

# Praying the News

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I've shared before how my father in a sense first opened the door for me to look at world events as connected with God's Word and His purposes unfolding on planet Earth. It has been a joy and an exciting adventure to watch the news on television or read a newspaper and see happenings as something more than a depiction of events that are out of my control. Instead, the very things taking place around us are an indication that God is indeed in control and has put in His word some amazing details of what is about to happen.

All too often, Christians feel powerless and at the mercy of a very big world. Watching or reading of news events can feel like an exercise in futility and even worse, bring a sense of anxiety and worry into our lives. One way to deal with this is to shut yourself off from the world. Turn off the television news and unsubscribe to your daily newspaper. Doing so may provide temporary relief, but certainly does nothing to change the situation.

There is a better way. It involves a commitment to change your world through prayer. It happens as you see God's commitment to prayer as a change agent. You begin to see yourself as a player on the world stage. Rather than passively watching and worrying, or ignoring and hiding, you begin to take significant action to bring God's power to bear on situations going on in the world. You pray!

The Bible is filled with examples of God's people watching political and national events unfold around them, and then intervening through prayer to bring change. Sometimes a national leader, such as King Asa or King Jehoshaphat of

Judah, prayed when faced with a crisis. In both cases, a military attack against the nation was overcome by the prayer of a godly leader.

Sometimes, though, the intervention of God comes through the prayers of more common people, such as Anna and Simeon in the New Testament. These two faithful prayer warriors were watching the signs of the times and understanding the prophetic Old Testament scriptures that pointed to the soon appearing of the Messiah. God used their prayers to prepare for Messiah's coming in ways that we won't understand until heaven.

A group of ordinary believers crowded into a house in Jerusalem when they heard that the Apostle Peter had been arrested and was chained to a prison wall. What a different twist world history would have taken without the powerful leadership of Peter! But God heard the prayers of these little-known believers and sent an angel to release Peter, allowing him to continue helping shape and lead the fledgling church for years.

Throughout church history, God has used the prayers of believers to change the flow of events and alter what might have been. One of the more dramatic instances of this occurred during World War II and involved the small group of intercessors that gathered in Great Britain under the leadership of Rees Howell. Again and again, God led them to pray over particular battles and situations, many of which they could not have known about through their natural senses. In numerous situations, the Lord used their prayers to ensure victory and change human history.

Obviously, in cases like this, the prayers by themselves did not bring about victory. Men and women in dangerous places fought fierce battles and some paid the ultimate price. But the prayers of Rees Howell and his band of intercessors brought the power of God into the battles and altered history.

For further reading on this amazing story, I recommend Norman Grubb's book, Rees Howell: Intercessor.

Most of us don't feel like world changers. We're just trying to get through to the end of the week. But God has provided an amazing opportunity for us to join with Him in intercession and see His power bring transformation. Making the most of this opportunity will take a change of attitude and a different way of responding to the news.

Changing our attitude is probably the most difficult. That's why I've spent the time I have to point out that God has always used people's prayers to bring about changes in world events. If we believe God, then our attitude will begin to shift from passivity to action. Rather than sitting and complaining about things as we watch the news or read the newspaper, we will begin to pray to bring about change. A changed attitude—agreeing with God that someone ought to do something and that He (God) is probably the best someone—will bring us into serious prayer.

That changed attitude will cause us to redeem the time we are using to become aware of world and national events. We begin to approach the evening news or morning newspaper as serious times of prayer. Instead of passive intake, we move into aggressive intervention. I call it prayer!

Let's talk about some practical ways to pray about the news.

**First of all, decide to become mentally and spiritually prepared and involved.** Very intentional praying is required. It doesn't happen accidentally. We don't just sit down to watch a news show and in the midst of a particular segment suddenly remember or decide to pray. This is not bad, but it is so irregular. Make a decision to sit down and watch the news as a prayer event. It will change everything about your experience.

**Second, ask the Lord to guide you as you pray.** There are so

many times we respond to events by telling God what He should do. You'd think we would have learned that He really isn't looking for our advice. He is, however, looking for our cooperation in releasing His power into situations. Many times the best question we can ask is, "God, what are You doing in this situation?" Then follow that up by asking, "God, what do You want to do?" Then pray with God's heart about what you are seeing.

**Third, watch the news with God.** Invite Him into the experience with you. Ask Him to allow you to see things from His perspective. Things that didn't formerly upset you may cause you to weep in sorrow. Other things that used to make you angry now may become side issues. His ways are so far beyond ours!

**Fourth, bring your journal to your prayer time.** By your prayer time, I'm talking about your time of watching the news or reading the newspaper. Journal what you are praying about. Write down insights the Lord provides over situations you are watching.

**Fifth, ask the Lord if there are any actions for you to take as a result of what you saw and prayed.** Prayer is always the first step but rarely the last. You may need to write a letter to someone involved in a news story. You might be called to give money to someone or something. There might be action steps for your family, especially as it relates to preparation for difficult days ahead. The Lord may direct you to change where your money is invested. He may even call you to move from one city (or nation) to another. Prayerful watching can help prepare you to be a more effective servant in the Lord's hands.

**Sixth, bring your Bible with you when you watch the news or read the newspaper.** As you pay closer attention to the prophetic Word of God, you will often be reminded of a passage of scripture as you are watching or reading. Having your Bible

with you will help you look up passages and verify that you are, in fact, literally living the Bible as you see things happen right before your eyes.

I will never forget June 6, 1967. I was almost fourteen years old. Dad was watching television news and called me in to watch with him. Pointing to the news that Israeli forces had just taken possession of the Temple Mount and the rest of Jerusalem, he said, "You've just seen a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled on by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles was fulfilled. Now you've seen it with you own eyes." That was a powerful demonstration for me of how to view the news through biblical eyes. In the very near future, you will see many such things if you are watching.

That brings me to another practical idea: Bring others to your prayer meeting. If you live with family, invite them to join you as you pray about the news. What a wonderful way to teach your children or spouse how to join their prayers to God's purposes. Perhaps you could have a weekly time when you invite friends to your home to pray about the news with you. What dramatic times of intercession might be unleashed as we pray together over the great events of our day!

## **Prayer**

Father, give me eyes to see what is happening around me. Help me to see things from Your perspective. I choose to use times of exposure to news from around the world as valuable times of intercession. Help me to be disciplined in praying as I watch and read. Show me how You would have me pray. Thank You for allowing me to be a part of what You are doing in the world today.

## **Questions for Reflection and Discussion**

1. Have you ever tried to pray regularly as you watched or

read the news? Was it easy or hard for you? Why?

2. Can you think of biblical examples where individuals prayed and national or world events changed? What incidents come to mind?

3. Has there been a particular news event that prompted you to pray? What about that event caused you to pray?

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# PRAYER AND THE END OF DAYS

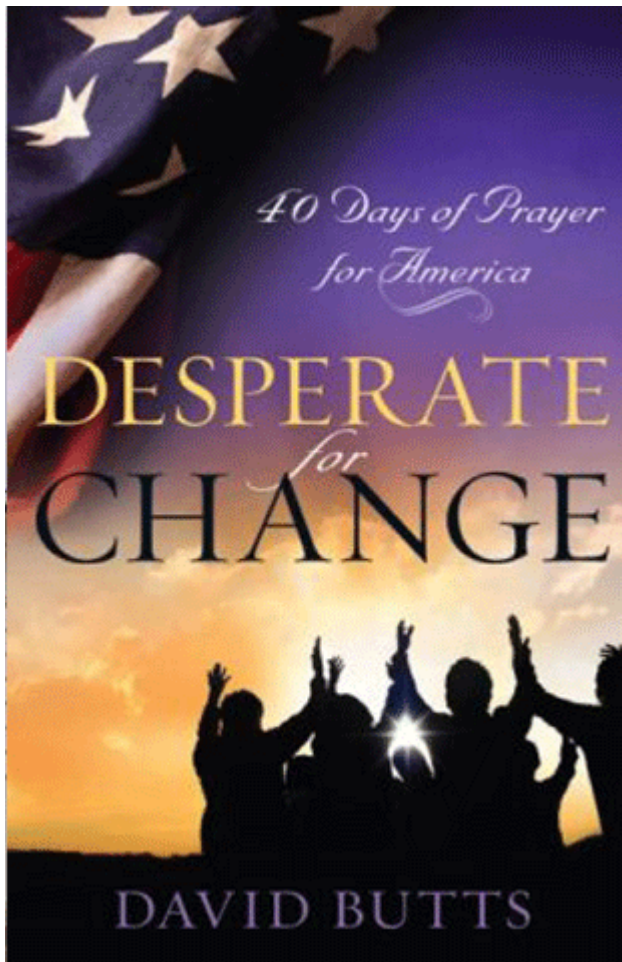
PRAYING GOD'S  
PURPOSES IN  
TROUBLED TIMES



# FORGOTTEN POWER

A Simple Theology for a Praying Church

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# Why Fasting Is Relevant for Today

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Perhaps no spiritual discipline today is as much misunderstood as fasting. Why to fast, how to fast, when to fast, how long to fast, what type of fast, SHOULD I fast...etc. In simplest terms, fasting means to abstain from food for a period of time for a spiritual purpose or goal.



As a Christian, obviously the first question we need to ask is, "What does Jesus say about this?" It is obvious in Scripture that Jesus fasted, but because He did, does that mean that we ought to as well?

In Matthew 6, Jesus discusses three specific spiritual activities and gives instructions as to how the disciples should perform these activities in a way that is pleasing to God. His language indicates that He assumes the disciples would already be doing these three things: "When you give...when you pray...when you fast..." This is an interesting combination. There is not a believer who would argue that God does not expect us to pray or to give, but when we talk about fasting, all sorts of arguments begin to be put forth as to why fasting isn't for today.

For many in this busy, self-centered world, fasting is just not an option, or even a consideration, even though we see numerous references to fasting throughout the Scriptures: (Joel 1:14-15, Nehemiah 1:4, Daniel 9:3, Luke 2:37, Acts 13:3 to name only a few).

Because Jesus modeled the practice of fasting (Matthew 4:1-2), and took the time to instruct His disciples in the discipline, it should be a pretty strong indication that He still desires us to fast today.

Although not everyone is called to the same levels of fasting, we believe Scripture indicates that all Christians who seek to grow and mature should remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in this area. **(Note: Fasting is never intended to be done out of guilt, or in cases where it is medically unsafe. If you are unable to fast from food because of medical reasons, please consider fasting from something that would be a sacrifice for you – TV watching, for example. Set aside that time to seek the Lord instead).**

Ronnie Floyd, in his excellent book, "The Power of Prayer and

Fasting", has, perhaps one of the most concise and understandable exhortations to fast: "God's gateway to supernatural power can become ours when we come to our heavenly Father with contrite hearts and obedient spirits in fasting and prayer." He goes on to say, "One purpose of prayer and fasting is to bring our hearts to a place of being filled with a sacrificial love that results in godly attitudes in our lives. True fasting will draw us closer to God and His purposes."

We see three main purposes in Scripture for fasting.

- It allows us to come before God in humility and repentance.
- It helps us to focus on God, and to become sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- It empowers us through God for service.

God's Word tells us that God "opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). How can we walk in humility before our God? By recognizing that humility puts us in a position to be able to receive from Him. As individuals, families, churches, communities and nations, we are in desperate need of a fresh touch from God...of hearing His voice instead of the clamor around us! We live in a society of "I'll do it myself" mentality. However, there always comes a time when "self" just can't do it anymore. Eventually, we realize that we are not God, but we do NEED Him.

That was the situation in Judah during Jehoshaphat's day. An army from several nations was on the march against them. Outnumbered and in despair, they turned to God and fasted and prayed. Their fasting put them in a place of humility where they could pray the right prayer. Jehoshaphat's prayer, after they had fasted, was not a prayer asking God to bless their efforts or to do what they wanted Him to do. Instead, it was an astonishing prayer of humility in which he said, "O Lord, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chronicles 20:2-12). Fasting brings us to a proper place of

humility before God where we are able to pray such a prayer of faith and dependence.

Fasting also helps us to focus ourselves upon God and the leading of His Holy Spirit. Doing without food for a period of prayer helps us to put away distractions and to turn to Jesus. We are living in a day in which Jesus is calling His Church back into an intimate relationship with Himself – a time when we come directly to Him and get to know Him deeply.

Christian author, Steve Hawthorne, recently described a seven day fast he experienced as he was seeking direction for his ministry. At the end of the fast, a friend asked him if he had received the guidance he was seeking. Steve replied, “Probably not...but I do know the Guide better now.” Where is your focus?

Fasting is also a way for us to be empowered by God for service. There seems to be a release of spiritual power when fasting and prayer are combined. The great men and women of God down through the ages have come to God in prayer and fasting to receive power for greater ministry. Jesus Himself launched His ministry after a forty day fast. Esther went to the king for mercy and salvation for Israel. It was her day of greatness and ministry to God’s people, but it happened after a three day fast undertaken by herself and many others.

Our ability to be empowered by God for service, relates back to the first two points. When we humble ourselves and draw near to the Lord through fasting and prayer, then we are ready to receive power to be used in God’s service in an even greater way than ever before. Having learned humility and intimacy, we can be entrusted with greater power because we realize that it is not our doing, but God working in and through us.

God desires to raise up a people who will surrender their lives to be used by Him in these critical days. Without God’s people being set ablaze in prayer and fasting, the revival He

longs to send cannot happen. Evil will continue to pervade the earth, and Christians will continue to watch weakly, wishing there was something they could do.

We believe that fasting is part of God's plan for His children. Ronnie Floyd says, "Unless we surrender completely to God's plan, we are destined to drift in a sea of disappointment, disillusionment, and depression. We are in constant need of supernatural power." Elmer Towns has said, "If every Christian fasted, the results could shake our society like a windstorm bending a sapling. Christians would demonstrate that they live differently, that their faith is imperative, that the Almighty works in their daily lives."

Reading about fasting is not enough. Seek God to know what He is saying to you personally about this vital spiritual discipline. How will you respond?

–Dave Butts was the co-founder and President of Harvest Prayer Ministries until his death in 2022.

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# THE DEVIL GOES TO CHURCH

COMBATING THE  
EVERYDAY ATTACKS  
OF SATAN

FOREWORD BY HENRY BLACKABY

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