

## Piety and Anxiety: Prayer Lessons from Jacob

Exams will be taking place in almost a week's time. From experience, I know that at these times my prayer life becomes more fervent— more out of anxiety than piety. I actually remember thinking one night before an exam that it would probably be better use of my time to pray for the second coming than to study! Life is full of anxieties – not just at exam time.

This week I want us to meditate on a prayer from someone in the Bible who was anxious as well. If you remember in Genesis 27 Jacob gets the family birthright by tricking his father. He dresses up as his elder brother, Esau, and takes the family blessing. Jacob is forced to flee from his brother, but several years later, God tells him to return. In Genesis 32, Jacob is worried how his brother will receive him. He has heard worrying reports about the fighting men around Esau. So he prays,

“O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’” (v. 9-12)

Let's look at some of the lessons from Jacob's prayer.

**Jacob acknowledges who God is.** This is the God of his family, who graciously made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (v. 9a). This is the God who has promised to bless and protect his people.

**Jacob looks back.** Next Jacob looks back to what God has commanded him to do (v. 9b-10). He says to God, ‘You brought me to this place, and you brought me here for a reason’. Jacob looks back to God's providence up to this point. This includes acknowledging just how good God has been. He didn't have anything, and didn't deserve anything, but God has blessed him thus far.

**Jacob calls to God.** Jacob calls out “Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau” (v. 11a). He is looking for salvation from the situation that he is in. There are no two ways about it. He cries out for what he feels he needs and leaves that with God.

**Jacob is honest.** Jacob tells God exactly what he feels (v. 11b). This is what struck me first. He says, “I am afraid [Esau] will come and attack me”. He is honest to God about his worries and concerns. He tells God exactly why he is asking for deliverance. It's easy for us not to be honest in prayer, but like Jacob we should explain to God why we are anxious or worried.

**Jacob looks forward.** Finally Jacob clings to the hope of God's promises (v.12). He petitions God by recounting God's promise to make him prosper. This shows Jacob's hope as well as faith. He claims God's promises for his life.

I hope that as we call out to God in the next couple of weeks and months over a variety of issues, we will be able to take our example from Jacob.

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### **Day 1**

Psalm 34:8-9

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

Lord, thank you that you were good to Jacob, and that you are good to me. Help me to taste and see this in my life, and help me to take refuge in you today. Amen.

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### **Day 2**

John 17:15-17

My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Lord, thank you that you protect us from the evil one. I pray that particularly when life is busy that you would protect me from attacks from the evil one. Sanctify me, I pray. Amen.

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### **Day 3**

2 Thessalonians 3:4-5

We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Lord, you provide direction for me. Fill my heart with your love and Christ's perseverance. Amen.

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### **Day 4**

Psalm 40:17

Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.

Lord, I need your strength and help daily. I pray that you would sustain me through the trials and tests that I face today. Amen.

## **Day 5**

Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life - of whom shall I be afraid?

Lord, everyday you are my light and my salvation, even when I don't acknowledge this. Teach me to take refuge in you through all of life's anxieties and worries. Amen