



“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:6).

Prayer in Worship

Central Truth: Prayer is reverent conversation with God.

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Prayer is worship, the same as singing, preaching, or giving. Prayer is worship because it is reverent conversation with God. Prayer is not only a form of worship, it is also essential to true worship.

Each worship service of your church should have periods of prayer. Jesus said His Father's house would be called “the house of prayer” (Luke 19:46). “Whatever other forms of worship may be performed in the church, prayer must be a major part. If you count the minutes spent in each part of your worship service, what percent of the time is spent in prayer?”

What is prayer? John Bunyan, the Baptist preacher jailed in England because of his witness for the Lord and author of the great classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, said, “Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised.” Read that definition again. It is excellent, isn't it?

Archbishop Richard Chenevix Trench said, “Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is laying hold of His highest willingness.”

Prayer is not artful monologue
Of voice uplifted from the sad;
It is Love's tender dialogue
Between the soul and God.

—John Richard Moreland

“In the morning, prayer is the key that opens to us the treasures of God's mercies and blessings; in the evening, it is the key that shuts us up under His protection and safeguard” (Anonymous). It has been said that if

Christians spent as much time praying as they do grumbling, they would have nothing to grumble about. Praise God for the privilege of prayer.

1. PRAY JOYFULLY (Psalm 95:1, 2)

The psalmist's prayer was inspired by the acts of God. He had “*done marvelous things,*” “*gotten him the victory,*” “*made known his salvation,*” “*openly shewed his righteousness,*” “*remembered his mercy and truth*” (Psalm 98:1-3). Does that list make you want to offer to Him “the sacrifices of thanksgiving” through joyful prayer?

Take heed how you pray. Long after I became a Christian I realized that I prayed with my eyes shut very tightly and my body in a tense strain. Why? There was no reason for it. But that problem was relieved when I learned to pray with thanksgiving as well as petition, with joy as well as solemnity.

Is it a burden for you to talk with a loved one? Do you feel tense and strained when you visit with a member of your own family? Of course not. Visiting with those you love is a joy. You relax and are refreshed by it. Then why not come with joy into the presence of your heavenly Father who loves you perfectly.

Revelation 5 pictures the inhabitants of heaven offering worship and praise before God who sits upon His throne. Incense was offered up as a part of their worship. That incense, which arose as a fragrant perfume before God, was the prayers of the saints. Think about that! God delights to receive your prayers. Pray with joy.

Here is a way to add joy to your prayers. Spend ten minutes in prayer without asking God for anything for yourself or any other, except Him. Spend the time in thanks and praise. Recount before Him the greatness of His person. Offer yourself and your circumstances to Him without reservation. Ask only that He be glorified and His name exalted in the earth. And you will come away from that time with joy in your heart. Remember that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). Learn to pray with joy.

II. PRAY HUMBLY (Psalm 95:3-5)

How great is our God? He is so great that “*all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God*” (Psalm 98:3). So while we come before Him joyfully, we do not come before Him flippantly or irreverently. “*The LORD is a great God, and a great King above all Gods*” (Psalm 95:3).

Have you examined the positions of people in prayer as recorded in the Bible? Sometimes they prayed standing (Genesis 18:22). At other times they prayed bowing the head (Exodus 34:8, 9). Again, they prayed while kneeling (I Kings 8:54). And sometimes they prayed lying prostrate on the earth with their faces to the ground (I Kings 18:42; Matthew 26:39). Sometimes they lifted their eyes to heaven (Mark 6:41), and at other times they looked downward (Luke 18:13). That indicates there is no one position required for prayer. To bow is to show reverence. To kneel indicates humility. To fall prostrate signifies helplessness and desperation of spirit.

But prayer must always be reverent. It commonly aids a person to close his eyes when praying because it cuts out distractions. By a conscious act of the will one must put aside all other concerns but God in order for his prayer to be effective.

The spirit is humbled when one remembers the divine Person to whom he makes an approach. The Bible says, *“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few”* (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Where have you seen a stronger appeal to humility when you pray?

The first test of a truly great man is his humility, not his accomplishments. Prayer crowns God with honor and glory due to His name, and God crowns prayer with assurance and comfort. It is essential to hear God when He speaks if He would hear you when you pray. Think of the sovereign God of the universe pausing to hear you pray. That will humble your spirit.

Humble prayer makes no demands on God. It presents its concerns and leaves the response to Him.

III. PRAY PERSONALLY (Psalm 95:7)

“He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” Notice the personal pronouns, He, our, we, and His. They speak of a personal relationship between God and His children.

I attended a religious service for students of a great university. A professor of philosophy came to the microphone to give the invocation. He began His prayer, “O Thou Great Unknown.” I wanted to cry out, “No! He is not unknown. He is our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ.” He is our God, and we are His people. We look up to Him and say “Father” while the Holy Spirit confirms in our hearts that He is truly our Father and we are His children.

Picture the worship service of your church as a family gathering. The

children (you who trust Jesus) have gathered to fellowship the Father (God in heaven). As a loving parent delights to have his children playing together before him, so God delights when His children gather to worship Him.

How does a loving child speak to his earthly father? In intimate and familiar terms, of course. So the child of God comes before Him in the spirit which cries out, "Father, O Father" (Romans 8:15).

Be warned that your prayers are not improved by eloquent words or long petitions. Jesus warned about long prayers of empty phrases (Matthew 6:7). Speak to God as "You" (Of "Thou" if you prefer the Old English form). Speak of yourself as "I, me." Speak of your concerns as "my" and "mine." God understands plain English like you speak day by day, and He is not impressed if you attempt to speak otherwise. Note the brevity and simplicity of the Model Prayer Jesus gave us (Matthew 6:9-13). It can be read in less than one minute. It has only three words with as many as three syllables and only about a dozen words with as many as two syllables. Pray like Jesus taught us to pray.

IV. PRAY PENITENTLY (Psalm 95:7-11)

The psalmist recognized that though God is our God and we are His people, there is still the danger of sin entering our lives. So he admonished, "*Harden not your heart*" (verse 8). The heart is hardened by "*the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13). Our prayers must contain a penitent element in which we confess our sins, desiring forgiveness and renewal in the grace of God.

The classic example of confession of sin in all the Bible is David's penitent prayer recorded in Psalm 51. (1) It confessed all types of sin: "*iniquity,*" "*sin,*" "*transgressions.*" (2) It based the request for forgiveness upon the nature of God, not the merits of man: "*lovingkindness,*" "*mercy,*" "*tender mercies.*" (3) It recognized that forgiveness is a cleansing which only God can perform: "*wash me thoroughly,*" "*cleanse me,*" "*purge me,*" "*blot out,*" "*create in me a clean heart,*" "*renew a right spirit.*" (4) It calls for a renewal in grace: "*restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.*" (5) It recognizes the peace which follows forgiveness: "*I shall be clean,*" "*I shall be whiter than snow,*" "*restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.*" (6) It recognizes that service follows forgiveness: "*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee*" (Psalm 51:13). That is the path for a child of God to follow when sin has invaded his life.

V. PRAY WORSHIPFULLY

Jesus said the Father's house would be the “house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13). How can you make your church building the house of prayer for you and your fellow believers?

Saturate every service with prayer. (1) Pray before the service begins, cleansing your heart and preparing yourself to hear from God. (2) Pray when another person leads in prayer. Agree with their petitions and praises, making their words your own before the Lord. (3) Pray during the offertory music. Your offerings become acts of worship when you present them to the Lord from a praying heart. (4) Pray as you sing the words of a hymn. Speak the words as to the Lord rather than just “singing a song.” (5) Pray during the sermon. Ask God to speak to you through the preached Word. Keep the Samuel spirit which says, “*Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth*” (1 Samuel 3:9). (6) Pray during the hymn of invitation. Ask God to show you if there is a response you should make. Then ask Him to speak to others about the response He would have them to make. (7) Pray after the service is over. Ask God to show you how to apply the biblical truths you have learned. You want to be a doer of the word, not a hearer only who deceives himself (James 1:22). Thus you can make your Father's house truly the house of prayer for you.

It is essential that you learn to pray in worship. You can make the worship service a continual communion with God by singing, reading the Bible, hearing the sermon, and responding to the appeal. Remember this principle: You do not worship if you do not pray.

Questions

1. In what way is prayer a reverent conversation with God?
2. How can you pray with joy?
3. How can you have greater humility in prayer?
4. How can you make your prayer more personal communion with God?
5. Where should confession of sin be included in your prayers?
6. How can you pray and sing at the same time?
7. How can you pray while another leads the prayer?
8. How is the sermon more meaningful if you pray as you listen?
9. What example is Anna in Luke 2:37?
10. How has this study helped you to worship God better?