

The seven levels of prayer

This is a brief summary of the material to be found on our YouTube page "Serving Africa Mission." Look for "Thursday Extra - The seven levels of prayer."

Here is the text from the Elijah story. 1 Kings 18

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

"Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back."

The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'"

Prayer tools

Elijah had to use a number of different prayer tools in his intercession in order to move the heart of God. Many intercessors are unaware of these different levels and so their intercession sometimes get stuck. Here is a brief outline of the seven levels as I see them. There is much more information on the YouTube broadcast.

1. Our father: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Matthew 7:9

This is the very basic level of prayer. It's an attitude of our heart. We go into the presence of our loving father and make intercession.

2. Call to me: "Call to me and I will answer you. (Jeremiah 33:3)

At this deeper level our intercessory heart is much more seeking and longing. Sometimes the Lord will ask us this question – "How much does it matter to you?"

3. Urgent: So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. Acts 12:5

At this level the intercessor becomes very aware that he or she is standing between the Lord and some significant move of the spirit or a move of the enemy. It's a level where intercessors feel the pressure to move the heart of God and they often find themselves alone.

4. Much prayer: Jesus replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." Mark 9:29

At this level the struggle is intense, and it causes enormous stress in the heart of those who are interceding. It takes a lot of courage to come to this level and to stay here. Many intercessors never arrive here because they don't understand that the struggle of much prayer causes such intense stress in the heart. At this level prayer is extremely costly. The next levels are even more costly.

5. Hannah: "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." 1 Samuel 1:15-16

Now intercession is being revealed for what it really is - the pouring out of the soul before the Lord in agony that his heart might be moved. I have found few people who are prepared to enter this level. They may have misunderstood what intercession is, but here they will find out, and maybe choose not to stay.

6. Gethsemane: Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:39-44)

It's hard to imagine that it could get any harder after Hannah but it does. At this level the intercessor is caught between the father's heart and the pressure of the enemy. While the word "destructive" is too hard, the spirit of the intercessor is at great risk here.

7. Sighs: In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. Romans 8:26

This should come as no surprise to those who have made their way through all the levels. Sometimes words are impossible and even emotions are difficult to handle. The Greek for "wordless groans" is not easy to translate. Intercessors do not need it translated. They know all too well that sometimes all that can be offered to God is this deep inner yearning. It is a great blessing to know that at this point the Holy Spirit will take these wordless groans and interpret them into the father's heart. For me this is the ultimate destination of my intercession.