

Prayer Power Unlimited

Achieving
Intimacy
With God Through Prayer

J. Oswald Sanders

Prayer Power Unlimited

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ONE

Worship and Adoration

Key Topic:

*How Worship
Is Stimulated*

Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

—1 Chronicles 16:29

In a sense, *prayer cannot be analyzed*, since it is a unity and is the outpouring of the life of the one who prays. Yet in another sense, it can be divided into its constituent elements. “The fact that [prayer] is worship, and the further fact that worship may be expressed in various forms,” wrote H. W. Frost, “makes analysis possible. . . . Prayer is indeed one. But also it is multiform.”¹

There are at least five elements that should be present in a well-balanced prayer life. They are: worship, or adoration; thanksgiving; confession; petition; and intercession. When I first read about the importance of each of these elements, a new world of prayer was opened up. Hitherto my prayers had been almost

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entirely petition; now my prayer life embraces whole new areas of spiritual experience.

Our Lord's immediate answer to the request of His disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray," was, "When you pray, say: 'Father'" (Luke 11:2). In other words, prayer begins with God. The pattern prayer He gave them was halfway completed before He prayed for personal needs. The concerns and interests of God came first.

This is a supremely important lesson. If God is not given the chief place in our praying, our prayers will be anemic. When our thoughts begin with Him, love is kindled and faith stimulated. So our first lesson will be concerned with Him. We shall consider worship, or adoration, for this is involved in the petition "hallowed be your name" (v. 2).

Dr. R. A. Torrey, who was God's instrument to bring revival to many parts of the world, testified that an utter transformation came into his experience when he learned not only to pray and return thanks, but to worship—asking nothing from God, seeking nothing from Him, simply being occupied with Him and satisfied with Him.

The idea of worship is common to the whole human race. But as generally used, the word *worship* seldom conveys its full scriptural content, which includes the meaning "to bow down or prostrate oneself." Worship is the adoring contemplation of God as He has revealed Himself in Christ and in the Scriptures. It is the act of paying honor and reverence to God. When we pray "hallowed be your name," we are worshipping Him.

F. W. Faber caught the sense of the word in these lines:

How wonderful, how beautiful, the sight of Thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power, and awful purity.
O how I fear Thee, living God, with deepest, tenderest
fears,
And worship Thee with trembling hope, and penitential
tears.

The Old English form of the word, *worþship*, gives us an interesting insight into its meaning as it implies worthiness on the part of the one who receives the honor. This implication is reflected in the apocalyptic ascription of praise to Christ: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive . . . honor and glory and praise” (Rev. 5:12).

Worship flows from love, and where there is little love there will be little worship. But even in our love there can be an element of selfishness. We can and should worship God in gratitude for what He has done for us, but our worship reaches a higher level when we adore Him simply for what He is, for the perfection and excellence of His own being.

“I have known men,” said Thomas Goodwin, “who came to God for nothing else but just to come to Him, they so loved Him. They scorned to soil Him and themselves with any other errand than just purely to be alone with Him in His presence.”² Worship, then, is the loving ascription of praise to God for what He is, both in Himself and in His ways. It is the bowing of the innermost spirit in deep humility and reverence before Him.

When Scipio Africanus returned to Rome after a resounding victory, he rode in triumph, followed by his captives. As he went, he scattered the largess of the

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victor to the crowds that lined the way. Some were stirred to grateful praise by his gifts; some praised him because he had rolled away from their homes the fear of the invading army; still others, forgetful of their personal benefits, praised his personal qualities—his courage, resourcefulness, liberality. It was in this last group that the highest element of worship was present.

Worship can be wordless. “My soul, be thou silent unto God,” said the psalmist (Ps. 62:5 ASV, mg). There are times when words are an intrusion, times when the worshiper is hushed in awe of the ineffable Presence and can only be silent to God. A single word can also enshrine a wealth of worship, as when the word *Rabboni* fell from Mary’s lips (John 20:16).

But all worship must be “in truth” (John 4:24), that is, free from mere profession or pretense. Brother Lawrence, that saint of the kitchen, learned that to worship God in truth is to acknowledge Him to be what He is and to acknowledge ourselves to be what we are.

How Worship Is Stimulated

A scholar in the school of prayer may feel that God seems far away and unreal, so that attempts to worship Him seem a farce. The question arises, How can I know God better so that I can worship Him more worthily?

God has granted a partial revelation of Himself in the wonders of nature. “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). We learn there of His almighty power, His transcendent beauty, His unsearchable wisdom. But nature does not reveal Him as a God of

love and mercy. Only “in the face of Christ” will we see the full blaze of the divine glory (2 Cor. 4:6). All the fullness of God dwells in Him in bodily form (Col. 1:19), and no worship that ignores Christ is acceptable to God, for it is through Christ alone that we have access to the Father.

In Thee, most perfectly expressed,
The Father’s glories shine,
Of the full deity possessed,
Eternally Divine!
Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou,
That ev’ry knee to Thee should bow.

—*Josiah Condor*

This raises a second question: How can I know Christ, who alone reveals God? The answer is, of course, that we know Christ primarily through the Scriptures, which are the only tangible means of knowing Him. “You diligently study the Scriptures . . . that testify about me” (John 5:39). In them is to be found the complete and satisfying interpretation of God in Christ.

The Scriptures are rich in material to feed and stimulate worship and adoration—especially the Psalms, which is God’s inspired prayer book. As you read them, turn them into personal prayer. Vast tracts of truth await our exploration. Great themes abound—God’s holiness, sovereignty, truth, wisdom, faithfulness, patience, love, mercy—all of which will call forth our worship.

The use of a good hymnbook in private devotions can also be a great aid to worship. Not all of us find it

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easy to express our deepest feelings or to utter the love of our hearts to God. We are very conscious of the poverty of our thoughts of God and the inadequacy of the words in which we express them. But we can appropriate the outpouring of worship and praise of men and women whom the Spirit has gifted to express these thoughts in verse. Try using a hymnbook regularly.

We should guard against the idea that worship is confined to the realm of thought, for Scripture links worship with service. During the temptation in the wilderness, our Lord quoted the Old Testament: “*Worship* the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Matt. 4:10, italics added; compare Deut. 6:13). We should not separate what God has joined. Worship is no substitute for service, nor is service a substitute for worship. True worship will inevitably find expression in loving, sacrificial service.

Prayer

Worthy of praise from every mouth,
of confession from every tongue,
of worship from every creature
Is Thy glorious Name, O Father, Son and Holy Ghost;
Who didst create the world in Thy grace
and by Thy compassion didst save the world.
To Thy majesty, O God, ten thousand times ten thousand
bow down and adore,
Singing and praising without ceasing, and saying,
Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts;
Heaven and earth are full of Thy praises;
Hosanna in the highest.

—*Nestorian Liturgy*

Questions

1. What does it mean to “worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)?

2. Bishop Moule said, “Worship will be a powerful, secret means to our spiritual growth.” In what ways will worship stimulate such growth?

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