

Anticipating God in the Morning

Psalm 5

Like many of you, our family has enjoyed the Olympics. We each like different events, but we were *all* interested in watching Michael Phelps swim. We've gotten swept up in all of the hype and all the anticipation over the possibility of him winning 8 gold medals. And so we've made a point of watching the Olympics when he was racing. When they would flash at the bottom of the screen, "Michael Phelps will race in 6 minutes," the anticipation would build. We found ourselves screaming at the television at 11 o'clock at night when he'd race.

You can probably think of things that have filled you with anticipation. I think you'll agree that such anticipation translates into motivation and commitment. You anticipate an appointment, so you show up on time (or early). You anticipate a meal, so you think about it and sit down ready to enjoy it. You anticipate a conversation with someone who has vital information that you need, and so you arrive alert and eager to listen.

Today we are going to look at a psalm in which David expresses this type of anticipation for *meeting with God in the morning*. In Psalm 5:1-3 David actually tells God "In the morning You are going to hear my voice. . . ." He tells God ahead of time that in the morning he's going to show up and pray. He didn't pray in the morning because he had to or because he was supposed to; he prayed because he desperately needed God. As we look at Psalm 5 today, I want us to capture the spirit of David's habit of praying/meditating in the morning. We'll see that this habit fits into the overall pattern of experiencing God "day and night" – all day long.

We are spending four weeks in the psalms noticing the emphasis upon experiencing God all day long. Psalm 1 says that the person who is blessed delights in the law of the Lord and in it "meditates day and night." When you keep reading in the psalms you see that people do seek and experience God in the evening, in the morning, and at noon. The Scriptures uniformly communicate that God is so good and so satisfying that he can and should be experienced all day long. Last week we looked at night-time meditation; today we consider seeking God in the morning.

Before we look at Psalm 5 I want to acknowledge that not everybody is a morning person. I talked with someone this past week who said that he felt guilty for years because he'd basically been told that unless you meet with God early in the morning that it's highly unlikely that you'd walk with God that day. He tried for years to get up early and meet with God, but that's not when he's at his peak mentally and spiritually. Now his primary time to meet with God is late at night when everybody else is in bed. I say all of this to acknowledge that you may listen to this whole sermon and conclude, "That's just not me . . . I'll never 'awaken the dawn' like David did." I'm fine with that. And I suspect that God is fine with that. Most of what David describes as his commitment to morning prayer is applicable to prayer at any time of day. (If it helps, keep in mind that no matter when you pray it's morning somewhere . . .)

Nevertheless, we do see a pattern in the Scriptures of seeking God in the morning.

Psalm 5:1-3 – A Case Study in Anticipating God in the Morning

David begins with an appeal to God to hear his prayers. It's not that God might not be paying attention or that David needed to inform God of anything; it's more an expression of David longing to be heard.

1 Give ear to my words, O LORD,
Consider my groaning.

“Give ear to my words, O Lord.” David wants God to cup His hand over His ear and listen carefully to his words. For David prayer wasn’t just filling the time; David was convinced that the God of the universe was responsive to his words. Because David desperately wanted God to hear and respond, he appealed to God to hear his prayer.

“Consider my groaning.” Some translations (such as the KJV) translate this term “meditation” – consider my meditation. The term means to mutter to yourself or to talk under your breath. The sense is that such muttering/groaning/meditation flows from the deepest part of your being. This is no superficial, fluffy praying; this is heart-felt prayer. Verse 2 makes clear that David was crying out to God for help.

2 Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God,
For to You I pray.

In saying “my King and my God,” David acknowledged both God’s sovereignty and his nearness. As his King God had the power and authority to do whatever He wanted; as his God YHWH was personally committed to David’s wellbeing. And so David’s understanding of God informed his praying. He knew that he could cry out to God for help.

Verse 3 is representative of numerous psalms that anticipate praying to God in the morning:

3 In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice;
In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch.

David didn’t have a “wait and see” attitude toward morning prayer. He didn’t think, “If I get to bed at a decent hour and if I get up in time, I may spend some time in prayer.” No, David was planning on crying out to God in the morning, so he tells God, ‘In the morning You will hear my voice.’

We find this same commitment to seeking God in the morning in other Scriptures as well. In Psalm 88:13 we find:

13 But I, O LORD, have cried out to You for help,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.

In Psalm 59:16 we read:

16 But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength;
Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For You have been my stronghold
And a refuge in the day of my distress.

We see that there is great precedent for seeking God in the morning through prayer, singing, and the Word.

Notice how David describes his prayer time in Psalm 5:3. First, “In the morning I will order [my prayer] to You.” The term “order” meant to arrange or set something in order. It was used of ordering an army to get ready for battle; it was also used of arranging sacrifices in the temple. There’s the connotation of planning and intentionality and even structure. Here David says that he will “order” his prayers to God. There’s nothing wrong with spontaneous prayer in which we pray whatever comes to mind at the moment. But here David says that he will intentionally lay out his prayers before God.

This intentionality is something that I’m trying out myself. I tend to get up in the morning without a plan for prayer. I have a plan for reading/meditating on the Scriptures: I have little bookmarks in my Bible in each major section of Scripture (Pentateuch, the “writings,” prophets, wisdom literature, gospels, Paul’s writings, and everything else [Acts and general epistles]). I simply begin reading where I left off the day before. For me it’s a great benefit not having to make decisions on what I’m going to read each morning. My bookmarks tell me what I’m going to read.

For some reason I’ve never really taken the same approach to my prayer life. I tend to pray for whatever comes to mind at the time. Or if I don’t have anything too pressing on my mind, I might not even pray. As a result I don’t think I’ve been as consistent and as focused as I could be in my praying. And so I’m trying out David’s pattern here in verse 3. “Ordering” one’s prayers could mean a lot of different things, but for me this means that I decide 1) *that* I’m going to pray the next morning, and 2) *what* I’m going to pray about. I’m finding such planning and intentionality to be good.

This past week I said to God at night, “I just want to warn You . . . tomorrow morning You’re going to hear my voice . . .” (I actually decided *that* I was going to pray). And then I decided what I would pray about. Each night there has been something obvious that was happening in my life. Consequently, the next morning I’ve been eager and motivated to pray about those things. My point is that I’m finding David’s example of intentionality and anticipation for morning prayer to be very helpful.

Notice what else David committed to doing: “In the morning I will order my prayer to You *and eagerly watch*.” The noun form of this term is often used of a “watchman” (like the guard in the tower) – someone whose sole responsibility is to remain attentive and notice who is approaching and what is happening. David had a commitment to such attentiveness after he prayed to God. He didn’t offer up prayers and then put the issue out of his mind; he remained attentive to notice how God might respond and answer his prayers. If we are praying for things that we really, really want and that we really, really think are good/right, then watching for God’s reply is an obvious thing to do.

It was probably the case that David “eagerly watched” during the time of prayer as well as throughout the day. It is good to linger and listen during times of prayer. God has the ability to communicate with us. And we are especially receptive to what He might say if we have saturated our hearts/minds with His word. This was the expectation in Psalm 119:147:

147 I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I wait for Your words.

There's another example of someone who prayed to God in the morning and then waited for God's response.

It is also good, of course, to continue to "eagerly watch" throughout the day. If we've prayed in faith, expecting God to accomplish His good will in our lives and circumstances, then it only makes sense to remain attentive to how He might answer what we've prayed. It's just not right to ask for something and then not even bother to pay attention when God answers. Listen to Micah 7:7:

7 But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the LORD;
I will wait for the God of my salvation.
My God will hear me.

Our expectancy that God will act on our behalf should accompany us throughout the day.

We've seen that David begins Psalm 5 with anticipation of praying to God in the morning. Read the rest of the psalm sometime. It is a psalm of lament in which David cries out for protection against those who were out to get him.

Let's spend some time thinking about how we might practice David's habit of anticipating God in the morning. Here's my standard disclaimer: these are not rules; use them when and if you find them helpful.

Practicing David's Habit of Anticipating God in the Morning:

We begin with a Prerequisite: A conviction about God and prayer. If you don't believe that God cares about your life or that He will respond to your prayers, you won't have the type of anticipation David had for morning prayer.

Listen to Lamentations 3:19-23. In these verses Jeremiah expresses a foundational conviction about God and His compassion, especially as it relates to seeking God in the morning.

19 Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness.
20 Surely my soul remembers
And is bowed down within me.
21 This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.
22 The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

Even though Jeremiah had a tough life, he believed that every morning was a new opportunity to experience God's lovingkindnesses (plural) and compassions (plural). Every morning is not "same old, same old." You and I need to be armed with that same conviction. God proved at the cross that His compassion toward us far outstrips anything we can fathom. He specifically, individually loves His children and longs for us to depend upon Him in prayer.

If you have no anticipation for prayer, it may be because you aren't convinced of God's lovingkindness and compassion. The first thing you might do is spend some time dwelling upon God's great love for you. When we're convinced of His love for us, we naturally love Him back in all sorts of ways (including prayer). I love Richard Foster's statement that "Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love" (Prayer, p. 3).

Decide **that** you'll pray in the morning and **what** you'll pray in the morning.

In Psalm 5 David decided that in the morning he would order his prayers to God. I guess I don't see any reason why you and I can't do the same thing. Of course you have to figure out exactly what time and what place works for you . . . but I'm looking at a room full of people who are well above average. You can decide to pray tomorrow morning. Honestly, sometimes I think we forget that we have a will. We don't exercise our will independent of the Holy Spirit, but we can and should exercise our wills.

I'm suggesting that you decide **that** you'll pray and then we decide **what** you'll pray. Figure out what works for you (in terms of when and where). Then identify the issue(s) that is the most pressing in your life, in the lives of people around you, and in the life of the church. Pray about things you really care about. Perhaps such resolve to pray the next morning could be part of your night-time meditation. When you're lying in bed thinking about God, express your intentions to show up in His presence the next morning and talk with Him about important matters.

Pray and eagerly watch.

Prayer isn't rocket science; it's relationship. Get up the next morning armed with anticipation that the God of the universe is waiting to hear **your** voice. If you speak to Him, He will cup His hand over His ear and listen to the cry of your heart. And then you cup your hands over your ears and listen; cup your hands over your eyes and watch for what He might do.