

Prayer: The Pathway into Reality

Review

- Personal/private prayer is different from corporate/public prayer in several ways:
 - *How we pray* – differing levels of formality (calling Dad vs. honoring Father at a banquet)
– differing levels of theological precision (raw honesty vs. public model)
 - *What we pray* – private prayer can “take a side” on matters controversial among Christians
– public prayer should not “take a side” where Bible allows different views
 - *Who can pray* – all believers should pray privately, may speak in small group prayer
– public prayer wisely limited to those trained on how/what to pray publicly
- *When we should pray:*
 - Without explicit command, Scripture shows us a consistent pattern of believers setting aside *regular times* for prayer (Gen. 24.63; Ps. 55.17, 63.6, 92.1-2; Dan. 6.10; Mk. 1.35).
 - In addition to this, Scripture also calls believers to embrace the practice of *continual prayer* (1 Th. 5.16-18, Col. 4.2, Eph. 6.18, Rom. 12.12, 2 Tim. 1.3).
- What does it mean to “pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5.17)?
 - Not diverting our attention from the daily grind of life (Neh. 2.1-5).
 - Rather, a ongoing conversation with God amidst the events and rhythms of daily life:
 - *Praising* him for the good things we see... “Look at that! Praise God!”
 - *Apologizing* to him for the bad things we say or think or do... “I’m sorry, Lord...”
 - *Thanking* him for the good things we experience... “Thank you, Father.”
 - *Asking* him for help in the moment – “Lord, give light... Lord, give wisdom.”
 - *Interceding* for people who come to mind – and then following up with them!

Four Categories of Prayer (ACTS)

- **Adoration/Praise** – celebrating God for who he is, what he’s done, and what he promises:
 - “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” (Ps. 19.1)
 - “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.” (Ps. 19.7-9)
 - “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (Ps. 90.2)
 - “From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart. The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.” (Ps. 104.13-16)
 - “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Ps. 119.105)
- **Confession** – admitting to God our fears, limitations, and/or sins:
 - “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” (Ps. 32.3-5)
 - “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (Ps. 51.1-2)
 - “O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.” (Ps. 88.14-15)

- **Thanksgiving** – acknowledging to God that he is the source of all our gifts and good things:
 - “I say to the LORD, ‘You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.’” (Ps. 16.2)
 - “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Ps. 103.1-5)
 - “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” (Ps. 136.1)
- **Supplication/Petition** – expressing our desires to God:
 - “Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.” (Ps. 17.7)
 - “Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.” (Ps. 25.5)
 - “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.” (Ps. 73.25)
 - “I am yours; save me, for I have sought your precepts.” (Ps. 119.94)
 - “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” (Prov. 30.8-9)

Four Pathways into Reality

- “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.” (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.1.1)
- The four categories of prayer correspond directly to four aspects of who we are:
 - Creature – adoration/praise reminds us that we are not God (Ps. 103.14)
 - Sinner – confession reminds us of our limits and flaws (Ps. 130.3-4)
 - Receiver – thanksgiving reminds us we are utterly dependent (Ps. 90.3, 104.29)
 - Believer – supplication/petition helps us to live by faith:
 - “Give me life according to your promise!” (Ps. 119.154)
- What this means: as we embrace and utilize all four categories, we become more in tune with the “totality of our reality” – we become more fully human!

The Bible’s Prayer Book: the Psalms

- “I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, ‘An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;’ for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated... Genuine and earnest prayer proceeds first from a sense of our need, and next, from faith in the promises of God. It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.” (Calvin)
- Begin with the masterpieces: Psalms 19, 23, 42, 46, 63, 73, 90, 103, 121, 139
- Explore the four categories:

Praise	– Psalms 34, 104
Confession	– Psalms 32, 51
Thanksgiving	– Psalms 16, 136
Petition	– Psalms 25, 119

Activation Tip #4: Try to include at least one point from all four categories in your daily prayers.

Request for this Week: Adults, pray for our youth to develop a habit of daily, fourfold prayer.
Teens, pray for our adults to do the same and set a good example.