

Crying Out to a God Who Answers

By Barbara Ho

I was six months pregnant and my winter jacket no longer fit. As my husband Danny and I walked through Sears and Roebuck, we noticed what seemed to be the perfect coat. It was \$69 and with tax it would cost \$75. It might as well have cost \$1,000. Danny was in seminary and we barely had enough money to pay our monthly bills. We left the store empty-handed.

In the car driving home, we lifted up the situation to the Lord. On the way back to our apartment, we stopped to check our mail. To our amazement, there was an envelope in our mailbox. No, it did not have cash in it—that would have been spent on more pressing bills. It contained an anonymous gift certificate to Sears for \$75. We got back in our car and bought my beautiful new coat!

I was 23 years old then and answers like that to prayer have led me to a life of learning to call out to God. I've seen countless answers to prayer and some that have yet to be answered. But I have never seen God fail me, not once! I may not have been privy to everything He was doing at every exact moment, but in hindsight I must say that in every situation God has always been faithful. He has never deserted me but instead has worked each concern for good. He has always been true to His Word!

I believe in prayer. I'm convinced that prayer does move the hand of God. Yes, it changes who we are, but it also changes our world, sometimes in a powerful way. As much as I believe in prayer, I believe more in Him to whom my prayers are sent. He speaks; we listen. He moves; we obey.

The Power of Crying Out

Throughout the Bible, God often led His people to cry out. Time and time again He led them in battle this way. Think back on when Joshua directed his people, by the power of God, to collapse the walls of Jericho. How did they do this? Joshua 6 tells us that God brought down the walls with a shout.

Have you ever wondered why He had the people shout? Of all things to have them do, why that? Because lifting our voices takes faith. Sometimes just stating facts aloud validates the reality of whatever the situation is. It somehow makes it real. Have you ever deliberately not spoken something out loud in the hope that silence would keep it from being true? I know I have.

The Old Testament is not the only place that speaks of crying out to God. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Heb. 5:7). If Jesus cried out to God, I do believe we should too.

Someone recently asked me if we need to pray out loud or if it's enough to pray silently. Of course God does hear us when we pray silently, but I encourage people to pray out loud for several reasons.

1. Praying aloud helps make our times with God more interesting. Our prayer times should be powerful and enjoyable! Praying aloud keeps them from falling into the category of the mundane or purely mental. We should never pray simply because we know we should; we should also pray because we love this time with our creator God. These times with God should be something we can't wait to have. God wants to meet us when we pray. Now that's exciting!

2. Praying out loud helps keep our focus on God. Let's face

it: We're human. I can't tell you how many times I've been praying and found myself planning my dinner menu, including writing down a list! It's so easy to become distracted, and before we know it, our time is gone.

When I'm struggling with a drifting mind during my times with the Lord, I'll often sing my prayers. I make up a tune to words that I want to pray. I do this to get myself over the hump of my distracted thinking. If that doesn't work, I'll try reading Scripture aloud. I'll also spend time listening to worship music. I determine not to allow my undisciplined mind to control my prayer life. I take the control, and if singing my prayers or reading Scripture helps, so be it.

It's easy to quit praying when things get tough. Consider the night Jesus was betrayed. He left three of His disciples to pray and watch as He poured out His heart before God. What did He find when He returned? They were sleeping. They weren't able to focus and stay awake for even one hour to pray! I'm sure they did not know it was one of the most important nights of their lives. I wouldn't be surprised if a bit of praying aloud or even a song or two might have been a big help!

3. Praying aloud professes words of faith. Romans 10:9 says it's not enough to believe in your heart Jesus is Lord; we also need to confess with our mouth that God raised Him from the dead. There's a spiritual blessing that comes with speaking words of faith aloud. I recently heard a preacher say that we need to proclaim a positive future. He went on to quote Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (KJV).

I so agree with this. We can be sure the Lord always wants to work things together for good in our lives. "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11). His mercies are new every morning.

Like many other good insights, the idea of speaking words of faith aloud has been distorted. I've heard it said that we have to be careful what we say because Satan will hear our words and use them against us. Although we do need to be careful of the words we speak, I don't go that far! That can easily lead to paranoia. Should we then write our messages to one another for protection? Or better yet, should we all join a silent convent? This seems a bit drastic to me. That being said, our words do matter. We have to be careful of the words we speak. They do make a difference in our lives.

This is true when we pray, too. It's important to verbally declare things, especially things of faith. Not only do we need to hear the profession of faith, but the enemy needs to hear it coming from our mouths. Every time Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He rebuked him out loud and declared the truth verbally. He could have just turned his back and ignored him. But He took another route. He lifted His voice aloud.

Why should we be any different? When God has spoken a clear promise to me, I will declare it when I pray, and I will always do this out loud. If God has promised me protection, I will pray, "Thank you, God, for the protection You are giving me, right here, right now!" Am I praying for an unsaved loved one? I may pray, "Thank you, Lord, that You love this person more than I ever could. Thank you that Your hand of mercy is on her life!" Often, just hearing my own words increases my faith. It may sound a bit crazy, but I verbally remind myself and all angelic and demonic beings that the victory is mine!

4. Praying aloud is encouraging to others. Have you ever been encouraged hearing someone else verbalize victory over a prayer burden? I have. Just hearing another's profession of faith will spur me on to keep my eyes on the Lord and to trust Him to bring victory.

For some of us, our personalities come into play. We may be more the quiet type. Maybe we don't want to feel awkward. Not

all of us are wired as David was when he danced before the Lord in (basically) his underwear. Although I don't believe all of us will be people who will shout out in groups of people, I do believe we all should be willing to lift our voices to Him. We can limit what God can do through us by not being willing to leave our comfort zone. Many of us are more than willing to shout at sports events but shun the idea of showing any emotion in prayer and worship. You never know what God has in mind or how you could encourage someone else.

Have you ever asked yourself what stops you from crying out to God, really crying out to Him? I think sometimes it's not realizing our desperation for the Lord. If you were in a situation where you felt desperate enough, I do believe you'd cry out for help. For example, if you saw a child running toward a street full of cars, I can venture to say all of us would scream for the safety of the child, either for the child to stop or for someone to intervene. When we pray, do we really see how desperately we need God's touch in the different situations we're praying for? Maybe we should ask God to show us this need clearly.

What a joy to lift our voices to God! We should never allow our prayers to become too mental and routine. Again and again Scripture exhorts us to cry out to the Lord. I take that literally. Our desperation for Him often comes through as we lift our hearts, our hands, and our voices up to our Creator God. Lift your voice to Him. The blessings far outweigh the discomforts.

Keep On Praying!

What is it you need? Are you in need of healing? He's the great physician. Do you feel you're at the end of your rope, hopeless? His mercies are new every morning. Are you lonely, discouraged, feeling confused? He can meet your needs. No request you could ever bring before God is either too great or too insignificant for His touch. If it matters to you, you can

be sure it matters to Him. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). That includes everything!

The best part of surrendering to God is not what He can do for us—but through us. There is a world full of hurting people who need the touch of the Savior, and God can use you, through prayer, to make that eternal difference. Do you understand what this means? Your life can count for something beyond your little world. God has plans to use you in a powerful way and your prayer life is pivotal to that.

The Lord has an amazing life in store for us. He will meet us in prayer. His presence is available. Who knows what miracles we will experience in our lives? Not only is it possible to see the dead rise, the lame walk, and the blind see, but it's happening, all over the world—maybe not within our Christian circles, but it is happening! Although I have never personally experienced seeing a person rise from the dead as an answer to prayer, I have spoken with missionaries from around the world and American pastors who have.

I don't know about you, but that excites me. I want to be used by God. I want my life to mean something. My daily prayer is that my life will be a poured-out offering to Him.

Make whatever adjustments you have to in order to put God first. And then expect Him to do the impossible in and through you!

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