

## PRAYING FROM THE HEART

Text: Psalm 119:145-152

Readings: Luke 6:12-16; 18:1-8; 11:1-13

Theme: An earnest prayer for God's salvation expressing his hope in God's word.

Purpose: To encourage you to pray earnestly to God because of his love and his promises.

Sometimes when we are in a difficult situation and in need of help we are reluctant to ask other people for assistance.

There may be a variety of reasons for that: maybe we don't want to bother others, or we may be too proud to ask for help, or we don't want to be dependent on other people.

But if we are in genuine need it is foolish not to ask for help because others are usually very willing to assist. If they found out that we had been struggling along on our own they would say, "Why didn't you tell us? We would have been happy to help you!"

If this is how it is with those around us how much more so when we need help from God our Father. Again, often we don't ask: maybe you just forget to pray; maybe you want to be independent and sort it out on your own; maybe you are too proud to turn to God.

But this is foolish because God is more than willing to help you, and he is more than able to do so; he has infinite resources available to him and he is abounding in loving-kindness!

In times of need we can learn from this part of Psalm 119 where this man prayed earnestly for God's salvation as he put his hope in God's word. This encourages us to pray earnestly to God because of his love and promises.

We'll look at:

1. His cry to God (v 145-6)
2. His concentration on God (v 147-8)
3. His confidence in God (v 149-152)

### 1. HIS CRY TO GOD

- a. "I call with all my heart; answer me O Lord" ( v 145)

Throughout this long Psalm this believer had been in trouble from his enemies. They were oppressing him, mocking him and slandering his name.

In response he *prayed to God*. He did not try to muddle along in his own strength nor did he turn to the pagan gods of Ashteroth or Baal, as many in Israel did. Today people cry out to Allah or Buddha or to the evil spirit world. This man cried out to the Lord his God knowing that God alone could help him, and we need to do the same.

He called with *all his heart*.

There are many people who never call on God with their whole heart at any point in their lives.

And there are others whose prayers are formal, who merely go through the ceremony of prayer, who "say their prayers" as on auto-pilot.

They pray that they may be more spiritually minded when their hearts are very worldly; they pray for a lively faith when they have no real interest in Jesus; they pray that they might live fully for God when they actually just want to live in the world.

The prayers of this believer are very different from those formal prayers; he prayed whole-heartedly, with sincerity and genuine faith. He was urgent and fervent in prayer, earnest and passionate.

Your prayers may not be expressed in beautiful words, they may not have a great depth of doctrine, they may not be grammatically correct, but none of that matters at all! What matters is that you call on God with all your heart, that you are sincere and genuine in prayer.

**b.** In verse 146 the psalmist echoes the previous line using the same Hebrew word for “call”; “I call out to you; save me”.

He wanted God to save him from the oppression and slander of his enemies. But his prayer includes all that we need as sinners – pardon for sin, acceptance by God, access into his presence, the ability to resist temptation, strength in times of trial, and comfort in suffering.

All that we need can be summed up in the Lord Jesus Christ:

“Thou O Christ art all I want;  
more than all in thee I find.

Raise the fallen, cheer the faith,  
heal the sick and lead the blind.” (SttL 433 – Jesus lover)

Everything you and I need is to be found in the person and work of Jesus our Lord and Saviour.

**c.** In response this man promised to obey God’s decrees and to keep his statutes (v 145b, 146b) He was committed to God and his laws and he was determined to obey them.

Many people have been in situations of trouble and they cry out to God; “If you get me out of this mess then I’ll go to church, I give a lot of money to the poor, I’ll mend my ways and reform my life”, but after the crisis has passed or they have regained their health they promptly forget the promises they made.

Not so with this man; his promises were sincere and his love for God’s word and commands was completely genuine. He prayed for God’s salvation *in order* that he might keep these commands. Is this your genuine desire; is this the motive of your prayer for salvation – that you may obey God’s decrees? *His cry to God*

## **2. HIS CONCENTRATION ON GOD**

**a.** “I rise before dawn and cry for help” (v 147)

He continues this subject of prayer. In his great need he was committed to prayer and he wanted God’s help so much that he was prepared to get up early, before dawn, to pray to the Lord. Jesus did this: “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Many of us usually read the Bible and pray in the morning, but sometimes we are cosy in bed and we get up too late to spend that time with the Lord.

The best time to read the Bible and pray is in the morning, early, before we begin all the work and activities of our day, but often we are too undisciplined or too lazy to do this.

Let’s take note of the example of this man and of the Lord Jesus who got up early to pray.

The early morning will not suit everyone, especially mothers who are up with little children at first light, or those whose brains don’t click into gear until midmorning after three cups of coffee! If the morning is not your best time then find another time that works for you to read your Bible and pray.

**b.** Not only did he get up early to pray but he also stayed awake through the watches of the night so as to meditate on God’s promises (v 148).

Sometimes we lie awake at night worrying about family members, others in the church and problems at work. At night these problems and concerns always seem much bigger and more serious than they do in the morning light. Jesus commands us not to worry about our life, food, clothes or about tomorrow; “each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:25-34).

Instead of worrying at night we need to meditate on God’s promises, to reflect on his goodness to us, to put our trust in him, to lay our concerns before him.

Meditating on God’s promises, says Spurgeon, “is the fuel which sustains the flame [of prayer].”  
Meditating on God’s word feeds and nourishes our prayers.

In his parables of the friend at midnight and the persistent widow Jesus urged us to keep praying. He set us *an example* of such prayer when, before he chose his 12 disciples, he went out to a mountainside and spent the night praying to God (Luke 6:12).

There are times in our lives when we need to concentrate on God in prayer, personally, or as a married couple, or as a family, or as a church. It is a great privilege to pray together as a church and the prayer meetings are among the most important gatherings of the congregation. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

His cry to God, his concentration on God,

### **3. HIS CONFIDENCE IN GOD**

**a.** In verse 147 he returned to his theme of crying out to God and prayed, "Hear my voice in accordance with your love."

i. Notice that he prayed with *his voice*. Sometimes it is helpful to pray out loud. When you pray in your mind it is very easy to lose concentration and for your mind to wander off the subject, whereas praying out loud forces you to think and to concentrate on what you are saying. That is the benefit of praying together as a married couple, or with your children, or with a Christian friend, and it can also be of help in your personal prayers when you are by yourself taking to God.

ii. He prayed on the basis of God's *love*, or his *lovingkindness*. This translates a rich and beautiful Hebrew word that includes God's mercy, goodness and grace. According to Spurgeon "lovingkindness is one of the sweetest words in our language" and it "the cream of kindness".

We do not pray to God on the basis of what we *deserve* because as sinful human beings we don't deserve anything at all!

Rather we pray on the basis of God's love, that in his mercy and grace he might hear our voice and answer us in his abounding love to sinners such as we are!

This lovingkindness of God is seen most clearly in his Son, Jesus. Even while we were sinners God loved us so much that he sent his Son to die for us (Rom 5:8).

iii. The first part of verse 149 has a parallel in the next line; "preserve my life, O Lord, *according to your laws*."

The word translated "laws" can also be translated as "justice" which would be a good parallel with God's love.

Again, if we prayed for God to respond to us with justice we could only expect to be punished for our sins. Rather we are praying as Christians who know that we have been justified through faith in Jesus Christ and that God has removed our sins far from us on the basis of the death of Jesus on the cross. So we pray, "Preserve my life, O Lord, according to your justice seen in your Son."

**b.** This man's confidence in God is expressed in verses 150 and 151, which set up a clear contrast between the wicked and the Lord.

i. "Those who devise wicked schemes are near." His enemies were close at hand, hard on his heels, seeking to do him harm. They were the cause of his troubles and trials and this is why he prayed so earnestly.

This was true of the Lord Jesus at various times in his ministry; the Pharisees and Sadducees devised wicked schemes to put him to death and plotted against him.

"Yet you are near, O Lord". His enemies were near but so too was the Lord, and God was far more powerful than his enemies, so he was safe! He knew that God would never leave him nor forsake him.

In verse 114 of this Psalm he wrote, "You are my refuge and my shield." This what God had said to Abraham; "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield" (Gen 15:1). The prophet Elisha knew this when he was in the city of Dothan surrounded by his enemies. His servant was afraid but Elisha assured him that "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.... Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:14-17).

When you are afraid remember that the Lord is near. When you feel that danger is near remember that the Lord is with you.

ii. This contrast between his enemies and the Lord is also there in the other parallel lines: The wicked "are far from your law" but the psalmist knew that "all your commands are true."

The wicked of our day do not know God's laws and they certainly do not keep them. God's commands mean nothing to them and they disregard and disobey them.

But we know that all of God's commands are trustworthy and true, they are right and reliable and we seek to live by them and put them into practice.

This brings the psalmist to his **conclusion** for this section; "Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever."

This psalm was probably not written by a young man but rather by an older believer who had known God and his laws for a long time, not only from his reading but also and even more from his personal experience of God. He knew that all God's promises were true. He knew this, not just intellectually but experientially!

Many of us here know what this is like. You may have known from the Bible that God is full of love and compassion and that he will sustain you in sickness and sorrow, but then you actually go through a serious illness or through great grief, and then you learn this and know it by personal experience; but your knowledge of God and his word is all the richer and fuller for that!

What's more, we know that God has established his statutes "to last forever".

We live in a day and age where people are always after something new and different; many want constant change.

But God is unchanging, immutable, solid and firm and his laws are reliable and dependable and applicable to every age and every generation. Spurgeon wrote, "We are satisfied with the truth which is as old as the hills and as fixed as the great mountains."

Because God and his word do not change we can cry out to God in prayer, we can concentrate our minds on him, and we can be confident of his loving-kindness and nearness to us as his people through Jesus his Son.

Amen