

## May our prayers be as INCENSE

### Psalm 141:2



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*All scriptures are NKJV unless noted otherwise.*

**KEY WORDS:** *incense, prayers, prayer as incense, altar of incense, frankincense.*

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**Summary:** *I pray this teaching will reignite our prayers into what they should be: a delightful fragrance to God throughout the day. What can we learn from incense offered to God? How often was it offered? What were its ingredients? How does it picture us? What's the connection between incense and our prayers? Why does this even matter? You'll be inspired I hope.*

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**How many of you know what incense is?** Do you like the smell of incense? I'm Philip Shields, founder of Light on the Rock. I'm not a big fan of incense, at least the ones I've come in contact with – probably nothing like the incense of God in the Tabernacle. So for some of us, maybe we don't care for the smell of incense – especially in certain stores. But God has much to say about incense and us.

Do you know that God *loves* the incense recipe he created and even made a law that He *wanted* His incense to be refreshed twice a day in his temple or tabernacle – at the morning and evening sacrifice times, about 9 am and mid-late afternoon – and wanted that incense burning all day and night long. He loved even more what the incense represents to God!

I'll describe it more soon, but realize this was a *fragrant* smell, a fragrance to God that pleased him. What did incense picture? You might be surprised. What was the point of this altar of incense burning a kind of fragrant smoke inside the tabernacle that God liked so much?

#### **Psalms 141:1-2**

**"YHVH, I cry out to You; Make haste to me!**

**Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You.**

**2 Let my PRAYER be set before You as INCENSE,  
The **lifting up of my hands** as the evening sacrifice."**

Our prayers are seen by God – or accepted as a nice scent by God – just like the sweet fragrance of the incense from the altar of incense.

*I'm hoping this sermon today will help us improve and revive our prayers into pleasing offerings to God each day.*

In verse 2, David also mentions praying with **uplifted hands** or arms. I've spoken on that at times. Are you praying with hands raised up to God? So many of you refuse to do even what the Bible tells us to do if you see believers in other churches that you don't agree with – doing it. Like praying with raised hands. Forget what other churches do. Just do what God says!

**But mainly today I want to cover, just how are our prayers are to be like a sweet smelling INCENSE to God.** Have you ever thought of your prayers being as incense, and what that could mean? That's our topic today: Realizing your prayers are – to God – a sweet smelling fragrance like incense. How does that happen?

**There was in the tabernacle and temple – just in front of the veil of the Holy of Holies, an Altar of incense.** This altar was fairly small, made of acacia wood, then covered completely in gold. It was about a foot and a half wide, and a foot and a half long and about 3 feet high, less than a meter high. God commanded the priests to burn incense on this golden altar every morning and evening, exactly when the burnt offerings outside, on the big brazen altar were being conducted, around 9 am and 3 pm.

The incense was actually left burning continually as a sweet smelling aroma to Yehovah. It was made up of four equal parts of precious spices and God didn't allow just anyone to make that incense for their own use on pain of death!

**I'm hoping this teaching today will inspire and sober us and refresh the way we approach God Most High, your Abba/Father in heaven, when you pray. It may even *change* the way we pray.**

Keep in mind that God's ingredients for his incense would not be at all like the Woodstock or hippie incense you smell in their shops. **God's incense was considered holy and made up of** equal parts of four precious spices (stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense).

**INGREDIENTS:** The **Stacte** could have been myrrh or a gum resembling myrrh. The **Onycha** was actually the shell of a perfumed mollusk, which when burned yielded a musky odor. **Galbanum** was a GUM you got

from cutting into a bark or shrub of that region. **Frankincense** -- a pale yellow, semi-transparent resin that was fragrant when burned. These were mixed together.

Turn to Luke 1. John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, was inside the first room of the tabernacle – the holy place where menorah and altar of incense were – and was about to offer incense, when the mighty angel Gabriel appeared with good tidings to him.

**Luke 1:8-13**

“So it was, that while he was serving **as priest before God in the order of his division**, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, **his lot fell to burn incense** when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the **people was praying outside at the hour of incense.**

11 Then an angel of the Lord [V. 19 – Gabriel] **appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.** 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

13 But the angel said to him, "**Do not be afraid**, Zacharias, **for your prayer is heard**; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.”

Here, incense is being connected with prayer that was heard.

Let's read more scriptures about prayer and incense tied together. Your prayers, remember, are going somewhere. It's not just your voice mouthing words that go nowhere. No – if you're in a room with incense, you're aware of that incense. God is very aware of your prayers, even ones you feel are ineffective. Remember, Jesus himself intercedes and cleans up our prayers (Romans 8:26-27, 34) so they're perfectly acceptable.

Let's make a side trip now to heaven. God the Most High God is on his throne. On the side of the throne in Revelation 5 is a scroll with seals on it and nobody at first was able to open the seals. This affects John – and he starts to weep.

**Revelation 5:4-7**

“So I wept much, because **no one was found worthy** to open and read the scroll, or **to look at it.** 5 But one of the elders said to me, "**Do not weep. *Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.***"

6 And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, **stood a Lamb as**

**though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 *Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne***".

**Revelation 5:8-9**

"Now when He had taken the scroll, *the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the PRAYERS of the saints*.

9 And they sang a new song, saying:  
**"You are worthy** to take the scroll,  
 And to open its seals; **For You were slain,**  
**And have redeemed us to God by Your blood**  
 Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,..."

**Turn next to Rev 8.** So your very prayers – which you may not think are so powerful – are what the bowls of incense pictured. You. Your prayers. You can't miss incense in the air. And your prayers won't go unnoticed either.

Do you ever wonder if your prayers for Christ to return soon are heard? Does it seem fruitless at times? Watch this. Remember David prayed, "May my prayers be set before you as incense." (Psalm 141:2)

**Revelation 8:1-6**

**Then He opened the seventh seal**, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given **seven trumpets**.

**3 Then another angel, having a golden censer**, came and stood at the altar. **He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the PRAYERS of ALL the saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

4 And the smoke of the **incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand**. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound."

**This incense was offered with your prayers. It's time for the 7<sup>th</sup> seal and its seven trumpet plagues to begin.** The first 6 seals, in Revelation

6, have been broken from off the scroll – and the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse have ridden, the great tribulation has been going on, the horrifying heavenly signs and falling stars – it's been a time I'm sure when we'll all have been praying a lot.

**And we're told, just before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal – that GOD is aware of our prayers along with the incense,** and it's TIME for the seven trumpet plagues of Revelation. Your prayers as incense is a part of all of that.

OK, are you getting it? Our prayers are really like fragrant incense to God and Christ. Your prayers mean something. The Godhead is very aware of your cries, like you'd be aware of incense.

### **Presenting the Incense**

Inside the tabernacle or temple later, were 2 main rooms. The first one was called the **Holy Place or Sanctuary** -- and priests alone could enter. Further inside was the next room, separated by a thick veil or curtain -- **the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies** where the ark of the covenant was.

Inside the holy place, the first room, were various items like the Menorah, which had 7 lampstands on one lampstand, and opposite it was **the table of showbread that held 12 loaves** of bread. As you went forward, you'd come to the **small altar of incense**, which was just before you'd get to the VEIL, the curtain blocking the way into the Holy of Holies, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> room where the holy ARK of the Covenant was.

Only the High Priest could ever go into the Holy of Holies and only on Atonement day, by himself, remember.

So each day, incense was brought to the altar of incense. The priests would take a censer, fill it with hot coals from the altar of burnt offerings or sacrifice *outside*, then place the burning coals in their censer, then carry that to the altar of INCENSE in the Holy Place. They would then sprinkle the holy incense on to the fire of the coals. The incense would start to burn, producing a wonderful, perfumed smoke that would fill the room and probably waft through the veil into the Holy of Holies as well.

Only priests – only descendants of Aaron – could offer the incense. Today, since WE are considered the royal holy priesthood in the new covenant, we offer what the incense pictured: our prayers, which are holy, special, set-apart sweet fragrance to God. The incense was presented twice a day.

Hopefully, we pray to God Most High and the Son of God at least twice a day also.

**What more lessons do we learn from INCENSE?**

- 1. Incense was carefully prepared, treated with great respect, taken seriously and considered HOLY. Since we know it pictures our prayers, we should not be flamboyant with our praying and words.**

You can read more of this in **Exodus 30:34-38**. Verse 35 says they were produced “by the art of the perfumer, salted, pure and holy.”

Turn now to Revelation 4. Let’s read the description of heavenly throne of God that John the Apostle saw and into which we enter when we pray. Turn to Revelation 4, for this one I’ll read from the NLT – New Living Translation.

**Revelation 4 NLT**

“Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and the same voice I had heard before **spoke to me like a trumpet blast**. The voice said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after this.”

2 And instantly I was in the Spirit, and I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it. 3 **The One sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow.**

4 Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads.

**5 From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder.** And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 **In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.**

In the center and around the throne were **four living beings**, each covered with eyes, front and back.

7 The first of these living beings was like a **lion**; the second was like an **ox**; the third had a **human** face; and the fourth was like an **eagle** in flight.

**8 Each of these living beings had SIX wings**, and their wings were covered all over with eyes, inside and out. Day after day and night after night they keep on saying,

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—  
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come."

9 Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), 10 the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). *And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,*

11 "You are worthy, O Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power.  
For you created all things,  
and they exist because you created what you pleased."

It's good to picture this sometimes when you pray, before you start. The priests were very careful about the fire and the incense – there was a time when Aaron's two oldest sons were not reverent, and offered STRANGE FIRE, and fire from the altar From God BURNED them alive (Leviticus 10:1-10).

**Leviticus 10:1-3 NKJV**

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each ***took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord***, which He had not commanded them.

2 So fire went out from YHVH and devoured them, and they died before YHVH. 3 And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what YHWH spoke, saying:

**'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy;**

And before all the people I must be glorified.'"

So Aaron held his peace"

So I take this sermon very seriously and I've received correction from it. I think my praying has not always been as holy as it should be. Remember in whose presence you are coming. **Maybe read Revelation 4 several times a year** to get a picture of God's throne presence, with the 24 elders, the 4 Living Creatures, with the Lamb of God Jesus Christ right there too, and HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS of powerful, holy angelic beings. Some with wings, some without. Some with six wings, some with 4 wings, some looking like various animals we know, some looking like men. NOT FAT little cherubs or just sweet little 5 year old girls with long hair.

**When we say, "Father, Father in heaven..." – what an exciting and holy scene we're coming into. Be aware of that when you pray!**

Even when you're praying a blessing on the food, and the little children are there, be sure you tell them from time to time who you're all coming before! They should treat praying time as sacred, holy time.

And it's OK to have your eyes open – or closed – it doesn't matter. If closed, you might not get distracted. One of my small children once said, after prayer for the food, "Daddy, daddy, Jonathan had his eyes open!" And I'd pause and say, "OK, and how did you know that?" (ha, ha)

So when they presented the correct spices – they were prepared. And after what happened to Nadab – who should have been the next high priest – they took it very seriously. We should also take praying before the greatest Holy Being in the universe – prepared for what we're doing and not just too casual.

**Is it possible we're not getting as many answered prayers as we would wish – because we're too casual about our prayers? Hmm?**

**Remember David said, "let my prayer be set before you as incense" – Psalm 141:2.** Bring your prayers to God – but be prepared. Remember to be HOLY, reverent and pure – like incense was. The priests went in with prepared incense, mixed and presented the right way.

**But what If you've SINNED?** And if you're like me, you don't even feel worthy to come before Holy God or wonder if he'll be happy to see you! But by all means come before him but DO come as the **Publican** who could not even raise his eyes to heaven but simply said, "God, be merciful to me, a SINNER." And that man went home justified, made right, made righteous in God's eyes. He went home righteous. Start your prayer with asking forgiveness. God does hate sin, but he loves sinners who see their sin and repent (**Luke 18:9-14**).

***We all may wonder at times if God even hears our words in prayer. Get this. Let me say it again: You can't be in a room filled with the smoke and fragrance of incense without realizing it's filled with incense.*** When there's incense in a room, you can't help but be aware of it. In the same way, God is also very aware of what you're presenting to him. He can't miss it. It's like incense.

So is it OK to pray while you drive, or do dishes, or shave? Yes, if done respectfully and ... AND... if you make sure you make time for some formal times of prayer too. I mean time when you "set your prayers as incense" before God, fully aware of whom you come before. Come to God in those formal times of prayer on your knees, beside your bed or face on the floor sometimes. "Worship" means bowed down, remember. *If you feel all this is never*



*important, you've already moved away from the sacred, holy realization of to whom you are speaking.*

**2) Another lesson of incense: It was beaten down very fine. Our prayers should not be huge chunks of information like** “heal all the sick. Remember to provide for the poor. Protect and inspire the ministers. Come soon Jesus. Amen.”

**Exodus 30:34-36**

And YHVH said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. 35 You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the ***perfumer, salted, pure, and holy.***

36 **And you shall *beat some of it very fine*, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you.**"

The “testimony” was the ARK of the covenant (Ex. 25:16). You’re coming to meet God. He wants DETAILS, DETAILS, SPECIFICS. I DO TOO when I’m asking information of our faithful pastors in Kenya.

***Ex 30:36 in other translations say to beat it, or grind this mixture into fine powder.***

So when we pray, ***be specific about how you feel***, specific about who needs healing, specific about the kind of answers you’re asking of God. Don’t just give God summaries or overall statements. He likes our incense, our prayers, beaten down to fine details.

I got an email recently from a church leader in Tanzania saying they need Bibles. But no specifics: how many Bibles, what translation? I’ve been helping them with one Bible per family, as we just simply cannot afford more than that right now. Paul Gibson in particular has contributed so much towards the Bibles. He’s the man with really bad MS that we’re praying for. My point is: be specific. Break your requests down.

The same man in Tanzania also said, “we also badly need help to finish our meeting hall because it’s so cold right now and rainy – but we have no money to finish it” – but he gave me no specifics. Don’t pray to God that way. Give details. I keep telling the Africans I want details, details, details, just like God does.

And YES, to all of you, I sure could use some help with more donors to help me in Africa to help “the least of these my brethren,” as Jesus said. They need you so badly. They are so poor compared to even our poorest. I need help

to provide them Bibles, bathrooms or latrines, windows and doors in their home-made meeting halls... or paying the costs of our faithful pastors to go visit outlying areas. The higher paid brethren – teachers – make at most about \$125 a month, 20,000 Ksh. That's just \$31 a week! But most Kenyans, if they even have a job, make far less than half that much, not even enough to buy a little food for the family and not much else. So they have no money left to travel to the Feast or buy a Bible. Nobody has a car. Not even a bike. Nobody has appliances among our brethren. These “least of these my brethren” really need your help.

So yes, I'll thank you now if you would send Light on the Rock some help when you can, regularly if you can. You can use PayPal or credit card on the website. I feel overloaded so many times. And praise be to God for the small handful of people who DO send some financial help here and there. Praise GOD for some of you donating money for Bibles, like Paul our MS paralytic does, for these incredibly poor Africans who want to worship God and learn about His word. I could sure use your help! Jesus can use your help for these people. Thank you.

**3) INCENSE was offered twice a day. Pray more often than you have been.** At least 2 formal times a day and then as you go about your business, many more times even beyond the two or three formal times a day.

**Exodus 30:7-9**

**“Aaron shall burn on it (the altar of incense) sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. 8 And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before YHVH throughout your generations. 9 You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it”**

**The INCENSE – like our prayers – was offered when they trimmed the lamps. God's word is our lamp (Psalm 119:105). COMBINE Bible study with prayer.** In fact pray before you open your Bible, bow your head and ask God to open your eyes to see and appreciate His wonderful truths.

*As you speak to God in prayer to bless your study of His word, ask him to truly SPEAK to you while you study and even while you pray. Prayer is a 2-way conversation when done right.*

In Ex. 30:8 the **incense is called a perpetual incense** before YHVH. Pray ALWAYS. Many times a day.

**Twice a day in formal prayer**, and don't be flippant in your prayers, or too casual. Daniel prayed 3x a day – **Daniel 6:10**. David said “Morning, noon and night” he would pray – Psalm 55:17.

**Psalms 55:16-17**

As for me, I will call upon God, And YHVH shall save me.

**17 Evening and morning and at noon I will pray**, and cry aloud,  
And He shall hear my voice.”

**Psalms 119:163-164**

“I hate and abhor lying, But I love Your law.

**164 SEVEN times a day I praise You,**  
Because of Your righteous judgments.”

A quickie prayer is better than none at all I suppose. BUT let's all commit to respecting God in our prayer times so much more than maybe some of us have been.

But show God you want to talk to him. Father loves that – just as a loving father loves hearing his kids shout out, “Daddy's home, daddy's home” when he comes home, and they come run up and HUG you. God loves it when he hears us say, “Father in Heaven...” And to start the day with “Thank you, dear Abba, for another day alive to serve you.” Give him that joy. Come reverently. Break your prayers down to fine details just like incense was. Know he's very aware of your presence and your words, just as you would be aware of incense burning in a room.

God's children love offering the incense of our prayers to God; that's us talking to Father. The body of Christ is a praying church. We pray a lot. I hope this message has inspired you to pray much more and with more thought in your prayers.

I hope this has moved you to re-evaluate your praying time and give God wonderful glory. Praise be to our Abba Father and to Jesus the Messiah.