

Experience the Balm of Gilead's Far-Reaching Effects—No Matter Your Past

I read and pray through the Psalms almost every day. Sometimes I get stuck. I'm sure you have experienced it too. There are certain verses that stop me in my tracks, even when I have read them many times before.

A few days ago, I had one of those experiences. I love Psalm 25 because it is a prayer that comes from David's gut, his pain over his own youthful sin and his awareness that the consequences of his sin has brought difficult circumstances his way. It is a Psalm I can relate to in very personal ways as I look back over my past and present sinfulness and then trust in the grace-filled mercy of the Father to forgive and redeem my struggles for His good purposes.

As a new year is once again upon us, it is a good time for such reflection. David's psalm gives me great hope for the future, even as I reflect upon God's goodness to me in the past.

So, as I began to read the Psalm recently, I couldn't move beyond the first verse: "To You, O LORD, do I lift up my soul." It made me ask the question, "What does it mean to lift up my soul to God?" I considered the fact that I am made up of body (my physical being), spirit (the part of me that connects with God through the spiritual realm) and soul (my mind, will and emotions). I am a soul with a spirit. My soul is the part of me that is tempted consistently to sin, using my body to carry it out through my words, thoughts or actions. It is my spirit that touches the heart of God and the place where He can heal my sin-sickness and set me upon the path of following Jesus more fully.

Lifting up my soul to God means I willingly give Him my sinfulness that has been set in motion by my mind, will or emotions. Immediately, my thoughts went to an old African-American spiritual, "There Is a Balm in Gilead." The first verse says:

Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain, But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again. There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole; There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

Such good theology! It is the Holy Spirit who renews and revives our sin-sick souls. Our Great Physician is an amazing soul-healer. How grateful I am to know that when my soul has led me into sin or is considering sinful behavior, if I will allow it, my spirit can engage the heart of God for forgiveness and healing. He can also give me the strength and power to resist. When I am discouraged, afraid, or threatened, He is always there to bring comfort, protection and encouragement. The consequences of sin always remain, but God is there with me in the midst of those consequences, sad that I have chosen a path that led me away from Christlikeness.

Watchman Nee* says the spirit is meant to be the part of me that is the strongest; however, my soul must submit to my spirit rather than give in to the impulse to sin. This is where my free will comes in. I am free to choose which way I will go. Nee also teaches that the body is world-consciousness, the soul is self-consciousness and the spirit is God-consciousness. This is very helpful as I recognize that prayer involves all three of these elements. If the spirit rules the other two, I am most aligned with the plans and purposes of God.

Lifting up my soul is submitting my soul to God in prayerfulness, asking Him to intervene in my mind, will and emotions as well as my physical body –whatever has led to the

situation or mental state in which I find myself.

I am trying to cultivate more occasions when I lift up my soul to God in thankfulness and praise. Mary, the mother of Jesus, comes quickly to mind and is probably the most amazing example of this kind of praying. In Luke 1:46-47, "And Mary said: 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.'"

In this passage, Mary also delineates between her soul and her spirit. Her mind, will and emotions exalted the Lord and her spirit, the part of her being that connects with the spiritual realm, rejoiced in God her Savior. And she was also submitting her body to be used for a holy purpose that would change the course of history and provide for the salvation of mankind.

I can involve all parts of my being in this prayer relationship (body, soul and spirit); however, I must choose to do so. If my soul does not yield to the spirit continually, I am in danger of sin and worldliness.

Soul Prayers from Psalm 25

After pondering how to lift up my soul to God, I felt God was leading me to step into a season of prayer using the rest of Psalm 25 as a guide. Here are some of the prayers I engaged in and hope will be useful to you as well:

Trusting God to Keep You from Sin (Ps. 25:2-3): "O my God, I trust in You; may I not be ashamed; may my enemies not triumph over me.

Yes, let none who wait on You be ashamed; let them be ashamed who transgress without cause." Thank You, Father, that I can place my complete trust in You to keep my soul pure and holy. Continue to guide me so that I will never be ashamed of my behavior, words or thoughts. I praise You that if I will wait for You and seek after Your heart, I will never be ashamed.

Seeking the Guidance of God (Ps. 25:4-5): "Make me to know

Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day.” Keep me from running after my own wisdom, Father. May I humbly keep my heart firmly upon Your path as You teach me Your truth and embed it into my soul more and more each day.

Asking God to forgive and forget our sins from the past because of His compassion and lovingkindness (Ps. 25:6-7, 10-11): “Remember Your mercies, O Lord, and Your lovingkindness, for they are from old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to Your lovingkindness remember me, on account of Your goodness, O Lord. All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth, for those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. For Your name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.” Loving Lord, how amazed I am each day for Your kind and generous provision of Jesus, who gave up His very life to allow my sins to be washed away.

Petition the Lord for deliverance:

- From the evil intentions of others (v. 15): “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He will lead my feet away from the net.”
- From loneliness and affliction (v. 16): “Turn to me, and be gracious to me, for I am isolated and afflicted.”
- From trouble and distress of the heart (v. 17): “The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.”
- From the sins that have caused the pain and misery (v. 18) “Look on my pain and misery, and forgive all my sins.”

One last prayer of deliverance returns yet again to the soul, the place where my Psalm 25 journey began is also the place where it ends. In order to continually lift our souls to the

Lord, we must ask God to guard our souls, for our mind, will and emotions can be our undoing apart from His help:

“Watch over my life, and deliver me! Let me not suffer shame, for I seek refuge in You. Truth and integrity will preserve me while I wait for You. (Ps. 25:20-21).

The evil that so strongly attempts to waylay us can only be thwarted by the power of the Holy Spirit moving upon our souls. We must wait upon the Lord and continually seek Him so that He may preserve us with integrity and uprightness.

*If you would like a very good, succinct explanation of the relationship between body, soul and spirit, [click here](#) for an excellent excerpt from the writings of Watchman Nee. {eoa}

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