Praying with a Purpose

Summary

The persistent friend at midnight, the widow and the unjust judge, Jacob wrestling the angel — Scripture's own prayer examples model something more than repetition. This article draws out what that something is.

- Old and New Covenant examples of sincere, persistent, reasoned prayer.
- "Reasoning with Yahweh" distinguished from making excuses.
- A closing call to bring specific, heartfelt requests with real confidence and originality.

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Whoever said, "prayer changes things", should have said, "prayer can change things". Whether or not it does, depends to a large extent on the prayer itself.

All prayers are not equal nor do they bring equal results. The more heartfelt a prayer is, the more meaning Yahweh sees in it, and therefore the more likely it is to be answered. The Bible clearly demonstrates this.

Through the prophet Hosea, Yahweh expressed concern about some whose prayers were ineffective. "They did not cry out to Me with their heart" *(7:14)*. Isaiah lamented to Yahweh, "There is no one who calls on Your name, who stirs himself up to take hold of You" *(64:7)*.

The purpose of prayer is to contact Yahweh, to have Him listen and to have Him respond appropriately. That purpose is not served by an approach that is unfeeling or indifferent. The "fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" *(James 5:16)*.

One day the disciples came to Yah'shua. "Lord, teach us to pray", they requested *(Luke 11:1)*. Yah'shua answered by giving them a short example to illustrate what they could pray about *(vv. 2-4)*. The entire *Christian* world knows this simple prayer as Yahweh's Prayer.

Yet when the Messiah spoke the words, He was not praying. Matthew's account of Yah'shua giving His prayer outline to the disciples records Yah'shua as saying: "In this manner, therefore, pray..." *(6:9-13)*. Yah'shua went on *(in Luke 11)* to give an important principle concerning effective prayer. In the middle of the night, He said, a certain man needed to borrow three loaves of bread to feed unexpected company.

The man went to his friend's house and asked for the bread. His first effort got him nothing but a weak, negative reply. He did not give up though. He continued to ask. The neighbour finally crawled out of bed and gave him the loaves he wanted.

Again, in Luke 18, Yah'shua stressed how we "always ought to pray and not lose heart" *(v. 1)*. In this case He told about the widow and the unjust judge. The judge at first refused to grant the widow's request, but she prevailed "by her continual coming" *(v. 5)*.

If an unjust judge would listen to a persistent widow, Yah'shua remarked, how much more surely will our heavenly Father, in whom is no injustice, listen to and respond to our needs? "Shall Yahweh not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily". *(vv. 7,8)*.

In both these instances, Yahweh is portrayed as one who may be moved by prayers offered with feeling and persistence by righteous people. Importunity and persistence do not, of course, mean disrespect or nagging at Yahweh. They do mean perseverance reflected in sincere petitions about a logical subject matter. They mean praying with a sense of purpose.

While it may be necessary to pray about some matters repeatedly, we must not assume that we always have to make a request more than once. The Scriptures contain numerous examples of answers to prayer that came after only one short prayer - to righteous people who had built up a level of mutual respect in their relationship with Yahweh.

Sometimes Yahweh's answer is a prompt "yes", sometimes it is a "not yet" or even "no". Yahweh knows whether a request is in our best interest, and the best time to grant a request. And He is not always in as much of a rush as we are.

It is good to reason with Yahweh. In fact, Yahweh urges, "Come now, and let us reason together" *(Isaiah 1:18)*. Abraham reasoned with Yahweh concerning His plan to destroy Sodom - as a result, Yahweh promised that He would not destroy the city if He found only 10 righteous parties there *(Gen. 18:23-33)*. Moses reasoned about the rebellious Israelites. Yahweh changed His mind on punishing them for their idolatry *(Ex. 32:9-14)*.

Reasoning with Yahweh does not mean making excuses for what we are or what we have done. Nor does it mean trying to get Yahweh to change His laws. It means giving Him reasons for why we make particular prayer requests.

Jacob was blessed by Yahweh, because Jacob "wrestled with him" all night! Yahweh responded, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with Yahweh and with men, and prevailed" *(Genesis 32:22-29)*.

The symbology is clear - if we really want something, and that something is good and right, then we will no doubt at times, find it necessary to wrestle with men and with Yahweh to gain His support. The message is, that if you know in your heart that you are doing a good thing - don't give up! Yahweh will help you!

Yahweh will in some matters be totally flexible and His decision may depend on how and why we make the requests we do. He wants to know our reasons for asking, just like any loving parent wants to know why a child asks for something.

He knows, that once we have accepted Him into our lives, that we are rightful heirs to His promises - including His promise to answer our prayers. Therefore He must be careful to grant only those things that are truly in our best interest. Like it or not, sometimes He does know better!

When you receive bills you cannot pay; a notification that you lost your job, a frightening medical report or some other bad news, do you ever think of taking the document to a private place, spreading it out and asking Yahweh to look at it? Is Yahweh that real to you?

King Hezekiah received a threatening letter that said the powerful Assyrian nation would attack his kingdom, and; "Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it: and Hezekiah went...and spread it before Yahweh" *(Isaiah 37:14).*

Listen to how he prayed: "O Lord of Hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim...incline your ear...open your eyes, O Yahweh, and see...Now therefore, O Yahweh our God, save us" *(vv. 16-20)*. Hezekiah prayed with a sense of purpose - there was no more he could do, so he asked Yahweh for help. His faith resulted in Yahweh defeating the Assyrians.

The ease of one's communion with Yahweh is directly related to the degree of one's surrender to Yahweh. If, for example, a party is knowingly preoccupied with sinful activities, that party cannot in good conscience, ask Yahweh in faith to grant a prayer request.

Here is how the apostle John explains: "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward Yahweh. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" *(1 John 3:21-22).* Here is confirmation again that only the righteous "that keep His commandments", receive answers to their prayers. A sincere repentant attitude is the beginning of righteousness.

On one occasion Yah'shua began to pray: "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me" *(John 11:41-42)*. He knew that Yahweh always heard Him, and that He could speak to His Father on the spur of the moment, because He always did the things that pleased the Father *(John 8:29).*

Yahweh says to those of us that seek to obey Him: "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him...He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him" *(Psalm 91:14,15).*

Yahweh makes Himself accessible to us. In fact, "He is not far from each one of us" *(Acts 17:27)*. It is so sad that so many today, have taken it upon themselves to think that they are above Yahweh - that they don't need or believe in Yahweh.

Their ideas of "self-enlightenment" have actually caused them to regress past the stages of our Biblical forefathers - to a time of ancient pagan myths!

Prayer is a dynamic contact with the Creator of the universe, not an empty ritual or form. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to Yahweh" *(Phil. 4:6).* This makes possible inner peace, "which surpasses all knowledge" *(v. 7)*.

Put original thought in your prayers. You will find it well worth the effort - if your goal is to have Yahweh hear you. And when you hear Him - and you will - your life will truly change!

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