

## Praying Like the Psalmists, Part 4 Viewing Prayer as the Psalmists Did

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### Introduction:

To many of us, the **Psalms** are the epitome of a great prayer life. We love the language, the emotion, the fervor demonstrated throughout this Old Testament prayer guide and hymnal. I am certain, as most of us are, if we just got into these psalms and let them guide us, our prayer lives would grow in profound ways. We have already spent some time learning from these psalms. The first step was about our relationship with God and so we've learned to look at God as the psalmists did and also at ourselves as the psalmists did. Now, before we actually look at any aspects of the prayers themselves, we need to note how the psalmists viewed prayer. If we want to pray as the psalmists did, we have to get these four keys down. We have to view prayer as they did. Otherwise, we just won't pray.

### Discussion:

- I. Prayer is necessary.
  - A. The sheer volume of prayer in the **Psalms** demonstrates the necessity the psalmists felt in prayer. However, their concept of necessity was not a rule-based necessity.
  - B. In our sermons, we might answer the question, "Why pray?" by making point #1, "Because God commanded it (cf. **1 Thessalonians 5:17**)."
  - C. **Psalm 145:17-20** declares the Lord is near those who call on Him. He saves those who cry out to Him. But the wicked He will destroy. In this context, the wicked are those who don't call out to Him. Prayer is necessary to have the Lord near and to have the Lord's salvation, not because prayer is the rule, but because prayer works.
  - D. In the final analysis, the psalmists grasped that they did not pray because God needed their prayers, but because they needed to pray and they needed what God offered through prayer (cf. **Psalm 50:12-15**).
- II. God hears.
  - A. With the possible exception of **Psalm 88**, even the laments recognize God hears. Despite the continuing turmoil, the psalmists continually asserted God heard them.
    1. **Psalm 6:8-9**—"Depart from me, all you workers of evil,/for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping./The LORD has heard my plea;/the LORD accepts my prayer."
    2. **Psalm 18:6**—"In my distress I called upon the LORD;/to my God I cried for help./From his temple he heard my voice,/and my cry to him reached his ears."
    3. **Psalm 61:5**—"For you, O God, have heard my vows..."
    4. **Psalm 106:44**—"Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress,/when he heard their cry."
    5. **Psalm 116:1-2**—"I love the LORD, because he has heard/my voice and my pleas for mercy./Because he inclined his ear to me,/therefore I will call on him as long as I live."
  - B. If the psalmists thought their words were simply going out into the air, they would have stopped long before 150 of them were compiled. The psalmists laments would have ended quickly if the One to whom they were complaining didn't listen. But they believed He was near and was listening, so they prayed.
- III. Prayer works.
  - A. I use this heading accommodatively because actually God is the one who works. Our prayers contain no mystical power that accomplishes anything. Rather, the one to whom we pray has the power and acts based on our prayers.
  - B. Prayer, as a means to connect with God and seek help and deliverance, works. That is, it accomplishes the job we need done.
    1. **Psalm 34:4**—"I sought the LORD, and he answered me/and delivered me from all my fears."
    2. **Psalm 40:1-3**—"I waited patiently for the LORD;/he inclined to me and heard my cry./He drew me up from the pit of destruction,/out of the miry bog,/and set my feet upon a

rock,/making my steps secure./He put a new song in my mouth,/a song of praise to our God.”

3. **Psalm 81:7**—“In distress you called, and I delivered you;/I answered you in the secret place of thunder...”
4. **Psalm 118:5**—“Out of my distress I called on the LORD;/the LORD answered me and set me free.”
5. James could have used many of the psalmists as his basis for saying prayer is effective in **James 5:16**.

#### IV. Prayer is life.

- A. That is especially true regarding praise through prayer. A repeated statement among the **Psalms** is there is no praise in the grave or among the dead.

1. **Psalm 6:5**—“For in death there is no remembrance of you;/in Sheol who will give you praise?”
2. **Psalm 30:9**—“What profit is there in my death,/if I go down to the pit?/Will the dust praise you?/Will it tell of your faithfulness?”
3. **Psalm 88:10**—“Do you work wonders for the dead?/Do the departed rise up to praise you?”
4. **Psalm 115:17**—“The dead do not praise the LORD,/nor do any who go down into silence.”
5. **Psalm 118:17**—“I shall not die, but I shall live/and recount the deeds of the Lord.”
6. **Psalm 119:175**—“Let my soul live and praise you...”

- B. Certainly, these psalms speak of physical death, but their repeated statement cannot help but draw the parallel that where life is, there is praise. Where there is no praise, there is no life.

- C. Claus Westermann draws this conclusion:

All these sentences have the meaning that *only* there, where death is, is there no praise. Where there is life, there is praise.

The possibility that there could also be life in which there was no praise, life that did *not* praise God, does not enter the picture here. As death is characterized in that there is no longer any praise there, so praise belongs to life. The conclusion is not expressed in the O.T., but it must still have been drawn. There cannot be such a thing as true life without praise. Praising and no longer praising are related to each other as are living and no longer living...Nowhere is there the possibility of abiding, true life that does not praise God (Praise and Lament in the Psalms, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1981, p 159).

- D. The psalmists recognized the connection between praise and life. If we will pray as they did, we must recognize that connection as well. Otherwise, we are dead despite our religious practices.

#### Conclusion:

As we must view God and ourselves like the psalmists did, we must also have the right relationship with prayer. Before we will pray we have to feel in our innermost being that prayer is necessary; we have to believe God is listening; we have to believe it will work; we have to see the life in prayer. That final point is really the amazing one. It demonstrates a cycle with prayer. Do you want a good gauge of your spiritual life? Look at your praying. Assuming you are in Christ, to the degree that you are praying and praising God, you are alive. What is your prayer life like? What does it say about your life or death in Jesus?