

“Refreshing Prayer”

Genesis 32:24-31, Isaiah 40:28-31, Mark 1:35, John 7:37-38 & Romans 8:26

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Prayer for Understanding Almighty God you are pure in every way and the source of love and life. Purify us with your word, which is sharper than a two-edged sword. Holy Spirit translate scripture so we can perceive your word which is a fortress of truth, a wellspring of wisdom and a fountain of life. Amen.

Are you discouraged, exhausted, demoralized? Are you overwhelmed by the demands of life? Are you wrestling with a problem? Prayer will encourage, guide, and rejuvenate you.

Jacob was wrestling. How can I reconcile with my sibling? Jacob prayed all night. Scripture describes the prayer as a wrestling match. Jacob is tenacious. Jacob keeps praying until he receives a blessing, until he is transformed.

Genesis proclaims: **Genesis 32:24-31 NLT** “This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob’s hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, “Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” “What is your name?” the man asked. He replied, “Jacob.” “Your name will no longer be Jacob,” the man told him. “From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with people and have won.” “Please tell me your name,” Jacob said. “Why do you want to know my name?” the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel (which means “face of God”), for Jacob said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been spared.” The sun was rising as Jacob left Peniel, and he was limping because of the injury to his hip.”

Why the night of prayer is called a wrestling match is debated. Was it different thoughts wrestling, arrogance and humility, guilt and forgiveness, the past and the future, trickery and goodness, fear and love, despair and hope. The prayer is personal, relentless, and visceral. The identity of who Jacob was wrestling is debated. Maybe a dream figure, an inspired vision, an angel, a refreshing river spirit of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit. There is agreement that the wrestler provides Divine refreshment. It was a determined, committed, and insisted prayer. Jacob did not stop until he was blessed, transformed, and refreshed. Jacob kept praying until his relationship with his sibling was restored.

Relevance for today is blessings of God are released into our lives through prayer. Wrestling with misery may give us the impression that God is hostile, combative, or indifferent. God is steadfast, everlasting, rejuvenating love. However, the difficulty of our circumstances often causes us to project our frustration onto God. We are encouraged to persist, to keep going, through pain to peace. Prayer sometimes feels like holy week; betrayal, beatings, agony, crucifixion, and all the while God is loving to resurrect. God cares enough to wrestle with each of us in prayer. God could easily crush us, defeat us, and destroy us. God gives up God’s strength to match our strength so we can wrestle equally, so a blessing can be transmitted. We can be sure God hears us. God came to earth, took on our flesh in Jesus, wrestled with our sin, buried our sin through the cross, so God can continually give all of us abundant life.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims that everyone becomes exhausted and everyone faints. We are renewed when we wait on the Lord. Waiting on the Lord is prayer, a deliberate choice to seek God’s goodness, to receive God’s blessings. Waiting on the Lord is prayers of hope, anticipation, and confident expectancy in the fulfillment of God’s promises. A few weeks ago, we explored the stewardship of pain, how God alleviates our pain, and wipes away every tear through prayer. Prayer that involves naming the pain, lamenting, grieving, agonizing, venting, crying, screaming, confessing, repenting, changing, worshiping, hoping, waiting, doing, and evolving. Prayer that involves letting go and letting God transform us, being grateful, pondering God’s promises, letting grace wash over us cleansing us of mistakes, guilt, and shame, asking for help, thinking about God’s redemption, love, and joy. Prayer that involves enjoying God, for David that was playing the harp, singing, and writing poetry.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims: **Isaiah 40:28-31** “**Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary; God’s understanding is unsearchable. God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.**”

Jesus was exhausted, grieving, and wept. Jesus was refreshed, renewed, and energized by prayer. Jesus had a ritual of morning prayer. The gospel of Mark states: **Mark 1:35 NLT** “**Before daybreak, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.**” John proclaims: **1 John 4:16b NRSV** “**God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**” We cannot manufacture love. God is infinite in love. Our love is replenished when we receive, savor, and enjoy God’s love. We worship God when we become fully alive with God’s love enabling us to love self, love others, love creation, and love God which glorifies God. **John 7:37-38** “**Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. For the Scriptures declare, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water’**”. God is the ever flowing, fluid source of all life, love, and blessings. The waters of baptism is a symbol of God creating, sustaining, and purifying life. The Lord’s Supper has the cup, a symbol that God is providing an ever flowing living water to quench our thirst. When we drink at the Lord’s Supper, we overflow with rivers of living water. When we gather around the Lord’s table, we remember. We remember creation, remember Jesus’ resurrection and remember the delight of goodness, love, joy, and peace. Our remembering is prayer that renews us to journey into the future. Prayer and the sacraments are mysteries. Both nourish us in ways beyond understanding, experiences, and words. This is why worship involves both word and sacrament, head and heart, knowing and questioning.

C.S. Lewis prayed at the moment he awoke writing: “It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.”

When I wake, I pray by being grateful for three aspects and then I ask for help in serving in three ways. It is a covenant prayer, being grateful for blessings I strive to bless others.

Prayer is to humans as a battery charger is to a battery. Biblical scholars consider Jesus’ morning prayer to be pivotal to the ministry of Jesus. The world was sucking the life out of Jesus. There was temptation for Jesus to rely on self, temptation for Jesus to forego prayer to fill that time with healing people. Jesus models that prayer fills us with life, energy and love.

It is when we are the busiest and under the greatest amount of stress--when time seems so scarce that we most need to stop and pray. Martin Luther declares, “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours per day in prayer.” John Wesley believed that we can do nothing apart from the transformational power of prayer. John Hyde made prayer such a dominant part of his life that he compared prayer to oxygen, to breathe was to pray. Prayerful self-care is the foundation to making good change.

Through prayer, God shows us how to live in the present. God loves us perfectly, completely, and always. Nothing in the past can make God love us less. God forgives us completely. Through prayer, God helps us let go of guilt, shame, “what ifs”, “if onlys” and negative self talk. Prayer cleanses us with grace that gives us freedom from the past. God creates every moment to be a fresh start, abundant with opportunities to love and be loved.

Prayer sets us free from expectations. God instills that our value is being God’s beloved masterpiece which gives us freedom from a culture that screams your value depends on productivity. Prayer assures us that our identity is a child of God, giving us freedom from a culture that wants to label and sort people into boxes. Prayer invites us to be true to our unique self, rather than conform to controlling people. Prayer gives freedom, making space for us to be free to love extravagantly.

Befrienders have a visual of transformative prayer. One can go through our days like a cup that is overflowing with toxic waste: worrying about the future, stressing about the past, distracted by the many things calling for our attention, being beat up by others, and beating ourselves up. All these things are toxic waste pouring into our cup. Through prayer, God empties the cup of toxic waste, fills the cup with living water, and

invites us to enjoy refreshing drinks. We are designed to be a vessel for the Holy Spirit radiating love, joy, and peace. God helps us empty our cup, so we are receptive and fully present to the glory God desires for each of us.

Scott Peck wrote a book entitled *Golf and the Spirit: Lessons for the Journey*. Scott says that we are challenged to follow Jesus' example of "self-emptying." We are challenged to get out of our own way and empty ourselves of anger, self-centeredness, and false hopes and fill our selves with the love, peace, and the direction of God. To be specific, Peck preaches:

- * Be attentive to the hazards ahead of you, but empty yourself of your fear of them.
- * Strive to do your best, but empty yourself of your concern with your score.
- * Learn from every mistake, but empty yourself of any shred of self-hatred for your imperfections.
- * Compete, but empty yourself of shame that you are not measuring up.
- * Play to win, but if you fail to do so, empty yourself of any remorse.
- * Use your mulligan.
- * Play one hole at a time.

Self-emptying is not to diminish ourselves, rather to make room within ourselves for God and unexpected life enhancements. Scott admits that the most valuable lesson learned from golf happened after a terrible performance on an early hole that depressed him and resulted in his continued poor play. His golf friend said, 'you know we have an expression in golf: "One hole at a time" A light bulb went on for Scott. Of course! Just like the famed Alcoholics Anonymous slogan, "One day at a time," it had to be true that the way to approach golf was "one hole at a time." In other words, do not become obsessed with the past. Do not become paralyzed by concerns about perfection or imperfection. Forgive yourself. Unburden yourself. Love your imperfect self in the same way that God loves your imperfect self. Play the game of life one hole at a time."

God helps us pray. The apostle Paul wrote: **Romans 8:26 NLT** **"The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we do not know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words."** You may be so overwhelmed, exhausted, thirsty, demoralized, discouraged, angry, grief stricken, hurt that you cannot even articulate a word. All you can do is cry, sigh, or groan. The Holy Spirit will transform your emotions, circumstances, and longings into a prayer. Often transformative prayer is a mystery happening when we are unable to utter a word.

The prayer life Jesus modeled involved listening and walking which we will explore in two weeks.

Through prayer, God's strength combines with our weakness so we can "run and not grow weary." God gives perspective enabling us to cope so we can "walk but not faint." Prayer renews us so we can soar like eagles. Amen