

First Requirement for Approaching God: Renounce Self-Will



How to Pray and Get What You Pray For (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today, as I continue to share with you on a theme that's of the greatest practical importance to all of us, "How to Pray and Get What You Pray For."

In my introductory talk yesterday, I explained that most of us need to change our image of God. I shared with you how as a boy I pictured God as a stern schoolmaster, in His office at the end of a long corridor, with creaking floor boards, that you would tip-toe down the corridor hoping the floor boards wouldn't creak, knock on the door and go in expecting to be scolded for something you'd done or hadn't done. That was my particular image of God. And many of us have somewhat of a similar image, but that's not the truth about God at all. The truth is that God is a Father who loves us and welcomes us. He delights to hear and answer our prayers. We can never bother Him or weary Him by praying too much or too often. God's purpose in the New Testament is to make us a kingdom of priests, or kings and priests.

As kings our responsibility is to rule. As priests our responsibility is to pray. We are not qualified to rule until we have first learned to pray. In other words, we rule by praying. The extent of our praying will be the extent of our ruling.

Today and for the rest of this week, I'm going to speak about the right way to approach God in prayer. I believe that there are four main requirements for a right approach to God. Today, I'm going to deal with the first of these requirements.

Jesus is our example. I'll go back to Hebrews 5:7, the verse that I read in my talk yesterday. This speaks about Jesus' life on earth and how He prayed:

> "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." (NIV)

I pointed out that Jesus is our example as a priest, and that a priest's primary responsibility is to offer up sacrifice. And that

during His earthly life, the sacrifice that Jesus offered up consisted of the prayers and petitions that He offered to the Father. But at the end of that verse we're told something else that is also very important. We're told why God the Father always heard the prayer of His Son, Jesus. It says, "He was heard because of his reverent submission." That's the point that I want to emphasize in my talk today, "Reverent Submission." That's the first aspect of approaching God that we need to look at.

How was this reverent submission of Jesus expressed? The writer of Hebrews is referring to the time when Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. This described in Matthew 26:39 & 42. It says:

> "And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' [And then a little further in verse 42 of the same chapter it says:] He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.'" (NAS)

So reverent submission consists in saying to the Father, "Not as I will, but as thou will. Thy will be done." It consists in renouncing our own will and embracing the will of God. Jesus gave us a pattern prayer. He told us a particular way in which we ought to pray. It's what we normally call the Lord's Prayer. In part of this prayer He includes this very thing we are talking about. He says, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

There we are. When we come to God we have to say, "Thy will be done." And we have to include in that, "If thy will and my will are not in accord, then I renounce my will in order that thy will may be done. Where the two wills conflict, it's the will of God that must be allowed to have free course.

You see, there's an aspect of the "old nature" which is being dealt with by this requirement. In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul says this:

> "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (NIV)

So there are two selfs: the old self, our nature before God changed us; the new self, what God wants to make of us. Now, for the new self to express itself, we have to first put off the old self. That's something we have to do, it's not something that God does for us. And so when we say, "Not my will but Thine be done," we're putting off the "old self" that's not my will. And when we say, "But Thy will be done," then we're putting on the "new self" that's being changed or made new in the attitude of our mind.

We have to understand that the old self is a rebel and he has no claims to God's inheritance. The whole inheritance belongs by right to the new self. But what often happens in our lives as Christians is the old self, the rebel, rises up again and asserts his claim to what is only the rightful inheritance of the new self. So to guard against that rebel claim we have to say as Jesus said, "Not my will but Thine be done."

Let's go on a little more with this relationship between the old self and the new. If God were to answer all the prayers of the old self in every one of us, the universe would be in chaos. Let me give you just one or two simple examples. The first example: The Sunday School has a picnic, so they are praying, "Lord, keep the rain away." Meanwhile the poor farmer's crops are withering and he's praying, "Lord, send rain. We need rain." How is God going to answer both of those prayers? Of course, the truth is, He's not committed to answer either unless it's the prayer of the new self which has renounced it's own will.

Or take another typical kind of example. Two nations are at war with one another. The Christians in each nation are praying, "God give our nation the victory." How can God possibly do that? But you see, God isn't committed to do that. God is committed to answer the prayers of the new self but He's not committed to cater to that old rebel, the old self who just keeps asserting his own will.

So when we pray for anything, we always need to ask ourselves, "Am I praying for this thing because I want it, or because God wants it?" It makes a great deal of difference. If it's because I want it, my prayers may not be answered; but if it's because God wants it, then my prayers will be answered.

There are certain areas where people habitually bring their requests and petitions to God. For instance, people may pray to be healed of sickness, or they may pray for financial need to be met. They may pray for God to send them money. Every time we find ourselves praying that kind of prayer, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I praying for healing because I want to be healed or because God wants me healed? Am I praying for financial prosperity because it's what I want or because it's what God wants?" It will make a great deal of difference in our whole approach to God if we settle that issue.

I remember once, some years back, a woman came to me and asked me to pray for her son about 12 years old, who was in hospital with a disease which was diagnosed as incurable. She asked me to go and pray for her son in the hospital. I was perfectly ready to do it, but without really thinking I said to her, "Have you surrendered your son to the Lord?" And when I asked her that simple question she became hysterical. She thought I was trying to tell her that her son was going to die. I didn't have that in mind. I simply wanted to point out to her that as long as she was pressing her will, the will of God really couldn't come to pass. And that as long as she kept her hand by her will over her son, God's hand couldn't really reach out and touch her son. As long as we are trying to force our own will through, we do not make room for the will of God.

Now when you think about renouncing your own will and embracing the will of God, there are some things you need to remember. Let me suggest three things you need to bear in mind. First of all, God loves you more than you love yourself. Second, God understands you better than you understand yourself. And third, God wants only the best for you. Are you prepared to say, "Not as I will, but as Thou will"?

When you truly yield to God's will you will discover that it is what the Bible says it is, "Good, acceptable and perfect." Remember this, prayer is not a way for you to get God to do what you want. Prayer is a way for you to become an instrument for God to do what He wants.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 3:20:

> "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us..." (NAS)

> "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..." (NIV)

So God's ability to answer our prayers goes exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. Well you might say, "How could that possibly be? What is it that could be beyond anything that I could ask or think or imagine or reason?" The answer is, it's what God wants to do. You see, what God wants to do is far greater and far higher and far better than anything that you could imagine or think of for yourself. But as long as we limit God to doing merely what we want, we miss what God wants. So it's very simple and very logical that in order to receive the best from God in our prayers, we have to come to God the way that Jesus came, with reverent submission. We have to say, "God, not as I will, but as Thou will. God I'm not praying to be healed because I want to be healed, but because I believe you want me to be healed."

I lay sick in hospital for one year on end and the doctors were unable to heal me. And I really didn't get out of hospital healed until I'd learned that God would heal me because He wanted me healed, not because I wanted to be healed. Can you bear that lesson in mind?

All right, it's time for me to stop today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow, I'll be speaking about the second requirement for approaching God in prayer, which is "Faith."

Radio Program

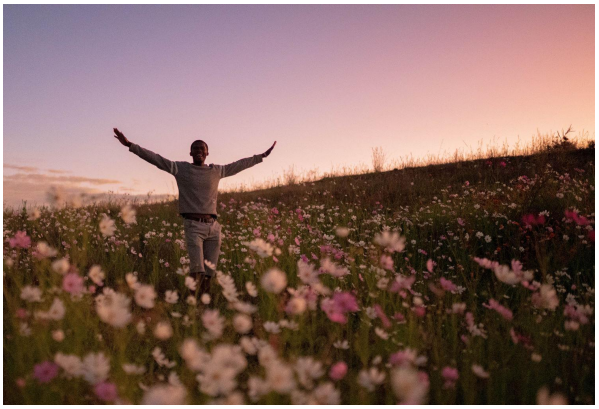
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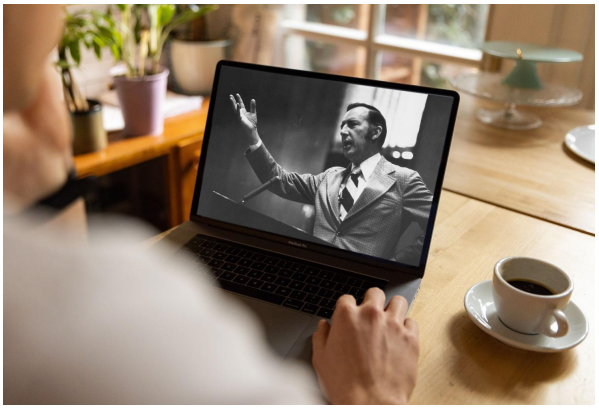
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