

**The Psalms**  
**Connecting with God through Honest Prayer**  
**How to Pray When You Feel Trapped**  
**Psalm 107 (June 29, 2014)**

This summer we are working through the book of Psalms in our series “Connecting with God through Honest Prayer”. I recently read a gallop poll statistic that said 75% of people pray and I was surprised at the high percentage. It seems like more people pray when they are in trouble. Even those who don’t call themselves believers ask for prayer or pray themselves when they feel trapped by something?

For some, including myself, when life is going well it easy to say, “life is good, look what I’ve accomplished”. That is until some trouble creeps into our life and traps us. At some point I can’t handle it anymore and everything falls apart. Has that ever happened to you? I can slowly be trapped by both the troubles and the comforts of this life. Often it’s only when I’m trapped that I cry out to God who rescued me and I’m not alone. About twenty-five hundred years ago Israel was facing many of same situations we face today. Psalm 107 helped me understand how I should pray I face them. The psalm is broken up into seven stanzas. Five stanzas tell stories about how they were trapped and how God rescued them. They are stories of:

1. The trap of purposelessness
2. The trap of rebellion
3. The trap of pride
4. The trap of busyness
5. The trap of comfort

But how should we pray when we face these traps? At various points in my life I have be paralyzed by each one of these. Leaning on myself not only took me deeper into the problem, it also made me felt separated from God. It wasn’t until the low point became unbearable that I cried out to God and He never failed to pull me out of my own self-doing. I knew I had created the problem and that was the first step in praying an honest prayer.

King David begins the psalm by giving thanks to the Lord for his goodness.

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south.*

*(Psalm 107:1-3)*

The Psalm reminds us to tell our stories. In this case it’s not the success stories that seem to be easier to share. It’s the stories of how we were trapped by something and God rescued us. My pride makes sharing stories about my failure, my sin or not trusting God hard. Sharing how I was trapped and how God rescued me gives glory to God and can comfort others. It demonstrates that he is LORD over everything in my life including my foes. And let’s not limit the foes to just our enemies. Our foes include all the enemies of this world and those in the spiritual realm as well. One of our biggest foes is our own sinful nature. God rescues us from all of them.

Finding purpose in our life can be challenging. Purposelessness is a foe that comes from within us.

The trap of purposelessness

*Psalm 107:4-9*

*Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. 6 Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. 8 Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. (Psalm 107:4-9)*

(Read verse 4 & 5)

Israel knew what it meant to wander in the desert, not having the safety of a city. Wandering for years without seeming to get anywhere. Hunger and thirst is not only physical but also spiritual. The New International Version uses a very descriptive phrase, “their lives ebbed away”. An ebb tide slowly draws the water away from shore as it moves from high to low tide. Anything in the ebb tide is pulled away from the safety of the shore and out to sea, facing death and needing to be rescued. Sometimes the ebbing is so subtle that you don’t notice how far away from shore you have gone until it is too late. It’s the gradual process of being trapped. The English Standard Version and King James Version read, “their soul fainted within them.” More then their life was ebbing away, it was their very soul. God creates us for His purpose. We are only satisfied by doing the work we were created to preform and in nothing else. Physical lack of purpose and spiritual lack of purpose are catalysts for our lives ebbing away. Purposelessness leads to boredom and ultimately sin. I’m wandering in the desert if can’t see where my life is going or I don’t find purpose in my life.

(Read verse 6)

When we find ourselves trapped by purposelessness we turn to prayer. Everybody prays differently and God hears whispers as well as screams. The psalm says, "they cried out to the LORD", it is more about the honesty and sincerity of the prayer instead of the volume. It's the type of pray you pray when you think you will die.

On one occasion I cried out with honest pray when I thought I would die. I have always been a good swimmer. I competed on a swim team, swam long distances in lakes and had swum in the ocean several times. On one particular day I was in Santa Cruz swimming out beyond the surf. As I came back to shore a wave caught me from behind and I began to tumble under the wave. I tumbled for a long time, couldn't tell which way was up or down and I didn't have air in my lungs. I cried out to God to save me because I thought I was drowning and my skills as a swimmer were useless. Then my foot hit the bottom. As I pushed up from I flew out of the ocean because the waves had dragged me into water about three feet deep. I thanked God as I stood there with my heart pounding and gasping for air. That was an honest cry for help like the cries of those wandering.

(Read verse 7)

God has prepared a straight way for us to find our purpose in life and stop our wandering.

In Isaiah 40 the Prophet Isaiah wrote "A voice of one calling: In the wilderness preparing the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

John the Baptist was the voice of one calling that foretold of Christ's coming. Christ's teachings are a straight way out of the desert for us to find life and purpose. Christ teachings are that there is one way to have life and the way is through him. When we cry out to Christ he leads us straight out of our wandering and rescues us with purpose and life through him.

(Read verse 8 & 9)

This story started with them wandering without purpose in a desert hungry and thirsty. The Lord not only satisfies our physical hunger, through Christ he also satisfies our spiritual hunger. Have you ever been in the desert? The desert is a place with no roads or markers for us to follow so we wonder. It's a place where things die and are forgotten. Christ leads us out of the desert and to a city where we have a relationship with him and find our purpose through Him.

I struggle with the trap of purposelessness. One of the resources I am reading to help me understand God's purpose for me is Timothy Keller's book Every Good Endeavor. It is about connecting your work to God's work. Keller helps us understand a new concept of work as designed by God and writes,

"you need to know the Bible's answers to three questions: Why do you want to work? (That is, why do we need to work in order to lead a fulfilled life?) Why is it so hard to work? (That is, why is it so often fruitless, pointless, and difficult?) How can we overcome the difficulties and find satisfaction in our work through the gospel?"

Keller seeks to answer those questions in his book. It point to how God created us for his purpose and how by performing that purpose we are fulfilled in our work.

So how does the story help us pray?

I think that our prayer against purposelessness must include a cry to be doing God's work in our life. We were created to work from the very beginning when God placed Adam in the garden to tend it and have dominion over the earth.

Having a little more salt at work instead of following the world may be how God will use some of us. Serving with joy or tending to the earth may be how he uses others. Repairing a road is maintaining something that God has given to us. Doing it with joy shows how much we appreciate that gift from God. We have both a physical purpose and spiritual purpose.

Paul writes in Ephesians:

[For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. \(Ephesians 2:10\)](#)

Through God we have purpose in both our physical work and our spiritual work. My prayer is that I am led out of my wandering to complete that purpose.

One trap that is really good news is the trap of rebellion.

## The trap of rebellion

*Psalm 107:10-16*

Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High. So he subjected them to bitter labor; they stumbled, and there was no one to help. **13** Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron. (*Psalm 107:10-16*)

(Verses 10-12)

Some were sitting in utter darkness and iron chains. This is an image of being trapped in sin and separated from God. For the purpose of illustration I want to separate sin into two groups. The first is sin that we stumble into. That may include losing our temper with someone in anger or a hundred other ways that we sin everyday without thinking about it. With this type of sin we realize the moment we do it that we are sinning, correct it and then ask for forgiveness. I'll call this sin "oh no" sin because we think, "oh no I've sinned". The other type of sin is when we actually rebel against God. Before we sin we know we are going to sin. You might call it premeditated sin or what I would call "I know" sin. I know I am going to sin against God and I'm going to do it anyway. Don't get me wrong, sin is sin, God hates sin and through Christ we are forgiven for all our sins but in the case of psalm 107 I think it applies better to the "I know" sin where we rebel against God.

It wasn't that they just rebelled. The psalm says that they rebelled against commands and hated God's plans. That sounds pretty severe and I've said that I'm glad I don't rebel like that. Actually don't I rebel in the same way each time I fall into the trap of an "I know" sins? Each time I say no to God's commands and yes to my desires I am rebelling against God. I am actually despising His plans for me.

(Verses 13-16)

This is really the Gospel message. We are trapped by sin and cannot escape it on our own. On the cross Christ broke away our chains of sin and tore down the gates of hates. When we accepted Christ we died to our old self and he raises us up in our new self. Before they cried out they were trapped in "rebellious" sin, trapped by their old self. Christ rescued them, gave them a new self and freed them from the chains of sin.

When we find ourselves trapped by rebellion we need to pray that we choose our new self in Christ. I pray for wisdom and prudence in my choices. We are saved only by the grace God freely gives and nothing we can do on our own. We have already been freed from the trap of rebellion, but we forget. By constantly thanking God for what he has done for us through Christ we can avoid this trap. The trap of rebellion has caught everybody. By sharing our stories and how we were rescued through Christ we spread the Gospel message.

One of the ways we recognize our old self is from our pride.

## The trap of pride

*Psalm 107:17-22*

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. **19** Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave. **21** Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy. (*Psalm 107:17-22*)

(Verses 17 – 18)

A fool is not someone with an intellectual deficiency it's someone with a moral deficiency. Psalm 14 says, "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." Proverbs 14 reads, "A fool's mouth lashes out with pride". We can identify a fool by their prideful mouth. Being prideful is a moral deficiency. The psalm says that they loathed all food. It wasn't that they were on a hunger strike. Food is the truth, the word of God. "They loathed all food" may sound strong but what if we don't fully believe God's word. Does that draw us near the gates of death? The less we know God the more we focus on ourselves. Focusing on ourselves is a moral deficiency that puffing us up and makes us prideful.

(Verses 19-20)

Our Lord saved them and healed them by sending out his word. So what is "His word"?

The first verse in the first chapter of the book of John reads,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

He goes on to write in verse 14,

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." The word that God sent to rescue us is Christ, who rescued us from the grave as the psalm says.

(Verses 21-22)

I pray protection from the trap of pride by praying that I want my life to be about God and not about me. I must receive His word through Christ. When, through a moral deficiency, I become trapped by pride I meditate on God's word and remember what Christ has done for me. I give thanks for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds.

The trap of busyness

*Psalm 107:23-32*

Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. **25** For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. (*Psalm 107:23-30*)

(Verses 23-24)

I really like this story. I like the sea; I like sailing and can only imagine sailing in the Mediterranean. The incredible water rushing past the hull turning to white as it rolls away. Blue sky and maybe the beautiful shoreline of some island or coast. But this wasn't a Mediterranean cruise. The merchants were busy handling dozens of lines to handle the sail; there were rows of oars men who needed to be pulling together. They had one or more heavy steering oars perhaps made of iron. They would fight head winds and currents while trying to stay on course. As a businessman I can appreciate how busy they were and understand how the urgency of the day can distract us. When I would not trust God and lean on myself my day could fall apart before 9 in the morning. God has a specific purpose that he wants us to accomplish through our life. I have been trapped in busyness and missed the little opportunities to live out my faith. I think you will see in the story how the merchants were caught in the trap of busyness and didn't trust God to guide them to their destination.

(Verses 25-30)

When they were distracted by busyness God stirred it up. He mounted the waves up to the heavens and down to the depths. We think we can handle life until we become too busy. At our wits' end, our courage melts away and we are in trouble. Does that sound familiar? We sometimes find ourselves too busy to allow God to guide us and we might even avoid God because our plate is so full.

You may be thinking that the story about a furious storm and God calming the wind and waves sounds familiar. About 500 years after this psalm Matthew recorded a similar event,

"Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!' He replied, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!'"

*Matthew 8:24-27*

Our God has put everything under Christ. That includes everything in nature and everything in our lives including our schedule. Busyness overwhelms me because I'm at a point of little faith or not thinking about my faith.

I prayed a simple prayer to help me avoid the trap of busyness. When people at work would ask me how I handled the pressures of my job it would allow me to share my prayer with them and my faith. When I first got to work I would pray for wisdom and guidance. My prayer would include; that God would give me the strength to complete what was important to Him and that he would take off my plate the unnecessary activities. I was always amazed on the days when I was especially busy that a meeting would be cancelled or that a project I thought would take two hours could be completed in one. Even when it was busy I would have peace that allowed me to listen more to God.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. (*Psalm 107:31-32*)

Praying thanks reminds us that Christ is in control of our schedule. In my prayer I prayed for guidance and wisdom to protect me from the trap of busyness.

Not all of life's traps come from troubles. The last story is about a trap of comfort.

The trap of comfort

*Psalm 107:33-41*

He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. **35** He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; there he brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; he blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and he did not let their herds diminish. (*Psalm 107:33-38*)

(Read v. 33,34)

Have you ever had something you thought was secure and then lost it? Comfort is often temporary. The punishment from God for the wickedness of the people was to take away the very thing that made them comfortable. They had rivers for water and fruitful land for food. God doesn't make us less comfortable because he is mean. We know that in God there is only good. God can make us less comfortable to get our attention and remind us to trust in him.

I was in management at our company when we received a new CEO. We had gone through a merger and were top heavy with senior management. The new CEO had a reputation of moving companies from fat to lean in order to control expenses. As we went through the process one vice president after another were either demoted or let go and replaced. I was feeling comfortable until the CEO asked me to step into his office one morning. I sat across the desk as he worked on emails and moved papers. He lifted his head, looked across the desk and said, "you know Jim you're the only VP left who was here when I came." A phone call came in, he went back to moving papers and I left the office. He didn't share much and I had sometimes thought that he wanted someone else in my position. I remember telling Robin that night that I wasn't sure what he meant by his comment. I didn't know if I was safe or would be the next to go. My comfort evaporated with a one-line conversation and I was too afraid to ask him what he meant. In hindsight I know God used that moment to bring me back to trusting him and not anything I had done myself at the company. It woke me from the trap of comfort.

(Read v. 35-38)

Our Lord is the God of rebuilding. He takes our life, turns it upside down and then rebuilds our life so we know it is from God. He turns rivers into deserts and then turns them back into pools of water. When this happens we have to make a choice. Do we stay in the desert and lean on our self or do we hunger to follow God to the better life he has prepared for us? For myself I hunger for God but I seem to have a short-term memory. Once I am again comfortable and things are going well I forget that it was God who brought me this comfort. It's an interesting process that takes me from "thank you Lord for what you did" to "look what I have done". My sinful nature won't allow me to appreciate the comfort God has brought for very long before I want to take credit myself.

Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; he who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the LORD.

(*Psalm 107:39-43*)

When we forget that God provides our comfort sometimes he gives us correction. The psalm says, "He lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks." I'm not sure the needy had any more needs than the others. I think that regardless of what they had they continued to rely on the Lord for their needs. Our prayer against the trap of comfort is that no matter how comfortable we are that we continue to rely on Christ for all our needs.

The last verse sums up the Psalm 107, "Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord."

All of the stories in the psalm are stories about being trapped by something and forgetting something. We forget that through Christ God has a purpose for our life. We forget that we are raised up in Christ with a new self that is free of rebellion. We forget God altogether and allow our pride to make us fools. We forget to trust God for guidance through our busy schedules. We get too comfortable and forget that Christ provides all our comfort.

The psalm says that the wise "heed and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord." To avoid these traps we must think about and meditate on the great deeds of our God. We then pray thanks and spread the Gospel by telling our story.