

How to Discover Your Prayer Passion

It was a cold March night as I tossed and turned, snuggling deeper under the warm blanket. Somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, a picture encroached upon my mind. I saw an oval-shaped stone covered with mud, dirt and moss. But as I watched, all the dirt and debris were removed from the stone, revealing a beautiful, glistening jewel.

In my spirit, I knew the stone was the church, the bride of Christ, and that God was cleansing and purifying His bride so that she might be revealed in all her splendor and beauty to the entire universe.

The next morning, I wanted to verify that the church was indeed referred to as a jewel in the Bible, so I grabbed my concordance and looked it up. To my astonishment, I found several verses that spoke of the church, God's bride and the heavenly Jerusalem, as a jewel or precious stone. One of them was Rev. 21:9-11: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he ... showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, her light like a most precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."

The awesomeness of this revelation of God's love for His bride called forth something deep within my spirit. As I began to pray, my heart ached with God's heart over her present condition. I prayed that the bride would be cleansed, purified and made ready for Christ's return. It was a prayer I had never prayed before, but somehow I knew it was a prayer from God's heart to mine. This prayer has remained with me for more than 15 years, and I have come to describe it as a prayer passion.

God's Purposes for Prayer

Alice Smith, an author of intercession books and co-founder of the U.S. Prayer Center, says, "Intercession is not a job—it's a passion; a stethoscope to the heart of God."

Without passion, our prayer lives become stagnant, boring and ineffective. While most Christians believe prayer is important, few would use the word passionate to describe their prayer life. Instead, many admit to being distracted, bored and frustrated when it comes to personal prayer.

In a 2005 poll released in *Facts & Trends* magazine, only 16 percent of Protestant ministers across the country were "very satisfied" with their personal prayer life. Another 47 percent were "somewhat satisfied," 30 percent were "somewhat dissatisfied," and 7 percent were "very dissatisfied." If our spiritual leaders have such difficulty in prayer, how can the average Christian hope to establish a meaningful, consistent prayer life?

One of the reasons we may not experience a satisfying prayer life is because we have misunderstood God's purposes for prayer. First, Christians and non-Christians alike often have the misconception that prayer is mainly for our benefit—to let God know our needs and desires.

U.S. News & World Report and funded a poll to learn about why, how, where and when people pray. Those who participated in the poll (75 percent Christians) say they prayed most often for health, safety, forgiveness, strength and guidance.

This survey, as well as others on prayer, reflects what I call a "me and mine" mentality. While Jesus certainly validates praying for our daily needs in the Lord's Prayer, He also tells us to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. A second misconception some Christians have is that intercessory prayer is best left to those who have the gift of intercession. But nowhere in the New Testament is intercession

described as a gift of the Spirit or as a special calling like that of pastor, prophet or teacher. Instead, 1 Pet. 2:9 tells us that all Christians are members of a “royal priesthood.” Therefore, as priests, we are called to intercession.

If we desire to have a more satisfying prayer life, we must understand that God’s purpose for giving us prayer goes beyond petitioning Him for our daily needs. It encompasses a divine call to become prayer partners with Him to establish His will on earth.

What Is a Prayer Passion?

I define a prayer passion as something on God’s heart that He desires to put on our hearts, resulting in a prayer partnership with Him.

In the Bible, we see many examples of people who took on specific intercessory prayer assignments. Abraham interceded for Sodom (Gen. 18:22-23). Moses prayed for God’s people throughout their wanderings in the desert (Num. 14:19-20). Nehemiah prayed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh. 1: 1-11).

Esther prayed and fasted for the Jewish nation (Esth. 4:16-17), and a widow and prophetess named Anna prayed and fasted in the temple for many of her 84 years (Luke 2:36-37). These prayer assignments, or prayer burdens, lasted from a few days to many years.

I consider a prayer passion as more than merely a short-term prayer assignment. I believe it is something we feel called to and passionate about over a longer period of time.

It fits with our unique spiritual gifts and call from God. My experience of a dream is not typically the way God reveals a prayer passion to us.

While He may use supernatural means, more often than not, He

reveals it to us through our everyday lives and circumstances.

How God Reveals a Prayer Passion

1) Our Vocational Calling

God will often give us a prayer passion related to our natural gifts, talents and vocational calling. Are you a doctor or nurse who longs to see people healed both physically and spiritually? Are you a teacher who grieves over children from broken and abusive homes?

Shelly Mongelli is a first-grade teacher who has a prayer passion for the children in her classroom. "It seems that every year I have kids placed in my classroom who have specific needs," Mongelli says. "One year, there was a student who had leukemia, and another year, a student whose mother had cancer. Not only do I pray for my students, but I also pray for their families."

2) Our Personality and Emotional Makeup

Sometimes our emotional responses in situations will point to an area of prayer where God is calling us. First, what moves you to compassion? Do you feel a deep empathy and pain when you hear of starving children, homeless families or victims of abuse? What news stories grab your attention? Drugs and crime in your city? Political corruption? Consider your emotional responses and ask God if He wants you to partner with Him in prayer in these particular areas.

Second, when you pray with other Christians, either in a small group or in church, and someone prays about a particular topic, do you find yourself engaged in prayer with an inner passion? If this happens more than once, it may be an area where God desires to give you a prayer passion.

Third, what makes you angry? Sometimes our prayer passion is connected to those things that cause righteous anger to rise

up inside of us. Are you angry because Christ's church is divided, ridiculed and stripped of power and influence? Are you angry with hypocrites or spiritual leaders who tarnish the reputation of Christ? Righteous anger can be a sign that God is calling us to pray with Him about it.

3) Our Day-to-Day Obedience

God often reveals a prayer passion as we walk in obedience with Him day by day. At one church I attended, we would gather for prayer every Sunday morning before the service in one of the four corners of the sanctuary.

Because I knew God wanted each focus covered, I hung back until others decided where to pray and then I filled in whichever corner lacked people praying. Although there was one particular focus I wanted to pray for, it was always well-represented and, more often than not, I ended up in the corner praying for children, youth and young adults.

This happened over and over again until I headed for that corner every Sunday morning. As I prayed, I felt my heart growing with God's concern for the next generation—especially for young people in our colleges and universities. My passion grew as I prayed for revival on our local college campuses and campuses across the nation. Because I was obedient to pray where God called me, I believe He shared His heart for the next generation with me and gave me a prayer passion for college students that I still carry today.

4) Our Personal Life Experiences

We have all heard of people who, because of personal tragedy, have lobbied for change, formed support groups or began charities or other organizations that have made a difference in the world. Likewise, a prayer passion may be born out of personal hardship or tragedy.

Patricia Freeman, one of the women in my Bible study group,

had to quit her job when her children were teens to care for her mother who had Alzheimer's. Later, she became a caregiver for her husband, who was paralyzed as a result of illness. Instead of becoming angry and bitter, she turned to prayer. As a result, she says that God has given her a prayer passion for caregivers because she knows the difficulties and struggles they face.

5) A Revelation of God's Purposes and Timing

As we study the Bible, God may open our understanding to new revelations about His purposes and timing on the earth.

Daniel was a man who read in the Scriptures that Israel's captivity was to last 70 years. When he realized that time was drawing near, he began to pray God's revealed will into existence (Dan. 9:1-19).

Our prayer lives will take on new purpose, power and passion when we understand God's call to partner with Him for the things that are on His heart. We need to be available and open to hear what prayer passions God desires to give us.

Sandra Chambers *has a calling to help believers grow in their Christian walk, especially in the area of prayer. She has served as a prayer coordinator at two churches and speaks on the topic of prayer at churches and conferences. Formerly a teacher, she is now a journalist and travel writer who recently published her first book, Lord, It's Boring in My Prayer Closet: How to Revitalize Your Prayer Life. Follow Chambers on her blog, .*

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