

# Making Prayer Your Second Language

## *“Personalizing Your Praise”*

### Psalm 100

We're in the midst of a series of sermons entitled **Making Prayer Your Second Language**. You may be wondering why I'm making such a big deal about this matter of prayer, why I'm talking about it Sunday after Sunday, why we've launched a special Prayer Gathering every Wednesday evenings, why we're setting up special opportunities for prayer during the Lenten Season.

There are two reasons why...and those two reasons are very closely connected to one other. First of all, I'm concerned—if all the telltale signs are correct—that most Christian believers do not spend nearly enough time in prayer.

According to one study that was conducted a few years ago, the average Christian believer spends about 3½ minutes a day in prayer. Now pastors, evangelists and missionaries do a little better than that—but not much! On average, they spend about 7 minutes a day in prayer.

Most of us spend more time with the daily newspaper than we do with the Lord! **Dawson Trotman**, founder of the *Navigators*, once asked a group of missionary trainees how many of them had a daily quiet time with the Lord—a time of prayer, a time of solitude, a time of meditation upon God's Word. Not one hand was raised.

These were not just average Christians but the godliest men and women of the church who were willing to go overseas to spread the gospel. Yet, even they did not seem to take this matter of prayer seriously.

I'm concerned that most Christians do not spend nearly enough time in prayer. Now here's the second reason why I'm so committed for us to spend time together talking about and thinking about and focusing upon prayer...and it's intimately related to the first reason. It's embodied within a quote that comes from one of the greatest

-2-

devotional writers who ever lived—a man by the name of **Oswald Chambers**. Perhaps you have one of his devotional classics in your own library. Listen to what he says:

**Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive, but the evidence that he is alive.**

*Do you get what he is saying?* If there is a serious lack of prayer in your life, that's not the real problem. It's a symptom, a sign, an indicator, of a much deeper problem. The real root of the problem goes right to the very core of your relationship with the Lord. There's a relationship problem.

Where there is life there is breath. When you are spiritually alive, you will pray. It will literally become a second language for you. And so that's why we, the leaders of this church, are so committed to helping you become proficient in the language of prayer. **Prayer is the pulse of the renewed soul; and the constancy of its beat is the test and measure of spiritual life.**

We have been using a little acronym, **A-C-T-S**, one of the books of the Bible, **ACTS**, to help us identify and remember the four fundamental elements of prayer.

- **A** stands for **Adoration** or praise.
- **C** stands for **Confession**, to acknowledge and/or admit the truth.
- **T** stands for **Thanksgiving**, or gratitude, appreciation.
- **S** stands for **Supplication**, or this matter of making requests of God.

Now this morning I want us to think about and meditate upon this 3<sup>rd</sup> element of prayer – **Thanksgiving**. Listen to the words of **William Hendriksen**, a very well-known Reformed scholar who has written many, many books about New Testament theology. He writes: *“Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings.”*

Another great theologian, a man by the name of **Ambrose**, once put it like this: *“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.”*

*Do you remember what the Bible says in Psalm 100? Psalm 100* is actually a song, a worship song, that was sung as the ancient Jews

entered the temple in Jerusalem to worship God. It was instructional in nature. It was one of the teaching psalms. It helped the Jews to know and understand the kind of spirit you need if you're really going to enter into the presence of the Lord and commune with Him.

As they entered into the temple, they heard these words sung by a massive choir of musicians:

**Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.**

**For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.**

Psalm 100:4-5 NIV

Notice the two key elements that are mentioned here in approaching God, in entering into His presence, in worshiping and truly connecting with Him—**thanksgiving** and **praise**.

Now we've already talked about **Adoration** or praise. That's the first letter in the acronym—"A", **Adoration**, praise. I trust you had a great time working with **Psalm 145** the past couple of weeks, listing His attributes and just being reminded of and reaffirming who God is.

*So how does **thanksgiving** differ from **praise**? Are they one and the same?* No! They're first cousins. They are closely related. They're similar, but they're not the same. Now here's my point this morning. Both elements are critical in the language of prayer.

*So what's the difference between the two?* **Praise** centers on who God is. Regardless of whether at the moment you sense God's presence and power in your life or not, you still acknowledge Him and worship Him and praise Him for who He is.

For instance, you may be ill. You have prayed and prayed and prayed for God to touch you and heal you. Others have prayed for your healing, but you're still ill. Even though you have not personally experienced God's healing in your life like you thought or expected, you remember that God has said to us, "***I am the Lord who heals***

***you***" (Exodus 15:26 NIV), and you continue to believe and affirm and embrace that that's who He is—that He is the healer although He has not necessarily healed you yet. You trust Him even when you can't track Him. You praise Him for who He is. That is adoration. That is praise.

Or you may feel that recently you haven't been treated fairly. Life has wronged you. You keep looking for a little bit of justice but there's just no justice out there. Here's what **adoration** is. Instead of getting bitter; instead of trying to take vengeance into your own hands; instead of becoming combative and nasty and malicious; you just put it all into God's hands and you say, "***Lord, I don't understand this but I know You're just and in the end justice will prevail, so I'm just going to trust You with this.***" You praise Him, you affirm Him, you worship for who He is. That's **adoration**. That's praise.

You see, praise centers on the nature of God, not on our given circumstances. You may not see God's attributes in your life right now, but you trust Him and worship Him and praise Him for who He is.

*So what is thanksgiving? How is it different from that?* Here's the difference. In **thanksgiving**, we shift our eyes from God and who He is, to ourselves and to what we are experiencing through His grace. In a sense, we **personalize our praise**.

That's what **David** did all through the book of **Psalms**. *Don't you just love the book of Psalms?* Some of the most uplifting and encouraging passages of Scripture in all the Bible are found in the book of **Psalms**. I linger there often. *But do you know what most of the psalms are?* They are simply prayers of thanksgiving of how God ministered His grace to the psalmist.

For instance, listen to the words of **Psalm 34**. "***I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears...This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them***" (Psalm 34:4,6-7 NIV).

This is a prayer the psalmist wrote out by hand. If he hadn't we wouldn't

still have a record of it today. So instead of just praying it spontaneously, he wrote out his thoughts, his praise, his prayer, his words of thanksgiving. A lot of people think of prayer as spontaneous—and often it is—but prayers can also be written out, composed, thought through...and can bless others, even as we have been blessed by the writings of David and others in the book of **Psalms**.

I told you that I want this series of sermons to be practical, helpful, interactive, down-to-earth. So here's what I want you to do this week as you pray. Here is your homework. As you pray the prayer of thanksgiving, keep track of what you say.

I want you to write it out. Compose your own personal psalm. List 50 items for which you want to sincerely thank the Lord. Personalize your praise. Pray with a pencil. If you're real creative then you might want to compose a poem or even a song. Or make a Top 25 List—the top 25 things for which I want to thank God.

**Thank you, God, for saving me and filling me with Your Spirit.**

**Thank you, God, for providing me with an absolutely wonderful partner.**

**Thank you, God, for allowing me to be born in a country with so many freedoms.**

**Thank you, God for the good job I have.**

Begin to keep a daily diary of thanksgiving. **Paul** writes in **Ephesians 5:20**, ***“Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (NIV). The words ***“always”*** and ***“everything”*** includes hard times as well as easy ones. His bottom line is that believers should practice exercising thankful hearts all the time.

What do you do with your list when you're done? Share it with a friend. Show it to your spouse. Read it to a grandchild. Update it every so often. Review it. Often faith for our future is rooted in what we have experienced from God in the past.

Just remember this: ***“Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings.”***