

Session Six: A Simple Way to Pray - Thanksgiving

1. Luther's A Simple Way to Pray

- a. There are countless pages written about prayer but seemingly very few about how to actually do it. I've found Martin Luther's *A Simple Way to Pray* to be the very best approach to actually praying. Not only does Luther's model teach us to pray it teaches us how to pray the Bible; i.e. prayerful Bible study.
- b. Luther's model consists of a series of four questions that help you engage with the Bible and turn it into prayer. They are:
 - i. Instruction: *What is this scripture telling me to believe or do?*
 - ii. Thanksgiving: *What worship and praise is due God?*
 - iii. Confession: *What sin do I need to confess and repent of?*
 - iv. Prayer: *How can I pray for my own life and for those around me?*
- c. Martin Luther would go through this process with every passage of the Bible he was studying. To some this may seem limiting or restricting but to Luther, and I would agree with him, the model acts more like a doorway into encounter than wall of limitation and thus liberated him to hear from God.
- d. This four step process is not something invented by Luther but is found in many prayers in the Bible. Daniel 9 is possibly the clearest example.

*"...in the first year of his reign **I, Daniel, understood by the books** the number of years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. **Then I set my face toward the Lord** God to make request by prayer... '**O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy** with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, **we have done wickedly and rebelled**, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgements...Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on You sanctuary, which is desolate...**O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act!**'"* - Daniel 9:2-5, 17 & 19

- i. Daniel first understands what was written by Jeremiah and *then* is moved into prayer. His prayer has the same three stages in the same order as Luther. He first extols the greatness of God, then confesses and repents of sin before finally asking God to act on the nation's behalf by releasing them from captivity.

2. Revelation as the Starting Point of Worship

- a. As we begin to shift our focus to prayer (although as we will see everything we talked about thus far is integrally related to and involved in praying) Luther starts us in the only place you can start when talking about worship and that is with God Himself.

- b. Any discussion about worship that does not begin with the subject of God Himself is completely missing the point.

“The starting point of any discussion of worship must be the object of worship, the Lord God himself, who is higher and more significant and far more glorious than life itself. This is the vision we need to inspire our worship; it is the vision that a world lost in sin needs in order to be reconciled to God.” - Allen P. Ross

- c. The major issue facing many believers in the area of worship is not one of song, music, or style but one of revelation. Churches are filled with men and women who are bored and dull in their hearts toward the very Person of God.
- d. We fill the eyes of our mind with hours of tv, movies, and websites all while the eyes of our hearts remain darkened to the light of the glory of God found in the face of Jesus Christ. We become fascinated with celebrities, sports teams, and motion pictures yet we come into worship gatherings and our spirits remain hardened and unmoved by the Creator of heaven and earth.
- e. The issue of fascinated beholding is paramount in our visual media saturated day and age because it is in our beholding of God that worship is birthed.
- f. The issue of shallow worship rooted in something other than the revelation of God is not a new one.

*“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. **You worship what you do not know;** we know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth;** for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.’” - John 4:21-23*

*“Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, **I even found an altar with this inscription: ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.’** Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.’” - Acts 17:22-24*

- g. Author A.W. Pink in his book “Attributes of God” addressed this issue the following way.

*“A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. The foundation of all true knowledge of God must be a clear mental apprehension of His perfections as revealed in Holy Scripture. **An unknown god can neither be trusted, served, or worshipped.**” - A.W. Pink*

3. The Bible as a Hymnbook

- a. The first five weeks of this study was dedicated to how to properly study the Bible. We said that the chief aim and purpose of all Bible study is to hear and encounter Christ.
- b. The natural result of this is worship. If the Bible is the inspired word of God that leads to hear and encounter the Living Word Himself than the Bible also becomes the arena and locale for our worship.
- c. If we are coming to the Bible in order to find God rather than ourselves (knowing that if you find God you will also find yourself) than what should we look for? There are four major clues to look for concerning the person of God as revealed in Scripture that will directly produce and fuel a life of worship:
 - i. God's emotions
 - ii. God's names
 - iii. God's promises
 - iv. God's actions
- d. The key for each of these clues is to (yup you guessed it) ask questions! Go beyond the simple easy answer and ask things like, "What does it mean that God is _____?" or "Why is God described this way?"

4. God's Emotions

- a. God has emotions. He has feelings, wants, and desires. Anytime you see an emotion of God mentioned or displayed pause because every emotion of God is an invitation to worship God as He reveals the inner workings of His heart and mind.

*"The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "**I have loved you** with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you **with lovingkindness**." - Jeremiah 31:3*

*"For **God so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." - John 3:16*

*"Behold **what manner of love** the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God." - 1 John 3:1*

*"But God demonstrates **His own love toward us**, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." - Romans 5:8*

- i. The foundational emotion of God is love. Over and over again throughout the Scriptures God declares, shows, and demonstrates His love for humanity.
- ii. By using some of the skills we learned in studying the Bible we can go much deeper into the reality of God's love and begin to worship Him and thank Him for it.
 1. In Jeremiah we see God's love is described as everlasting meaning it never fails, fades, dwindles, changes, or questioned therefore He draws

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us close to Himself. Our relationship with Him is therefore founded upon His love for us, which is everlasting, not our love for Him.

2. In John 3 we see that God's love is universal meaning He loves all. He loves the poor and the rich, the lame and the healthy, the dejected and the successful, and the lost and the saved with the same everlasting love. This love was the fuel behind Christ coming to the earth, taking on flesh, dying on a cross, rising from the dead, and making a way to eternity with God.
3. In 1 John we see He loves us like a father loves his son. How do you love your children? What do you feel for them? What would do for them? How do you see them? If you being wicked and evil (Luke 11) feel this way and act this way towards your children what does that speak about the magnitude of God's love for us?
4. And finally in Romans we that God's love is most clearly seen in Christ willingly giving up His life for His enemies and declaring, "Father, forgive them". His love is not passive, it is not silent, it is not distant, it is not unknown. His love is clearly and wholly seen in the life and crucifixion of Jesus; that God would rather die for His enemies in love than be separated from them in sin.

- b. God's emotions are seen and displayed everywhere. We see things such as His anger, love, compassion, mercy, sorrow, joy, hate, pleasure, and jealousy. Each are an opportunity to hear and encounter Christ.

5. God's Names

- a. The story of the Bible is the story of humanity discovery who God is and what He is like. As God continued to reveal Himself to people they would ascribe a name to God that described that revelation.
- b. Here are a few of God's names/titles in Scripture:

*"The Lord is my **shepherd**; I shall not want." - Psalm 23:1*

*"Our **Father** in heaven, hallowed be Your name." - Matthew 6:9*

*"He is despised and rejected by me, a **Man of sorrows** and acquainted with grief." - Isaiah 53:3*

- c. There are over 900 names and titles attributed to God in the Bible and each of them reveal His nature and character that lead us to worship.

6. God's Promises

- a. The third clue to look for is any time God makes a promise. His promises are an extension of Himself because He has attached His very and name and glory to the fulfillment of those promises.

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*“Thus God, determining to show more abundantly **to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel**, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which **it is impossible for God to lie**, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.” - Hebrews 6:17-18*

- b. God’s promises are typically attached to one of His names. He promises to deliver because He is a deliverer, He promises to heal because He is a healer, He promises to forgive because He is the merciful God, etc.

*“God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. **Has He said, and will He not do?**” - Numbers 23:19*

*“If we confess our sins, **He is faithful and just to forgive** us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” - 1 John 1:9*

*“Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. **Of how much more value are you than the birds?**...If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **how much more will He clothe you**, O you of little faith?” - Luke 12:24 & 28*

7. God’s Actions

- a. God’s promises are the actions that He will do in the future but He has already done many things in the past which reveal His character and nature to us. These past testimonies are some of the best ways to enter into worship.
 - i. This could be personal testimony or the testimony of Scripture, both are right and will lead us to Christ.

*“But I have trusted in Your mercy; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because **He has dealt bountifully with me**.” - Psalms 13:5-6*

*“Our fathers trusted You; they trusted, and You delivered them. **They cried to You, and were delivered**; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed.” - Psalms 22:4-5*

*“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and **raised us up together**, and **made us sit** together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...” - Ephesians 2:4-6*

*“To Him who **loved us** and **washed us from our sins** in His own blood, and **has made us kings and priests** to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” - Revelation 1:5-6*