



Pray as David Did

Our Mindset Toward Prayer

In our children's classes we have a session call "Bible Heroes" where the teacher talks about the life of a certain individual, that person's values, and how his or her life impacted the people of Israel. Though there are many men and women who could be classified as scriptural heroes, the hero who stands out in my mind is King David. David was a mighty warrior for the God of Israel. He slew lions and bears while shepherding his sheep, and slew the giant Goliath when he challenged God's people. As king, David subdued the enemies of Israel and ushered in an era of peace that lasted nearly 70 years.

But as mighty as David was as a warrior on the battlefield, he was much more mighty as a "prayer warrior". His prayers were his psalms. More than just words put to a melody, they were his innermost thoughts - his joy and his fears, his praise and his complaints. Together, they give us a glimpse the relationship he shared with the God of Israel and the love he had for God and His way of life.

David's psalms are examples of effective prayer - prayer that get's results, and though David was unable to pray all his problems away, they did give him peace and hope when he found himself in dire straits. We too can have peace and hope in times of need. Though our prayers may not be as eloquent as David's psalms, they can be just as effective. We too can pray in such a way that God will hear and answer us, just as He did for David.

In this three-part study, I want to discuss a few things I've learned over the years that have helped me in my prayer life and have helped - at least in my mind - make my prayers more effective. This will not be a formula for prayer, but simply points that I've used in my life to help enhance my own prayers. Maybe they can help you as well.

In this first part, we'll discuss our mindset toward prayer:

- What is Prayer?
- Preparing to Pray
- For What Should We Pray?

What is Prayer?

The Hebrew word for prayer is "tephillah" (תְּפִלָּה – St. 8605) which is the noun form of the Hebrew root word "palal" (פָּלַל - Strong's 6419). ". According to Strong's, "palal" means "to intervene, interpose, to mediate, and to judge". All of these words imply reaching out to another who can take action on your behalf. But the real meaning of a Hebrew word is oftentimes found in the pictographic picture of that word.

The Hebrew spelling of "palal" is (from right to left) "pey", "lamed" "lamed". The ancient "paleo Hebrew" letter "pey" made the shape of a mouth (⇐) and the letter "lamed" made the shape of a shepherd's staff (∪). The mouth is something that speaks, and the shepherd staff implies authority over his sheep. When you double the letters, you have "great authority".

According to Jeff Benner's Ancient Hebrew Research Center¹, the mental picture conveyed by that letter sequence is that of a person speaking to one in authority. In the ancient Hebrew culture, that would imply that the person speaking would be on his knees. This is illustrated in Isaiah's prophecy which likens the Persian king Cyrus to the messiah because both were raised up to free the Hebrew people. In the prophecy it shows that people from all nations will come to Cyrus and that -

¹ <http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/emagazine/021.html>

^{KJV} **Isaiah 45:14** . . . they shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee . . .

In this passage, the Hebrew word translated “supplication” is “palal”. Thus we see that falling down before one in authority when making supplication goes hand-in-hand.

“Palal” also means “judge”. In ancient times a person would go to the gates of the city to seek justice if his neighbor had harmed him, as in this verse -

^{KJV} **1 Samuel 2:25** If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him . . .

In this case, one person is entreating the judge for justice, and to the Hebrew, when justice has been served, then life is preserved². In other words - prayer is how we petition one in authority for a better life. This is the case even today. If you have ever seen the way a civil lawsuit is drawn up, you will see that after the plaintiff makes his case, he petitions the court with what is call a “prayer”.

With this background, Paul’s admonition to the Thessalonians has a little deeper meaning -

^{NKJ} **1 Thessalonians 5:12-18** ¹² And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Being the Hebrew scholar that he was, Paul understood that praying to a higher power, in this case the God of Israel, implied seeking justice from Him, thus we as individuals must practice justice in our lives if we expect God to provide justice for us.

In David’s psalms, he often asked God for justice.

^{NKJ} **Psalm 35:1-24** A Psalm of David. Plead *my cause*, O LORD, with those who strive with me; Fight against those who fight against me. ² Take hold of shield and buckler, And stand up for my help . . . ⁴ Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor Who seek after my life; Let those be turned back and brought to confusion Who plot my hurt . . . ¹¹ Fierce witnesses rise up; They ask me *things* that I do not know. ¹² They reward me evil for good, *To the sorrow of my soul* . . . ²² *This* You have seen, O LORD; Do not keep silence. O Lord, do not be far from me. ²³ Stir up Yourself, and awake to my vindication, To my cause, my God and my Lord. ²⁴ Vindicate me, O LORD my God, according to Your righteousness; And let them not rejoice over me.

With the concept of prayer being tied to justice, let’s move on to the next point . . .

Preparing for Prayer

In his book “To Pray as a Jew”, Rabbi Hayim Donin³ says -

“Jewish law requires the worshiper to be aware that it is God who is being addressed, to “know before Whom you are standing” (Berakhot 28b).”

In other words, when we pray, we must realize that we are making a request of the creator of the universe. This implies that we take into account that . . .

1. we are standing before the King who has the power of life or death over us

² http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/JudgesInTheCongregation_P2.htm?zoom_highlight=diyn

³ “To Pray as a Jew”, Hayim Donin, Copyright 1980, ISBN 0-465-08633-0, pg.18-19

2. we are asking the King to give us some of His time so we can make a petition or to hear our praise
3. what we are asking or saying must be of interest to Him
4. that we have done our part before seeking His input

The Jewish term for this mindset toward prayer is “kavanah” (כַּוְנָה). Kavanah comes from the 3-letter root כוּן. Even though the word is not used in scripture, the root is equivalent to the Hebrew word “kuwn” (Strong’s 3559) which has as one of its meanings “to prepare”. The rabbis say that it means “the intent of the heart”. In other words, it’s how you prepare yourself for prayer. For the Jewish people, whose prayers are often read straight out of a prayer book, it is sometimes hard to get their mind focused on God as they repeat the same prayers day after day. But non-Jews have the same problem. We often find our minds wandering as well, especially if we pray what is virtually the same prayer day after day. In time, prayer becomes rote. The remedy is “kavanah” - preparation.

So how do we prepare for prayer? The first step, especially in light of the fact that prayer is tied to justice, is to follow the words of our Messiah -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 5:22-24** ²² whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. ²³ "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

In other words, get right with your brother. The context seems to indicate that the person who is angry with his brother has the responsibility to make things right. Maybe your brother has borrowed something from you and failed to return it; or maybe you’ve been led to believe that your brother has slandered you but there is no evidence to prove that is the case. You may discover that your brother simply forgot to return what was borrowed or that your brother never said what you thought he said. In both cases, your anger may be unfounded and could be an inhibition to effectual prayer. Bring a just ending to the conflict so that both you and your brother can move on with your lives.

The next step in preparing for prayer is to come up with an outline for prayer. The “Lord’s Prayer”⁴ is a good model. It begins by honoring the name of the Creator and His purpose for us - the Kingdom of God. This is followed by various petitions that are according to His will. The model closes with praising Him for who He is.

Another model for prayer is the Jewish “Amidah” prayer. It is the quintessential prayer of Judaism because it - like the Lord’s prayer - offers praise to God then leads the offerer through the process by which God will bring His people into the Promised Land.

Many of David’s psalms seem to follow an outline of sorts as well. That outline goes somewhat like this:

- Praise to God for His power and glory
- A petition showing David’s current need
- A statement showing that David’s need is according to God’s will
- A statement of faith that God will deliver what David has asked

Considering again that prayer is in many ways a plea for justice, we can see that David’s psalms tend to follow that theme. Take, for example - Psalm 11:

⁴ Matt. 6:9-13

^{ESV} **Psalm 11:1-7.** In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, "Flee like a bird to your mountain, ² for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; ³ if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" ⁴ The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test, the children of man. ⁵ The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. ⁶ Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. ⁷ For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.

In this prayer, David acknowledges God's power to protect him. He follows that by showing that he - as a bird in flight - is vulnerable to those who seek his life. But David believes his heart is upright (righteous) and since God loves the righteous and hates those who love violence, David believes that God should destroy those who are wanting to kill him. David then reminds God that God himself is righteous.

Along with having a prayer outline, it's also important to plan in advance what you will be praying about. There are certainly things we would probably pray about everyday - the health and well-being of our family, our job, our fellowship, and our country to name a few, We would also want to give thanks and praise for the many things God has done for us. Then there are current and special needs: a sick child, an unexpected expense, insight into a certain aspect of scripture. All of these are things that are of interest to God and the type of help He wants to give.

Besides preparing a plan for our prayers, it's important to be able to pray without interruptions. Try to imagine yourself standing before the King of the Universe, asking him to take care of your various needs, then your cell phone begins to ring. Do you answer it or let it keep ringing. In either case, your train of thought has been interrupted and the King has noticed they you have not thoroughly prepared to have Him as your audience. Therefore, in regards to kavenah, it is important to prepare a special place for prayer as well as a time for prayer.

In his rebuke of those who were making a show of their prayers, Yeshua said -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 6:6** "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

The Greek word used for "room" in this passage is "tameion" (Strong's 5009). When you cross-reference it to Hebrew through the Septuagint, you find that it translates the Hebrew word "chedar" (חֶדָר - Strong's 2315) which is an inner room, most often a bed-chamber. It's the private room inside the house where the husband and wife share intimacy. The prophet Joel speaks of it as the place from which the Bridegroom emerges as He and the bride prepare for the wedding supper of the Lamb.

^{ESV} **Joel 2:16** gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room (*chedar*), and the bride her chamber.

Does this mean that public prayer is wrong? No! Though there are a number of examples of God's people praying in private, there are also examples of them praying in public. In fact, Yeshua Himself prayed both privately⁵ and publicly⁶ (or at least semi-privately). The difference seems to be the urgency and seriousness of the prayer.

⁵ Mark 1:35; Matt. 14:23; Matt. 26:36; Luke 6:12

⁶ Luke 9:29; Matt. 19:13; John 17:1

In order to further avoid interruptions, you may want to consider having a specific time for prayer. For many, this may be dictated by your work schedule, but if your schedule is more flexible; or if you are on vacation, you might want to consider praying at certain hours of the day. "What difference does that make?" one might ask. "Doesn't God live outside of time?" Yes and no! God certainly created time, but then He set up a schedule where He rests every seventh day. In addition, He set up specific "appointed times" during the year when He invites us to dine with Him. It also appears that there are certain times each day when He is more accessible than at other times. Those specific times are the times of the morning and evening sacrifices⁷. These are special times each day when God said He would meet with us -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 29:38-43** ³⁸ " Now this *is* what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. ³⁹ "One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. . . . ⁴² "*This shall be* a continual burnt offering throughout your generations *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you. ⁴³ "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and *the tabernacle* shall be sanctified by My glory.

Each of these are a "sweet hour of prayer" when God appears to be standing at the door waiting for us to knock. Were these times no longer important after the death of the Messiah? No, for we see the disciples continue to go to the Temple at these specific times -

^{NKJ} **Acts 3:1** Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.

There are many examples of good things happening to God's people at the times of either the morning or evening sacrifices, but we'll have to cover them in a later message.

One last point in regards to kavenah before we move on . . .

Though we might have removed all the obstacles that get in the way of effective prayer, have put together a plan for our prayers, have established a place to give them, and have carved out a specific time each day to offer our prayers, we still have to arrive at the King's throne with a clear mind. This is one of the hardest things I face in regards to daily prayers. It seems that the day is so short and there are so many things to do, and thus when my time for prayer arrives, I have a hard time getting up from what I'm doing to devote the needed time for prayer. What's more, once I've entered my prayer chamber, I oftentimes find it hard to get my mind focused on what I want to pray about. That's where - at least for me - the Jewish Amidah prayer comes in. Like I mentioned earlier, it is a step by step guide through the plan of God for His people, and it keeps that plan in front of you on a daily basis? It's become my practice to use the Amidah as a prelude to my personal prayers. It is not the focus of my prayer time, but it helps clear my mind from the day's activities so that I can focus on what I'm wanting to talk with God about. By reciting the Amidah, I'm able to come to a state of kavenah where I'm finally ready to pray.

For What Should We Pray?

Going back to the model prayer, Yeshua begins by saying "Your will be done". That pretty much sums up what we should pray for. We should pray for things that are according to His will. So how do we determine his will? Paul, in a somewhat round-about way, defines the "will of God".

^{NKJ} **Romans 2:17-20** ¹⁷ Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in

⁷ Exodus 29:38-42

darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.

In this passage, Paul - even though he ridicules their hypocrisy in regards to it - states that the Jewish leaders know that the “will of god” is to teach and observe the Torah. But the Torah is more than just laws and instructions, it’s also a book of prophecy . . . a prophecy that God will restore His kingdom on the earth. So, by extension, God’s will encompasses not only obedience to the Torah, but any action we take that will further God’s kingdom. That’s why Paul goes on to say -

^{NKJ} **Romans 12:1-2** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So our prayers should not only be in accordance to the Torah instructions, but should include your desires in regards to God’s overall plan for the kingdom. For example:

Say your fellowship wants to host a camp during a particular festival - say “Shavuot” - and that you want it to be successful so that others can learn of God’s festivals, then it would be appropriate to petition God for warm days, cool nights, and no rain. Yes - I’m being facetious, but hopefully you get the point. When praying for God’s will in our lives, we should be very detailed. Even though He knows what we need in order to perform His will, he - like any father - appreciates it when we ask.

For those of us who have been called back to the Hebraic way of Messiah Yeshua, we should remember that our calling comes with a responsibility - not just to observe His instructions, but to proclaim God’s awesome virtues to a dying country that is intent of removing any semblance of God from our culture.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

This is a responsibility that will take a lot of prayer in order know what to do and how to succeed.

In conclusion, let’s remember that prayers are petitions that should be based on God’s will and requested in a frame of mind that recognizes the greatness of the one to whom we’re asking.

Shalom Alechem.

