

# Have You Confronted the Problem?

## *Praying to Victory:*

Ezekiel 13:3-5, 9-12; 22:24-31

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We are family! Would you turn to the person next to you? Look them in the eye. Even point your finger at them and say, “We are family!” We are family. We are not islands. We are not isolated individuals. We are family. We experience so many things together. We experience peace together, war together, gas prices together, social blessing and turmoil together. We are family, and many answers to prayer are helped or hindered by our family life.

Early in my pastoral experience, I prayed for a car. Cars were not scarce, but I could not afford to buy or insure a reliable one. I had read some books that encouraged me to be specific in prayer, so I prayed for a specific car. I asked God to provide me with a blue 4-wheel drive, Toyota Tercel. I thought that would be economical and get me around in all kinds of weather. I prayed and prayed. One evening I got caught with a pastoral emergency. I walked over to a neighbor, knocked on the door and borrowed her car. I kept praying. A relative called with a reliable car that cost a small sum, but I had to decline. We couldn’t afford the small sum. Some time later, I was offered a beat-up old Saab. It didn’t appear to have an ounce of paint on it, and I wasn’t sure what worked and what didn’t. I turned it down, and kept praying. It wasn’t much later that I received a phone call. A high school friend of Diane had learned we were looking for a car. Her husband received a new car with his promotion, and offered us one they were using.

It wasn't blue. It wasn't a 4-wheel drive. It wasn't a Toyota. It was a common red Ford. It was easier to maintain, easier to fix, and easier to insure. Moreover, the color was a favorite of my car-crazy toddler. God answered persistent, believing prayer. However, God did not answer it in isolation from the blessings of those around me. I was blessed by God blessing others, and my toddler was blessed by God blessing me. We are family.

God does single us out and make us the exception at times; however, God gives us one another for mutual blessing. The passage from Ezekiel today emphasizes that truth. Although it is disturbing, it also gives us great hope and help in praying to victory.

We are learning to pray to victory. God is growing in us the prayer life of Jesus. We are to rise to the full measure of his intimacy with the Father and his fruitfulness in prayer. As a church, *we, first, are sharing with one another answers to prayer or a favorite prayer promise.* As a corporate prayer project, *we, second, are praying at noon for our church.* We'd like you to stop at 12 noon (or as close to it as possible) Monday through Friday, take one minute and pray for Bethany's provision and fruitfulness in ministry. We need provision. We also need God to guide and bless the work of our hands. *Third, we are fasting one meal a week.* We are reinforcing with hunger, our spiritual cry for provision and fruitfulness. We've provided a tear off sheet (in the back of the bulletin) for you to post at home. *Fourth, we are exploring in worship how to pray to victory.* God is working with us to show the world what he does when people actually believe.

Key principle #1 in praying to victory is just pray. Talk to God. Call out to him. Ask and keep asking. Don't stop until you hear from God. Honestly, that key principle isn't just principle #1, it is principle #2, principle #3, principle #4, and so on. Everything else we talk about is to equip you in that vital act. For example, don't just ask for something, expect an

answer. Expect that God will reveal his heart and mind about what you want. Don't be an agnostic about God's will. You can know God's will. Jesus learned God's will, and you are to learn and know God's will, so that you are confident in what you ask and do.

However, sometimes, we pray and can't hear a thing. We pray and pray and pray some more, but have no peace and no awareness of what God wants to do. The prophet Daniel had that experience. He had a dream, but no understanding. He called out to God, "What are you telling me?" Finally, he added fasting to his prayer. He mourned, wore no lotions, and for 21 days he drank water and ate only vegetables. He ended that fast when he finally got an answer. He prayed to victory. Why did he need to do that? Somehow, his prayers were hindered by the community and nation he lived in. The Bible puts it this way:

***Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. (Daniel 10:12-13, NIV)***

Since Daniel both served the human prince of Persia and was his friend, we can assume that the human prince was not interfering with Daniel's prayers. A spiritual prince interfered. How can that happen? And what does that mean for us?

In the Bible God gave his people a helpful way to understand their prayers and his blessing. Since law enforcement wasn't readily available, wealthy families erected walls to protect themselves. Cities erected walls to protect themselves. The nation of China erected a great wall to protect the nation. In the book of Job, Satan complains to God that Job has a wall protecting him and his family so that Satan can't get to him with bandits, natural disasters or disease. A physical wall may help us with bandits, but what kind of wall prevents natural disasters and disease? In Job, it appears that there was a spiritual wall of righteousness erected

by a faith that loved God and neighbor. Gaps were filled in by repentance and forgiveness of sins. The Bible said that Job offered God sacrifices just in case his children sinned. This wall frustrated Satan. He could not touch the health, wealth and social well being of Job and his adult children without special permission.

In Ezekiel we encounter that same spiritual wall. In the prophet's writing, it becomes clear that it is a wall of righteousness that stretches protectively around a city and a nation. How citizens treat God and one another affect the protection and prosperity of residents. The shared blessings of health, wealth and peace are affected by that wall. Answers to prayers for rain are affected by that wall. Answers to prayers for peace are affected by that wall. Answers to prayers for health are affected by that wall. Not all answers to prayer are affected, but many may be. That was true with Daniel, it was true with Israel, and it true with us. We white-wash the wall of righteousness when we substitute a humanly-devised ethic for obedience to God's word. We substitute a tarp for an impenetrable wall when we hide or paper over the gap created by our sins.

We often employ expressions like "We're only human" or "We're all sinners" to excuse rather than repent from our sins. Each of those statements insults God. The first insults God as creator. "I'm only human, made in your image, God. What do you expect?" The second insults Christ as redeemer. "Jesus, I'm only a sinner whatever you think you accomplished on the cross and regardless of your decision to call me saint." When we act as if sin or violating God's word is no big deal, we substitute our vision of life and justice for God's. We create a dynamic where any loving act of God harms us. God's actions either reinforce our self-righteous thinking or deprive us of the blessings we need.

However, there is terrific news. In Ezekiel God looked for just one person to stand in the gap and rebuild the wall for the entire city and nation. God looked for just one who would

believe and act on that belief. One person could close the gap and frustrate the enemy. One person could avert judgment for the city. One person could make the difference for many. One person can believe the word of God. One person can look to Jesus for forgiveness. Jesus' obedience has provided every material necessary to rebuild the wall. His atoning death provides forgiveness that turns every gap into an impregnable wall.

Today, when you pray, if you are not seeing an answer or hearing a response, ask your heavenly Father about the problem, the gap in righteousness, that allows Satan to interfere. You can confront that problem. You can stand in the gap and rebuild the wall that will change the outcome for many. You are the one who can make the difference... because you can do all things with Christ and through Christ who strengthens you.

Keep calling on your heavenly Father until you pray to victory.