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Complementary Prayers: Prayers to Accompany the Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the New Hymnal Lift Up Your Hearts

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Calvin Symposium on Worship 2014

A19: Complementary Prayers: Prayers to Accompany the Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs of the New Hymnal *Lift Up Your Hearts*

The main idea: prayers and songs can fortify each other. Prayers written to complement songs are ligament prayers.

A. Operating assumptions:

--Praise falls into the category of what's fitting.

--Thanksgiving is exhalation within the Christian's respiratory pattern.

--Lament takes faith.

--In the providence of God, intercession may do the ones-interceded-for some good, but are sure to do the interceder some good.

--In the heavenly realms prayer is heard (or overheard) by more than one listener.

B. **Sing** #537 "Open the Eyes of My Heart" (Paul Baloche)1. *At the opening of worship:*

Gracious God, Master of the Universe, you who are holy beyond human thinking and glorious beyond human telling, lift us now toward your holiness and point us toward your glory. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord; we want to see you shining in the splendor of your light. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sing #537, Opening lines (w/repeat)

2. *For the service of reconciliation:*

Wonderful God, radiant in your splendor, we confess how often we avert our eyes from your glory, seeing instead what we want to see and watching whom we want to watch. We choose to watch what is shameful, or vengeful, or disdainful, gradually becoming more like what we watch. Before it is too late for us, open the eyes of our hearts, Lord, that we may gaze on your holiness and be healed through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Sing #537 Opening lines (w/repeat)

3. *For illumination before teaching/preaching:*

We turn now to your Word, gracious God, praying that you will illuminate it through the radiance of your Holy Spirit, that, drawn to the light, we may spot a part of your glory. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord; we want to see you through your perfect image, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sing #537 Opening lines (w/repeat)

4. *At the close of worship:*

Eternal God, shining in glory like a thousand suns, you have shone on us in this time of worship, lighting up your work and Word; lighting up the faces of our brothers and sisters, drawing us toward the splendor of your presence, which is else too high for us. You have opened the eyes of our hearts, Lord, to see your glory. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.

C. #538 “Holy, Holy, Holy”

Lord God Almighty, our prayer rises to you in all your mercy and power. Your inner life is a dazzling mystery of glory and love, and we have beheld your glory in the One incarnate. You are merciful and mighty, God in three persons, blessed Trinity, and we worship you in the power of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Sidebar: Have too many Christians lost the sense of God’s holiness? Has God become safe?]

Antidotes: worship that is deliberately reverent in context-specific ways: silences, tone, rhetorical register, avoidance of fillers

Another antidote: use of songs/prayers that confess human sin

D. Sing #623:1-3 “God, Be Merciful to Me”

A Prayer for Lent

God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I am in trouble, and I caused my trouble. I am in trouble not because the world is unjust, but because I am unjust. I am unjust not because the devil made me unjust but because I made me unjust. I have no excuse. I am a sinner because I sin. I sin because I am a sinner. So wash me, make me pure within; cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sing #623:1 “God, Be Merciful to Me”

While we’re still in the antidote department: songs/prayers centered in justice and lament, e.g.

E. Sing #647:1-3 Come, Sing to God with All Your Heart

A Prayer for Vindication

O God, make this a bad day for tyrants. Displace them with righteous rulers. Vindicate the oppressed. Right their wrongs. Raise them back up to the full stature of human beings created in your image. Crown them with glory and honor, so that even their children and infants will silence foes and avengers by singing your praise with all their hearts. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sing #647:4-5

F. #650 “O When Will We See Justice Done?”*A Prayer of Lament*

God of justice, when will we see justice done? When will the righteous win? Why do the powerless have no one to speak for them? Why do the powerful amass more power? How long will legislators bicker instead of passing solid laws? Why do the wronged have to wait so long to be put right? God of justice, in the name of Jesus, when will we see justice done? Amen.

While we're still in the antidote department: prayers that recite God's mighty acts as prelude to petition, affirmation, praise, or thanks. (Else adoration floats free of its rationale.) E.g.,

G. Sing #757 “O Word of God Incarnate”*A Prayer of Praise to Jesus Christ* (mighty acts as prelude to thanks and praise)

O Word of God Incarnate, O Wisdom from on High, you mediated at creation, pouring your self-giving love into the world. You mediated our salvation, taking our flesh, taking our pain, taking the death we deserved. You mediate for us now as our flesh in heaven. Wisdom from on High, you have gone back on High for us and for our salvation. And so we thank and praise you with tender hearts. Amen.

H. Sing #743 “O God, You Are My God”*A Prayer for God's Leading* (mighty acts as rationale for following God)

Loving God, you led your people from Egypt through the wilderness and into the promised land.

Lead us too.

You led your son Jesus out of the grave in second Exodus.

Lead us too.

You led the great apostle Paul through rivers, past robbers, out of shipwreck, into world mission.

Lead us too, O God. Lead us in Jesus' name. Amen.**Sing #743 “O God, You Are My God”**

[Sidebar “In Jesus' name” “In your name”]

Prayers/songs that address the Holy Spirit (Note on prayer to the Holy Spirit)

I. Sing #747 “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”*A Prayer for the Spirit to Breathe on Me*

Breathe on me, breath of God. I am empty; fill me. I am chilly; warm me. I am suffocating under the mound of my unconfessed sin; revive me. Breathe on me breath of God; fill me with life anew in Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

Sing #747 “Breathe on Me, Breath of God”

J. Problem: Songs of high emotion are hard to match in prayer, so the complementary prayer may be emotionally more brisk.

#615 “Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling . . . Come home, come home, you who are weary, come home”)

A Prayer of Confession and Assurance

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us. You are the one who calls not the righteous but sinners. You call through our defiance, through our confusion, through the first turning of our hearts toward you. Softly you call, tenderly you call, always you call, waiting to renew our hearts and bring us home. All in Your wonderful name. Amen.

K. A Wesley/Gounod closing hymn, with complementary prayer:

Sing #667 “Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies”*A Prayer in Eastertide*

O Lord Jesus Christ, you who have triumphed over the shade of night, rise above our shadowed lives. Rise above our doubts. Rise above our sorrows. Rise above every bad memory and crumbling hope. Sun of righteousness, arise, and make your resurrection the magnet for ours. Amen.

The main idea: prayers and songs can fortify each other. Prayers written to complement songs are ligament prayers.