



Walking and Talking with God

Models of Prayer in the Old Testament

Cork Scripture Group 25th September 2023

Outline of Presentation

Introduction / General comments

Characteristics and Forms of Prayer in
the Old Testament (Text: Exodus 15)

Categories of Prayer (Text: 1 Sam 1,2)

Praying "worthily" (Text: Jonah)

Conclusion / Wrap-up

What is Prayer???





"a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God"

"being in the presence of God and in communion with him"

"wellspring of Christian spirituality"

"when my gaze matches God's gaze ... and [we] look out at life together"

"a participation, a mutual indwelling; not an achievement or performance on my part"

"[a] duet sung by the Spirit and the human heart"

"the exciting adventure of the search for God's presence and the endless joy of rejoicing in it when it is found"

Sources: *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* x2; Pope Francis, *Desiderio Desideravi*; Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden* x 2; *The Glenstal Book of Prayer* x2.

Why study Prayer in the Old Testament?

- **Deeper understanding of Scripture**
 - Essential element
 - Interpretive lens
 - Intertextual links
 - Background / context for New Testament
- **Enhanced prayer life**
 - Origins of contemporary prayers
 - Resources & inspiration for personal prayer
 - Deepen relationship with God



Presentation of Prayer in the Old Testament

- *Contextualised*
- *Explicit / Implicit*
- *Multivocal*
- *Sometimes uncomfortable!*

Instructions on Prayer and Praying

"Thus you shall bless the Israelites..."

Num 6:23

Celebration of the Passover

Ex 12:14-20

Festivals , sacrifices, pilgrimages

Ex 23:14-19, 29:38-41

Instructions concerning sacrifices

Lev Ch1-6

Also Deut 6:6-9

Multivocal / Contradictory Prayers

"Seek the Lord while he is still to be found,
call to him while he is still near.." Is 55:6

"The Lord is close to all who call him." Ps 145:18

But...

"Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?

Awake, do not cast us off for ever!

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"

Ps 42:23-24

Multivocal / Contradictory Prayers (contd.)

"Trample my courts no more; bringing offerings is futile;

Incense is an abomination to me...

Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates,"

Is 1:13-14

"I hate, I despise your festivals,

and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies ...

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps."

Hos 5:21, 23

Difficult / Uncomfortable Prayers (1)

"Blessed be God the Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand."
Gen 14:20

"Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."
Ex 15:21

Also Deut 33:29; Judg Ch 5; Jer 51:10-11, 20-23.

Difficult / Uncomfortable Prayers (2)

"Let them be put to shame and dishonour ... Let their way be dark and slippery." Ps 35:4,6

"O God, break the teeth in their mouths..." Ps 58:6

"Let my persecutors be shamed ... let them be dismayed ... bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with a double destruction." Jer 17:18

Also Jer 18:19-23; Ps 79:6; Ps 137:8-9.



Prayer "markers"

- Individual / Communal?
- Internalised, contemplative?
- Externalised, expressive?
 - Spoken
 - Sung
 - Embodied
- Spontaneous / Stylised?



Prayer Text:

Exodus 15:1-21



Analysing Prayer

- Categories (Content) of prayer
- Worthy / unworthy prayer
- Effects of prayer

Categories of Prayer ... Content

- Supplication / Petition (*"Please"*)
- Praise, Thanksgiving (*"Thank-you"*)
- Lament, Repentance (*"Sorry"*)

Prayers of Supplication (1)

For rescue from oppression, danger, or distress...

"Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God."

Ex 2:23

Tobias and Sarah "began to pray and implore that they might be kept safe."

Tob 8:5

"Then Queen Esther, seized with deadly anxiety, fled to the Lord...and said, 'O Lord my God ... help me who am alone and have no helper but you, for my danger is in my hand.'"

Esth 14:1, 3

Prayers of Supplication (2)

For children...

"But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless..."

Gen 15:2

For a sign...

"The prophet Elijah came near and said, ' ... Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.'

1 Kings 18:36-37

For answers...

"Why have you made me your target?"

Job 7:20

Prayers of Supplication (3)

On behalf of others...

"And Moses cried to the Lord, 'O God, please heal her.'"

Num 12:13

"Moses said to the people ... 'I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.'"

Ex 32:30

Also Gen 18:23-33, 25:21; 1 Kings 17:20-21, 2 Sam 25.

Prayers of Praise & Thanksgiving (Blessing)

"I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise."
Ps 138:1

"I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name for ever and ever."

Ps 145:1

"Berekah"

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his hand has fulfilled what he promised with his mouth."
2 Chron 6:4

"Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise; and glorious is your name for ever!"
Dan 3:26 (52)

Also 1 Chron 16:36; Tob 11:14,13:1; Luke 1:68

Prayers of Lament & Repentance

"David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.'" 2 Sam 24:10

"...we have sinned, we have been ungodly, we have done wrong, O Lord our God, against all your ordinances. Let your anger turn away from us..." Bar 2:12-13

Also Lamentations; Ps 51:1-3; Ezra 9:6; Neh 1:5-7.

Combinations...Movement

"The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!

My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, '**therefore** I will hope in him.'

Lam 3:19-24

Also Ps 130.



Prayer Texts:
1 Sam 1:9-19 (27)
1 Sam 2:1-10

Praying worthily ... and unworthily (1)

Authentic, from the heart, actions in accord with words...

"David was stricken to the heart..."

2 Sam 24:10

"Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God ... the people also wept bitterly."

Ezra 10:1

"Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts, not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God."

Joel 2:12-13

Also Jdt 4:8-15

Praying worthily ... and unworthily (2)

Converse: insincere and hypocritical prayer

"...these people draw near to me with their mouths and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is a human commandment learned by rote." Is 29:13

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is his delight." Prov 15:8

Also Micah 6:6-8; Is 1:11-17; Hos 10:2.

Praying worthily ... and unworthily (3)

Humble...

"Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet'... Moses hid his face."

Ex 3:5-6

"Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted..." Dan 3:39

"A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Ps 51:17

Converse...

"[T]heir heart was proud; therefore they forgot me." Hos 13:6

Also Gen 18:27; 1 Kings 19:13; Ps 10:17 *and* 2 Sam 22:21-46.

Praying worthily ... and unworthily (4)

Faith-filled...

"Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm ... the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still..."

Ex 14:13-14

"But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

Mic 7:7

Also Gen 15:6, 22:8.

Effects of Prayer (1)

- God intervenes directly

"The Lord drove the sea back ... and turned the sea into dry land."

Ex 14:21

"The Lord listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived."

1 Kings 17:22

- God works through others

"The Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald ... and declared ..."

Ezra 1:1

Effects of Prayer (2)

- God relents, changes plan

"The Lord relented concerning this; 'It shall not be,' said the Lord." Amos 7:3

"Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him...?"
Joel 2:14

Also Gen 18:23-32; Ex 32:14; Jonah 3:9-10.

Effects of Prayer (3)

When God does not respond or refuses to act ...

"You rebelled against the command of the Lord ... When you returned and wept before the Lord, the Lord would neither heed your voice nor pay you any attention."
Deut 1:43,44

"Your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."
Is 59:2

Also Is 1:12-15; Job 8:3-6 , 11-13-20 etc.

Effects of Prayer (4)

However...

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" Job 38:2

"You have not spoken of me what is right" Job 42:8

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord." Is 55:8



Prayer Text: Jonah

Notice...

Who is praying?

Why are they praying?

Form of prayer?

Spontaneous or formalised?

Internal / Externalised (Embodied)?

Authentic?



What does their prayer tell us about the person(s) and their relationship with God?

What – if anything – happens as a result of their prayer? Does God hear? Respond?

What can we learn from studying this text?

What does the Old Testament teach us about Prayer? (1)

- Prayer as relationship with God

"The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend"

Ex 33:11

- Prayer as God's initiative

"I was ready to be sought ... I held out my hands."

Is 65:1-2

What does the Old Testament teach us about Prayer? (2)

- Pray constantly, in all situations

In repentance, drought, famine, in exile, before battle..."Hear in heaven ... and act" I Kings 8 (Dedication of the Temple)

"My child, when you are ill do not delay, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you"
Sir 38:9

"Bless the Lord for all his works... and give thanks to him with praise,"
Sir 39:14-15

Also Tobit – Praying in illness, despair, adversity ... and in rescue, healing, celebration, rejoicing.

What does the Old Testament teach us about Prayer? (3)

- God hears our prayers

"I have heard their cry ... I know their sufferings ..." Ex 2:7

"At that very moment, the prayers of both of them were heard in the glorious presence of God." Tob 3:16

- God responds to our prayers

"On the day I called, you answered me" Ps 138:3

"I have come down to deliver them ..." Ex 2:8

"So Raphael was sent to heal both of them." Tob 3:17

"The Lord said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing that you have asked ...'"

Ex 33:17

What does the Old Testament teach us about Prayer? (4)

- Prayer which is pleasing to God is...
 - Authentic*
 - Humble*
 - Faith-filled*
- Warning against insincere prayer and excessively external worship

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Comments?
Questions?

