

## Short Prayers That Changed Everything

In that monumental passage in Matthew 6, there in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spends some time on prayer. In verse five he said, “Don’t pray like the hypocrites...” To pray like a hypocrite is to pray for the eyes and the ears of others. In verse six is the great text on “closet praying” that Dr Clyde Martin, who edits this online magazine, has expounded so clearly and passionately. In verse seven Jesus says, “Don’t pray like the heathen...they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” Jesus makes it clear that God’s response is not based on volume of words. The heathen in the flesh praying to Gods that appeal to the flesh assume that more is better. Truth is more flesh is just more flesh and is not accepted in the halls of heaven. Verse eight says in essence don’t be like them. They think they have to inform their gods. Jesus says “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask Him.” We have Father who knows already. It just becomes us to get up to speed with Him, to line up our desires with His, and believe *Him* for the answer, not believe in our skill with, nor our volume of words.

None of this is meant to say there aren’t times for extended prayer...seasons of prayer...days or weeks of prayer, even continuous prayer. It is to say that even then the issue is not our much speaking. There are times when fervency can be expressed in few words as Jesus is instructing in the Sermon on the Mount.

Let’s walk around some events in the lives of Biblical characters who prayed disarmingly short prayers with astounding effect. Then I want to conclude with a very personal experience when I could get out nothing more than a very short prayer.

### 1. When you are in over your head

There is a clear passage in **Psalm 69:14-16**

*Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. <sup>15</sup>Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. <sup>16</sup>Hear me, O LORD; for thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.*

And again in **Isaiah 43:2**

When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Isn’t it a comfort to know that our Lord understands that we get in “deep water” sometimes? We are in over our head when something goes wrong at a great moment – even a great moment caused by *obeying* God, as Peter in Matthew 14 in that well known story of walking on the water. The notable thing is when Peter, in water over his head, began to sink he didn’t take long to get out what he needed from the Lord: “Lord, save me!” A short prayer that changed things.

Don't overlook the Lord's comment to Peter... "O thou of little faith." You can make that a negative if you wish. I choose not. I choose to make it that we, yes you and me of "little faith," can receive from the hand of the Lord Himself. Note also, bless His name, He took Peter by the hand and rescued him, answering his prayer *first*, then instructed him further.

Its worth remembering what the great Methodist preacher Roy Putnam of North Carolina, said, "*Remember that everything over your head is under his feet!*"

## 2. Father of the "lunatic" son...."Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief"

This prayer occurs in the story of Jesus coming down from the mount of transfiguration to a failure of his disciples to meet a need. It is found in Mark 9:14-29. It is a thrilling story of what can happen in a situation where nobody else can help; and Jesus comes on the scene. The boy is brought to Jesus by a loving father who tells Jesus he brought the boy to the disciples and they could not heal him. Jesus tells him, "If you can believe all things are possible to those who believe." In the face of that divine truth the father is reduced to tears and blurts out, "Lord I believe help thou my unbelief." The Lord did not chastise him for unbelief. He heard his prayer, took him at his word, and healed his son.

Everything was changed after that prayer. Why? He got *earnest*: "Lord, I believe." He got *honest*: "help my unbelief." His confession of sin and affirmation of faith, albeit imperfect faith, opened up the Lord to his need.

So when nobody else can help; and when it's hard to believe...but *you want to* with all your heart...turn to the Lord with your tears and tell him what's on your heart. Remember the Lord looks on the heart...neither the number of words nor your lack of eloquence.

3. The thief on the cross prayed, "Lord, remember me when you come to your kingdom." Luke records in the next verse that Jesus accepted his prayer and told him, "Today you'll be with me in paradise."(Luke 23:42,43)

One thing I love about this prayer experience is that it underscores that a short fervent, honest prayer about life's destiny can change everything even at life's last minute!!

That prayer, though brief, affirmed who Jesus was... "Lord". This dying thief, in a time when believing was hard...everyone else was mocking the Lord...trusted his destiny to a man who was dying on a cross. The Lord immediately saw that great faith and rewarded it. Think of it, maybe the last words the thief heard was the affirmation of the Son of God.

There is hope for those whose loved ones come down to the last few moments of life and cry out for mercy and salvation. Little faith, last moment, yes. But a patient and merciful Father. Our God does not pout with us!

One final thought on death bed conversion: I think it was C.I Scofield who pointed out that one was saved so we need not despair, but only one so we should not presume. A lay friend of mine said of this, "It's not good to cut that kind of thing too short!"

4. When speechless before a great calamity.

The shortest prayer I ever prayed happened on the way to the hospital with my darling baby girl, about eleven months old. She had a fever of 105, veins collapsed in her extremities, her eyes were locked open in extreme shock. She was the sickest little human I have ever seen.

As we sped toward the hospital in Havre de Grace, Maryland her mother and I were distraught. We weren't sure she would last the 20 minute drive. I began to pray and think. I remembered the word of a wise man of God, Paul Rees, "Only those are mightily used of God who have first been through the crucible of suffering." My thoughts were "Lord if the passing of my little one is the price of a great ministry for me, I don't want it. I want my baby. Soon I could no longer think or pray long sentences. I was reduced to simply, "Oh God." Over and over I prayed just that.

In retrospect now I know that when you bring the good name of the Lord in on your great crises there is strength in His mighty name. So when you are overwhelmed, baffled, frightened use his name. Get through to God...cry out. The psalmist teaches us:

"I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth *all things* for me."

Get Him in on what is going on...move toward Him with abandon...use His name and the sweet Holy Spirit will "kick in" saying things you just can't get out. There are those times we don't know what to pray for nor how to pray as we ought. That's why we can only get out "Oh God!" And it is enough to change everything.

Although the doctor said she had brain damage and would be an imbecile, if she lived. He knew the brain is irreparably damaged when the blood is away from the brain for only a few minutes. The veins in all her extremities had collapsed.

**"OhGod!"** My heart cried.

(My dear wife prayed around the clock, 24 hours on her knees, along with others all over America.)

*My little dear lived....and she made all "A's" save one in the first grade!*

*Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.(Ps 66:20)*