



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory  
Prayer And Fasting*

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## COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

Communication with God is the privilege of every child of God. Every believer has the opportunity to spend time in the presence of the Father through prayer. Because of Jesus Christ, believers have an open door to the Father's presence, "For through Him, we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (**Ephesians 2:18**). Because of this open door, believers have the opportunity to talk with God and listen to Him. The reason for spending time in His presence talking and listening to Him is so that we will develop an intimate relationship with Him. We communicate with God in order to deepen and strengthen our relationship to Him.

Learning to communicate with God takes time and hard work. It is true that believers have a desire to pray from the first moments of their new life in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit who resides in believers is the Spirit of prayer. He empowers and enables believers to cry out to God, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (**Galatians 4:6**). Charles Spurgeon once wrote that praying is as natural to the Christian as breathing is to a human!

Yet, this desire to pray has to be developed into a deep and intimate communication with God. When a person surrenders his or her life to Jesus Christ, that person becomes a "babe" in Christ, a child of God. He or she is a spiritual baby. In the natural realm, a baby does not come out of the womb communicating like an adult does. A baby has to learn how to speak and listen. A baby has to learn how to put words and sentences together. A baby has to learn how to communicate with others.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. A believer has to learn and grow in his or her communication with God. A believer does not automatically have a deep and intimate relationship to God. When a person surrenders to Christ, it is the beginning of learning how to communicate with God.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* focuses on learning how to communicate with God. In this issue, I want to introduce a simple plan of how to

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approach and relate to God. This plan is based on the name of God. Each letter in His name stands for a different aspect of our communication with Him. I simply offer this plan as a guide to help you grow in your ability to communicate with God. You might want to use this plan or you can glean some insights from it to help you. I have used this plan in my personal prayer life and in teaching others, especially new believers, how to communicate with God.

## GLORIFY HIS NAME

The first part of this plan for prayer is to glorify the name of God. When I say that we are to "glorify" the name of God, it means to reveal the greatness and majesty of God. It is declaring how great and awesome God is. The way that we glorify the name of God is through praise and thanksgiving.

Praise and thanksgiving are closely related to each other. They are so closely related that it is hard to draw a distinction between them. Yet, it is important to see them as separate acts. The basic distinctions between praise and thanksgiving are:

- ◆ Praise focuses on the character of God; giving thanks focuses on the actions of God. When you praise God, you adore Him for who He is. When you thank God, you adore Him for what He does for you.
- ◆ Praise is selfless; giving thanks focuses on God and His blessings in your life. Praising God is looking only at God. When you give thanks, you are looking at how this great God has blessed you and relates to you.
- ◆ Praise finds its delight in God Himself; giving thanks finds in delight in what God does. When you praise God, the person and the perfections of God wholly consume you. When you give thanks, the blessings that flow out of His person and perfections consume you.

Though they are distinct, both praise and giving thanks are essential to glorifying God's name.

In this plan for prayer, the believer is to approach God by glorifying His name. This means that he or she is to enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving for God, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (**Psalm**

**100:4**). The Word of God also says in **Psalm 103:1-2**, "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

In both of these texts, praise and giving thanks are connected. In **Psalm 100:4**, the believer is taught to enter God's presence by being thankful to Him and by blessing His name. This is praise and giving thanks to God. In **Psalm 103:2**, the believer is exhorted to bless God's name and not to forget all His benefits. To bless the name of God is to praise Him. It is to adore and exclaim the glorious character of God. When a believer gives thanks to God, he or she is not forgetting the benefits of God. Giving thanks prevents the believer from forgetting God's blessings.

When you enter the presence of God, you need to enter with praise and thanksgiving to God. I realize that there will be times when the believer does not do this. An example of this is what I call "arrow" prayers. These are short prayers that you pray throughout the day concerning people and situations. These prayers are short, sharp, and go straight into God's presence. However, the believer needs to develop the practice of entering God's presence with praise and thanksgiving. You need to develop your ability to praise and thank Him. This is essential to your communication with Him.

I also realize that there will be times when you will enter God's presence only with praise or only with thanksgiving. There have been times when I prayed and all I did was praise God. I spent the whole time adoring His character and celebrating His greatness. At other times of prayer, I spent the whole time thanking God. The whole focus of these times was thanking God for the blessings that flowed out of His character. I was wholly consumed by His blessings and thanking Him for these blessings.

In this prayer plan, believers are taught to enter God's presence first and foremost with praise and thanksgiving. I have used and taught other models of prayer that separate praise and thanksgiving. These other models are fine and can be helpful in guiding a believer in how to pray. Yet, since praise and thanksgiving are so closely related, I feel that it is best to have them connected, especially when you enter into God's presence to communicate with Him.

Why should praise and thanksgiving be connected in your praying? There are some basic reasons for this:

- ◆ *God is worthy to be praised and thanked by you.* This is the most basic reason for this. God is worthy to be praised. He is the only true and living God. He alone is worthy of your praise (**Psalm 115:3; Romans 11:35-36**). He is also worthy to be thanked by you. He consistently blesses you with God and perfect gifts (**James 1:17**). The only proper response to His goodness is to thank Him.
- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks sets the tone for your praying.* God is worthy to receive praise and thanks from you. Yet, when you do this, it has a powerful and a positive impact on you. It gets you in the right frame of mind to pray. It causes you to focus on the fact that you are entering into God's presence. It slows you down and fixes your faith on God.
- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks build your faith.* Faith is essential to powerful and effective communication with God (**Hebrews 11:6**). Your faith is strengthened as you praise and thank God. When you praise Him, you see how great and powerful He is. You come to realize more profoundly what a glorious God He is. As you give thanks to Him, you see how He has exercised His power and goodness toward you. You come to realize that God has blessed you beyond measure. This strengthens your faith to trust Him and to intercede before Him. By entering His presence with praise and thanks, you are building your faith to communicate with Him.
- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks increase your intimacy with God.* As you adore God and give thanks to Him, you will be drawn closer to Him. You will grow in your understanding of His glorious character. You will see the depths of His goodness in fresh and new ways. You will realize His love and compassion for you in new depths. This will in turn move you to love Him and motivate you to know and serve Him in fresh and new ways.
- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks will deepen your humility before God.* When a believer praises and thanks God, it produces in him or her a deeper humility. By combining praise and

thanksgiving, one sees how glorious, almighty, and good that God is. As you praise and thank Him, it produces a sense of how great He is and how unworthy that you are. When this happens, you experience a deeper humility before Him and a willingness to submit to Him in all that He commands and leads you to do.

- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks makes you willing to listen to God.* Many times we come to God with our own agenda. We pray and ask God to adopt our plans and make them His own. Yet, powerful and effective praying is based on listening to God and following His leading in prayer. Praise and giving thanks will help you do this. These things will increase your ability to submit to God and His leadings. As you praise Him, you realize how wise and powerful He is. You recognize that He is right and true in all that He says and does. As you thank Him, you see how good He is. You realize how He has blessed you and answered your prayers. When you practice praise and giving thanks, your will is made pliable and willing to receive what God wants because He is so great, wise, and good.
- ◆ *Praise and giving thanks are the responsibility of the believer.* The Word of God says in **Hebrews 13:15**, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." This is another verse that connects praise with thanksgiving. Because of Jesus Christ, we have entered into a personal relationship with God. It is our responsibility to praise and thank the God who has created us and saved us.

## Praise

How can you develop your ability to praise God? *You must make a commitment to praise God.* The psalmist declares, "By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You" (**Psalm 71:6**). It is not enough to have a desire to praise God. You must move beyond this to a commitment to praise Him. This requires you to strive daily to learn about Him and praise Him with what you learn.

*You must saturate your life with the Word of God.* God has revealed Himself in His Word. You grow in your understanding of who God is by reading and studying the Word. This is crucial in learning to praise God. Your knowledge of God will determine the depth of your praise to Him. The more you know God, the deeper and more intense your praise will be for Him. Dig into God's Word and learn about who God is. As you learn about God, turn every truth that you learn about God into a point for praise.

*Another way to grow in your ability to praise God is to ask God to teach you how to do this.* God delights in praise. It is His desire for His people to praise Him. The Holy Spirit is your Teacher. Ask Him to teach you how to offer the sacrifice of praise. Plead with Him to grant you a deeper understanding of God. Call on Him to give you a heart for praise.

*Doing "I" exams will help you grow in your ability to praise Him.* When you pray, how much do you use the word "I"? Overusing the word "I" may mean that your prayers are more self-centered than God-centered. It might be helpful to write out "You" prayers. An example is, "You are righteous, O God" or "You are holy and wise, Father". By using the word "You", it enables you to focus more on God than on self.

*A constructive way to grow in your ability to praise God is to build a vocabulary of praise.* A vocabulary of praise consists of the names, characteristics, titles, and pictures of God. As you learn these things, you can then use them to praise God. God has revealed these things about Himself to help us know Him more intimately. Strive to gain an understanding of these things and use them as points of praise.

## Giving Thanks

The following are some suggestions on how you can develop your giving of thanks to God. *First, ask God to create a spirit of thanksgiving in you.* Plead with the Holy Spirit to give you a heart for thanksgiving. The Word of God says in **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." God's desire is that you offer thanks to Him on a continual basis. God's blessings in your life are unceasing (**James 1:17**). Giving of thanks to God

should flow continually from your heart and lips. This is God's will for you. Turn this command of God into a prayer request. Ask Him to enable you to give thanks in everything.

*Next, seek the filling of the Holy Spirit.* The filling of the Holy Spirit is intimately connected to thanksgiving (**Ephesians 5:18, 20**). It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that a believer can be thankful to God. He empowers the believer to give thanks to the Father on a continual basis. In order to develop a spirit of thanksgiving, seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

*Another way to develop a heart for thanksgiving is to offer spontaneous and planned thanks to God.* By spontaneous thanks, I mean thanking God throughout the day for His blessings. It is immediately offering to God thanks for particular things that He does for you. By planned thanksgiving, I mean having a time where you think about God's blessings in your life. You record these in a journal and give thanks to Him for these things. The key is to have a variety in this matter. You need both to develop a heart for thanksgiving.

*You might want to keep a catalog of blessings.* A catalog of blessings is a place where you record God's blessings in your life. You can do this in your journal or you might even have a special journal or notebook to put this in. It is simply keeping a record of God's various and rich blessings in your life. By doing this, it enables you to develop sensitivity to His blessings and the need to thank Him. It will also increase your faith in and intimacy with God as you look back and see how richly God has blessed you.

*Finally, it will be helpful to remember three basic guidelines concerning your giving of thanks.* First, give thanks **daily**. This can be either planned or spontaneous thanksgiving. It could be both. As God blesses you daily, remember to thank Him daily. Second, give thanks **specifically**. Beware of blanket statements like, "I thank You for all that You do for me." I realize that these can be sincere and can honor God. Yet, too many times, these types of statements are empty phrases that we use to go through the motions of giving thanks. Strive to be as specific as possible. At the same time, give thanks **intentionally**. Make it a point to thank God. This is not always easy. Yet, God's blessings continually flow into your life. He deserves your thanks. Purpose in your heart to thank Him daily. I realize that one can turn this into a dead routine. It