and to hear from You (**Luke 10:35-42**).

Holy Spirit, I pray that You would create in me a passion for prayer. Unleash in my spirit a hungering to seek my Father and my God. I plead that I would be devoted to prayer. I ask that I would be diligent in prayer with an alert mind and thanksgiving (**Colossians 4:2**).

Father, make **John 15:5** a living reality in my life. I ask in the name of Jesus that I would depend on You. I plead that I would grow in my dependence on You. Deliver me from depending and relying on the power of the flesh. Teach me that I cannot do anything apart from You. Stir me to pray because of this amazing truth (**John 15:5**).

Father, I pray that I would always pray and not give up. Deliver me from thinking that I can do anything apart from prayer. Keep me from believing that I can grow and mature without seeking You. O God, enable me to make prayer the priority of my life (**Luke 18:1**).

## Praying Against Peer Pressure

The following is a prayer guide to help you pray against the peer pressure that a young person will face. You can use this guide for your child or grandchildren. You might also use it for other children whom you know and love. The enemy uses peer pressure to attack, frustrate, and wound people. By prayer, you can stand in the gap against the peer pressure that will come against a person.

Father, I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ will develop friendships with wise and godly people. Deliver \_\_\_\_\_ from being the companion of fools. Set him/her free from ungodly friends so that he/she will not learn their ways and set a snare for his/her life (**Proverbs 13:20**).

Father, I plead that \_\_\_\_\_ will resist temptation when he/she is enticed by friends and acquaintances. Empower him/her to refuse their invitations to rebellion. Deliver him/her from yielding to ungodly friends and role models. Keep

\_\_\_\_\_ from following in their path (**Proverbs 1:10, 15**).

Father, enable \_\_\_\_\_ to stay away from foolish people. Let him/her develop deep and abiding relationships with those who know You, who seek You, and who love You and Your Word (**Proverbs 14:7**).

Father, I ask that \_\_\_\_\_ will not envy the wicked. Never let him/her be fooled or enamored by the temporal prosperity and popularity of those who rebel against You and Your Word. I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ would not desire the company of those who love sin and rebellion against You (**Proverbs 24:1**).

Father, I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ would detest the sin of the ungodly. Grant him/her a hatred of rebellion against You and Your Word. I ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would grant him/her strength when he/she is ridiculed or tempted by them. Pour out Your power, mercy, and love on him/her during these times. Help \_\_\_\_\_ to stand strong in the faith, not wavering or doubting. Do not allow the ridicule and opposition of ungodly people to silence or discourage him/her (**Proverbs 29:27**).

Father, I plead that \_\_\_\_\_ will rest in You and wait patiently for You to act. Deliver him/her from envying the wicked and believing that the path of obedience is foolish and senseless. Cause him/her to know that the path of obedience and surrender to You is the only way to true life, joy, security, and hope (**Psalms 37:7**).

Father, cause \_\_\_\_\_ to understand the misery and the end of those who rebel against You and Your Word. Set him/her free from the deception of the devil. Protect him/her from the devil's lie that the path of selfishness and pride is the way to life and joy. Let him/her understand clearly the consequences of following those who refuse You and Your Word (**Psalms 73:27**).

Father, I pray that \_\_\_\_\_ will refuse to walk in the paths of evil. I ask that \_\_\_\_\_ would remain obedient to You all the days of his/her life. Deliver \_\_\_\_\_

from anyone who would lead him/her from the path of obedience to Your Word. Instead, grant \_\_\_\_\_ friends and role models that will encourage and influence him/her to love and obey Your Word (**Psalm 119:101**).

Father, You are \_\_\_\_\_'s Lord. He/she has no other help but You. 'Cause him/her to love and choose the fellowship of godly people. Grant that he/she will seek the company of those who can build him/her up spiritually and who has the right perspective on life (**Psalm 16:2-3**).

Father, I pray that You would grant \_\_\_\_\_ deep and abiding relationships with those who fear and trust You and who obey Your Word. Bless \_\_\_\_\_ with committed friends who love You and want to serve You (**Psalm 119:63**).

Father, I know that many will attempt to lead \_\_\_\_\_ into sin. Yet, anchor him/her in Your Word and to the path of obedience. Raise up friends who will encourage him/her to obey You (**Psalm 119:61**).

Father, I plead that You would deliver \_\_\_\_\_ from any unhealthy soul ties. In the name of Jesus, I ask You to sever any of \_\_\_\_\_'s relationships that are not of You. In the name of Jesus, I ask You to bind and destroy any friendships that the enemy will use to tempt and attack \_\_\_\_\_. I pray that You would bind these relationships and loose him/her into godly relationships (**2 Corinthians 6:17-18**).

## Praying For The Hurting

The famous pastor and preacher Phillips Brooks once remarked, "On every pew there is a broken heart." We are surrounded by people whose hearts have been broken. We encounter people daily who are hurting. Their broken heart stems from a variety causes—the death of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, bad choices, dreams unfulfilled, disappointment with life, an unhappy relationship with a spouse, a parent, or a child, the loss of a job or income. People hurt for a variety of

reasons; there is no way that we could list them all in this newsletter.

Yet, what can we do for those who are hurting? What can you do when you are hurting? Prayer is crucial for the brokenhearted. Through prayer, the brokenhearted can be strengthened, blessed, and healed. You can make a difference in the lives of hurting people through your intercession.

The following prayer guide can help you pray for the hurting. It can assist you in interceding for someone whose heart has been broken. You can use these prayers or develop your own from them.

- *Plead that God would deal with the pain in the person's life (Psalm 147:3).* The Bible reveals that God is the Healer of the brokenhearted. He alone can deal with the pain that people experience. He is the only One who can touch a person in the innermost part of his or her being. He is the only One who can grant healing.
- *Ask that the person will not focus on the present pain but on the good that will result (Romans 8:28).* Plead that the person will not drown in self-pity. Pray that he or she will trust God and believe that He will bring good out of his or her pain. Ask that this person will trust God for the good that will result as He works in the situation.
- *Pray that this person would seek God's guidance (Proverbs 3:5-7).* When you're hurting, you can make bad decisions and jump to hasty conclusions. Plead that this person will not simply react to the pain. Pray that he or she will seek God and make wise decisions even though he or she is hurting.
- *Ask that this person will not lose focus (Matthew 6:33).* When you're hurting, it's easy to lose focus. You can get sidetracked from doing what God desires when your heart is filled with pain. Call on God to help this person stay focused on doing what God wants him/her to do. Plead that he/she will be determined to pursue God and His will in spite of the pain.
- *Plead that this person will repent of sinful responses to the pain (1 John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13).* This is especially true when others have hurt a person. There is a tendency to lash out at others. Sometimes people feel that they have a right to be

unforgiving, bitter, and unkind when they have been hurt. They have a tendency to justify their behavior. They feel that their broken heart gives them the right to say and do whatever they want. They offer a sinful response to the pain that they are feeling. Ask that Spirit of God will convict them and draw them to repentance. Pray that they will not justify their attitudes or their behavior.

- *Plead that this person will be forgiving to those who have hurt him/her (Matthew 6:14-15).* Pray that this person will not harbor unresolved anger and bitterness toward those who have hurt him or her. Ask God to convict this person about any unforgiveness that he or she is allowing to remain unchecked in his or her life. Unforgiveness is a disease that destroys both the soul and body.
- *Ask God to grant His strength to this person (Psalm 29:11).* When your heart is broken, you feel weak. You don't feel as if you have the strength to go on. Call on God to supply this person with abounding strength. Plead that He will overflow this person's life with strength and help.
- *Pray that God will use people to strengthen and encourage this person (Proverbs 17:17).* Ask God to use friends or to raise up people who will strengthen and encourage this person. Pray that God will surround this person with people who will love, listen, and minister to him or her. Plead that this person will experience God's love and healing through others.
- *Plead that this person will praise God through the pain (Job 1:20-22).* Praise has the power to heal. God manifests His presence and power in a unique way when His people praise Him. Ask that this person will develop a spirit of praise to God in the midst of the pain. This is a channel for God's healing. And it will help the person to stay focused on God instead of the circumstances.
- *Pray that this person will understand God's sufficiency (Isaiah 50:10).* It is when your heart is broken that you realize that God is all you need. He is sufficient to help you and guide you in the midst of all the circumstances that you face. Plead that this person will see and know that God is the great need of his or her life. Pray that this person will come to a greater

understanding of and dependence on God in this time.

## Staking Your Claim

The Word of God says, "Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your pegs" (Isaiah 54:2, NASB). Throughout the Old Testament, God called His people to stake out their claim for the land. The people were to mark off the land, declaring their possession of it and then dedicating it to the Lord. Then they were to continue to expand their influence and control over the land.

"Staking Your Claim" is a prayer ministry that calls for the people of God to stake out the land, mark it off for the Lord, and expand their influence. It is a public declaration that the land belongs to the Lord. It is a commitment to pray and labor for the work of God at particular places.

In order to stake your claim, you can use a variety of items. You might consider selecting ~~large rocks or bricks. Paint them and then write a~~ Scripture on them. You might also consider short biblical statements like "Jesus is Lord," "God Is Love," "Jesus Is The Savior," or "The Word of God Is True." You might also consider making wooden "tent" stakes. You could then write one of each of the following words on the four sides of the stake:

**Regeneration (John 3:3,5)**

**Repentance (Luke 13:1,3)**

**Reconciliation (Ephesians 2:15-18)**

**Revival (Psalm 85:6-9)**

Once you make this preparation, then you are ready to go and stake your claim. During low traffic times, go to the site and stake your claim with the rocks, the bricks, or the stakes. Some of the places that you might consider "staking a claim" at are:

- ◆ *City hall*
- ◆ *Courthouse*
- ◆ *School*
- ◆ *College*
- ◆ *Abortion clinic*
- ◆ *Pornography site*

- ◆ *Casino*
- ◆ *Major roadways*
- ◆ *Certain properties*
- ◆ *Churches*
- ◆ *Boundaries of a city*
- ◆ *Police station*

Before, during, and after staking your claim, plead with God to work at that place. Saturate your claim with prayer. Ask Him to bless this place and make the truths on your stake a living reality. When you stake your claim, ask God to take ownership of that place and to release His blessings there. Continue to visit that location periodically in order to check on your claim and to continue to plead with God.

### Classic Prayers From History:

#### *A Prayer For Those We Have Neglected* *Anonymous*

O Lord God, merciful and mighty;  
 Help those whom I have neglected to help;  
 Set aright those whom I have caused to stumble;  
 Visit those whom I have neglected to visit;  
 Bring back home those I have led astray;  
 Cheer the hearts of those whom I have made sad;  
 Draw with cords of love those for whom my love  
 has grown cold.  
 Save them all, O Lord, and have mercy upon me.

***“No answer to prayer is an indication of  
 our merit; every answer to prayer is an  
 indication of God’s mercy” – John  
 Blanchard***



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