

An All Encompassing Prayer for a New Year

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[0 : 00] On this first Lord's Day of 2014, I want to commend to you a prayer to pray as we seek to follow Jesus into his new year.

It is one of the shortest prayers anyone can pray. But short though it may be, it is one of the most all-encompassing prayers anyone can pray.

It is very easy to memorize. It has two clauses. It's easy enough to work into anyone's busy schedule.

It takes less than five seconds to pray. Ready? I am yours, save me.

Psalm 119 verse 94. I am yours, save me. I could, of course, commend many other prayers to you at the beginning of this year, like the Lord's Prayer.

[1 : 07] Our Father who art in heaven, you who sit on the throne of the universe, hallow your name on earth as it is in heaven. Bring your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Cause your good pleasure to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Cancel our debts as we cancel the debts of others. And when you lead us to the test, do not let the test become a temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

I could also commend to you the other Lord's Prayer. Jesus' Prayer in John 17. Where Jesus opens his heart to the Father. Where he shows us what makes his heart tick.

Father, glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you. Keep my disciples in your name. Keep them from the evil one. Make my joy full in them. Make them one as we are one.

I in them and they in us. Let them be with me where I am. Help them to know that the love you have for me, you also have for them. Father, I want to be in them.

[2 : 09] I could commend to you also the Apostle Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 3. I ask the Father to strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner person. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. I enthusiastically commend such prayers to you. I would be foolish not to. But this morning, I want to especially commend to you the short prayer of Psalm 119.94.

I am yours. Save me. During the months of this past fall, from early September until the Saturday before Christmas, many of you have joined me in praying through the Psalms.

On September 9th, we began with Psalm 1. Blessed are those who. And on December 21st, we concluded with Psalms 148 to 150.

[3 : 19] Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Six times. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Along the way, we have discovered why for centuries the people of God have been drawn to the Psalms.

Again and again, these ancient prayers give us the words we need to say in any and all circumstances of life. We've come to agree with St. Athanasius, the 4th century African theologian who said, Most of Scripture speaks to us.

The Psalms speak for us. Most of Scripture speaks to us about the living God. The Psalms speak for us to the living God. Throughout the fall, we on the church staff have almost daily said to one another, Wow, today's Psalm.

Nailed it. Or, I really needed to pray that today. And many of you have shared similar responses with me. Now, because this discipline has been so meaningful to so many of us, I invite you to do it again.

To enter into yet one more season of praying by the book. Thus, you have in your hands a new prayer calendar. Beginning tomorrow with Psalm 1, Blessed are those who, And concluding on the Saturday before Easter, With Psalm 148 to 150, Hallelujah.

[4 : 41] I have a number of favorite Psalms where I often camp out. Like Psalm 2. As for me, I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.

Referring to the Lord Jesus. Psalm 16. You will make me know the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand are pleasures forever.

And Psalm 139. Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your faith? But my favorite, favorite Psalm is 119.

It's the longest Psalm in the prayer book. It's probably one of the longest prayers anywhere. 176 verses.

It takes about 25 minutes to read out loud. It is one of the most carefully crafted of all the Psalms. It has 22 stanzas. Why 22 stanzas?

[5 : 41] Because one stanza for each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalmist lets the alphabet guide his praying. He simply starts with the first letter, Aleph, And prays whatever that letter triggers in his soul.

Then he moves to the second letter, Bet. And he prays whatever it triggers in his soul. All through, and so on, all through the 22 letters. It's a powerful way to pray. Start with the letter A.

And let it pull out of you what your heart wants to say to God. Then go to the letter B. And let it pull out of your heart what you want to say to God. And make your way through the whole alphabet.

22 stanzas. Each with eight lines. And all eight lines beginning with the same letter. It's an exquisitely crafted psalm.

The psalm is celebrating the gift of God's law. Law? Celebrating law? Who would celebrate law? Because in the law and through the law, The living God is opening up reality to us.

[6 : 50] God is telling us who we are. And God is telling us who he is. The word translated law is the Hebrew word Torah. Now the noun comes from the verb which means to shoot or to throw.

As an archer shoots an arrow. Or as an Olympic athlete throws a javelin. The word also has then the meaning of teach or reveal.

So one Old Testament scholar puts it this way. When one teaches another, He shoots ideas from his mind into another's mind. But in so doing, He reveals what is on his mind.

Torah. Torah. God's shooting what is on his mind to us. God throwing what is in his heart and mind to us.

So of course Israel celebrates. The living God is opening himself up to us. In the 176 verses of Psalm 119, The psalmist then responds to God's Torah.

[8 : 00] That is, In the 176 verses, He opens himself up to God's opening up of himself. And through these 176 verses, He helps us open our mind and heart To God's opening up of his heart and mind.

The psalm is so carefully crafted, There is no repetition in the 176 verses. Now, on surface reading, It appears there's a lot of repetition, But that's not the case. Every line comes at it from a different angle, And from a different perspective.

When we complete this round of praying the psalms, I'm thinking about praying Psalm 119 for 176 days. One line at a time.

And there is one line that I will want to pray every day. Verse 94, The shortest prayer in the longest psalm.

I am yours, save me. Will you say the words with me? I am yours, save me. Again, please.

[9 : 11] I am yours, save me. I belong to you, O Lord. Save me. Because I cannot. I cannot save myself.

Only you can save me. Only you can save anyone. Only you can save the world. No religion can do it. No organization can do it. No government can do it. No self-help program can do it.

Only you can do it. I am yours, save me. Now, I do not know exactly what the author of Psalm 119 was thinking or feeling as he prayed this short prayer.

It's safe to assume that he had in mind everything else he prays in the other 175 verses. That is, his verb, save, would encompass all the other requests he makes for God's saving help.

Like forgive, cleanse, revive, lead. And I think it's safe to assume that his save me also encompasses the request for God's saving help in all the other psalms in the prayer book.

[10:17] We disciples of Jesus, of course, cannot help but pray the short prayer in light of the gospel. We cannot help but pray the prayer in light of Christmas when the Torah of God became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

We cannot help but pray any prayer in light of Jesus' life and teaching, in light of Jesus' death and resurrection, in light of Jesus' ascension and coming again.

So, I think we can rightly expand the short prayer into a slightly longer but still easy to memorize prayer.

In light of Jesus' life and saying, Every way a human being needs to be saved.

What a prayer. In that last phrase, I am quoting from the end of the movie, The Titanic. Remember? Rose, who survives the tragedy, is speaking about Jack, her lover, who sacrificed his life for her that she might go on living.

[11:53] And at the end of the movie, Rose says of Jack, He saved me in a way every human being needs to be saved. Slightly audacious to say of Jack.

But not audacious to say of the God who comes to us in and as Jesus. He can and does save us in every way a human being needs to be saved.

So, the prayer is, I am yours. In every way a human being can be yours. Save me in every way that a human being needs to be saved.

What a prayer. I want to now illustrate just how all-encompassing this short prayer turns out to be. So, for the next 10 to 12 minutes, I'm going to pray in your hearing what this five-second prayer awakens in my heart and mind.

[12:55] And I'm hoping that as you hear me pray, your soul along the way will be saying, Yes, Lord, me too.

Here we go. Living God, I'm yours. I'm yours by creation. You made me.

I did not make myself. You, the living triune God, made me. I am not a chemical biological accident. I'm not the product of some random evolutionary process.

You made me. You. You willed me into existence. You formed me in my mother's womb and did so for yourself. You made me for yourself. You made me for your own pleasure.

I am yours by creation. I am yours by election. I don't know how it works. But you chose me in Jesus Christ from the foundation of the world.

[13:57] You chose me before I did anything to earn your choosing. You chose me before I could do anything to unearn your choosing. There's nothing I can do to reverse your choosing.

I am yours because you chose me to make me yours. I'm yours by redemption. You acted to redeem me, to purchase me.

When, like all other human beings, I was caught in sin, you came and you bought me with a price, with the price of the blood of Jesus. You paid the ransom for me. You bought me for yourself.

I'm your possession. And like all your possessions, I'm a highly prized possession. No one can take you from me. You have redeemed me for yourself. I'm yours by justification.

You've already dealt with my case in the courtroom. You have ruled that I am acquitted of all my rebellion. You have declared me righteous and justified because of what Jesus has done for me.

[14:59] You have declared that as far as you're concerned, I have kept the entire law. I have not, but you have declared it so. Oh, mercy, mercy, mercy.

I'm yours by justification. I'm yours by reconciliation. You overcame your holy hostility toward my sin, and you made me your friend.

You turned me, your enemy, into your friend. Amazing love. I'm yours by adoption. You go beyond redemption and justification and reconciliation and adopt me into your family.

When I was lost and kept wandering from you, you searched me out, and you brought me into your home. You could have left me on the street, but you didn't. You adopted me.

And like every other adopted son and daughter, you treat me like you treat Jesus, the only begotten of the Father. You now bestow on me the same status and dignity that the only begotten has had from all eternity.

[16:03] You did not have to do this. You did not have to bring me into your family as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But you did. I'm yours by adoption. I'm yours by engagement.

You have come from the Father's house, and you have proposed to me. And you have made me, along with all the others you choose, the bride of Christ.

Oh, how I am yours. I'm yours by conquest. When I was running the other way, you ran after me. Indeed, you outran me, and you overtook me.

You apprehended me. You seized me. You conquered me. I'm yours by occupation. You have come, and now you occupy me.

You have come and take up residence in me, Christ in me, the hope of glory. Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? You are now dwelling in me, in every part of me, my mind, my heart, my body, my soul.

[17 : 04] I'm yours by volition. I will to be yours. I want to be yours. I'm yours by self-surrender. I surrender to your relentless pursuit of me.

I choose to give in to your relentless love. I choose your choosing of me. Living God, I am yours in every way a human being can be yours. So save me.

In every way a human being needs to be saved. Save me from myself. I am my own worst enemy, oh Lord. I keep trying to be my own master.

Please do not let me do it. Trying to be my own master just messes everything up. Save me from the self turned in on itself.

Save me from the grip of sin. From so often missing the mark. From regularly trespassing clearly marked boundaries. From that twistedness in the soul that makes us miss the mark and step over the line.

[18 : 08] Save me from the state of sin. You have rescued us, I know. But we still see sin all around us. Do not let me fall back to it in any way.

Do not let me wander from you. Do not let me suddenly justify even the slightest expression of sin. Save me from the consequences of sin.

From guilt, from shame. From alienation from you and from others. From addiction to things not of you. From death. Save me from sin's curse of death. You have and you will and you are.

My heart knows that. But help me experience the full realization of it. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Save me for the full realization of grace.

Oh dear God. Save me from that deeply rooted sense that I can still and must save myself. I keep thinking that I have to add to the work of the cross.

[19 : 08] I keep thinking that there's something more that I must do to have friendship with you. Please, dear God, save me from sin's lie. Save me from the evil one.

The father of lies. He keeps lying to my soul. He keeps telling me that I have to add to the work of Jesus. He keeps messing with my mind. He keeps lying to me about you.

Creating suspicion in my soul. The suspicion that you are really not for me. That you're not as good as you say you are. Why, oh God? Why do I keep giving the voice of the enemy more space in my head than your voice?

Why do I keep giving the enemy's voice any attention at all? He's so subtle and manipulative. Save me from him, dear God. Save me from doubting you.

You are good. So very good. You've proved this over and over again. Yet so much goes on around me and goes on in the world that questions your involvement and your sovereignty. Save me from discouragement.

[20 : 11] Save me from resentment. Save me from bitterness. Save me from self-pity. Save me from fear, oh God. I don't want to act out of fear.

Save me from the gods and goddesses of consumerism. Every day I'm bombarded by the law that I need all this stuff to be happy. I do need some of it, but not nearly as much as the lie tells me.

Don't let me be seduced, dear God. Save me from vanity. The vanity in my own soul and the vanity that swirls all around us.

Save me from the empty pursuit of what finally is empty. And from futility. Save me from futile quests like the quest for power and fame.

Do not let me waste time and energy on what really does not matter. And oh God, save me from my shadow side. Save me from any hidden sin.

[21 : 13] Do not let it have any sway over me. Save me from acting out of this deep woundedness in my soul. Do not let me in any way be driven by the wounds around my identity.

Do not let me be driven by the hurts others inflict on me. Heal the wounds, oh Savior. Save me from the inappropriate ways of coping with pain that are so ingrained in my soul.

They never work. They only induce more guilt and shame. Free me from these habits shaped by the darkness. Save me into the light of your holy life. Save me from the need to control. And to be in control. It's all so subtle. I'm not wise enough, dear God, to quickly spot when it happens. Please do not let me fall into this need of having to have life go my way. Please help me relinquish to your control. Save my mind so I think your thoughts. Save my heart so I feel your feelings. Save my will so I will your will.

[22 : 19] Free me to will your will and only your will. Oh God, save me from trying to find my soul satisfaction in anything but you. I've lived long enough now, dear God.

I should know that only you can satisfy the longings of the human heart. Save me for yourself. Breathe your breath in me again and again and again.

Fill me with your spirit again and again. Save me for your glory. Use me to joyfully announce the unfathomable riches of Christ. And oh God, help me finish well.

And bring me safely into the heavenly home. Save me for the reason you even bothered making me.

I'm yours. In every way a human being can be yours. So save me in every way a human being needs to be saved. And save the world in every way the world needs to be saved.

[23 : 21] As I've been praying this short prayer over the last little while, the first lines of the Heidelberg Catechism keep looming in me. Question one.

What is your only comfort in life and in death? Answer one. My only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own, but that I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

I want to repeat all that again. Question one. What is your only comfort in life and in death? Answer one. My only comfort in life and in death is that I do not belong to myself, but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the price of His own precious blood has fully paid for all my sins and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He so watches over me that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to Him, Christ by His Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

I'm yours. Save me. And when I then say the amen, I hear Him say, Amen.

[24 : 52] Yes, you are mine. And I am yours. It's the foundational affirmation of all the covenants God has ever made with humanity and especially the new covenant.

I will be your God and you will be my people. So come to the table where He who was born in the stable says with great joy, You are mine.

And I'm yours. And because you are mine and I'm yours, I have saved you and I will save you and I am saving you right now.

Amen. Amen.