

Sweet Hour Of Prayer

-I want everyone to think about what your favorite time of the day is and why. Would someone please share that with us? (...)

-Now, think about a time in the day when you feel most peaceful. When would that be? (...)

--When do you feel most joyful? (...) Why? (...)

-There are certain times in a particular day that these emotions can be felt or experienced. But, according to one hymn writer, there is a particular hour of the day that can be sweet, peaceful and joyful if we choose to be a part of it.

-Have any of you heard of the hymn “Sweet Hour of Prayer”? (...)

-Do you know who wrote it? (...)

-His name was Rev. William W. Walford, a blind English minister, who wrote this hymn around 1842. Little is known of Rev. Walford except that he would preach occasionally and he would make useful articles out of bone and ivory to sell to support himself. He was never famous or well known during his lifetime. In fact, it wasn't until 17 years after he wrote it, that his hymn was published in a little known book called the “Cottage Melodies”. Even though he wasn't famous or wealthy, his song has lasted over 150 years and has ministered to many people over that time. We are going to study his song today to see why.

-Let's start by reading the first part together, #1 on your verse sheet: (“Sweet hour of prayer, Sweet hour of prayer, That calls me from a world of care,”)

-Why do you think Rev. Walford described the hour of prayer as “Sweet”? (The definition of sweet is pleasing, agreeable, or delightful. An hour of prayer or conversation with our Creator and Comforter can be delightful and sweet!)

-How does this “sweet” hour of prayer call us from a “world of care”? (When we go to the Heavenly Father and spend time with Him in conversation, we tend to lay our cares and concerns at His feet. We begin to realize that He is capable of handling all of them and this releases us from our “world of care”. Then we have sweet fellowship with Him.)

-There is a verse that tells us to cast our “world of cares” on Him. Let's read it together, #2, on our verse sheet: (1 Peter 5:7 “Cast *all your anxiety* on Him because He cares for you.”)

-Why should we cast our anxiety on Him? (Because He cares for us.)

-What happens to our hearts when we “unload our anxieties” on God? (It is relieving because we know He really is the only One who can help. *He cares for each of us* and each of our burdens personally and can handle them. He is the God of this universe and the Creator of each one of us and there is nothing He cannot do! We turn and trust in Him rather than our own abilities.)

-Let's continue and read together the 2nd phrase in this hymn, #3 on your sheet: (“And bids me at my Father's throne, Make all my wants and wishes known”)

-When we pray, where do our prayers go? (Right to the Father Who is on His throne in Heaven!)

-Now, let me ask, is it always easy to make all our wants and wishes known? (Sometimes yes and sometimes no. It depends on what we may be going through.)

-Has there been a time when you are hurting so badly that you can't even pray, or maybe you don't even know how to pray for a certain situation because it seems so impossible to change? (...)

-Can anyone describe a situation like that? (death of a loved one, painful divorce, diagnosis of a terminal illness, a wayward child, etc.)

-Or, has there been a time when you are hurting so bad that you don't even know how to put it into words because words cannot even describe the pain or the need? (...)

-To help us with this, let's read a verse together, #4, on our verse sheet: (Romans 8:26: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.")

-According to this verse Who helps us when we don't know what to say and says it for us to the Father? (The Holy Spirit! God's Holy Spirit!)

-So, is it okay if we don't know what to say sometimes in prayer because God already knows our heart and its' need? (Yes)

-His Spirit cries out for us when we don't know how to put it into words! How does that make you feel knowing this? (Restful, Hopeful, etc.)

-What sweet relief to know that God's Holy Spirit knows our inner struggles and tells our Father in heaven when we cannot!

-Let's read together the next phrase in this song, #5 on your sheet: ("In seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief.")

-How many of you have been through seasons of distress and grief? (...)

-How can your soul find relief during those times? (...)

-Let's read together the next verse to find out. It is #6 on our sheet and it was written by King David during the time when his own son, Absalom, was trying to take over his throne and was forcing David and his family to flee across the Jordan to save their own lives. Let's hear what he has to say at this time: (Psalm 61:1-3 "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to You, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For You have been my Refuge, a Strong Tower ...")

-Who does David CALL out to as his heart grows faint? (God!)

-What does he use to describe God? They are underlined. (His Rock, his Refuge, His Strong Tower.)

-How can God be our Rock in times of struggle? (We can lean on His promises in His word that He will never leave us or forsake, that He will guide us through and give us strength, that He is faithful to the end, etc.)

-How can He be our Refuge? (When all others fail us and we are hurting, He opens His arms of love and strength, pulls us in and holds us as the war goes on all around us. Etc.)

-How can He be our Strong Tower? (He is the One that covers us and surrounds us with His kindness and mercy and strength for the journey we are on, etc.)

-You see, in seasons of distress and grief, our soul can find relief if we remember to CALL out to God who is our Rock, our Refuge, our Strong Tower!

-Let's continue and read together #7 on our verse sheet, another part of this great hymn : ("And oft escaped the tempter's snare, By thy return, sweet hour of prayer.")

-In the last phrase of this song, Rev. Walford warns us of the “tempter’s snare”.

-Who is the tempter? (Satan)

-What are some of the “tempter’s snares” that may enter our minds that can keep us from praying? (Worry, fret, negative thoughts, unforgiveness, doubt that He is able to do what we need or even cares, etc.)

-According to this song, in the last sentence we just read, how can we have victory over these snares? (By returning to prayer, remembering that God is our Rock, our Refuge and our Strong Tower no matter what the enemy may say!)

-To save time, I’d like to read the 3rd verse of this song to you and let’s discuss it together: “Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear. To Him whose truth and faithfulness, Engage the waiting soul to bless.”

-Let’s think about these words for a moment: “Sweet hour of prayer, Thy wings shall my petition bear”. When you think of wings what do you think of? (flying, soaring high above, rising above the earth, etc.)

-So picture our every prayer or petition, whether it is a thought or a conversation with the Father, being transported on the wings of the Holy Spirit to the throne of God.

-How does that make you feel about how important you and your prayers are to Him? (That everything I say is important to Him, like His favored one!)

-And then the second part of this verse from the song says, because of “HIS TRUTH and HIS FAITHFULNESS, our soul is blessed!”

-Let me ask you this, how can God’s Truth (which is His Word, the Bible) and His Faithfulness bless our soul? (The more we read His Word, the more we know His promises are true and His faithfulness for us is to the end. This should bless our souls.)

-The last half of the 3rd verse on this hymn says: “And since He bids me seek His face, BELIEVE His Word and TRUST His Grace, I’ll cast on Him my every care, And wait for thee Sweet Hour of Prayer.”

-The two keys words here are Believe and Trust, two very simple words that only require a *decision* in our hearts and minds.

-We need to decide to Believe His promises in His Word and Trust in His gift of grace, the free and unmerited favor of God through the gift of His Son for our salvation.

-We need to believe and trust that He will do what He has promised for us. The Bible talks about having the faith or trust of a child is all it takes to enter the kingdom of heaven.

-Let me ask you this, have you ever told a child that you will catch him/her if they jumped and they did it, trusting you will catch them? (...)

-God is telling us the same thing, just trust and jump, believe that He will take care of you and all that you are concerned about. He is saying He will carry the burden for you. David was a great example of this as we read many of the Psalms he wrote.

-God is telling us in His Word that He truly cares for each one of us! And it is by prayer that we can lay our joys and burdens down at His feet. We can celebrate our joys with Him in prayer and we can curl up in His lap like a child and share our burdens with Him as well. Prayer is a sweet time of fellowship. I think that is why the author called it “Sweet Hour of Prayer”!

-Let’s sing this hymn together and remember how sweet the hour of prayer with our Lord is!

SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER VERSE SHEET

- 1. Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer! That calls me from a world of care,**
- 2. 1 Peter 5:7 Cast *all your anxiety* on Him because He cares for you.**
- 3. And bids me at my Father's throne, Make all my wants and wishes known.**
- 4. Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.**
- 5. In seasons of distress and grief, My soul has often found relief,**
- 6. Psalm 61:1-3 "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to You, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. For You have been my Refuge, a Strong Tower ..."**
- 7. And oft escaped the tempter's snare, *By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!***

SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER

by: Rev. William W. Walford

**Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!**

**Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
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