

Nearness of God

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- [0 : 00] Psalm 119 verses 145 to 152. With my whole heart I cry, answer me O Lord.
- I will keep your statutes. I call to you, save me, that I may observe your testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for help.
- I hope in your words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. Hear my voice according to your steadfast love.
- O Lord, according to your justice, give me life. They draw near who persecute me with evil purpose. They are far from your law, but you are near, O Lord.
- And all your commandments are true. Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever. I don't think it's a stretch to say that the amount that we pray, how much we pray, is directly related to how real God is to us.
- [1 : 20] Because if we don't feel the need for God, we don't pray. If we don't feel like God can or will do anything for us, then we don't pray. It's just God's not very real to us when we don't pray.
- And I think this stanza is really teaching us that we should cry out to God desperately in times of trouble, when we're persecuted, because God's presence is near and his promises are true.
- So in the first four verses, we see the prayers of the saint. And then in the second half, 149 to 152, we see the promises of the Lord that he holds on to as he seeks the Lord.
- And so let's look at it. I think it's a great stanza for learning how to pray. It says in verse 145, So this kind of speaks to the manner of prayer, how we should pray.
- And it says, With my whole heart, that's how we should pray. And so we shouldn't pray in a half-hearted way. And I think if we don't have faith when we pray, naturally our prayer is going to be half-hearted.
- [2 : 33] Because if we don't have faith, then we're not going to be into it. We're going to be hesitant. We're going to hedge our bets. We're going to be distracted. But the psalmist, as he prays, he goes all in on his prayers.
- And he's not seeking the help of other gods or other idols. He's seeking the help of the Lord alone. So he prays with his whole heart. And it's an undivided heart.
- That's the manner of prayer. That's how we should pray. And then verse 146 is similar to that. It says, I call to you, save me that I may observe your testimonies. So look at 145 and 146 again.
- And notice the goal of prayer. The outcome that he's looking for. It says in verse both of them, With my whole heart, I cry, answer me, O Lord.
- I will keep your statutes. And then I call to you, save me, that I may observe your testimonies. So the goal of keeping God's word.
- [3 : 34] The goal is the observance of God's will when he prays. And we see that also in the way Jesus taught his disciples to pray in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. Right? Our Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Right? So the ultimate goal, the purpose of prayer is to have God's will done. To have God's word kept.

And so that's really the goal of this psalmist's prayer. And if our prayers conform to this overarching purpose of furthering God's purposes, then our prayers will be answered.

That's the promise in God's word. 1 John 5, 14, 15 says, If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

But if we pray for self-serving purposes, then our prayers will not be answered. Or another place, James 4, verse 3, it says, You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.

[4 : 38] So if we pray according to his will, there's a promise that he'll answer. And there's a book by the name of The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer by John Owen, a Puritan theologian.

And he writes, We are to pray in faith. And faith has to do with God's promises. If, therefore, we don't understand what God has promised, we can't pray at all.

Because he's saying we're commanded to pray with faith. So Matthew 21, 22, Ask whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. So we're commanded to pray with faith. And what is faith?

Faith is believing what God says. Faith is belief in God's promises, belief in his word. And so if we don't know the promises of God, if we don't believe in the word of God, then we can't pray in accordance with his will.

We can't pray with faith because we don't know his promises. And so that's really important to how we pray. And we see that connection between God's word and prayer in verses 147 to 148 as well.

[5 : 42] Look at it with me. It says, I rise before dawn and cry for help. I hope in your words. My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise.

So the psalmist's cry for help is connected to his hope in God's words. And he stays up through the night meditating on God's promise. So there's that meditation on the promise of God, that hoping in the word of God spurs his prayer.

It produces prayer. There's a 17th century English pastor named Thomas Manton who explains the relationship between meditating on the word and prayer.

He says, Meditation is a middle sort of duty between the word and prayer and hath respect to both. The word feedeth meditation and meditation feedeth prayer.

These duties must always go hand in hand. Meditation must follow hearing and precede prayer. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. We may hear and hear, but it is like putting a thing into a bag with holes.

[6 : 45] It is rationalist to pray and not to meditate. What we take in by the word, we digest by meditation and let out by prayer. These three duties must be ordered that one may not jostle out the other.

People are barren, dry, and sapless in their prayers for the lack of exercising themselves in holy thoughts. He's saying that when we exercise ourselves in holy thoughts and meditate on God's word, his promises, that's what produces prayer.

And so because the psalmist knows this and he knows the importance of prayer, God's presence is very real to him. Even at the loss of sleep, the psalmist prays in this passage. He meditates on God's word, which is the exact opposite of what some people do.

Sometimes when we're really stressed out or anxious or despairing, people like to sleep. They like to sleep off the sorrow or they like to try to forget or avoid.

But the psalmist does the opposite. He stays up into the wee hours of the night to meditate on God's word. And he gets up early in the morning before sunrise to pray to God. And I think if we believe in the efficacy of prayer, in the power of prayer, we will do the same.

[7 : 59] And so we should cry out to God desperately when persecuted because God's presence is near and his promises are true. So let's look at those promises in verses 149 to 152. He says in verse 149, Hear my voice according to your steadfast love.

O Lord, according to your justice, give me life. So these are the attributes of God that he reveals when he reveals himself to his people, that he has steadfast love toward them.

And that's the covenant he makes with them, that he would have steadfast love, that he would give them justice, that he would be faithful and truthful to them. And so the psalmist is appealing to his promises, appealing to God's character, the covenant that God made with them, with him and God's people.

And then in verses 150 to 151, there's a contrast between the nearness of the persecutors and the nearness of God. He says, So the psalmist is in trouble because of evil doors drawing near to him to persecute him, but he has confidence because God is near to help and to deliver him.

And God's commands are true even though these persecutors are far from God's law. And that's why he doesn't waver from God's law. He knows in verse 152, Long have I known from your testimonies that you have founded them forever.

[9 : 29] And if the psalmist had faith that God will always be present with him in times of trouble for him, that God is near to him, we have all the more reasons to believe that God is near to us when we're going through difficult times.

Because we know, as Matthew 1.23 says, Jesus is Emmanuel. He is God with us. He's present. In Ephesians 2.12-14, it says, We were at one time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

So we were once, like the evildoers that are persecuting the psalmist here, we were far from God's law. But we have been brought near by the blood of Christ, by Christ paying for our sins with his atoning death on the cross.

And because Jesus was raised from the dead and has ascended to the right hand of the Father, and now he's interceding on our behalf, in the Father's presence, that's why we can have all the more confidence, as it says in Hebrews 4, verse 16, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

[10 : 56] And so the prayer and faith of this psalm is ultimately fulfilled in Christ and what he has done for us, and we can have confidence that God is near. And when times get hard, we can cry out to him out of desperation and expect him to deliver us because he is near and his promises are true.