



THESE THINGS I PRAY

This five-week series will be an exploration of the power of prayer, using the book of Psalms as a guide. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms the “Prayerbook of the Bible.” While we don’t necessarily pray for everything the Psalms pray for, we do learn from the Psalms the mode of prayer – how to come to God in prayer. Through this series we’ll explore the simple acronym for prayer – ACTS – which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Prayer changes things and every prayer has power. Our hope is through this series you’ll be better connected to the power of prayer.

ADORATION • Psalm 145 • Katie Fowler • October 30, 2016

My husband and I enjoy watching British movies. I don't know why – maybe we just like the accents. Have you noticed everything sounds cooler in a British accent? You know my sermon would sound so much better in a British accent. But I think really there is something about the culture that intrigues us. Particularly, there is something interesting about the Royal Family. We were watching a movie the other night about a young Queen Elizabeth. In the movie she has spent most of the night out in London incognito but at one point in the film the crowd around her realizes it's her. They realize they were in the presence of royalty. Want to guess their first move? They bowed before her. Their first move was to bow.

Today, we continue in our series in prayer, and maybe you come into this place and have a lot of questions. How do I pray, what does it look like? What's it all about? Maybe you have experienced struggles in your prayer life, dry spells, and questions of how do I start again? Where do I even begin?

I want us to think about us when we come before God in prayer—when we come before God the King, whose kingdom is everlasting, the One who far above any earthly power, the Living God whose name is above all other names—what's our first move?

Our passage today (Psalm 145) points us to our first move in prayer. As we come not before earthly royalty but our God the King, we bow in praise and adoration.

We are in our second week of our sermon series, "These Things I Pray." And as we explore the power of prayer, we are looking at four movements of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

We begin today with adoration: the first movement in prayer... which means "before we bring our laundry list to God," before we start naming our needs, before we get to our prayer requests, we are starting with a posture of praise.

Now, I have to tell you, I struggle with this—I can reduce prayer to God to here are my requests, here are my needs. I can reduce prayer to something like a stop at Dutch Brothers coffee – let me drive thru, give you my order, get my coffee, and be off with my day. I am not getting out of my car; I am not even taking the keys out of the ignition. You can make your small talk to God if you want; you can be super chipper like the people at Dutch Brothers, but I am here really to receive from you and I am off.

Do you ever feel like that in your prayer life with God? Like it is just a transaction. A quick give and take. But is that what prayer is about? Is that the sum total of prayer? Remember, as we talked about last week, prayer is not so much us pulling God into our world, but pulling us into God's world.

Scholar NT Wright described prayer as an invitation. It is an invitation into the life of God, the life shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (<http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/the-lords-prayer-as-a-paradigm-of-christian-prayer/>) Wright says this, "We are welcomed into God's very presence....we see through prayer a door standing open in heaven, and we are ushered into the throne room. But we are no longer there as mere observers. We are there as beloved children." (Wright, N.T. *Simply Christian*, pp. 171-172)

Prayer is entering into God's very presence. It's encountering the Living God. And here is what we find:

Adoration flows from encounter. Like in Isaiah 6, when the prophet Isaiah sees the Lord, he sees the Lord high and exalted. And there is this song surrounding Him, the seraphim calling to

one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory." Or in Revelation 4, the veil is pulled back, and we see this scene of worship, and the 24 elders fall down before the Lord. Before the beauty, the glory of the Lord, they cry out, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power."

This worship, this adoration flows from encountering the Living God. And like in those scenes of worship, as we enter into God's presence, this first movement of prayer is adoration. Adoration comes before I get anything off my chest, before I bring my questions, my requests.

Can I just declare who You are? Can I proclaim Your beauty Lord? It is what we see in our passage today, Psalm 145—this psalm of praise. Line after line in our psalm today, calling us into praise, reminding us of who God is.

CS Lewis wrote: "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance." (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 45) That's adoration—this deep delight in God—that made the angels cry, "Holy." That made the elders sing, "Worthy." That leads the psalmist in Psalm 145 to say:

Verses 1 & 2:

I will exalt You, my God the King; I will praise Your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise You and extol Your name for ever and ever.

Our psalm starts with one individual lifting up his voice...but it moves from there...the psalmist calls all the generations of God's people into praise. Verse 4, one generation commends You works to another. And then the psalmist, in this ever expanding circle, calls all of creation into praise. I can't help but think of our mission statement when I read this psalm—our mission to prepare all generations to impact lives for Christ. This ever widening movement, this ever widening story we are being caught up in—yes, you come as an individual offering yourself to the Lord, lifting your voice, but it grows from there into this ever-widening community of praise.

And what does this praise, this adoration look like? Words flow in this psalm — words like worthy and greatness.

Greatness that no one can fathom.
Mighty acts, glorious splendor
Wonderful works, great deeds.
We are talking about not just goodness but abundant goodness, the psalmist says.
Let's praise Him, for remember who our God is...
This God who is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.
And you got to hear, you got to know, we have to declare. ...
God is good to all.
This is our God.
Who has compassion on all He has made.
Who is trustworthy.
Faithful.
Who upholds those who fall.
Who lifts up those who are bowed down.
Who opens His hand and satisfies.
Who is near, who hears, who rescues.

And after reflecting, mediating on all that is true about the Lord, the psalmist closes with verse 21.

Verse 21:

²¹ My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise His holy name
for ever and ever.

Church, Psalm 145 is teaching us how to pray prayers of adoration, praising the Lord for who He is—meditating on who the Lord is, calling to mind the Lord's characteristics, praising the Lord what He has done.

In this way, our psalm points to an important shift in prayer. We start not with ourselves. We will get to our confession, to our requests—but we aren't starting there. Now, let's be honest, most of life is spent focusing on ourselves. My phone now automatically categorizes my pictures and you know what one of the categories is—selfies. You want to know how many selfies I have on here?—114.

Most of life is spent focusing on ourselves. My prayer life can reflect that too. But there is this deliberate move—we are talking about—this deliberate move focusing first on the Lord, bowing before Him in worship and adoration.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *"Reflections on the Psalms"* reminded me of something, we know something the Israelites didn't. We know the fullness of God's saving work in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, we know the full expression, the full extent of the Lord's love and greatness; we know the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth. The visible image of the invisible God, who sat down and ate with sinners and tax collectors, who welcomed outcasts and made room for the least of these, Christ who loved us and gave Himself up for us as fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Great are you Lord, for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. He who did not spare his own Son— but gave Him up for us all. Oh what mercy flows from the heart of God, what beauty revealed in Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One. (C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 52)

As the old hymn goes, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in light of his glory and grace."

The first movement in prayer is adoration. And we could end the sermon there, but let's think about our lives for a minute. We declare the Lord is worthy, but what about when our delight in God slips and slides down the list of our priorities—when other things start to crowd out our adoration for the Lord?

I adore a lot of things. I adore my husband. I adore my friends. I adore cold brew coffee. I adore the fact that I will be able to drink it again one day. I adore my smart phone. I adore my comfort and safety. I adore getting things done and being efficient. I have some competing adorations. God, who alone is worthy, whom we could never praise enough, starts to get bumped down the list.

And here is the problem, as the great theologian Augustine said, our loves are not rightly ordered. Things that should not be loved supremely make their way to the top and God who alone should be worshiped, adored above all other things, gets knocked out of position. Let me give you a few examples.

I went to undergraduate school at the University of Florida. And every home game in the fall, some 80,000 people gather in the stadium, decked out in orange and blue. And of course, there

are all kinds of chants and cheers and songs that fill the stadium, including the singing of our alma mater.

I want you to hear the words of this song:

University of Florida ALMA MATER

Florida, our Alma Mater,
thy glorious name we praise.
All thy loyal sons and daughters,
a joyous song shall raise.

...

Neath the orange and blue victorious,
our love shall never fail.
There's no other name so glorious,
all hail, Florida, hail!

I remember being 20 years old, singing that song in the stadium and thinking wait—what? No other name so glorious? I remember talking with someone about this who deeply loved Jesus and said, "Isn't that song a little blasphemous?" And she said, "What? No—it's football."

Sure, it's football—but it can be worship, supreme adoration.

Or how about this, this song that is popular on the radio now by Florida Georgia Line:

Speaking of this sort of salvation he has experienced through his relationship with this woman, the singer says about the woman---

"You're holy, holy, holy, holy
I'm high on loving you...."

Now, that might feel like hyperbole, those two examples. A bit over the top, right? But it points to something. We were made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, but adoration for God can get knocked out of that top place. It could be a relationship. Yes, it could be even our love for our football team. It could be our career, our hobbies, our politics, our pursuit of power or popularity, our adoration for material goods and thrilling experiences. Our loves become disordered, and honestly, our prayer life reflects that. At least mine does.

What's the solution? How do we rightly order our loves? How do we love God and adore Him above all other things? James K.A. Smith says this: "Ever had the experience of hearing an incredibly illuminating and informative sermon on Sunday, waking up Monday morning with new resolve and conviction to be different, and already failing by Tuesday night?" (James K.A. Smith, *You are What You Love*, p. 5)

He goes on to say we don't just think our way into new behaviors. It's not that we all sit here and grit our teeth and say we are going to adore Jesus more. No, we actually need the Holy Spirit to change us, to make us into worshippers, lovers of the One, True God. Smith says we need to take up habits, practices that shape our loves. Because it is in these practices, that the Holy Spirit has access to our hearts and begins to shape us. (James K.A. Smith, *You are What You Love*)

So what are some of those practices we can take up? First, I want you to think about our time in gathered worship every Sunday as the community of God's people. I know for some people gathering in worship seems like maybe at best a helpful-add on to the Christian life. They wonder, do I really need to gather with the people of God in worship? But at First Pres, we talk a lot about a commitment to be here, to gather together. This is, in part, because we recognize this is space for the Lord to re-orient us.

Think about some of the practices we share in week after week in worship. At the beginning of our service, we participate in a call to worship. We orient ourselves towards the Lord. And then as we move through the service, as we pray, as we hear God's word proclaimed, as we share in the sacraments, all of it is re-orienting us back to our first love, shaping us, forming us as we are then sent out.

But what about in our daily lives, what practices shape our hearts and re-order them?

I know someone who for years, every time he started his car he said the Lord's prayer. He got in the car in the morning to begin his commute to work, and he prayed. He got back in his car at the end of the work day and he prayed, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name."

I heard recently of a pastor outside Chicago—every morning he gets out of bed by getting to his knees, that's his first move. And this action, this practice, it is shaping him, forming him. Before he brushes his teeth, before he answers a single email or ponders what he is going to get done that day—he hits his knees.

You know most mornings one of the first things I do is check my phone, but what if instead of reaching for my cell phone, I began a practice of a simple prayer: Holy, Holy, Holy, are You Lord God Almighty, the whole earth is full of Your glory. Incredibly simple practice right, but how might the Holy Spirit begin to shape me?

Or what if you began to daily pray the psalms? Start with Psalm 145—use it daily as template for prayer.

In these practices, as we gather on Sundays, as we incorporate them into our daily lives, we are saying Lord, we need You to shape us, to order our hearts. Would You shape us into a community that delights in You and adores You above all?

For we have seen You in Your sanctuary, Lord.
We have tasted of Your goodness.
We have gazed upon Your power.
We have knelt at Your cross.
And every day we want to bless Your name.

We are going to close now with a time in prayer to bring our praise and adoration to the Lord in prayer.

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STUDY GUIDE

"Adoration" • Psalm 145

Start It

- Today, we will explore our first movement in prayer, "adoration." Scholar N.T. Wright says this about prayer, "We are welcomed into God's very presence....we see through prayer a door standing open in heaven, and we are ushered into the throne room. But we are no longer there as mere observers. We are there as beloved children." How does entering into God's presence lead us to adoration of God? Why is it important to begin prayer with adoration of God?

Study It

- C.S. Lewis wrote, "The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance." Psalm 145 is full of this deep delight in God. As we enter into prayer and delight in who God is, we too are led to praise and adoration.
- Read slowly through Psalm 145. How is the psalmist expressing his delight in God? What words or phrases capture you? Why do you think you are drawn to those particular words or phrases?
- What starts as one individual voice (Psalm 145:1-2), leads to an ever-widening circle of praise spreading through all the generations of God's people and then all of creation (see Psalm 145:4-7, Psalm 145:21). How might our individual praise of God impact the wider community around us?
- While we were made to glorify God and worship God alone, while our prayers should be full of adoration, we recognize that, as Augustine said, our loves are not rightly ordered. Other loves, other priorities begin to take top priority over God. Our delight in God wanes and often in our prayer life we rush right past the beauty of the Lord that leads to praise and adoration. How have you experienced this in your own life?
- As James K.A. Smith says, our loves are shaped by the practices and habits we participate in. How might a steady practice of reading and praying the psalms lead us back to a rightly ordered heart that loves God above all other things? What other practices help shape your heart and move you towards deeper love for God?

Pray It

When Jesus' disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, he said to them, "When you pray, say, 'Father, hallowed be your name.'" Pray that the Lord's name would be blessed in our prayers- both as a church community and in our own individual lives. Spend some time right now blessing the Lord's name in prayer.

Live It

Every day this week read through Psalm 145. Let the words of the psalmist shape your own prayers of adoration. What new delight in God do you discover growing in your own heart?