

I Found Prayer

Psalm 116

Introduction:

Do you struggle to pray? I mean, is it a problem for you? You know you should, but the pattern of your life is checkered with prayerlessness and guilt. You would say you lost your prayer life along the way, or maybe you're not even sure you ever really had it. Psalm 116 is for you. Here you find the direction you need right from the Scripture that will help you to find prayer like never before.

I have found in my experience that there are two things that motivate me to pray like nothing else. The first is found in verses 1-2 and these verses are a summary of the entire Psalm. In fact, these two verses form for us an invitation into a season of prayer. We are breaking off of our study through the book of Matthew for a mini-series on the topic of prayer. Why?

- Easter approaches and will be here in a few weeks (April 4). It seems fitting to use this time to draw close to the Lord in prayer.
- Because as a people, and many of us individuals, we need renewal.
- Because in our history we have experienced that God's church is built by prayer – prayer must be stirred up. We do well to periodically, constantly and intentionally return to this subject.

III. – Answered prayer in God's provision for a playground.

Nothing motivates one to pray like answered prayer! He heard... He inclined... Therefore, I will call on him as long as I live. The knowledge that prayer works is a great motivator. What a power prayer is.

These are a launching pad for us in this miniseries. We are a part of a community that prays. God has answered prayer in the past and will continue to do so as we call out to him.

But prayer is more than power. It is relationship. The psalmist begins, "I love the Lord." "I love the Lord, because he has heard me." There is something so exhilarating about being in a desperate place and God coming through, so that when God has come through you were so desperate that you know it only could have been God that brought you through. You come away with more than relief, you come away with a love for God that you feel like you can contain. It just erupts from your mouth: "I love the Lord!"

So, the first great motivator to pray is answered prayer. It works, and along with its working is an exhilarating love for God. But in order to have this motivator you must pray and experience an answer so that you can then be motivated to pray. Sadly, some people never seem to get to that point. For you, it sounds a little like I am saying to you that the way to get motivated to pray is to pray and then you will have answers and that will motivate you to pray, but you are thinking well that is the problem, I don't pray. So, for you, and for all of us, we will move on to the second great motivator. **The second**

great motivator to pray is found in verse 3 and that motivator is trouble! In fact, I want to give your four phases in the cycle of prayer.

I Found Trouble (verse 3)

There it is, here is the great first cause in prayer. Trouble! I was as good as dead. And I was suffering greatly in distress and anguish. In other words, I was not taking it well. I was a wreck.

Praise God for trouble. If we just will not pray than God will sometimes put us in such desperate straits that we simply cannot do anything else.

And here is the kicker – when this trouble finds you, then you try everything you know to do and nothing works. Nothing works and you have no choice but to go to God.

You soon discover that what worked yesterday is not working today. In fact, many Christians are living in such anguish because they are trying to endure today's trials with yesterday's grace. They need fresh grace. They need to go to God.

I found Prayer (verses 4-7)

Verse 4: Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"!

Here is this place of prayer you meet the Lord (**verse 5**) and discover that he is:

- Gracious
- Righteous
- Merciful

In fact, praying to God is based upon who God is. We often remind God of his character in prayer. This builds faith in us as we consider the personality of God! He is gracious indeed.

III. Consider the outrageous prayer of David. Now consider for a moment that David, even though he sinned huge sins, was a man with a heart after God's own heart. There was something about his heart that pleased God greatly. In 2 Samuel 12 we read of Nathan confronting David with his sin.

- 1 Samuel 12:10-15
- The next account, 15b, judgment comes
- And what does David do – he has the audacity to ask God for a miracle!
- He is so fervent and so intent that when the child dies the servants are afraid to tell David, thinking that if he was this upset when the child was sick, then how will he handle the news that the child has died?

- But David perceives the child has died, and he explains to the servants, verse 22... There it is, “Who knows whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?”
- He knew God to be gracious. He pleaded with God on the basis of God’s character: “O God, we know you to be gracious and merciful, show the greatness of your kindness one more time and heal this child.” The prayers of that man please God.
- There is more – David’s faith was not misplaced. You see, it was not just his love for the child that over took him that he insanely cried out to God in the face of God’s judgment. It was bold, but not idolatrous. We see this back in verse 10 when we look to David’s response to the death of the child. ‘He cleaned himself up; he went and worshipped God, then he went and fed his body.’ He accepted God’s answer and went on with a heart to worship and serve God and not in self-pity.

The character of God is contrasted with our own. In verse 6 the word for “simple” is not a flattering word. It is a word commonly used for “fool” and the singer here likens himself to the fool of the Proverbs. It is a little bit of a play on words. The effect is to say, ‘I was beside myself; I was lost; I was a knucklehead, but you preserve the simple!’ The foundation for our prayer is the goodness of God, not our own worth or lack thereof as the case may be.

Now, here is some good news in verse 6. He preserves the simple. He saves those who are very low. Thank God for your trouble, because your trouble has made you an ideal candidate for God to work. It may indeed reveal some very serious deficiencies in yourself, but fall on God!

Verse 7: And the result, even in that moment, is rest. Your soul begins to experience peace and the Lord’s bounty as you carry your burden to him in prayer.

Application – It is great that we believe that God uses suffering, but sometimes we need to be reminded that God answers prayer. Yes, he uses suffering, but he also shows mercy. In fact, I might go so far as to say that when the obvious answer we look for and feel we need doesn’t come, then the absence of that answer should clearly be a blessing.

III. – We prayed for God to give us a school to fill our educational space. I prayed because in the providence of God I was overseeing this particular area. Two years ago we had an elementary school that rented our space for a quarter of a million dollars a year. Their lease expired and we had a new tenant coming in. I prayed. I knew it could fall through and that we would be in a difficult spot. But God said no and the new tenant did fall through. But God showed up in a big way. He provided by showing himself so glorious. We had a best giving year. You gave. The shopping center thrived in the midst of a recession. No one was laid off. Sacrifices were made, but God sustained and it was glorious. Now we use our class rooms for other ministries, like having classes for homeschoolers and for various other functions that we simply were never able to do before. God’s no became a better yes. I don’t want to mislead you. Sometimes God says no. But he doesn’t always say no. His no is better than a yes when it is no.

I found Deliverance (verses 8-11)

The deliverance is full: The crisis is gone, the anguish with it, and now I can walk again (verse 8).

And we are talking in the nasty now and now. The answer is now. Not just in heaven, but I have experienced the deliverance of God in the land of the living. (Verse 9)

Faith was the key. Back in verses 4-7 I found prayer and there in prayer I experienced the presence of God. I communed with him. And I trusted. I believed. Though every human witness told me it couldn't be done, it couldn't happen, I said all men are liars and I believed even when I was crying out saying "I am afflicted."

III. – Samuel was a gift from God. His name means "God has answered"!

I Found Praise (Verses 12-19)

Now the psalmist asks a question. In light of the bursting in my heart, in light of all that I feel for God, what can I do? What can I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?

Here is the answer: I will lift up the cup and ask God to fill it one more time!

I will pray. That is right: I will call on the name of the Lord. I will live a life of prayer, a life of depending on God and not on self. I have found that this prayer stuff works. I found that not only does it work, but in its working it has worked on me and I know God like never before. I love God!

Verse 14 – I will do my part. Don't get me wrong. I am not just going to go about making trouble and getting into trouble so that I can receive more from God. No, I will pay my vows. I make and keep promises to God and do it in front of God's people. I won't use God's mercy and goodness as an excuse to be lazy or rebellious or as a way to cause others to stumble. But yes, I will obey.

This is all about public worship at this point. That is what the paying of vows refers to. The psalmist is here sacrificing and praising as he had promised God he would do. He is publically worshipping because God has answered his prayer.

But I have discovered that God has a special watch over the death of his saints. They do not, verse 15, go under without his signal. We don't die and we don't sink and we are not overcome. The death of his is precious to him. They will not leave this world one second before all, all, their work is done. And then it is time.

So now, I will serve you. I was enslaved to trouble and sin, but now I am free and enslaved to you and I love it. (16).

So, I will pray. And this is what prayer looks like from a saved sinner, from someone lost and now found, from someone enslaved and now free, from someone dead and now alive... It is first of all thankful. It is second of all dependent upon God – asking. It is third of all obedient – I will pay my vows. It is fourth of

all a true witness – I will pay my vows in the presence of the people. Finally, all it together is praise and that is what I live for. That is what has found me – praise!

The Cycle of Prayer continues with Praise

How do I worship God in light of what he has done? I hold up my cup for God to fill it one more time. That is not greed. That is dependence upon God that pleases God. I will not do it on my own, but I will do it depending on him!

In this season of prayer we come aside to call on the name of the Lord. Do you think that God will respond and say, 'O good grief, there they are again, wanting more, wanting more from me, wanting more of me. Is enough ever enough for these people?!' No! God is praised in our asking.