



KNU International English Church

A LOVING COMMUNITY THAT CHANGES OUR WORLD.

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Feeling our Prayers

Isaiah 63:7 - 64:12

[1] Every single person I know has struggled with prayer at some time. Most people I know struggle with prayer most of the time. Praying can be hard. Someone told me last week that he has just about given up on prayer. Most people say they wish they had more time to pray, but most people don't seem particularly interested in actually spending more time in prayer. When it comes right down to it, most of us would rather do most other things. If you have ever struggled with prayer or with not praying, you are not alone. Most people are like you.

[2] We are entering the Season of Advent. This is a season of waiting. We are waiting in three ways.

1. We're waiting symbolically with the people of the Old Testament for Jesus, the Messiah to come. We'll celebrate Jesus' coming at Christmas time.
2. We're waiting for Jesus to come again and make our world right.
3. We're waiting for God's coming and action to be more fully present in our world and in our lives.

In the midst of all this waiting, prayer can be hard. When I graduated from university, my Aunt Sue gave me a book by one of America's greatest philosophers: Dr. Seuss. [3] It's called *O, the Places You'll Go*. Dr. Seuss describes life as this long journey of ups and downs, celebrations and failures. But one stage of life is often "The Waiting Place":

*a most useless place ...
... for people just waiting.
Waiting for a train to go
Or a bus to come, or a plane to go
Or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
Or waiting around for a Yes or a No
Or waiting for their hair to grow.
Everyone is just waiting.
Waiting for the fish to bite
or waiting for wind to fly a kite
or waiting around for Friday night
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake
or a pot to boil, or a Better Break
or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants*

*or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.
Everyone is just waiting.*

For Seuss and for most of us, The Waiting Place is a useless place. Nothing good happens when we're waiting. Most of us say we hate to wait. We hate waiting in lines. We hate waiting for haircuts or for buses or for videos to buffer.

[4] But for God, in God's time, waiting means something different. Waiting is not inaction. Waiting is active. Waiting is being alert. Waiting is being prepared. In Mark 13, waiting is keeping the house in order because the master might come back at any moment. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul says God is enriching us and strengthening us in the waiting time. It's not useless time. It's very important time. The waiting time is a time of preparation for what comes next.

Our church is in a time of waiting. All this year, our focus is to make space for God so that God can show us what is next. This year our task is not to do big things but to do less *things*. This year our task is to slow down, to become less busy, so that we can hear God tell us what the *real* task is. But we're still active. We're learning to become alert. We're making space all week this week through 24/7 Prayer. Make sure you sign up. This can completely change the way you think about prayer.

As we prepare for our week of prayer, let's take a look at one long prayer in the Bible. This text covers lots of different kinds of prayer, but it's not your ordinary kind of prayer. It's not the kind of prayers we ordinarily pray - or at least not the kind we talk about praying. My prayer today is that the scope and depth of this prayer from Isaiah will shape and guide our prayers this week in the prayer room.

[5] Throughout this prayer with its wide ranging emotions, there is one message that we need to hear today: **If you feel it, pray it.** I want your help today. Every time, I say, **SO...** then you say: **"If you feel it, pray it."**

[6] Let's get started with Isaiah 63:7-9

⁷ *I will tell of the Lord's unfailing love.*

I will praise the Lord for all he has done.

I will rejoice in his great goodness to Israel,

which he has granted according to his mercy and love.

⁸ *He said, "They are my very own people.*

Surely they will not betray me again."

And he became their Savior.

⁹ *In all their suffering he also suffered,*

and he personally rescued them.

In his love and mercy he redeemed them.

He lifted them up and carried them

through all the years.

This is the kind of prayer we expect good religious people to pray. We feel warm and comfortable with this kind of prayer. This is the "Footprints in the Sand" kind of prayer.¹ God is our loving God, and he cares for us when we need him. We like this kind of prayer. Sometimes, this is exactly the kind of prayer we need. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.**

¹ www.footprints-in-the-sand.com.

[7] But Isaiah continues.

*¹⁰ But they rebelled against him
and grieved his Holy Spirit.*

*So he became their enemy
and fought against them.*

How could God become their enemy? Well, think back to a time when you said something really mean to your mom, and then your mom got that look of anger in her eye. I always knew when my Mom was really mad because her nostrils would start flaring in and out. That's when I knew that I had "grieved" her spirit, and that's when I knew I better run - because at that moment, she was my enemy and she was going to fight against me. Israel has rebelled against God, and they are feeling the pain. If you feel like God is against you right now, go ahead and tell him. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.**

[8] *¹¹ Then they remembered those days of old
when Moses led his people out of Egypt.*

*They cried out, "Where is the one who brought Israel through the sea,
with Moses as their shepherd?"*

*Where is the one who sent his Holy Spirit
to be among his people?*

*¹² Where is the one whose power was displayed
when Moses lifted up his hand—
the one who divided the sea before them,
making himself famous forever?*

*¹³ Where is the one who led them through the bottom of the sea?
They were like fine stallions
racing through the desert, never stumbling.*

*¹⁴ As with cattle going down into a peaceful valley,
the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.
You led your people, Lord,
and gained a magnificent reputation.*

*¹⁵ Lord, look down from heaven;
look from your holy, glorious home, and see us.
Where is the passion and the might
you used to show on our behalf?
Where are your mercy and compassion now?*

Listen to the doubt and the pain here. *What happened to the good old days God? Remember when everything used to be great? Remember when God did all those great things? Where is that God? Why isn't God doing that kind of stuff now? Don't you still love us? Don't you still care? Do you see what is happening to us? It is OK to pray like this. If you feel like this, it is good to pray like this. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.***

[9] *¹⁶ Surely you are still our Father!*

*Even if Abraham and Jacob would disown us,
Lord, you would still be our Father.*

You are our Redeemer from ages past.

This is the touchstone for prayer. This is the bedrock of faith. No matter how bad it gets, God is still our Father. No matter how far away we turn from God, God is still the One who calls us home. If you feel the Father calling you, pray it. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.**

[10] ¹⁷ *Lord, why have you allowed us to turn from your path?*

Why have you given us stubborn hearts so we no longer fear you?

*Return and help us, for we are your servants,
the tribes that are your special possession.*

¹⁸ *How briefly your holy people possessed your holy place,
and now our enemies have destroyed it.*

¹⁹ *Sometimes it seems as though we never belonged to you,
as though we had never been known as your people.*

*This is really your fault, God. You made us like this. You chose us. You know we are broken and sinful people. Why have you made us stubborn? Why do you make it so much easier to sin than to live righteously? We had some good times, but now we're doubting even those. The good times were so brief, and the bad times seem so long. Sometimes, we doubt that we've ever had a genuine religious experience. Sometimes, we doubt our salvation. Sometimes, we doubt that you even exist or that you have ever cared for us. It is OK to pray like this. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.***

[11] ^{64:1} *Oh, that you would burst from the heavens and come down!*

How the mountains would quake in your presence!

² *As fire causes wood to burn
and water to boil,*

your coming would make the nations tremble.

Then your enemies would learn the reason for your fame!

³ *When you came down long ago,
you did awesome deeds beyond our highest expectations.
And oh, how the mountains quaked!*

*Rip open the heavens and come down! Do something! Lightening, thunder, earthquakes, anything! Make some people's knees shake. Set our world right! Bust some heads, because I know there are some heads that need a good busting! That will settle our doubts. That will show people who you are. If you want God to bust some heads and send some lightening bolts, go ahead and pray it. Get it out there. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.***

[12] ⁴ *For since the world began,
no ear has heard,*

*and no eye has seen a God like you,
who works for those who wait for him!*

⁵ *You welcome those who gladly do good,
who follow godly ways.*

We know. We know deep in our bones. No matter how much our world denies it, we know that you care for your people. No matter how bad life gets and no matter what

*happens in this world, we know that somehow you will do good to those who do good to you. Life and justice demand it, and we know it in our hearts. Claim what you know in the depths of your heart. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.***

*[13] But you have been very angry with us,
for we are not godly.*

*We are constant sinners;
how can people like us be saved?*

*⁶ We are all infected and impure with sin.
When we display our righteous deeds,
they are nothing but filthy rags.
Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall,
and our sins sweep us away like the wind.*

*⁷ Yet no one calls on your name
or pleads with you for mercy.
Therefore, you have turned away from us
and turned us over to our sins.*

Eventually we will have to face this ugly fact. We are sinners.

*We know you care for the godly, God, but we aren't godly. We are sinners. All of us. Even our best acts are filthy rags. Our most holy actions are about as pure as the rag we used to clean the toilet. We are wasting away inside. We have come unplugged from your life and the wind threatens to blow us away into nothingness. But even when we come face to face with our despair, we still don't cry out to you. We just change the channel and turn up the volume. We have rejected your healing hand, so you have let sin's cancer run its course in our souls. What is up with that? If you are frustrated about your sins, pray it. If you are frustrated that God still hasn't freed you from your addictions, pray it. If you are angry at yourself and angry at God, if you have come face to face with your own depravity, pray it. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.***

*[14] ⁸ And yet, O Lord, you are our Father.
We are the clay, and you are the potter.
We all are formed by your hand.*

*⁹ Don't be so angry with us, Lord.
Please don't remember our sins forever.
Look at us, we pray,
and see that we are all your people.*

In the end, we come back to this. God is our Father. God is our Maker. Despite all our doubts, despite all our sins, despite all the problems of our world, we really have no where else to turn. We know we are sinners, but we also know that God is our Father. All we can do is to throw ourselves at the mercy of God and ask God to be God. God is our Father. This is the foundation of our lives. We are all sinners in need of mercy, but the good news is that Jesus has brought us God's unfailing mercy. God has swallowed up his own anger by dying on the cross. He sees that we are his people, and he opens his arms wide for us to come home. If you have come to the point in your life where all you can do is stumble into the Father's arms and beg for mercy, that's good. Pray it. **SO ... If you feel it, pray it.**

Ah, I wish Isaiah's prayer ended there in verse 9. "Look at us, we pray, and see that we are all your people." That's a comfortable, churchy ending. We belong to you God. In the end, we belong to you. Sometimes, we really do feel that, and if you feel it now, then by all means, pray it. But sometimes our days don't end on happy notes. Sometimes we have whole weeks or months or years that sad notes in minor keys. Isaiah keeps praying:

[15] ¹⁰ *Your holy cities are destroyed.*

*Zion is a wilderness;
yes, Jerusalem is a desolate ruin.*

¹¹ *The holy and beautiful Temple
where our ancestors praised you
has been burned down,
and all the things of beauty are destroyed.*

¹² *After all this, Lord, must you still refuse to help us?
Will you continue to be silent and punish us?*

Sometimes, when we pray, we just can't see past the pain. Sometimes, we can't get through the pain to the hope and joy. Healing doesn't come with every prayer. *After all this Lord, must you still refuse to help us? Will you continue to be silent and punish us? I really don't know. Are things going to change? Are things going to get better? Are you really on our side? Are you really up there? Do you really care? Today, I'm not sure.*

That is OK. This kind of prayer is OK. This kind of prayer is very Biblical, very Christian. If you feel pain, pray pain. If you feel doubt, pray doubt. If you feel hope or faith or joy, pray faith, hope, and joy. Pray what you feel - whatever you feel. God can take it. God is big enough. God can handle it. Don't hold back. Give God all your feelings. Give God all your emotions. Give God all your pain and all your hope and all your fears and all your longings. Give God all that you are and all that you ever hope to be. Give everything you are and everything you feel to God.

[16] **If you feel it, pray it.** If you do, something amazing happens. Sometimes it happens quickly. Other times it happens slowly, over the course of many years and many prayers. If you give all of yourself to God, you will discover that God has already given all of himself to you. If you give all that you are and all that you feel to God in prayer - slowly you will begin to experience more of God in your life. It's an exchange, more of you for more of God.

Let me be very honest with you. I am in a waiting place. I am in a time of rebuilding and restructuring in my life. God is reworking me right now. God is teaching me some deep things about life and how to live. This week, when I go into the 24/7 prayer room, I'll be praying a wide range of feelings joy and pain, faith and doubt, fear and hope, frustration and love. At this point in my life, I feel like God's greatest calling for me is to learn joy in the waiting. I'll be praying with all of my feelings that God will empower me to live deeply in the Spirit in *this* moment and the next and the next.

What is your Waiting Place? What is your calling at this time? What are you feeling? Pray it. Pray it all. **If you feel it, pray it.** Pour out your heart to God, and let God pour out his heart to you.