

This Poor Man Cried

Living in Johannesburg makes one more or less used to lightning. A lightning strike consists of opposite charges of electrical energy. A negative charge or build-up of energy occurs in the bottom part of the cloud closest to earth, and a positive charge occurs directly underneath in the ground. Separating these two opposite charges is the non-conducting dry air belt separating cloud and earth. As the two opposite charges continue to build up and the dry air belt becomes moist, lightning starts down towards earth in 150-foot jagged intervals.

A lightning conductor allows positive charge to flow upwards: it meets and neutralises the negative charge of the lightning, drawing it into the earth. This can be thought of as an analogy of God relating to you. Consider the negative charge as God's glorious grace, wanting to display His mercy and love. God desires to magnify the glory of His name. He desires to show Himself a strong God, a sovereign God, a supreme God. You could think of that as the negative charge building up in the clouds of heaven itself.

Then think of the positive charge as our need. Humans are needy people – sinners needing forgiveness and deliverance, sheep needing direction. We are helpless – needing food and provision. We are unwise – needing wisdom. We are suffering – needing comfort, love, hope, righteousness, help and strength. And our dire need is like the positive charge building up in the ground.

What then causes the lightning strike of grace from heaven to earth? What is the lightning conductor that sends up our need and draws upon His power? The lightning rod is this: a prayer of faith in Jesus' name.

Prayer is a grace lightning conductor. Biblical prayer draws grace to earth the way a lightning conductor draws lightning and diffuses it into the earth. Some believers have been mighty grace lightning rods. I think of George Mueller, known for the huge orphan ministry he founded in England in the nineteenth century. He recorded over fifty thousand specific answers to prayers in his journals, thirty thousand of which he said were answered the same day or the same hour that he prayed them.

God delights to answer prayer. Why? Because it magnifies Him: *"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me"* (**Psalms 50:15**). Notice the relationship: first you call upon God when you need Him, then God replies, and you get the help you need. God in turn gets the glory for being your deliverance.

That's why when you pray biblically, you are not trying to overcome God's reluctance – you are **laying hold of God's willingness**. Prayer is not trying to convince God to do something He does not want to do. Prayer is finding out what God is very willing to do, and calling on Him to do it.

His grace desires an outlet to display itself on behalf of those who yield to Him. It is as if God has this massive desire to show His power, to display His mercy, to those who ask for it and will acknowledge Him as their source when He helps them. As **2 Chronicles 16:9** says, *"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."*

There is this massive, crackling energy, as it were, of God saying, 'I will be glorified, I will display how beautiful and sufficient and strong and supreme and wise and mighty and powerful I am – that my Creation will see it, acknowledge it, enjoy it and praise Me for it.'

And if you will pray biblically, you are sending up an opposite charge that attracts and draws the mighty hand of God. Your biblical prayer draws the grace of God like positively-charged ions draw that mighty lightning from the sky. What then, is biblical prayer? I believe we see all of it captured in verse 6 of Psalm 34, and reiterated throughout the Psalm:

*I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.
They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.
This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

Psalm 34:4-8

1. Recognise your position: 'This poor man'

Step one to praying biblically is to recognise your position. Notice, the psalmist here does not just say 'this man' or 'I cried.' David takes the time to describe himself – and he describes himself as 'this poor man.' The word 'poor' connotes a lack of finances, a shortage, a deficiency. A state of lacking, perhaps of painful leanness.

But for David, it means even more. He is referring to himself in this way to emphasise his neediness, his weakness, his destitute state in all of life. He looks at himself spiritually and senses need. He looks at himself mentally and he knows he has needs. He looks at his physical circumstances, and he knows he has needs. And in humility, he admits it. He says, 'I am poor without God.'

There are only two things you can do when you recognise need. You can admit you are needy, or you can deny it. The ground root of prayerlessness is pride, a pride that says, 'I am not that needy, certainly no more than others. I do not see myself as requiring forgiveness, or strength, or grace, or God-given joy.' Consider the parable in **Luke 18:10-14** of the two men who went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee was denying his true position, his neediness; the tax collector was confessing it.

Prayer is not seeking to impress God with your self-sufficiency, it is expressing to God your soul-poverty. The crackling charges of a God desiring to magnify His power and glory do not start down toward a man saying, 'I'm fine, I'm alright, I'm managing.' And do you know the loudest way we say to God, 'I'm okay, I'm sufficient?' When we don't pray.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalm 34:18

This is brokenness. It speaks of coming to the end of yourself, of pleading before God – coming to Him with nothing, in absolute hunger for help, repentant, dependent, insignificant, weak, aware and broken over your sin, over your smallness, over your helplessness. The Hebrew word for 'a contrite spirit' refers to being broken in pieces,

crushed, bruised. Only when you understand your true position, your true need, and know the answer is not in yourself, do the positive charges of prayer begin to flow upward.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Isaiah 57:15

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

2. Respond with passion: ‘This poor man cried’

When David recognised his position as a poor man, someone needing grace from God, what did he do? This poor man *said*? This poor man *politely cleared his throat and began to speak*? This poor man *shared his burdens with others*? No, this poor man **cried**! Sensing his acute need, he was not content to look nice, to pretend to have it all under control – he cried out. And this is the heart of prayer – we are coming to God with passion, and crying out to Him to come and meet our need.

The problem with much prayer today is that it is hardly done with urgency. Imagine a man wandering over to you, indulging in small talk, and finally saying, “There’s a fire!” This would be bizarre. When you sense a real need, you call right away, impassioned. When sick, you call the doctor. When in dire straits, you call a friend or a relative. The need determines the urgency of the call.

*The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and **His ears are open** unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. The **righteous cry**, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*

Psalms 34:15-17

When Jesus spoke about prayer in Luke 18, he described the prayers of God’s people in this way, “*And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?*” (**Luke 18:7**). Jesus’ own prayer life was described by the writer of Hebrews like this, “*when he... offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears*” (**Hebrews 5:7**).

Once again, the root of prayerlessness is not weakness. It’s not busyness. It’s not ignorance. It’s pride. Pride says, ‘I do have a need, but I will handle it my way. I have other avenues to try before I turn to God. I’ll take the big things to God but right now, I don’t need grace. Crying out is for weaklings. Only the desperate cry out. Only helpless people cry out.’

Samuel Rutherford once put it as, “Need cannot blush” – and that’s true. People who sense that they are weak and helpless and desperate without the grace of God simply cry out. Psalm 34 describes this prayerful cry in a number of ways: ‘*I sought the LORD*’ (verse 4); ‘*they looked unto Him*’ (verse 5); ‘*them that fear Him*’ (verse 7); ‘*blessed is the man that trusteth in Him*’ (verse 8); ‘*there is no want to them that fear Him*’ (verse 9); ‘*they that seek the LORD*’ (verse 10); and ‘*none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate*’ (verse 22).

This sensing of acute need – the urgent and continuous prayer – is what’s needed for the ground charge in our lightning analogy to go up. But perhaps the reason we do not call is that we do not always expect to be heard. Thus the Word of God encourages us – God hears the cry of the humble.

1. Expect a hearing: ‘The LORD heard Him’

Consider these lines in Psalm 34, ‘*and He heard me*’ (verse 4); ‘*the righteous cry, and the LORD heareth*’ (verse 27); ‘*His ears are open unto their cry*’ (verse 15); ‘*the LORD is nigh unto them*’ (verse 18).

Many believers don’t pray because they don’t think God hears. But we are not to go on our feelings – we are to go on what God says. Even when it feels like God is not listening, the Bible tells us that He is. God has no trouble hearing. But God’s grace is most attracted to the prayer of the humble. The broken cry of the needy, the strong urging for grace from the poor in spirit.

You may ask yourself, ‘Why would God want to listen to me? He is so high; I am just a little human – why should my prayers make any difference to Him?’ But that’s just the point – His highness and your smallness is precisely the reason He delights to answer your prayer. God answering the prayer of insignificant humans magnifies Him as a merciful, gracious God.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Isaiah 57:15

Well, He may hear, but will He answer? David tells us.

2. Expect a response: ‘and saved Him out of all His troubles’

Consider these lines: ‘*delivered me from all my fears*’ (verse 4); ‘*and saved Him out of all His troubles*’ (verse 6); ‘*and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed*’ (verse 5); ‘*and delivereth them*’ (verse 7); ‘*for there is no want to them that fear Him*’ (verse 9); ‘*but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing*’ (verse 10); again, ‘*and delivereth them out of all their troubles*’ (verse 17); ‘*and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit*’ (verse 18); ‘*but the LORD delivereth him out of them all*’ (verse 19); ‘*the LORD redeemeth the soul of His servants: and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate*’ (verse 22).

God delights to answer the cry of His children, for it magnifies His glory. Your prayer creates an opportunity for God to glorify Himself by giving you the grace you need. God is magnified, you are satisfied. Think of the parable Jesus told of the persistent widow in **Luke 18:1-8**, where He contrasts God with an unjust judge.

Here, He describes a widow who needed justice from an unjust judge. This judge didn’t fear God or man, but because she kept asking him, he eventually gave her the justice she needed. The contrast is this: God is not unjust; He does not lack compassion. God does not simply answer prayer because we are bugging Him. So if an unjust judge could give grace to

a widow simply because she kept asking, how much *more* will a good and gracious Father give grace to His beloved children who keep asking? Similarly, Jesus used this contrast:

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

Luke 11:11-13

The point is: expect God to answer because He desires to do so. He desires to show Himself strong on behalf of the weak. You've just got to register yourself as weak before God. And remember, God will always answer one of three ways: Yes, no, or not yet. Each one is done so because of His love for us.

When prayer doesn't change your *situation*, it will change your character, and so change your *expectation*. In this way, God surprises us as to how He answers our prayer (read **2 Corinthians 12** for more).

So our conclusion from our key passage is this:

O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

Psalms 34:8

To taste is to experience. In other words – pray. If you do not pray, you are not tasting, and you will not discover that the Lord is good.

What is your prayer life like? For some, it is a vast exaggeration to call it a prayer *life*; it's more like a prayer points. Sometimes someone will say to me, "I don't have a specific time for prayer once a day, I pray all the time." When I hear that they cannot make time to pray at one particular time during the day, I am almost positive that they are not praying all the time. Those who make time to meet with God over His Word – to cry out for grace, to praise Him for grace received – these are the ones most likely to be praying at different times during the day.

Ask yourself – does this describe you: *"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard Him, and delivered him"*? If not, which part do you battle with? Calling yourself a poor man? The crying out part? Believing that the Lord hears you? Believing that the Lord will always answer? Turn to God in faith today by praying Psalm 34 as your own.