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A Biblical Focus On Prayer - Part 2
A Prayer of Praise

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When I was a new Christian, I naturally did not know how to pray very well. I thought effective prayers had to be said with lofty words and following a complex formula. However, early on, someone introduced me to a simple and easy to remember outline for praying based on the acrostic A-C-T-S. The letters stand for ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING, and SUPPLICATION.

Adoration is the expression of love and praise to God just because of who He is. Confession is admitting our sins to God with as much specificity as we can. Thanksgiving is offering appreciation to God for forgiving our sins, answering our prayers, and blessing our lives in material ways. Supplication is the petitioning of specific things for ourselves and others. These include spiritual needs (especially salvation of others), the material items we need to live (food, money, medicine, clothes, etc.), and for the physical healing of ourselves and others we know. I still often use the ACTS outline in my own prayers, and I teach it to children and youth to help them with theirs. It is appropriate that it begins with adoration or praise to God. It is the right way to approach God before we deal with other items of life.

In this series of studies we are looking at how Jesus taught His disciple to pray (Matt. 5:9-13). In the last installment, Part One (read it here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2024/07/a-biblical-focus-on-prayer-part-1-the-object-of-our-prayer-tal-davis/>), we discussed how the Gospel of Matthew was written by one of Jesus' original twelve

disciples. Matthew was a tax collector in the city of Capernaum who abandoned his prestigious position to follow Christ (Matt. 9:9). Chapters five through seven of Matthew's Gospel is Jesus' extensive discourse, delivered in Galilee, called the "Sermon on the Mount." We are also analyzing other key biblical passages which provide examples and instructions about how and what to speak to God.

In His sermon, Jesus condemned hypocritical Pharisees who denigrated Judaism's primary forms of religious piety, including almsgiving (charity - 6:1-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). The Pharisees practiced those sacred acts in ways that drew attention to themselves. Jesus told His followers to pray privately and God would hear and reward them. The key passage is Matthew 6:9-13 – what we usually call the Lord's Prayer. It is actually the model that Jesus taught His disciples and us as a pattern for our communications with God. So, in this article, we again look at Jesus' model prayer (vs. 1b) to see how He said to give adoration to the Father.

We will also look at another of the Psalms to see how the people of Israel were encouraged to honor the Lord and proclaim His greatness to the whole world. In Psalm 96, the unidentified poet calls on the people of God to sing "a new song" of praise and worship to the Lord. He desires his readers to honor and revere God in their prayers. This passage is part of group of psalms (93-100) that affirm and celebrate God's sovereign rule over all the earth.

This Psalm's "new song" concept is found in other biblical passages (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 144:9-10; Isaiah 42:10; Rev. 5:9; 14:3). It basically means to sing with

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a fresh exuberant voice. A "new song" invigorated the worshippers in a crisp and joyous way. In the Old Testament hymns were vocal songs of praise, usually in connection with important acts of God. In the times of the Tabernacle and the Jerusalem Temple, the congregation harmonized led by trained choirs and musicians playing instruments. "As the offering began, singing to the Lord began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel." (2 Chron. 29:27b CSB).

Our Prayers Should Always Start with a Desire to Honor God.

Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. (Matthew 6:9b CSB)

1 Sing a new song to the LORD; let the whole earth sing to the LORD.

2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name; proclaim his salvation from day to day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations, his wondrous works among all peoples.

(Psalm 96:1-3 CSB)

In the last installment we saw how Jesus told his followers to address God in prayer as "Our Father," a title of respect and intimacy. In the next line (vs. 9b) he says we should honor God's "holy name" ("hallowed" - KJV). God's name refers to His person, character, and authority (see comments below). God, as represented by His name, should be approached in prayer as holy and honored because of His perfection and goodness.

"Holiness" has four connotations in Scripture. One meaning is that God is "set apart," especially in places where He is present such as in the Tabernacle or the temple. Another way God is holy is that He is perfect, transcendent, and spiritually

pure. His holiness also is found in the awe and fear of His greatness. Finally, holiness reflects His supernatural power over everything that exists. Thus, Jesus says, as we move into our prayer, it is important to honor His holy name.

In Psalm 96, the psalmist begins his worship encounter calling all the earth to join in singing his new song to the Lord (vs. 1). They are to "*bless His name*" (vs. 2a). Bless is *barak*, which literally means "to kneel." Throughout the Old Testament, individuals are said to bless the Lord (Gen. 9:26; Ezek. 3:12; Ruth 4:14; Psalm 68:19). God Himself also blesses His people. People also can bless each other. In this context it refers to giving praise and honor to "*His name*."

The Lord's name is *Yahweh*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush (Ex. 3). When Moses asked God His name, He answered, "*I AM WHO I AM*." He said to tell the people "*I AM*" had sent him. So God revealed His sacred name which is transliterated from Hebrew as *YHWH*. It appears more than 6,000 times in the Old Testament. *YHWH* is a Hebrew form of "*I AM*." The precise pronunciation of the name is lost in antiquity since biblical Hebrew had no vowels. Nonetheless, most Hebrew scholars believe it is best transliterated as *Yahweh*.

The name of God here, as in Jesus' model prayer, is a significant personal disclosure and reveals the intimate relationship He has with His people. It reflects the duality of the hiddenness and revelation of who the Deity is, and of both the transcendence (otherness) and imminence (closeness) of His nature. The name reveals His power, authority, and holiness. Israel had great reverence for it. The Ten Commandments prohibited anyone from violating God's sacred name. "*You shall not take the name of the Lord (YHWH) your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished (hold him guiltless)*

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who takes His name in vain." (Ex. 20:7 NASB - also Deut. 5:11).

So why does the name *Yahweh* not appear in most English Bible translations? The answer is that the Hebrews never verbalized that name. They did not want to mispronounce it or desecrate it in violation of the above commandment. When they recited Scripture aloud, they substituted the Hebrew word for Lord (*Adonai*) whenever *YHWH* appeared in the text (Judaism still follows this tradition). In the 2nd century B.C., seventy Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint, ["70"]). Following custom, the translators used the Greek word for Lord (*Kyrios*) wherever the Hebrew *YHWH* appeared in the text. That's why, even now, most English Old Testament versions do not transliterate *YHWH* as *Yahweh*, but rather substitute it with LORD (usually in all capital letters, as in Deuteronomy 6:4: "*Listen, Israel: The LORD (YHWH) our God, the LORD (YHWH) is one*" (CSB).

So what is it they are to sing about? God's "*salvation*" (*yesuatow*) for one thing (vs. 2b). In the Hebrew mind, salvation is never a purely a secular deliverance. Any saving activity was a representation of God's rescuing or freeing them from national oppression. Salvation is God's redemptive work in history. In the Old Testament, the foremost salvation event was the Israelite's Exodus from Egypt. Usually in the Psalms, salvation is a corporate or community experience. Some psalms, however, do reveal a concern for individual salvation from sin or enemies. They speak of the salvation of the "upright in heart" (Psalm 36:10) and "the righteous" (Psalm 37:39-40). The best example is found in David's song of repentance in Psalm 51: "*Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me*" (vs. 12 CSB). We will study Psalm 51 in depth in part six.

In light of the New Testament, we know full salvation is focused in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. His life, death, and resurrection are the apex of human redemption, accomplished once and for all. "*He entered the most holy place once for all time, not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption*" (Heb. 9:12 CSB).

The New Testament also views salvation from the experience of the believer. In the individual's case, it involves: conviction of sin (John 16:8); repentance (turning) from sin to God (Luke 15:7, 10; 2 Cor. 7:10); a faith or trust commitment to Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 36); and confession of Jesus as one's Savior and Lord (Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:9-10). Salvation proceeds over three stages in the life of the believer. (1) Justification is the initial point of conversion and reception of eternal life. It is a once and for all event. (2) Sanctification is the on-going lifetime growth process of the believer in his or her faith and relationship with God. It is not always a straight path in that Christians still struggle with their sin nature. Nonetheless, they have the Holy Spirit to empower them. (3) Glorification is the eternal culmination of salvation when believers will go to be with Jesus and receive a new glorified body.

And how often are they to proclaim God's salvation? Every day. Yes, day to day they are to praise Him and "*declare His glory among the nations.*" "*Glory*" is *kabod* and can also mean abundance or honor. It comes from a root word meaning a heavy weight. So to give glory is to give heavy weight to honoring God. It is recognizing the importance of His revelation and His goodness to the worshipping community.

"*The nations*" are the *goyim*. They are the Gentiles or heathen peoples

outside of the covenant community of Israel. The Israelites are to declare the Lord's glory and "*wondrous works*" (marvelous deeds) throughout the world. One might look at this as sort of an Old Testament Great Commission. The Hebrews were intended to share the knowledge of the true God with the world. God told Abraham, "*I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing... and all the peoples (families or clans) on earth will be blessed through you*" (Gen. 12: 2-3 CSB). Years later, God told Moses, "*Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.*" (Ex. 19:5-6 CSB). They were to be a nation of priests to all nations, acting as mediators between the Lord and all humanity.

We know the Israelites failed to do as God intended. By the time of Jesus, the Jews had pretty much become totally self-absorbed. They imagined their status as God's Chosen People meant they were more favored by God than other peoples.

Of course, Jesus refused to limit the scope of His ministry to one ethnic group. He showed love to Samaritans, Greeks, Romans, and all others. His Great Commission was "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 28:19 CSB). Paul says God's ancient intentions are fulfilled in Christ: "*The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you'*" (Gal 3:7-8 CSB).

World missions had its beginning in the heart of God from the time of Adam and Eve. That mission continues today. We are obliged to carry the Gospel to every people and language in every corner of the globe. We are to break through the worldview barriers that separate how mankind perceives truth and reality.

It is sad to read that some mainline denominations are scaling back their mission programs or eliminating them altogether. Evangelical groups, however, are involving growing numbers of churches and individuals in short and long-term mission projects yielding great harvests of souls.

In our prayers we should always honor God whose very name is holy. Every part of His creation sings the praises of God. Therefore, we should sing and praise God for His salvation and wonderful deeds.

God's Splendor and Majesty Call Us to Honor Him.

4 For the LORD is great and is highly praised; he is feared above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

6 Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

(Psalm 96:4-6 CSB)

The Psalmist declares that "*great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.*" He is worthy of praise but also "*feared above all gods.*" In the last installment we discussed the fear (*yare*) of God. It is that deep sense of awe, humility, and sinfulness people feel when they are confronted by the omnipotence and holiness of the Lord. Often they fall on their face or kneel in response.

So the psalmist is affirming the Lord's (*Yahweh*) total superiority over all the gods of all other nations. As the previous psalm confirmed, "*For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods.*" (Psalm 95:3 CSB). Does that mean those other inferior gods actually exist? The psalmist provides the answer in vs. 3. He says the gods of the pagans and heathens are lifeless "idols." The most distinctive aspect of the Judeo-Christian theistic worldview is its clear monotheism. That is the recognition and worship of only One God. As the Lord says through Isaiah, "*This is what the Lord, the King of Israel and its Redeemer, the Lord of Armies, says: I am the first and I am the last. There is no God but me*" (Isa. 44:6 CSB).

The Israelites' strict monotheism was in contrast to the polytheistic pagan religions of the peoples they engaged (and whose gods the unfaithful Israelites sometimes paid homage). Their gods were often nationalistic symbols who fought among themselves for dominance. Many ancients also believed that the gods' power

was limited to specific geographical regions. Some of the national gods the Israelites encountered included: *Baal* and *Astarte*, the Canaanite god and goddess of fertility (1 Kings 18),; *Hadad*, the storm god of the Arameans; *Dagon*, chief god of the Philistines (1 Sam. 5; 1 Chron. 10:9-11); *Molech*, god of the Ammonites, who practiced child sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5); and *Chemosh*, god of the Moabites (1 Kings 11:33; 2 Kings 23:13; Jer. 48:13).

In any case, the psalmist rejects them all as mere objects of human hands. Idols were physical or material images or forms of divine beings that were worshiped. Scripture regards them as abominations to the Lord. The Ten Commandments absolutely forbids making idols: "*Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them*" (Ex. 20:4-5 CSB). Isaiah mocked them, "*All who make idols are nothing, and what they treasure benefits no one. Their witnesses do not see or know anything, so they will be put to shame. Who makes a god or casts a metal image that benefits no one?*" (Isa. 44: 9-10 CSB).

Most modern Americans assume that idol worship was an ancient relic of superstitious and ignorant people. The fact is, even in this country pagan idolatry is now widely practiced and is expanding. In a Georgia county near where I live stands the largest Hindu temple in North America. It is filled with literally hundreds of idols of various Hindu gods. Another example is Wicca or witchcraft, which is essentially a revival of ancient paganism. Also, the New Age Movement includes many aspects of pagan philosophy.

The point of it all is, only the Lord deserves the worship and honor due Him because He is the only God who truly exists! The psalmist proclaims that He is the all-powerful and sovereign Creator of the universe. He says "*all splendor (hed) and beauty (or majesty - hadar) are before Him.*" He says "*strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.*" His sanctuary is the place (in the tabernacle or Jerusalem Temple) that is sacred and set aside for worshipping God.

Sometimes Christians refer to their church's worship center as the "sanctuary." However, Jesus taught that anyplace can be a sanctuary where we can approach the throne of God in prayer. When we humbly pray in His name, we know we are invoking His sovereign control in our lives. He calls us to come to Him with all our cares and needs. Unlike a wooden or stone idol, He hears our words and thoughts and answers according to His will. The next section reminds us of a very important dimension of our prayer and our lives.

We must remember, only one true Creator God exists who can hear and answer our prayers. People who worship idols or other false gods need to be shown the truth. And because God is real we should go humbly into His divine presence to honor and worship Him.

Everything in Our Lives Is to Be an Offering That Honors God - Including Our Prayers.

7 Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; bring an offering and enter his courts.

9 Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; let the whole earth tremble before him.

(Psalm 96:7-9 CSB)

The psalmist calls on all the "*families (tribes) of the peoples*" to "*ascribe to the LORD.*" The families of nations again brings to mind God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth (see comments above - Gen. 12:2-3). Through Abraham and his descendants God would make His name known throughout the world. Ultimately, that pledge was fulfilled in Jesus and the church. Literally untold millions of people, of every ethnic, racial, and language group, in the last two millennia have been blessed with the knowledge of God incarnate in Jesus Christ (the same Yahweh of which the psalmist speaks).

As missionaries carried God's word and the gospel to nearly every corner of the globe, Christian populations are now found in some of the farthest flung places. About twenty years ago I visited American Samoa and the independent nation of Samoa. Many people have misconceptions of what the Samoan people are like.

Much of that is based on the distorted 1920s writings of anthropologist Margaret Mead. What I saw was one of the world's most Christianized cultures. Churches are found everywhere on the islands and most people have great devotion to Christ. As I worshipped with them, I saw exactly what the psalmist says in this passage.

"*Ascribe*" is a common translation of *habu*. It is used three times here, in verses seven and eight, in a sort of parallelism for emphasis. It means "to give" or "to offer." He tells the peoples to give the Lord (*Yahweh*) the credit He is due. How is that done? By ascribing to Him the glory and strength of His name. These qualities attest to His powerful saving acts in history.

Ascribing to the Lord is not to be done merely in verbal praise. They are told to bring an "*offering*." An offering (*minha*) referred to physical items which were brought by the people to God to express devotion, thanksgiving, or to seek forgiveness. They could be in the form of animal sacrifices (meat offerings). Burnt offerings were meats seared on the altar. Whatever was not burned was given to the priests to eat. The offerings may also refer to gifts of grain for the sanctuary and the worship leaders (see Lev. 2).

Unfortunately, talking about giving or taking offerings turns off many people about church. That's probably because of the way the principle of Christian stewardship has been so abused by unscrupulous charlatans. One need only listen to the unbiblical solicitations done by some manipulative television preachers to understand why many people are wary of giving to any religious organization.

The Bible actually has much to say about stewardship and giving. Stewardship (from the Greek *oikonomos*, from which we get the English word economics) involves more than just giving. In biblical times, a steward was someone (usually a slave) who was entrusted with the management of their master's possessions. God has entrusted us with material possessions. So stewardship involves the totality of our material life: earning, spending, saving, and even making a will. Giving to support our church and other legitimate ministries is a major aspect of this principle. As Paul told the Corinthians, "*Each person should do as he has decided in his heart – not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Cor. 9:7 CSB)."

So, with their offerings, the worshippers are to "*enter his courts*." The image brings to mind the court of a mighty king. The Lord is the King of all the earth, so when they enter His presence in prayer or worship they should do so with reverence, submission, and wearing "*holy attire*" (raiment). We earlier discussed the meaning of fearing the Lord. His holy presence and omnipotence causes the whole world to tremble (vs. 9).

At the beginning of this session we talked about the ACTS acrostic principle of praying. It starts with Adoration. When we come to the Lord, we must remember just who He is. He is the Almighty, All Knowing, Creator of the universe. We must not forget, our prayers are not to tell God what to do, but for us to learn what His will is for us. What a privilege we have to enter His courts with the confidence that He cares for us, He hears us, and He will answer our petitions in accordance with His desire.

God desires for all the people of the world to know of His love for them, and to worship Him. Stewardship

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includes giving offerings to express our devotion to God and to support Christian ministries. God is our king, yet He desires we come into His royal courts with our prayers.

In the next installment we will examine how to pray in humble submission to God's will.