



**WORLDVIEW MADE PRACTICAL**  
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**A Biblical Focus On Prayer - Part 3**  
***A Prayer of Humble Submission***

By Tal Davis

"I'm humble and proud of it!" Ever heard someone say that? Probably not, but you may have met people who seem to have that attitude. Pride is a two edged sword. On the one hand, we tell our children how proud we are of them when they do something extraordinary. Hitting a homerun, making an A on a test, graduating from college, those are the kinds of things we praise our kids for, and naturally feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments. We also want them to have pride in themselves to work hard and do what is right.

But in the other hand, pride can be the source of arrogance or self-righteousness. Indeed, that kind of pride is a major source of human sin. Along with rebellion, greed, and sloth, pride breaks our fellowship with God. Rebellion is working against God and His will. Greed is desiring things that are outside God's legitimate bounds. Sloth is laziness or a lack of concern for doing God's will. Pride is lifting up ourselves and our accomplishments for our own aggrandizement, rather than God's glory. That's when positive pride becomes sinful hubris.

Christians should not fall into the pride trap. In this seven-part series we have discussed how prayer is a critical aspect of the Christian worldview. However, when we pray, we need to go to God with humility. Humility is the opposite of pride. We should come to Him with an attitude of total submission (even fear). He is, after all, the Omnipotent Creator of the universe. We must surrender our desires to His sovereign will and divine wisdom. In this installment of this seven-part series we continue our analysis of Jesus' model prayer

(Matthew 6:9-13). In this section He focuses on the principle of submission to God. We also examine James' counsel about bowing in surrender to God's will to overcome pride and to resist the devil's attacks.

Previously we discussed the background for Jesus teaching His disciples how to pray. He had warned them not to pray ostentatiously as did the hypocrites. Their prayers were better done in private so God could reward them in secret. As we pointed out, Jesus did not intend for them to just recite the words repeatedly, but to see it as sort of a template for talking to God.

(To read the previous Parts 1 and 2 click: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2024/07/a-biblical-focus-on-prayer-part-1-the-object-of-our-prayer-tal-davis/> and <http://www.marketfaith.org/2024/07/a-biblical-focus-on-prayer-part-2-tal-davis/>.)

So now we continue our study of the model prayer to learn more how Jesus wants us to understand God's kingdom and submitting to His will.

**We Should Pray with a Heart of Surrender to the Lord**

*10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread.* (Matthew 6:10-11a CSB)

As Jesus continues His lesson on prayer (Matt. 6:10), He further instructs his disciples how they should address God. He first says to recognize the all powerful sovereignty of the Lord and His "*kingdom come.*" God's kingdom (*basileia*) generally refers to God's

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sovereign will over all that lives. It is a central theme in the Gospels, with more than 100 references. To pray "*Your kingdom come*" has something of a dual meaning in this context. It refers to God's royal rule that He now extends to those who have bowed in submission to his will. It also expresses a longing for the eternal kingdom when Jesus returns.

Meanwhile, for believers, Jesus says it has several specific applications. Believers are to make His kingdom their priority and to seek it in every facet of their lives (Matt. 6:33). They are to repent of their sins and receive the good news of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). God's people should also pray for His complete rule to come soon (Matt. 6:10). Therefore, they must be prepared for when the kingdom finally comes in its totality (Matt. 25:1-46).

In the same breath Jesus tells His followers to pray that God's "*will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" In English the word "*will*" has differing meanings depending on the context where it is used. In one case, it refers to the declaration of a person's wishes regarding the disposition of his or her property after death. Most people prepare a will detailing what and to whom specific portions of their estate will go upon their death.

Another way "*will*" is used refers to a person's ability to make conscious and deliberate choices. It is the act of asserting a choice between two or more objects or courses of behavior. Some deterministic philosophers (usually naturalistic worldview Atheists) argue that mankind's "*free will*" and self-consciousness are just illusions. They assert that we, like all animals, are unconsciously controlled by our genetics and/or environment.

This contradicts a key aspect of the Christian worldview and doctrine of humanity. The Bible says we are made in God's "*image*" (Gen.1:26-27) with the quality of knowing right and wrong and making moral decisions. Paul says God has given us the instinctive ability to know right from wrong. All people, including pagans, are without excuse when they disobey God's will (see Rom. 1:18-25).

So what exactly is "*God's will*" (*thelema*)? Paul says it is that which is "*good, pleasing, and perfect*" (Rom. 12:2). It describes God's inclination (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Eph. 2:3; 1 Pet. 4:3), resolve (1 Cor. 7:37), purpose (2 Tim. 2:26; 2 Pet. 1:21), and sovereign pleasure (Matt. 18:14; Luke 12:47; Acts 13:22).

It can be understood in several ways. First, God's will is whatever He *causes* to happen. God is all powerful, so certain things happen that He directly causes. For instance, God created the universe. Why? It was His will. He created the laws of nature and physics. He decided when and where we would be born. Some things are not under our control so, in those cases, we must accept them for what they are, trusting God's wisdom.

God's will also is what God *desires* us to do. He has a *perfect* will for every person. He has a plan for us to live the best possible life. Our highest goal is to find and do what God wants us to do! We should aim as close as possible to His perfect will for our lives.

The fact is, however, no one finds every aspect of God's will for his or her life. That being understood, God's will is also what He *allows* us to do. This is God's *permissive* will. Let's face it, our choices are not always God's perfect will. He, nonetheless, can bless them. Here's an illustration. Suppose you want to drive from Atlanta to Tampa? Clearly, the shortest and quickest route is straight down I-75 South. This

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is sort of like God's perfect will. But what if you take a different route? You leave Atlanta on I-20 East to I-95 South, then to I-10 West and then catch I-75 South? Would that work? Yes, but it would take longer to get there. This is like God's permissive will. It is not precisely what He wants, but it will get us there with His approval.

God allows us much latitude if we don't stray from the absolute boundaries of His will (i.e.: sin). We can choose where to go to college, who to marry, where to work, etc. Those are morally neutral choices in most instances. They may not always be the best choices, but so long as we follow God's righteous path He will bless them. Jesus lays out three specific prayer requests that are certainly in line with His will (vs. 11b-13). We will examine each of those in later installments of this article series.

*Heaven is God's dwelling place (see vs. 9). It is not, however, some isolated location where God shields Himself from the earth and its concerns. It is the divine workplace from which God sends blessings to His people and punishments to His enemies. God the Son left heaven to live and die on earth for humanity's redemption. Jesus, "who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited. Instead he emptied himself by assuming the form of a servant, taking on the likeness of humanity. And when he had come as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death - even to death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8 CSB).*

We should pray remembering God is the sovereign ruler over the universe now and forever. We should pray for God's will to be done in the world and in our lives and keeping in mind that heaven is the eternal dwelling place of God from which Jesus came to save us.

Now we turn to what James, in his letter, has to say about pride versus humility.

## Our Prayers Should Be in Submission to the Lordship of Christ

*6 But he gives greater grace. Therefore he says: God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. 7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:6-10 CSB)*

The authorship of James' letter has for centuries been a point of interest among Bible scholars. There are only two men mentioned in the New Testament who are considered serious candidates. One was James, the son of Zebedee and a part of the inner-circle of Jesus' twelve disciples (with Peter and John - Matt. 17:1; Luke 8:51). However, he was martyred in A.D. 44 by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2) which was too early for this book.

The other more probable writer was the half-brother of Jesus by Mary and Joseph. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions maintain that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus's birth. However, Matthew 1:25 says Joseph... "*did not have sexual relations with her (Mary) until she gave birth to a son (Jesus).*" In Matthew 13:55, four men and an unknown number of women are called Jesus' siblings, none of whom at that point believed Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, they may have considered Him deranged (Mark 3:20-21). In any case, James' mind was radically changed when he personally saw the resurrected Jesus (1 Cor. 15:7). Eventually, James' commitment and

wisdom was widely recognized and he became the leader of the Jerusalem church. He was himself martyred in A.D. 62 (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; Gal. 2:9).

James' letter was probably written in the decade before his death (ca. AD 55). It is addressed ... "*To the twelve tribes dispersed abroad*" (vs. 1:1). His readers were most likely Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah since he called them *synagogue*, the usual Greek term for a Jewish congregation. They likely had been scattered out of Judea by the persecution after Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58-8:4).

In this passage James turns his attention to the issues of humility and submission. He starts telling them that sins are overcome by God's *grace* (*charis*). Grace is God's unmerited favor or undeserved compassion. Indeed, James says God gives "greater grace." This is similar to Paul's assertion that, "*where sin increased, grace increased all the more*" (Rom. 5:20 NIV). James buttresses his assertion with Scripture. He quotes Proverbs 3:34, "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" The "*proud*" (*hyperephanos*) are those who have an undue confidence in and attention to their own accomplishments, possessions, or positions. It is to be arrogant, conceited, or braggadocios. This differs from pride we feel for the accomplishments of someone else. What parents' hearts have not swelled with pride when their son or daughter makes a great play or a good grade?

Negative pride is a grievous sin and comes in various manifestations. James had already admonished those who had pride in their riches, "*For the sun rises and, together with the scorching wind, dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way, the rich person will wither away while pursuing his activities*" (James 1:11). Another exhibit is racial pride. Jesus warned His Jewish hearers, "*And don't start saying to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'*" (Luke 3:8). He also warned the Pharisees against spiritual pride, because they "*trusted in themselves that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else*" (Luke 18:9).

The opposite of pride is humility. Of course, the greatest example of this virtue is Jesus Himself (Matt. 11:29; 1 Cor. 4:21; Phil. 2:1-11). It was a constant theme of His preaching. A person who is *humble* (*tapeinos*) is not concerned about prestige or position. Jesus termed it "meekness" (Matt. 5:5).

In the next four verses (7-10), James presents a short outline for genuine repentance and humility. He issues ten commands using plural imperative verbs that have a cumulative effect for attaining a penitent heart. He opens saying that to be truly humble "*submit (hypotasso) yourselves to God.*" They are to stop resisting God and turn to Him. Repentance is a necessary ingredient for a right relationship with Him, both for salvation and for the believer to restore fellowship (Matt. 9:13; Acts 2:38). Often this aspect of the gospel is glossed over, which infers a sort of easy believe-ism that diminishes the magnitude of turning from sin to Christ.

Next, James tells them to "*resist (anthistemi - oppose) the devil.*" Actually the phrase is conditional, "*If you resist the devil...*" *The devil (diablos) or Satan is the "Adversary."* The Bible does not explicitly explain his origin, but hints that he is chief of the fallen angels who rebelled against God. In Revelation, Satan is identified as the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1-2; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). He is also prominent in the book of Job.

The Gospels clearly indicate that Satan is personal, and demons are his servants (Mark 3:22). Jesus called him the "*prince, or ruler, of this world*" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and taught that hell was prepared for him and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Jesus was tempted three times by the devil who lied about Scripture. Jesus resisted by accurately quoting Scripture. (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1-13). This reminds us that memorizing Bible passages is a strong deterrent against satanic attacks.

James now adds another admonition to his list. He tells them to "*draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" This is both a parallel and contrast to verse 7b. In the Old Testament, only the priests were allowed to approach God. The New Testament, however, affirms the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rom. 15:16). In Christ we have the privilege of approaching the throne of grace in prayer.

The fourth of James' imperatives is to "*cleanse your hands, sinners.*" In Scripture, cleanliness has a moral dimension. The temple priests were required to be free of disease or defilement. James applies it as a positive symbol for cleansing oneself from sin and living daily with high moral and ethical standards.

The fifth command is to "*purify your hearts, you double-minded.*" The heart is, figuratively, the center of one's psychological self. Being "*double-minded*" (*dipsychos*), is being torn between two loyalties. Again this expresses the need to rid oneself of moral and spiritual pollution (sin). A heart divided cannot pray with full confidence in God.

Commands six through nine (vs. 9) seem somewhat strange. James tells them to "*Be miserable and mourn (grieve) and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*" He wants them to understand the gravity of iniquity. When they fully comprehend how sin affects their relationship with God they should naturally feel ashamed and sorrowful. Consequently, their frivolous spirits will turn to mourning and gloom in repentance.

Finally, James comes full circle and orders them to *Humble yourselves before the Lord* (literally "in the sight of the Lord."). All of James' directives have the common goal of reconciling them to God so that He can exalt them. This principle is accentuated in Jesus' teaching, "*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*" (Matt. 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14).

Perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of someone who learned this truth was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He had required his subjects to bow to an idol, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused. He then had them thrown in to a furnace where God's angel saved them. God punished Nebuchadnezzar with seven years of insanity. When his mind was finally restored he gave glory to the true God (Dan. 4:28-33).

*"For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing, and he does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. There is no one who can block his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"* (Dan. 4:34-35)

Let's never forget that pride is a dangerous personal quality when one exalts himself or herself above God. But, if we surrender ourselves to the Lord, He will help us resist the attacks of the devil. Also, humility (the opposite of pride) is the key to remaining in right fellowship with God.

### **We Should Humbly Seek God's Will for Our Lives**

*13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring-what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes. 15 Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it.* (James 4:13-17 CSB)

Following a short admonishment about criticizing and judging other believers (vss. 11-12), James moves on to a discussion of making business plans, particularly those done without divine guidance. This continues his earlier warnings about not humbling themselves before God. In this case he is addressing some successful traders who put too much stock in their own business acumen. In the First Century itinerate traders were common. So these were probably Christians who traveled frequently to buy, sell, and make big deals.

One of America's most famous highways is U.S.1. It begins in the Gulf of Mexico at Key West, Florida, where is found the MILE 0 marker. It ends at the MILE 2,369 marker on the Canadian border in Fort Kent, Maine. The Romans had constructed a complex system of paved roads, primarily for movements of their powerful military. They, too, placed mile markers along the way to inform travelers of their progress to certain destinations. The Roman roads were great assets to commercial enterprises throughout the empire. They also had the unintended (but providential) consequence of aiding in the spreading of the gospel (e.g.: Paul's missionary journeys).



James starts this section with a sort of dare, "*Come now, you who say...*" He is about to present a hypothetical situation that signifies their self-assured attitudes. He taunts them a bit to listen. He quotes what he knows they probably arrogantly say among themselves, "*Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.*" Apparently they were quite confident of their success because they were following what they believed to be the "right formula for success." Note the precision of their commercial strategy. First is the time frame to set out: "*Today or tomorrow....*" Next is the market location: "*we will travel to such and such a city....*" They project the necessary time investment: "*and spend a year there....*" They then plan how they will devote their time: "*and do business....*" Finally, they are convinced of the positive outcome: "*and make a profit.*" James says, however, they plan their itineraries presumptuously.

Most of us would commend the traders for such a well-developed strategy. As anyone who starts a new venture knows, you need a detailed and realistic business plan. You must project the start up costs, inventory expenses, and salaries in relation to your expected income. The problem of the businesspeople in James' letter was they presumed too much. He tells them that, despite their precise blueprints for success, they really did not know what the future held. He chides them because they made no allowance for any unforeseen challenges and poses a pointed question, "*What is your life?*" (NIV).

The Christian merchants had forgotten that human knowledge is limited and that life is full of uncertainty. They acted as if they would live forever and their plans would go perfectly. So he reminds them of a harsh universal truth: all human life "*is like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes.*" The metaphors of a vapor, mist, or morning dew are used in other Scriptures to signify something which happens and then quickly passes. (Isa. 44:22; Hosea 13:3; 2 Pet. 2:17).

Perhaps life's only certainty is that it is limited and will end someday sooner or later. In November of 1986 Billy Graham conducted an evangelistic crusade in Tallahassee, Florida. During the week he celebrated his 68th birthday. The audience sang happy birthday, after which he made an interesting disclosure. He remarked to the crowd that the thing about life that surprised him most is how brief it is.

The other major mistake the would-be tycoons made was to leave God out of their schemes. Instead of going audaciously forward, and even before taking their first step, they should prayerfully consult the Lord to bless their plans for His glory.

He warns them that their *boasting (kauchesis)* about their accomplishments is pure arrogance. He even declares that such bragging is not just bad thinking, it is evil! James closes this section asserting what is probably the key spiritual principle of his letter. He says "*So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it.*" In other words, knowing what should be done obligates a person to do it. Jesus established this same principle in His teaching. Three of His parables address the problem of the "sins of omission": the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30); the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37); and the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus also declares it will be an issue of reckoning at the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46).

No Christian should live his or her life detached from God. Any believer, no matter what their life situation, must always submit his or her plans to God in prayer. Businesspersons, doctors, lawyers, laborers, homemakers, scientists, teachers, and, yes, pastors, must humble themselves and seek God's will for whatever they do. God does not promise we will always be successful, nor does He guarantee prosperity and health. But we are assured He will bless those who seek His kingdom and provide for their needs. As Jesus stated, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you*" (Matt. 6:33).

As we go about our daily lives, we need to keep in mind that this life is temporal and that only God knows the future. So we should always submit our business plans to God to make sure they are in line with His will. Remember also, knowing what is the right thing to do in any situation but not doing it is no less a sin than doing what is wrong.

In the next installment, Part 4, we will continue to examine Jesus' model prayer and also see how God heard the prayers of King Hezekiah as told in Isaiah chapter 38.

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