

# Spiritual Dry Spells

A traveler wanders the dry land preoccupied with his thoughts, the dry heat weighs down every step of his aimless journey. Why doesn't he return to the oasis from which he came?

At times, the soul finds itself thirsty but there is not enough water to quench its thirst. We, much like this traveler, often drift away from the spring of life and wander around looking for hope. These spiritual dry spells are often due to the challenges we face in life: personal failures, the loss of a loved one, or other difficult circumstances. In these times, we need to trust in the power and blessings of PRAYER! Saint Ambrose of Milan refers to prayer as "the wing on which the soul flies to heaven."

Prayer is Heaven in the heart; it is the kingdom of God within us. Many times we find ourselves in spiritual wars where our relationship with God is weakened and daily temptations overcome us; so, we give up on prayer and lose hope. However, it is comforting to know that we are not alone and that many great saints had their faith tested too. The difference, however, is that they prayed until God gave them strength. King David is a great witness of the power of prayer. Among all people, God had chosen King David to serve Him. Moreover, God called him

His Beloved, *"I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will."* (Acts 13:22) Nevertheless, King David had his weaknesses and sinned greatly before God (2 Samuel 11). However, he did not stop praying but instead humbly offered supplications to God asking for forgiveness. King David knew that in order to see God, he had to have a pure soul which can be obtained through prayer. A hermit once said, "No one can see his face reflected in the muddy water; so the soul cannot pray to God with contemplation unless it is first cleansed of harmful thoughts." When a person takes responsibility for his mistakes and prays with humility, his prayers become effective and God supplies the power and strength to persevere. Saint John Chrysostom reflected on prayer saying: "Prayer is a great weapon, a rich treasure, a wealth that is never exhausted, an undisturbed refuge, a cause of tranquillity, the root of a multitude of blessings and their source."

Jabez was a simple man in the Bible who prayed to God daily to

help him with his responsibilities saying, *"Oh that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!"* So God granted him what he requested." (1 Chronicles 4:10) When the pressures of our daily responsibilities cause us to become stressed and we mix up our priorities. Our worries take hold of us and we try to plan our future without God's help. It is at this point that we need to remember Jabez. What is noteworthy about Jabez's prayer is that he prayed to God for support and guidance throughout his life. The result: his prayers became a blessing to him and his family. Prayer vigilance is a source of purification for our hearts and minds. It allows us to focus on the center of life: God. When we focus on Christ, our worries dissipate knowing that when God is in control the best always happens to His children. Our fathers, the desert monks, teach the importance of the prayer, "O my Lord Jesus Christ help me, a sinner." Daily repetition of this short yet powerful prayer will

help us remember to not be fearful for God always knows how to take care of what belongs to Him. As St. John Climacus once said, "When a man has found the Lord, he no longer has to use words when he is praying, for the Spirit Himself will intercede for him with groans that cannot be uttered."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego followed God with their hearts and sought Him daily. They strove to keep His commandments and trusted His presence among them despite their captivity. Therefore, it was not a surprise to hear them calling upon God during their time of need. Now, let us stop for a minute and meditate about their situation. It would have been normal to want to follow the crowd, and it is an even stronger instinct to try to survive and live! So why did they refuse the king's order? What gave them the courage to obey God's Word even unto death? My friends, it was the power of prayer and the trust they had in His promises. *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."* (Psalm 50:15) The three saintly youths trained themselves, through the power of prayers, to overcome their difficulties. They trusted God's will for their lives and drew so close to

Him through their prayers that even the possibility of death would not separate them from Him. There is indeed power in prayer, power that can change hearts, open eyes, crumble mountains, and put out fires! *"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."* (James 5:16) Let us seek God daily so that through prayer we gain the virtues of trust, love, and patience. When we pray passionately and purposefully, seeking God's will, God responds powerfully!

Humility is an important factor in effective prayer for it leads to constant prayer that results in spiritual growth. A humble soul always remembers his sins; therefore, the basis for his prayer is the mercy of God. As a result, prayer takes us to a point where God continually imparts grace upon us, by which we are increasingly conformed into His image. This is what makes our prayer fruitful. Therefore, let us obey St. John Climacus' words on prayer saying, "Make the effort to raise up, or rather, to enclose your mind within the words of your prayer; and if, like a child, it gets tired and falters, raise it up again. The mind, after all, is naturally unstable, but the God who can do everything can also give it firm endurance. Persevere in this, therefore, and do

not grow weary; and He who sets a boundary to the sea of the mind will come to you too during your prayer and will say, *"This far you may come, but no farther."* (Job 38:11) The Spirit cannot be bound, but where He is found everything yields to the Creator of the Spirit. The beginning of prayer is the expulsion of distractions from the very start by a single thought; the middle stage is the concentration on what is being said or thought; its conclusion is rapture in the Lord."

When you drift away from the source of life remember to pray. Whatever cross you bear, trust that God is always ready to answer your call. When you lose hope because your plans have come to nothing, remember God is your All-in-All and has better plans for you. You are His child whom He will take care of. Pray and trust in His power and the blessings in store for you. When the world turns against you and Satan tempts you, do not be afraid. Always trust that God will deliver you as He delivered the three saintly youths. Meanwhile, do not ever give up hope but rather pray in humility, for through prayer we will regain the image of God in us. Last but not least, do not forget to P.U.S.H. - Pray Until Something Happens!