

## 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 complete sincerity and commitment. Sadly enough, there really is no other way for human beings to become wholehearted except through hardships and sufferings. 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. Although some under these circumstances resort to violence, many experienced 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 have their lives because of the sacrifice of others. Those who owe something they can never repay 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, or permit injury or disadvantage to, for the sake of something or someone else. Prayers are a sacrifice TO God.

[FV] PSALMS 51:15-17 15 O LORD, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise, 16 **For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.**

[FV] PSALMS 141:2 **Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.**

The Bible is full of sacrificial prayers. Reading them lets us actually KNOW the heart of 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.

[FV] PROVERBS 20:27 The spirit of man [is] the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.

God searches the deepest parts of our heart. He sees through the walls we put up for other, 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:

[FV] DANIEL 9:3-4, 7, 9, 13, 16-19 And I set my face toward the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. 4 And I **prayed to the LORD my God** and made my confession, and said, "O LORD, the great and awesome God, keeping the covenant and mercy to those who love Him, and to those who keep His commandments, ...7 O LORD, righteousness [belongs] to You, but to us confusion of face, as at this day to the men of Judah and to the people of Jerusalem, and to all Israel who are near and who are afar off, through all the countries where You have driven them because they dealt treacherously with You. ... 9 To the LORD our God belong mercies and forgivenesses even though we have rebelled against Him. ...13 As [it is] written in the law of Moses, all this evil has come upon us. Yet we did not make our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. ...17 **And now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications,** and cause Your face to shine upon Your sanctuary that [is] desolate for the LORD'S sake. 18 O my God, incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name. **For we do not present our supplications before You on account of our righteousnesses, but because of Your great mercies.** 19 **O LORD, hear; O LORD, forgive;** O LORD, hearken and do. Do not delay, for Your own sake, O my God; for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

Daniel is obviously mourning for his people. They are captives in Babylon because of their disobedience. Knowing their punishment was from God and seeing the suffering, Daniel calls 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 ("bow down") to hear his small voice. Imagine the tears when he says, "O Lord, hear! O LORD, forgive! O LORD, hearken ... O my God." Daniel wholeheartedly appeals to God for the Jews' salvation.

Another magnificent prayer was spoken by a master of all manner of prayer - David.

[FV] 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 here?** 19 **And this was yet a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD.** But You have spoken also of Your servant's house for a great while to come. And [is] this the manner of men, O Lord GOD? 20 **And what can David say more to You? For You, O 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.** 22 Therefore You are great, O LORD God. For there is none like You, neither is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. ... 24 For You have established for Yourself Your

people Israel [to be] a people to You forever. And You, LORD, have become their God. ...27 For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed to Your servant, saying, 'I will build you a house.' **Therefore Your servant has found in his heart to pray this prayer to You.** 28 And now, O Lord GOD, You [are] that God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. 29 Therefore, now, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You. For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken. And with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever."

Like Daniel, David considers himself a servant to God. However, their use of this word was as worshippers of God. Both men called God by the name He revealed to the Israelites while in Egypt - Jehovah - a name that describes His eternity. David absolutely believes God's promises and was moved to thanksgiving when he said that he "found in his heart" a 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 his God as well and the sense of heartfelt humility is evident in this prayer:

[FV] 1 KINGS 3:7-9 And now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of David my father. And **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 numerous people who cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. 9 Now therefore, **give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil, for who is able to judge this, Your great people?"**

The king who reigned over a vast land filled with wealth and peace, saw himself as a little child before Jehovah, his God. His desire wasn't 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, prays inaudibly*) unspoken words (Romans 8:26) to God. God in turn encourages, teaches, and uplifts us through His Holy Spirit.

Read the prayers of the ancients. Read 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 the children. Pray for the Kingdom! Open your heart to God for He is faithful to His promises.