

LIFE CHANGING PRAYER – PART TWO

Prayer of the Weak in Faith

Pray until you can pray; pray to be helped to pray and do not give up praying because you cannot pray. For it is when you think you cannot pray that is when you are praying. - Spurgeon

Leonard Bernstein, the late conductor of the New York Philharmonic orchestra was asked what was the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation he replied, “*The second fiddle! I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm—that’s a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.*” It does not come naturally for God’s children to desire to play ‘second fiddle’ because second fiddle is a humble position.

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
James 4:10

E. M. Bounds said, “That which brings the praying soul near to God is humility of heart. That which gives wings to prayer is lowliness of mind. Pride, self-esteem, and self-praise effectually shut the door of prayer.” Many times it is the difficulties of life that bring us to the point of humility and weakness before the Lord. Paul gives an example of how our weakness brings us to the point of strength.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:10 (ESV)¹⁰ *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

It is easy to value physical strength just like Samson of the Old Testament did. He was a man known for his physical abilities. But it was only at the end of his life when he was physically weak that he became spiritually strong.

In most situations our first thought is not coming to God but instead our first thought is ‘I can do this.’ Our human nature wants to be ‘in control’. Our spiritual nature knows that we are not and longs to go boldly to God for help.

Read Micah 6:8 (ESV)⁸ *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Recognizing our weakness and being humble in our prayers is the appropriate way to approach the throne of grace.

Genesis 32 records one of the greatest prayers found in scripture prayed by a man who is not often remembered as being one of God’s humble servants. Jacob whose name means *he supplants* began his life by taking hold of his twin brother’s heel at birth. He continued to take hold of the possessions of others: his brother Esau’s birthright, his father’s blessing, and his father-in-law’s flocks and herds.

Nevertheless, the time arrived when Jacob found his ‘back against the wall’ when the LORD told him to return home! How would you feel if you knew you were about to come face-to-face with the person you had cheated out of their most precious possession? Jacob feared his family would ‘pay the price’ for the deceit of his earlier years.



When God called Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham, to Canaan (modern-day Israel) he called him out of the land of Haran (modern-day Iraq). Because of his deceit, Jacob fled from his home in Canaan to Haran. God’s long range design meant Jacob needed to get back to the place where he was called to be no matter the cost! Even though Jacob knew he was facing danger, he was obedient to God’s command to return to Canaan. Reminding us that no matter the danger our safest place is always inside the will of God.

In hindsight we can see the ‘bigger picture’ of God’s design for the life of Jacob. The region promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a ‘land bridge’ connecting three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa). It was not coincidence that God placed the people who would reveal the Messiah to the world on this bridge connecting three continents. This strategic location would serve as the starting point for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Jacob comes boldly to God when he realizes that he has no control of what is to come. His prayer is significant because it was prayed by a man who was very weak in faith even though he had a profound knowledge of God’s ways and God’s character. We find him praying in desperation and not in confidence.

Read Genesis 32:9-12 (ESV) ⁹ And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ ¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. ¹² But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

Like Jacob, when we face problems in life we can either run out screaming which accomplishes nothing OR we can **pause and pray**. In Jacob’s words we find a blueprint for prayer.

A mighty piece of weaponry in the battle of prayer
is God’s promise. - Spurgeon

Jacob approached the LORD on the basis of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and his descendents. This particular covenant is known as the Abrahamic Covenant based on the promise of the land to Abraham’s descendents. In order to fulfill that covenant Jacob asked God for the help he desperately needed to return to the land safely. Wiersbe reminds us that God’s commandments always involve God’s enablement. The

will of God will never lead us where the power of God can't protect us and provide for us. Jacob in his weakness knew his strength would come from his God.

The Abrahamic Covenant applied to Jacob and not to us. However, we are recipients of God's grace found in the New Covenant. As you know, the second major division of the Bible is called the New Testament. It tells of the life and ministry of Jesus and the growth of the early church. The word 'testament' is best translated as 'covenant.' The New Testament embodies the new covenant of which Jesus is MEDIATOR. **Hebrews 9:15 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

Even when we are confident that we are living within the will of God, it is still easy to become fearful. Jacob's imagination ran ahead of his knowledge of God. When he came to God in his weakness he was consumed with the thought that Esau was coming to destroy him. I personally can identify with Jacob's imagination since my thoughts often run ahead of my knowledge of God. This imagination weakens me when I worry over the 'what-ifs'.

Next, we see how when Jacob was weak, he became strong. As we listen in on his prayer, we hear this man who had been a lifelong schemer for his own purposes saying, *"I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant."* The steadfast love of God is mentioned frequently in the Bible. God's steadfast love is for every generation. In fact, we read of Jacob's own son in *Genesis 39:21 (ESV)* ²¹ *But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.* If we are to follow Jacob's pattern in prayer, we must humble ourselves and rest in the steadfast love of God.

Jacob was bold enough to remind God of His promises. We can do the same thing. If we have no specific promises of God to bring to mind, then we need to be in His Word more.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! **Psalms 95:6**

There are two prayers written by Paul in Ephesians. David Jeremiah says the second one may well be the most glorious prayer in the New Testament apart from the prayers of Jesus. Are you perplexed concerning what to pray? We are quick to copy things we like about our friends and family (from their recipes to color choices). It is advisable to make Paul's prayer our own!

Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV) ¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,* ¹⁶ *that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* ¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸ *may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* ²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Notice Paul's posture: *I bow my knees*. Wiersbe comments, "This must have been quite an experience for the Roman soldier chained to Paul!" The Bible nowhere commands any special posture for prayer. Abraham stood before the Lord when he prayed for Sodom and Solomon stood when he prayed to dedicate the temple. David sat before the Lord when he prayed about the future of his kingdom. And Jesus 'fell on His face' when He prayed in Gethsemane.

Some of the strongest Christians are often some of the weakest physically. Power from God does not necessarily bring physical strength. Power from God brings inner strength to surpass physical weaknesses. Paul does not ask for material possessions for the Ephesians but strengthening in the inner person. What an awesome prayer – to ask God to strengthen the inner person.

Paul also prayed that they would be *rooted and grounded in love*. Paul's mention of being *rooted* is a reference to the plant world. We have power in the Christian life, when we are rooted deeper and deeper. We experience Christian growth when our roots grow deeper into the love of Christ. Grounded is an architectural term. Wiersbe says of the second building program he experienced as a pastor, "we had to spend several thousand dollars taking soil tests because we were building over an old lake bed. For weeks, the men were laying out and pouring the footings. One day I complained to the architect, and he replied, 'Pastor, the most important part of this building is the foundation. If you don't go deep, you can't go high.' That sentence has been a sermon to me ever since."

Paul prayed for them *to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love*. Paul was praying that they would understand that God's love touches every corner of their lives. It should be our prayer for others and ourselves to understand that God's love is broad enough to cover the width of our life's experiences. God's love is long meaning it continues the entire length of our lives. It is not turned on and off. God's love is high rising to the pinnacles of our times of joy and celebration. His love is deep enough to reach the depths of our discouragement, despair, and even death.

A doxology is a short hymn of praise and Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology when he says: *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us*. There is no limit to our God's power! We have a glorious God!

In the book *In His Steps*, there is a description of two sisters attending the same worship service. One sat enthralled by the worship. She was described as being like fire. Her sister sat beside her listening to the same service yet remaining unmoved and transfixed as if she were ice. Two sisters - one on fire for God and the other remaining cold like a block of ice.

The same Divine Power is available to everyone. Some choose salvation and some do not. Among believers some catch fire and others remain like ice. Let us light the fire of our praises to God to melt the coldness in the hearts around us. And when our own hearts feel cold and indifferent let us cast our cares upon Jesus. He will do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.