

Feeling Oppressed? Learn to Discern Intercessory Prayer Burdens

I was sitting on the edge of a worn-out bed in a foreign city with my head in my hands trying to shake off a flood of disturbing emotions. I knew I couldn't effectively minister until I got to the root of the issue.

"What is wrong with me, Lord? I have absolutely no reason to feel this way. What is going on?" I pled with the Lord to reveal the root. I felt like my world was coming to an end; like there was no hope for a better tomorrow; like quitting and giving up. I started praying in the Spirit and then entered another plea.

"What is happening, Lord?" This time, He replied.

"It's despondency. This is how the people of this city feel. I want you to pray for them."

Merriam-Webster defines despondency as feelings of extreme discouragement, dejection or depression. And that nailed it. That was exactly how I was feeling—only it wasn't me. It was a prayer burden from the Lord.

Dividing Between Soul and Spirit

Of course, that was many years ago. I was reminded of that story after a recent message I posted on Facebook about intercession. It was short and sweet, but it hit a nerve with people who were looking for answers—or reminders—about this spiritual truth. I actually wrote the post after discerning an unusual prayer burden the night before. Here's the post:

"Intercessors, as we move deeper and deeper into the things of God, it's increasingly vital to learn to divide soul from

spirit. When the burden of the Lord comes upon you, you may feel the weight of oppression, hear the enemy's accusations, or experience various negative emotions seemingly out of the blue. That's not you! Learn to quickly discern the call to pray against a thing rather than coming up under it."

In other words, we need to discern between the emotions of our soul and the prayer burden of the Lord. I can sit in church and hear what the devil is saying to other members of the congregation. I used to think it was my own thoughts, but I learned that I was hearing into the spirit realm so I could engage in warfare over their souls. Many times I feel disturbed in my spirit without any reasonable cause—there's no trouble, no sin, no warfare. I have learned that if my hands are clean and my heart is pure it's time to press into intercession whether or not I ever know what I'm praying about—and I don't always know. I just answer the Holy Spirit's call.

Burden Bearing for the Lord

The principle of intercession includes burden bearing. Where I live, when they plant new palm trees they use three stakes of wood to hold them steady until they are rooted and grounded in the soil. Those stakes bear the burden of the tree. When we intercede for people or places—whether we know what we are praying for or not—we stake ourselves to them and work with the Holy Spirit to remove what doesn't belong there. Dutch Sheets goes into this in detail in his book *Intercessory Prayer*.

Jesus is our model intercessor. 1 Peter 2:24 explains that He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. 'By His wounds you were healed.'" Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (see Heb. 7:25). At times, our intercession turns into all-out warfare. Again, we may not even know why. But we rely on the Holy Spirit to pray with and through us.

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom. 8:26-27).

Sometimes we may know exactly what we’re praying for but we don’t know how to pray. The key to fruitful intercession—to effective burden bearing for the Lord—is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit feels the same burden and is sharing with you so you can work with Him to bring His will to pass over people, situations and even nations. Pray in the Spirit as much as you can and you’ll develop greater discernment to recognize the burden of the Lord. And again, remember this:

“Intercessors, as we move deeper and deeper into the things of God, it’s increasingly vital to learn to divide soul from spirit. When the burden of the Lord comes upon you, you may feel the weight of oppression, hear the enemy’s accusations, or experience various negative emotions seemingly out of the blue. That’s not you! Learn to quickly discern the call to pray against a thing rather than coming up under it.” Amen.

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