

Praying the Prayer that Moves Heaven

By

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Pour out your Heart to God in Earnest Prayer

As humans, we are but clay--we are fragile and vulnerable. At prayer, we are supposed to implore the greatest power in the universe to have pity on us and to come to our aid. We are supposed to throw ourselves on the mercies of God as we desperately call upon Him. Our souls are hunted day and night; our lives are tearing apart before our eyes; our businesses are in terminal coma and near death.

But the sad truth is that many of us do not know how to pray an earnest imploring prayer that touches the heart of God and thereby provoke His swift intervention. This is largely because, first, we often fail to appreciate the dangers that threaten us at every turn, much less articulate them in prayer. This world is "the valley of the shadow of death", full of perils and tragic unknowns which often catch people unawares.

Another is that we seem to have lost the fervent dynamic of the Biblical saints, both of the OT and NT. They prayed with zeal and heartfelt earnestness. God was their succour or all was bleak, no hope!

This is the kind of prayer Jeremiah, the lamenting prophet, exhorted his lamenting people lamenting their hard fate to pray.

The year was 586 B.C. Jerusalem had been sacked, the temple burnt and the king deported. Both royal and commoner blood flowed freely in the streets. There was no solace anywhere. The city of peace had been thrown into chaos, the city of joy turned into one of wailing and lamentation. A city bustling with life was now reduced to despair and ruins. Innocent babies cried for the attention of their dead parents, and parents wailed over their dead children. Fractured lives, broken homes, orphaned children and widowed women and disenfranchised men defined the demographics of Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been sapped of all strength, its reduced people to wrecks. Babylon rode roughshod over them, and they could not withstand the power of the Babylonian monarch. The situation was grave, if not hopeless. The only source of hope was God, and Jeremiah's recommended prayer was the prayer to prompt Him to act:

"Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward Him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street" (Lam. 2:19).

A pall of grief and despondency hung over Jerusalem. But the prophet prodded them, 'Don't sit resigned to your fate, whining and brooding. Arise and cry out to God to do something about your situation--your children who are on the point of death from famine. Don't be restrained in your supplications. Pour out your heart to Him'.

It's tempting to give in to despair when we are overwhelmed by dire circumstances about which we are powerless to do a thing as the people of Jerusalem experienced. It's only human to feel so--we are often caught inadequate when crises break out. But then, let's not forget that there is a greater power we could always call upon to intervene and turn the situation around.

And we must call upon Him with all earnestness. "Cry out", let your voice be heard in His holy Temple as David says in Ps 18 with an air of triumph: "In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth" (Ps 18:6-7).

In crying out to the LORD for help, don't hold back; bare your soul to Him. Have a heart-to-heart conversation with Him as you would with an intimate dear friend. Keep nothing from Him. You are standing before One who has your welfare at heart, whose love and care for you infinitely surpasses that of any of your friends or relatives, none of whom, by the way, could help you the way God alone can help and restore you. For all you know, they may even be in the same soup with you. So "cast all your anxieties on Him" in prayer (1 Pet. 5). Unburden yourself to your Heavenly Father who loves and cares for you best and has the power to truly lift you up. Tell Him your innermost feelings and concerns; let Him into your soul. Although He knows all about your soul, this time you are inviting Him to address its deepest anxieties and groans. Thereafter, His peace will reign in your soul. We read in Phil. 4:6-7:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (ESV).

This was the prayer the distraught and lamenting people of Jerusalem needed to pray. Their plight called for only one prayer--the prayer that would tug at the heartstrings of God:

"Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom Thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

"The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied" (Lam. 2:20-21).

The prophet urges the supplicants to bare it all in the raw. Tell the Lord that things have got so desperate that mothers have resorted to cannibalism and that on their own children. They kill, cook and eat their sweet little darlings they took years to raise, feed and care for. Although you sinned against Him to bring upon yourself this hellish judgment, don't spare Him the unpleasant details. Let Him feel the agony of your plight.

Serious situations call for earnest prayer. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, they didn't sleep on their predicament nor resigned to it. They rose "at midnight" and "Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and THE PRISONERS HEARD THEM" (Acts 16:25). And what was the result?

"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (v. 26).

Paul and Silas prayed what I call a concentrated anointed prayer. Their prayer service was joyous but vigorous. *"And everyone's bands were loosed"*. And the jailer "came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace" (vv. 29-36).

Earnest prayer prayed feelingly in the power of the Holy Ghost produces blessings which not only benefit us but also those around us and even beyond. If so, don't be mean to yourself and others. Pour out your heart to God in prayer and pray with joy and gusto! Heaven has been stirred, and "a great earthquake" of freedom, conversion and baptism is on the way. It piles on. The blessings and effects of earnest prayer are imponderable. "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its working" (Jam. 5:16 *Grk*).

However, it is not always that pouring out one's heart in prayer will necessarily mean praying or singing aloud or even be practical to do so. Sometimes we may only mutter the supplication, but it will still be an effective way of expressing our inner feelings and pleas to God. Such was barren Hanna's prayer as she stood praying in the temple of Yahweh in Shiloh. And she was an amazing sight to Eli, the high priest, even amusing to him but not for long:

"And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

"And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

"And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.

"Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

"And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

"And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

"Count not Thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

"Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him" (1 Sam. 1:10-17).

No loud cries. The key was the sincerity of her heart and the earnestness of her petition to God. In the process, she averted the possible taunts of her rival Peninnah (vv. 6-7) who would surely have used her sorrowful pleas to mock her had she prayed loud enough for her to hear. Nevertheless, Hanna's silent prayer worked mightily. Its efficacy was made manifest when Yah granted her request and gave her the child Samuel, who would become a great prophet and the writer of the Book of I Samuel, followed by five other children (1:19-20; 2:20-21).

The hostile environment Hannah found herself in necessitated that she prayed silently but earnestly and feelingly to God. Although here the words are barely audible, it is the heart that prays from the depth of its agony suffused with sincerity.

What is the Best time to Pray?

The time of prayer the prophet recommends is "the beginning of the night watches". This referred to the three equal divisions (four hours each) into which the ancient Jews divided the night. The first watch was from 6pm (the time of going to bed) to 10pm; the second watch was from 10pm to 2am; and the third watch was from 2am-6am. By the time of Jesus when the Romans ruled Judah, the Jews had four night watches of three hours each; namely 6pm - 9pm; 9pm - 12midnight; 12am -3am, and 3am -6am (Matt. 14:25; Luke 12:38). So, in effect, praying at the beginning of each watch of the night amounts to *praying throughout the night*, as Jesus did in Luke 6:12: "And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued ALL NIGHT in prayer to God".

The outcome of this all-night prayer of Jesus was two-fold: He received clearance and discernment from the Father in choosing the Twelve Apostles (vv. 13-16); then, He received a fresh additional endowment of power in healing multitudes of sick and demonically oppressed people who thronged to Him "out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon", "for there went virtue [power] out of Him, and healed them all" (vv. 17-19).

Our Master Jesus prayed "all night" to set us an example (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6). But how many of us will find *all-night praying* a comforting thought?

While there is no definite commandment that believers should always pray at night--and indeed the commandment is to "pray without ceasing" at all times (1 Thess. 5:17; Eph. 6:18)--or that it's the ideal time for God to listen to our prayer, the night is, nevertheless, the optimum time to pray. For one thing, it's a time of least distraction making for focused prayer. For another, it's the time the powers of darkness are most active and therefore an opportune time to counter them through prayer.

But isn't night-time the time sleep is sweetest?

Well, hear what the Book of Proverbs have to tell you:

"Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.

"Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler"
(Prov. 6:4-5).

The arrow is aimed at your soul in the dead of night, but here you are snoring away on your velvety, bouncy bed as though you have no care in the world! You have no appreciation of the dangers that stalk you, even though heaven may even be afraid for you!

As He envisaged the disaster that would engulf Jerusalem in a few years' time (the Roman invasion of 70 AD), Yeshua "wept over it" when He drew near and saw the city, "Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

A few days later, the scene cuts to the Garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus speaks in a voice of exasperation as He wakes up His disciples in those last nail-biting moments leading up to His betrayal and subsequent death on a cruel cross, "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" (Matt. 26:40).

But then, He knew they were flesh and so commented: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 41).

But don't take eternal solace in those words. The Lord said them some days before the historic day of Pentecost when the Church was "endued with power from on high". The flesh did not always restrain the disciples from the delights of the spirit. The days immediately preceding this Pentecost, in which the resurrected but not yet ascended Master had breathed on the disciples to receive the Holy Ghost (as preliminary to the Pentecost outpouring, John 20:22), and the days following it, saw a Church immersed in prayer and fasting in the "upper room" (Acts 1:13-14, 2:42), at a spontaneously organized prayer meeting after the apostles Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin who had them arrested for healing a lame man in the name of Yeshua (Acts 4:23-30), and in the house of the mother of John Mark when, after killing James, King Herod Agrippa I imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:5, 12). Now, the very night before he was to be condemned to death, the Lord sent His angel to bring Peter out of prison in direct answer to their prayer.

The disciples were now an empowered Church, and it showed in their prayer! In the prayer held after the Sanhedrin (council of Jewish leaders) arrested and questioned Peter and John, the assembled believers prayed so fervently that the place shook as a visible sign of the mighty power of God their prayers evoked (Acts 4:31).

And it was not just the Jerusalem church. The church in Antioch "fasted and prayed", and "the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

The prayerful New Testament Church we encounter in the Book of Acts was not an assembly of men and women of the flesh but a Spirit-empowered Church. It therefore follows that a church or believer weak in prayer is weak in Spirit, for "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26).

So be filled with the Spirit through Bible study and the singing of spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16) and energize your prayer life. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

The demonic forces against whom we fight will gladly weaken you in spirit through indolence and a love of worldly entertainment and pleasure so they can deprive you of one of the vital weapons of the Spirit God has given you for victory over them--"the sword of the Spirit" wielded through prayer!

There is never a Reason not to Pray

Today, I challenge you to pray always--and especially nightly--with all earnestness. All is not well yet. You could pray more to improve your business, increase in anointing, keep the powers of darkness at bay and bless others in ways you could never foresee nor quantify.

God actually laments those followers of His who, in the mistaken belief that all is well and always will be, live a cushy life of ease and refuse to pray. He says disaster is afoot, and they will be the first victims--completely caught napping:

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!

"Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: be they better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?

"Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;

"That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;

"That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David;

"That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

"Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed" (Amos 6:1-7).

You could do better than this. Be moved by a sense of your vulnerability as a trouble-prone human being to ever draw near the throne of grace with all sincerity and confidence - as expressed in *bluntness or openness* (Grk) - "that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Amen!

Song: NIPA YE MO BO AWURADE SE...