



BE THE BODY INTERCESSION

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DEFINED

Persevering in prayer on behalf of others who need God's intervention.

SPIRITUAL OUTCOME DESCRIBED

We are tired of living in a twisted and broken world, and we long to see lasting transformation. But how does real change happen? Is there something we can do to truly make a difference? The answer we find in Scripture is a resounding, yes!

Considering the broken state of the world around us and in us, it can be hard to believe that prayer could make a difference. But, for some reason, God has chosen to partner with His people as agents of change in the world through our prayers. Intercessory prayer is a way in which we step onto the front lines of the spiritual battle happening all around us. It's standing in the gap on behalf of someone or some event and beseeching God to do something.

Prayer is an incredibly powerful tool for change, not because the act of prayer is what is powerful, but the God we pray to is. What then keeps us from praying may not be the result of a small view of ourselves, but a small view of God. We cannot say we trust God and not pray. It is in prayer that we acknowledge that God is trustworthy, good, and able to work in whatever situation someone is facing.

Our prayers are powerful because we have a powerful, unceasing Intercessor. As the Scriptures say about Jesus as our faithful, eternal High Priest, He "always lives to intercede" for those who "come to God through him" (Hebrews 7:25). So, when we come to God with our requests, Jesus is appealing to God for us. In addition to that, when we don't know how or what to pray, the Spirit also intercedes for us "according to God's will." If we do the math correctly, we have the power of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) in our corner when we pray. That is no small thing! Do we even scratch the surface when it comes to petitioning the One "who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine"(Eph. 3:20)?

Lastly, and probably often overlooked, our prayers are powerful because they change *us*. The process of continually appealing to God on behalf of someone else not only has the effect of working in that person's life, but actually does the work of transforming us, as well. For instance, when we approach God consistently on behalf of our nation's leaders, even if we don't like them or agree with their character or modes of decision-making, our hearts begin to soften toward them and maybe even break for them so that we can see them from God's vantage point, instead of our own limited one. And when we come to God on behalf of a friend we've been at odds with for years, asking Him to bless them and reveal Himself to them, our love will grow for them because our prayers align our hearts with God's will. We can expect that God is at work through our prayers for others, while also touching our own hearts.

Intercessory prayer is not for the faint of heart. It required perseverance and hard work. Scripture acknowledges this and encourages us still to roll up our sleeves and pray on! We are told to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" and to "be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." (Ephesians 6:18). God is working in the world through our prayers, but we won't see it unless we are willing to hit our knees regularly and stand in the gap on behalf of others.

"We never know how God will answer our prayers, but we can expect that He will get us involved in His plan for the answer. If we are true intercessors, we must be ready to take part in God's work on behalf of those for whom we pray."

- Corrie Ten Boom

EVIDENCE OF THIS SPIRITUAL OUTCOME IN A PERSON'S LIFE

- Regularly perseveres in prayer for others.
- Trusts that God hears and responds as He knows best.
- Can look back over the year and see answered prayer.
- Can identify one's own heart change toward a person or situation as a result of prayer.
- Consistently prays for the spiritual journey and faith of others and not just when there is a health or financial crisis.

GUIDANCE

Read each passage multiple times. Then write your observations about the passage and any thoughts you have from the discernment question. What do you notice in the passage, and what does this reveal about your life?

LUKE 18:1-4

Observations:

Discernment Question: When you pray do you expect God to answer you? How easy is it for you to persevere in prayer until you get an answer, whether yes or no? Write about a time that you felt like you got an answer when you prayed.

ROMANS 8:26-27, 34

Observations:

Discernment Question: When you do not know what to pray, how can you lean into God's Spirit to help you?

ISAIAH 55:6-9

Observations:

Discernment Question: What keeps you from praying to God for guidance for yourself or for others? In verse 8 it says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts," and verse 9 says, "my thoughts are higher than your thoughts." How can submitting to God's infinite knowledge and mysterious ways through prayer affect your life?

2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-5

Observations:

Discernment Question: In what sense is prayer equivalent with doing battle? How can you use the power of prayer to "demolish strongholds and arguments?"

1 CHRONICLES 16:8-11

Observations:

Discernment Question: When you come to God in prayer do you spend time first praising and acknowledging who He is? What would it do for your heart and head to start there?

GENESIS 18:20-33

Observations:

Discernment Question: How are you currently praying for the welfare of your city? How can you increasingly do so? What do you or can you talk with God about regarding where you live?

MATTHEW 5:43-44

Observations:

Discernment Question: Which relationships or people are most challenging for you to love? Would you consider consistently praying for their well-being? What might change in your own heart and disposition toward them if you did?

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

Observations:

Discernment Question: To what extent are your prayers an expression of your heart and passion? What are the people and situations in your heart that you can pray for?

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-3

Observations:

Discernment Question: How fervently and frequently do you pray for the advancement of the Gospel in the world? Why a lot? Why a little?

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

Observations:

Discernment Question: What motivates you to pray for leaders and government?

JAMES 5:13-18

Observations:

Discernment Question: Do you pray for the sick to be made well? Do you pray big prayers asking God to move (like Elijah praying for no rain)? If not, how can you cultivate these two areas?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:25

Observations:

Discernment Question: What has encouraged you or intimidated you to ask for prayer? How can asking for prayer develop you as a prayer warrior?

NEXT STEPS

What are practical next steps you will do based on what you have discovered in this survey of Scripture about intercession? Include insights offered from others in your Life Group that could be applied in your own life, as well.

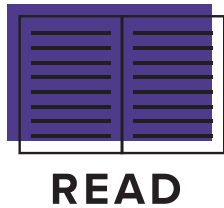
MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 6:18, NIV

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

2 Corinthians 5:20, NIV

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.



BE THE BODY INTERCESSION

THE BATTLE

There's a battle going on.

A battle?

Yes, a battle. Consider two scenes:

Scene #1: The sky is blue. The sun is shining. A child is heard laughing in the park. A dog barks. A couple strolls hand in hand down the street. An older man leafs through the newspaper. A young girl rides her bike. The little league team takes the field.

Scene #2: The sky is dark. The sun is hidden. A child is heard crying in the park. A dog snarls. A couple walks coldly and silently side by side. An older man reads of tragedies in the newspaper. A young girl rides her bike dangerously close to a busy street. The little league team is filled with jealousy and selfish pride.

No doubt we recognize the battles of the second scene. We know dark days. We know struggle. We know of snarling dogs and relationships on ice. We've flipped through newspapers and have been appalled by the tragedies. We know of hardship for both young and old. We know this. We live this.

But there's more to it than that.

What about the blue-sky battles? What about the battles when the sun is shining, children are laughing, and the day seems so tremendously bright? Is there a battle then or has the battle ceased? What's really going on? What do we experience? What do we feel? What do we deal with? What about life on good and normal days?

Let's consider a day in the life.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Start with the thoughts that greet us in the morning. What's the typical disposition at the beginning of a day? Do we wake with encouraging thoughts, thoughts that strengthen us, thoughts that inspire us? Not usually. Are we alive and inspired, feeling good about ourselves, good about the day before us, and good about our God? Not exactly. Morning challenges are not reserved for those lacking morning passion. Even early risers are greeted by varying degrees of funk: the quiet thought that belittles us, the mild fear of the afternoon meeting, the unaddressed but ever-present wound that looms over our lives. It can be extreme; it can be mild. Either way, the battle greets us in the morning.

Fast-forward to the middle of the day. What's been the experience so far? Did the conversations, information, and circumstances naturally inspire us to love God, to live courageously, to be kind to those around us? Did the voicemail and email bring internal peace? Did the external chaos from work, family, or friends usher in healthy thoughts toward the people that surround us? What message did we internalize? What do we carry with us? What rolled off? What stuck with us? Was it major? Was it minor? Either way, the battle continues throughout the day.

Now it's evening. We lie in bed and reflect on our day: the conversation with the friend; the phone call (or lack of phone call) from a family member; the meeting with the co-worker, the boss, the principal, the client; the book we

read; the show we watched. It all weighs in. Then there are the whispers, those quiet whispers now increasing in volume as we attempt to drift off to sleep. *Why did I do that? Why did I say that? What was I thinking? If I could only have that day back, that season back, that year back. The money is going to run out. She thinks I'm a fool. I am a fool.*

And that's just a day, maybe even a blue-sky day, which is the critical insight from the two scenes above. There's a battle going on. It's not a physical battle or a political battle. It's a spiritual battle, and it's raging. This spiritual battle presents itself in many ways. Without a doubt, though, this spiritual battle is primarily a battle of deception, which makes those blue-sky days terribly confusing. Circumstantially, life may be going well, but this does not mean the battle is being won. A very thin veil covers reality.

If we are to be transformed and if we are to rise up, we must gain deep insight into this raging battle. To gain this insight, we must go back to Christ.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We noted previously Christ's two observations in His conversation with Nicodemus:

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing person. Christ insisted he become a new person (the new birth).

Christ did not ask Nicodemus to make changes to his existing reality. Christ referenced a new reality (the kingdom of God).

We addressed the new birth. Let's address the kingdom of God.

We don't use "kingdom" language much today. We speak of countries or governments. Kingdom language is a bit of a throwback, but a kingdom is simply the area over which a king reigns. One could argue that God's kingdom is everything. God made it all and is sovereign over all of it. That's true; but when speaking of the kingdom of God, Scripture seems to speak not so much of His universal reign of all things, but the area over which God's reign is celebrated. This leads to an important distinction from worldly kingdoms.

In the physical world, a kingdom is defined by geographical borders, but even in these physical kingdoms, there can be people within the borders disloyal to the king. Their bodies are inside the kingdom, but their hearts are outside the kingdom. History shows us that this can hold tremendous strife. Christ's plan is profound. His early emphasis on the heart is the beginning of a kingdom. This kingdom will not be just physically loyal. Christ's kingdom starts from the inside and works itself to the outside. He came to bring a kingdom where external conformity without internal loyalty simply will not happen. His kingdom starts with the heart and grows to full presence in eternity. This is why it's not hard to understand that God's kingdom is happening today and will happen more completely in eternity. It's happening today in a manner that does not have geographical borders but through the hearts of those who love the King.

What are the implications? Consider a scenario:

The phone rings. It's a government official. You're asked to take part in a covert operation. You will be taken to a foreign country. The country lives by a different, and even hostile, value system. You will quietly live in this country. Your mission is to live in this land, not by their values, but by the values of your home country. These values will not always be received well. There will be times you will appear out of step, odd, or even be in danger, but you will not be alone. Satellites will monitor your every move.

You will have a phone with immediate access to authorities in your home country. Military intervention will always be available just over the horizon. They will guard you carefully and give you regular provisions to meet your needs. All they ask is that you live by the values of your home country, no matter the cost.

So, Christ's statement to Nicodemus is both bold and profound. Not only must he become a new person, he must live with an entirely new perspective — the perspective of Christ's kingdom. This new perspective is not based upon

what he sees around him. Rather, he must have vision for what he does not see but knows to be true. We, too, must gain this vision, the perspective of Christ's kingdom while living in the midst of the kingdoms of this world. To gain this vision, we must gaze through the window offered by Scripture. We don't see all. We don't know all. We know, by experience and by Scripture, that our current experience is one in which we "*know in part*" and "*see but a poor reflection as in a mirror*" (1 Corinthians 13:9, 12). But with that said, Scripture offers glimpses, windows into a spiritual world, and these glimpses offer a new perspective, a new vision, and strength for living lives that can be out of step with the world around us. These insights are essential for transformational living. One day we will "*see face to face*" and "*know fully,*" *but that day is not today* (1 Corinthians 13:12). Today, we gaze through Scripture's windows.

One such window is Scripture's final entry, the book of Revelation.

CAST DOWN

Consider a bold statement:

Then war broke out in heaven (Revelation 12:7).

This statement is followed by a brief description of a battle in the spiritual realm. The battle raged between God's angels and "*that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him*" (Revelation 12:9). So, the enemy was not able to stand but was hurled out of God's presence.

Listen closely to the victory declaration following the battle...

...Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down (Revelation 12:10).

The accuser, described as the one who now leads the whole world astray, was cast from God's presence. That's fascinating. Before the time of this battle, the accuser was permitted to go before God and accuse God's people. The Bible says these accusations would be heard "*day and night.*" What's most fascinating, though, is that the accusations were tolerated, and then they were not. Why were they once tolerated? Why were they then stopped?

Yes, for a time, God let the accusations stand. The accuser relentlessly belittled God's people. One can only imagine the kind of accusations leveled:

Did you see what he did? He said he was your follower, and then he did that. Did you hear what she said? She claimed you as her God, and then she said that. And what about that one over there? What a fraud! Wonderful people You have following You. You must be so proud.

And then it stopped. It was tolerated no longer. The accusations went silent, and the enemy was hurled from God's presence. Why? Was God simply tired of the barrage? Was it just, "*enough is enough!*" Or did something qualitatively change? Had a new day dawned? Was there something that happened that rendered the accusations useless? One would certainly not fault God for getting fed up with the accusations, but consider Scripture's description of the change:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah (Revelation 12:10).

Yes, something changed. Christ came.

Why might God have tolerated the accusations? Because, for a time, the accusations were legitimate. There was no grounded response. The enemy could point to the numerous failings and legitimately state: "*See! They're failing! You lose! This grand endeavor to establish a faithful following is a failure! They're all failures!*" Such accusations would stand. There was no solid response. The people would, in fact, fail their God.

But then something changed. Christ came, and the accusations were powerless. What was the statement we read previously about our standing before God? Because of Christ's death, we read that we will one day stand before God, "*free from accusation*" (Colossians 1:22). The accusations were leveled, and the accusations were tolerated, but now they are not because Christ's work is known. In another place, in regard to the enemy, Scripture states, "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [God] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*" (Colossians 2:15). The enemy is disarmed and hurled from God's presence. The accusations must stop.

Unless, of course, the accusations are believed to be true, even when they are not. Consider again what we view in the unseen world when we gaze through Scripture's window: "*For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down*" (Revelation 12:10). So now, the accuser who was once before God cannot legitimately make an accusation before God. The accuser knows this and has now "*been hurled down.*" What might the accuser do now? Does he sheepishly slink off into the corner waiting for time to come to a close? Not according to Scripture. In this very passage we read, "... *But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short*" (Revelation 12:12).

The accuser, who once leveled accusations before God, now levels accusations toward God's people. God does not tolerate the accusations. The accusations that once held legitimacy are now debunked because of Christ's death on the cross. The only tactic left is to continue the accusations with those who will listen, those who will entertain them as possibly true. The accusations are based on deception, and the response is clear. This very passage, this very same window into the unseen world, lets us know how those in the seen world overcome the accuser:

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).

Yes, there is a battle going on, and this battle rages. But to overcome this battle is to live faithfully by what has already happened in Christ, no matter the cost.

IMPERATIVES

The first imperative:

I must recognize the real me.

Our second imperative builds upon this by digging more deeply. Simply put, it's this:

I must fight for my life.

Scripture states that the devil "*prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). How might he bring destruction? Over and over, again and again, we hear of the enemy's weapon of choice. This accuser has no legitimate accusations. Rather, "*he is a liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44). In other places, we read:

[He] deceived the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:14).

All the nations were led astray (Revelation 18:23).

Satan ... will go out to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-8).

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 20:10).

We cannot wade through life with our guards down. The enemy is far too determined and crafty. He is a liar and the father of lies. He will lie to us about God. He will lie to us about ourselves. He will lie to us about true life, true living. If we are to not just survive life but thrive in life, we must be a people who fight for our lives.

If we take a passive approach, if we sit back and let life happen to us, we quickly discover that being passive does not inspire us to live well and to love God. The enemy will take full advantage of passive living. Lives will be lulled to sleep with the remote control drooping from the tired hand. Fear will rule. Anxiety will dictate. Escape becomes the solution.

HOW?

So how does this work? How do we truly fight for our lives? What must we do? How do we engage? This imperative can be easily misapplied. As always, we look to Scripture for clarification.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

What do we do when one of the enemy's favored tactics is that of deception? We demolish enemy strongholds. We "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Yes, there's more to it than just this. We'll dig even deeper in subsequent weeks, but for now, let's zero in on this one essential idea. We must be a people who identify strongholds of deception and bring these pockets of resistance into truth-filled obedience to Christ.

STRONGHOLDS

What do we mean by a stronghold? Let's consider a few examples:

He's 33 and genuine in his desire for Christ. One might not know it, though, by the weekend he just lived. He had no intention of stumbling like that. He was alone, tired, and simply wanted rest. But sleep evaded him, and in a matter of hours he found himself, once again, clicking through a website inconsistent with his convictions. With every click he traveled further from the man he wanted to be. Why was he there? What was he doing? He knew he didn't really want this, but he did it anyway, just as he'd done the week before. The week before that was a good week, which seemed irrelevant now. He knew he'd regret this. He knew he'd wake up feeling compromised and frustrated, but *I've already crossed the line*, he thought, *might as well keep going*.

She's 29 and single and a regular volunteer for the church's middle-school ministry. She genuinely loves God, and she loves to laugh with those young girls. If they could see me now, she thinks, *What would those girls say if they knew this side of me?* She hovered over the toilet and pushed her finger to the back of her throat. The evening's binge erupted from her stomach and splashed before her. She cringed. She'd done it once again. She told herself she wouldn't, but she did it anyway. Why? What was really going on? She had confided in a few people. She'd read websites and even a book on the topic. Yet, here she was again. She knew she didn't want to be this way, but night after night, week after week, month after month, it controlled her.

He's 44, married, has three kids, is active in his church, and has little to complain about. His career had been stratospheric. For nine years he'd been at the top of his game. Few had scored the deals he'd scored, and many envied his success. An email dinged his inbox. He clicked to find a prospective new client expressing continued interest in his services. Once again, he was on the brink of major dollars. The last paragraph presented the one potential inhibitor. It was the question they always ask, the very question his company had yet to adequately answer. The honest answer would jeopardize the deal. He'd been here before. He'd developed a canned response that, at best, diverted their attention. In truth, though, it was a lie, a bold-faced lie to get the deal. It troubled him every time — sometimes more than others. He had his justifications, but the genuine justification was that he wanted the deal; and, yes, it was the money, but it was more than that. He wanted the "W" by his name declaring him the winner. He wanted to set the records. He wanted to stand out among his peers. *One more time*, he thinks. Click.

Strongholds come in various shapes and sizes, but we get the idea. These are pockets of resistance strengthened by a bundling of deceptions. What are the lies that lead to pornography, eating disorders, or dishonesty in our work? Or, in a subtler way, what are the lies that generate anxiety, fear, and restlessness? What keeps us from pausing? What lies generate sleepless nights? Why would we compromise our integrity, purity, or commitments? Why do we overwork and overeat? Are these decisions as simple as the actions, or do we believe things that are simply not true? If it is as simple as the external actions, surely, we could change these actions with a couple of New Year's resolutions. But it doesn't seem to work that way. New Year's resolutions consistently sound like last year's resolutions. Strongholds have a tendency to show up again and again.

But what if we faced the lies? What if we unpacked what was really going on and held these deceptions up to the light of Scripture? Consider the lies that fuel sexual deviation. Surely physical impulses play a significant role, but there's more to it than that. There's the lie that says we're missing out. There's the lie that says unbridled sexual expression generates a more satisfying life. Or how about the lie that screams from the lives of those we think are living the good life by the way they play their weekend nights. And one more: There's the lie that says, *"If I don't do this, I'll lose this person, and this person is good for me."* Deception after deception, brick upon brick, the stronghold is fortified.

How about eating disorders? What bundle of deceptions cement these strongholds? Is it just about the food? Or is something deeper going on? Is that food being used for food's sake? Or is that food being used to anesthetize the pain of some form of insecurity? The food tickles the pain but is only followed by fear of fat grams and calories, which only strengthens the original insecurity. Relief from the vicious cycle is sought through purging the food, but this, too, strengthens the original insecurity and brings it right back to where it all started. Here, as well, deception builds upon deception, brick is laid upon brick, and the stronghold is fortified for yet another day.

And what about dishonesty, lies, and deception? Is it just about providing for one's self or one's family? Or, as with other categories, is something deeper going on? How much are our decisions influenced by the way we define our worthiness? Is worth defined by always winning, always beating the competition, or always getting the deal? Does losing the deal bring normal degrees of disappointment or is this self-defining? How much influence does Dad's definition of worth and value still hold sway over our lives? Dad may or may not even be living, but what did he celebrate? Did Dad celebrate honesty at all cost, or did Dad celebrate victory at all cost? Is this just about the deal, or is this about pleasing a hard-to-please parent? Or maybe it's not Dad. Maybe it's the voice that says, *"She won't love me for my looks, but she'll love me for my success."* Getting the deal will gain us something, but what do we lose in the process? As with other categories, brick is laid upon brick and a stronghold is fortified through the complexity of multiple deceptions.

BREAKING OUT

How do we break out? How do we live from our new hearts, our new selves? How do we get to the place where this week is better than last week and next week looks better still? Without question, we can and must be a people who fight for our lives by swinging the sword of truth. In doing so we *“demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

So, back to that blue-sky day. How might it be different? How might we engage the day actively rather than waiting for the day to engage us? What if we entered the day entrusted to God and with sword and shield in hand? Attacks will come, as they always do, but what if we're ready? A co-worker or friend leaves us feeling belittled. The belittlement could send us spiraling toward escapist behavior, or we could fight for our lives and swing the sword of truth: *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made”* (Psalm 139:14). Moving past that we encounter a great opportunity, one we want to take but is daunting and leaves us feeling small. We could cower in fear, or we could raise the shield of faith and swing the sword of truth: *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (Isaiah 41:10). Maybe we're then beckoned by a temptation.

It's the all-too-familiar magnetic draw to a quick fix and a feel-good moment. We crave that buzz to at least momentarily escape the challenges of life. The pull is strong and is accompanied with the lie of hopelessness. Caving feels inevitable. What should we do? We must stand firm with the belt of truth buckled around our waist, *“...God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear”* (1 Corinthians 10:13).



BE THE BODY INTERCESSION

When we look at great leaders in the Bible including David, Nehemiah, and Paul, we see people who prayed. We see people who weren't afraid to get on their knees before God, admit they don't have it all together, and ask for guidance, intervention, rescue, healing, blessing, forgiveness, etc.

As we grow in our faith, the same opportunity waits for us. We can be people who pray powerfully for ourselves, our loved ones, our neighborhoods, work places, city, country, and world. God hasn't changed. He is the same God that Paul said this of, *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20). God is able to do more than we can "ask or imagine."

So, let's ask. Let's imagine.

That's what intercession is: Engaging the spiritual battle on behalf of yourself, others, and the kingdom of God. The battle is all around us. We see it in the brokenness around us and within us. But we can effectively engage. *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Let's look at three powerful prayers from Scripture and practice praying for our lives and world.

First, look at Nehemiah 1. God's people were described like this, *"Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace ..."* (Nehemiah 1:3) The people in Jerusalem were vulnerable because their city was broken down and unprotected. Nehemiah saw this and cried out to God to do something about the distress and vulnerability of His people:

Then I said: "Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.' They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king (Nehemiah 1:5-11).

There are a couple of things happening here:

- Nehemiah sees the need of the people and cries out to God for them. He doesn't point fingers and cast blame for the situation they are in. Instead, he confesses his sins and his family's sins and asks for God's help for His people.
- Nehemiah prays this before he goes into the pagan king to ask for permission for the Israelites to build back the wall around Jerusalem, so they can protect themselves from attack.

Do you pray for your city, family, friends, and church like this? Do you praise God, confess your sins, and then ask for God to repair and restore or grant favor?

Nehemiah's prayer follows a format that looks like this:

- Recognition of who God is and what His promises are
- Asks for God to hear him
- Confesses his sin, family's sin, his people's sin
- Reminds God of His promises (to restore those who follow Him)
- Asks for what He needs to help the people and for their situation to change

Use the space below to write out a prayer for someone/ place/ people. Follow the format of the prayer we see in Nehemiah.

Maybe you pray for a child who is far from God and getting involved in things that could hurt him or her. Maybe you lift up your city and ask for God to forgive the wrong things that have been done and bring revival. Maybe you pray for people in an oppressed country to be given freedom and for justice to be served.

Let's look at another prayer from another powerful leader in Scripture.

This is a prayer written by Paul to one of the churches that he has helped establish. In this prayer he is praying for those who have come to faith in Jesus.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come (Ephesians 1:15-21).

Do you pray for those who know Jesus in your family, friends, city, and church like this?

Paul's prayer follows a format that looks like this:

- **BE THE BODY:** Intercession

- Thanksgiving for these people
- Asking for God to give wisdom
- Ask God to give understanding and hope
- That they would know God's power
- They would behold Jesus and His position of authority

Use the space below to write out a prayer for someone you know who follows Jesus. Follow the format of the prayer we see from Paul.

This is an online resource where many prayers in Scripture are listed along with the theme of those prayers (© 2013 truthaccordingtoscripture.com:

<http://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/prayers/prayers-old-testament.php#.WQCAOIPysdU>).

As you think about next steps, you can use this list to prompt you to pray more for yourself, those you interact with, and the world.

Next Steps: How will you take what you have learned/practiced through the Intercession Outcome and approach prayer differently moving forward?

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