

A Breath of Desperation

#1 in Series – *Prayer: A Breath of Fresh Air*

Have you ever been in a situation where you had a need for a “breath of fresh air”?... Perhaps as a young parent, you were overwhelmed with the aroma of a baby’s dirty diaper and you immediately needed “a breath of fresh air”...

Perhaps it was a boy’s locker-room in school that would take your breath away – and you couldn’t wait to get out so you could get a breath of fresh air...

Perhaps you have been in a city like Los Angeles, CA where you can see the smoke cover the city like a blanket – and you long to get out in the country where you can breath clean, refreshing air...

Some of you may recall an experience that was worse than that!.... You remember a time when you were not only in need of a “breath of fresh air” – you were DESPERATELY in need of a simple BREATH!... There are those in this very room who experience a near-drowning event when you recall being in a situation where you could NOT breath and would have done anything in that moment to simply ... get a breath!

For many – their prayer life has become a stagnated stench to themselves and God – if not comatose altogether... Their prayer-life is lacking the refreshing, deeply satisfying, life-giving pleasure God intends it to be!...

If that describes you – please join me in a journey to recover an intimately loving and enjoyable prayer-life the God desires for you to know and experience with Him, both now and throughout eternity!

If you have been robbed by the enemy of your soul, the world or even your own flesh into giving-up on *breathing God’s refreshing air* of a passionate conversation with Him on an ongoing basis – then be sure not to miss the next four weeks as we discover God’s great provision for our lives that we are going to call – *Prayer: A Breath of Fresh Air*.

This simple, yet life-giving series is not merely theoretical – but will be very practical in our recovering, if not discovering for the first time – what God has given us for our benefit... A benefit and blessing that we are to rely upon and enjoy while we remain in this sin-sick, putrefying environment called a *fallen world!*... God intend for every follower of Jesus – to know and enjoy the

intimate relation with Him that is discovered and maintained in a healthy prayer life!

Praying is as natural to the Christian, as breathing is to the body... If you don't breath – you would live!... Christian, if you don't learn to conversationally pray to God – you will be forever trapped into enduring stagnate, polluted *air*.

Our series will not be exhaustive... By that I mean – there is a whole lot more in the Scripture about prayer than we will explore in these next four weeks... But what we will look at – will be four essential characteristics that must be present in our lives if we are ever to enjoy a spiritual *breath of fresh air* that prayer is designed to bring to you...

We will begin today thinking about the necessity of *desperation* in our prayers, next week, Lord willing, we will consider how, and why *gratitude* is the default to our prayer-life... Please don't miss the next message in two weeks – when we will spend time in the privilege and responsibility of *intercession*... The final message in this series will be discovering the joy of *continuous* praying that is the life-line to the ever-flowing blessing of *breathing* the fresh air in prayer...

Today, we begin with *A Breath of Desperation*...

If you lack any other motivation to pray – then the mere fact of you living in this fallen world with all of its challenges ought to create enough motivation in your life – to literally drive you to your knees and cry-out to God in *desperation*...

Perhaps there is no greater example of one being motivated to seek the Lord – than is the example of the Syrophenician woman we read about in –

Matt. 15:21-28 (NASB)

²¹ Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²² And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." ²³ But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." ²⁴ But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and *began* to bow down before Him,

saying, “Lord, help me!”²⁶ And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”²⁷ But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once (*Lit from that hour*).

As we delve into this passage – let’s first consider –

1. The Cultural Context

We begin with the observation that Jesus purposefully set out to go up the coast to the region of Tyre and Sidon... There was a two-fold purpose in His going...

First it was to “get away” – to “*withdraw*”... Sometimes – we need to do just that... But, we are not going to take a lot of time discussing this point today – but to simply acknowledge that there were times Jesus would “leave where He was”... but do notice – it was never just to “leave”... He was always “going to” something, somewhere, or someone ... for a purpose!...

We need to be careful in our lives to not merely “run from something” ... but be going “to something”... and that “something” is always the pursuit of God’s purpose and pleasure... That’s exactly how Jesus lived His life here on earth...

But let’s consider that second purpose in His *going* in this passage... Jesus was going to encounter the Syrophenician woman... This was not a chance meeting that was about to occur. The Lord was going to this Canaanite area, to this Canaanite woman... It was a Divinely arranged encounter – a Sovereign Appointment!

It is interesting to note that Jesus had been focusing His ministry up to this point on the Jews... In Israel Jesus was demonstrating proof that should have convinced the people that He was the Messiah!... And yet, the Jews were constantly challenging Him to prove it with “a sign”... But here in this Gentile territory, Jesus meets a woman who was convinced He was the Messiah and He – being in full control of this meeting – would test her – and she would not be discouraged in her efforts to appeal to Him... But more about that in a few moments...

What is clear is that the woman was not going to give up...

This encounter teaches us about the grace of our Lord – about faith we should exercise in our time of need – and about the Sovereignty and ability of God to meet those needs...

2. The Unrelenting Desperation

This woman was desperate... She had a daughter that had a need that no one could meet – but God!... This woman had enough theology to understand that her daughter was not merely sick. She didn't merely have a disease – she had a demon! She was demon-possessed!...

I said earlier that Jesus was in full control of this meeting – and His actions of appearing to walk on past her was to test her – and she would not be discouraged in her efforts to appeal to Him...

The question that now burns in my heart is – just how easy is it for you and me to become discouraged in our appeals to the Lord – and just quit praying... I do not mean to “spiritualize” every detail in the narrative – but there is a parallel in this woman's experience to what we often experience... How easy is it for us to become so discouraged – or – if we are honest – so disappointed with God not answering our request on our terms and timing – that we simply quit?...

We need to take a lesson from this woman! She did not quit in her time of desperation!....

Notice the many obstacles she had to overcome – just to make her appeal to the Lord:

- **She had to overcome the Gender Barrier!...** She was a woman – and like the “Woman at the well” in [John 4](#), there was the awareness that women were not to engage in conversations with a man in public – especially a Gentile woman with a Jewish man – which leads us to acknowledge that second barrier:

- **She had to overcome the Race Barrier!...** This woman was from Tyre and Sidon. She was a Canaanite. This tells us two things about this mother. First, she was descended from a cursed people. When Joshua led the people of Israel into Canaan, they had been commanded to totally destroy the Canaanites (Deut. 7:2). She was a member of a doomed race. And second, she was from a region known for ungodly religious practices... This woman had two strikes against her from the very start.
- **She had to overcome a huge Religious Barrier!...** She came to Jesus and called out to Him and said, “**Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David**”. Here she was a Gentile mother crying out to the Jewish Messiah. She had no right to come to Jesus through the door of Judaism. She was a Gentile and He gave her the response she deserved: “**He did not answer her a word**” (:23).
- **She had to overcome a Prejudice Barrier!...** When the disciples see and hear this Gentile calling out to their Messiah, they react by appealing to Jesus to send her away! It seems that they did not want to have anything to do with her. She was not one of their people!... In their eyes, she was different and that was enough to justify their impatience with her... (More about these disciples in a moment.)
- **She had to overcome Initial Rejection!...** As Jesus speaks to this woman – and we will look at His response more closely in a moment – But, as He speaks to her – it seems that at first His words appear to be harsh and demeaning... His words must have shaken her to the very core of her being. His words probably broke her heart. First, he simply ignores her. It is as if He turns an indifferent ear to her cries for help. Then, He tells her that His whole purpose in coming to this world was to reach the lost sheep of Israel. When she persists, Jesus uses words – that to our ear – sounds like He calls her a dog... and does not deserve the children’s bread!... The disciples rejected her and now it appears that Jesus Himself is rejecting her too...
- And finally – **She had to overcome the Reality Barrier!...** The *realities* of this situation are harsh! Her daughter was under the total control of the

Enemy of her soul – the devil... She was demon-possessed!... The desperate mother was in a bad spot!... It seems that these “religious” men did not care about her or her situation at all! It must have appeared to her that her situation was hopeless...

Despite the apparent barriers that should have discouraged her – if not stopped her cold in her pursuit – yet we see –

3. The Progressive Appeal

There is a lot for us to learn from her appeal to Christ! Notice that when she first approached Him – she appealed to Him as “**Son of David**”... At this point – scholars say – she was putting herself on “*Jewish ground*”, and this something she simply could not do!... She was a Gentile... But it is obvious that her use of this title in calling out to Jesus – shows her faith in Him as the Messiah of God! “**Son of David**” was a Name for the Messiah (**Matt. 22:42**)... Since she came to Him on Jewish terms, He was silent... Despite that – she continued asking...

We see the progression in the development of her faith when she goes from appealing to Jesus as the Messiah to calling upon Him as **Lord**!

²⁵ **But she came and *began to bow down* (Or *worshipped*) before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”**

I am convinced that this woman was a believer in Christ the moment she called Him “Lord”!... And as a believer – now follower – she has the armor of God’s grace to sustain her and meet her need!...

4. The Initial Response

Notice, first the response by others – the disciples: They were impatient with her persistent following and crying out... They made the appeal to the Lord to “**send her away!**”

We are not sure whether they meant, “*Give her what she wants and get rid of her*” or just “*Get rid of her!*” Either way – they were not showing much compassion for either her or her demonized daughter...

Some scholars suggest that because of Jesus' reply in verse 24, that they probably wanted Him to just go ahead and answer her request...

Warren Wiersbe – "...our Lord responded to this woman as He did, not to destroy her faith, but to develop it. Her own replies showed that she was growing in faith and unwilling to let Him go without getting an answer."

Initially, Jesus refuses her request by saying, "It is not good (Or *proper*) to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." (Matt. 15:26).

Taken out of context, and especially in English, it's easy to mistake this for an insult. In the flow of the story, however, it's clear Jesus is creating a something of a metaphor – which He uses to explain the priorities of His ministry... Jesus is also teaching an important lesson to His disciples.

Jews in Jesus' day considered Non-Jews as "*dogs*"... Non-Jews were considered so unspiritual that even being in their presence could make a person ceremonially unclean... However, much of the time, Jesus would turn the prejudices and expectations of people upside down...

The exact word Jesus used here, in Greek, means "*small dog*" or "*pet dog*"... (This is a completely different word from the term , used to refer to unspiritual people or to an "unclean" animal.)

Jesus explained His current ministry in a way that both the woman and the watching disciples could understand... His duty was to the people of Israel, not to the Gentiles... So He basically says that He will not recklessly turn His attention away from Israel, in violation of His mission... That would be like a father taking food from his children in order to throw it to their pets...

Jesus often tested people to reveal their intentions – He would often respond with questions or challenges... His response to the Canaanite woman is similar. In testing her, Jesus initially declined her request and explained that she had no legitimate expectation of His help... The woman, however, lived out the principle Jesus Himself taught in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18). Her response proved that she understood fully what Jesus was saying, yet had enough conviction to ask anyway... ²⁷ But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Jesus acknowledged her faith – calling it “*great*” and granted her request...

So, according to both the context and language involved, Jesus wasn't referring to the Canaanite woman as a “*dog*,” either directly or indirectly. He wasn't using an epithet or racial slur but making a point about the priorities He'd been given by God. He was also testing the faith of the woman and teaching an important lesson to His disciples.

Warren Wiersbe – “Jesus was not playing games with the woman, nor was He trying to make the situation more difficult. He was drawing out of her a growing response of faith. She immediately seized on His illustration about the children's bread, which was exactly what He wanted her to do. We may paraphrase her reply: *“It is true that we Gentiles do not sit at the table as children and eat the bread. But even the pet dogs under the table can eat some of the crumbs!”* What a tremendous testimony of faith!”

5. The Resulting Answer

It was this faith that Jesus acknowledged, and immediately He healed her daughter. It is worth noting that both of the persons in the gospel of Matthew who had “*great faith*” were Gentiles: this Canaanite woman and the Roman centurion (**Matt. 8:5-13**). In both cases, Jesus healed the one in need from a distance...

Spiritually speaking, the Gentiles were “afar off” until Calvary, when Jesus Christ died for both Jews and Gentiles and made reconciliation possible (**Eph. 2:11-22**).

6. The Personal Application

Most people today would throw up their hands in frustration and storm off – saying “*I don't need this! So much for your God of love; for your message of compassion and your narrow, bigoted religion! I don't want anything to do with a god or a religion like that!*”...

That is the way many react when they do not get what they want, when they want it... But, not this woman!

She persisted in spite of everything that was thrown into her pathway... Why?

She persisted because too much was at stake! Her daughter was in a desperate condition that only God could change!... She needed to be delivered from her bondage... This family needed to be saved... She needed help and she was determined to get it!

A crumb might have been all she could get; but she knew that a crumb from the hand of Jesus would be enough!... She wouldn't give up until she got what she needed!

Question:!... How much does your problem mean to you? Have you encountered some obstacles along the way that have made you throw up your hands and quit seeking God about the answer you need? Have you looked at the hypocrisy and the apathy of the church and concluded that since God's people don't care, you won't care either? Have you decided that God can't help you and Jesus can't save your soul?

Friend, too much is at stake! Be like this desperate Syrophenician woman mother...

- Keep bringing that need to Jesus until He answers.
- Keep seeking His face until He responds.
- Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking and in His time, He'll hand you down a morsel of answered prayer!

Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)

⁷ "Ask (*Keep asking*), and it will be given to you; seek (*keep seeking*), and you will find; knock (*keep knocking*), and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

I realize that some people in this very room are looking at situation and problems that are every bit as hard and as painful as that faced by this woman.

I know that many of you have prayed and sought God about your situations and things remain the same.

I know that the devil and the flesh are whispering in your ear right now. They are saying, *“It’s no use! God doesn’t care! Go away and don’t bother Him with this anymore. It’s never going to change.”*

I know that some are discouraged and defeated and you wonder if there is any use or any help for you...

Take heart today, dear friends! There is hope!

Today might be the day when the Master responds to your cries. Today might be the day when you see that mountain moved in your life. Today might be the day when you come to Him and call on Him to be saved. Today might be the day when God speaks in your soul and says, *“It’s going to be all right! I’ve taken care of it”*. Today might be the day when His peace replaces your pain and you get the help you need.

William Cowper (18th C. English poet) – grasped the understanding of true prayer when he wrote – “When we don’t pray, we quit the fight. Prayer keeps the Christian's armor bright. And Satan trembles when he sees. The weakest saint upon his knees.”

Bring that need to Jesus again today. Bring it with faith in your heart that He will hear you; that He will help you and He will fix it. Bring it to Him and place it in His hands. Watch Him take it and make it as it ought to be. You say, *“Pastor, you don’t understand how big my problem is”*. No, I don’t know – but God does! Look with me for just a minute at what He can do.

- Look, there’s Jairus. He places his daughter in the hand of Jesus and Jesus raises her from the dead.
- Look, there is Lazarus, four days in the tomb. Mary and Martha place him in the hands of Jesus and Lazarus lives.
- Look, there is a multitude that needs to be fed, but they have no food. A few loaves and fishes are placed in the hands of Jesus and suddenly everyone had more than enough.

- Look, there are the disciples, in a boat, in a storm, in the middle of the lake, in the dead of night. They are afraid they are going to die. They place themselves in the hand of Jesus and they arrive safely to the shore.
- Look, there is a leper and he is healed.
- Look, there is a blind man and he can see.
- Look, there is a deaf man and he can hear.
- Look, there is a crippled man and he can walk.
- Look, there is a man possessed with a demon and he is freed.
- Look, there is Jesus. He is hanging on a cross. He is dead! They take His body down and place it in the grave. Look! For three days there is nothing! Hope is gone and it appears that evil has won. But wait, look again, He lives! He lives!

Oh friends, if He can do these things – and they are just a small sample of what He can do – then you must know that He can surely meet your needs!... Surely – He can save your soul. Surely – He can forgive you and restore you to that place of fellowship. Surely – He can take whatever is wrong in your life and He can make it right. Surely – He can do that!

A little crumb from the Lord's table might be all you need today. Others may need Him to drop the whole platter down before you... I don't know what you need or where you are today; but I know God is the One Who can meet you where you are and meet you in your need today.

- Do you need to be saved?
- Do you have a desperate need in your life?
- Do you need to be restored to faith and fellowship?

- Do you need to see God moving in your life?

Then seek Him today!

Regardless of what you need today, come to Jesus and give Him that desperate need you have! Trust Him to meet that need the way He chooses to! Trust Him to meet you in that need as you call on Him today!