



Prayer Service: Rejoicing in What God Can Do Twenty-One Days of Prayer Series, Part #1

Psalm 126

David Sunday

March 15, 2015

The Bible contains many enticing invitations, like this one in James 4:8: *“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.”* None of us would be drawing near to God if He had not first drawn near to us. Praise God that He didn’t wait for us to come to Him, but sought us when we were running far from Him. When we were running straight toward hell, He rescued us.

As those who have been rescued by His grace, He now calls us to seek His face. Psalm 105:3-4 says, *“Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!”*

That’s what we are going to be doing these next three weeks. I hope that’s what we are doing all the time. But sometimes we need to slow down, simplify things a bit and concentrate our focus on seeking the Lord so that we can pray more earnestly. So our services these next three weeks are going to be very simple. We’re not going to have a worship team, or a highly structured liturgy. Our sermons are going to be shorter—that doesn’t have to mean less meaningful. We’re doing this so we can take more time to pray—to pray quietly in our hearts, and pray together in groups and pray in one accord as we are led together by the Holy Spirit. You can participate meaningfully without feeling pressured to pray out loud but by quietly praying from your heart.

God has been very gracious to us here at New Covenant Bible Church. As we approach our fifth anniversary together as a church, we’re asking God to stir us up, to revive us, to awaken our affections, to energize us afresh for mission, to deepen us in our love. We believe there are things God wants to do in us that can only be accomplished through Him and that we need to be a people who break through our inhibitions and learn to be comfortable praying with each other, calling on God together. This prayer focus is not prompted by any sense of decline or crisis; it’s just based on the reality that we always need God to be doing a fresh and powerful work of grace among us because what He calls us to be and do for His Name’s sake is far beyond anything we can accomplish on our own!

A book I've been reading said this: "The greatest workings of God come by corporate prayer. We will not see the power of God in sufficient measure to transform the world around us until we pray together."

The work that needs to be done in our lives—in our neighborhoods, in our families, in our nation, in the world—is well beyond us. In Scripture and history, God has always worked through people who are praying together so we're seeking Him to do in and through us that which only He can do.

Good Morning, Father, Son & Holy Spirit

Let's begin with a Morning Prayer that was written by John Stott who prayed this in his daily devotions. I pray this often as I start my days as well. It helps get us started, reminds us that we live in God's presence and is a good way to greet our Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, our comforting Holy Spirit. It helps us express our desire to be with Him and in Him, filled up by Him as we rejoice with all our hearts in the worship of our great God and King.

Good morning heavenly Father,

Good morning Lord Jesus.

Good morning Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I worship You as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

Lord Jesus, I worship You as Savior and Lord of the world.

Holy Spirit, I worship You as sanctifier of the people of God.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in Your presence and please You more and more.

Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow You.

Holy Spirit, I pray that this day You will fill me with Yourself and cause Your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Holy, blessed and glorious Trinity, three Persons in one God, have mercy upon me. Amen.

Call to Confession

Our King is a King of grace and mercy. We can enter into His presence with thanksgiving and His courts with praise, knowing that we are His people, the sheep of His pasture, the flock of His hand, the object of His redeeming blood (Psalm 95). The fact that He gave His Son to be the

Shepherd Who has laid down His life (1 John 3:16) for the sheep and that Jesus has died for us gives us boldness to come into His presence. We come as a people, aware of our on-going need for grace so we're going to confess our sin together, beginning with Isaiah 51:7-8:

Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
the people in whose heart is my law;
fear not the reproach of man,
nor be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool;
but my righteousness will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

God identifies here a common idol of the heart that we wrestle against—putting more stock in people and what they think of us and their approval or disapproval, than we do in the Lord Who endures forever. We're going to confess together our tendency to fear man, to care more about what people think of us than we do about God's judgment of us. Meditate on this prayer with me.

Prayer of Confession

Ransoming Lord, we confess that we do not listen to You or remember Who You are. We are quick to forget that You stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth with a word. You created us and everyone around us. You alone are from everlasting to everlasting. You are the One Who judges all men in righteousness and truth. Because we often forget this truth, we fear and worship people instead of You, giving them the power to cast us into despair by their judgments of us. Instead of trusting and rejoicing in Your verdict of "not guilty," we are undone by their displeasure and devastated by their criticism. Sometimes they revile us for our actions and we are crushed, even though we have not broken Your law, but only the laws of men. At other times, when they reproach us for truly breaking Your law we hear only their words of condemnation and not the comforting words of the gospel. When we love Your righteousness and feel Your law written on our hearts, we have trouble remembering Your grace and forgiveness. Forgive us, Lord.

Pause a moment and consider whose voice is loudest in your mind and heart right now. Are you most aware of God's thoughts toward you or are you consumed with relationships and what people think of you. Are you in despair because of something that has been said or done against you? Are you elated with pride because of your perception of where you stand in the eyes

of others? Confess to the Lord your preoccupation with human approval. Ask Him to rid you of the fear of man which is a snare. Find refuge in Him.

We thank You, Lord, that You do forgive us. We thank You for the perfect goodness of Your Son, Who knew and loved Your law with all His heart, mind, soul and strength in our place. He never feared the reproach or criticism of men, nor was dismayed at their reviling. Instead He spoke the truth in love at all times, fearlessly serving others instead of worshiping them. Yet on the cross He paid the deadly price for all our fear-driven adoration of the approval of men. His body was slain and bathed in blood as He withstood Your fearful wrath for all our crimes. His loving hands were pierced with nails; His faithful head bloodied with thorns as He listened to the mocking ridicule of those He came to save. He cried out in anguish, so that we would never know the anguish of trying to pay for our own sin.

Father, we desperately need Your help to know Your righteousness in all its fullness and to love Your law well. Cause us to see the glory of Your Son, Jesus Christ, so that we remember Your grace as well as Your justice. Dissolve our hearts in thankfulness by reminding us of the cross many times each day. Lord, draw our hearts to be amazed by Your outrageous love for us.

Wean us from our addiction to glory and the admiration of others by persuading us of the truth that You delight in us every moment of every day. You love us exactly as much as You love Your Son, Jesus, because we are forever joined to Him. May this truth melt our eyes to tears and fill us with unfathomable joy. Amen.

Now take a few minutes to offer your prayer of confession. Express your need for God's grace and mercy, as well as your confidence that He is able and willing to be merciful and gracious to you.

Meditate on Psalm 51:

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned

and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;

¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Assurance of Pardon

Listen to this wonderful assurance of pardon and God's on-going grace in our lives from Isaiah 51:

*¹¹And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

*¹⁴He who is bowed down shall speedily be released;
he shall not die and go down to the pit,
neither shall his bread be lacking.*

*¹⁵I am the LORD your God,
who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—
the LORD of hosts is his name.*

*¹⁶And I have put my words in your mouth
and covered you in the shadow of my hand,
establishing the heavens
and laying the foundations of the earth,
and saying to Zion, "You are my people."*

Take a few minutes to thank and praise the Lord for His restoring work. For His redemption and atonement for our sins. For making us His people. For giving us new life. For the fellowship His work on the cross brings us. For lifting us out of the pit that we've dug through our sins and putting our feet on the solid ground of Jesus. Thank Him for His grace and mercy.

We thank You, Lord, for these words: *"...the ransomed of the Lord shall return..."* When we were far off, running from You, You are the Father Who is waiting for our return. When You saw us on the distant horizon, You ran to us. You welcomed us home with open arms. We thank You for rescuing us from our bondage to sin. We thank You that our future is one of everlasting joy crowning our heads. We thank You that we're not in the pit of destruction any longer because You've set our feet on a Rock; You've put a new song in our mouths—a song of praise to You. We thank You for Your Word that You've put in our mouths. You've covered us in the shadow of Your hand. We thank You for the cross and the blood that was shed there so that all these gracious words could become our inheritance. We worship You, Savior. *"He loved me and gave Himself up for me."* That's what the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 2:20; that's what every believer can say. *"He loved me and gave Himself up for me."* Thanks be to God!

God Invites Us to Believe Again

We're now going to turn to God's Word, to a passage designed to help us in our prayer lives—Psalm 126:

¹ *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.*

² *Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."*

³ *The LORD has done great things for us;
we are glad.*

⁴ *Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negeb!*

⁵ *Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!*

⁶ *He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.*

Listen to the same psalm from the New English Translation:

*When the LORD restored the well-being of Zion,
we thought we were dreaming.
At that time we laughed loudly
and shouted for joy.
At that time the nations said,
"The LORD has accomplished great things for these people."
The LORD did indeed accomplish great things for us.
We were happy.*

*O LORD, restore our well-being,
just as the streams in the arid south are replenished.
Those who shed tears as they plant
will shout for joy when they reap the harvest.
The one who weeps as he walks along,
carrying his bag of seed,
will certainly come in with a shout of joy,
carrying his sheaves of grain.*

Do you hear the tension in this Psalm? We have here a people who have experienced great things from the Lord and they recall the joy those great things brought them in verses one through three. But now their enthusiasm is waning and they are dry spiritually (verses 4-6) and they are praying from that vantage point. Joy is a distant signpost in the rear view mirror with vast and barren desert stretches out on the foreseeable horizon. Laughter is an almost-forgotten luxury; tears are their daily drink.

Here is a people who have experienced redemption and acknowledged that in verses one through three, but they're still in need of it now. They've been restored (verse one); they need to be restored again (verse four). They've been redeemed; but need redemption. They have been saved; but still need to be saved. They have every reason to rejoice, but they need their joy to be reclaimed and reignited by a fresh realization of God's presence and power in their lives in the present.

This is a Psalm for people who are living on fumes; whose tank has run dry; who need replenishment; who need revived. It's a Psalm for people who've give up hope and forgotten how to laugh. There are lots of people like that in the church today. We know the Lord has done great things for us in the past and we're pretty confident God has great things in store for us in the far distant future. We're not worried about where we're going to be a hundred years from now; we think that's going to be good. We're worried about the next few months; the next five years; the long season of life that lies ahead. We've stopped believing in a God Who is powerfully present and active in ways that bring us unimaginable joy today. We've gotten the wind knocked out of us; we're glum. We're in captivity, wondering, "How did it come to this? Am I stuck here with this kind of dismal existence for the rest of my life? Is this all there is?"

It's the tension of unrealized hope when the promises of God and the realities of the present seem to have an unbridgeable chasm between them. Let's think about what God has done for us in Jesus, like in the first three verses of this Psalm:

- In Christ, God has taken our sin and nailed it to the cross so we bear it no more. Is that good news?
- In Jesus, we've been ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.
- In Jesus, Who has risen from the dead, we have become heirs of eternal life, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for us—who through faith are being guarded for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last day.
- In Jesus, we are clothed in His robes of righteousness!
- He's come to live in us by His Holy Spirit, opening our eyes to the goodness of God's Word, giving us faith in the gospel, instructing us in the ways of righteousness, conforming us to His image.

This is what God has done for us in Christ! So dear Christian, I can say to you with confidence—even though your life is not finished yet—that will be the banner headline that sums up the story of your life: **THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR YOU!** I'm so confident that this is the story of your life in a nutshell that you could order your tombstone right now and have this engraved on it. If you are a Christian, your descendants won't need to make any revisions. There is not an ounce of hyperbole: **THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS FOR YOU!** That's the story and that's not going to change.

That's the gospel truth. That's what the Lord has done for you. So, are you glad? If not, why not? Why isn't your mouth filled with laughter and your tongue with shouts of joy? Why aren't we the talk of the nations, as they look upon the mighty works of God on behalf of His church? *"Nations will marvel at what God has done for his people in Jesus!"* (Revelation 15:3-4).

So ask yourself, "If the Lord has done these great things for you, are you glad? If not, why not?" Could it be because you've got bills to pay and you don't know how you'll be able to pay them? Could it be because you've got responsibilities that you don't know how you're going to fulfill? Could it be because you're nervous about your job; you're tired of the unbelief and opposition the world displays against your faith? Could it be because you live in a world of broken relationships and they pain you? Could it be because you hear the prayer of your Savior that we would all be one in unity but you wonder why Christians so often can't seem to get along? Could it be because you have heart ache in your home; you're disappointed by people? Because you're concerned about loved ones who are heading down a precarious path over which you have no control?

Could it be because you're seated with Christ in the heavenly places, yet you still sin and sometimes fall flat on your face and fail miserably? Could it be because you look at life as you know it right now in the present and you've been praying—as the church has prayed for 2,000 years—"Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus!"? But the years still roll on and the world is both enticing and devastating. Life is full of disappointments and hopes that have not been realized. You're starting to settle into a Christian life of low expectations because it seems more tolerable than the alternative. No one starts the Christian life saying, "I just want to have a mediocre Christian life. I want to just barely get by; I just want to survive." We start with high hopes, with great joy over what God has done for us and great anticipation of what He will do in our lives but as life goes on

and troubles rise and sometimes things don't seem to get any better, we start to expect the inertia of inevitable decline instead of the momentum of continual revival.

But we become self-absorbed. We stop being defined by the great things God has done for us and we let ourselves settle into a coma of spiritual indifference. I think that's where a lot of Christians are today. We're just expecting inertia. Inevitable decline—not momentum and continued revival. That's tragic because the Lord Who has done great things for us is not finished with us.

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done
and great our rejoicing through Jesus His Son!
But purer and higher and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see!

(To God be the Glory by Fanny Crosby & Robert Lowry, 1875)

If that's what lies on the horizon for us, if that's what God is preparing for us, then we should be preparing the way of the Lord. We should be lifting our drooping hands, strengthening our weak knees, making straight paths for our feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed (Hebrews 12:12-13).

Consider this quote from Ray Ortlund: "Psalm 126 invites us to believe again... The gospel puts deep in our hearts a yearning for what only God can do; the gospel stirs in us a dream that nothing in this world can satisfy. Never lose that dream." God has created in His people longings for only what He can do. He has stirred in us a dream for only what He can satisfy but we're in danger of losing that dream.

When you're living on fumes and losing that dream, how do you fight to reclaim your spiritual passion? How do you reclaim the erosion of enthusiasm for God in your life? Here are three directions from Palm 126:

#1: Attack self-absorption by delighting in what the Lord has done in history (126:2-4)

That's what's happening in verses one through three. As the Israelites are ascending to Jerusalem on their pilgrimage, they're remembering the great joy and startling suddenness of the great work of God when He restored the fortunes of Zion. They were like those who dreamed; they weren't expecting this but it happened. God moved powerfully in their lives, over and over again in their history. The result was exuberant joy and international recognition. The people of the Lord agree when the nations say the Lord has done great things for them, they are glad.

But God's work in the world is not all about you. If you gage your joy by what's happening immediately in your life and you let your joy rise or fall depending on what's happening with you, then you're going to forget that you're part of this grand drama that is infinitely bigger than you. You won't realize that you are woven into a tapestry of redemption that is breathtakingly magnificent. Don't get so caught up in the mundane details, burdens and disappointments of the present moment that you forget you're on the grand stage of the greatest story ever told. You are sharing in the victory of the Champion of that story—Jesus. Your life is one act in this vast drama, but it's a vital act. You get to share in the story of what God is doing.

You might think, "I've ruined it. I've destroyed everything. I've written myself out of the script." But here's the great news: you cannot destroy the work of God! The Israelites sinned their way into exile in Babylon for 70 years. That could not stop God from restoring them. He brought them back, restored their fortunes, filled their mouths with laughter and shouts of joy. You cannot destroy the work of God! You're not that clever or that strong. You're not even that important! The Devil cannot destroy the work of God and He's certainly not going to let you get in the way!

God specializes in restoration. God collects the junk of our lives and restores damaged goods. He is a Master at recouping losses and turning them into great gains, including what looks lost and beyond repair to us—beyond redemption to us. He puts shattered fragments together and rebuilds the ruins of our lives. So stop focusing on all the disappointments of sin. Stop dwelling on what you've squandered and on what other people have done. Look afresh at what God has been doing faithfully in history for thousands of years and rejoice that your life is included in that massive restoration project. You get to be part of this gospel story! Stop dwelling on the junk and start rejoicing in the One Who is able to give ruined people their lives back again.

Ray Ortlund says the story of the gospel has three simple steps:

1. God gave us everything.
2. We gave Him grief. Then what did God do?
3. God gave us everything back again and infinitely more in Christ.

Do you believe in Jesus? That's your story. God gave you everything. You gave Him grief. He gave you everything back again and infinitely more in Christ. That's the story of your life. That's what gets you up in the morning. If that is what fuels your brief existence—if that's what charges us up as a church—it's going to be a joy-filled existence, even in the midst of great sorrow because we have inextinguishable joy through this gospel story. So fight against self-

absorption. Fight against looking just at yourself. Don't forget about what God is doing in the world and history. Rejoice that you are part of the great things God has done—and be glad in that!

#2: Trust that God can turn things around in an instant (126:4)

When the people in verse four turn to God in prayer, they are trusting God to turn things around. *“Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!”*

I've been to Jordan and have seen how dry and barren that desert land is. The Negev is the southern-most part of Judah, around the Sinai Peninsula. It is so dry and so arid that in that desert there will be dry, dusty channels carved out of the land called wadis—river beds that are hardly ever watered. But once in a while a rain will come so quickly that it will cause that wadi to overflow and a desert can go from barrenness to a botanical garden in a day. That quickly things can be turned around.

Sometimes the fulfillment of God's promise is as sudden and dramatic as the flooding of a wadi in the desert. What was once all dry and barren is lush and vivid with life the next moment. That's what God's people are praying for in verse four. As we sing:

Again refresh us, Lord, with Thy reviving love,
And be Thy blessing in mercy poured in mercy from above;
By grace revive our hearts again,
As streams refreshed by copious rain.

(When In His Might the Lord by John Goss 1874)

I wonder what the dry and barren places of your life are right now. For some of you I know it's so painful because it touches the most intimate places of your life—your marriage, your home, your family—and it is dry and barren there. That's what you go home to every day and it seems like nothing changes. For some of you it's a son or daughter who has no interest right now in God—dry as death. What's the Death Valley in your life right now? For some of us it's just mission. We look at where God has placed us and we don't hear anyone asking about Jesus so we start thinking that our culture is going a hundred miles an hour in the opposite direction and we're just stuck. Instead of focusing on what God is able to do, we're worried about what we might fail to do.

Verse four tells us that God is able in an instant to do what we can't accomplish in a life time. What looks like Death Valley today might be lush with life a week from now. The person in your life right now who is dead in sin might be alive in Christ tomorrow. And sometimes that

transformation is dramatic and beautiful and glorious. Like a sudden flash flood, God can turn scorched land into a botanical garden overnight. He can restore fortunes like streams in the Negev and we must not neglect this revival dimension in our theology and in our praying. This must factor into the way we look to the Lord about the Death Valleys in our lives.

That's not how God always acts. It's not the only way we see His reviving presence in the lives of His people. In fact it's probably not the way He usually acts which is why I'm glad we have verses five and six which say:

*Those who sow in tears
shall reap with shouts of joy!
He who goes out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
bringing his sheaves with him.*

Listen to what J.I. Packer, an elderly statesman in the church, said a few years ago:

Would we recognize a reviving of religion if we were part of one? I ask myself that question. For more than half a century the need of such reviving in the places where I have lived, worshiped and worked has weighed me down. I have read of past revivals. I have learned, through a latter-day revival convert from Wales, that there is a *tinc* in the air, a kind of moral and spiritual electricity, when God's close presence is enforcing His Word.

I have sat under the electrifying ministry of the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who as it were brought God into the pulpit with him and let Him loose on the listeners. Lloyd-Jones' ministry blessed many, but he never believed he was seeing the revival he sought.

I have witnessed remarkable evangelical advances, not only academic but also pastoral, with churches growing spectacularly through the gospel on both sides of the Atlantic and believers maturing in the life of repentance as well as in the life of joy.

Have I seen revival? I think not—but would I know? From a distance, the difference between the ordinary and extraordinary working of God's Spirit looks like black and white, a difference of kind; to [Jonathan] Edwards, however, at close range, it appeared a matter of degree...

Some evangelicals need to be asked, "Are you not expecting too little from God in the way of moral transformation?" But others need to be asked, "Are you not expecting too much from God in the way of situational drama?" Do we always know when we are in a revival situation?

#3: Keep sowing seeds of faith even while you weep (126:5-6)

The Psalm ends with the metaphor of the harvest that's so fitting because the life of faith involves sowing seeds and waiting for them to come to harvest. Life doesn't always look like there have been copious rains in the desert. It doesn't always look dramatic when God's Spirit is working powerfully among God's people. Sometimes it looks more like verses five and six when His people were weeping over any number of circumstances in their lives, but they went out continually, to and fro, weeping, bearing seed for sowing.

Sometimes we are full of sorrow, nonetheless we are to go forth into the world and sow the seed of gospel truth with tears, then water that seed with our tears. Any farmer will tell you, that seed gets planted and it takes months for the harvest to come. There's often a long interlude between the seeds of our prayers and the seeds of our witness, the seeds of our disciple making and the seeds of our building into the ministry of the church and the harvest time. It involves toil and it takes time. Maybe a generation will separate the sowing from the harvesting but God's people sow in faith and they do not lose heart because they know God is faithful and they shall come home surely with shouts of joy, bringing their sheaves with them.

When you're weeping and your life is full of grief and disappointment, the temptation is to stay home and self-medicate, isolating yourself and forgetting what story you're part of and what God is able to do. This Psalm is calling you, even while you weep, to do the hard work of praying, spreading the gospel, making disciples, building-up the church, not growing weary in well-doing, *"for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up"* (Galatians 6:9).

Isn't that the pattern of our Savior's life? What was Jesus doing as He entered into Jerusalem during Passion Week? He was weeping over Jerusalem. By the end of that week, He would be lifted up on a cross—like a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die before it can bear much fruit, so would our Savior give up His life (John 12:24). How fruitful has the sowing of the seed of our Savior's life been? Infinitely fruitful!

Sometimes the working of God's Spirit is dramatic, as in verse four, and we pray for that. Other times the work of God's Spirit enables us to steadily persevere and press on, not losing

heart even while we weep and that is just as remarkable. Right now, verses five and six are what we are called to do.

Listen to James 5:7-8:

Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

That's what we're going to do in this life. We're going to sow, maybe even with tears. We're going to be calling on God to do only what He can do—and we're going to do so with confidence even as a result of our prayers.

As John Newton said, “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring, for His grace and power are such none can ever ask too much.” Let that be reflected in your prayers. Show that you believe in a God Who is both able and generous to answer these prayers.

Are you facing a burden that feels so heavy it starts to crowd out your joy and memory of the great things God has done for you? Do you have a burden that is just crippling at times? If you do and it is robbing your joy and making it difficult to focus on the great things God has done for you, lay your petitions at His feet.

Heavenly Father, there are days when the first thing on our minds as we wake up is a crushing, difficult, seemingly unchanging and unchangeable problem. It's there in the back of our minds all day long and it keeps us awake at night. For some of us, it's an illness; for many of us it relationships. For some of us it's financial pressure that never goes away and we're working as hard as we can but nothing changes. Others are burdened for sons and daughters who are far from You right now.

God, we confess that sometimes these problems become so big in our minds that we no longer feel and believe that we have a God Who has done great things for us. We confess the sin of our unbelief and pray that You would enable us to see that we are part of a story that is full of magnificent goodness. Help us rejoice in all that You are and all that You have done even when there are things in our lives we desperately long for You still to do. Help us, Lord, to believe that You can turn things around in an instant and we pray that You would. Save our sons and daughters. Father, change our marriages that are not reflecting Christ and the church. Lord,

save our neighbors. God, provide financial relief—provide in amazing and wonderful ways that would cause us to see that You are good and rejoice in that goodness.

But Lord, where you don't do something dramatic, we pray that You would do that which we most need which is to enable us to persevere in faith, going forth weeping, carrying seed, sowing, believing that in the end there will be a great harvest. Help us not to grow weary in well doing, Father. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now take some time to thank the Lord for the great things He has done throughout history. Focus on the mighty works of God and think Him that you are part of this story of redemption.

Think of the dry and barren places—the Death Valleys of your life. Pray for the reviving work of the Spirit.

Pray for faithfulness in sowing, even while you weep. Pray that you would persevere in witness, in mission, in love and prayer. Pray according to Psalm 126:5-6.

Trust in Him and what He has done on the cross. *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). If you trust in Jesus alone and the work He has done for you, He will be here to nourish you. The harvest is always greater than the seeds sown. You put a seed in the ground, up comes a stalk of corn! The blessings of God are utterly disproportionate to the investments you make.

Alexander the Great once had a general whose daughter was about to get married. He offered to pay for the wedding and his general took him up on it. When the general gave Alexander's steward the bill, it was extravagant. The steward was incredulous when he brought the bill to Alexander, but to his surprise, Alexander the Great said with a smile, "Pay it. Don't you see, by asking me for such an enormous sum he does me great honor. He shows that he believes I am both rich and generous."

Does your prayer life reveal that you believe in a God Who is both rich and generous?

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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