

## “PRAISE”

I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name  
forevermore. (Psalms 86:12 NKJV)

Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him,  
and bless His name. (Psalms 100:4 NKJV)

Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Lent is a 40 day period of spiritual preparation for Resurrection Sunday when we announce and celebrate Jesus Christ rising from the dead. This year for Lent I am going to preach on the five component parts of prayer, Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession, Intercession, Supplication.

One important reason that churches exist, one reason people should come to church, is to be introduced to Jesus Christ and through Him to God. Every one of us should want to know how to talk to God and should be talking to God on a regular basis. Many church people don't.

Praise and thanksgiving are frequently confused. In simple terms, to praise God is to talk about Him, thanksgiving is to talk about what He has done for you or your family, your neighbors, your country. Toby Keith has a song "I Wanna Talk About Me." As I read the first verse of the song, ask yourself if God could say similar things about our prayers.

"We talk about your work how your boss is a jerk  
We talk about your church and your head when it hurts  
We talk about the troubles you've been having with your brother  
About your daddy and your mother and your crazy ex-lover  
We talk about your friends and the places that you've been  
We talk about your skin and the dimples on your chin  
The polish on your toes and the run in your hose  
And God knows we're gonna talk about your clothes  
You know talking about you makes me smile  
But every once in a while I wanna talk about me Wanna talk about I  
Wanna talk about number one Oh my me my  
What I think, what I like, what I know, what I want, what I see  
I like talking about you, you, you, you usually, but occasionally  
I wanna talk about meeee I wanna talk about me."

Praise should come first in our prayer, as it does in the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That is talking to God about Him- what He thinks, what He likes, what He knows, what He wants, what He sees. Praise is the hardest part of praying. Let me suggest some ways you can begin to add praise to your prayers.

1.) Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7 NKJV)

The place to start with learning to praise God is in our relationship with our spouse. One of the purposes of marriage is to teach us about our relationship to Jesus Christ and God our Father. (cf. Ephesians 5:22-33) Most marriages would never have happened if the husband and wife talked to each other before marriage the way they do after several years of marriage. Conversely, the best way to revive and revitalize your marriage is to begin to deliberately praise your spouse about something every day and punctuate it by saying, "I love you."

It might be funny in an office party to tell how your wife is dumb as a hammer, or it might be clever in a women's group to make fun of your husbands, but that isn't the way to have a happy marriage. John's advice to the church at Ephesus that had left its first love was to return to the first works. You didn't win the heart of your spouse by ignoring what he/she did, but by noticing and telling him/her what you admired. Psychologists say that we marry the person who sees us the way we see ourselves. Your husband, your wife **needs** you to notice the admirable things he/she does, the sterling qualities she/he possesses, the attractive points of voice, grooming, personality and for you to mention them.

When you learn to look at your spouse with the purpose of finding praiseworthy qualities, you will also be learning to praise God.

2.) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:16-17 NKJV)

There are not many people who can just start off ad-libbing a prayer. We end up sounding like Whoopi Goldberg in "Sister Act". When they asked her to pray, she mixed up the Lord's Prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, and maybe "now I lay me down to sleep."

There are three books you can go to for expressions of praise. The first is the Book of Psalms. Not all Psalms are Psalms of praise, but you won't have to look far before you find one that is.

What do you do next? A lot of times my father calls on the phone and then forgets what he wanted to tell me. I tell him to write it down first. I think everyone needs to have a notebook in which they write down what they are going to pray about. When you find something to use for praise, write it down, then say it in your own words when you pray.

There are prayer books. The Presbyterian Church has one called Daily Prayer. Prayer books are helpful when we are learning to pray. We don't want our prayers to become recitations instead of conversations. Use them like first grade primers and leave them behind when you've learned.

Hymnbooks are a rich source of material for praise. Take hymns like:  
"Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes  
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise"  
that is only the first verse!  
"The God of Abraham praise Who reigns enthroned above,  
The ancient of eternal days, The God of love!  
The LORD, the great I Am, By earth and heaven confessed,  
We bow before Your holy name, Forever blest."

3.) “Blessed Lord, who caused all holy scriptures for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which You have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Those words come from a prayer book. They describe not only how the mature Christian reads their Bible but also how they use their Bible reading as the substance of their prayers. The Bible is God’s love letters to us. When you believe that God loves you and wants to communicate with you, then you will begin to see the Bible as the way He does that. “Hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them.”

When Lorraine and I had been married for exactly one year, I was sent to a remote base, Shemya Island, Alaska. For the whole year of 1960 the only way that we could communicate was with letters – no telephone, no email, no text messaging, just letters. Do you think that I just read those letters from her one time? I read, reread, underlined, and inwardly digested them. When I replied, I would quote things she had written and then express my feelings and opinions. We remembered, we planned, we told each other what was happening in our lives.

That is how the mature Christian prays. In a notebook she/he writes down thoughts that come as he/she is reading their Bible, or in a sermon, or Sunday School. They write down when they see something that strikes them as beautiful, or something that moves them to tears. When they learn something new about God that makes them love Him more, they write it down so they won’t forget about it, so they can tell God about it.

God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son. We love Him because He first loved us. We should start telling our spouses and telling God how much we love them and why we love them and we ought to do it every day!

