

PRAYERS OF THE ANCIENTS

Prayers usually have two forms: 1) to offer God heartfelt thanksgiving, worship, and honor; and 2) to ask, entreat, petition, supplicate, implore, or otherwise seek God on behalf of ourselves or others. Prayers can occur at regular times of the day or they can be inspired by the urgency of a crisis that arises. For each of us, our prayers are unique because they are the result of our individuality and our experiences. When we first began to pray our thoughts were simple; usually focusing on asking for forgiveness and Godly wisdom and strength. Although they were sincere, over time our prayers change. As time passes and we experience more of this physical life and we grow in understanding of God's word, our prayers are principally changed by one thing that has the greatest impact in our lives—suffering. Trials change us and, as we grow in the Holy Spirit, our prayers become wholehearted.

Wholehearted simply means with complete sincerity and faith. Sadly, it is most often through hardships and sufferings that human beings can grow to become wholehearted. People that have been given everything and are never denied anything are shallow and uncaring, thinking only of themselves. They are incapable of loyalty and compassion. The world around them exists only to gratify their lusts. Think about it. People that have experienced dire privation are debtors because they receive more than they can give. Although some resort to violence under these circumstances, many experience something life changing through suffering. Sometimes this is from the charity of strangers. They were given food, clothes, or money when they needed it most. Some even owe their lives because of the sacrifice of others. Those who are indebted to others know humility. Humility binds us to others, even strangers. This is what God has done for us. We owe God and Jesus Christ debt that we can never repay and trials are a test of our humility and love whether they fall upon us or others.

God desires prayers from humble hearts and the only way to please Him is through sacrifice. Not the sacrifice of animals but something of ourselves. *Sacrifice* means to surrender or give up, allow personal injury, or accept a disadvantage for the sake of something or someone else. Prayers are a sacrifice to God. Notice these from Psalms:

PSALMS 51:15-17 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise. 16 For **You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.** 17 **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart— these, O God, You will not despise.**

PSALM 141:2 **Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.**

The Bible is full of sacrificial prayers. Reading them lets us actually know something about the giver. Key to understanding why prayers are so important to God is our heart. It is through prayer that God knows our inner thoughts and emotions: "The

spirit of a man *is* the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart.” (Proverbs 20: 27).

God searches the deepest parts of our heart. He sees through the walls we put up for others, He hears beyond our words, and He touches us in places we cannot reach. One of the most heartfelt is a prayer of Daniel, who was “greatly beloved” of God:

DANIEL 9: 3-4, 7, 9, 13, 16-19 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. 4 And **I prayed to the LORD my God**, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, ... 7 “O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You. ... 9 “To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ... 13 “As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. ... 16 “O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. 17 “**Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications**, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. 18 “O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for **we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies**. 19 “O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

Daniel is obviously mourning for his people. They were captives in Babylon because of their disobedience. Knowing their punishment was from God and seeing the suffering, Daniel called upon “the LORD my God” to be merciful. His desire is for God to put an end to the pain and agony of the people. He knows that God is the source of all righteousness, mercies, and forgiveness. His request is powerful and direct, yet with the humility of one who has suffered. He considers himself God’s servant. In his humility, he is small before the “great and awesome God”, so much so that God even has to bend down (“incline Your ear”) to hear his small voice. Imagine the tears when he says, “O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God.” Daniel wholeheartedly appeals to God for the Jews’ salvation.

Another magnificent prayer was spoken by a master of all manner of prayers—David:

2 SAMUEL 7: 18-22, 24, 27-29 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD; and he said: “**Who am I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? 19 “And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD; and You have also spoken of Your servant’s house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? 20 “Now what more can David say to You? For You, Lord GOD, know Your servant. 21 “For Your word’s sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them.** 22 “Therefore You are great, O Lord GOD. For *there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ... 24 “For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, LORD, have become their God. ... 27 “For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed *this* to Your servant, saying, ‘I will build you a house.’ **Therefore Your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You.** 28 “And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. 29 “Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken *it*, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever.”*

Like Daniel, David considers himself a servant to God. However, the use of this word was as a worshipper of God. Both men called God by the name He revealed to the Israelites while in Egypt—Yehovah—a name that describes His eternity. David absolutely believes God’s promises and was moved to thanksgiving when he said that he “found it in his heart” the need to pray. The word *found* literally means “to come forth” so his prayer came forth from his heart.

David was constantly praying and put many of them to music. He trained his son Solomon to be devoted to God as well and the sense of heartfelt humility is evident in this prayer:

1 KINGS 3:7-9 “Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but **I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.** 8 “And Your servant *is* in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. 9 “Therefore **give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?**”

The king who reigned over a vast land filled with wealth and peace, saw himself as a little child before Yehovah, his God. His desire was not for riches or power but to serve the people in righteousness and wisdom. This came from seeing the horrors of wars, murders, and traitors during the reign of his father David. It came from seeing the lust and greed of a few that produced suffering and death for many. It came from seeing injustice as in the case of the woman whose child died and then tried to deprive another woman of her own infant child.

Prayer is true communications with God. Not just in words, but in the innermost thoughts of our hearts. They cannot be concealed from God when we pray because

the Holy Spirit “groans” (sighs, murmurs, speaks inaudibly) unspoken words to God (Romans 8:26). God in turn encourages, teaches, and uplifts us through His Holy Spirit.

Read the prayers of the ancients including Nehemiah 1, Psalm 4, Psalm 61 and others. Read the prayers of Jesus. Pray always. Pray in *faith*. Pray for yourself. Pray for your brethren. Pray for this world. Most of all, pray for the Kingdom to come! Open your heart to God for He is faithful to His promises.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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