

Making Prayer Your Second Language

“Praising God For Who He Is”

Psalm 145

I heard this story about a woman who was trying to find God. She had a certain dream which she dreamed more than once, namely, that she was standing in front of a thick, plate glass window; and as she looked at it, she seemed to see God on the other side.

So she hammered on the window and tried to attract His attention, but without any success. She began calling to Him, *“Lord! Lord!”* until she found herself literally shrieking at the top of her voice. But, still, no response!

She was desperate, frantic, distraught. But when she finally stopped screaming and yelling and hollering there was this quiet, calm voice at her side that said, *“Why are you making so much noise? There is nothing between us.”* It was the voice of the Lord.

I believe that is an accurate description of where multitudes of people are today in their relationship with God. We feel that He is somewhere far away, unapproachable, inaccessible, some place that is difficult if not impossible to reach...and we have cried out for Him and groped for Him and tried all kinds of ways to get His attention...when all the while He has been standing right there beside us.

I know that He is here right now at this very moment and that He is interested in each one of us. God says to us in the **49th chapter** of **Isaiah**:

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

Isaiah

49:15-16 NIV

Jesus said one time:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them

will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even

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the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31 NIV

God knows us that intimately. Someone has put it like this: *“Between the humble and contrite heart and the majesty of heaven there are no barriers. The only password is prayer.”*

I want to spend the next several weeks with you focusing upon and thinking about this matter of prayer. **Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones**, a great preacher from the past, used to say, *“There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christians so much as our prayer life.”*

I was reading a story this past week about **Robert Murray McCheyne**. Now you may not be familiar with that name but God used Robert Murray McCheyne to bring a great revival to the land of Scotland during the early part of the 19th century.

He died at the young age of 30. His entire public ministry lasted 7 short years. But he has been called *“God's Special Gift to Scotland.”* After hearing him speak, one Scottish evangelist wrote, *“He preached with eternity stamped upon his brow. I trembled, and never felt God so near.”*

One day years ago, a very discouraged young minister visited the church in Dundee, Scotland, where McCheyne had ministered in such a powerful way under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This young man was deeply concerned that his ministry was producing such meager results; and so he said to the old janitor who was showing him around St. Peter's Church there in Dundee, Scotland, if he could tell him the secret of the amazing influence of Robert McCheyne.

The old janitor led this young minister into a little room near the auditorium where the communion elements were stored and where the minister's robes were hung. There was little table there and the janitor said to this young minister. *“Sit down. Now put your elbows on the table.”* So, he did so.

“Yes, yes,” said the old sexton, “*that’s the way McCheyne used to do it. Now put your face in your hands like this.*” The young minister did.

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“*Now let the tears flow and pray! That was the way McCheyne used to do!*”

That was his secret to his success—his prayer life. And that is our secret to success in finding intimacy with God—our prayer life. I’m always reminded of the words of **Warren Wiersbe** who served for so many years as the pastor of the historic *Moody Memorial Church* in Chicago. He once said, “*Prayer is not something that I do; prayer is something that I am.*”

Prayer is not some kind of religious act. It is not some ritual that you do. Prayer is the total exposure of our souls to God. It is not so much submitting our needs to God but submitting ourselves to Him. And so I have entitled this series of sermons: **Making Prayer Your Second Language.**

Are you familiar with the term ESL? It stands for “*English as a Second Language.*” All over this area there are people from China and Korea and India and Brazil and Kenya and all over the world who are learning English as a second language.

I have several missionary friends who are living in Taiwan and Japan and the Ukraine who are teaching English as a Second Language. Frankly it’s just mind boggling to me that people from Venezuela and Indonesia and Nigeria and Bulgaria can communicate in English just as clearly as they can in their own native language.

I have traveled to South America on several different occasions—to Paraguay and Chile and Argentina and Brazil—and found myself in the midst of a group of people with whom I could barely communicate. I mean I would be sitting in the midst of a worship service and people would be singing and praying and preaching and talking and I had no idea at all what they were talking about.

I would be in a small group of people from time to time and they would be chatting and laughing and gesturing and I would have no

idea at all what they were laughing about or referring to. I would be sitting across the table from brothers and sisters in Christ and yet there was this invisible barrier between us—a language barrier, a

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communications gap, a conversation killer. It wasn’t just frustrating—it was intimidating. I would often just sit there and say nothing. Just kind of smile and shake my head and act like I knew what they were talking about and laughing at when the truth of the matter was I had no idea at all what was going on.

And the few times I tried to communicate were so difficult and so exasperating that I just quit trying and I was there but I wasn’t there. *Have you ever experienced that kind of language barrier when you were trying to communicate with God?*

I mean you see other people pray; you here them talk about what a rich and meaningful experience prayer is to them; and someone says, “*God told me this,*” and someone else talks about how God told them something else; but when you try to pray to God there is just nothing—nothing happens, it’s like He doesn’t hear you or He speaks another language or there is some barrier between the two of you. And what is worse, you don’t hear anything from Him!

Well, here is my hope; here is my desire; here is my aspiration; here is the who point of this series of sermons—that you might truly learn how to **Make Prayer Your Second Language.** Just as people from other nations and other cultures and other languages learn how to make English their Second Language, that you (though you are earth bound, though you are sinful, though you are un-Godlike and imperfect in so many ways) may learn how to make prayer your Second Language!

That you will become just as proficient in the language of prayer as you are in your own mother-tongue! So let me introduce a new term to you—**PSL**, Prayer as a Second Language. Not **ESL**, English as a Second Language, but **PSL**, Prayer as a Second Language!

Listen to what the Word of God says in **Ephesians 6:18**. “*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*” (NIV). That is going to be the theme verse for us throughout this entire series of sermons and so you may want to underline that verse in your Bible.

I don't want this series of sermons to just be a monologue, a lecture, an intellectual exercise where you just hear me talk about prayer. Frankly,

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we're drowning today in a sea of information! I don't want to just stuff some more information into your head. I want to help you—especially those of you who are not all that comfortable speaking the language of prayer—to learn how to make prayer very much a part of your daily prayer.

I'm going to give you some homework! I'm going to do my best to help you develop confidence and competence in communicating with, speaking to, speaking with, the Lord God. I'm going to talk about speaking with God in four vital ways—**Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication** (that's an old and popular acrostic people use when they think about prayer, ACTS, the book of Acts, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication)—and I want to help you to know how to incorporate each of these attitudes of prayer into your daily life.

I want you to really live out the words of this passage of Scripture from **Ephesians 6:18** - "***Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.***"

Now I want to begin this morning by talking about the importance of **Adoration** in prayer—***Praising God For Who He Is***. That's what adoration is—it is praising God for who He is. Praise in prayer is much like praise in real life except that it's directed toward God.

When you praise someone you commend them or you tell them what it is that you appreciate about them. You pay them a compliment.

- "I really like the way you've decorated your house."
- "You played a great game."
- "Wow! You look great in that outfit."
- "I love your laugh."
- "What a generous person you are."

Those are all words of praise. Now some people make statements like that quite easily. It comes natural to them because they were raised in homes and with parents and families who affirmed one another. If

you were raised in a home like that then you ought to stop right now and give silent thanks to God because that is great, great blessing.

But in other homes (and maybe you were raised in a home like this), words like

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this were unheard... rarely, if ever, uttered. Put-downs were more the order of the day. Whatever you did, it was never quite good enough. You could do a dozen things right and one thing wrong; and what did your parents stew over and focus upon and harp about? That one thing you did wrong!

- "Aren't you ever going to learn?"
- "What a stupid thing to do!"
- "Can't you ever get it right?"
- "You're hopeless!"

Not adoration or praise, but put-downs were what were repeatedly modeled for you! Here's my point. The ***Prayer of Adoration*** does not come natural for many of us; and, yet, it is literally the doorway to genuine intimacy with God.

If you somehow miss or bypass this attitude in prayer it's like failing to learn your ABC's and you never will learn how to **Make Prayer Your Second Language**. Every other attitude in prayer flows out of the ***Prayer of Adoration***.

Now let me just stop for a moment and say something parenthetically. Flattery is not to be mistaken for praise. Flattery is false. The Bible says in **Proverbs 26:28**, "***a flattering mouth works ruin***" (NIV). Self interests are what prompt a person to say flattering words. Listen! That may work with gullible people, but it will never make it with God.

The Bible says of God, "***Surely you desire truth in the inner parts***" (Psalm 51:6 NIV). So we're not talking about flattering God, but praising God. **Why is praise so important to God?** *Why is it such an important part of communicating with God?*

Is God some kind of glory hog who needs our praise? You've met people like that, haven't you? They just need your praise. They just need you to tell them how great they are. And if you don't do it they'll

tell you yourselves just how great they are! They just don't feel good about themselves unless someone is telling them how great they are.

Is God like that? Does He need our praise? Of course, not! The great

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God of this universe doesn't need our fumbling words of affirmation to be healthy. Here's the thing—**we need it!** We need to praise Him to make *us* more aware of who *He* is.

Have you ever had someone treat you in a way that is just inconsistent with you really are? Maybe this person thinks and acts like you have a hot temper. They regularly say things to you like this: “**Now don't get mad if I tell you something you don't want to hear**” or “**This could upset you, so let me know if I'm being too frank.**”

And after a while, you just feel forced to say, “**What's the deal with you? You must not know me very well. You don't have to talk that way with me. I have my faults but a hot temper is not one of them. So you don't have to tiptoe around me like I'm suddenly going to explode and belch out fire at you. Just stop it and say whatever you have to say.**”

All of us have some very misconstrued notions and ideas and images as to who God really is. Some of us have grown up with some very negative images of who God is because of how we were raised or what we were taught or what we saw in people who claimed to be godly but whom were in fact very ungodly.

For some of you God is like Big Brother up in heaven always looking over your shoulder, always waiting for you to mess up, always looking for some flaw or weakness or shortcoming in life, and you just know you will never be able to really please Him.

For some of you God is like an angry Judge with this big, heavy book full of laws and He's always condemning you and denouncing you and bringing bad things into your life to punish you.

For some of you God is this great big Killjoy in heaven with a scowl on His face and every time you find something in life that you enjoy

and fulfills you and makes you laugh, He shakes His finger at you and says, “**Now you cut that out. Shame on you!**”

For some of you God is some far, remote Unmoved Mover. He started it all, created the universe, got things rolling; but now it's

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pretty much up to us to figure it out and keep things moving. He is way up there somewhere detached, unreachable, just watching His beautiful creation go to hell and self-destruct.

For some of you God is a permissive old grandfather with a long white beard who just walks around saying, “**Love, love, love.**” To you, He is outdated, irrelevant and obsolete.

God doesn't need our praise to fill some void in His life. It's not His way of making us grovel. He's not on some kind of power trip. He doesn't need our praise. It's not for *His* benefit. It's for *our* benefit. We need to praise Him to make *us* more aware of who *He* is. It helps us properly understand who God is.

Now I told you that I want this series on prayer to be very practical, very down-to-earth, very interactive. I don't want you to just listen to what I have to say about praise and adoration. I want you to truly experience for yourself the value of adoring and praising God. **So here is your homework.**

This week I want you to read one of the classic passages of Scripture when it comes to this matter of **Adoration—Psalm 145**. It is a *Prayer of Adoration* composed by **David**, one of Israel's greatest and most godly of kings. It is an example of the very thing I have been talking about his morning.

Look how it begins. “**I will exalt you, my God the King.**” To exalt is to lift up or extol or praise or express adoration. “**I will** (here's our special word) **praise your name for ever and ever. Every day** (not just once a week at church!) **I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.**”

“**Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom.**” It's beyond our ability to truly comprehend it. “**One**

generation will commend your works to another (according to the dictionary, to commend is to recommend as worthy—it's like a commendation that the generations pass along regarding the greatness of God) *they will tell of your mighty acts.*"

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"They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness."

"The Lord is gracious and compassionate (these are great qualities – gracious and compassionate) *slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made."*

I'll stop right here because this week I want you to work with this psalm. Here is what I want you to do. **First, read the entire Psalm.** In fact, I would recommend that you go over this Psalm a number of times between now and next week, preferably every day.

Second, on a sheet of paper list the qualities of God that David mentions in these verses. For example, already we have seen that God is compassionate. He's also good to all. Slow to anger. Gracious. Righteous. You should be able to come up with at least a dozen such attributes, because there are even more than that listed in the psalm.

Third, every day this week, choose one characteristic of God from this Psalm to think about and dwell on. For example, perhaps on Monday you might make this your praise theme—the *patience of God*. And you focus upon that 14th verse. *"The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down."*

You dwell on that thought all day long—that one thought, that one attribute—the *patience of God*. Maybe you really mess up that day. You fall flat on your face. You say something you should never have said. You do something you should never have done. You fall off the wagon. You did what you swore you would never ever do again.

And the old enemy of your soul just kicks you up one side and down

the other. Satan whispers in your ear, *"Man, you've blown it this time. You've already had your final last chance. People don't forget. God's not going to have a place in His kingdom for you now. He can't use you now. It's too late. You're worthless. You're a failure."*

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And then you remember this attribute of God—His patience. You recite this verse in your memory. *"The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down."* You praise Him. You bow down to Him. You remember who He is—who He really is—not who Satan says He is or whom you have thought Him to be, but who He really is.

And grace flows and He lifts you up. That's the power of praise and adoration.

Here's what I'm saying in a sentence: **Like King David, learn to delight in praising the Lord.** David was a man after God's own heart, and *you*, too, can become a man or a woman after God's own heart. You see, I'm convinced the prayer of praise was a big part of that special relationship he had with the Lord.

So again, like King David, learn to delight in praising the Lord ... and have a good time doing this. Enjoy the upcoming week because it's not only challenging, it's fun and life changing.