



PÂLAL: TO INTERVENE, INTERCEDE - SIMPLE PATTERNS OF PRAYER

I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his
purpose for me. Psalm 57:2

These short “Meditations on Mercy” are not intended to replace one’s regular reading and meditation on God’s Word. Instead, they are offered as a supplement to those times, much like you might take vitamins along with your meal. The purpose of the vitamin isn’t to replace the meal but to add to the meal something that may be missing. So also, these short glimpses of truth are intended to stir faith and love in our great God and lead to a life of surrendered and devoted worship.

For some, these meditations will prove most helpful before their regular reading of the Word. Or perhaps they will be most helpful as a brief meditation before bed. Others may prefer to meditate on these concise truths during a pause at lunch hour in order to bring their mind back to a faith-filled consciousness of God. However and whenever done, it is hoped that these short pauses over grand truths will convey a sanctifying grace on those who ponder them.

This month we will focus on simple, yet powerful patterns of prayer set out for us in Scripture. Becoming familiar with the many ways Scripture directs us to pray will hopefully break us free from the somewhat stale patterns we often form by habit or rote imitation. We can break free from these bad prayer habits when we are tutored in the simple patterns of prayer found in the Scriptures!

01

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night. Ps 92:1-2

Goodness is in part expressed by thankfulness—“it is good to give thanks to the Lord”. This puts us in memory of verses like Col 2:7 & Col 3:17. Gratitude is presented as the polar opposite of an impure mindset in Eph 5:4.

Note the rhythm of prayer that regulates the grateful spirit. We find two faith declarations here: a declaration of anticipation in the morning & a declaration flowing from reflection in the evening. Two bookends to the day, both punctuated by gratitude.

We start the day with a faith-filled anticipation of meeting God’s steadfast love for “his mercies are new every morning” (Lam 3:23). This is gratitude for what is to come. Even if the day contains trials or unexpected sadness, we can face the day with the unwavering confidence that “nothing in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39)

Then, at day’s end, we reflect on the happenings of the day and declare God’s faithfulness. We express gratitude for his never-changing faithfulness: “Great is your faithfulness!”

Would you be willing to put yourself in this rhythm of prayer? Would you be willing to try it for one week?

02

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD! Ps 25:6-7

“Remember” and “Remember not”. Here is an excellent two-point request pattern for prayer. Note what the Psalmist asks God to remember and “forget” in verses 6-7. Now think of the person you like the least (hint—the one you find yourself critiquing the most). What would change if you remembered them according to God’s steadfast love and goodness instead of their sins?

03

In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth. Ps 119:88

Note the basis of the petition. What does he appeal to – in order to “move” God to answer his request? How does this display faith in prayer? Why do you think he asks for “life”? Why is a grace provision from God always essential before we can obey him on any level?

04

Let your steadfast love comfort me according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. Ps 119:76-77

This is a simple prayer for comfort. Few things comfort us more than knowing that God’s covenantal love will not depart from us, nor be diminished, even when we go through deep trials or slip and fail. Human nature tends to withdraw from others when they fail. Success attracts and failure repels. But God is so different from us. Note the utter dependence reflected in this prayer. What two-fold argument is used to make a case for the two requests made? Do you ever pray this way?

05

Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, for in you I trust. Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul. Ps 143:8

The original Hebrew literally says “cause me to hear”. A slightly stronger accent on God’s sovereign action than the word “let”. The context concerns someone in the thick of battle (see verse 3 & 9). The battle is compared to a long night and deliverance is portrayed as the break of dawn.

Note the presence of faith even while surrounded by enemies, and while the Psalmist is “faint” (vs 4) and his “spirit fails” (vs 7). Faith can live alongside great feelings of spiritual weakness! In fact, faith increases as self-sufficiency decreases. They have an opposite relationship to each other.

What specific manifestation of steadfast love does he pray for? Why is this so essential in the midst of spiritual warfare? (consider someone being guided through a mine field!)

06

Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you. Ps 33:22

What a beautiful prayer! Notice first that this is a prayer made with others and for others. We could imagine that a prayer like this was possibly offered in the upper room as they prayed and waited for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4-5,14). There is a collective longing in these words. There is a deep sense of inadequacy that only God can satisfy. Faith reaching upward and the love of God poured out upon his people through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

07

Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. Ps 5:8

Here we find instructions for spiritual warfare. “In your righteousness” could be taken two ways. It could be a request for the righteous God to lead us in the way that is right. Or it could be a request for godliness which can be the best defence against spiritual enemies.

Lead me in the right path, O LORD, or my enemies will conquer me. Ps 5:8 NLT

As you think of the Lord’s leading of your life, are you aware of spiritual enemies that are seeking to harm you by diverting you from God’s will? Why is prayer such an essential part of our spiritual weaponry in battle?

“Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come. Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home”
(Amazing Grace, John Newton)

Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? Ps 10:1

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? Ps 22:1

When experiencing suffering, often the most painful and distressing part of all is the seeming disinterest of God. When life gets most difficult, it often seems that God is most distant. Trials, by their very nature, are hard to bear, but they can seem overwhelming if God is not present.

These verses show us that there is a kind of praying that gives expression to the deep troubling questions of the heart. There is, of course, a sort of refined pious way of praying that never addresses God in this way. But the end result of such prayers is an endless circling of the mind, collecting unbelieving debris as it makes its rounds in the heart. Much better to release our doubts and questions to God. In releasing them they are quickly joined to faith as they take upward flight to God! Releasing them to God is an act of faith in itself. Does the fact that Jesus, himself, prayed this way encourage you to follow his example? (Matt 27:46) What do we learn from his holy “questioning prayer”? How does Christ’s redemption, and the fruit that resulted from it, shine hope for us as we hear his despairing cry of “Why”?

09

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Ps 13:1-2

“How long?” appears 4 times in these two short verses. This kind of questioning of God is rarely if ever spoken in times of favour and spiritual prosperity (though we would expect the truly humble and reflective person to ask it, most never even consider the “unfairness” of prosperous times, so deep is our sense of entitlement).

But there is evidence of God’s favour even in these verses. Do you see it? Because of the sorrow, anguish and sense of defeat being experienced, the Psalmist is praying!

He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity. Job 36:15

The sanctifying grace of prayer is squeezed out in times of adversity which in a very real way, makes adversity a true gift!

10

Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Ps 19:13

It is right for us to pray about our sin struggles. While it is good to confess sins committed, it is better to defeat them—before committing them—through prayer!

There is some irony in the fact that presumptuous means “willful” yet the word “dominion” indicates the will is not free. That is, we are stubbornly willful in our sins, but that willfulness is actually evidence of a deep bondage of the will. There is a bent toward evil, enslaving our capacity to choose what is right. Therefore habituated willfulness and inclination toward any sin is really an indication that our wills are enslaved.

How seemingly hopeless! Unless of course grace is found—grace that is greater than all our sin. And each time we pray we open ourselves up to the One who is the endless source of sin-overcoming grace!

Are there any willful and habituated sins in your life? How are you praying for grace to overcome them?

11

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Ps 19:14

Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. If we think about grievances, our mouth pours out accusations. But if we think on God's mercy to us, our mouth speaks mercy-filled words to others. If we meditate on the gospel, we will find ourselves speaking its good news to others. We speak what we think.

So, how do we think the right thoughts? This verse gives us the answer. There is an objective provision in history that if connected to our subjective life in the present, can make our heart meditations acceptable. The two are connected via prayer. What is the objective foundation of subjective transformation in this verse? How does this work?

12

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Ps 25:16

Sometimes it seems to us that God is not facing us. We see his back but not his face. And there is nothing lonelier than when even God seems absent. So we plead with God to turn his face toward us. This is a strong metaphor for God's presence and favour to be experienced tangibly. There is always plenty of grace available when we are conscious of God's presence. How does God's grace fill the deep void of the lonely and afflicted soul? Why is grace from outside of ourselves the key to the problem we feel inside of ourselves?

13

Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God. Ps 31:5

A critical part of prayer is the act of self-surrender. It is something that needs to be done again and again. Note the way this is done in Jesus' life and then in our lives in the following two verses:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23

Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19

How does his "paying a price for us" (redeem) actually motivate us to entrust ourselves to our Redeemer?

14

There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!” Ps 4:6

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. Ps 67:1

Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love! Ps 31:16

In these verses we see a clear connection between God’s face and the shining of light on the one praying. It is also associated with good: a deliverance; God’s grace; His blessing. To have God’s face turned toward us is to experience his favour. It is like being in a long dark night, shivering with cold, and to suddenly feel the warm rays of sunlight on us. How good the warmth and light are!

Many times God comes to us on his own initiative. He comes to us and surprises us, as he did when he sought us before the foundation of the world; gave his Son for us; and then called us to himself through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. But there are times when God comes to us because we ask him to. Are you asking God to shine his face on you; your family; your church; and unbelieving friends, and even nations that do not know him?

15

***Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!
O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your
people's prayers? Ps 80:3-4***

This verse presents us with an issue we might never have considered. God's anger is sometimes directed toward seemingly good things—like prayer. A good thing becomes a bad thing when the heart remains bent on sin even while “doing the right thing”. Even prayer becomes repugnant if it covers an evil heart. Notice this in the following verses:

***My people are bent on turning away from me, and though
they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at
all. Hos 11:7***

***If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his
prayer is an abomination. Prov 28:9***

***“Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their
hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before
their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them?
Ezek 14:3***

***Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them;
he will hide his face from them at that time, because they
have made their deeds evil. Mic 3:4***

In other words, our heart attitude and posture in prayer is critical. Ps 80:3-4 is a prayer offered, knowing that previous prayers have been rejected. What do we learn here about how this cycle of rejected prayers is broken?

16

Give us life, and we will call upon your name! Restore us, O LORD God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved! Ps 80:18-19

God's supplies always provide for our obedience. I call this the echo effect in prayer. In a canyon, one can hear a repeat of words shouted out coming back as an echo. The words bouncing back are none other than the words of the speaker himself.

So it is with prayer. God first breathes into us his prayer-enabling power, and then we breathe out prayers back to him. Our prayers are mere echos of his enabling grace. Note the 3 requests in this verse. How are the two results connected to the three requests?

17

O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you. Ps 38:9

Two items that are hard to communicate to others are our deep longings (literally "desires") and our deep disappointments ("sighing"). Sometimes they are hard to articulate because we barely understand them ourselves. We strongly yearn for things and we deeply feel the disappointment when what we hoped for is denied (Prov 13:12). Yes, there are some who are given the skill to extricate the deep purposes of the human heart and bring them to light (Prov 20:5). But there is only one who intimately knows every desire and every disappointment of our life. How good it is to be understood by someone! Sometimes the omniscience of God is a terrifying truth, but in this case it is profoundly comforting. We are never truly alone for He is the God who sees! (Gen 16:13)

18

***From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Ps 61:2***

The word translated “faint” here is sometimes translated “overwhelmed” (NLT, NKJV). It has the sense of anguish, exhaustion, and complete lack of strength or will to go on. It is when one hits bottom, with no strength to carry on. In our lives we generally don’t hit this wall very often—but when we do, it is truly a great opportunity to grow in prayer!

There are times our prayers to God are reduced to a whisper, for we are brought so low and are humbled so deeply:

You will be brought low; from the earth you shall speak, and from the dust your speech will be bowed down; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and from the dust your speech shall whisper. Isa 29:4

The very nature of faith is to trust “away from ourselves to another”. So faith is very powerful when the spirit is very low and without strength. Why do you think that it often requires such dramatic “strippings” before we are compelled to look for help away from ourselves?

19

Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us. Ps 68:28

Here is a powerful one-verse prayer about power! Power is being personified and is presented as a servant of God that does his bidding. It is a prayer asking God to work, using divine power—power that we don’t have. It is asking God for something BIG. Something beyond what human power can achieve. Something that only God can do and which will glorify God if he does it, for only God can take the credit for it!

Yet it is an appeal to his love and his covenantal relationship with us. Do you see this in the last two words of this verse? He is doing something great, but it is “for us”. How does the cross help us to pray this kind of prayer with great faith? See Romans 8:32.

20

Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant; for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. Ps 69:16-17

Notice how the Psalmist appeals to God’s character, and to his desperate need, as the reason God must answer his prayer. Why do you think the Psalmist does this? Why would an appeal to God’s goodness and mercy move God to answer a desperate prayer? What does it say about God, when our “soul distress” moves him to act on our behalf? Give thought to this, for it reveals something very wonderful about our God. Then worship him for it!

21

Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies! Ps 69:18

O God, be not far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! Ps 71:12

Closeness to God means everything when we are deeply aware of need and danger. If God is everywhere at all times (which he is) then this appeal is not for an absent God to come and fill the void. Instead it is an appeal for God to break into our senses and reveal his presence with us. It may even be a request for a greater “faith sense” of God’s presence, even if the senses are still left unaffected. But it is an appeal for a sense of God’s nearness—something which the Psalmist, and we too, often lack.

Note how these two prayers are framed. One appeals to God’s work to redeem and ransom. The other appeals to the fruit of that work – “be not far from me”. What wonderful truth is revealed about our relationship with God in the words “my God”?

22

Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name’s sake! Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Ps 79:9-10

Here is God-centered praying at its best. It is God’s honour that is at stake. This short prayer links gospel deliverance directly to God’s glory and the vindication of his name. Notice the words used: “salvation”, “deliver”, “atone”. How does the atonement in a particular way bring glory and honour to God?

23

Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord! Vindicate me, O LORD, my God, according to your righteousness, and let them not rejoice over me! Let them not say in their hearts, "Aha, our heart's desire!" Let them not say, "We have swallowed him up." Ps 35:23-25

Rarely do we hear bold praying like this in our churches! God does not sleep yet the Psalmist asks him to wake up. He expects God to take up the Psalmist's cause and vindicate him! Here is prayer for God to protect the honour of the Psalmist's name!

Notice that it is a prayer FOR the one praying, as well as a prayer AGAINST his enemies. It is actually a prayer for God's interference in the thought life of God's enemies! Amazing!

24

Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!" Ps 35:3

Lack of assurance is a common problem among genuine believers. It is somewhat similar to not knowing if we are loved by another person. The key is hearing and seeing expressions of love from that person toward us. Interest, attention, kindness, affection—these are all tangible ways that we receive assurance that we are truly loved by another. How then does one receive assurance of God's love toward them? This verse tells us that it begins with a prayer for God to speak his love to us. This is a very personal request. It is a request for God to whisper something deep into our soul, to give us the assurance we lack.

When God answers a prayer like this, what form would you expect it to take? Would it be an impartation of faith in a written promise? An encouragement spoken through someone else? A faith-sense of God's love through a direct work of the Holy Spirit? Nagging fears suddenly erased? A gradual or sudden sense of inner peace? A message from God's word through a preacher, bringing special conviction? A song or a book that speaks directly to the longing of your soul? How would you expect God to answer a prayer like this?

25

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Ps 85:6

Joy is rare. So rare, in fact, that it gets the attention of believers and unbelievers. It is something everyone wants but few ever taste. Most accept the poor substitute called pleasure. Pleasure is much easier to find, but transient and shallow in comparison. Pleasure is a “feel good” experience that typically comes from the outside in, whereas joy is a deep heart-happiness that comes from within...but given first from above.

This prayer is a plea for God’s people—a plea for the church to be characterized by joy—a plea for marriages and families and relationships of all sorts to display a God-centered delight and gratitude.

Note what **MUST** come first. Joy is the result, not the request itself. And it all begins with prayer. Are you praying this regularly for your church? For your friends? For your family? For your marriage? For your small group? If not, why not? Will you make this a regular part of your prayers from now on?

26

Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Psalm 86:4-5

These two verses remind me of a verse in Proverbs:

An evil man is ensnared in his transgression, but a righteous man sings and rejoices. Proverbs 29:6

The first and second line interpret each other. Singing comes from being free—not being ensnared by sin. The song of the soul set free!

Psalm 86:4-5 hints at a similar theme. Note the request and the appeal to God’s forgiving nature. How does forgiveness granted by God give us gladness? What do we learn, then, about the connection between prayerlessness and a heavy spirit?

27

***Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth;
unite my heart to fear your name. Ps 86:11***

Every believer struggles with a divided heart on some level. Paul teaches us in Galatians that “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Gal 5:17)

But while we live with the presence of the flesh, we do not need to live with the mindset of the flesh. We find, in the request of Psalm 86, two requests, with two sanctifying results. One request seeks God’s truth. The other request seeks God’s power. We must know both before we can be truly changed.

“You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Matt 22:29

28

Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. Show me a sign of your favour, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me. Ps 86:16-17

God loves bold prayers and this is a bold prayer! Five bold requests in rapid succession. Nothing changes things like when God stands beside a man, woman or child. Impossible odds suddenly dissolve into nothingness! We need to pray this prayer more often—especially “Show me a sign of your favour!”. Note the two-fold effect of answered prayer—one toward demonic enemies, and one toward the one praying. Answered prayer has spiritual warfare implications! So we keep our eyes focused on God when in spiritual battle. His involvement changes everything, and that change comes through prayer!



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