

Psalm 28:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee,
when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

Analysis

Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle. This verse continues the urgent petition while introducing the posture and direction of prayer. David doesn't merely think prayers but cries aloud, engages physically, and orients toward God's presence.

"Hear the voice of my supplications" (שְׁמָע קֹל תְּחִנּוּנִי/shema qol tachanunai) intensifies the previous verse's plea. Shema is the great Hebrew imperative: "Hear!" or "Listen!" (as in Shema Israel, Deuteronomy 6:4). Tachanun means supplication, plea for grace, earnest entreaty. The plural form suggests multiple petitions, ongoing prayers, various needs brought before God.

"When I cry unto thee" (בְּשָׁבֵךְ אֲלֵיכָה/beshav'i eleikha) emphasizes vocal, emotional expression. Shava means to cry for help, call out in distress. This isn't calm meditation but desperate crying out. Biblical prayer includes quiet contemplation but also urgent crying—Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Emotional honesty characterizes authentic biblical spirituality.

"When I lift up my hands" (בְּנַשְׁאֵי יָדַי/benos'i yadai) describes prayer's physical posture. Lifting hands toward heaven was ancient Israel's standard prayer posture, signifying reaching toward God, openness to receive, and surrender. Solomon lifted hands dedicating the temple (1 Kings 8:22). Paul instructed: "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands" (1 Timothy 2:8). Physical posture

can engage our whole being in prayer, not through mechanical ritual but as expression of inner attitude.

"Toward thy holy oracle" (devir/Holy of Holies) reveals prayer's direction. The devir was the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary where God's presence dwelt between the cherubim above the ark (1 Kings 6:19-20; 8:6). Though physically distant from the temple, David prays toward God's dwelling place, acknowledging God's revealed presence. Solomon later prayed that God would hear prayers directed toward the temple (1 Kings 8:29-30, 35, 38, 42, 44, 48).

This verse teaches prayer involves the whole person—voice (vocal expression), heart (emotional authenticity), body (physical posture), and orientation (directing attention toward God's revealed presence). Prayer isn't merely mental activity but comprehensive engagement with the living God.

Historical Context

The reference to the "holy oracle" (devir/Holy of Holies) places this psalm after the temple's construction, or perhaps anticipates it. If Davidic authorship is maintained and this references the existing temple, it must post-date Solomon's building project, or David may be praying toward the tabernacle's Most Holy Place.

Ancient Israelite worship centered on the temple as God's dwelling place. Unlike pagan temples viewed as houses for idol-statues, Israel's temple represented God's actual presence—not contained by it but manifested there. The Holy of Holies, entered only by the high priest once yearly on Yom Kippur, was sacred space where heaven and earth intersected.

Lifting hands in prayer appears throughout ancient Near Eastern iconography, but Israel's practice had distinct theological meaning. This wasn't manipulation of divine powers through magical gestures but physical expression of spiritual reality—reaching toward God, demonstrating dependence, showing openness to receive.

The practice of praying toward Jerusalem/the temple continued even in exile. Daniel "went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed" (Daniel 6:10). Jews in diaspora maintained this practice, and Muslims later adopted similar practice (qibla) praying toward Mecca.

After Christ's coming, physical location matters less. Jesus told the Samaritan woman: "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-23). Yet the principle remains—directing attention toward where God has revealed Himself. Now believers approach God through Christ, our great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), who enters the true Holy of Holies in heaven on our behalf.

Early Christians adopted hands-raised prayer posture, seen in catacomb art showing orans position (standing with raised hands). This continued through church history, though Western Christianity eventually adopted hands-folded posture. Many traditions today are recovering ancient physical prayer expressions.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does crying out to God with emotional honesty differ from calm, controlled prayer, and does Scripture suggest one is more authentic than the other?
2. What is the significance of physical posture in prayer (lifting hands), and how can engaging our bodies in prayer affect our spiritual focus?
3. How does praying 'toward' the temple (or now, through Christ) differ from generic spiritual meditation without specific orientation toward God's revealed presence?

4. In what ways can believers today direct their prayers 'toward God's holy oracle' now that Christ has opened direct access to God's presence?
5. What does David's comprehensive engagement in prayer—voice, emotion, body, orientation—teach about avoiding mechanical or merely intellectual approaches to prayer?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵשָׁא	וְ	אֶל	יְבָשֵׁעָנִי	בְּשִׁיעָרִי	שְׁמָעָנִי	וְ	לְ	קְרָנְכִּי	תְּ	חִנּוּבִי	וְ	בְּשִׁיעָרִי	אֶל	יְבָשֵׁעָנִי	בְּנֵשָׁא	
Hear	the voice	of my supplications	when I cry	unto thee when I lift up												
H8085	H6963	H8469	H7768	H413												
my hands	oracle	toward thy holy														
H3027	H413	H1687	H6944													

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 138:2 (Holy): I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.

Psalms 141:2 (Parallel theme): Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

1 Timothy 2:8 (Holy): I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Psalms 5:7 (Holy): But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.

Psalms 140:6 (Parallel theme): I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.

Psalms 134:2 (Parallel theme): Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

Daniel 6:10 (Parallel theme): Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward

Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

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