

August 9, 2020

## Praying along the Way Jesus sends us

### **Call to worship:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 124:8)  
Let us worship God.

### **Prayer:**

O God,  
you who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
    ever three yet ever one,  
you are our God and greatly to be praised.  
When we are brought low, you raise us up.  
When we call on you, you are near.  
As we approach you in this time of worship,  
    draw near to us,  
    renew in us the joy of your salvation,  
    and grant us the courage to continue walking the way you send us,  
        to make known to all people your mighty deeds,  
for your glory and the world's good.  
Amen.

### **Hymn:** #394 "Holy spirit, truth divine"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnXCbF1jz9w>

### **Hearing and interpreting God's Word:**

When the psalms speak of meditation, they refer to the practice of repeatedly reciting aloud some phrase or thought. Meditation, in the understanding of the psalms, is mumbling. When we meditate on the psalms; when we recite the words out loud and repeatedly, we are joining our voices with the prayers of generations of God's faithful people offered in times of hardship and times of ease – Christians and Jews alike. Moreover, praying the psalms takes us beyond merely reciting someone else's thoughts. Praying the psalms involves resting with the poem, and often with only a couple lines of the poem, until your patterns of thought and behavior become so transformed by what you are reciting, that the words you read become true expressions of your own sentiment.

In the book of the Psalms, God has given to us a prayer book. He means for us to use these prayers, not solely to gain knowledge, not solely to repeat some ancient words, but to be transformed by them. To learn faithful devotion to God at the feet of those who have walked the Way of the Lord before us.

We began last Sunday with a psalm of praise.

Today we'll pray for community revival.

READ PSALM 85.

This psalm is addressed to the leader of the Korahites. They were the priestly tribe descended from the Levitical priest Korah. They were the Temple singers.

Knowing that informs us that this song was used in Israel's corporate worship. It's more a communal prayer than a personal prayer. However, as is the case whenever we sing in our corporate worship, the understanding is that the words which the singers sing in concert are expressions of the personal sentiments of the worshippers.

This is a prayer for when it feels as though God has removed his favour from the life of the community.

I wonder what was happening in Israel that made them conclude that God might be angry with them. What might have been happening that would cause the entire community of faith to raise their voices and pray for revival?

Maybe there were fewer people attending their worship gatherings?

Maybe other nations saw them as part of the problem rather than as messengers of the solution to society's ills? Maybe they were irrelevant or even harmful in the eyes of society?

Maybe they were being attacked and it didn't seem like God was doing anything to protect them?

Maybe it felt as though the life of the community had become stagnant, or even in decline?

Because we can't date the writing of this psalm, we can't really place it in a particular historic period. Whatever were the specific circumstances, the worshiping community recognized that things were out of balance. Communal life was not as it should be.

In order to truly pray the psalms, we have to approach the poems as God's ordained way for us to learn devotion to him. Meaning, that we take the words as they have been written, compiled, and preserved in scripture, and ask what it means for us to read these words out loud.

When we petition God to "revive us again" and to return his favour to our community, we need to begin by asking what this might look like.

The psalm begins by evoking communal memories. In so doing, it calls not only the worshippers to remember the times of blessing, but insists God remember as well:

Lord, you once were favourable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
You forgave the iniquity of your people.  
You turned from your hot anger.

As the choir sang these words, and as the worshippers joined in the refrain, individual thoughts would turn to stories of Passover, of exodus, of pillars of fire and smoke leading a nation through a wilderness, of Pentecost and Moses on the mountain receiving the Law, of King David uniting the Holy Kingdom, of restoration following exile, of rebuilding the Holy City and its temple.

As you hear the choir singing these words in your imagination, what are your personal memories? What are some of our congregational memories?

When were times when God was favourable?

To you? To your congregation? To our denomination?

That can be a pretty complex question to answer. We also need to ask: What defines these seasons? What transpired during that time that led you to the conclusion it was because of God's blessing?

Another way of saying this is: What are we asking when we ask God to restore and revive us?

When we learn God and God's ways from the stories of the Bible, we learn that there are some common manifestations of seasons of blessing. In the story of Abraham, we learn that the blessing which Abraham's descendants were to pass on to the nations was the way of living in righteousness and justice; in proper relationship with God and with humans. In Jeremiah 31:33 the prophet wrote that God's people will have a hunger and a passion – a heartfelt desire – to know God and to learn his Word. The prophet Joel wrote that God's people will have a sense of purpose and vision. And that they will be motivated to work toward that purpose. When the Holy Spirit catalyzed the church into action on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter confirmed Joel's analysis. There was purpose and passion; vision and desire. And the fruit of such a desire to know God are God-honouring relationships with people and all of creation. The apostle Paul, Jesus himself, and others wrote about how, when God's people are driven by the Holy Spirit,

when God's blessing infuses his people, they will know contentment, kindness, patience, gentleness, and gratitude; they will know peace despite their circumstances. And joy.

The desire to know God and his Word. The passion to make Him known among our families and neighbours. Together with a vision of peace, contentment, kindness, gratitude, and forgiveness in the name of the Lord. These are manifestations of revival. These are what make for a healthy, vibrant, and God-glorifying community of faith. These are what make the People of God stand out as a lighthouse; a city on a hill; as witnesses of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven.

This is what we are asking when we pray "Will you not revive us again, so that your people may rejoice in you?"

Revival may be what we want. Indeed, it might be what we need. But revival is the consequence, not the catalyst. Revival is to our religious life what a fire is to a spark.

Praying for revival is like looking at an unsplit oak log and willing it to ignite!

Our prayer ought not to be for revival but for new and renewed awareness of God's grace.

And so, our supplication is verse 7: "Show us your steadfast love, O LORD."

When we have new understanding and new experience of God's grace, revival will follow. And your glory will dwell in our land, O Lord.

As you pray Psalm 85 – as you recite it out loud, as you listen to it being read, as you memorize lines and mumble them out loud – you come to learn, if you didn't immediately notice it, that if you truly want to know in a new and greater way God's steadfast love, there are some things you can do.

First, Psalm 85 teaches us to expect God to respond. After making our supplication, we sit back and listen.

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people...

Why can we so boldly declare that God will speak to his people?

Because God is not a voiceless idol or a philosophy entombed in written volumes on a shelf. He is the Living Lord and Compassionate King who is near to all who call on him.

After Jesus' resurrection, he "ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Jesus is not physically present with us, yet he is not inert. From his place at the altar of the heavenly temple Jesus lives to intercede for his church. He breathed the Holy Spirit into the souls of those who believe in him. And by his Holy Spirit, through his Word, God the LORD will speak.

The prayer offered in faith expects to hear an answer. Charles Spurgeon wrote that we can hear God's answer in his written Word, in the ways he provides for our needs, and by the Spirit convicting and convincing our inner souls.

And we can test the words we hear by their effects. The answer that comes from the living Lord Jesus is the answer that unites love and truth, justice and holiness, righteousness and faithfulness. The answer of peace.

So, while we pray for renewed experiences of God's grace, we wait expectantly for God to answer – as he has answered his church in generations past and Israel as well.

And as we wait for his answer, we turn to him in repentance.

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful,  
to those who turn to him in their hearts.

If we don't know that we need to experience God's steadfast love, we probably won't. The walk of discipleship is a constant walk of returning to the path on which Jesus sends us. A pastor once said it is a daily and hourly saying "Yes" to Jesus and his ways and a "No" to everything else.

As Jesus sends us to reveal his grace and his way of living, he calls us to turn to him hour by hour, to listen in his Word, and to expect to experience his grace.

Glory be to God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore. Amen.

**Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession:**

Great and gracious God,

we thank you that you chose to create life with whom to share your life;

we thank you that you have forgiven sin through the sacrifice you offered on the cross,

and are redeeming your good creation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you that you have created us

to be partners with you in creation and redemption.

We thank you that you have given us your Word, written, translated, and preserved

so that we can learn faithful devotion to you.

And we thank you that you are not a God who remains far off,  
but you hear the prayers of your people.

And so now we offer to you our prayers of intercession.

For the world you love.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are suffering because of COVID-19,  
for those who are ill, for those whose lives have been transformed.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are recipients of prejudice and those who are perpetrators of prejudice,

Refresh the eyes of the soul

so that people can see each other as beloved images of you,  
as images of all that is holy and good.

Hear our prayers

For your church.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are beginning to gather once more and for those who are waiting,  
grant us the courage to proclaim your works and your righteousness,  
to be true witnesses of your stable and constant grace in a world with so much turmoil.

Hear our prayers.

For those who are near to our hearts at this time.

O Lord, Hear our prayers.

And though we are separated, hear now our united voices as we pray:

**Our Father ...**

**Hymn:** #398 “When the spirit of the Lord moves in my soul”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UENQsL3s5Ng>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYrNXZtWw4Y>

**Blessing:**

As you walk through your day,  
may God go before you to lead you,  
behind you to protect you,  
beneath you to support you,  
beside you to befriend you.

Do not be afraid.

May the blessing of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you.

Do not be afraid.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.