

NOBILITY OF BARREN PRAYER

DEEP UNTO DEEP - DANA CANDLER

I. RENEWING OUR HEARTS IN THE TRUTH OF GOD'S RAVISHED HEART

"You have ravished My heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished My heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace..." S.S. 4:9

- A. As we set our hearts to love God wholly and to respond to His affection without reserve, it is of necessity, of unquestionable magnitude, that the fuel of our motivation and the force of our pursuit flow from the fountain of His overwhelming love. In as much as we drink deeply of this fountain will we lovingly offer our lives unto Him freely and entirely.
1. The ravished heart of God, that unthinkable reality, is a most essential paradigm of His heart that we must behold continually. We have to engage with these truths about Jesus' heart, not just at the beginning of our journey, but over and over, countless times all the way along.
 2. Our connectedness to this profound and abounding wellspring in God sustains a life of wholeheartedness and preserves us in fresh and deep devotion unto Him.
 3. The proneness of the human heart is towards distance and dullness even over the things that only yesterday we would have considered most precious and most clear.
- B. The fact that God could be ravished over us is a statement of *who He is*, the One who has been laid hold of by holy emotion. The burning heart of the uncreated God is *a ravished heart* and out of this heart, He evaluates our lives with such kindness. He is a lovesick God who knows the paradox of total satisfaction within the fellowship of the Trinity, and yet longing for love of the redeemed.
- C. The idea of a ravished-hearted God is brand new for so many of the Body of Christ. Most people have limited Him to a Sovereign with all power or an omniscient Being with great wisdom. The idea that He is actually filled with extravagant emotion and delight when He relates to His people is brand new to most. Though it may be new to many, it does not change the fact that it is the premier transformative piece of information to take hold of about God.
- D. The measure of the Father's loving affection of Jesus is the *standard* of the Son's affection for us. Jesus declared, "*as the Father loved Me, I also have loved you*" (Jn. 15:9). The measure of the Father's loving affection of Jesus is equal to the Father's affection for us. The Father loves the Church as He loves Jesus (Jn. 17:23). The measure of the Father's loving affection of Jesus will be the quality of affection imparted to the church. Jesus prayed that we would love Him like the Father loved Him (Jn. 17:26).
- E. The New Testament paradigm of God as a loving Father and Jesus as a passionate Bridegroom, first emphasized in the days of Jesus, was a new idea in terms of religious history. Though we clearly find these messages in the Old Testament, it was almost entirely missed by God's people, escaping the emphasis of most teachers, prophets and believers until Jesus came and emphasized this dimension of the personality of God.

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F. False Views of God:

1. A Holy and thus Separated God: In the Jewish tradition, the primary view of God emphasized the fact that He was *holy*—He was totally separated from sin and different from everything that existed—and this is what the average Jewish rabbi would teach in the synagogue. He was perceived as aloof and distant, not having human feeling.
2. A Feelingless God: At the time when Jesus walked the earth, the Greek philosophers, with the most prominent group being the stoics, greatly impacted the mindset of the people all over Europe and the Roman Empire. They saw God as One who was emotionally distant, having an inability to feel or relate to emotion. He was a non-emotional God. This idea of God was a very important philosophy of that day because a God with feeling meant a God that could be subdued by His feeling, and they considered this too vulnerable and belittling to be true of a holy God.
3. A Detached God: Another Greek school of thought was the Epicureans. They believed that God truly was happy, living in joy and bliss, but the stipulation was that He lived in an intermediate world different from the natural world and disconnected from the human affairs and the events of the world below. Believing in many gods, they believed that these gods had emotions, yet they were distant from knowing what was going on in the earthly realm, and thus unable to be negatively impacted by their emotions.

G. Into this three-fold context of religious thought stepped Jesus, declaring the paradigm of a God who deliberately embraced every human experience. He became a man, and one of the reasons was so that He might experience all that humans felt and then provide atonement for the human race—bringing them to the full glory of their human emotions.

1. For century after century the human race had been confronted and deceived with the idea of the untouchable, distant, and detached God. That is the God that many of us imagine that we are worshipping and the undeniable result is cold and locked hearts.
2. Though we are not interested in emotionalism, where we are governed by our feelings and where we try to conjure up all kinds of emotions, no matter if they are real or not, this does not negate the powerful gift God has given us in experiencing emotion. We are interested in walking in the glory of the emotions of God's heart—the feelings that He desires to reflect and express through our own hearts. The only way into this glorious experience is by understanding and encountering His holy emotions. When we study His emotions, our own emotions are profoundly awakened for Him in a corresponding way.

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H. Salvation is more than a legal exchange effecting our position before God. Salvation includes the exchange of deep affections between our heart and God's. An intellectual understanding of the legal aspects alone is not enough. Why? Because we will never have more passion for God than we understand He has for us. As God communicates His longing and affections for us, then we respond in a similar way. As John said, we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

I. A God who rejoices over and takes pleasure in His people.

For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers. Deut. 30:9

The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. Zeph. 3:17

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men. Prov. 8:30, 31

For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. Ps. 149:4

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Ps. 16:11

II. THE GOD WHO IS RAVISHED BY OUR WEAK DEVOTION

A. He embraces and enjoys us even in our weakness. We see this at the Last Supper, on Jesus' last evening with His disciples (Jn.13-17). Jesus prepared them for the pressures of disappointment, persecution, and temptation that were soon to come. The very night they would all deny Him (Mt.26:31), *Jesus affirmed His love—not to mature apostles—but to weak yet sincere believers.*

“You have ravished My heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished My heart with one look of your eyes (with every glance in prayer and devotion), with one link of your necklace...(with every choice and decision you make in loving Me and choosing righteousness).” S.S. 4:9

B. This passage gives insight into what transpires in Jesus' own heart with each weak glance toward Him and with every small choice of our will to love Him. This is a statement of His personality.

1. A summary of the Hebrew definition and its English equivalent of the word "ravished" is *to overwhelm with emotions of delight because of one who is unusually beautiful, attractive, pleasing, or striking.*

2. He reveals His passion for her and how deeply He enjoys and desires her. He counts every move of our heart towards Him. Every glance of our devotion touches Him.

“With one link of your necklace” (4:9)

3. Her neck speaks of her submitted will, which refers to each specific decision to obey even in little things and to submit to Him.

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How much better than wine is your love (4:10)

4. So many of these weak glances and small choices are made in the place of dryness, when we feel nothing. God is the One who measures love and what we call barren He often calls fruitful; what we call wasteful He often calls well spent. ***“He calls those things which do not exist as though they did.” Rom. 4:17***
- C. In our weak devotion, He is ravished over us. The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof yet He has committed the affections of His heart to be overcome by the likes of you and me. Our weak gaze overcomes Him. This is what is happening in the spirit while we struggle to believe on the earth. It is this gaze that overcomes Him and sends Him into this whirlwind of poetic song, “Turn your eyes away from Me! They’ve overcome Me!” (S.S. 6:5).
“(Jesus Christ) whom having not seen you love.” 1 Pet. 1:8
- D. I believe these faint movements of the heart, made in the times of such grey shadows, move His heart like no other time. Each choice He records; each glance He remembers. And one very real day in our future, He will open up the book of remembrance and remind us of each one. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed (Jn. 20: 29).
Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. Mal. 3:16

III. THE RICHNESS OF WHAT WE CALL BARRENNESS

- A. As we search for Him and we perceive no answer, the experience of barrenness in prayer is so difficult for our desirous hearts. The tendencies to feel that God is ignoring our prayers out of disappointment or discipline are great. How easily we feel the accusations both toward God and toward ourselves—and this just as the enemy would have it.
- B. The testimony of these prayers from the Eternal Eyes is that *they matter*. These times *feel* barren to us, but they are not. They are far from fruitless.
“He who sows to the Spirit shall reap eternal life.” Gal. 6:8
- C. God does not despise our weakness but enjoys us as we progress in finding our strength in Him.
“My strength is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Cor. 12:4
- D. Cornelius—a Portrait of Weak Prayer’s Nobility before God. The testimony of this gloriously startling reality is portrayed in the life of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. He was a man who feared God, gave alms generously and prayed always (Acts 10:1, 2). On one ordinary day, as he was lifting his voice in prayer as usual, an angel of the Lord suddenly broke in and declared to him just how Heaven interpreted his prayer life. He cried, “Cornelius! Your prayers and your alms have come up for *a memorial* before God” (Acts 10: 3, 4).

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- E. God is jealous that we not give up our slow down in our pursuit of Him in prayer because of our own false ideas of what that prayer should look like. In these times of such weakness and barrenness, the grace that God imparts to our hearts is the grace of the “one more day.”
- F. The Lord invites the one who has known spiritual barrenness, the one who has not yet known what it is to bear fruit and reap the harvest of labor, to lift her voice and sing (Isaiah 54:1). Prayers lifted to the Lord from our place of dryness are desired by the Lord. He is not waiting for us to bear fruit and experience what we would call “victory” in prayer before we lift our voice. He calls it a victory when we willingly lift our voice to Him from the place of barrenness.
- Sing O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman,” says the Lord. Is. 54:1***
- G. The wisdom of the waiting will be seen in time. So often the accusation that arises in our prayer time is that we are doing it wrong. Because we don’t feel His nearness, we think we’ve missed it. Yet, most assuredly, what we reap we will sow and if we sow to the Spirit, we will reap the Spirit. We must not be deceived by what we perceive in the now. There is something deep happening with the seed just below the ground (Gal. 6:8).
- But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Heb. 11:6***

IV. I WILL REMEMBER YOUR LOVE

- A. For all eternity the Lord will remember our love, our choices and even our tears.
1. The Song of Solomon begins with the cry of the bride and her companions saying, “We will remember Your love more than wine” (S.S. 1:4). She vows to remember His affections throughout her journey and in her darkest nights to meditate on the love He has revealed to her in times past.
 2. This is a beautiful and necessary vow she offers. Yet I believe it is only an echo of a greater promise; the promise of the Lord Himself. He says to our fainting hearts as we come to Him time and time again with weak prayers lifted high, “I will remember *your* love, my sister, my bride, for all eternity. I will reveal the relevance of all the weak moments of faith that you yourself have long forgotten and My Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matt. 6:6). I will declare to all the heavenly hosts the true weightiness of the prayers you considered so weak when you offered them. *I will remember your love.*”
- B. He will remember our tears. He will one day wipe each one away forever.
- “...and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold***

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this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Is. 25:8, 9, NKJ).

- C. I believe He keeps them in a bottle so as to bring to remembrance each one. They are indescribably precious to Him. We only have one life on the earth to cry them and then forever they are the treasures of our intimacy’s history.

You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? Ps. 56:8

- D. Let us not forget that in our quest for the fullness of intimacy with God, at many points we will only perceive rawness and emptiness. Yet as we remain before Him in love and worship, we can be sure that a very real and fragrant aroma is arising before the throne of God. This understanding of the nobility of our prayer, be it ever so weak, is so important to our journey. We need it for the sustaining grace to keep going.

V. GOD’S AFFECTION: FUELING AND EMPOWERING OUR ABANDONMENT UNTO HIM

- A. In the pursuit of a life of prayer, perhaps the most difficult thing of all is the necessary re-signing up, even several times a week, for this focused heart standard. Our natural proneness toward losing our way, even while imagining we haven’t, wars against us daily. In this fight, our only answer, our only way forward, is the continual drinking in of the love of God. This is the sustenance of all prayer.
- B. *In as much as our hearts are expanded by love, we can respond wholeheartedly to God. A tenderized heart is the heart that can move forward in God. When we see our dullness, our distance and our falling short, the answer is not to somehow fight to go harder, but to go deeper in love.*
- C. It is a heart renewed in the remembrance of God’s love and affections that gives everything in abandonment. What fueled our fervency at the very beginning must fuel us once again; we need a deeper revelation of His love and a greater exchange of communion. This is how we “re-sign up” throughout the different seasons of life, continually moving forward in God by His own might.
- D. In conclusion, it is a God with a ravished heart that we pursue, gaze upon and live before. Preserving this paradigm of God is our way forward in devotion. Much of our lives will feel mundane and our prayer powerless, yet if offered in love, something of great worth and proportion is transpiring in the heart of God and this is our constant joy and consolation.