

Fuel For The Fire:

The Incense Of Prayer

Throughout scripture, incense is symbolically connected to prayer:

Psalm 141:2 (New King James Version) “Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

*Revelation 5:8 (New King James Version) “⁸ 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.**”*

*Revelation 8:3-4 (New King James Version) “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.”*

The Fire

The fire that lit the incense could only come from one place: the altar of atonement. If it came from anywhere else it was repulsive to God and indicated a lack of reverence on the part of the person bringing the fire. In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron’s sons were destroyed when they offered “profane fire.”

The atoning blood of Christ is our only basis to approach the throne of God.

The Fuel

*Exo 30:34 NKJV And the LORD 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.*

Brokenness and Suffering

- Stacte – white liquid that is produced from hardened Myrrh when it has been bruised or broken. Myrrh is associated with suffering. The myrrh tree has long thorns which could have been what composed the crown of thorns placed on Jesus.

Fallen Flesh

- Onycha – most commonly believed to be the outer crust of a shell fish found in the Red Sea. Shell fish were unclean to the Hebrews; in the same category as pork. The process of making this spice is significant. Various cultures have various methods but all of them involve crushing or grinding the shell into powder that is then mixed or infused into water or oil (more commonly oil)

Transparency and Holiness

- Galbanum – a clear, translucent liquid flowing out of a plant that grows on the mountain side in Persia. When this plant is broken it secretes a clear liquid that has a bitter taste. Pliny asserted that this was a key ingredient in a poison used to kill serpents and vermin.

Abiding and Rooted in Christ

- Frankincense – The sap of the Boswellia Tree. These trees typically grow in rocky and harsh surroundings. They are often found growing out of a rock. They are known to weather harsh storms because of their base produces thick disc-like growths that has wedge itself in the rock. The liquid is produced when the bark is slashed and the golden colored sap bleeds out and is collected. The trees that have weathered the harshest storms typically produce the sap with the sweetest aromas.

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These four ingredients were beaten small and mixed together with salt to form a paste or powder that set on fire.

Salt is symbolic of the Covenant. Many times it was eaten together with a meal shared with whomever one would enter into Covenant. If two enemies sat down to a table and one of them had place salt between them it indicated his intent to make peace and become friends. Many times the phrase, “There is salt between us” is used even today to describe the friendship or loyalty of a covenant.

By itself, the incense served no purpose, but when ignited by the fire from the altar, it released a sweet smelling smoke that filled the room with fragrance.

This smoke was symbolic of prayer and praise.

The Frequency

It was continual:

Immediately after the lamps were lit the incense was lit. The incense on the altar was to be kept burning continually. The priest renewed it morning and evening. There was never a time in the Holy Place when the incense was not burning.

***Ephesians 6:18 NKJV** “praying **always** (made of three words: 1st – through, among, in, 2nd – any, all, 3rd – occasion, opportunity) with **all** (any, every) **prayer and supplication** (to ask with great desire – from the root word “deo” meaning to bind) **in the Spirit, being watchful** (literally sleepless) **to this end with all perseverance** (from a word meaning “to adhere to”) **and supplication for all the saints**—“*

It was consistent:

When these are combined and lit the produce a smoldering flame that burns consistently throughout the incense and is internally sustained without the need of an outside flame. In some instances the burning is so consistent portions of incense are measured and lit to mark time.

God never intended for our relationship with him to be a roller coaster.

“The beauty of holiness is its consistency” – Dr. Chester Todd

It was internally fueled:

Once it is lit, there is an ongoing internal flame that produces the sweet smelling smoke rising up.

Likewise, the fire of the Holy Spirit in us keeps us persevering. He is our continual source.

Conclusion:

- ✚ If you have made prayer a priority, keep it there.
- ✚ If you have not, repent of your prayerlessness and let God make this a priority in your life.
- ✚ The secret in overcoming prayerlessness is not in being more determined to pray, but in humbly confessing your need for God to teach you to pray and move you to pray.
- ✚ If you feel a desire in your heart to be a person of prayer, that desire is from God and He intends to fulfill it in you.
- ✚ You must not strive to be strong enough or determined enough, but simply surrender and let Him work and you obey.