

A Requirement for Entering God's Presence



Thanksgiving, Praise, and Worship (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue to study together the rich and exciting theme of thanksgiving.

In my two previous talks this week I've discussed various kinds of gifts or sacrifices that God requires us to bring to Him whenever we come into His presence. I've explained that these include, but are by no means limited to, money and material possessions.

Scripture also speaks of various spiritual gifts or sacrifices that God requires from us. Specifically, I mentioned three: thanksgiving, praise and worship. Yesterday I focused on the first of these, thanksgiving. I explained that thankfulness is a direct command of Scripture and also an indispensable mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit. These facts about thankfulness lead to two important practical conclusions that apply to each of us personally:

(1) First, an unthankful Christian is a disobedient Christian;

(2) and second, an unthankful Christian is not full of the Holy Spirit.

Today I am going to deal with another important aspect of thanksgiving or thankfulness. I'm going to speak about thanksgiving as a requirement for entering God's presence. The first Scripture that I'll turn to is Psalm 100:4-5, where the psalmist says this:

> "Enter His gates [and he's talking, of course, about God's gates], Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations."

The psalmist here pictures two stages in our approach to God. The first stage is the gates. The second is the courts. And there's an appropriate way to enter each stage. We enter the gates with thanksgiving, but the courts with praise. In other words, the first stage of our approach to God is with thanksgiving. That gets us in through the gates. Then we

move on through the courts with praise. But these are the two essential phases of our approach to God: We enter His gates with thanksgiving; His courts with praise.

The psalmist also gives us three specific reasons why we should thank God. They are stated in verse 5: The Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting; His faithfulness to all generations. Notice that every one of these reasons is permanent and unchanging. The Lord is always good. His lovingkindness is everlasting. His faithfulness to all generations. In other words, the primary reasons for giving God thanks do not depend on our feelings or our circumstances. These may change. We may feel up one day and down the next. Our circumstances may change; in fact, they frequently do. Sometimes they seem encouraging. Sometimes they seem discouraging. But whether our circumstances are encouraging or discouraging is no reason for us to change our attitude of thankfulness to God for our thankfulness is not based primarily on our circumstances or our feelings. It's based on eternal, unchanging facts about God. The Lord is good. His lovingkindness is everlasting. His faithfulness is to all generations.

If we're going to approach God with thanksgiving on this basis, very often it means that we are going to have to change our focus. We're going to have to look away from things that irritate us or discourage us or provoke us and we're going to have to look at other things, eternal things, seeing them with the eye of faith. And this change in focus is extremely important for us because when we come to God with our focus right, we're in a position to hear from God and to receive from God.

Now, another thing that I need to say about thanksgiving or thankfulness, and it's directly related to the first, is that this approach is necessary to make all other forms of prayer successful. Let's look first at petition, the kind of prayer in which we're asking God for something special. In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul says this:

> "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Paul says we're to worry about nothing, but anything we need we're to bring to God in petition and in request. But Paul says never come to God with a petition or a request without coming with thanksgiving. Let me read those words again, "...in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." The result of that, Paul says, is this: "...the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." So, one key to peace of mind is always approaching God with thanksgiving.

Apart from the fact that Scripture directly requires this of us, there are certain psychological benefits to practicing coming to God with thanksgiving. The more we thank God for the good things and for the prayers He's already answered, and for the ways in which He's already blessed us, the more we focus on these things, the more our faith is built up that when we come to our requests, God is going to answer. But if we simply come to God with a kind of "shopping list," a list of things we want, probably there's no basis for our faith. Giving God thanks for the good things builds up our faith to receive more good things from Him. I'd like to just mention a particular way in which I myself at times practice prayer. Sometimes I make written lists of the things that I want to pray to God about, the people, the situations, but I make it an absolute rule always to begin every section of my list with thanksgiving and then move on to my petitions and my requests. And I find the more I practice this, the more I have to thank God for. In fact, sometimes my lists of thanksgivings are longer than my lists of petitions. And that tremendously builds up my own faith. When I've made up a long list of thanksgivings and then I come to the petitions, I come with an attitude of expectation. I really feel confident that just as God has answered all the prayers and supplied all the needs that I've been thanking Him for, so He will answer the prayers and supply the needs that are listed in my petition.

I've said that giving God thanks is necessary to make our petitions effective. This applied also to our intercessions. By intercession I mean when we're not asking for something for ourselves, but we're praying for something for others.

One of the most remarkable things about the writings of Paul is that from his writings we learn that whenever he entered into intercession for others he always began by giving God thanks. He never went straight to petition or intercession, but he always began by giving thanks. I'm going to give you a number of examples now from the epistles of Paul and I want you to notice how absolutely unvariable is his practice of starting by thanking God for the people he's going to pray for.

Romans 1:8-10:

> "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how

> constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times."

Notice, first thanksgiving, then prayers for the people.

Ephesians 1:15-16:

> "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers."

Notice, "I give thanks for you," then "I remember you in my prayers."

Philippians 1:3-4:

> "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy."

Notice, Paul never prayed without first giving thanks.

Colossians 1:3:

> "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you."

We always thank when we pray.

1 Thessalonians 1:2:

> "We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers."

2 Timothy 1:3:

> "I thank God, whom I serve as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers."

The order is unvarying; always first give thanks, then intercede.

There is a remarkable story of a man named "Praying Hyde," a missionary of a former generation who went out to India. But on the voyage out to India he had a remarkable experience with the Holy Spirit that transformed his life and ministry. Arriving in India, he had all sorts of plans and projects as a missionary, but God absolutely shut him up to one primary ministry of prayer and intercession. And that's how in due course he became known as "Praying Hyde."

And he relates in his own personal testimony an incident about a certain Indian gospel worker whom Praying Hyde considered to be very cold and ineffective. And one day Hyde started to pray for this man and he began to mention the man's name and he said, "God, you know how..." and he was going to say, "...how cold and ineffective..." but the Holy Spirit arrested him, would not permit him to say that. Instead, he began to thank God for this man, and thanked God regularly for that man every time he prayed for him. And he records that within a few months the man had become a flaming witness for Christ.

So bear that in mind when you pray for other people, never point out their faults to God but always begin by thanking God for them.

Our time is up for the day but I'll be back again with you tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll continue with this theme of thanksgiving. Specifically, I'll be speaking about thanksgiving as a key to unlock God's miracle-working power.

Radio Program

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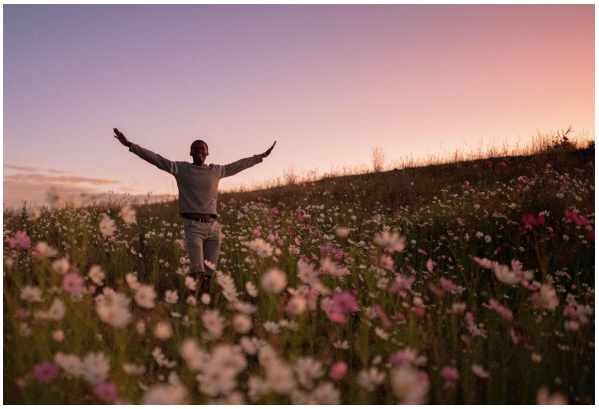

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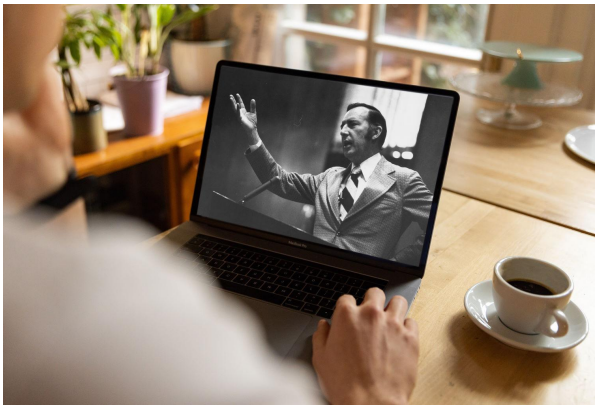

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