

Lord, Help Me!

The Prayer of a Desperate Mother

Matthew 15:25

No one on earth has the power to break your heart like your own child. Seeing them hurt and watching them struggle is a gut-wrenching, soul-shaking experience. You feel their pain. They have the power in a split second to bring tears to your eyes. When they make you proud, joy explodes in your heart that cannot be contained. When they disappoint you, it is like a knife jabbed deep into your heart. When they are treated unjustly, righteous indignation overwhelms your common sense. And when they hurt, you would do anything you could to take their place.

Cathy and I have three adult sons. From the hospital to the awards banquet to the church platform, to the police station, to the prom, to the emergency room, to the courtroom, to the ICU, Cathy and I have ridden the emotional roller coaster of parenting. We have cried, laughed, prayed, worried, lost sleep, and made more sacrifices as a parent than in any other role in our lives. Yet today they all love Jesus and their families and serve the Lord.

Among the many prayers I pray as a dad have been "Give me wisdom," "Give me success," and "Strengthen my hands." I have asked God to protect my children, bless them, grow them, and use them. But as parents sometimes the need is greater than our resources.

In Matthew 15, we find the very special prayer that is the cry of a desperate parent. As Jesus was resting from His heavy schedule in a non-Jewish region east of the Mediterranean Sea, He encountered a desperate mom.

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" Matthew 15:22

There is much we don't fully understand about demonization. We do know that it has ugly, physical results and emotional expressions. We recognize that those dominated by the evil one are in extreme pain. We see that while human medicines may relieve symptoms, they are ineffective to produce lasting cures. We can appreciate the challenge that modern psychology faces in adequately understanding, explaining, or dealing with such a curse.

Most of all, we can confidently affirm that it was overwhelming to this mother to see her daughter experience such anguish of the soul. But when this mother cried out to Jesus for mercy, He did not answer.

"Jesus did not answer a word." Matthew 15:23

As a follower of Jesus, I find it most difficult to deal with the unexplained silences of God. You have been there. You have a legitimate need. You have come to the right source for help. You ask for mercy, but all you get in response is the thundering silence of God. Most people would quit at this point.

This woman, a Canaanite, was used to the unresponsiveness of her gods. This was not new to her. She could have easily marked Jesus down as just as uncaring or impotent.

But she didn't.

"So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'" Matthew 15:23

Still, she badgered them for help. She kept coming for relief. Her pain was greater than her pride. After she persisted, Jesus answered.

“He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.’”
Matthew 15:24

Thanks a lot! He didn’t even speak directly to her. He made this comment to His disciples. It was not what she wanted to hear.

She knew that she had no right to ask a Jewish man to help her. She knew that she had no basis for expecting Him to respond. But she had heard that He was mighty and compassionate. And she was desperate. So she pressed the issue ahead.

“The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said.” Matthew 15:25

Lord, help me.

What a simple prayer! “Lord, help me.” What a powerful prayer!

With all of her faith, all of her emotions, and all of her love for her daughter, she prayed. The weight of her need, every ounce of her hurt, and the totality of her helplessness were embodied in those three little words, “Lord, help me.”

What do you say when you have nothing else to say? What words can better express the burden of the brokenhearted parent? “Lord, help me.”

What is your pressure point of pain today? What about your child’s situation is overwhelming you? What burden is completely beyond your control? Where do you need help?

“Lord, help me.” Say the words slowly. See the suffering soul of your beloved child. See your own empty hands. See the all-sufficient Savior. Bow before Him and speak your heart. Jesus was moved to act on her behalf.

“He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.’”

‘Yes, Lord,’ she said, ‘but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour.” Matthew 15:26–28

Read verse 28 again. First, Jesus commends her faith. Then He promises that her request is granted. Her little prayer had produced a big answer, and her daughter was healed.

Making It Personal

What can we learn from this desperate mom?

Prayer needs all the faith we have.

Jesus said, “Woman, you have great faith!” A look back through this passage gives us some insights into the type of faith she displayed. As a Canaanite, non-Jew, and not yet a devoted follower of Jesus, she had great faith. Her faith was great for the little amount of truth and light she had been given. She had not had the privilege of growing up hearing about the powerful love of the God of the Bible. This was a new venture for her. She had to turn from pagan deities in order to trust in Jesus to help her. She was way out of her comfort zone. Coming to Jesus, persistently asking and not giving up until she was helped, took all of the faith she had.

1. **Prayer needs faith that refuses to quit.** We don’t fully understand the ways of God. We do know that sometimes God holds off answers in order to allow our faith to blossom fully. This desperate mother did not give up, even when she initially got no answer. She did not quit asking until the disciples again asked Jesus to do something. She continued asking even after He said “No.” Her love for her daughter and her confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal would not let her give up.
2. **Prayer needs faith that is humbly dependent.** Her faith was great because it was not based on her sense of worth

but on her conviction that Jesus must eventually respond to those in need. If a master would give crumbs to dogs, then Jesus must surely answer the prayer of a Canaanite.

3. Prayer works.

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour. Matthew 15:28

Her prayer worked. God heard her heart, saw persistent faith, honored her humble dependence, and touched her daughter. I can only imagine the joy that exploded in her heart. I bet she danced all the way home. She probably had a huge smile on her face for years to come.

It is a wonderful thing when God answers the prayers of desperate parents. And all parents get desperate at one time or another. Among many painful concerns, we wonder if they are well physically, who they are involved with, what college they will choose, or will choose them, and what career they will pursue.

Desperation takes over when children begin to take the path of prodigal living. One of my good friends and a fantastic worship leader, Andy Bullard, is the son of a dear pastor and his wife. In college, Andy went through a period of prodigal living. This is his story of how his father's love and prayer helped him realize that living for God is the only way.

I grew up in a pastor's home. My parents loved God with all their hearts and were great parents! During the last two years of high school and the first two years of college, I slowly fell into a bad lifestyle of ignoring the Holy Spirit's conviction in my heart. I chose to get heavily involved with alcohol and partying.

One lonely night when I was twenty years old, I had been drinking and hanging out at a party. Someone came in and told me my dad was outside. It was about 2 a.m. I immediately felt

this huge lump in my throat, and I walked outside. Ashamed, I approached my father, who calmly looked at me and said, "Son, the Holy Spirit woke me up a little while ago and I felt Him telling me to go take a drive. He told me, 'Your son is in trouble and needs you.' That's how I found you here. Andy, I believe God has a plan and design for your life and wants to use you for His glory, but if you keep on living like this, you're going to miss out on all of it. I love you—I'll see you at home."

That same weekend I was on my face before God, weeping and repenting for the way I had been living. I felt so dirty inside and decided, from that moment on, I would acknowledge God's greatness. I would fear Him and let Him change my life. By God's glory, I have not lived that kind of lifestyle since then. I know that God used my father and my mother and their prayers, love, and loving rebuke to draw me back to the Lord! I am so thankful for honest, praying and loving parents! 1

I recently spoke at a missionary training conference and had a wonderful time of fellowship with these pioneer servants of God. A mom who had heard me speak in previous years stopped me after my second day of teaching. The year before, she had told me of the difficult transition her children were having upon returning to the States from the mission field.

Then she said, "The first time we heard you speak, we were convicted to fast and pray for our children one day a week. But we did not do it. They had a very frustrating year that year. The next year we made a commitment to fast and pray for them one day a week. My husband and I would pray together over lunch. It was not easy," she said, pausing, with tears welling up in her eyes, "but it sure made a difference."

God loves our kids because He is their Father. He wants to give us all the help He can in raising them.

As I write this, my three teenage sons are all in high school at the same time. None of them is a shrinking violet or

wallflower. They all seem to be gifted at getting themselves in a variety of complex situations. Like all pastors' kids and second- or third-generation Christians, they struggle to find their own faith relationship with God. As very human young men, they are not immune to temptation, trials, or troubles. Parenting three teenagers, while often a great deal of fun, is also very challenging. Parenting "just ain't easy." Almost daily I pray the prayer of the desperate woman, "Lord, help me."

If you are a parent, this chapter has probably resonated with you on several levels. Learn to pray the prayer of the desperate mother for her daughter, "Lord, help me." If you do not yet have children, begin now to pray for the children that you may have in your future. Ask God to help you. Or pray for your nieces and nephews. Ask God to help them and their parents.

If you are past the point of having children, that's all right. Pray for Cathy, me, and our three boys. We need all the prayer we can get.

Notes

1. Used by permission of Andy Bullard.

—Dr. Dave Earley from *The 21 Most Effective Prayers in the Bible* (PrayerShop Publishing 2023). Hundreds of churches and thousands of believers will be using this book as they pray through The 21 Days of Prayer Event, January 1-21, 2024. We encourage you to join them.