

Prayers of Thanksgiving

BY HANK
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Shout for joy to the Lord,
all the earth.

Worship the Lord with
gladness; come before him
with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us and we
are his; we are his people,
the sheep of his pasture.

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

—Psalm 100: 1-4

Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more basic to prayer than thanksgiving. Scripture teaches us to “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4).

Failure to do so is the stuff of pagan babblings and carnal Christianity. Pagans, says Paul, know about God, but “they neither glorified him as God *nor gave thanks to him*” (Romans 1:21, emphasis added).

Carnal Christians likewise fail to thank God regularly for his many blessings. They suffer from what might best be described as selective memories and live by their feelings rather than by faith. They are prone to forget the blessings of yesterday as they thanklessly barrage the throne of grace with new requests each day.

That, according to the Apostle Paul, is a far cry from how we should pray. Instead we ought to approach God “overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:7) as we “devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (4:2). Such thankfulness is an action that flows from the sure knowledge that our heavenly Father knows exactly what we need and will supply it.

Thus says Paul we are to “be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18; also Ephesians 5:20).

Prayer begins with a humble faith in the love and resources of our heavenly Father. Thus prayer becomes a means through which we learn to lean more heavily upon him and less heavily upon ourselves.

Such faith inevitably leads to thankfulness and adoration as we

express our longing for an ever deeper and richer relationship with the One who knit us together in our mothers’ wombs.

The more we get to know him in the fullness of his majesty, the more we are inclined to thank him not only for his saving and sanctifying grace but also for his goodness in supplying all our needs.

It is in the context of such a relationship that God desires his children to bring their requests before his throne of grace with praise and thanksgiving.

After all, it was Jesus himself who taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” And as we do we must ever be mindful of the fact that the purpose of supplication is not to pressure God into providing us with provisions and pleasures, but rather to conform us to his purposes.

As we read in 1 John 5:14–15, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything *according to his will*, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we ask of him” (emphasis added).

But if God knows what we need before we even ask, why bother asking at all? One very important response to this question is that supplication is not the sole sum and substance of our prayers.

Far from merely being a means of presenting our daily requests to God—prayer offers a means of pursuing a dynamic relationship with our heavenly Father. □

Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff, The Prayer of Jesus: Secrets to Real Intimacy with God (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001).

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