

Praying our way to fruitfulness

As I was reading the story of the loaves and fishes recently, it grabbed my attention in a new way. I could imagine the stunned looks of the disciples as they gathered up the left-over's – and the chuckle of Jesus as he helped them. Twelve baskets full of food to spare! How generous is the heart of our God. He could have made just enough.

How did this story progress from need and helplessness to abundance?

Four things in this story lead to prayer – and each are different types of prayer – and each lead step by step into this abundance. For different needs and different occasions, we will require different kinds of prayer under the direction of the Spirit. Ephes. 6:18 says, “*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.*”

Notice first the background to this event. All but one of the gospel accounts put this story just after the death of John Baptist who was a cousin of Jesus, and his forerunner. (See Matt 14:13 and Mark 6:30) Jesus is grieving the loss of this courageous man and he calls his disciples to go to a solitary place. He seems to need time away from the crowds.

But the crowds follow him and catch him up – and he has compassion on them.

Matt.14:14 'He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Mark 6: 34 "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things."

1. The compassion of Jesus.

His heart of love led him to forget about his personal grief and serve the people. Compassion has a compelling aspect to it. It is a fuel to ignite action. It moves us and motivates us. We are restless and disturbed until we have done something about the need that has touched us.

Compassion has a creative aspect to it. It causes us to devise all sorts of ways to bring relief to those in need. Compassion characterised the life of Jesus, and it was an exact expression of the heart of the Father.

It must characterise the lives of his children too. It is frequently the first step towards a miracle.

When do you feel a deep compassion? For whom? What longings are stirred in you? What action has this prompted in you? Compassion must be the basis of ministry and serving...otherwise we give up when it gets hard or contentious. We can have all sorts of gifts and abilities – but without compassion our service for God is likely to become empty and self-serving.

I was listening to a woman tell the story of her eleven year old son Jason going on a team trip to South America with his dad. At one point they were held up by gunmen, and they wondered if they were being kidnapped or would be killed. It was a terrifying experience. Eventually someone persuaded the gunmen to release them, and they went on to their goal of helping at an orphanage.

Jason's mum had a deep concern about the effect of the trauma of this hold-up on him – but when he got home some weeks later, all he could talk about was his intense compassion for the orphans they had served. Such was the power of compassion he had no thought of the traumatic event they had endured. He went on in his twenties to help set up an orphanage in Rwanda, where he almost died of a tropical illness. But this was not going to stop him returning after he recovered. Such is the compelling power of compassion.

His mum concluded, “*Don't ask for power or influence - ask for compassion and then you will get power.*”

Note that the disciples expressed concern about the needs of the people, but they did not yet have compassion that compelled them to cry out to God for an answer.

Let us ask for this compassion until we receive it. **“Lord Jesus, pour your compassion into my heart for those you want me to serve.”**

Say it often – because he longs to do this. Expect it to happen. It can happen in a moment as the Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts. It can change the direction of our lives and even our churches. What would it be like if ministries grew up in our churches because of this level of compelling compassion?

Pray the prayer until it does!

2. The helplessness of disciples.

When the disciples realised the crowd were hungry they could only think of a natural answer. “Send them away”, or spend a huge amount of money. They had no other answers. But Jesus did. He always does!

On one occasion Paul asks repeatedly to be healed, but the Lord said to him “My power is made perfect or complete in your weakness.” Paul responded “Therefore I will gladly boast about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” 2 Cor. 12:9

The disciples missed something here. There was an opportunity for prayer and they missed it. *Every place of helplessness is an opportunity for a miracle.*

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” This was the prayer that led to a miracle for a nation besieged by a huge army. (See 2 Chron.20:12b) The people had no answers, no way out, and they could not imagine how God would turn their situation around. It looked like annihilation. But after this prayer of desperation the Lord said, “You will not have to fight this battle. Just worship.”

We all have situations where we have no idea how God can turn them around. But he can do what we cannot yet imagine. Take a minute to think about a situation in your own life where you feel helpless and powerless. This is an opportunity for God’s supernatural intervention.

“Lord, I do not know what to do, but my eyes are on you. You alone have the answer to this.”

Say it over all your places of helplessness. It is a statement of faith. It is a step on the way to a miracle. He may give your mind a make-over so you are not overwhelmed by the situation. He may change the situation radically. He has an answer – he just needs our utter dependence.

3. The surrender of what they had.

‘What do you have?’ Jesus asked them. The little they had in their hands was enough – when it was put into the hands of Jesus.

What we have in our hands is enough - IF IT IS PUT IN HIS HANDS. It is not what we can do with a lot of effort and strain – it is what HE can do through what we put in his hands. And it is more than we can imagine. This is his promise. “*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...*” Ephes.3:20

Surrender involves trust; trust that what is handed over to him is better off in his hands than ours. Our instinct, since the Fall, is not to trust. But our redeemed heart WANTS to entrust all to him. He cannot bless and multiply what is not put in his hands. So let us practice saying a prayer of surrender. It is the next step on the path to fruitfulness.

Lord Jesus, I put all I am and all I have into your hands for you to bless and share with a needy world. None of it belongs to me. It all comes from you.

Think of what you are putting there - past successes...possessions, finances, material goods.

Your relationships – both the good ones and the difficult ones.

Your roles and responsibilities in your home, community, and work place.

Your longings and heartaches - your health and physical needs.

All are in his hands.

A prayer for compassion – a prayer of utter dependence – a prayer of full surrender. Let him move your heart – and let him enlarge your trust. This is the path to fruitfulness.

4. Jesus' prayer of blessing.

Jesus took what they had given him – those few loaves and fish – and looking up to heaven, he blessed them. Do you see him doing that with what you have just put into his hands? He is asking the Father to pour out his blessing on what you have entrusted to him. He wants the multitudes fed, he wants the wounded hearts healed, he wants the captives set free and the ignorant taught. And it will come through our lives surrendered into his hands. Nothing is too small or too insignificant for the blessing and empowering of the Father to fall on it, so it gives life to others over and over. Our skills, our talents, our gifts, our caring, our words... none are insignificant in his hands. We will be amazed when we get to meet him how many lives have been touched and changed by what we considered ordinary or little or insignificant things.

So receive this blessing – and keep trusting him to give you compassion, to come through when you are helpless, and to delight in what you put in his hands daily.

I bless you in Jesus' name

May you know his great delight in you – so you can daily delight in him.

May your health and well-being flourish so you can serve him with energy.

May your resources multiply so you always have something to give away.

May you know safety and rest in his care so you can live without fear.

May all you do - release his life into the world around you

– for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Amen.

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