

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 11

Prayer: Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving

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Prayer: Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Bible as the Textbook on Prayer

The Prayer of Adoration and Praise

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- discover the Bible as a textbook on prayer, especially the prayers of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving
- appreciate the significance of adoration and thanksgiving that is often neglected in personal Christian prayer
- develop a growing vocabulary of adoration, praise and thanksgiving and incorporate into your personal devotional life

Prayer: Adoration, Praise and Thanksgiving

INTRODUCTION

How important is prayer, anyway? Joseph Benson was a bright young man, a younger contemporary of John Wesley, who became one of the first systematic theologians and Bible commentary writers among the early Wesleyans. John Wesley wrote to him on November 30, 1770. Benson was such a good scholar that Wesley wrote part of the letter in Greek, part in Latin, and part of it in English. Wesley closed the letter with these words: “Let no study swallow up or intrude upon the hours of private prayer. *Nil tanti* [nothing is of so much importance].”

Ann Bolton was a woman whom John Wesley led to sanctifying grace and to remarkable Christian service—mostly by mail, writing her some 130 letters of spiritual guidance over a period of 29 years. Ann was a tireless worker organizing prayer meetings, small group ministries, and charities for the poor and the sick. In a letter dated August 25, 1771, Wesley advised Ann, “Let not your works of mercy rob you of time for private prayer.”

No advice could be more important to the Christians of today. We live in a society that values full schedules. Being busy seems to be the natural development of our lives unless we use purposeful restraint. Our ministries in the church while important can be another demanding layer of activity in our lives. As we cut corners to make time for the needs of others, we can borrow time from only three sources: the time for sleep and rest, the time that should go to family, and the most easily invaded time of all the hours of private prayer. Spending oneself for others is no excuse for missing private prayer. *Nil tanti!*

This module is the first of two on prayer. Since this unit is about the personal disciplines and devotional skills and practices, we deal primarily with private prayer. Corporate prayer will come up for more attention in the module on the community disciplines.

THE BIBLE AS THE TEXTBOOK ON PRAYER



NOTES

The Bible gives examples of prayers, model prayers, and prayers that we can make our own. Before we plunge into the many books on prayer available, we should become acquainted with what the Bible teaches about prayer.

BIBLICAL PRAYERS

Using the following elements and sequence of prayer, study and apply the elements and sequences to the four prayers listed below.

The Elements and Sequence of Prayer

- Adoration or praise (for who God is)
- Thanksgiving and praise (for what God does)
- Confession (of sin or need)
- Repentance (turning from sin or disobedience to God)
- Affirmation of trust, faith, hope
- Intercession (praying for others)
- Petition (asking God for help or guidance)

Biblical Prayers

- The Lord's Prayer: Matt. 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4
- A Prayer Psalm: Psalm 90. Compare to the hymn "O God Our Help in Ages Past" (*Sing to the Lord*, 95)
- A Nation's Prayer: Lam. 5
- St. Paul at Prayer: Three times in 1 Thessalonians, Paul pauses for a short prayer for the believers. (1:2-3; 3:11-13; 5:23-24)

THE PRAYER OF ADORATION AND PRAISE



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PRAYER, PUNISHMENT, AND PLEASURE

Take away the bliss of heaven and the punishment for sin and where is the motivation for prayer, praise, and adoration for God? No heaven, no hell—why pray? That sort of shallow thinking by Christians motivated the 12th-century disciples of Bernard of Clairvaux to make popular the vision of a woman carrying a pitcher of water in one hand and a torch in the other.

All over France, they carried drawings and preached sermons that said with the pitcher of water the woman would put out the fires of hell. With the torch, she would burn up the pleasures of heaven. With the punishment of hell and the glories of heaven not scaring people or coaxing people into righteous living and self-serving prayers, people would be able to simply love God for His own sake and offer prayers of adoration and praise that had no vested self-interest.

That image may be extreme, but as Wes Tracy writes in *Reflecting God*, “In adoration one worships God, not for what He has done for you, but for His own sake. That is to say, adoration does not spring from the heart because God has forgiven sins, removed guilt, brought peace of mind, . . . or sent the rent money—though He may have bestowed all of these. Rather, adoration rises in love for the God who was before we were born what He is and will be long after we are gone.”

Frederick Buechner said, “I loved him [God] not so much in spite of there being nothing in it for me, but almost because there was nothing in it for me.” Have you experienced this kind of prayer? You are to express the idea of the Woman with the Torch and the Pitcher by making a drawing or sketch of the scene. *From Reflecting God*, 114

BUILDING YOUR ADORATION VOCABULARY

E. Dee Freeborn, teacher of spiritual formation at Nazarene Theological Seminary, wrote he discovered his adoration vocabulary was “meager indeed. A friend helped me by suggesting I use the alphabet. Following his advice, I made a list of ‘adoration descriptor,’ writing one word for every letter of the alphabet. Then I prayed the whole list. What a breakthrough!” Freeborn said he began to record his new adoration vocabulary in his prayer journal, going back and adding new words or descriptive phrases as they came to mind. *From The Upward Call*, 84.

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING



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A BIBLICAL PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

Examine Mary's prayer of praise and thanksgiving (Luke 1:46-55, NRSV). List the things God has done for which Mary offers thanks. List the words and phrases of praise for who God is.

My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Other examples of prayers of thanksgiving include Psalm 105 (thanks to the God of history) and Psalm 107 (thanks to the delivering God).

JESUS AND THE THANKSGIVING PRAYER

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18, NIV). "Give thanks in all circumstances" is not only the will of Jesus Christ; it is the model He lived out before us.

Faced with a hungry throng in the desert and with only one sack lunch with which to feed them, Jesus did not get desperate and wail, "O God, if You hear me, I sure need a miracle now. I think . . . I really believe You can do it!" No, Jesus simply took the loaves and fishes, returned thanks, that is, said a table grace, and passed out the food (Matt. 14:13-21).

When Jesus stood at the grave of His good friend Lazarus, He gave thanks. He did not ask everyone to join hands and hum "I Would Not Be Denied." Instead, He simply prayed, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me . . ." (John 11:41).


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Consider Jesus at the Last Supper. His heart was broken by the betrayal He knew lay just ahead. His death, too, loomed only hours away. Give thanks in those circumstances? That is exactly what Jesus did. He took a piece of bread, called it the symbol of His broken body, took the cup and called the wine the symbol of His own blood of the covenant, and before distributing the bread and wine, what did He do? Jesus “gave thanks” (Luke 22:17-19). Mark 14:26 tells us Jesus went to His death singing a hymn. We do not know the words, but who would be surprised if the hymn He sang on His way to the Cross was a hymn of thanksgiving?

All four of Jesus’ biographers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were struck with the fact that “in all circumstances” Jesus gave thanks.

GIVING THANKS

The call to give thanks “in” all circumstances is sometimes confused with giving thanks “for” all circumstances. We need not force ourselves to praise God for things that are not praiseworthy. Nevertheless, the power of praise in difficult times can be life changing. Sitting down with a blank piece of paper gives us an opportunity to make a list for that which we give thanks. This is a wonderful reminder of all that is good and right in our lives.

Giving thanks can also re-direct our vision. When we have been beaten down, it literally and figuratively causes our eyes to become downcast. Giving thanks as a “sacrifice of praise” can begin to lift our eyes to our God and helper. Giving thanks is also contagious. I will forever remember a friend reflecting on her ongoing recovery from a debilitating stroke saying: “How can I ask for more from God when He has given me so much already.” She then began to recount her salvation story. If nothing else our hearts should be able to remember with great thanksgiving the story of our redemption.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Consider Henry Van Dyke’s classic hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” *From Worship in Song, 17.*

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,
 God of glory, Lord of love;
 Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,
 Opening to the sun above,

**NOTES**

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
Drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness,
Fill us with the light of day!

All thy works with joy surround Thee;
Earth and heaven reflect Thy rays.
Stars and angels sing around Thee,
Center of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain,
Flowery meadow, flashing sea,
Chanting bird and flowing fountain
Call us to rejoice in Thee!

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Use the alphabet to create an adoration list (see Journaling). Here is a prompt for the first three and the last.

A—Almighty

B—Blessed

C—Creator

Z—Zenith of Glory

2. List things that God has done do you wish to thank Him. List three things you wish to praise God for *being* rather than *doing*.
3. Conduct a prayer-life survey of 10-12 people. Create a “survey” that can be filled out anonymously. Do not report names, but descriptions of the person would be useful (i.e., 19-year-old-college sophomore, experienced pastor, middle-aged businessman, etc). Tabulate the results in an organized manner and report trends and discoveries. The following questions would be useful:
 - In a word, how would you describe your prayer life?
 - What book or sermon on prayer has helped you most?
 - What examples of prayer in the Bible come to mind?
 - When you pray, what place do praise and thanksgiving have in the prayers you offer?
 - What plan or method of prayer (if any) do you use?

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

Record, contemplate, and amend the adoration list you created.

NOTES**SUGGESTED READING**

- E. Dee Freeborn, et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 81-94.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 111-18.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Workbook*, 76-82.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Leader's Guide*, 30-32.
- Morris Weigelt and E. Dee Freeborn, *The Lord's Prayer: Design for Spiritual Formation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001).
- William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Lord, Teach Us: The Lord's Prayer and the Christian Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. Adoration is an important element of prayer.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. *Nil tanti* means nothing is of so much importance.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. In adoration one worships God, not for what He has done for you, but for His own sake.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. The Bible is a primary source of prayers.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Petition means asking God for help or guidance.
 - A. True
 - B. False
6. We cannot give thanks in all circumstances.
 - A. True
 - B. False
7. It is too difficult to grow your vocabulary for adoration.
 - A. True
 - B. False
8. Adoration is praise for who God is.
 - A. True
 - B. False
9. Repentance is just being sorry.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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10. Intercession is not an important element of prayer.
- A. True
 - B. False
11. Giving thanks can _____.
- A. re-direct our vision
 - B. lift our eyes to God
 - C. can encourage others
 - D. all of the above
12. There are examples of Jesus giving thanks in _____.
- A. all the gospels
 - B. Matthew
 - C. Mark
 - D. John

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Talk about the “adoration” list you created. Engage your mentor in a time of sharing by going back and forth suggesting “answers” for the alphabetical list.
2. Ask your mentor to fill out the prayer-lie survey you created. Share the findings/tabulations of the survey you conducted with your mentor.