



Fatalism Prayer Guide

THE ISSUE: THE POWER OF BELIEFS

Poverty is complex. For decades, the world has sought to understand what causes poverty in order to know how to address it. There are a web of factors that may affect a person experiencing poverty: lack of education and income opportunities, poor infrastructure (like roads, markets, schools, electricity), illness and lack of access to medical care. There are often societal causes, like oppression of a people group or of women, and personal choices, like substance abuse or poor work ethic. There are man-made disasters, like war and environmental degradation. The list goes on and on. To make it more difficult, these issues often feed into and build on one another.

Underlying all the interwoven contributors to poverty, there is something deeper: Satan's lies. Jesus refers to Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44). And why does he lie? What is his goal? Jesus tells us that, too: Satan seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He feeds off of brokenness, sorrow, and destruction.

That's why, if we want to help people move out of poverty, we must seek to understand what lies Satan is using to create brokenness.

All of us hold all kinds of beliefs—some based in truth and some on lies. Many of these beliefs are so ingrained in us through our culture and life experiences that we don't even realize we have them and would certainly never think to question them. Without someone pointing out the flaws in our belief system, it is nearly impossible to examine and change them on our own. People experiencing poverty believe lies that keep them poor. Societies of people believe lies that cause them to create broken and oppressive systems that keep some people in poverty (like government corruption or the Indian caste system). And then those of us who want to help bring our own lies into the situation.

THE IMPACT OF FATALISM

One of the most common lies we see in the Majority World is fatalism—the belief that our fate, or destiny, is set and outside of our control. Fatalism is hopelessness. It says, “We were born poor and we’ll die poor. The future will be the same as today.” Imagine the impact this lie has on a person experiencing poverty:

- Why send your child to school, when they are destined to be a subsistence farmer (or day laborer, or go to prison...) like generations before them?
- Why work harder in your field (or minimum wage job or market stall), when no amount of hard work will change the amount of crop that is fated to grow?
- Why try to solve problems like water shortages or child mortality, when these problems are our lot in life?
- Why dream of a different future, when your destiny is set and nothing can change?

FATALISTIC BELIEF SYSTEMS

ANIMISM

Animism is a traditional belief system with variations found throughout much of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The basic belief of animism is that everything in creation has a spirit or spiritual element—from rocks to animals to dead ancestors—and that suffering and prosperity happen at the whims of the spirits. To find the cause of suffering (like sickness or a poor harvest) and to alleviate it, an animist will look to the spiritual realm. In traditional religions, people would seek the help of a Shaman or witch doctor to try to affect their outcomes. For an animist, everything is spiritual, therefore much of life is mysterious and unexplainable. An African believer explained, “This fatalistic mindset leads to failure to find alternatives and solutions, the sense that putting forth effort is a waste of time, not challenging the status quo because ‘all will end where they are meant to be.’ It is difficult for animists to make plans or have new ideas, so we see cyclical life choices in individuals and people groups.” She points out that Animist-background Christians, if they are not disciplined to understand otherwise, carry these ideas with them. She says, “Even prayer is not done trusting in God’s leading for changed actions, so it reinforces the idea that the outcome is already set and suffering is ‘God’s will.’”

HINDUISM

Fatalism is woven into Hinduism, causing many to accept the caste system, huge class divides that leave millions in extreme poverty, and all kinds of suffering. One Hindu-background believer described Hindu fatalism this way, “In Hinduism, the belief is that your actions affect not only your present life, but life in the next birth. It takes many births to reach human birth. Your actions in your previous birth affect what form you will take in the next birth AND your suffering and/or joy in the human birth. Hence the fatalism: your suffering is caused by your actions in your previous birth, which you cannot change now; by accepting it, you can pay for all your past-birth sins in the this birth, so that in your next birth you might have no more suffering. This leads to accepting our pain stoically, knowing there is nothing we can do about it.”

FATALISM IN CHRISTIANITY

Without a theology of God's good intentions for all of life, even Christians often default to fatalistic thinking. Rather than seeking to overcome problems, believers can fall into a fatalistic acceptance of them. Some believe that whatever is must be God's will. Others just remain in the fatalistic mindset of their culture because they have never learned what the Bible has to say about bringing change. When churches are asked to draw a map of how they would like their community to look in five years, they often struggle with the task, admitting, "We never imagined it could look different" and asking things like, "Can we draw a bridge...a school...a road?"

For those from the West, it can be difficult to understand this fatalistic mindset. For the most part, we've been taught to believe that, with hard work, almost any problem can be identified and solved. And yet, many wealthier people retain a subtle fatalism in how we think about those who are poor. Perhaps we shake our heads at the conditions in inner cities with a feeling of, "We've tried everything; nothing works; the problems can't be fixed." Or we question whether our government should be giving international aid because, "It does no good; they won't change." Or we quote Jesus, saying, "The poor will always be with you."

THE TRUTH THAT OVERCOMES FATALISM

Fatalism is one of Satan's most destructive lies. Yet it crumbles in the light of biblical truth. The whole Bible narrative defines humankind as divine-image-bearers who are designed to be creative and to steward the rest of creation. Our choices and efforts can change the course of history. When Jonah finally chose to obey God and preach in Nineveh, the whole city repented and was spared from God's wrath. Joseph's use of his talents and skills resulted in Egypt and all her neighbors surviving a seven-year famine. Ananias obediently sought out Saul, who had been persecuting Christians, and prayed for him to receive the Holy Spirit; Saul (rechristened Paul) went on to spread the gospel to at least 50 cities and authored much of the New Testament.

The Bible also shows us that God is intimately involved in all of life. He has a grand design, a redemptive plan for all of history. He works all things for our good (Romans 8:28), He plans to prosper us (Jeremiah 29:11), and He has prepared in advance good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

As we understand these biblical truths, we gain hope that the future can be different than the present and we begin to understand our role in seeing God's kingdom here on earth. The truth sets us free to make new choices, to work hard, and to seek solutions to whatever problems we face.

The destructive power of fatalism cannot be broken by human efforts alone. We need God's truth and the Holy Spirit to intervene. The great news is, He is already at work uprooting this lie in His church around the world. Believers who have thrown off this lie are experiencing transformation. Hope is restored. Problems that they have lived with for generations are being solved within a few years. Communities are moving out of poverty, and God is receiving glory. Please join us in praying for more and more people to be freed from the lie of fatalism.

HOW TO PRAY

- **Begin by worshiping God** for who He is—Creator, loving Father, Savior, Redeemer of all the brokenness in the world. Thank Him for how He has revealed His redemption plan in His word and for how He has used people throughout history to accomplish that redemption plan. Thank God for the things He is doing now in churches around the world to awaken His people to the life-giving truths of the Bible.
- Let's ask the Holy Spirit to reveal our own fatalistic attitudes and renew our minds with truth.
- Pray for **Christians** bound by fatalism to know the truth and that the truth would set them free (John 8:32). Pray that they would have restored hope and would gain a vision for what God desires for their lives. Pray for opportunities for people to develop their skills and gifts, so that they can take steps toward a life that is different than their ancestors' or those around them.
- Pray for **communities and nations** who have systems built on fatalism that lock people in poverty. Pray for the leaders of the nations to gain a vision for God's unique plan for individuals, families, communities, and societies—for development of potential and for well-being. Pray for them to see the path for communities and nations to be transformed. Pray for them to have the courage and strength to work toward that vision.
- Pray for those trapped in **religions that promote fatalism**. Pray that they would hear the gospel and find life in Christ. Pray for revelation of the character of God, especially of His goodness and His faithfulness. Pray for people to know God as a loving Father whose plans are for good, for a hope, and a future. Pray for their eyes to be opened to God's desires for their lives.
- Pray for **pastors and denominational leaders** to have their eyes opened to anywhere biblical truth has been warped by fatalistic thinking. Pray that fatalism would be broken in their own hearts and minds, and that they would be able to teach their congregations and students the truth of humankind's purpose in God's redemptive plan.
- Pray for those **seeking to alleviate poverty**, especially Christian-based organizations, to know how to address and overcome fatalism among those they work with. Pray for the Holy Spirit to inspire their teachings and practices so that they reinforce truth. And pray that God will work in the hearts and minds of those whom they seek to serve, making them "fertile soil" for biblical truth that would take root and bring change to their lives.
- Let's **thank God** for hearing our prayers, trusting that He is at work to answer them and to tear down the lie of fatalism among vulnerable people.

SCRIPTURES

Praying through scriptures and songs as we intercede for vulnerable people can help us connect with the heart of God.

Scriptures for meditation

- Isaiah 43:18-19
- Jeremiah 29:4-13
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-15
- Deuteronomy 30:15-16
- Genesis 1:27-28
- John 8: 31-34

SONGS & HYMNS

"I Am No Victim" by
Kristene DiMarco

"Break Every Chain" by
Tasha Cobbs Leonard

"God of This City" by
Chris Tomlin

MORE RESOURCES ON THE POWER OF BELIEFS

Coramdeo.com - a source for online courses and many articles on topics related to worldview. A good place to start would be "What is a Biblical Worldview" by Scott Allen (5-page document)

Discipling Nations, by Darrow Miller - carefully unpacks the statement that "ideas have consequences" and shows how truth can bring transformation. (320 page book)

Nurturing Truth and Confronting Lies - a booklet produced by Reconciled World that outlines the principles and practice of confronting cultural lies that hold people in poverty. (48-page booklet)

Was Jesus fatalistic? Examining Jesus' statement, "The poor will always be with you."

"Loving Money is Suicide" - John Piper talks about John 12:1-8 (5 minute audio and/or transcript)

"What does Jesus mean, 'The poor will always be with you?'" - an article which appeared in Relevant Magazine (4-minute read)