

## **TALKING TO GOD: THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

### **Psalms 1-6**

**Living God's Word—A Walk Through The Bible**  
**May 18, 2014**  
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Today we continue our Walk Through The Bible by focusing on the first few chapters of the Book of Psalms. It is important to note that many of these Psalms were written at that time in history as songs and readings for worship; they were used as prayers and ways to talk to God.

An example: Psalm 4 says, *"Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God."* Psalm 5 says, *"Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighings. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray."* The Psalms show that we can simply talk to God about whatever is on our hearts and minds.

Yet prayer, unfortunately, is often something that easily confuses and scares us along with many others. It is true that as we have often listened to other people pray we may have surmised that certain people are expert pray-ers. We may have thought that only certain people are blessed with the kind of eloquence needed.

I remember in my first 2-point parish meeting with the women's Bible study leaders each month. Often I would talk with and encourage them about praying a prayer when their particular circle would meet. A common response, however, was that they could never pray like Berdella, Carol or Gladys.

Their image was that there were some super pray-ers who knew how to do it. Being that some were quite eloquent with their prayers, some others said they wouldn't dare to pray out loud for fear that they would fumble their words or say something really dumb.

Jesus, of course, was one who also addressed this issue of prayer. It seems as though in Jesus' time there were some very religious folks who made a really big deal out of praying in public. In fact, they would pretty much make it into a big show or production. They were people who loved to have others look at, be impressed by and listen to them.

Yet Jesus warned them that one can easily be a hypocrite if their prayers are mostly a show and are not being lived out in one's daily life. In other words, it is extremely easy to say all kinds of religious and spiritual words in a very eloquent way, yet these words mean absolutely nothing if one does not believe them in their hearts, and if they don't put these words into action.

You may remember that Jesus actually told a story or parable about this in Luke 18. Jesus said there was a Pharisee, a very religious person, who often prayed in the middle of the temple, *"God, I thank you that I am not like other people; thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income."*

Yet Jesus says that a tax collector, hiding in the corner, would not even look up to heaven. Beating his chest in remorse he said, *"God, be merciful to me a sinner!"* Jesus concludes his story by saying, *"I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other."*

Jesus was teaching in this parable the truth that God is not impressed by religious pomp and circumstance. He is not impressed by pastors, bishops, pious church members, or any kind of religious super stars trying to show off their ecclesiastical positions. In contrast, Jesus is ready to receive the prayer of any person who may not even feel worthy enough to pray.

Jesus is ready to receive the prayers of any individual who knows and admits they are a sinner in need of God's love and grace; of anyone who doesn't think too highly of themselves; of anyone who stands before God in humbleness, faith and trust.

This truth that we see so beautifully in the Psalms is that prayer is always more about God than about us. In fact, God doesn't need our information and insights at all. He already knows everything about us; our world; our needs. God is not the one who needs our prayers.

Prayer, then, is not really for God—it is for us. True prayer therefore focuses our hearts and lives on God, on his Word. True prayer acknowledges that we, you and me, are not the center of the universe; we are not the masters of our own destiny. True prayer always acknowledges that we cannot live without God.

It acknowledges that God is the source of our life and salvation; that we have faith and trust in God's love and promises. True prayer opens our hearts to our need for forgiveness, for new life, as well as opening our hearts to the needs and concerns of others. Prayer is always to be more about God and his will than about us.

This is why, I believe, Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer as an example of true prayer. In this familiar prayer we pray that God's name may be hallowed in us; that his kingdom may come in us; that his will may be done in our hearts.

We also pray that we may remember that our daily bread, that all our daily needs, come from his gracious hand. We pray that we may forgive others as God so graciously forgives us. We also pray that we may have God's help in the time of trial; that we may be protected from the evil one. The focus here, as well as throughout all the Psalms, is always on God.

Many years ago I heard a very helpful way to think about and remember how to pray. It uses the letters of the word, "ACTS." The letter "A" stands for "Adoration." Whenever we take time to pray it is good to begin with adoration and praise; to celebrate God's love and goodness. There are many Psalms that can help us to do this like Psalm 100:

*"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth; Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture."*

An excellent way to give God adoration is to meditate on the wonder of God's creation; to reflect on the miracle of birth and life. Another great way is to sing songs of praise. Charis and our Praise Band, along with some new praise and worship songs, is a wonderful time of adoration and praise. It is not something that we as Lutherans are usually very good at.

The second letter in the word ACTS is “C,” which stands for “Confession.” In our prayers it is always good to take some time to confess our sins. We are to confess those things we feel bad about along with those sins we don’t even realize we do. We are to confess that we are sinners totally in need of God’s love and forgiveness.

Psalm 51 is such a confession: *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love...Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me...Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”*

Now again we as Lutherans often think of confession as mostly a liturgical or written prayer in a service. Yet as a result we oftentimes just say the words without really thinking. True confession comes only when we take the time to think about our lives; when we listen to God’s Word; when we don’t just say liturgical words, but instead tell God from our hearts how we feel.

Confession can be said anytime during the day, “Lord, forgive those thoughts I just had; forgive what I just said or did to that person...” Confession can be in a song or hymn, as our hearts and emotions are brought into God’s presence. I know I have been drawn to tears many times when I sing, “Beautiful Savior,” or “Lord, Let Your Light,” etc. Confession is anytime I feel God’s love and forgiveness for me an undeserving sinner.

The third letter in the word ACTS is “T,” which stands for “Thanksgiving.” This part of prayer should not be difficult since we are all blessed with so much. Yet this part of prayer is extremely difficult. The truth is that if we are truly thankful like we say we are, then our hearts will also be moved to give and share with others. Thanksgiving is not just nice words; it is seen in a life, an attitude; in joy and giving.

Finally in the word ACTS is “S,” which stands for “Supplication.” This big word means that we lift up the needs, the concerns, the intercessions of others. It is a very powerful part of prayer because it reminds us of our real purpose in life which is to live for others. It means to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

My friends, people who faithfully pray for others are always more understanding and grace centered toward them, and toward other people. People who pray for others also don’t tend to be as selfish or me-centered. People who pray for others are also often moved to providing those in need with care and help. Praying for others actually changes our own lives and attitudes more than it changes the other person.

The Psalms can be like a personal prayer book for us and can show us how to talk with God. Psalms often reflect every kind of feeling we may have; they show us how we can be honest with God in our confessions, our praises, our prayers from the depths of pain and discouragement. Yet most of all they help us keep our complete focus on God.

Another use of letters from a word is FAITH. Forsaking All I Take Him. That, my friends, is the key to prayer. Forsaking all I take him.