

A prayer for when you barely have strength to pray
July 21, 2013 - Psalm 6

It's survey time. Imagine you've just purchased something new that you've looked forward to. Maybe it's a new piece of furniture or a phone or computer or an appliance. Say this item requires some assembly or some knowledge to begin using it. The item comes with a manual or instructions. I believe there are two types of people when it comes to manuals or instructions. Group 1 attempts assembly or using the product first. Then if they need the instruction manual they will consult. Group 2 reads the manual first. Then they attempt assembly. So which type of person are you? How many read first and assemble with confidence? How many assemble or play first and consider it a defeat if you have to consult the manual.

Now when it comes to something that has a pretty extensive manual, it's probably good to read and learn the information in there. You gain knowledge about features you might know nothing about. But I think for most of us, a lot of things would have to come together for us to sit down and read through a manual. We'd need time, energy and have nothing else really pressing for us to actually do that. On the other hand, if something doesn't work and all our efforts to fix it fail, we will make time to read the manual.

I think this is very similar to our prayer lives. If we don't have a habit of prayer, we will likely pray only in a couple of situations. Situation 1 – when you feel like praying. Everything has come together perfectly so that you want to pray. You are well rested and maybe on a spiritual high. You have lots of time to think and maybe look out over a beautiful spot. You experience no interruptions, no distractions and have a deep desire to pray with lots of energy. I don't know about you but that happens about once a year for me.

Situation 2 – You are in desperate need. Something terrible has happened. Or you've been knocked down by life. You have nowhere else to turn. You have no resources left. You have no answers to sickness or a situation. You are deeply distressed. Job offers have not come in. That person did not respond like you hoped. You have lost something or everything. You face a major lifestyle change. When we're in these types of situations, we have little or no personal resources to pray. We're likely low on energy & emotion. We struggle with lots of interruptions and distractions. We have much on our minds. We're not on a spiritual high nor do we find ourselves in the perfect inspiring situation that moves us to pray.

Then we face another barrier. We realize we don't have the resources to "properly" pray. We aren't able to sit down and work through Adoring God for all His character traits, confess our sin and thank him for all He's done before we start asking. We conclude that since we're not in the right frame of mind to pray, we might as well not pray at all. When you're in situation like that, how can you pray? What do you pray?

Well I'm here to tell you today that there is great hope when we find ourselves in situations like that. In fact **God hears the faintest cry so keep praying when you're weak.** We discover this great news in our next Psalm. If you have been with us at all anytime this summer, you have seen the practical and down to earthiness of the Psalms. We have seen Psalms 3, 4 and 5 talk about enemies, preparing for sleep amidst troubled times and dealing with malicious talkers.

The next Psalm shows us how to pray when we don't have the strength to pray.

The author is again King David. This is a dark time in his life. You might not be in a similar situation today. But you might file this for such a time. I think David basically lays out a simple pattern for prayer for those times when we can barely pray. So today I want you to see this simple pattern for prayer and then we'll have opportunity to pray from our weakness at the end of our time.

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS; ACCORDING TO THE SHEMINITH. A PSALM OF DAVID.

6 O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.

2 Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.

3 My soul also is greatly troubled.
But you, O LORD—how long?

4 Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?

6 I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.

7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.

8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.

9 The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD accepts my prayer.

10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;

they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

How can we pray when we barely have strength to pray?

Pour out your heart to the Lord. Unload the reality of your situation upon the Lord. Release all that you've kept inside and pour it out to Him. That's what David does in these first three verses. He doesn't engage in adoration of the Lord. He just pours it out. (Pour out pitcher of water into bowl)

Now we don't know David's specific life circumstances that led to this prayer. But it might be because of his own sin. "Rebuke me Lord, but not in your anger. Discipline me but not in your wrath. David could be suffering because of something he's done. Whatever the cause, he now faces a life-threatening situation. He makes this clear in the next phrase. "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing. I am weak. I am suffering. I am failing. I'm slipping away!

This condition affects both his body and soul. He prays, Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled or my bones are in agony. He experiences deep physical pain. But he also struggles in his soul. My soul is greatly troubled. Apparently this has been going on for a while because he finally pours out his exasperation or frustration. How long? I love that broken phrase at the end of verse 3. "But you, O Lord – how long?" It's like he wants to say "how long will this go on Lord or "You Lord, when will you act." But his own frustration doesn't allow for the completion of a nicely phrased appeal. Instead, it's that raw unloading. David pours out his heart to the Lord.

When you lay on a bed of sickness for any length of time, you understand a little of what David expresses here. I've never experienced sickness like some of you bear today but this past winter I got sicker than usual with some sort of infection. I was sick and off work for a whole week. I still went through recovery weeks later. During that week basically lying flat, it was challenging. I remember the second day I thought I was getting better. So I began planning in my mind. "Okay, this is what I've got to do to catch up. This is what I need to reschedule. Let's get back at it." The next day I felt worse. I despaired but I was also mad." How can this be happening to me? How can I spend another day in bed? I can't afford to be sick. Then it went on for a fourth day. And I could barely see any improvement. Then a fifth day came with barely any progress. Thoughts start going through your mind – will I ever get better? What could this be? Why am I not progressing? With all of our technology, medicines and access to specialized medical care, we can

conclude we should always be healthy. But take a trip to the third world or to a long term care ward here and you realize health is a great gift that we fail to give God glory for all the time.

Sometimes we get sick. Sometimes we suffer. Sometimes bad things happen. God sometimes delays. In those times, we need to keep praying. We pour out our heart to the Lord. We may even pray more. Calvin writes “All God’s delays are maturing. If God delays to be gracious, it is not that he is without love, but that he wants to incite us to more fervent prayer, to make us more vigilant against sin, to try our faith, and to make us realize how much more grievous is the lot of those who don’t know Him (impenitent).” (John Calvin)

When you barely have strength to pray, pour out your heart to the Lord. **Cry out for deliverance and mercy. (4-7)** (With megaphone) TURN O LORD, DELIVER MY LIFE. SAVE ME FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR STEADFAST LOVE! David cries out for deliverance and salvation. After pouring out his soul to the Lord, he calls on the Lord to act. David does not point to His own worthiness as a reason for the Lord to save. Instead he appeals to the Lord’s character. Save me because of your steadfast love. Rescue me because of your loving character. You, O God, have shown again and again that you are a saving God. You have shown that you deliver your people. So I ask for you to deliver again.

We can do the same when we remember the number of ways the Lord has delivered us in our lives. Christian think back over your life for a few moments. Think about the sinful habits that used to be part of your life from which you have been delivered. Think about times of illness that you have come through. Think about your own coming to Christ when He first saved you. The Lord has proved Himself steadfast and faithful in our past. When we’re weak, we call on Him to save again.

Then David gives the Lord another reason to act and save him. “For in death, there is no remembrance of you, in Sheol who will give you praise?” Before we read that phrase from our New Testament perspective, we need to consider how David and Old Testament believers looked at death. They saw it as the great leveler. They believed that sheol was a kind of underworld where people existed in a form of semi life. They were at rest yet not in joy. They did not have the fullness of life which made possible a relationship with the living God. Some Psalms offer glimpses of rescue from Sheol. The hope of resurrection is clearer in Isaiah and Daniel. But in David’s time, this hope was not yet fleshed out.

So they dreaded death. They saw it basically as the end of life in relationship with others and God. If you didn't have a relationship with God or memory of him, you couldn't worship him. So David appeals to the Lord to rescue him with this understanding of life after death. "I won't remember you there. I won't be able to give you praise".

David cries out as he faces this. He pours out a little more in the next verses. He paints a very clear picture of the effects of his suffering. He can't sleep. He cries through much of the night. He cries so much that his bed and couch get soaked. It even affects his eyes.

This is the cry we shout out to the Lord when there's a business failure or a major setback; when a relationship ends or someone hurts us; when there seems to be no improvement at work or no response to our job inquiries; when you've witnessed the realities of the joys and difficulties of your sponsor children in Honduras – and it is so overwhelming. The good news is the God hears the faintest cry.

Then something happens between verses 7 and 8. **Everything changes – we don't know why.** David goes from soaking his bed with tears to confidently dealing with his enemies. What happened? There is no priestly blessing and no prophetic word of hope. We have no information about healing or deliverance. Bruce Waltke writes *As suddenly and miraculously as a resurrection from the dead, David's psyche rises out of the depths to heavenly heights, from anguish to courage, from sorrow to joy, from sobbing to laughter.* How can this be? The only explanation is that God's Holy Spirit in David has reawakened his voice of faith. This is a gift from God of faith. The prayers and tears have not been wasted. Or as Jewish rabbi put it "Lament has done its work. In voicing all the tensions of his soul, the poet moves through his anguish to new insights, a firmer faith and unrivaled confidence." (Rabbi Morganescu)

So from barely having strength to pray, **He declares his confidence in the Lord to act. (8-9).** He commands those who circle him like vultures to depart because he's confident the Lord heard his weeping. In fact he declares this three times. "The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea. The Lord accepts my prayer." Then he pronounces his hope in the Lord's future action upon his enemies. "All my enemies SHALL be ashamed and greatly troubled." So the Psalm started with his soul greatly troubled. Now he looks forward to the troubling of his enemy's soul. "They SHALL turn back and be put to shame in a moment." He anticipates a sudden dramatic blow that puts them down.

Talk about a transformation. David has gone from anguish, despair, weeping and a sense of separation from God to confidence and renewed faith in God. Like him, there are times we need to go through the anguish and sense of separation from God before we can emerge with a renewed and deepened faith that rests more confidently upon Him.

God still hears when we barely have strength to pray. Think back over your life – God has brought you through everything you’ve ever gone through. He will continue to walk with you, guide you and strengthen you through whatever you’re dealing with now. God will bring you through whatever you will face in the future. You can leave that all in His hands.

You might not be in a bad state physically today. You might not be suffering financially or facing some great enemy at work. But you know you’re missing the Lord. Maybe you’ve been running from Him. He’s been calling you to come to Him for a long time. Maybe you’ve been resisting Him. He’s been calling you to give your life to Him and put your trust in Him. Maybe you want to respond to Him – but you don’t know what to pray. In a way, you barely have the strength to pray.

If that describes you, then I’ve got good news. The first step towards a relationship with Jesus requires an admission of our own weakness spiritually. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who recognize their own spiritual poverty, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. If that’s you, in a moment, I will lead you in a prayer that you can repeat.

We have learned that God still hears when you barely have strength to pray. If you have something in your life that barely have strength to pray about, I will ask you to let me know that with a quick show of your hand. In a moment I want to pray for you and give you opportunity to offer the faintest prayer to Him. If you don’t know Christ and would like to receive Him, will you repeat a prayer after me when it’s time?

First – anyone want to acknowledge some situation in their life where they barely have strength to pray?

Prayer –

- Lord Jesus I may act strong but I am weak without you.
- I need you to deliver and save me.
- Please forgive my sin.
- I put my complete trust in you as my Savior and Lord.
- I look forward to your responding to my faintest cry.