

Through Gates Of Brass

An Intercessory Prayer Guide
For Prisons And Prisoners



*"...I will break in pieces the gates of brass And cut the bars of iron.
I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places,"
(Isaiah 45:2-3)*

*"Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners..."
(Hebrews 13:3, NIV)*

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INTRODUCTION

Barbed wire. Steel bars and heavy metal doors. Guard towers with armed officers. Criminals. This is prison!

- X Society says, "Lock them up and throw away the key."
- X Politicians say, "We need to build more prisons."
- X Statistics say, "80% of inmates return to prison after release--we are wasting our time trying to rehabilitate them."

Prison populations grow larger and larger. Often, people come out of prison worse than when they went in. Many commit additional offenses, return to prison, and get stuck in the cycle of recidivism, the "revolving door" of crime, prison, and release. Some inmates are truly innocent, yet they are trapped for years by the bureaucracy of the criminal system.

The answer to this is not more prisons. It is not locking people up and throwing away the key." The answer is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Prisoners need regeneration not rehabilitation--and Jesus has commissioned His followers to reach beyond the barbed wire fences and steel bars to touch the lives of men and women who are bound by the shackles of sin.

The mandate for prison ministry is clear in God's Word, by both scripture and example. Jesus said:

... "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You...in prison'...And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" (Matthew 25:31-40)

Jesus Christ Himself is our example for prison ministry. He declared that the anointing of God was upon Him...

...To open blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. (Isaiah 42:7)

Even while dying on Calvary's cross, Jesus took time to reach out in love and concern to a prisoner. As a result, that convicted criminal experienced God's love, grace, and forgiveness. During the time between His death and resurrection, Jesus "... went and preached to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19).

Every born-again believer should be involved in prison ministry, but this does not necessarily mean you are called to go into a prison to minister. In church missions, not everyone can go to a foreign field to share the Gospel. The same is true in prison ministry. Not everyone is to go into prison to minister, but every believer should be involved in prison ministry in some capacity. Prayer is one important way that all believers can impact the prison system.

WHY PRAY FOR PRISONS?

Why should we focus concerted intercessory prayer on prisons, prison ministries, inmates, and their families? Because. . .

- Prison ministry is mandated by scripture (Matthew 25:31-40).
- We should follow the example Christ set by ministering to prisoners, and intercessory prayer is one of the greatest ministries.
- Prisons meet the criteria of a mission field: There are lost people and a need for laborers to harvest the souls of men and women.
- God is not willing that any should perish--not even serial killers, rapists, or molesters (2 Peter 3:9). God loves even the "worst of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).
- For every person incarcerated, there are three to five others affected: Spouses, children, parents, etc. Inmates and their families represent a large segment of society and they need our prayers.
- False religions and cults are reaching out to prisoners. We must get there first with the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

WHAT IS INTERCESSORY PRAYER?

An **intercessor** is one who takes the place of another person to plead their case. When you pray this way, you are **interceding**:

"Intercession may be defined as holy, believing, persevering prayer whereby someone pleads with God on behalf of another or others who desperately need God's intervention." (Full Life Bible)

Prisons, prison ministries, inmates, and their families certainly are in need of God's divine intervention.

Intercession has no limitations, as prayer can penetrate prisons in unreached nations and reach beyond geographical, cultural, and political barriers. You can affect the destinies of individuals and entire nations. Your prayers can go behind prison bars, through gates of brass, and past razor wire to extend the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

When you intercede in prayer, you actually battle with Satan for the souls of prisoners and their families. You do not do this in your own ability or strength, but on the basis of the spiritual power and authority delegated to you by Jesus (Luke 24:49).

You have authority to intercede for inmates and their families who need salvation:

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Acts 2:21, NIV)

You have authority to pray for laborers to reap the great spiritual harvest behind prison bars:

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37)

You have authority to intercede for those in need of healing and deliverance:

Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. (Luke 9:1)

You have authority to bind the power of the enemy. The term "to bind" originates from the Hebrew word *asar* meaning "to imprison, tie, gird, to harness." Jesus explained:

...how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Matthew 12:28-29)

The strong man referred to in this scripture is Satan. The goods which are to be taken from him are his most prized possessions, lost men and women who are enslaved in sin. Jesus said that it is impossible to take the possessions of a strong man without first binding him, so He gave believers the power to both bind and loose:

And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

In prayer, you can bind the evil that is operating in prisons and in the lives of inmates and loose the power of the Holy Spirit, thus clearing the way for the Gospel to be effectively preached and received.

The Name of Jesus is the authority upon which you intercede. Jesus promised:

...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. (John 16:23)

HOW TO INTERCEDE

Study the following references which provide Biblical guidelines for intercession:

-Prayer is to be made to God:	Psalms 5:2
-Quality rather than quantity is stressed; Prayer is not successful because of "much speaking":	Matthew 6:7
-Empty repetition is forbidden, but earnest repetition is not:	Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8
-Pray with understanding:	Ephesians 6:18
-Pray in the Spirit:	Romans 8:26; Jude 20
-Intercede according to the will of God:	1 John 5:14-15
-Pray in secret:	Matthew 6:6
-Pray without ceasing:	Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17
-Intercede to the Father in the name of Jesus:	John 14:13-14
-Pray with a watchful attitude:	1 Peter 4:7
-Pray with a forgiving spirit:	Mark 11:25
-Pray with humility:	Matthew 6:7
-Accompany prayer with fasting:	Matthew 17:21
-Intercede fervently:	James 5:16
-Pray with submission to God:	Luke 22:42
-Use the strategies of binding and loosing:	Matthew 16:19

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE INTERCESSION

-Begin by praising God for who He is and for the privilege of engaging in the same ministry as the Lord Jesus (Hebrews 7:25). Thank God for the privilege of cooperating with Him in the affairs of men through prayer.

-Make sure your own heart is clean before God by giving the Holy Spirit time to convict any unconfessed sin (Psalms 66:18).

-Acknowledge that you cannot really pray without the direction of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26). Ask God to control your intercession by His Spirit, believe by faith that He does, and thank Him for it.

-Deal aggressively with the enemy. Come against him in the all-powerful Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and with the "sword of the Spirit" which is the Word of God (James 4:7).

-Pray about what the Holy Spirit brings to your mind, believing in faith for an answer. You may also want to start a list of written requests from inmates or prison ministries.

-Conclude your prayer by praising God for what He has done and will do in answer to your intercession.

PRAYING FOR PRISONS

Here are some specific suggestions for praying for prisons. Obtain a list or map of prisons in your state and pray for each one by name.

- Pray for God's peace to reign in the institution.
- Ask God to raise up laborers for a great spiritual harvest in the prison.
- Ask God for open doors for faith-based ministries to access the institution.
- Pray for the warden, correctional officers, staff, and administration.
- Pray for the chaplain or program director.
- Bind the spirits of violence, suicide, homosexuality, and addiction which are ruling spirits in penal institutions.
- Pray for revival in the institution.

You might want to contact the chaplain or faith-based ministries of a specific prison to obtain additional requests unique to that institution.

PRAYING FOR PRISON MINISTRIES

The following are general requests for prison ministries. For more specific requests, contact various prison ministries on the Internet and ask to be added to their mailing list.

- Pray for open doors for the Gospel to be shared with inmates.
 - Pray for favor for ministries with administration, chaplains, and correctional officers.
 - Pray for God to raise up laborers to reap the spiritual harvest in prisons.
 - Pray for protection for workers ministering inside institutions.
 - Pray for power and anointing upon the workers.
 - Pray for adequate funding for prison ministries.
 - Pray that ministries working in prisons will network together in unity for the Kingdom.
- Bind the spirit of division.

PRAYING FOR INMATES

Feelings of isolation, depression, and hopelessness are common among inmates because they are segregated from society, confined in cells a great deal of the time, and have limited options.

Some inmates admit their guilt, but do not show any remorse for their crimes. Others deny their guilt and refuse to deal with the issues that resulted in their incarceration. Others are truly innocent and are struggling with injustice. You must accept them as they are and, through prayer, believing that God will take them step-by-step to the place they need to be in Him.

You must have an understanding of Biblical regeneration in order to pray effectively for inmates. The Bible explains that: “...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Society will still require an inmate to pay for his crimes after conversion, but if they confess their sins and ask God to forgive them, they are a new creation. Spiritually, they are not the same person who did the crime.

Understand that just because you pray for an inmate and they receive Jesus as Savior, this does not necessarily mean God will deliver them from their sentence. Hebrews 11 records that some people were delivered, others were not

Each inmate is unique. God loves each one and is not willing that any should perish. There is no typical inmate in God’s sight, but here are some common characteristics that will help you understand the majority and help you pray more effectively.

Education: The educational level of inmates is often low.

Home environment: Inmates frequently come from homes where there was abuse, divorce, little supervision, or no discipline.

Vocational background: Many inmates have little or no vocational training. They may have been unsuccessful at obtaining or maintaining employment or have labored at low paying jobs.

Self-image: Inmates often have a low self-image because they have been rejected by society, friends, or family.

Emotional issues: Many inmates suffer from guilt over their crimes and what they have put their families through. Depression, hopelessness, and hostility are common.

Social responsibility: Inmates sometimes have a limited sense of social responsibility. They may feel no remorse for their crime or that they were treated unfairly by the justice system.

Common offenses: Four crimes account for the majority of prison inmates in most countries: Robbery, burglary, murder, and narcotics violations. Other common reasons for incarceration are sexual offenses, kidnapping, assault, embezzlement, forgery, and fraud.

Remember--these characteristics are not true of all inmates. Some prisoners are highly educated and held good paying jobs in society. Some came from good homes and supportive families. The general characteristics listed are based on numerous studies of the majority of prison inmates. View each inmate not as they were, or even as they are. View them as the valiant men and women of God that they will become when the Gospel has supernaturally changed their lives! This is the goal of your prayers.

Many guilty inmates maintain their innocence as an escape mechanism. They cannot face what they did, so they rationalize or blame others. But there have also been many cases where inmates were released from prison after it was proven--beyond any doubt--that they were wrongly convicted. Your purpose is not to judge the guilt or innocence of an inmate. Your mandate is to pray for them.

Here are some specific ways to pray for prison inmates:

- Pray that God will convict those in need of repentance.
- Pray that God will help those who need to forgive others to do so.
- Ask God to heal their emotional wounds.
- Break the bonds of violence, suicide, homosexuality, and addictions--ruling spirits operating in many inmates' lives.
- Pray that God will give strength and wisdom to those who need to break harmful relationships.
- Pray for restoration between inmates and their families.
- Intercede for comfort and proper care for the children of inmates.
- Ask God to intervene in behalf of their pending legal matters.
- Ask God for justice, to rectify situations for those wrongly imprisoned.
- Pray that inmates will experience the life-changing power of God that will free them from guilt, shame, and other negative emotions.
- Pray that the inmate will use their time wisely while incarcerated.
- Pray that they will be prepared spiritually, emotional, and materially to reenter society.
- Ask for sustaining grace, strength, and deliverance for those who are wrongly imprisoned and/or incarcerated for their faith.
- Pray for guidance for inmates who are making parole plans.
- Pray that the parole board will look favorably upon those believing inmates who are worthy of parole.
- Pray for those who are facing execution, that they will be ready to meet God and be faithful to God in the face of death.
- Pray that God will make inmates receptive to faith-based programs operating in their institution.
- Ask God to send ministries to disciple new believers in the Word of God and teach them how to study the Bible and pray.

PRAYING FOR FAMILIES OF INMATES

Thousands of families are directly affected each year by having one of their loved ones incarcerated in a prison or jail. When a family member is arrested, it causes anxiety, fear, and uncertainty for their spouse, their children, and their parents. Family members often experience feelings of anger, resentment, loneliness, anxiety, and rejection.

Imprisonment results in a double crisis to a family. The first crisis is that a family member has been arrested for breaking the law. The second crisis is that the family is torn apart. Children face shame and loss when a parent is in prison. The children may be displaced, having to live with relatives, friends, foster homes, or in institutions. Many are not able to visit the incarcerated parent--perhaps because of court orders, their distance from the prison, or the financial situation of those keeping them which prohibits visiting (costs for transportation, food, housing).

Here are some specific prayer points for inmates' families:

- Pray for adequate housing, food, clothing, transportation, and employment. These are important needs if the incarcerated person was the bread-winner in the family.
- Pray that God will provide employment and finances for those left with the care of the inmate's children.
- Pray for the children, that God will place them in the right environment, whether it be in a foster home or with relatives.
- Pray that God will comfort the hearts of the children of inmates and raise them up as strong men and women of God.
- Ask God to provide favor for the family to obtain the social services they may need.
- Ask God to do a spiritual work in each family member while their loved one is incarcerated, drawing them to salvation through Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to guide the family to a loving and supportive church home.

PRAYING FOR EX-OFFENDERS

Here are some common needs of ex-offenders about which you can pray.

- Acceptance in a local church that is nurturing and supportive.
- Housing, food, and clothing.
- Vocational training and/or a job.
- Restoration between the ex-offender and their family and friends.
- Strength to face the temptations of former addictions and life-styles.
- Power to break negative relationships.
- Guidance from God in making good decisions.
- A strong support network of friends who will love and accept them, pray for and with them, and help them work through problems.

PRAYING FOR REENTRY MINISTRIES

Inmates released from prison have many needs as they reenter society. Some inmates are blessed to be returning to supportive families or churches upon release from prison, but if they do not have such a support network then post-prison ministry is very important. Here are some common types of ministries that assist former inmates in reentering society.

A Christian half-way house. This is a group home for ex-offenders and is called “half-way” because it is a transition between prison and getting back into normal society. This type of ministry usually provides housing, food, counseling, and job placement assistance to its residents. Participants may remain there for a set time dictated by authorities or until they can secure employment and housing. Some group homes have a discipleship program and participants are required to complete the program before moving out on their own.

The local rescue mission. Some cities operate rescue missions that accept ex-offenders into their discipleship and vocational programs.

Government or privately operated programs. Government and privately operated programs help ex-offenders be reintegrated back into society. These may include group homes, vocational counseling, and other assistance.

Church-based programs. Local churches may have an ex-offenders ministry, offering assistance in housing, counseling, and job placement. Business owners in the church may cooperate in these programs by providing jobs for ex-felons.

Christian colleges and Bible schools. Some schools offer tuition scholarships, room, and board to ex-felons who are believers and demonstrate educational and spiritual promise.

Obtain a list of the reentry ministries in your area, contact them for specific requests, and pray for them as they minister to ex-offenders. Here are some general requests for post-prison ministries:

- Pray for open doors for reentry ministries, that they will have favor with prisons and courts to receive ex-offenders.
 - Pray for God to raise up laborers for spiritual harvest in these ministries.
 - Pray for God to raise up additional post-prison ministries. This a great need!
 - Pray for protection for workers ministering to ex-offenders.
 - Pray for power and anointing upon the workers.
 - Pray for adequate funding for reentry ministries.
 - Pray that post-prison ministries will network together in unity for the Kingdom.
- Bind the spirit of division.

CONCLUSION

Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for laborers to reap the great spiritual harvest of the world:

Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:37)

Not long after the disciples began praying for laborers for the harvest, they were thrust into the harvest-fields themselves. Do not be surprised if, after praying for prisons for awhile, you are drawn to minister to prisoners in additional ways. You may decide to visit an inmate, write them, or join a prison ministry or reentry organization. For guidelines on prison ministry, see the Harvestime International Network manual entitled "*You Came Unto Me*", a training manual for prison ministry available free online at <http://www.harvestime.org>.

By accepting the mandate to pray for prison related ministries--by marching fearlessly past the rows of razor wire and armed guard posts in the spirit world through your prayers--you are going into the very depths of spiritual darkness to mine precious gems for the Lord. You have become part of an exciting team--a world-wide network of prayer warriors who are interceding for prisons, prison ministries, inmates, and their families.

Through intercessory prayer, you can continue to raise up spiritual sons and daughters behind prison bars until the Lord Jesus Christ returns. Don't ever be discouraged. Don't ever lose the vision.

As you pray, remember God's promise:

*"I will break in pieces the gates of brass
And cut the bars of iron.
I will give you the treasures of darkness
And hidden riches of secret places,"
(Isaiah 45:2-3)*

The riches of secret places and the treasures of darkness are the men and women who will be set free spiritually through your prayers.

Don't ever give up on an inmate. Don't ever let go of them spiritually. You are the lifeline of God extended to them through intercessory prayer. Your prayers can make the difference between success and failure, life and death, Heaven and Hell.