



Why Pray? - January 26, 2020

OPEN

Do you like online shopping? Sometimes I wonder if it is a little descriptive of the way we pray. We scroll through and settle on our desired options, add them to our shopping cart, and then click on the “complete order” with an “amen.” Of course, God already has our “payment information,” after all, we’ve placed an order from Him before!

We began our series about the Lord’s Prayer last week with the thought that we have a sense that we *should* pray but we are not always certain *how* to pray. Sadly, it is all too easy to default to self-centered praying.

Yet, the human instinct to pray still persists! Swiss theologian Karl Barth referred to this drive as an “incurable God-sickness.” (***Prayer: Experiencing Awe And Intimacy With God***, Timothy Keller, Penguin, 2014, 36)

DIG

When His disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” His response was the “Lord’s Prayer”. This prayer is found in Luke 11 and Matthew 6 but we are focusing on Matthew’s account – note that it is set in the context of “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5,6,7).

In nine sermons we are examining Jesus’ pattern for prayer in a series called, “Teach Us To Pray”. Last week we noted that prayer is about moving from duty to delight and from desperate to dependent. True prayer is not a ritualistic display but it is leaning into the amazing relationship with God, provided by His grace.

George Herbert called prayer “the Church’s banquet.” (Keller, 28,30) Prayer is that place where we come to feast on the realities of who God is. And as we do, we are beckoned to adore Him.

What does it mean to adore God? Adoration is very active and involves:

- *Acknowledging* - a submissive recognition of who God is
- *Apprehending* - a growing understanding of who God is
- *Appreciating* - a thankful and worshipful response to who God is

Consider two powerful phrases in Matthew 6:9b, which call us to adore God.

[A] “Our Father In Heaven”

Father. It is a term that can evoke powerful emotion. Thus, to be instructed to pray to a “Heavenly Father” can be comforting and compelling...or confusing for others. Whether we our earthly fathers are positive or negative we must grow in adoring God – which includes acknowledging, apprehending, and appreciating.

This means understanding where He is in relation to our deepest hurts and needs. Is He aware and engaged? These questions are addressed by the first phrase of the Lord’s Prayer. God is in Heaven...He is our Father. Adoration precedes asking!

As we consider the often used “Father who is in Heaven” phrase in Matthew we learn about the God we adore...

- ***Our Heavenly Father faithfully provides for our needs*** - Matthew 7:11: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”
- ***Our Heavenly Father furthers His good and perfect will*** - Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.”
- ***Our Heavenly Father reveals truth about Himself*** - Matthew 16:17: “And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”
- ***Our Heavenly Father is compassionate*** - Matthew 18:14: “So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”
- ***Our Heavenly Father welcomes our prayer-participation in His Kingdom*** - Matthew 18:19: “If two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.”
- ***Our Heavenly Father deserves our singular focus and allegiance*** - Matthew 23:9: “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”

Recently, there has been a lot of buzz about new residents of Vancouver Island. A tweet from **The New York Times** on January 11, 2020 stated, “Many Canadians are giddy at the prospect that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle could be moving to Canada, injecting some razzle dazzle to the sprawling, bone-chillingly cold country.”

Whatever excitement there is about royalty among us, in a far greater way, we should be giddy that the God of heaven is our Father. By faith in His Son Jesus, we can have amazing, adoring access to His presence!

[B] “Hallowed Be Your Name”

We hear a lot of foul language these days. Sometimes, this is edited out when we listen to radio or TV media. But doesn't seem just a tad trite for a mere high pitched “bleep” to cover what is clearly profane language? The second phrase that we come to in Matthew 6:9b addresses this situation. This part of the prayer teaches us to approach God correctly – with a high view of His name. We must treat His name with reverence.

The word which Jesus used is often translated “hallowed” in English. It means “let it be holy, consecrated, sanctified”. By praying this way – at the beginning of the prayer – Jesus modeled something essential for all followers of God. Prayer is primarily relational, not informational. There is a place of encountering God – and resting in our Father's arms – before the asking and the agonizing.

To adore God – to acknowledge, apprehend, and appreciate His holy nature is not so that we will be afraid but to be in awe of Him. Consider that the invitation of Psalm 99:2-3 is not to run away from God because He is holy – but to seek Him! *“Great is the Lord in Zion; He is exalted over all the nations. Let them praise Your great and awesome name – He is holy.”*

The early Church father Augustine said, “A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot.” (***A Long Obedience in the Same Direction***, Eugene Peterson, IVP, 2000, 53) Perhaps we could also say that our prayers should be an alleluia from beginning to end!

REFLECT

In writing about the cry of the disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray” Andrew Murray wrote, “At first nothing appears so simple; later on, nothing that is more difficult; and the confession is forced from us: We do not know how to pray as we ought.” (***With Christ in the School of Prayer***, Clarion, 1983, 3)

Do you feel that prayer has become difficult? Perhaps the greatest expression of adoration you could make to God today is to humbly kneel before Him and cry out, “I don't know how to pray...but I long to adore You.”

Read thoughtfully through **Psalm 99** and reflect on the awe of God's name, yet the welcome He gives to His followers to approach Him.

Listen to [session two of the Prayer Course](#).