

Ranting in Prayer Is Better Than Rioting: How Our Prayers Are Fixed by Praying

The Summit Church - Feb 2023 - by Raudel Hernandez

Welcome: Hi Church, my name is Raudel and I have the privilege of serving our Spanish Campus; we now gather in Raleigh right behind Crabtree Valley Mall, please help us invite bilingual and Spanish speakers to our Sunday gatherings there.... I think they'll love it, and we'll love to meet them....

Pray....

Let us read **Psalm 73**, it's a dense passage for sure, but hang in there with me

A Psalm of Asaph.

1

Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

2

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.

3

For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4

For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.

5

They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.

6

Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.

7

Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.

8

They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.

9

They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.

10

Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.

11

And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

12

Behold, these are the wicked;

always at ease, they increase in riches.

13

All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.

14

For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.

15

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

16

But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,

17

until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.

18

Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.

19

How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!

20

Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.

Let's stop there at verse 20 for now:

Intro: I was asked to share with you today specifically about **prayer**, and I was asked to do so specifically out of the **book of Psalms**. My first reaction was: "*Are you sure? Have you read how messed up prayers are in the book of Psalms*" ☺; thankfully there is a lot of beauty and truth in the mess

My second reaction was: "*What can I possibly tell you about prayer that you haven't heard?*" Especially with all those amazing prayer videos you guys have been getting.... "*What else can I say?*"

And the third thing that happened as soon as I heard the topic was **prayer**, was that I couldn't help it but be transported back to some of the ways I have personally seen with my own eyes the mighty power and hand of God through prayer... right before my eyes...

- I'm not sure if this is a good introduction or not, but I hope it'll at least encourage you to know that God does answer faith filled prayers
- I'm only going to pick two occasions and encourage you with those:

When I was about 7 years old, my uncle Ramon (which we lovingly call Ramoncito) came to my house an evening, and said, "*I came here to pray for Oneal, I believe God is going to heal him*"; // he didn't say it in an arrogant way, nor in a demanding manner, he said it very loving and tenderly yet completely assured

- Oneal is one of my brothers... / he was born with a physical deformity in his body, his spinal cord had several bents and "S" like shapes,
- Because of that he was hunched down all of the time and limped.... The bone deformity also meant that my Mom had to custom tailor every pair of pants he would wear (that's hard in a poor country btw),

but she would remove a good size of the length of the bottom of the left leg of each pant so that my brother Oneal's body would look less crooked and the pants somewhat even...

- On top of that he was born with a deformity to his vocal chords and even though despite being poor we had access to great doctors, the doctors didn't want to do surgery to his vocal chords because his condition was such that there was a high risk of him not being able to speak again after the surgery... / that also devastated my family because I come from a family that loves to worship the Lord with music and with songs, my family is always signing to God... but Oneal simply couldn't sing like us because of the birth problem with his vocal chords and body...
- And so that evening my Tio Ramoncito (my uncle) comes to my house and says, "**we are going to pray for Oneal tonight, I believe God is going to heal him...**" (BTW lots of modern Christians today have gone **so far away from actually embracing prayer and the power of the almighty God we pray to**, that perhaps if someone were to go to your house and tell you the same thing about praying for your child for healing because God wants to heal him, **some would think it's weird...** - that's how far we've come...) -P- **↑ do not undermine the power of God because of what you have experienced or not seen...** / yes it's true that my family didn't know if God was going to heal Oneal or not (we had prayed for him lots of times before) **but we never doubted that God could heal him...** / we thought: "**why not pray for him for the 100th time? God can still heal him if He wants to...**", yes, it will take a miracle due to the gravity of his condition, but you see, my family has always had this child like believe and conviction that there is nothing too hard for The Lord
- The family gathered around Oneal to pray for him, my uncle stood in front of him, knelt before him and told, us, "*leave your eyes open, let's witness with eyes wide open what God is going to do right now...*"; **Summit Church God as my witness every word that I'm telling you is pure truth:**
- My uncle started praying and **you can literally hear the cracking of bones as my brother Oneal's body started straightening and moving up and being healed right before our eyes....**
- God straightened every bone in his spine and legs, and as if that wasn't enough, as we all started praising God, we heard Oneal praising God as well and immediately his voice changed right before us, **God also healed his vocal chords....**
- I don't want to get ahead of this sermon but what followed was a praise party... because **prayer always starts and ends up in a praise party....**

I'll give you one more: My parents were missionaries in Peru, but the poor kind (the missionaries that have nothing and live on a dirt floor house, that was us...); my Dad worked doing anything he could to do ministry, and we lived meal by meal... yeah you heard that right, not paycheck to paycheck, but meal by meal...

- One time we had nothing to eat, my Dad had worked like a dog almost 24 hours straight only to not be paid, he was empty handed and didn't have anything he can take home for us to eat...
- When he got home (we were all like bird chicks waiting to receive something to eat) except his hands were empty, and he looked so very exhausted, the silence and was palpable in the house;
- Then all of the sudden he asked the family to gather around the table (when I say table, I mean a piece of plywood we had found, 3 of us were sitting in buckets, and the other 3 in chairs and BTW one of the chair was missing a leg but we knew just how to sit in it so we wouldn't fall...)
- So my Dad gathers us around the table and says with a loud and clear like child conviction: "**Let us thank God for this meal and pray before taking it...**", **except there was only one problem, I'm looking at the table and there was nothing on the table....**
- None of us 4 brothers dared to say anything, but it was awkward and confusing...
- **Then my Dad raises his voice and GIVES THANKS GOD FOR THE MEAL WE ARE ABOUT TO EAT, ↑ "Dios tu eres Jehova Jireh, gracias Dios por estos alimentos..."**
- He finished praying, we open our eyes, and the next 15 seconds of silence seemed like an eternity
- But all of the sudden, someone knocks on our wooden door, and says: "*I don't know who you guys are, but I'm a follower of Jesus, and JESUS told me to bring you all dinner tonight*"
- I'm not gonna lie, I couldn't believe it...

- And what a dinner it was, it was the rotisserie chicken and fries we could never buy because we were poor.... // that's why today I stuff my face with Alpaca every week... takes me back y'all...

Now, there are some of you that have been praying for healing, and God hasn't done it, or you've prayed for healing and God didn't do it and the loved one you prayed for has passed.... If you are in this group let me encourage you with this real quick:

- **First**, every prayer for healing for a child of God / every single one / 100% of them **will be answered** / I don't know what Bible you read, but in my Bible it says 100% of them will receive healing, if not on this broken earth, then in the New Heaven and New Earth that is coming. **God heals and restores all things....**
- In case I wasn't clear enough, **Un-answered prayers for healing DO NOT EXIST**, those who have placed their trust in Jesus WILL BE healed and restore, if not here, there (and btw, the healing there is not for a few years, but for an eternity)

Now for the rest of you not in this group of prayer warriors like my Tio Ramincito, **sometimes you have not because you give up asking too quickly**, many of you don't know 10 year and 20 year answers to prayers **because you won't pray for something not even a whole day, let alone 20 years:**

↑ Prayer **happens** when self-sufficiency goes out the window, and you realize GOD ALONE is your hope. And prayer happens when regardless of what the world says / how long it's been, / or what you have not seen or experienced, **you have not lost sight of the power of our living God. / God's still the same!!**

- ↓ I decided to join this Church 15 years ago after observing 5 different weaknesses in this body that became 5 prayer requests, **15 years later, God has NOT answered all those prayer requests / He may not even answers all 5 in my lifetime**, but I have NO doubt that either voluntarily or involuntarily, sooner or later, GOD will finish what He started, **because I know one thing beyond the shadow of a doubt: I'VE SEEN HIS POWER THROUGH PRAYER, AND GOD ANSWERS PRAYERS ACCORDING TO HIS WILL AND RICHES IN GLORY**
- We (me included) may be too stiff-neck of a people for now, but don't worry, God will humble us, He'll bend the paralyzed knees and crush our sin and pride
- BTW I have **other** personal prayer requests that God has not granted yet (and I'm not referring to some of the vain prayer request I have... / like having a shop where I can work on cars... 😊 okay listen I'm not that holy, sometimes I do ask for vain things, love working on cars); I'm talking about prayer requests straight out of the Bible... / one of them I've been praying for 18 years, the other one for 14 years... // and yet I'm convinced that God will answer those, **He is faithful / He never changes / there is NO shadow of variation in God.... And I can't wait to tell you about it when it happens....**

Beloved church:

You can either be praying or rioting; -P- what's it gonna be? Do you live complaining and rioting, or praying?

So let me use the rest of my time here to show you this in action right here in Psalm 73 ...

Prayer is simply communication with God / communication with God that allows me to know and enjoy God, strengthens my relationship with God / helps me see the hand and power of God / and where my life steps are ordered according to God's will for my life. 2x

Remember God's not dead, He lives, He is everywhere, and you can talk to Him

He listens, / He answers prayers according to His Will (His will is what is best for us), He does not grow weary of hearing your prayers... **↑ it's actually the opposite: God is saddened by your silence, not your continuous and messy pleas**

Talking about messy pleas and prayers, you heard the 1st part of Psalm 73, that was pretty messy wasn't it?

Now, some of you may notice that I'm not going really deep in the first part of the Psalm (other than to point out the messiness of the prayer (which is a pattern in prayers in Psalms that teaches us something), but, I'm not going any deeper than that. **Well, it's not because that part is boring or confusing or I just don't like it.** In fact, it's a beautiful picture of lament — looking around at the injustice of the world and telling God, "**Lord this isn't right!**" (there are more prayers like this in the psalms than any other kind btw, lots of lament);

- You know, I have a lot of prayers like this, too. I look at our community and I say, "**God, this isn't right!**" I even look around our church and recognize, "**We're not where God wants us to be; God, this isn't right!**" And I will keep praying those prayers until Jesus calls me home.

Those are good prayers. But today I want to focus on how the psalmist *ends*. Because while he begins by saying, "**God, this isn't right!**" he ends by saying, "**God, you are with me ... God, you are my portion.**" **I want you and I to end up saying the same....** You see, if we don't have that vision of reality, then the injustice in our community and in our church will eat us alive.

It's a sad and messy prayer those first 20 verses, **but look with me what happens in verse 21:**

Psalm 73:21-28

21

When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,

22

I was senseless and ignorant;

I was a brute beast before you. Modern translation: "I was an idiot before you in prayer Lord..."

This is the part of the Psalm when he realizes "**Well, I may not have been wrong in what I saw around me ... but I still wasn't seeing the whole picture. Why? Because I was more concerned with comparing myself to others than being grateful to God**" - Church there is no greater balm of healing for pain, rejection, and indifference than the fact **THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE HAS NOT FORSAKEN AND IS WITH YOU, pain is real, so is His company.**

You see, he realizes he has been praying out of the sin of comparison rather than out of the joy of gratitude and compassion (the reason we start praying with praise and thanksgiving rather than our petitions is because what we really need is God... / it's ok to ask for things but things won't fulfill you as much as God)

But he starts his prayer complaining about all the people around him with money and he is broke.... // he is jealous of the wealth of others... / he has fallen into the sin of comparison....

- **Been there anyone? -P-** I know I have. In my flesh, it doesn't take too much to start down the road of comparison. **I hear so many of you talk about your kids being at UNC and NC STATE, and Duke, well; my kids are in WakeTech because that's all I can afford just so you know; And I find in my heart a bitterness, a jealousy rising up, which I know is not from God....**

- But you and I have to be careful because you can start falling into the sin of comparison and you'll start praying like this guy here in Psalms 73, out of sinful comparison rather than out of joyful gratitude and compassion
- But thankfully he hears himself speaking and is convicted, **because He is doing what? Because he is praying,** / (if fact, v.17 reveals that his first moment of seeing the whole picture is precisely because he is praying... that's how powerful praying to God is... v.17 says, **17 "until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end."**) it takes you being in the presence of God in prayer to see things right... / he was able to become aware through The Spirit that he was not praying correctly **while he is praying** / Church, **God even fixes the way we pray THROUGH US PRAYING, we gotta pray!!** / He can perceive in v.21&22: "*ok Lord I'm thinking more ill than i should; / I wasn't just angry at injustice, I was actually accusing you God of wrongdoing ... I'm so sorry Lord*"; look at it with me again:

21

When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,

22

I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.

In the mix of his pain mixed with truth and lies, God is injecting humility in him because He is indeed praying... **↑ Prayer is the playground and the garden of the power of God! 2x You've never seen a garden in the Bible where there isn't God and prayer....** He's been mixing some truth with real pain leading him to wrong conclusions about God, **BUT, he is in the garden where God's power resides: Prayer! And he won't be able to escape God ministering to him. -P-** God ministers to us in prayer!

- God starts granting him the humility He needs **so that he may change the way he sees and prays and not hate others because they are wealthy,** again God does this work while he prays, **he started praying with some truth but somewhat wrong, but because HE IS praying, God is doing transforming work,** and notice God doesn't punish him for being honest either, / God is not surprised by his messy confessions & lack of humility....
- **↓ BTW talking about humility and the wealthy...** I've had the privilege of grabbing a cup of coffee with some of you that are very wealthy, and (this just between you and :), do you know how you can tell a wealthy person with humility and one that needs a piece of humble pie? The humble one lets me buy them coffee, the other one doesn't...
- Some of you forget that one of the greatest ways to tackle pride is not by giving **but by receiving**
- Well the Psalmists here starts receiving humility and he says in verses 21 & 22, "*Lord, I've been too harsh and senseless...*" **and watch now what he starts saying:**

"It's true Lord that I've felt all these things I've been saying to you, "yet" verse 23:

23

**Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.**

In other words:

"Lord, you are the wealthiest of them all, / the highest of them all, / the most powerful of them all, **AND I GET TO BE WITH YOU AND YOU ARE WITH ME,** I'm not alone, **YOU HOLD ME BY MY HAND...** **why am I worried about them? Why am I comparing when you are better and greater Lord"**

24

You guide me with your counsel, (and guess what? If the worse was to happen and others ridicule me for my simplicity and ask me "and now what?", I'll be able to tell them Lord of my destiny with You,)

and afterward you will take me into glory. It doesn't matter in what neighborhood my Zipcode is here and now, my eternal destiny is the riches of God in glory

- I may appear to have nothing, but because God lives in me I HAVE EVERYTHING
- I may appear poor, yet I know I'm making many Rich, for the gospel I preach is priceless & life giving
- I may be beaten and sick, but I am NOT destroyed
- I may even appear sorrowful at times because our church still has a long way to go in learning to love people who don't look like them, but don't get it twisted: **I am always rejoicing on the inside, this earth has nothing that compares with the God I belong to...**
- For all the good things we have in this local church, don't get it wrong, **MY JOY IS NOT IN THE BRANCHES BUT IN THE VINE / THE VINE ALONE CALLED CHRIST JESUS IS THE ONLY ONE THAT FULLY SATISFIES MY SOUL!**
- v.25:

25

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

26

My flesh and my heart may fail,

but God is the strength of my heart

and my portion forever.

The other thing that strikes me of prayers in Psalms is the messiness of the prayers!! Whatever you go to in the Psalms the prayers are incredibly messy!! And the messiness of the prayers reveal two points that I believe teach us something really important: First,

Those praying in Psalms are not seeing God primarily as a boss, but as a loving Father...

- He ends up saying in this Psalm things like, "**God is my portion**," "**You guide me with your counsel**," and "**You hold me by your right hand**"; **these are phrases you tell a Good Dad, not a boss.**
- Also, you would never say to your boss the things that people in the Psalms say to God in prayer... / you would get fired... / *as a side note, every time I preach in English I get a since I'll get fired 😊*
- You can't tell your boss what these guys say to God in prayer in the Psalms... *for example, you can't go to your boss and tell him verses 3, 4, and 7 here (Just imagine! "Oh, I'm jealous of my coworkers money, I think they are fat and sleek at the same time / their eyes swell out through fatness...");* my point here is that, **he is obviously having a private conversation with His loving Father, not his boss...**
- The level of raw truth in Psalm prayers is amazing! / they are not afraid to **have** honest and difficult conversations with God / **listen, God can handle you being real, HE IS more real than you, He is actually the author of reality....** And yes they are Raw, honest, genuine, messy prayer, **but at least they are not fake...** / *sometimes we talk to God as if He doesn't know how we really speak...* ("*...to thy majestic benevolence and the nourishment of our bodies...*" **let me tell you that ketchup and fries ain't gonna nourish anything... Nope... nobody**); Psalm prayers are Raw, but not fake
- **Again: They are not treating God as a boss but as a loving Father...** That's who God is, a L.Fa.
- They are also not trying to impress God with their words... / or to take control of God in any way
- If God is just a boss in your mind, there you'll think you get paid by Him by asking him for something in prayer, *it makes prayer about you rather than about Him...* OR, He can be your loving Father and there you pray because of what He has done for you and how amazing is to commune with Him

- Here is how you know you are praying to God like your boss rather than as your Loving Father:
 - a) In a boss relationship rather than father and son or father and daughter, in that boss relationship with God, you pray in public but you don't really pray a lot in private....
 - b) Also, praying to God like a boss only will produce a lot of asking to God but not a lot of worship of God (**when you are in love with someone you praise that person more than asking anything off of that person**) // boss relationships wants something from God, Loving Father relationship wants God (for He is better than any blessing he can give you) - **you praise what you enjoy, in a boss-like relationship you can't enjoy God...**
 - c) Boss relationship with God will also lead you to prayerlessness when things are "good" according to you, and they also lead you to panic when things are not going well (because you can't rest in the good plan of a loving Father when you only see Him as a boss)

God is your loving Father, pray to Him as such, and be real in your prayers. You can tell him, *"God I don't understand what you're doing! Why does it feel like You are taking so long to answer this prayer Lord, but I trust You Lord, you know better, and you are teaching me to love a little bit like you love me and others..."*

The second point that the messiness of the prayers in the Psalms reveal, is that:

What matters primarily is not WHERE you pray or WHEN you pray but WHO you pray to! -P-

- Prayer without the ultimate highest source of power (namely GOD) is not effective
- **Prayer is powerless if not TO THE ONLY WISE GOD who IS almighty**
- You can pray during the week in front of this stage or you can pray from the belly of a giant fish, what matters is not **the where**, but **the WHO**
- It's about relationship with God... **in the same way you don't read the Bible in order to "sharpen your reading skills" but rather to have communion with its author, so is prayer...**

Let me add one more thing about messy prayers that sometimes we can be guilty of: Is not the where or when, pray without ceasing, but **it's also not so much the "how"...** *give me a second on this:*

- I feel that sometimes in a highly academic setting like ours, **we can unintentionally put so much emphasis on the HOW of praying, that it puts unnecessary pressure on people to the point they don't even wanna pray anymore...**
- **↑ Sometimes it can feel like the prayers in the Holy Bible are too messed up for our sanitized programming....** // -P- // sometimes it may perhaps feel like we are afraid of the Holy Spirit or **calling the elders of the Church to pray for healing** (those are not my words, that's James 5)
- It's Like if we only like "grammar checked prayers"
- My first answer to that is: Have you actually read the prayers in the Bible? I have... they are messy!
- **If I'm wrong about this, please forgive me, and I'll wholeheartedly repent; but:** Sometimes in our pursuit of excellence, // or because you may be too professional of a Christian and too critical of prayer, // or perhaps because you have had a somewhat prosperous life, sometimes you can intimidate people by telling them *"you need to be praying like this and like this other"*, **but let me break some news to you: ↑ The book of Psalms shatters your pretty preconceived notions of well crafted prayers**, because so many of the prayers in Psalms are A MESS, an emotional mess... / they almost sound schizophrenic and bipolar; **read the book...** - **Because dear Church, the point of life is not to sanitize prayers, but to actually PRAY, to actually live a life of constant prayer to God, broken but in prayer / expressing how I feel and the need God already knows but pleading for consolation...** (even Jesus himself before giving us the model prayer in Matthew 6 warned us against

prayers worded with the intent to be seen by others, and prayers with empty phrases just to fill up the time with words...)

- Some of you may be **so** concerned about the HOW that you make others feel so timid about praying. I love it when a brand new believer prays in a service, it is so real...
↑ **I don't care what you think of my prayer, I care that I need to cry out to THE LORD for HE IS MY ONLY HOPE! – Perhaps you have had too little suffering and that's why you pray so cleanly... let me tell you, in the same way that if you were on a Cruise Ship and you fell overboard and you would scream your lungs off not to be left behind, if you were aware of your sin and hated it you would scream your lungs off too in prayer for deliverance.... // same if you were aware of God's amazing beauty.... (excuse my messy desperate prayers, I'm not trying to be emotional, just trying to get Sanctified, I need The Lord)**
- You don't have to go to Seminary to pray, / you don't even have to go to school to pray, all you gotta do is open your mouth to GOD: **"Lord have mercy on me!!!" - And He will have mercy on you, for He hears your prayers; a broken and contrite heart He will not despise...**
- Sometimes in churches people start criticizing others behind their back, *"I don't like when this person prays this way, or I don't like when this person says this word in prayer..."*, listen, if that's you, I say this to you in love:
 - **Their messy way of praying a child-like prayer to God is way better than your college educated way of murmuring!!! Repent! 2x**
I don't spend too much time teaching my kids "HOW" to ask me for something, I just wanna hear them... / I want to hear them / I want to hear my children / I don't care how messy or messed up it is, I would rather my children come to me and tell me something messy than telling someone else or keeping it inside / Dear Saint: God wants to hear YOU, forget the haters and PRAY!
- Wouldn't you love your kids wanting to talk to you even if their words and sentences are not the best pick of the dictionary? Of course you would, **because it's not about talking it's about BEING, being WITH THEM, IT'S ABOUT BEING WITH GOD and God with us, and God loves to hear us...**
- Prayer is a privilege, so you cannot view it as something you have to do, but rather as something you get to do...
- Prayer is not catching up God on the news of your life but rather inviting Him to every aspect of your life; this guy in Psalm 73 was real, you can be real too, and be transformed...
 - Remember We don't pray to fix God, we pray 'cause **we are the ones** that need the fixing
 - God's not broken, we are, so we pray.... // **God doesn't need to change, we do // He does take humble requests and loves to bless His children but don't get confused, HE IS GOD, He is not looking to be your assistant, HE IS THE LORD**

I love the way the Psalm ends: (*MUSIC VAMP*)

27

**Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.**

He is acknowledging that the greatest gift ever is not wealth, but the nearness of God with us....

And now look at what happens; every prayer ends in a praise party:

28

But as for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;

I will tell of all your deeds. (that's praise right there. **If you extend the timeline long enough, all prayer turns into praise!**)

- All prayers according to God's will, all of them, answered prayers and "un-answered for now" all of them will end in a worship party, all of them...
- The Bible says in Revelation that God receives our prayers in golden bowls, and one day, the last prayer will drop and the bowls will be turned over, **He shall return**, and every prayer answered and we will praise for an eternity. All prayer turns into praise!!! Every tear turned into joy!!!
- Don't be discouraged, pray! Look at the contrast of the beginning of the Psalm with the end of the Psalm: First 20 verses a sad emotional raw conversation... verses 21 and 22 he realizes he is not seeing the whole picture (cause he is praying) end of the chapter: Praise!
- What is the point? You and I know how to be harsh and impatient. I know our pain is real, but if we bend our knees/if we pray, we are going to be transformed into WORSHIPERS!!!! That's what prayer does

**APPLY THIS / PRAY /
END**

