

Wrestling In Prayer

There is an idea abroad among some Christians that wrestling in prayer is always a good thing, but that is by no means true.

Extreme religious exercises, which includes prayer, may be undergone with no higher motive than to get our own way.

The spiritual quality of a prayer is determined not by its intensity but by its origin.

In evaluating prayers we should inquire who is doing the praying, our determined heart, or the Holy Spirit guiding us along a path to fulfil our part in the will of God?

Romans 8:26 [NIV] *“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.”*

The Holy Spirit, being God, knows the will of God and if we let Him, will guide our thoughts and words in our prayers.

Wrestling in such a Holy Spirit guided prayer can be beautiful and wonderful, being fully accepted by God the Father.

Matthew 6:31-33 [NIV] *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

I am **not** saying we should **not** include our daily physical needs in our prayers, but notice that in the guideline given to us for our prayers, our physical needs come **after** we praise God and pray about the coming in full of the Kingdom of God, [**Matthew 6:9-13**].

If our prayers are overheated desires for personal “needs” then our prayers can be as sinful as any other act.

Isaiah 58:1-5 [NIV] *“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”*

Here is the description of a group of people who are wrestling in prayer and adding a fast to get the answer they sought from the Creator God.

God did not answer because the origin of their prayers and fasting was wrong.

Isaiah 58:6-12 [NIV] *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. ‘If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger*

and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.’”

This is the kind of prayers and fasting that is acceptable to our Creator God and will bring to our lives answers and great power to fulfil the will of our Creator God in bringing joy and lasting pleasures to those who are oppressed, starving and in darkness.

This list of blessings such prayer will bring to all humanity are both physical and spiritual.

1 Kings 18:16-29 [NIV] *“So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, ‘Is that you, you troubler of Israel?’ ‘I have not made trouble for Israel,’ Elijah replied. ‘But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.’ So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said to them, ‘I am the only one of the LORD’s prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire, he is God.’ Then all the people said, ‘What you say is good.’ Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, ‘Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.’ So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. ‘O Baal, answer us!’ they shouted. But there was no response; no-one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. ‘Shout louder!’ he said. ‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or travelling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no-one answered, no-one paid attention.”*

Frantic wrestling in prayer but to a false God by a people who had abandoned worshipping the true Creator God and were disobeying Him.

1 Kings 18:30-39 [NIV] *“Then Elijah said to all the people, ‘Come here to me.’ They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which was in ruins. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, ‘Your name shall be Israel.’ With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench round it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, ‘Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.’ ‘Do it again,’ he said, and they did it again. ‘Do it a third time,’ he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench. At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, ‘The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!’”*

What a contrasting simple prayer that sought to bring honour and glory to the true Creator God but was dramatically answered by God.

The writhing of these ignorant and superstitious religious leaders got them nowhere.

Everything was a mistake, their zeal and body-punishing prayer, their determination.

In contrast the prayer of Elijah, God's obedient servant, was short but confident. **This prayer was offered** at the right time, the evening sacrifice [verse 29] and **with the intention of bringing glory to the true Creator God**. It also brought a complete change of direction in the lives of many people.