

Sermon: Psalms as a School of Prayer:
Part #1 - Prayers of Praise, Trust, Thanksgiving, by Linda Worth
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Last week, we began our series on prayer. Zak described prayer as communication with God. I like that description. Just as there are many ways to communicate with each other, there are many ways to pray or communicate with God.

For the next 3 weeks we will be looking at "Psalms as a School of Prayer." And since it is Thanksgiving, we will begin with "Prayers of Praise, Trust and Thanksgiving" today. Next week we look at "Prayers of Lament, Disorientation and Anger," and on October 24th "Prayers of Confession and Renewal."

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems or prayers, 73 written by David. It was known as the Prayer Book of God's people and since many of these poems were put to music, it was also called the Hymn Book of God's people.

I decided to begin this morning by asking, "who over the years taught you how to pray or communicate with God?" and "what kind of prayers or ways of communicating have you been taught?" (the older you are, the more ground you have to cover.)

When I first considered these questions, I thought my first teachers were my family and my first prayers were prayers of intercession or asking God for things.

Then I remembered some of the songs from my Nursery Songbook which I received when I started S.S. as a 2-year-old, and noticed that they were songs expressing praise, trust and thanksgiving. E.g.

- Praise him, praise him, all you little children God is love, God is love 2x;
- God takes care of me everyday. When I run about and play.
And at nighttime when I sleep, God takes care of me;
- We thank you God, We thank you God, for (fill in the blank), we thank you God.

I was surprised to realize that I have been praying songs of Praise, Trust and Thanksgiving for most of my life.

Another childhood memory is of my mother teaching me - through her actions - that I could pray any time, not just at mealtime and at bedtime, and I didn't need to kneel, bow my head, or close my eyes to pray. She did this by singing this song while we were doing dishes:

- Whisper a prayer in the morning, whisper a prayer at noon,
Whisper a prayer in the evening, to keep your heart in tune.

Others who taught me to pray when I was a child or youth include S.S. & Vacation Bible School teachers, Girl's Club & youth group leaders, and the many people participating in Sunday worship services.

In addition to church related teachers, I remember learning to pray at public school.

Like Twila mentioned last Sunday, we prayed the Lord's Prayer each morning and sang songs like: Holy, Holy, Holy, Trust and Obey, and What a friend we have in Jesus, to name just a few. Again, I now recognize these songs as prayers of praise, trust, and thanksgiving.

As a young adult, I learned new ways to pray from other participants in small groups, first here at home, and then when I was in voluntary service in Pennsylvania with people from across Canada and the United States. It was during this time that I learned many choruses, some of which were verses of Psalms put to music.

Over the years, I also learned to pray from those who shared their ideas in books and then the internet. The book, "Too Busy Not to Pray" caught my attention as a young mom. Author, Bill Hybels recommended the A.C.T.S. or ACTS pattern of prayer to give balance to our prayer lives. A for Adoration (or praise), C for Confession, T for Thanksgiving & S for Supplication (or intercession). When thinking about this pattern, I realized we include all four of these forms of prayer in our worship services - when we speak or sing words of praise, confession, intercession, and thanksgiving.

Others, who introduced me to new ways to pray or communicate with God include friends, one who kept track of her prayer requests in her journal, as well as the answers to her prayers. And then there were Spiritual Directors, resource people at workshops and retreats, and teachers of courses on prayer and spirituality.

I recall being shocked at one workshop, when the resource person suggested that we see all the parts of our worship services as prayer. This was another opportunity to expand my understanding of prayer. At this same workshop, it was suggested that we look at worship services as drama, the audience is God, the actors are the congregation, and the worship leaders, musicians, Experiencing the Story presenters and preachers are all prompters - each helping the congregation communicate with God.

But now let's look to the psalms to see what more we can learn about communicating with God through prayers of praise, trust, and thanksgiving.

Some psalms, like Psalm 100, combine prayers of praise, trust, and thanksgiving.

Verse 4 reads: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. Verse 5, For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 23 is a great example of a prayer of trust. I think I was encouraged to memorized Psalm 23 at Vacation Bible School and when I was in the hospital as a pre-teen, to have my tonsils out, I recall how comforting it was to repeat it, over and over again.

I like the word pictures David draws when comparing his relationship to God to that of a sheep and a good shepherd who meets all the sheep's needs, The shepherd provides green pastures for food, and still waters for drink, because after all, rushing waters are dangerous for sheep. But it isn't only physical needs the shepherd meets. David also highlights that the shepherd meets his need for a restored soul and his need to find the right path.

David goes on to say when - not if, but when he goes through difficult times he is not afraid. Why? Because he knows the shepherd is with him. David is comforted, knowing the shepherd is there for protection & direction. The shepherd's rod was to protect him from wild animals, and his staff was for nudging him onto the right path or returning him to the right path when he strayed.

Then David says, he can relax and eat what the shepherd has provided, even when surrounded by enemies. How can this be? Because he trusts the shepherd to keep him safe.

David talks about having his head anointed with oil. Some commentators suggest this refers to a shepherd tending to a sheep's cuts & bruises with healing oil or of putting oil on the sheep's nose to prevent insects from crawling in and laying eggs causing deadly diseases.

David acknowledges his over abundance of blessings, saying, "My cup runs over." And because of his experiences of the shepherd taking care of all his needs, he trusts that goodness and mercy will "follow" (some translate this word "pursue") him for the rest of his life and he will live in the house of the Lord forever or he will live with the awareness of God's presence with him forever.

I invite us to try to write a prayer of trust, similar to David's, this week.
What comparisons might we use to describe our relationship with God?
Can we identify the ways God meets all our needs?
How might we describe the basis for our trust in God?

Now, I would like to focus on prayers of praise & thanksgiving. There is a fine line between prayers of praise and thanksgiving. It has been suggested that prayers of praise focus on who God is while prayers of thanksgiving focus on what God does.

Many psalms are a combination of prayers of praise and thanksgiving. E.g. Ps. 92.1
[It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord](#)
[It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord](#)
[and to sing praises unto God's name, O most high](#)

A prayer of praise I sometimes use to communicate with God is Ps. 63.3.
[Thy loving kindness is better than life](#)
[Thy loving kindness is better than life.](#)
[My lips shall praise thee](#)
[Thus shall I bless thee](#)
[I will lift up my hands to thy name.](#)

I wonder, if you were going to communicate with God through praise, on what aspect of God, might you choose to focus?

And now for prayers of thanksgiving. Psalm 107:1; (ESV) says Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever,"

I decided to invite us to write our own psalms of thanksgiving this morning, by thinking of something for which we are thankful that begins with each letter of the alphabet.

Take the letter sized piece of paper that I invited you to bring - if you forgot and you are at church, you can ask the ushers for one, If you are at home, hopefully you can find one. Then in two columns, write the letters of the alphabet a to m, and then n to z.

You can begin by going through the alphabet one letter at a time. If you can't think of anything you are thankful for beginning with a particular letter, go onto the next and come back as time allows.

Or you can start with your five senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste, and the many things related to them, or think of things relating to a particular area of interest, or go through a typical day, thinking of all the things for which you are thankful. There is no right or wrong way to do this.

I will give you a couple of minutes to do this. If you finish before others you can go through the alphabet a second time.

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And now we will follow one of the prayer patterns of some of our sisters and brothers in churches in Africa and Asia who pray their individual prayers out loud all at the same time.

I will begin by saying "Thanks be to God" and call out each letter of the alphabet one by one and invite you to respond out loud, everyone at the same time with the item on your page beginning with that letter.

A	J	S
B	K	T
C	L	U
D	M	V
E	N	W
F	O	X
G	P	Y
H	Q	Z
I	R	

May our prayers or communication with God during the rest of today, tomorrow and all the tomorrows to come, be filled with praise, trust and thanksgiving. Amen? Amen.