

“Unto You, O Lord, I Lift Up My Soul” - A Service for Prayer

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction: Psalm 86:4

A. We have been bearing with a burden for over a year and a half that seems to be unprecedented in our own lifetime.

1. However, history shows that there have always been periods of great trial for the people of God.
2. Because such periods of time in the Bible seem so distant from us, we struggle to identify with them.
3. In our own nation, similar times of trial seem distant from us as well, and are equally difficult to empathize: the War Between the States, the Great Depression of 1929, WWII and rationing.
4. Ours is a generation that has not had to face a worldwide crisis with our nation severely divided -- until now.
5. In the past 19 months we have faced a nation divided by political parties in what appears to be an irreparable rift, a nation divided by racial tensions that may not be resolved in our lifetime, a virus that has killed over 4.5 million people, more than 663,000 of them were Americans. To put that into perspective, the number of deaths by US citizens in WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and 9/11 comes to 642,000, and a national media that prostitutes itself and its integrity for viewership, money, and its own warped political agenda.
6. Trust in one another is nearly non-existent, faith in the future died last year, and the few who express any hope are viewed as naïve.

B. We are burnt out, weary to the bone, sick at heart, and numb from the constant flow of increasingly worse news.

1. Even in spiritually strong churches like Trilacoochee, Tomlinson Run, Powers Ferry, Clermont, Lakeland, Plant City, et al, the elders look haggard, the preachers' shoulders sag, and the members' eyes are red from sorrow, fear, and lack of sleep.
2. And let's be completely honest, all congregations including the spiritually healthy ones are divided over these issues: race, politics, and how to locally address the virus.
3. What is holding us together is our love for each other and the fellowship we share. But that bond is being strained by the incessant barrage of burdens. I worry for the remaining strong congregations: Will the next crisis be the straw that breaks the camel's back?
4. In my lifetime, I cannot think of a time when we have had a greater need of the help of God.
5. And while it is evident that He has helped us this far, we are exhausted and fear we are reaching the limits of our strength.
6. Our strength is not enough, our patience is becoming fragile, and our love for God and our fellowship with one another is being weakened by the Adversary. We are not enough; we need the help of the Lord.

C. We need to pray to God; but not casually, not ritually, and not ordinarily.

1. Matt. 26:39

2. We need loud, honest, intense prayer
3. We need convicted, focused, driven prayer
4. We need persistent, insistent, consistent prayer
5. We need personal, specific, self-oriented prayer

I. LOUD, HONEST, INTENSE PRAYER

Heb. 5:7 - I sometimes wonder why God places such a high value on honesty in our prayers, even to the extent of putting up with unfair and even unrighteous outbursts. Some Biblical prayers seem angry and out of bounds.

Jeremiah griped about the unfairness of having to be burdened with the responsibility of speaking God's word. (Jer. 20:7-8). "O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; Everyone mocks me; For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, Violence and plunder! Because the word of the LORD was made to me A reproach and a derision daily."

Habakkuk accused God of deafness (Hab. 1:2-4). "O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, Violence! And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth."

Job conceded, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit do we have if we pray to Him?" (Job 21:15).

The Bible teaches us to pray with honesty. God wants us to come to Him with our complaints. If we march through life pretending to smile while inside we are bleeding, we dishonor the relationship. However, at some point reason must be restored to the end that we do not charge God with injustice over every prayer not answered as we wish it would be. What friend do you have that gives you everything you ask for when you ask for it without question? What family member do you have that grants your every request the moment you ask?

II. CONVICTED, FOCUSED, DRIVEN PRAYER

James 5:17-18 - When the brutal Assyrian king Sennacherib was laying siege to the city of Jerusalem in preparation to overrun it and destroy everyone, he boasted, "Behold, I have shut up Hezekiah like a bird in a cage." He sent a message to Hezekiah saying that Judah would be just like all of the other nations he conquered. King Hezekiah took his message into the temple of the Lord and "spread it out before the Lord" (Isa. 37:14). He then prayed to God for help.

Soon afterward, Isaiah sent a message to Hezekiah from the Lord: (Isa. 37:21-22). His prayer was answered that very night. (Isa. 37:29).

Do you know which are the most important words in this chapter? "Because you prayed." The three words that made all of the difference. The three words that ended the Assyrian conquest, deposed an emperor, and saved the nation of Judah. "Because you prayed" changed the course of Jewish history.

Now, what will you change with prayer? Not something as ordinary as physical health or steady jobs or personal safety, but what about eternal matters, the salvation of souls, the unhindered preaching of the word. In the Judgment, what will be different "because you prayed."

III. PERSISTENT, INSISTENT, CONSISTENT PRAYER

Luke 18:1, 7 - There is no force given to man that is more potent than the ability to stand before the throne of the Creator and talk to Him about our needs. By means of the mediation of Jesus Christ and the aid of the Spirit, we can enter into the presence of God and talk to Him anytime, anyplace, about anything, at any length, as often as we wish, and He will listen... every time to every one! He knows your name. You are special to God.

Jesus prayed often, occasionally praying all night. His prayers were fervent and full of love. His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, so He taught them the who, what, when, and why of prayer as well. One of His great lessons on prayer was to persevere in letting God know how serious we are. Faith is what gives our prayers substance. It is easy to become discouraged when we do not see the evidence of prayer in the short term.

The parable of Luke 18 is no as much about the unjust judge as about the determined nature of the widow. If we persist in seeking the blessings of our Father, He will grant them. Prayer is not a vending machine where we put in a quarter and get what we want immediately. It is not about whether God answered our prayer to our liking but whether or not our faith governs our reactions to His answers to our prayers. People often quit praying because God did not answer the way they wanted when they wanted. Faith is believing that God knows and will give the best answer. Prayer is not about me; it is about the Lord's will.

IV. PERSONAL, SPECIFIC, SELF-ORIENTED PRAYER

Psalms 86:1-7 - Have you ever been stuck in a conversation with someone who talks only about herself or himself? To be polite, you generate a conversation by asking questions. The other person proceeds to talk endlessly about herself, and she seldom asks you anything, or if she does, she rushes on to talk about herself before you can answer. I get irritated when someone comes to me ostensibly to ask for help with a Bible question, and before I can reply, they rush into answering their own question and defending it while I sit there bewildered by the barrage of words. It is all about them.

Now, imagine what it must be like for our heavenly Father to listen to our prayers. Some pray like kids on Santa's lap; "Dear God, I want a pony and a plastic rocket and an iPad and candy." The writer of Psalm 119 did not have that spirit. Instead, he solicited God's help in understanding the Word: "Open my eyes," he said, "that I may see wondrous things from Your law" (v. 18). As he prayed, he expressed how he treasured God's Word, calling it his delight. He prayed for himself, asking for things that will bring him closer to God and more useful in His service.

II. NOTHING ILLUSTRATES THIS MORE THAN THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

A. 1Chron. 4:9-10 - "Oh, that You would bless me indeed"

1. He knew he needed to pray for himself.
2. It somehow doesn't seem right to ask for ourselves. But unless we are in a position to help others or have resources to do so, our usefulness to them will be very limited

B. "Enlarge my territory"

1. He was asking for more responsibility; when one gets blessings, he also gets responsibilities.
 2. Picketers - "Give me rights," yet they don't picket for responsibilities.
 3. Increase my sphere of influence. Would we ever pray, "Lord, give me more to do, more to be accountable for?"
- C. "Your hand would be with me"
1. He got the blessings and the responsibilities, now what is he going to do with it?
 2. Lord piles blessings and burdens on us to teach us something: We can't do it by ourselves. But, with His help, we can do it all.
 3. Third part of the prayer of Jabez: bless me, work me, help me do it.
- D. "Keep me from evil that I might not cause pain"
1. Jabez prayed that the Lord would keep him from evil, that he might not cause pain. Sin causes pain! Sin hurts others!
 2. If we get the first three, suddenly we find ourselves making a difference for the Lord. Immediately Satan steps in. Notice the sequence.
 3. Satan didn't bother with us when we were just sitting there doing little
 4. Nothing makes an enemy or makes you a target quicker than to do good where another has failed or done wrong.
- E. "So God granted him what he requested" - James 5:16 - Surprised?
- F. We prayed that God would bless us after the difficult transition in 2018; He did and we began to recover in spirit and in number
1. We prayed that God would increase our territory; He did and we baptized seven people and help a number of others to be restored; our reach went nationally and internationally via the social media
 2. We prayed that God's hand would be with us; He answered us with opportunities to learn and grow through His word, and we have!
 3. We prayed to be kept from sin that we might do no harm and cause no pain; and as a congregation, we have enjoyed a rare and blessed relationship of peace and love with one another.
- G. And because of this, the Adversary wants Trilacoochee.
1. We worked hard with the Lord's help to appoint elders, and three weeks later we had to face the COVID crisis last year.
 2. We began to heal and return to forward progress and growth in the early summer, and we have been overwhelmed with sickness and loss in the past several weeks.
- H. The Adversary wants us; he can't have us. We are going to pray even more diligently and wait patiently for the Lord to turn the tide of loss for us.