

Praying With Honesty!

-One morning a little girl overheard her mommy praying and as she listened she heard her say: “Dear Father, so far I’ve done all right. I haven’t lost my temper or yelled at the kids, I haven’t gossiped, I haven’t been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or even over-indulged. I’m really glad about that. But in a few minutes, God, I’m going to get out of bed and from then on I’m probably going to need a lot more help!”

-This is humorous but in reality it reveals a lot of truth. Honest prayer is exactly what God desires from each of us, honestly sharing our weaknesses and asking for His strength.

-To help us understand this today, we are going to start with a few questions:

-First off, can anyone share what prayer really is? (Having a conversation with God, Asking God to meet your need or somebody else’s, It’s praising Him and thanking Him, It’s worshipping Him, It’s committing things to Him)

-How often do you think we should pray? (It should be an everyday part of our lives, just like breathing.)

-What is the worst thing that can happen when you don’t pray? (Nothing! If we don’t bring it before the Lord, we may never get an answer to our petition that we would know of.)

-What are the 3 answers to prayer that God may give us? (No, Yes or Wait)

-Which one do we like best and why? (Yes!...)

-What happens to us when He gives us the other two answers like No or Wait? (We may lose faith, we may think He isn’t listening, we may think His way is not the right one, we may even get angry!)

-Have any of you experienced a time when you boldly shared with God your feelings about His answer of “No!” or “Wait!”? (...)

-How did that make you feel? (good, relieving or guilty, selfish, ...)

-Let’s ask ourselves a question: If you have a child or are close to a child, do you want that child to share with you their heart’s desires, struggles and disappointments? (...) And when they get disappointed because you had to say no to something, would you want them to talk to you about it so you may comfort them to help them understand why you had to say no? (...)

-God desires that relationship with us as well for we are His children. He wants us to be honest in our prayer lives. Not just saying what we were taught in church growing up or what we think He wants to hear, but like any parent of a child, God wants to hear what is really on our hearts. He wants to hear what we are happy with and what we are struggling with.

-Even Jeremiah the prophet talked to God about something He was struggling with. He wrote in Jeremiah 12:1 “You are always righteous, Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” The great prophet Jeremiah was struggling with seeing the wicked prospering and living at ease and shared this with the Lord, but He shared it with reverence in Who God is.

-He also wrote in Jeremiah 17:10 “The Lord searches the heart and examines the mind....”

-What do you think this means that the Lord searches our hearts and examines our minds? (...)

-According to this verse, Jeremiah is telling us that God is already aware of our thoughts and our hearts so we might as well talk to Him about it.

-Then King David wrote in Psalm 62:8 “Trust in Him at all times, you people; *pour out your hearts to Him*, for God is our refuge.”

-He also wrote in Psalm 38:9 “Lord, all my desire is before thee; *and my groaning is not hid from thee.*”

-So here, King David, who God Himself called “a man after His Own heart” is instructing us to “pour out our hearts to [God] for our groaning is not hid from Him”.

-Does this make you feel uneasy or uncomfortable or comforted that He already knows and willing to listen? (...)

-This is where our lesson really starts. It starts with a famous prophet who openly struggled with God in a situation that He did not like. He didn’t hide His feelings or emotions but honestly, respectfully and boldly shared them with God.

-The beauty we are going to see in this story is the vast patience God has for His children and His ability to handle our groanings and utterings!

-How many of you remember the Bible story of Jonah and the Whale/Great Fish? Tell me all that you know:

- (Jonah was a prophet of Israel called by God to go to the wicked city of Nineveh, only 500 miles away, to tell them that if they didn’t repent of their sins, God was going to destroy them.
- Jonah did not want to go because the Ninevites were a part of Assyria and the Assyrians were proud and ruthless killers, bent on world conquest. They would take over towns and torture their captives by crucifying them or beheading them among other horrible atrocities.
- They were enemies of Israel, Jonah’s own people, and took over some of their own towns and villages, murdering them as they conquered them. They were a constant threat to Israel.
- When God called Jonah, he was afraid (and possibly angry for he knew God was going to offer salvation to this wicked people) and sailed 2500 miles in the *opposite* direction.

- God caused a storm to almost sink the ship so the sailors threw Jonah overboard by his request.
- God sent a great fish to swallow him and he was in the fish 3 days and night.
- Jonah cried out to the Lord and the fish spit him out on dry land.
- Again, God told him to go to Nineveh and this time Jonah did. He preached the message and the people of Nineveh repented and were saved from destruction.)

-What an amazing story of repentance and of God’s mercy on Jonah and the people of Nineveh. But, the story doesn’t end there. This is where we see true honesty in a prophet of God about a situation he did not like the answer to.

-Let’s read our first verses together on our Verse Sheet, #1: (Jonah 4:1-3 “But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed, ‘O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. *I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.* Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live!’”)

-How upset was Jonah? (Enough that he didn’t want to live anymore.)

-How honest was Jonah in his prayer to God? (Extremely honest.)

-Why do you think he was so disappointed and bitter? (Probably because he thought they didn’t deserve forgiveness for all the wickedness they had done. God didn’t give the Ninevites what Jonah thought they deserved.)

-Have you ever felt this way about someone or a situation; that they got something good instead of what they really deserved? (...)

-Or maybe you didn’t get something good that you thought you deserved for all your faithfulness or hard work? (...)

-Should we be honest with God about our feelings when this happens?(...)

-Do we realize He already knows, so we might as well be honest with Him as the prophet Jeremiah and King David reminded us of earlier?

-Let’s take a moment on this verse we just read and look at the attributes Jonah used to describe God in the midst of his anger, they are underlined on your sheet.

-What are they? (Gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, relents from sending calamity.)

-Didn’t God just show Jonah all of these when he was disobedient and in the belly of the fish? (...)

-Let me ask us three questions:

-How often does God show these attributes to us?(Daily)

-How often do we show these to others? (...)

-What are some ways we can show these to others? (...)

-Let’s get back to our verses. So, Jonah is basically telling God, “Didn’t I tell you this was going to happen? I knew they were going to repent and they were going to get away with their evil because you are so gracious and compassionate, that’s why I didn’t want to go. Just let me die, I just can’t take this!”

-Let's see how God responds with Jonah's honest prayer in our next verse. Let's read verse #2 together: (Jonah 4:4 "But the Lord replied, 'Have you any right to be angry?'")

-Did God zap Jonah for his honesty? (...)

-What did He do instead? (He was patient and took time to talk to Him.)

-What was God reminding Jonah of in this question? (God is reminding us of who we are and Who He is! He is the One who made every human being and He does with them what He desires so that it fits into His perfect plan for eternity. Who are we to decide man's destiny?)

-The next few verses we are about to read, Jonah 4:5-8, describes even after all of this, Jonah still went outside of the city and sat down to watch the city of Nineveh in the hopes that it would be destroyed.

-Let's read it together on our Verse Sheets #3: (Jonah 4:5-8: "Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live.")

-What are your thoughts on Jonah's attitude? (ungrateful, sulky, etc.)

-Have you ever been ungrateful or sulky on how God answered a prayer because it wasn't what you had planned? (...)

-Isn't it funny that we are not too different from this prophet of God?

-Did God *ask* Jonah to go out in the hot sun and watch the city get destroyed? (No)

-Sometimes we make ourselves miserable because we aren't happy with God's answers and we look for ways to change it ourselves or just stay angry about it.

-Let's read verse #4 to see the conversation that God and Jonah are having as Jonah's heart is continuing to struggle in this area. (Jonah 4:9 "But God said to Jonah, '*Is it right for you* to be angry about the plant?' 'It is,' he said, 'And I'm so angry I wish I were dead!'")

-Notice what God asked Jonah again to help him think beyond his own emotions and feelings, "*Is it right for you*"?

-Do we need to sometimes ask ourselves this very same question when we are upset to help us get the right perspective? (...)

-But Jonah blew right past it with his answer of "It is!" He wasn't even stopping for a moment to listen to what God was really trying to get him to think about, which was his own sinful heart and Who God is in all of this.

-Why do you think Jonah responded this way again? (...)

-Do you think the heat of the day and the situation got to Jonah and he just blurted out his frustration and misery to the Lord? (...)

-Has there been a time that things just seemed to get so bad that you just blurted out to God “I can’t take it anymore”? (...)

-Just like Jonah, we all face these temptations in our lives. But we need to be honest with the Lord about these things when we talk to Him for the Lord knows what is on our hearts. But, we also need to be willing to *accept His answer and His timing and remember Who He is.*

-Now, let’s get back to Jonah and see how God responded at the end of Jonah’s final complaint.

-It will be good for all of us to pay close attention to these last 2 verses that were spoken by God, because after them, the story of Jonah abruptly ends.

-God is trying to tell us something here so let’s listen as we read it together, #5 on our Verse Sheet: (Jonah 4:10-11 “But the Lord said, ‘*You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?’”)*

-What is God telling Jonah in these verses? (Jonah’s selfish concern was on the wrong thing. It was on a plant that made him comfortable that God created in the first place. Yet, he did not care for the 120,000 souls that God created that were heading to an eternity in Hell. He cared more for their judgement instead of their redemption that God had given them, the same redemption that God gave Jonah earlier in the belly of the fish.)

-Have we done this in our own prayer lives, more concerned about our own comfort and our own ideas of what people need rather than what God deems best for them? (...)

-Maybe we don’t pray for them because we don’t think they deserve God’s grace and mercy because of what they have done or are doing, just like Jonah did? (...)

-And if we do pray for all of these things, do we pray in honesty about how we feel, but also willing to trust God to answer it in the way He chooses to? (...)

-There is nothing wrong with praying for anything that God lays on our hearts to pray for, but when our focus becomes *totally* self-centered as Jonah’s were, we might reconsider what we are praying for.

-God wants us to pray in honesty but also in the right spirit *WITH* Him.

-Just remember, He already knows our thoughts, so share them with Him.

-Also, let’s remember Who He is and listen to Him when He responds, whether we like it or not. He still is the God of the Universe, the Creator of all mankind and the Lover of all our souls.

Praying With Honest Bible Verses

1. **Jonah 4:1-3** “But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed, ‘O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a *gracious and compassionate* God, *slow to anger and abounding in love*, a God who *relents from sending calamity*. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live!’”
2. **Jonah 4:4** “But the Lord replied, ‘Have you any right to be angry?’”
3. **Jonah 4:5-8:** “Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”
4. **Jonah 4:9** “But God said to Jonah, ‘*Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?*’ ‘It is,’ he said, ‘And I’m so angry I wish I were dead!’”
5. **Jonah 4:10-11** “But the Lord said, ‘*You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people[souls] who cannot tell their right hand from their left – and also many animals?*’”