



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER

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## CRISIS PRAYING

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 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

fellowshipping 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 Jehoshaphat that he should not be afraid. A great multitude was coming against him. He did not have the power or the wisdom to deal with this crisis. How could Jehoshaphat overcome fear and discouragement? It is because he knew whose battle this was. He understood to whom the crisis belonged.

When you are in the midst of a crisis, you must remember whose crisis it is. You must understand that it is God’s crisis. It is God’s opportunity to work in powerful and unique ways in your life. It is His occasion to reveal Himself in new and fresh ways to you. It is His circumstance to show you how much He loves you and cares for you.

I am not saying that everything that happens to you is good. On the contrary, there are a lot of lousy, rotten things that can happen to you. The crises that you can face in life can be agonizing and devastating. Yet, at the same time, they can be opportunities for God to work in you, speak to you, and change you. They can be times for God to show you Himself as never before in your life.

You do not have to drown in fear and discouragement in the midst of crisis. Understand

that this is God's opportunity to work in your life. The crises may be bad, but God is good. No matter how hard life gets, God is always good and merciful. God is so good and merciful that He can take the crises of life and use them for His own glory and your good.

It is easy to lose sight of this when you are hurting and struggling. A self-righteous pastor visited a member of his church who had had back surgery. The self-righteous pastor asked him in a pious tone, "My dear brother, what has God taught you through your back surgery?" The member shot back, "God has taught me that back surgery hurts!" In the midst of a crisis, you can forget that God is good and that this is His opportunity to work and to reveal Himself. Your focus can move from God and His goodness to the circumstance and your pain, fear, and discouragement.

That is why it is crucial to keep in mind whose crisis it is. You must continue to remind yourself that this is God's battle not your's. One of the things that I have done to help me remember this truth is to say the following prayer on a daily basis. I especially use it in times of crisis.

**Father, this is Your crisis, not mine. Reveal Yourself to me in fresh and new ways.**

**Father, this is Your circumstance, not mine. Speak to me in clear and powerful ways.**

**Father, this is Your opportunity, not mine. Change me in those areas that You desire.**

**Father, this is Your battle, not mine. Release Your power to sustain me and deliver me.**

**Father, this is Your time, not mine. Let me taste and experience Your goodness as never before in my life.**

As you understand whose crisis it is and surrender it to Him, His peace and power will flow into your life. You do not have to be afraid. You do not have to be overcome by fear. Remember to whom the crisis belongs.

### **Praise God throughout the crisis.**

After Jehoshaphat and the people heard the word of the Lord, they worshipped Him, "And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD" (**2 Chronicles 20:18**). Before the battle on the next

morning, Jehoshaphat makes an unusual move. Rather than lining up his military, he appoints a choir (**2 Chronicles 20:21**). They were going to march ahead of the army onto the battlefield. He told them to sing praise to God **before** the battle. Never had anything looked so ridiculous since Joshua's priests marched around the city of Jericho and blew trumpets to make the walls fall down.

Yet, God responded in mighty power, "Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated" (**2 Chronicles 20:22**). God honored their praise. When they praised God, it unleashed power from heaven. This power made the difference in the battle. Judah did not have to fight the battle. God fought for them. He released His mighty power in response to their praise. In response to God's victory, the people blessed Him (**2 Chronicles 20:26**). Jehoshaphat and the people praised God before the battle and after the battle. Even the midst of their crisis, praise poured out of them to the true and mighty God.

When you face the crises of life, offer fervent and continual praise to God. Why should you render praise to God in the midst of a crisis? There are four basic reasons for permeating your crisis times with praise.

- ◆ *It unleashes the power of God (Psalm 22:3).* Praise releases the power of God from heaven. When the praise goes up, the power comes down. This power can sustain you and strengthen you. It can also deal with whatever problem or circumstance that you are facing.
- ◆ *It builds your faith.* During crisis times, your faith can be weakened. When you focus more on the crisis of your life rather than the character of God, your faith will be weakened. Yet, when you praise God, your focus is on Him and His awesome and holy character. It enables you to trust Him in spite of what you are facing.
- ◆ *It is a testimony to others.* When you praise Him in crisis times, you are telling others how great God is. You are providing a living example of what to do when you hurt and struggle.
- ◆ *It is the antidote for fear and discouragement.* The only way to answer any feelings of fear and discouragement is praise. Praise is the antidote for these diseases of the soul. It weakens and destroys fear and discouragement.

In order to praise God in a crisis, you must develop a lifestyle of praise. If you do not adore God daily, it will be virtually impossible to praise Him in the midst of a crisis. Praise for God in a crisis is born out of a lifestyle of daily praise. Plead with God to grant you a heart for praise. Ask Him to create within you a spirit of praise in daily life. As you do this, you will be better equipped to praise Him during a crisis.

### **Claim the peace that comes from prayer.**

This event in Jehoshaphat concludes with these words, “Then the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around” (**2 Chronicles 20:30**). Jehoshaphat was not worried that these three nations might try and regroup and attack again. He did not fear any other enemies. Even if another force came against him, he knew that the Lord would be his helper. Jehoshaphat was experiencing the peace of God. This peace resulted from his praying. When confronted with a crisis, he sought the Lord and God granted him peace.

Prayer must be our response to a crisis. Yet, we must also claim the peace that God provides through prayer. The Word of God reveals that there is an intimate connection between peace and prayer, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **and** the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 4:6-7**, emphasis mine). When the believer pours out his or her heart in prayer, it prepares the way for the peace of God to fill his or her heart. In prayer, the believer surrenders the crisis to God. The believer expresses to God his or her feelings. When this takes place, God grants His peace. This peace then encourages and sustains the believer in the crisis.

Peace is yours when you surrender your struggle to God through prayer. Claim that peace when you pour your heart out to Him. God wants to grant you His peace. He will grant it when you surrender yourself and your circumstances to Him through prayer. The combination of prayer with thanksgiving is the path to peace in the midst of any circumstance.

At a conference, a man asked me, “What if you pray and yet you are still struggling with worry and fear in a crisis?” My answer was, “As many times

as you feel worry or fear coming over you, surrender yourself and your circumstance to the Lord.” You may have to continually surrender your crisis to God. You may have to maintain an attitude of constant thankfulness. Yet, this peace can be yours. It can encourage you and sustain you in all that you face. God wants to give you this peace and you can claim it through prayer. You can receive it as you pour your heart out to Him and commit into His hands.

### **Praising And Thanking God In The Midst Of Adversity**

This may appear to be an unusual topic. Often the last thing that anyone wants to do in difficult times is praise and thank God. After all, how can you praise and thank God in the midst of adversity? It seems that trying to cope with the adversity zaps all your energy and causes you to focus on the difficulty.

Yet, praising and thanking God can help you face these times with faith and confidence. You can not only endure these times, but also actually grow through them. When you praise and thank God in adversity, you are fixing your faith on Him. Your gaze is not so much on the circumstances as it is on the God of the circumstances. Rather than being absorbed in the crisis of the moment, you are consumed by the character of your God and Father.

What can praise and thank God for in the midst of adversity? **James 1:2-5** provides a model for putting this truth into practice. These verses provide truths that you can turn into praise and thanks to God in difficult times.

- ◆ Praise God that He prepares you to face crisis times; *Thank Him for the joy you can have in the midst of a crisis.*
- ◆ Praise God for His willingness to help you in the midst of crisis times; *Thank Him for using all the circumstances of your life for His own purpose.*
- ◆ Praise God for His patience with you; *Thank Him for the endurance that He is creating within your life.*
- ◆ Praise God for being the Potter who shapes and molds your life even through adversity; *Thank Him for loving you so much that He works to change you.*
- ◆ Praise Him for being a God of purpose and having a plan for your life; *Thank Him for accomplishing that plan in everything that you face.*

- ◆ Praise God for His wisdom that can use adversity for His purpose and your good; *Thank Him for the wisdom that He grants to handle and use adversity.*
- ◆ Praise God for being the generous God who pours out His blessings on you in the midst of adversity; *Thank Him for never getting tired of hearing you cry out to Him.*
- ◆ Praise God for being the giving God who supplies your needs even in the midst of crisis; *Thank Him for knowing what you need and for granting it to you at the right time.*

### Praying For 50/20 Vision

20/20 vision is considered perfect eyesight for a person. This vision allows you to see things clearly and correctly. As believers, we need to develop 50/20 vision. This is based on Joseph's statement in **Genesis 50:20**, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring about as it is this day, to save many people alive." Joseph declares to his brothers that God used their evil actions to accomplish His purpose and to bring great blessing to others. These brothers sinned against Joseph; they were responsible for their evil actions. Yet, God took their evil actions and used them to work out His plan for Joseph.

50/20 vision is the ability to see God's hand at work in every circumstance in life. It is that ability to know and rest in the truth that God is working all things together for good for those who love Him and live for Him. 50/20 vision gives you the ability to trust God even when you face adversity.

The following are Scripture prayers to help you seek God for this 50/20 vision. They are designed to help you cry out for this ability.

Father, cause me to realize as never before that You are good and powerful. Let me sense and know Your love in fresh and new ways. Help me to know that You will use everything in my life to accomplish Your purpose. Deliver me from yielding to fear and doubt in the midst of adversity (**Genesis 50:20**).

Father, empower me to cast all my cares on You. Help me to unburden myself on You. You care for me. Let me know and experience this care as never before in my life (**I Peter 5:7**).

Father, You are the powerful and wise God of all time and eternity. You can make the wrath of man praise You. You can take the evil of men and bring good out of it. Grant me the total assurance of this truth. Let me rest in this and rely on this daily (**Psalms 76:10**).

Father, use the adversity in my life to prepare me to minister to others. Let the difficulties in my life birth in me the compassion and the ability to minister to others. Empower me to use the strength and the encouragement that You have given me to help others (**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**).

Father, when adversity comes, cause me to dig into Your Word. Make the adversity of my life a pathway to Your Word. Speak to me and comfort me as I anchor myself in Your Word in adversity (**Psalms 119:71**).

Father, I love You. I am called according to Your purpose. Teach me that all things work together for my God. Grant me the confidence that You are at work in all the circumstances of my life. Fill me with the Spirit and let me walk in faith, knowing that You are in control of my life (**Romans 8:28**).

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