

A Passion for Prayer
Psalms 126 | 01.01.2017 | Spiritual Disciplines @OBC

Imagine yourself standing with the word of God in your hands before a giant mountain.

But instead of the Bible just being a book to read . . . it is a projector that displays a vision of God's kingdom at the top of the mountain.

The image of Christ's throne is beautiful, full of love and totally free from sin & death.

In between the mountain and you, there is a giant field full of people. These are the people in your family, your work, your school . . . all the people you will ever know.

Your calling is to make your way to the mountain . . . and every time you look at the book your vision of the kingdom gets that much better and brighter.

But every time this heavenly brightness increases . . . so does your awareness of the people whose lives are lived in darkness.

And so you begin walking through the fields . . .

Pointing to the mountain. Showing from your book the promises of the kingdom.

Some listen. Some laugh. Some follow for a bit. Others walk the other way.

Soon . . . you are grieved. Almost panicked. Will anyone listen? Does anyone care?

The book says cry out to the heavens . . .

And so you do . . . You plead for God to open eyes. To awaken souls.

Only your vision of the heavens blurs . . . because your eyes are filled with tears.

You wonder . . . is this the way it's supposed to be? Why is it so hard?

And then you come to Psalm 126 . . . and you read these words

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy . . . YES . . . THIS IS THE LORD'S WAY

Church . . . as we begin 2017 . . . I pray we would pray with this kind of passion.

I pray I would pray with this kind of passion.

So . . . we look at Ps 126 . . . a Psalm that teaches us how to pray w/ passion

FIRST THING . . . we need to see is passionate prayer begins in close proximity to God.

In context . . . Psalm 126 comes as the seventh Song of Ascents.

While composed individually by David (4x), Solomon (127), and others . . .
. . . Psalms 120–34 comprise a cohesive unit in the Psalms.

O Palmer Robertson says: “[The Songs of Ascent] are “grouped around Psalm 127, which was composed by Solomon [and focuses on building the temple]. [Psalm 127] stands in the middle between the first and last of the pilgrim poems. On both sides there stands a [grouping of seven] pilgrim songs, consisting of two psalms composed by David, and five new ones, which have no name.

Historically, it is often said these songs were sung by Israelites on the way to the temple. Hence, the center song by Solomon about the House of God.

ATST, there is a progression in them from distress and danger to rest and refuge.

In **Psalms 120–26** . . . there is a prevalence of need and intercessory prayer.

Ps 120 begins . . . “In my distress . . . READ vv. 1–2”

Ps 121, 123 continue with eyes affixed to heaven, looking for help.

Ps 122, 125 pray for the peace of David’s city and the people of God
In all . . . these Psalms petition God with priestly language – bless us, keep, shine your face upon us

Then . . . Psalm 127 brings us to the house of God itself . . . and the blessings that flow downhill from God’s dwelling.

Psalms 128–34 then speak more confidentially . . . from w/in the walls of the temple and w/ tones of answered prayer.

Israel’s afflictions are remembered, but only in the past.

Ps 128 speaks of the ability to enjoy the bounty of God’s covenant.

Ps 129:4 says, “The LORD . . . has cut the cords of the wicked.”

Ps 130 says forgiveness has been experienced / redemption is plentiful.

Ps 131 describes the rest temple-dwellers enjoy.

Ps 132 speaks of God rewarding David’s sufferings with a new temple.

Ps 133 describes the joy of dwelling at peace with the family of God.

Ps 134 concludes . . . READ

So where does Psalm 126 sit?

It sits in proximity to the temple of God.

These songs were sung on the way to the Lord's house, and arranged by Ezra or another post-exilic priest, they are centered on the Temple.

Like Solomon's own prayer in 1 Kings 8 which called Israel to turn towards the temple – the place where God dwelled – these Songs of Ascent are also temple-oriented.

Now what does that mean for us?

Prayer ALWAYS takes place IN and AROUND and ON THE WAY to the temple.

In the OT, the mercy seat was the place where God met with his people.

God put his name in Jerusalem. The temple was his footstool.
... And the priests offered daily sacrifices and constant incense—
... incense which is associated with prayer in Psalm 141:2.

It is much the same today . . . only better!

Prayer is still a pleasing aroma to God, only it is not offered by Levitical priests.
Rather . . . All children of God are saints, priests, servants in the house of God.

Christ is in God's heavenly temple, living to intercede for us.

And we who have trusted in him . . . **are the temple of God** – set apart by the Father, purified by faith in the Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Whereas . . . the OT saints had to pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray in God's presence, we can pray without ceasing . . . the Spirit of God never departing from us

And thus true prayer . . . and enduring prayer begins with living in God's presence.

Do you want to grow in praise this year?

Marvel at this access . . . this gift of God's audience . . . his constant presence w/ you.

DO YOU WANT TO GROW IN PRAYER THIS YEAR?

Learn what it means to live in the presence of God – Study the temple, the songs of ascent, the priestly service of Levi . . . **and realize in X** . . . you have more.
You are royal priesthood, a holy nation, servant in God's house.

The starting place for prayer is not a list . . . but a location. **Proximity is the key.**

Draw near to God . . . worship him in his holy splendor . . . marvel at Christ's sacrifice . . . feel his love . . . and watch what happens to your prayer life.

So . . . Proximity to God is the first step towards passion;

Next . . . passionate prayer comes from a rising confidence in God's greatness.

Consider a pop quiz

A son will ask their father for help when . . .

- (a) He is afraid of their father
- (b) He is ignorant of their father
- (c) He is commanded by his father
- (d) He is confident in the goodness of their father

The answer is D . . . a son asking his father for help is largely dependent on trust

. . . and such trust is largely based upon the father's faithfulness, goodness, and love.

The same is true in prayer . . . As children of God . . . the fervency of our prayer will depend upon the kind of faith you have in God.

To turn it around: What you believe about God – not what you say you believe – but what you really believe . . . will be revealed in prayer.

Prayer-less living . . . is a mark of faithless living.

But genuine faith... prompts confident prayer.

And . . . therefore . . . if we want to grow in prayer . . . we must grow in FAITH

But what increases faith . . . my answer: **meditating on the greatness of the gospel.**

In other words . . . prayer increases WHEN it comes FROM and comes AFTER meditation on the powerful working of God in redemption . . . the very thing we find in Psalm 126:1–3

Technically speaking . . . there is only one petition in Psalm 126 . . . **v. 4**

“Restore our fortunes, O LORD . . . like streams in the desert.”

We'll need to see what this “restore our fortunes” entails . . . but notice . . .

The petition in verse 4 is based on God's previous working in v. 1.

“When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.”

Do you see the parallel?

v. 1 speaks of God's previous work of redemption / restoration . . .
. . . which is compared to dream . . . the restoration is so improbable and great.

v. 4 echoes the same words, turning God's previous restoration into a word of prayer
. . . and then v. 4 follows with another improbable comparison

Just as a dry and arid land is overcome by floodwaters that restore vegetation and life,
so he prays that God make the 'fortunes of Israel' flourish again.

Interestingly,

This is not the only comparison between vv. 1–3 and vv. 4–6.

In v. 2 . . . the Psalmist recounts the "shouts of joy" that resulted from God's work.

In v. 5 and 6 . . . he uses the same wording . . . **READ v. 5 . . . v. 6**

Likewise, the praise of God's greatness in v. 3 is matched by the harvest in v. 6.

Which leads to the Q: **What is his previous work? What "great thing" has he done?**

While some debate remains about the historic referent in Psalm 126 . . . it seems best to see the "restoration of fortunes" as a return of God's people from exile.

Indeed, eight times in Jeremiah 29–33, God promises to "restore the fortunes" of his people . . . the context there is one of return from exile.

The fortunes here . . . are not a proof-text for prosperity . . . but a promise that God's people will return to God's place under God's rule . . . and that in this setting, their blessing will be restored.

In the context of the Psalm 126, this restoration is described as the 'great work of God'

Throughout the Psalms . . . the "great works of God" are always related to God's power creation and God's wisdom in redemption.

And it is from remembering these testimonies that our faith is increased . . . and our prayers are empowered.

DO YOU WANT TO GROW IN PRAYER THIS YEAR?

Don't just memorize the commands of God, or the verse that says "You must pray."

. . . Let your mind run the hills of God's redemptive history.

- Consider how God directed the steps of Abraham and fulfilled the promise of son.
- Meditate on God's wisdom as he sent Joseph ahead of his brothers to save them when famine came.
- Marvel at the exodus, how God saved a recalcitrant people thru the Passover and Red Sea . . . how he gave them his Word . . . and put built his tent among them
- Recall all the ways he forgave sin, raised up deliverers, brought people back from the dead, overcame exile, and healed diseases.

Let these testimonies lead you to X . . . what he has done and continues to do.

Count the blessings he has promised and number the ways he is working in the world, and THEN you will be ready to pray . . .

If you want to grow in prayer this year . . .

Draw near to God in proximity

Draw deeper on the gospel promises
. . . in God's Word.

Finally . . . Passionate Prayer comes from a heart broken by God himself.

You may know . . . passion in its original sense means “to suffer.”

Today, passion often conjures up ideas of strong emotions or sexual desire.

But that’s not what I mean. . . **Xians need to define passion in terms X’s passion**

Following men like Paul & Peter . . . we need to embrace suffering for Christ’s sake.

In fact, **Philippians 1:29** says suffering is a gift God gives to us.
1 Peter says we ought not to be surprised when we face fiery trials

To follow Christ passionately . . . will include a life of Christ-like, cross-like prayer.

What does that mean?

Like everything in life . . . our prayers should be shaped by the cross.

In prayer . . . we not only pour out our heart to God, he pours his life into us . . . a life that looks like Jesus Christ.

And So . . . Like Jesus in Gethsemane . . . we pray for God’s will above our own.

We submit our desires to his . . . we seek his kingdom, not our own.

And in that process . . . we struggle . . . we suffer . . . we die to ourselves

But in that dying . . . God gives us new life . . .
. . . and miraculously, through our dying daily in prayer . . . God brings eternal life.

This was the wonderful testimony we heard from Jeff Heim

He and Suzy have prayed for his father for 25 years

How much struggle was in that praying? How much waiting? How much pain?

But today . . . we praise God for hearing, answering, and saving his father.

This is true prayer . . . one that abides . . . one that suffers . . . one that is purified by time . . . one finds shouts of joy after tears

Consider . . . In Israel . . .

real tears were sown when the harvest did not produce . . .

. . . and the people of God had no food to feed their children (Lamentations)

. . . and no crops to bring to the temple (Joel 2).

These tears are related to the exile of Israel . . . hence the dream like state when previous tears were replaced by joy.

But now . . . tears are shed when we sow the word of God and wait for the harvest.

. . . Though Christ has won the victory . . . death is not yet defeated.

. . . Therefore, we cry when death continues to steal our loved ones

. . . AND when our loved ones continue to choose death over life.

These tears are just as real as in the OT, but b/c of Christ, they are also different . . .

. . . they include compassion for all nations, not just Israel.

. . . they center themselves on faith in Christ's gospel, not just keeping the law.

. . . our longing is just as material as the OT

. . . but because it is grounded in the NC . . . we look for our restored kingdom in the resurrection and return of Christ.

. . . And hence our tears are also turned towards seeing others find life in that resurrection.

In John 4, after bringing salvation to Samaria, he said . . . **"look unto the fields; they are white unto harvest." (v. 35)**

In this statement, he wasn't being allegorical . . . but neither was he promising his followers a restoration of physical fortunes in this fallen age.

He was enlarging their vision to see how his kingdom would come

When the disciples asked if he would restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus pointed to the Holy Spirit . . . and the work of being witnesses

Once we recognize this fact . . . it teaches what we are to pray for.

We are to pray for the Kingdom . . . and the salvation it gives.

This is the point of Psalm 126 for us

The kingdom is on the mountain . . . we are in the valley.

And between the mountain and us . . . is a harvest field for us to work!

It is no accident Jesus uses imagery of the hard working farmer.

In **Matthew 9** . . . The Lord of the harvest has called us to pray for laborers . . .

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

This labor is more than we can handle . . . and it is not surprising he tells us that unless we pray, we will not bear fruit.

John 15:7–8 says

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

This must be our prayer . . . that God would be glorified . . . thru making of disciples

In 2017 . . . this will be our refrain

From the Word of God . . . we will look to the king and his kingdom

And it is my prayer that he will enflame within us a passion to pray . . . for much fruit

But like any good farmer will tell you . . . such a harvest requires blood, sweat, and tears.

But such sorrow is not impediment to following Christ

Spiritual poverty and desperate longing for Christ’s kingdom is the WAY of prayer.

Look again at Psalm 126

Those who pray as Jesus taught us . . . Thy kingdom come . . . thy will be done . . .

NEVER . . . EVER . . . pray in vain.

No . . . the more we weep FOR God's kingdom . . . the more joy we'll have when it comes

This is the promise repeated twice in verses 5–6:

v. 5 . . . Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.

What's this based on – God's great works of past redemption

Our future hope is secured by his past works.

If this was true in Israel . . . how much more for Jew/Gentile in X today

Those who sow the seeds of truth in the gospel, will not be disappointed.

And he says again

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

In Israel . . . the farmer might have wept over the seed because it was something he could not put in his mouth or on the table.

In years of famine . . . this would have been painful . . . bringing tears.
But for him to have future harvest . . . he had to plant.

So too for us . . . if we will store up treasure in heaven, we must give ourselves to prayer, the word of God, and proximity to the Lord.

But to do that . . . means sacrificing something of our earthly pleasures.

Maybe it means you use vacation to go on a mission trip; or you use that cruise money to send a teenager while you stay home and pray.

Maybe it's giving up the freedoms at home to house a refugee family

Maybe it's forsaking a raise . . . to spend more time shepherding a child.

Maybe it's postponing a career to start a family, instead of the reverse

Maybe it's forsaking an hour of sleep or a weekly meal to pray

Are those sacrifices . . . **absolutely** . . . Will they produce tears . . . **probably**
Will it be worth it . . . Yes . . . 200% Yes.

We pray with passion . . . when . . .

We weep over this earth . . . because of how far it is from Christ.

We join him in his labor . . . and we water gospel seeds w/ tears of hope.

As we look on the world and its problems—just think of all the ways 2016 let you down

When you look at the world and its fallenness . . . it should problem sorrow

Instead of ignoring that sorrow . . . let it lead you to pray . . .

At the same time . . . as you abide in close proximity to God and feast on his word

Your hunger for him grows . . . and so does your distaste for this world

But instead of growing cynical . . . let such meditation increase your love for the lost.

Jesus was a man of sorrows who wept b/c of Israel's sin . . . may we do the same.

Do you see how the kingdom, and the cross, and promise of future joy encourages prayer

It doesn't stir up prayer by giving you lists and logistics

But passionate prayer comes from a heart full of Christ that breaks for a broken world

Such longing is what empowers us to make lists and dedicate time to pray.

DO YOU WANT TO GROW IN PRAYER THIS YEAR?

Then weep.

Weep over the glories of God to come and the agonies of man on earth.

Weep over your sin and the sins of others . . . and weep for the way God grants pardon to undeserving sinners.

Do not harden your heart by ignoring the pain . . . but let the pain lead you into pray

For brothers and sisters . . . such is the kingdom of God.

We weep and pray in the night . . . knowing that joy comes in the morning.

Take heart . . . we live in the dawn of a new age . . . and Jesus Christ is soon to return, but until he does . . . **let us pray with passion.**