

"WHEN IT IS HARD TO PRAY"

Luke 18:1-5

INTRODUCTION:

There are times when a person says "I just can't take it anymore." And during these times, quite often, people will say - "I just can't pray or it is hard to pray." Jesus told a parable in which he talked about a judge in a certain city. And there was a widow in that city whom came unto him asking for justice. And the judge put off the decision for quite awhile. After awhile, he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor do I regard man. Yet because this widow continues to come back and has faith to seek me again - I will take care of her problem. As Jesus told this parable, he was underscoring this phrase -- men ought always to pray and not faint.

Paul put it another way. "Pray without ceasing." But most of us experience times when it is not easy to pray. Or we experience times when God seems to be far far away. There are other times when our hearts are cold and hard. And we have no desire to pray.

As we consider the experience of this widow, and your experience which is not different than anyone elses. In Job 23:3-4, we read, "oh that I knew where I might find him. That I might come even to his seat. I would order my case before him and my cause. And fill my mouth with arguments."

In the Psalms 42:2-3, my soul thirsteth for God. For the living God. When shall I come and appear before him. My tears have been my meat. Day and night.

While they continually say unto me, where is thy God.)

Both of these men had experiences that were hard. And they were going through sorrow. And they were saying tears is just about all that we see. It is hard to pray.

Have you ever felt like that - is that your experience in life.

I. WHY IS IT HARD TO PRAY

Let us look and see what are the things that block, or get in our way. And make it hard.

First, (pain) is one. Sometimes pain can be so severe that our minds cannot focus on anything else. We think only of our suffering. Only of that pain which we have. And it is hard to pray.

Second, (shock) is another. How many times have we been grasp by the hands of people who had been crushed by a tragedy and they have entreated us -- please pray for us. We just can't find the right words to say now. And we don't know how we are going to get through with this.

Third, (worry) can do so. We can think about things until we are numb. Until we cannot even see the sunlight. Now this blocks and causes us to have a hard time with prayer.

Fourth, (sin) This can make it hard to pray - when there is some guilt or some sin in our hearts, we have truly not the encouragement to pray. And we neglect it.

Fifth, (pride) may cause us to have problems with this. We may feel that we can exclude God from our conscience. We become so busy maybe with a lot of good works, that we find it hard to pray.

The Quaker Dr. Rufus Jones once said, yes I know. But at the end of a long hard day) I think back on the man at the filling station. Who helped me find the way. And the woman who smiled when she served our plates at the restaurant. And the little girl I saw skipping down the street. And the high school youth I saw waiting for the school bus. And I want to thank God for them, and to pray a blessing upon each of them. I tell the Lord how I feel. Tired and out of sorts. Then I find healing and renewal of strength. And I want to keep on praying. The habit of prayer stand in good when feelings are not what they ought to be. Remember the example our Lord left us.

What encouraging words by a great Christian. He found it hard to pray. But there are words that will help and guide you in many ways if you will take them.

Numbers 11:10-15

Widow No And

II. WHERE CAN WE FIND A CASE LIKE OURS

As we think of this subject, we ought always to pray and not to faint. And as we associate with it - there are so many of you tonight who are at this very time, turning over in your mind - this is just like my life. Let me take a case in the Old Testament and bring you just a word about a man who found it hard to pray. In fact, he was one of the greatest intercessors of the Old Testament. His name was Moses. Would you believe it. Moses at one time said, I just can't take it anymore. Moses was often called upon to plead for the people before God. Through most of his lifetime, he was in deep distress over his people.

Numbers 12:13, It was at Mariams bedside praying for her healing from leprosy.

Exodus 17:8 - He held the rod of God. A symbol for God's warrior's. In the battle against the Amalekites. And prayed for Israel's victory.

He prayed for them when the people went astray and worshipped the golden calf. The amazing miracles of this man. He is described as a man of faith. By the writer of Hebrews. As Hebrews talks about Abraham's faith. And yet, Moses at one time came to the place where he said - I just can't make it.

you Now tonight put this into life. You know what it is to have a heart attack. You know what it is to suffer a stroke. We know what it means to be stricken with disease. We know what it means to be physically, emotionally, sick - even unto death.

We know what it is to be spiritually ill. To be depressed. Without vitality or

purpose.

Moses, this unusual man who was also meek. The Bible says he was meek above all the men upon the face of the earth. Numbers 12:3. When God approached him, he reminded God, I am slow of tongue. I cannot speak.

And in these verses we see that Moses was feeling as though he had too much to do. And too much responsibility to bear. As he went into that work as a reluctant leader. How many of us have felt that way many times. How many of us have asked, why do you treat me like this, Lord. Why do you boast the whole burden upon me and leave me to bear it alone. Why do you pick on me - why me?

Notice Moses was displeased. The people complained and that was evil in his eyes. Their actions and their attitudes didn't please him.

Another thing, Moses was distressed. The people harrassed him and they made him feel somehow that he wasn't the right one - as they criticized and complained, and Moses brings all of this out before God. Why have I not found favor in myself. Did I arrange all of this and bring these people forth. The outcome was kind of self-pity. It is too heavy for me alone. And Moses said, just kill me. If I have to do all of this myself, just take me away. He is like a child who picks up his toys and says - I have everything but no body really loves me. And Moses had a feeling like this. Have you sometimes felt that way - frustration.

Have you ever felt that people have failed you and left you down. You know, how

Moses felt when he prayed.

If it seems that you have more than your share of the load to carry, if you are doing more at home or in the church than anyone else, and you are able to grasp what it is that Moses was trying to deal with. That same thing. If you feel that your efforts have netted your nothing. You know something of what Moses felt in that time.

moses made
But as we look at his case, there are some mistakes - fundamental mistakes.

First, there was a mistake in his estimate of the people. He first thought too highly of them. He first thought that because God had led the people out of Egypt, toward the promised land - that they would be grateful and they would be behave and live that way.

When the people fell, in another direction, Moses just gave up on them. And he had doubts about their spiritual quality. But he underestimated them, because he made a surprising discovery. He found that there were 70 men and women that had not worshipped the golden calf, and that God would pour out his spirit on these few faithful. Just as he did upon Elijah. He thought all was hopeless and there were 7000 who had been faithful.

If we place our trust in us, we will be disappointed.

God helps us when we place our trust in him.

Not only did Moses mistake what was in man, but he mistook what was in himself. He was off-target. He had been carrying the people by himself. But if Moses had been looting alone - would he have gotten these people out of Egypt. Did God bring the curse or the plagues. If only Moses had the power, would he have been able to cross the Red Sea. Would God part the waters. Moses had been the one feeding them food in the desert. Could he have kept them alive a single day. God made the manna and the cloud to guide them.

Like the people, Moses had (forgotten God's care) of all of this.

This - many times we minimize God's part. How actually little (we) do. And how much God does.

Are we like Moses - is this our case. Moses did the right thing in his despair, he complained to God - he was honest. He brought his gratitude.

There is a wonderful hymn by a song-writer that goes --- I must tell Jesus all of my trials. I cannot bear these burdens alone. In my distress, he kindly will help me. He ever loves and cares for his own.)'

When Moses confessed his weakness - he received strength. This is the secret of intercession for ourselves.

God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. I Cor. 1:27. I can do all things through Christ which strengthenth me. Phil. 4:13.

Moses found relief in sharing his burden with God. He found things hard to pray for - but sometimes like Moses, we tell someone - we tell God. We hear what Jesus says - let not your heart be troubled.

Therefore, there are some things that make it hard to pray. And there are cases in the Bible that are exactly like your case and my case. Now I come to the final conclusion of this message.

→ III. WHAT KIND OF HELPS CAN WE FIND

In times like we experience.

What to do when it is hard to pray.

Let me see if we can find some simple things that we need to take out of Moses' experience,

→ First, be honest.

When you find that it is hard for you to pray - just like Moses He came to God and he said - I can't take it any longer. He says, I just can't make it.

He tells God so. He is honest about it. He is honest with himself. Now God already knows and there is no need for us to pretend that we are in command.

There is no need to put on the airs and to use some flowery words, or to impress God with some pretty speech. You need to come to God just as you are. And tell him in honesty, that there is one of the words (for prayer) in the Old Testament means to level. (To level with God.) It is to tell it like it is. It is to come clean and straight, be honest, and to pour it all out - confess it all to God.

If you are hurt, if you are angry, if you are worried, frustrated, upset, sick. What this word means is to get it all out - give God the full story. And then you are empty of it all. God can fill you up again.

And as you are honest with God, you will confess your own faults, your own sins. And this is what makes it hard to pray sometimes. We seldom in any condition, do we find fault with ourselves. Or take responsibility. If we want to level with God, we must be willing to confess our sins. Now that's where God's part is going to come in. I John 1:9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God already knows what we have done. But our telling him of our sorrow, enables him to do something about it.

2 (gratitude) When you find it hard to pray - here is another thing. I want to be honest. Be grateful. Be grateful for something - for anything. And I will guarantee you, even in the most severe times of trouble, when it seems like the Heaven's are shut out - if you will look the second time, you will see there is one more star a shining. And quite often when some tragedy comes we major on that. If we would take time to see what we have left, then it would be different.

Chesterson said, gratitude is the golden thread by which many a weary man has found a way into the presence of God.

The leper who returned to thank Jesus received a blessing which the other nine never knew. His faith did make him whole. Luke 17:19.

Paul put it in these words - in everything give thanks. I Thess. 5:18.

(William Law) put things in the right proportion when he said, "if anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to all happiness and to all perfection, he must tell you to make a rule to yourself. To thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For it is certain that whatever in the way of calamity happens - if you thank God and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing." Could you therefore work miracles. You could not do more for yourself. Than by this thankful spirit. For it heals with a word, and turns all that it touches into happiness.

3 (Look to Jesus) This is the way that you can handle situations when it is hard to pray. First, be honest. Second, show some gratitude. And thirdly, put your

eyes upon Jesus. William Manson, just to tell, that although the way is not marked in every detail, in the Gospel account of Jesus - there are signals for you to find your way into the harbor.

One Scotch pastor said that every believer should chose some incident in the Gospel for his landmark or this touch-stone. Something when Jesus seemed dearest and closest to you. Then when you seem far away from God, or when God seems far away from you - think on this favorite passage and address yourself to him. How many, many times saints of God have done this. As they have prayed unto Jesus, and it works. Even though you cannot understand all of the doctrine about the trinity. But you know from experience when it is hard to pray, you begin to look toward Jesus the Master. You'll be saying in Jesus' name. And it is in the spirit which bids you to come. It will help your tongue to speak. And your stumbling feet along the way. God is the one.

And when you come into his presence, it is over powering. There is Jesus to pray and to be with you as you come on a level with him.

Charles Allen once said that a young man came to him about 20 years old. And said, he wanted to pray. But he found it hard to pray. In fact, he told him, (I have never prayed in my life) And he asked him what he could do about it. He sat down and he reminded this young man - you know the Disciples of Jesus once asked him that same question. (Lord, teach us to pray.) Luke 11:1. Matt 6:9

Come to think about it - that's the only thing that they ever asked Jesus to teach them. Jesus was a great preacher. The common people came out to hear him gladly.

But the Disciples never asked him - Lord, teach us to preach. Jesus performed miracles - the winds and waves obeyed his voice. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead. But you know the Disciples never ask him, Lord, teach us to perform miracles.

He told the Disciples to go out and to win the world to him - go into all the world. But the Disciples never said to him - Lord, will you teach us how to build a church. But in response to this one request - teach us to pray, Jesus did not preach a sermon to them on prayer. What did he give them. Not a lecture on how they should talk to God. Instead, he simply said (pray this) mat 6:9

Now this is exactly what Charles Allen told the young man, who had never prayed before and found it hard to pray. Take your Bible, that I am going to give you, he said. And I am going to mark the Lord's prayer. And you just kneel down and pray these words. He says, I assure you that you will learn how to pray. I could assure him of that, he said, because it happened to me. Night after night, as I was growing up, I would kneel down and pray with my father, mother, brothers, and sisters the wonderful prayer.

Our Father, which Art In Heaven.

Hallowed be Thy Name

Thy Kingdom come

Thy will be done

On earth, as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory

Any young man or woman - this very hour, who does not know how to pray. And who is finding it hard to pray, can take these words and look at them and look unto Jesus, and find the answer. Our Father. That's how a prayer should begin. Prayer does begin with God. So many times we begin our prayers with our needs, our desires. Our interests. But the mind must first turn to God who is located in Heaven. It is like the old rugged cross. Then he will call me someday to that home far away. We have the idea that God is way out yonder somewhere - but that is wrong. God is as near to us, and that is the reality of the Lord's prayer. That here is one who has authority, one who is in control. And one who is willing to help us. And the prayer begins with our. That means his love for us. And as you kneel to prayer, wherever you are, you can seek God. And you have reverence for God. And if you study that petition that God reveals himself to people, and that you pray his will be done on this earth, as in Heaven - that is putting your life in God's hands. And many times we are prone to come to God in prayer and say, this is what I have decided, and this is what I hope. This is what I want. And I want you God to rubber-stamp this and put your approval on it.

But God reveals to me - he ought to say what he wants done. There are many people who would do this. There are many people who tell us they would do God's will if they knew what God's will was. Through countless hours of counselling, you try to help and explain to people - that maybe God has already revealed his will to them. The trouble is, they are looking too far ahead. They are looking over and over.

But then you ask people what do you believe that God wants you to do this day. And they will answer, the problem is that they are looking a year or two, or maybe 10 years ahead. Have you ever walked down a dark road with a lantern. It only shines

— # (Patiently Wait)

-15-

we must learn to wait. They tell us that our English word to wait means two things.
In relation to prayer.

— First, it means to watch. That means to stay in one place in expectation or hope of something or somebody. The word implies a delay or postponement. It means a readiness and expectation. In prayer we must learn to be still and know that God is God. Psalm 46:10. We cannot boss God around. Or use our own opinions about what we think God would have in the kind of lives we live. God knows about evil. He knows the full folly and foolishness of our ways. But God keeps on being God and he keeps on loving us.

— Psalm 37:7 - rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him.

— Psalm 91:1-2 - "he that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. And I will say of him, he is my refuge and my fortress, my God. In Him will I trust." You learn to trust and you learn to put your life in the everlasting arms. You give up a life that is anxious. In which you panic.

— Many times people get carried away with certain aspects of faith. And we are frantic sometimes concerning the right part of truth in getting a balance. Paul rebuked the Christians at Thessalonica. They got all excited about the Lord's (return) and they did nothing to fulfill his mission. Or to carry on his work. And he said, when we were with you - this we commanded you. If you would not work, neither should you eat. For we hear that some of you that are walking among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such, we command and exhort our Lord Jesus Christ - that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. 2 Thess. 3:10-12.

Jesus told us, watch. For none of us knows the hour of the Lord's coming. Matt. 24:42. This watching and waiting is not idleness, but it is faithfully attending to the work to which each of us has been called.

We must stay still before the Lord. We must wait. As a Nigerian Christian told, of the experience of his wife. He had finished school and was coming to a responsible place of leadership when his wife began losing her eye sight. This grieved the wife greatly. She wanted to share in his work. So she took her problem to the Lord. She laid it all out before him and then she waited - every day for a whole year, she went to their church early in the morning and stayed all day. She waited and waited. And as she waited, her own spirit grew calm and still, and slowly the shadows began receding and the darkness lifted. And while he and his wife were in our country for additional study, (Joseph Bamikole), his wife spent her time teaching other children and helping other women to read and sew.

We have a guarantee that it will come out in God's will. It may not always be answered in the way that this woman received an answer. It didn't happen that way for Paul. That thorn in the flesh stayed with him. Hurting, hindering, but he found grace sufficient enabling him to go on.

I read the story of a French farmer who stayed on his knees in the village church. Long after everyone had gone home. On this day, the priest came and knelt beside him. Gene, you pray long. Yes. Are you troubled. No. Then why do you pray so long - what are you asking for. Asking for? Oh, I am not asking for anything. Then he brushed him a smile - I'm just looking at God and he is looking back at me.

Now that is the peak and the climax to which we all aspire. In which we reached as Charles Wesley put it - lost in wonder, love, and praise. No questions, no requests, no complaints. Just being with the Lord, waiting upon him, was the fulfillment of prayer.

The second word about the meaning of wait - that is derived from the term which means to watch and wait. Is the term that means to serve. So we want to wait. That can help us. And then we want to serve - that can help us. When you go into a restaurant, you don't want the waitress just to look at you. You want her to serve you. When you go to the hospital - you want a person to meet your needs and to wait upon you. And this is a very important thing in prayer. This waiting on the Lord and serving him - and doing something good. It hardly makes sense even to do it. But that is the redemption to which we are called. We return evil for good - good for evil. We try to offer up our sacrifices to a silent Heaven. And that is the kind of things that Jesus did - and that he calls upon us to do because God cares. Was there ever so much love as at Calvary. Somehow by serving and waiting, we too can enter into God's labors.

I like what William Cowper wrote. God moves in mysterious ways - his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea. And rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take. The clouds ye so much dread. Are big with mercy and shall break with blessing on thy head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense. But trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. Blind unbelief is sure to err. And scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter. And He will make it plain.

Tagore expressed it - thou didst save me by thy hard refusals. Yes, today as we

look back over the years, we really think how happy we are that God even sometimes refused our prayers. He did not grant them all. You know, quite often people request us to pray for them. This we do. We pray definitely for people who request it by name, and we try to keep them in mind, and lift them up to God. I think when I pray for somebody else and lift them up in the presence of God, I remember what Augustine said -- "without us, we cannot, without us, God will not"

Rom. 8:18-28

When you find it hard to pray → Be honest & tell God what is in your heart -
look for some things to thank him for
Fix your eyes upon Jesus -
Learn to wait on the Lord -
serve the Lord while wait -