

Discerning the Call to Prophetic Intercession



There's plenty of talk about prayer, prophetic intercession, standing in the gap, making up the hedge, prayer burdens, and, of course, spiritual warfare. But how do we discern the call to prayer? How do we recognize a proverbial prayer burden?

These questions may seem simple, but far too many saints have come to me carrying burdens they thought were their own when in reality they were feeling the weight of oppression over a person or a city. I know how they feel. It took me some years to learn to accurately divide soul and spirit.

The turning point for me was during a mission trip to Nicaragua. I woke up feeling severely depressed for no apparent reason. I felt down and out, like giving up, throwing in the towel, calling it quits and running home to pull the covers over my head. It felt like my best friend had just died. I sat there for about 20 minutes trying to figure out what was wrong with me and crying out to God to help me escape these oppressive feelings.

As I persisted, I heard that still small voice in my spirit saying, "Despondent. This is how the people of this nation feel. Pray." Despondence is a feeling of extreme discouragement, dejection or depression. Once the Lord gave me that insight, I joined with others in a circle to pray against the oppression with the weapons of our warfare, which are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4).

That was a memorable lesson for me, and it was later reinforced by the teachings of E.M. Bounds, a saint who lived

from 1835 to 1913. He may or may not have known it, but he was prophetic. He was certainly a man of prayer. He said things like this:

“We have in the Holy Spirit an illustration and an enabler of what this intercession is and ought to be. We are charged to supplicate in the Spirit and to pray in the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that the Holy Spirit ‘helpeth our infirmities,’ and that while intercession is an art of so divine and so high a nature that though we know not what to pray for as we ought, yet the Spirit teaches us this Heavenly science, by making intercession in us ‘with groanings which cannot be uttered.’

“How burdened these intercessions of the Holy Spirit! How profoundly He feels the world’s sin, the world’s woe, and the world’s loss, and how deeply He sympathizes with the dire conditions, are seen in His groanings which are too deep for utterance and too sacred to be voiced by Him.

“He inspires us to this most Divine work of intercession, and His strength enables us to sigh unto God for the oppressed, the burdened and the distressed creation. The Holy Spirit helps us in many ways. How intense will be the intercessions of the saints who supplicate in the spirit. How vain and delusive and how utterly fruitless and inefficient are prayers without the Spirit!”

E.M. Bounds understood prayer burdens. He understood how to recognize them. Do you? Sometimes God places someone on your heart and you pray. That kind of prayer burden is not difficult to recognize. But many times there’s a spiritual weight that comes with a prayer burden like the one I felt in Nicaragua. I’d describe it as:

- A heaviness of heart
- A restless mind
- A spirit of mourning
- Depressed emotions that seem to come on us out of nowhere

When this happens, we may think it's just our own emotions. So what do we do? We focus on ourselves rather than pressing into intercession. A wise prophetic friend once explained it this way: "When these feelings come to us, the flesh wants us to focus on me, me, me and turn it inward. The Spirit wants us to focus on them, them, them, and turn to intercession."

With that in mind, let's consider some Scriptures that compare the flesh to the Spirit to drive this wisdom home:

Jesus said to watch and pray. He said the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41). Jesus also said, "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing" (John 6:63, NIV).

The apostle Paul said, "Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves" (Gal. 5:16, NLT). What does your sinful nature crave? Self-gratification.

Paul also said, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. ... So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Romans 8:5-9 KJV).

A few chapters later, Paul said, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). He also said, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17). And again, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

So what's my point?

When you feel heavy-hearted, when you feel depressed, when you feel oppressed, when you feel out of sorts, don't get into your mind about it. Even if it is your own personal problem, getting into your mind is not going to solve it. Pray in the Spirit. He is willing to help you with your infirmities and He wants to pray through you to help the infirmities of others.

Remember, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Walk after the Spirit and you won't fulfill the lusts of the flesh. And get passionate about intercession.

In closing, I'll leave you with another quote from E.M. Bounds:

"Desire burdens the chariot of prayer, and faith drives its wheels. Prayerless praying has no burden, because no sense of need; no ardency, because none of the vision, strength, or glow of faith. No mighty pressure to prayer, no holding on to God with the deathless, despairing grasp, 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.' No utter self-abandon, lost in the throes of a desperate, pertinacious, and consuming plea: 'Yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin—if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book.'"

Are we ready to pray?

Jennifer LeClaire *is news editor at Charisma. She is also the author of several books, including The Heart of the Prophetic. You can e-mail Jennifer at*

@ or visit her website here.