

Lift Up Your Hands to the Lord

***“Whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man...each knowing the affliction
Of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house,
Then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act...whose heart
You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men...”
1 Kings 8:38-39***



Portion for the Journey

There are times when we just don't have words to express what is in our hearts. Sometimes we don't pour out our hearts to the LORD because we think we do not know how to say the right words or that our prayers will not be "good enough" to be heard by the Most High God. We mistakenly think if we can't pray an eloquent prayer to the LORD then we cannot pray at all.

My mother in law discovered the power of prayer when she was experiencing great suffering and pain related to terminal cancer. She did not have a close relationship with the LORD at that time even though she was a believer. As I took care of her in her illness, I prayed for her on a particular day and the LORD marvelously answered that prayer and relieved her pain. She said she had never known prayer to be that powerful and asked, "Even though I may not ask you, I want you to pray with me every time I see you." We prayed together regularly after that but I prayed and she held and squeezed my hand in agreement. I don't think she felt she could pray as effectively as me, so she remained silent. I shared with her that there are times when she may feel too weak to pray or not even have the ability to express what was heavy on her heart. I told her that the lifting of the hand to the LORD is a silent prayer and He would hear those prayers because He knows what is in her heart. Many times, as the disease progressed and she was unable to speak or even recognize her family, I would see her lifting her hand to the LORD.

We all face times when we don't have the strength or ability to express the cries of our hearts to the LORD. ... Times when our heart longs for the LORD and our burdens, sorrows or deepest needs cannot be expressed. Times when we are overwhelmed and our words are insufficient. Times of anxiety and despair when we do not even know frame words to describe our needs! These are times when the lifting of our hands to the LORD speaks to Him with more power than even our most eloquent words! The LORD knows our hearts and He hears the unspoken prayers of our heart. (1 Ki 8:39; Rom 8:27)

*"Spreading forth our hands in believing and fervent prayer
Is the only way of grasping mercy."*

The Saints Ebenezer 1667

Over and over the word describes the lifting of the hands to the LORD as a form of prayer and worship. When King Solomon dedicated the temple to the LORD, he asked God to honor the prayers offered in the direction of the temple and asked God to hear from His dwelling place in heaven and answer their prayers. Solomon's request that God would respond to the prayers and supplications of the people of Israel included the lifting of the hands. He acknowledged that God knew the hearts of every man and that He would hear and answer their cries.

Exodus 17 offers wonderful insight into the lifting of the hands in the place of intercession and warfare. The Amalekites, a fierce and aggressive enemy of Israel fought against Israel. Joshua fought with the men of Israel in the valley while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the hill. "So, it came about that when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. ...So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword." Ex. 17:8-16

The lifting of the hands is an instinct embedded deeply in the hearts of all people. To this day, the lifting of the hands is a universal language understood around the world:

- 1) Before an infant can speak, he is able to implore his parent to pick him up and take him in their arms by the simple lifting of their hands to the parent. What good parent could ignore the unspoken desire of the infant to be held close? The promise of the LORD is that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us! Lift your hands to Him and ask Him to pick you up and hold you in His strong and comforting arms! (Psalm 69:18; Heb. 4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; James 4:8)
- 2) The lifting of the hands is also a universal sign of surrender and helplessness. It communicates the person is placing themselves at the mercy and control of those to whom they are surrendering.
- 3) The outstretched open hand is a universally used expression of the beggar's cry for help! Ps. 63:4 says "So I will bless You as long as I live, I will lift up my hands to Your name."

Definitions:

1. The Hebrew word for “hand” used in this passage (Ps. 63:4) is “kaph” (Strong’s #3709) and this particular word for hand describes the palm of the hand, or the hollow of the hand, open like a pan to be filled, it is actually sometimes translated “pan” and is used with reference of the hands being lifted before the LORD or as the gold “pans” in the temple of the LORD full of incense (another symbol for prayer!) Numbers 7:14, 20, 26, 32, 38, 44, 50, 56, 62, 68, 74, 80, 84, 86
2. The Hebrew word “yad” is also translated “hand” in our English Bibles, but this word for hand is an open hand and the significance of yad related to the direction to which the hand is reaching. Yad is the Hebrew root for the word “yadah” which is one of the primary Hebrew words for worship used in the Old Testament. Yadah means ‘to hold or extend the hand in praise and thanksgiving. It speaks of an action used to revere or worship the LORD (with extended hands) in praise and thanksgiving. Ps. 100 is often called the “pattern for praise” because it uses so many of the ways in which we can worship the LORD. Verse 4 tells us that we are to “give thanks” which is the word “yadah” to lift the open hand to the LORD.

Digging Deeper in the Word

Read and meditate on the following passages, where God’s people have lifted their hands to the LORD. Note what circumstances they were facing and what kind of prayer they were uttering through the lifting of their hands.

Exodus 9:28-29 Pharaoh asked Moses to make supplication for him and Moses responded, “...I shall stretch out my hands to the LORD and pray” (Amp) or “spread out my hands to the LORD” or “lift my hands to the LORD.” The Hebrew word from which the lifting or spread of the hands is translated is “paras” (Strong’s #6566) and it means literally, ‘to spread out the hands in prayer to God.” Matthew Henry describes the spreading of the hands in prayer as both intercession and an outward expression of earnest desire and humble expectation. The New American Standard translation of this verse says, “I will make supplication to the LORD.” We can see that the idea of stretching out the hands to the LORD is synonymous with supplications which are prayers of entreaty, humble earnest prayers making request, thanksgiving and worship.

Ezra 9:5 “But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and stretched out my hands to the LORD my God.”

Job 11:13 “If you would direct your heart aright, and spread out your hand to Him...” (Note this advice to Job may not have been appropriate in his context, but it does show that the spreading out of the hands in prayer was a known practice in Job’s time.)

Ps. 28:2 “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to You for help, When I lift up my hands toward Your Holy Sanctuary.” The Hebrew word for hands used here is “Yad” which we remember speaks of the opening of the hands *in the direction* of God’s Holy Sanctuary (dwelling place).

Ps. 88:9 “My eye has wasted away because of affliction, I have called upon You every day, I have spread out my hands to you.” Spurgeon’s Exposition of the Psalms in “The Treasury of David,” describes verse 9 as a reflection of the soul’s agony. In reference to the phrase, “I have stretched out my hands unto Thee,” he writes, “He used the appropriate posture of a supplicant, of his own accord...as a little child stretches out its hands to its mother when it cries, so did this afflicted child of God. He prayed all over, his eyes wept, his voice cried, his hands were outstretched, and his heart broke. This was prayer indeed.”

Ps. 141:1-2 “O LORD, I call upon You, hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You! May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.” Spurgeon so beautifully expresses the heart of this prayer of David. “This is my last resort, prayer never fails me. My prayer is painful and feeble and worthy only to be called a cry; but it is a cry unto Jehovah and this ennobles it. I have cried unto Thee, I still cry unto Thee, and I always mean to cry unto Thee. To whom else could I go? What else can I do? Others trust to themselves, but I cry out to Thee. The weapon of all prayer is one which the believer may always carry with him, and use in every time of need. “*Make haste unto me.*” His case was urgent and he pleaded with that urgency. God’s time is the best time, but when we are sorely pressed we may with holy importunity quicken the movements of mercy. ... “Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense.” As incense is carefully prepared, kindled with holy fire, and devoutly presented to the LORD, so let my prayer be... “And the lifting of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” Whatever form his prayer might take, it was his one desire that it might be accepted by God. Prayer is sometimes presented without words by the very motions of our bodies, bended knees and lifted hands are the tokens of earnest expectant prayer. ...our desire is that this may be sweet unto the LORD as the sacrifice at eventide. Holy Hope, the lifting of hands that hang down, is also a kind of worship.” What a beautiful thought: The lifting of our hands joined with the longings of our hearts might be counted as holy smoke arising before the LORD on the golden altar before His Throne!!

Ps. 143: 6 “I stretch forth my hands unto Thee, my soul thirsteth after Thee, as a thirsty land.”

The heart yearns for the LORD with such intensity that the hands are stretched toward the LORD. We cannot reach the LORD at best our reach doesn’t even touch the ceiling, much less ascend to the throne of God, but in His grace, when we reach toward Him, stretching our hearts to the utmost, He draws near to us! Stretching the hands toward God is an expression of our burning desire for Him. Spurgeon notes, “As a prisoner whose feet are bound, extends his hands in supplication when there is no hope of liberty, so does David.” He reached out knowing that if the LORD would draw near to him, he would no longer dwell in darkness and despair, but everything would turn to peace and joy.

Paul makes reference to this very thing in Phil. 3:10-14. “...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ... but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ...one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching toward what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word for “reaching toward” is epekteinomai, (Strong’s #1901) which means to stretch toward or to stretch out to, to reach toward. When we stretch out our hands, we are extending ourselves as far as we can in the direction of God.

“So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn, and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain, watering the earth.” Hosea 6:3

Isn't it wonderful to know there is such a powerful way we can reach out to the LORD when words fail us or we lack the strength to cry out to Him? Romans 8:23-27 speaks of those times when we, along with all of His creation, are groaning and longing for the freedom that will come when He finally sets us free from the sufferings of this present age. The real encouragement of this passage is that Jesus is constantly praying for us! He helps us in our weakness; “for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Our Response to God:

1. What has the LORD spoken to your heart through this message?

2. How would you like to respond to the LORD?