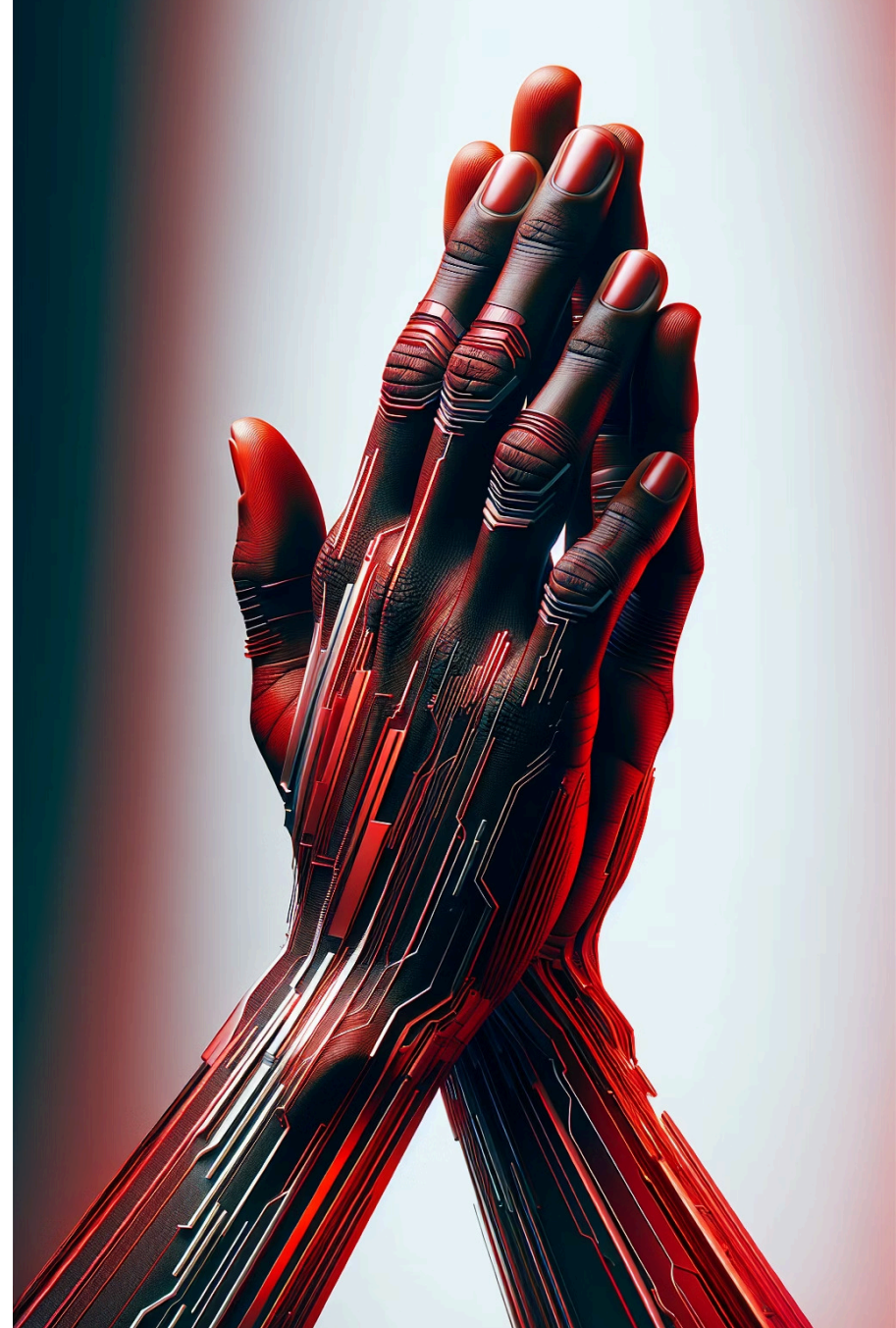


Week 9: Have A Little Talk With Jesus

Learning The Language of Prayer

Welcome to the ninth week of our journey into deeper prayer practices. This week, we explore one of the most challenging yet necessary forms of prayer: crying out to God for justice in the face of oppression and injustice.



Imprecatory Prayer: Crying Out for Justice

This week we examine a form of prayer that may feel uncomfortable at first, but has deep roots in Scripture and in the Black church tradition. Imprecatory prayers are honest cries to God when we witness injustice, when we feel the weight of oppression, and when we need God to intervene against evil.

Our foundation texts include Psalm 55, Psalm 109, and Revelation 6:10, each offering a window into how God's people have always brought their pain, anger, and longing for justice directly before the throne of grace.



Psalm 55

David's cry for deliverance from betrayal and violence



Psalm 109

An intense prayer for God's justice against the wicked



Revelation 6:10

The martyrs' cry: "How long, O Lord?"



Opening Our Hearts in Song and Prayer

Opening Hymn

"We Shall Overcome" or "I'm Gonna Lay Down My Burden"

These songs of the movement remind us that our prayers for justice stand in a long tradition of faithful resistance. They connect us to those who came before, who also cried out to God in their darkest hours, trusting that God hears the prayers of the oppressed.

Opening Prayer

"God of justice, hear our cry. When we are weary, give us courage to speak truth and to trust You for deliverance. Help us to pray honestly, to lament freely, and to believe that You will make all things right. Amen."

Opening Scriptures: The Biblical Witness

Psalm 55:15 (NRSVUE)

"Let death come upon them; let them go down alive to Sheol, for evil is in their homes and in their hearts."

David doesn't mince words when he brings his pain before God. He names the evil he sees and asks God to act.

Psalm 109 (NRSVUE)

This entire psalm is a powerful cry for God's intervention against those who have acted wickedly. It reflects the depth of pain that injustice creates and the need to bring that pain honestly before God.

Revelation 6:10 (NRSVUE)

"They cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?'"

Even the martyrs in heaven cry out for justice. This is not vengeful hatred, it is righteous longing for God's kingdom to come.

What Are Imprecatory Prayers?



Imprecatory prayers are those bold, honest prayers where we call on God to judge wickedness, to stop injustice, and to vindicate the oppressed. They appear throughout the Psalms and in the prophets, and they reflect a deep theological truth: God cares about justice, and God invites us to bring our pain and anger about injustice directly to the divine presence.

These prayers are not rooted in personal hatred or a desire for personal revenge. Rather, they emerge from a place of deep trust in God's character as a God of justice. They acknowledge that we are not the ultimate judges, God is. We bring our pain, our rage, our exhaustion with evil before the One who alone can make things right.

Prayers That Call for Divine Justice

These are prayers where we ask God to intervene, to stop the hand of the oppressor, to judge those who perpetrate evil, and to deliver those who suffer under injustice.

Rooted in Trust, Not Hatred

The key distinction is this: imprecatory prayers are not about us taking revenge. They are about trusting God enough to hand over our anger, our pain, and our desire for justice to the One who judges rightly.

Honesty Before God

These prayers give us permission to be fully honest with God about what we feel when we witness injustice, about the pain and anger and weariness that come from living in a broken world where evil often seems to triumph.

Richard Foster's Lens: Prayers of Intercession and Tears

While Richard Foster does not explicitly discuss imprecatory prayers by name in his classic work on prayer, his category of "Prayers of Intercession" and his emphasis on bringing our whole selves before God provide a framework for understanding these difficult prayers. Foster reminds us that God is not afraid of our honesty, that God meets us exactly where we are, even when where we are is angry, hurt, and crying out for justice.



God Meets Us in Our Honesty

Foster teaches that prayer is about authenticity. We do not need to sanitize our feelings or pretend to be more holy than we are. God already knows what is in our hearts. Imprecatory prayers allow us to bring the fullness of our pain before God without pretense.



Prayers of Tears

Foster speaks of prayers that emerge from deep sorrow, from witnessing suffering, from the groan of creation longing for redemption. Imprecatory prayers fit within this tradition. they are the tears of the oppressed made vocal.



Purifying Anger Through Prayer

When we bring our anger to God in prayer rather than acting on it ourselves, something transformative happens. Our desire for personal vengeance is refined into a cry for divine justice. Prayer purifies our anger, keeping it from becoming bitterness or hatred.

Howard Thurman on Righteous Anger and Love

"The awareness of evil must not destroy the capacity for love."

— Howard Thurman

Howard Thurman, mystic and spiritual guide to the Civil Rights Movement, understood deeply the tension between naming evil and maintaining a heart of love. He knew firsthand the weight of living under systemic oppression, and he also knew that bitterness and hatred could destroy the soul as surely as external oppression could destroy the body.

Thurman taught that lament and righteous anger are not only permissible, they are holy when they are surrendered to God's purposes rather than allowed to fester into vengeance. Prayer becomes the crucible where our anger is tested, refined, and redirected toward God's justice rather than our own retribution.



Recognizing Evil Clearly

We must name injustice for what it is. Silence in the face of evil is complicity. Thurman calls us to see clearly and to speak truthfully about what we see.



Bringing It to God in Prayer

Rather than letting anger consume us or harden into bitterness, we bring it to God. Prayer becomes the place where we process our rage and our pain in God's presence.



Transformed for Love and Justice

Through prayer, our righteous anger is transformed. It becomes fuel for the work of justice rather than poison for our souls. We can act for justice without losing our capacity to love.

James Cone on Justice and Divine Wrath

James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology, understood that God's wrath is not the opposite of God's love, it is actually an expression of it. When we see God's anger in Scripture, we are seeing God's passionate commitment to justice, God's refusal to let oppression have the final word.

"The wrath of God is the love of God in conflict with injustice."

— James Cone

Cone argued that the God of the Bible is not neutral in the face of oppression. God takes sides. God stands with the oppressed against the oppressor. This is the God who hears the cry of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt and acts to deliver them. This is the God who, in Jesus, proclaims good news to the poor and release to the captives.

Black Prayer Tradition

The Black church has always known how to cry out, *"How long, Lord?"* From slavery through Jim Crow to mass incarceration, this prayer has been on the lips of God's people.

Theology of Resistance

Imprecatory prayer is not passive. It is a form of resistance, a refusal to accept injustice as normal, a declaration that God still moves against Pharaoh.

Scripture Witness: The Biblical Foundation

Imprecatory prayers are not an aberration in Scripture. they are woven throughout the biblical witness, particularly in the Psalms and the prophets. These prayers remind us that the people of God have always brought their pain and their longing for justice before the Lord.

Psalms 94:1,2 (NRSVUE)

"O Lord, you God of vengeance, you God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; give to the proud what they deserve!"

The psalmist calls directly on God to act as judge, to rise up and deal with those who oppress the vulnerable.

Luke 1:46-55 (NRSVUE)

Mary's Magnificat is itself a kind of imprecatory prayer. She praises God for scattering the proud, bringing down the powerful from their thrones, and sending the rich away empty. This is revolutionary prayer.

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2

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Jeremiah 20:11,12 (NRSVUE)

"But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior... O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them."

Even the prophet Jeremiah, in his deep anguish, asks God to vindicate him against those who persecute him.

Luke 18:7 (NRSVUE)

"And will not God grant justice to the chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?"

Jesus himself affirms that God hears the persistent cries for justice and will act on behalf of those who call out.

African American Witness: A Legacy of Crying Out

The African American church has a long, sacred tradition of imprecatory prayer. From the earliest days of enslavement to the present struggle against systemic racism, Black Christians have brought their pain and their longing for justice before God. These prayers have sustained communities through unimaginable suffering and have fueled movements for liberation and justice.

Enslaved Prayers for Deliverance

"God, trouble the waters." In the hush harbors and brush arbors, enslaved Africans prayed for deliverance, for God to disrupt the system of bondage, for freedom to come. These were imprecatory prayers, asking God to act against the evil of slavery.

Civil Rights Laments

"How long must we endure hatred?" During the Civil Rights Movement, churches became centers of prayer and resistance. The people cried out to God, asking how long injustice would prevail, trusting that God would vindicate their cause.

The Prophetic Cry Today

"If God be for us, who can stand against us?"
The Black church continues to pray imprecatory prayers today, in the face of police brutality, mass incarceration, economic injustice, and ongoing racism. These prayers declare that God is still God, and evil will not have the last word.

The Nature of Imprecatory Prayer

To pray imprecatory prayers faithfully, we must understand their nature and purpose. These prayers are not about cursing our enemies or seeking personal revenge. They are about bringing the full reality of injustice before God and trusting God to act according to divine wisdom and timing.

01

Truth-Telling: Naming Injustice Before God

Imprecatory prayer begins with honesty. We name the injustice we see. We refuse to pretend that everything is fine when it is not. We bring the truth of our situation, our pain, our anger, directly before God without sugarcoating or spiritual platitudes.

03

Transformation: Refining Righteous Anger

As we pray, something happens within us. Our anger does not disappear, but it is refined. It becomes righteous anger, anger at injustice rather than hatred of persons. This refined anger can fuel the work of justice without consuming our souls.

02

Trust: Leaving Vengeance in God's Hands

The heart of imprecatory prayer is trust. We trust that God is just, that God sees what we see and more, and that God will act according to divine justice and mercy. We hand over our desire for revenge, acknowledging that vengeance belongs to the Lord alone.

04

Action: Praying with Our Feet

Imprecatory prayer does not replace action. It empowers it. We pray for God's justice, and then we get up and work for justice with our hands and feet, trusting that our labor is not in vain because God is at work in the world.

Pitfalls and Pathways to Growth

Pitfalls to Avoid

Using Prayer as Personal Revenge

If our prayers are motivated by hatred or a desire to see our enemies suffer for our own satisfaction, we have missed the point. Imprecatory prayer is about God's justice, not our revenge.

Suppressing Anger Instead of Confessing It

Some of us have been taught that anger is always sinful, that we should never feel or express it. But suppressing righteous anger does not make it go away. It drives it underground where it becomes bitterness. Imprecatory prayer gives us a way to express anger honestly and healthily.

Pathways to Growth

Praying Truthfully Keeps the Soul Healthy

When we bring our honest emotions before God, we do not have to carry them alone. Prayer becomes a way of processing our pain and anger in God's presence, which keeps these emotions from poisoning our hearts.

Keeping Conscience Awake

Imprecatory prayers keep us spiritually alert to injustice. They prevent us from becoming numb or complacent in the face of evil. They remind us that God cares about justice and calls us to care as well.

**To believe in
God is to
believe that the
last word on
oppression has
not yet been
spoken.**

— James Cone

This powerful declaration from James Cone captures the essence of imprecatory prayer. When we cry out to God for justice, we are declaring our faith that oppression does not have the final say, that evil will not triumph forever, that God's justice will ultimately prevail. This is not wishful thinking. It is theological conviction rooted in the character of God and the testimony of Scripture.



Discussion Questions

Take time as a group to explore these questions together. Create space for honest reflection and conversation. Remember that there are no wrong answers when we are genuinely seeking to understand and grow.

Question 1: Revenge vs. Righteous Anger

What is the difference between seeking revenge and expressing righteous anger? How do we discern our own motivations when we are hurt or angry about injustice? Share examples from your own life or from current events.

Question 2: Praying Without Bitterness

How can we pray about injustice without becoming bitter or consumed by hatred? What practices help us maintain hope and love even as we cry out for justice? What role does community play in this?

Question 3: Modern Injustices

What modern injustices need our honest prayers today? Think locally and globally. What situations of oppression, violence, or systemic evil weigh on your spirit? How might we pray imprecatory prayers about these situations?

Practice Exercise: Praying the Psalms

This week's practice invites us to enter into the tradition of imprecatory prayer through Scripture, personal reflection, and creative expression. Take your time with each element, allowing the Spirit to move in your heart.



Read Psalm 10 Aloud as a Group

Psalm 10 is a powerful cry to God about the wicked who oppress the poor and vulnerable. Read it together, slowly, letting the words sink in. Notice the psalmist's honesty, the vivid description of injustice, and the ultimate trust in God's justice.



Silent Reflection

After reading, sit in silence for 3 to 5 minutes. Ask yourself: What injustice weighs on my spirit right now? What situation makes me want to cry out to God, "*How long?*" Allow whatever comes to mind to simply be present without judgment.



Optional Writing Exercise

If you feel led, compose a short modern psalm of lament and justice. Write honestly about what troubles you, name the injustice you see, and ask God to act. End with a statement of trust in God's character and justice. Share with the group if you are comfortable.

Memory Verse and Key Takeaway

Memory Verse

"O Lord, you God of vengeance, you God of vengeance, shine forth!"

— Psalm 94:1 (NRSVUE)

Key Takeaway

Imprecatory prayer lets us cry out honestly for God's justice. It is not rooted in hatred or personal revenge, but in deep trust that God sees injustice and will act. These prayers give us permission to bring our full selves before God, including our anger and our pain, and they keep us spiritually awake to the reality of evil in the world.

When we pray imprecatory prayers, we declare our hope that evil will not have the last word, that God's justice will ultimately prevail, and that the arc of the moral universe, though long, truly does bend toward justice because God bends it.

Closing Prayer: God of justice and mercy, thank you for inviting us to bring our honest cries before you. Help us to pray truthfully, to trust deeply, and to act faithfully for justice in our world. May our prayers keep our hearts soft, our consciences awake, and our hope alive. In the name of Jesus, who wept over injustice and promised that the last shall be first, we pray. Amen.