

Crutches of Prayer

Psalm 111.1-10

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To pray is to purposely open our hearts to God, because we ache, we desire for God.

He knows you, you have no secrets, He knows what goes on in your heart. So prayer is not to inform God of something that He did not know before.

Prayer is much more the communication between you and God that helps you to align to the heart of God. And to his will for you life.

Prayer to God should be, as it were, a hamburger. We begin with praise, we end with praise, that is like the two parts of the BigMac. And in between is that messy communication with God.

When we pray we can be brutally honest about how we feel. Throw it out. But it is not only asking and more asking. Psalm 111, we have read it, shows us that thankfulness is also an important part of prayer.

Psalm 111 is, by the way, a perfect example of the sandwich I mentioned. It begins with “Praise the Lord, Hallelujah.” And it ends with, “His Praise endures forever.”

1. Thankfulness for his works and his faithfulness

The tone of the Psalm is set immediately in the first line: “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.”

God is not interested in half-hearted prayers. The singer of the Psalm begins his prayer because his heart is all on flame: whether others will follow him or not, is a secondary matter for him. He will at once begin and continue.

What does he thank God for? For the works of God. They are great, full of majesty and honor.

We should be so thankful to God for his great works. He created a fantastic universe; he made the sun to warm the earth, and he gives rain, and harvests. We can list a thousand beautiful works of God that we are thankful for.

It is immediately clear in the Psalm, that the writer does not just thank God for the beauty of nature, or this awesome universe - but that he thanks God for his works that He enacted for blessing his own people.



When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, God sent his redemption, he gave them manna to eat in the desert, and in a powerful way God gave them a land as their own inheritance. And God gave Israel his commandments.

When Jesus ate his Last Supper with his disciples, in the night that he was betrayed, they sang this Psalm 111 together at the table. That was the Jewish tradition at the celebration of the Feast of Passover. This specific Psalm.

For Jesus, the song about the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt had a very acute meaning. He knew that He himself was to become the true Sacrificial Lamb.

Psalm 111 says that God had sent redemption to his people, long ago, to save them from Egypt, but Jesus had been sent by God to be the perfect sacrifice, to enact the true and final Exodus.

He was to die to take us out of the land of the bondage of sin, sickness, misery, and to bring us into the promised land of reconciliation with God.

Our Lord and our God, we will give thanks to you with all our heart for what you have done for us.

Our prayers must always be prayers of thankfulness for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

And for all the more mundane, daily reminders of his care we also thank him. What are some of the things you are thankful for? [pause, to let people answer]

For food on the table. For safety in travel. For friends. For help in our work, our studies. For encouragements He gives us. For our salary. For sunshine and rain. For music, for nature, for joy.

God deserves our thanks; But He does not need our thank-you's, He is far above needing that.

But it does honor God, and it is healthy for ourselves to make ourselves aware all the time that we have a caring Father who has redeemed us, and who blesses us day in day out.

2. Study those and see

In verse 4 of Psalm 111, we read that God had appointed a memorial for his marvelous deeds. God had given memorials to Israel, so they would not forget how He had acted in their history.

We are people who easily forget. We need memorials to keep the memory of God's gracious acts in our life fresh.

Israel had some feasts that acted as memorials - like a harvest feast, to focus on how God gave them food and drinks. And they had the feast I already mentioned, the Feast of Passover.

Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples - a feast to commemorate annually that God had saved them from Egypt, and how God had done this.

Nowadays, at the Passover Meal in a Jewish home, one of the young boys, at the beginning of the meal, asks: "What makes this night different from any other night?" And then the history of Israel and the great saving acts of God are remembered.

As Christians we also have our memorials, to be reminded of what God has done for us and what He does for us each day.

These memorials are to make sure that we remember and that we thank God - again and again. And we need them to be assured of what He can do for us today.



Our relationship with God needs these 'crutches'. Our prayerlife needs crutches. To help us to go on. By ourselves we are so lame, so forgetful.

What memorials do we have? Can you mention a few? [Pause, to give people time to answer]

Our weekly liturgy, our Eucharist, our Christmas, Easter, etc.

Both our annual liturgical year and our weekly liturgy are for the praise of God - to show our thankfulness for his great deeds.

And we have them to remind us each week, and throughout the year, what God has done for us. To make us thankful people and to increase our trust in God when we face problems today .

In order to remember God's great works, we must be pro-active. In verse 2, Psalm 111 says: "The works of the Lord are great, sought out by all who delight in them."

If you enjoy the life that God has given you, if you enjoy forgiveness and his presence and your future with him, seek it out. Study it. Think about it. Meditate on it.

This is how Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a Baptist preacher in London 150 years ago, in his commentary on the Psalms, encourages us to make work of studying what God has done for us:

Because the works are great they cannot be seen all at once, but must be looked into with care, and this seeking out is of essential service to us by [...] strengthening our spiritual eye gradually to bear the light of the divine glory. [...]

The history of the Lord's dealings with his people is especially a fit subject for the meditation of reverent minds who find therein a sweet solace, and a never failing source of delight.

Take Spurgeon up on this! He promises, based on his own experience, that your spiritual eye will learn to see ‘the light of divine glory... and you will find ‘sweet solace’ and a ‘never failing source of delight.’

If you have this desire, I think you may want to give your prayer life a few more personal crutches. Not just the general meetings of the church, but also help to pray personally.

What do I mean? For instance, some people put prayer times in their agenda, to make sure the busyness of life does not push it away. Or they use a notebook to write down what they prayed for.

If you desire to pray but you find it hard, you may want to use some of those methods to make you more regular in praying. Stick a reminder on your fridge.

3. God’s acts in history teach us

If we desire to know Him better, we have to focus on what God does. How He has acted toward our forefathers and to us.

Part of this information we get from the Bible. In the Bible we read of God’s faithfulness to his people.

But we must be careful that we do not read the Bible only for knowing God. Rather, we have to use the Bible to lead us to knowing God in his faithful acts today.

Ofcourse - read your bible, study it, “seek out the works of the Lord”. Read the memorial of how He acted in the past of Israel, and most importantly, how He became a Man for our salvation.

But the goal of this is to know where to find God today, how to find God today. How to pray. How to enjoy our present life in community with God.

If someone is drowning, you do not help him by explaining to him that you truly love him so much, or by telling him how salvation works. He just wants to be pulled out of the water.

And if your feel that you drown in your sins, or in sickness, or in problems, then you need rescue, the actual work of God in your life. Today. Not necessarily a Bible study.

The remembrance of God’s past works - and that includes the study of his Word - will open us up to looking forward to His present work. His work in your soul, in your life, in your community, in our church.

As I see what he has done for others in the past, I will begin to believe that He can do the same for me. I will begin to believe that He is gracious and full of compassion, that is, that He is ready to do His wonderful works in me as well!

And that is what we need. And that is why we pray.

He gave food in the desert to the people of Israel - we need that food today. Yes, in Eucharist God reaches out to us spiritually, but we also need help in so many other areas.

So while our prayers are surrounded by praise, before and after, and drenched in thankfulness for what God has done in the past, we also lay our present needs before God. And the needs of others. Of our cities. Of our lands, our world.

Conclusion

Your personal prayer is important. It can move mountains.

But this Psalm was written to be sung in community - in the fellowship of believers. As it also opened, with

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the faithful and in the congregation.

The company of the faithful, that is the small group of you and a handful of friends maybe. A weekly prayer meeting.

And in the congregation, let us say, that is here on Sunday, in the bigger group.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he did not teach them an individualist prayer. The assumption of the Lord's Prayer is that it is prayed together.

'Our Father who art in heaven... give us today our daily bread...'

If we pray, personally and together, for our big and small needs, for our food, our health, our children, all things, then our Lord will listen to us.

And that is why we can praise and thank Him always, even before we have shared our needs with Him.

As He acted in the past to save and support his people, so He will act to save and support you. Today.

Amen.