

# WORSHIP



PHIL  
SANDERS

# **SEARCH PROGRAMS**

**October 2010**

**Topics subject to change without notice**

## **OCT 3 - PREPARE FOR WORSHIP**

Worship is an intentional act of the heart, but many people take little time to prepare for worship. God expects us not only to prepare our hearts but also our lives when we come into His presence. How do we prepare for worship?

## **OCT 10 - THE NATURE OF WORSHIP**

Many people go to worship each Sunday, but do they understand what they are doing and Whom they are worshipping? Some churches have turned their worship into musical productions. What does God desire in our worship?

## **OCT 17 - PROBLEMS IN WORSHIP**

How God sees our worship and how we see our worship may differ greatly. Things we may like are sometimes problems to God. God does not accept all that people call worship. He asks that we honor Him by how we worship.

## **OCT 24 - WORSHIP IN SONG**

Music is one of the most powerful influences in life. God desires our worship in song to glorify Him in spirit and in truth. How we worship God in song matters to God, and it should matter to us.

## **OCT 31 - WORSHIP IN PRAYER**

Prayer is man's great opportunity to pour out his heart to God the Father. In this lesson we'll explore ways to make our prayer lives more meaningful.

## "Prepare for Worship"

Our reading today from God's sacred Word comes from the book of Revelation chapter 5, verses 11 to 14. "Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing! And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! Then the four living creatures said, Amen! And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever." That's from Revelation 5. Let's pray together. O Father, we know that You are worthy of glory and honor and blessing. And, Father, may our lips, our hearts, and our lives give You that honor and praise and reverence. In Jesus' name, Amen!

What are we doing when we gather together for worship? What does it mean to worship and praise God? Now, if we are to prepare for worship, we must know what it is that we're planning to do. Now, as we begin this lesson, and this series, I want us to explore what worship is all about. First, worship is internal; it comes from the heart. One can worship internally without doing anything externally, but one cannot worship externally without doing anything internally.

Zechariah 7, verses 5 and 6 says that the Jews of Zechariah's day feasted and fasted for themselves and not for God. They went through the motions but they didn't involve the heart. William Temple rightly said that, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God."

Our worship must be genuinely from our hearts. In a discussion with the woman at the well, Jesus said in John 4, verses 23 to 24, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." God isn't seeking worshipers who have their minds elsewhere or are simply going through the motions; He is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Second, worship is intentional. One can't worship God accidentally; it must be an intended act. Perhaps you remember Naaman the leper, whom God healed through Elisha. Naaman said that he would only worship the Lord God. Well, in 2 Kings 5:17 to 19 Naaman was worried and told Elisha that he had to bow in the house of Rimmon, that's another god, as part of his duties. Well, Naaman makes the point that he must bow, but that worshiping a false god is not his intention. Well, Elisha understood that unless you intend to worship, it's not really worship. The unfortunate thing some Christians come to a church to socialize or to see a production, and they never intend to worship. I hope you are a true worshiper.

True praise is not merely "going through the motions." Jesus spoke about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, whose worship was only an outward show and not from the heart. The Lord said in Matthew 15, verse 8 that, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." This not only revealed itself in their worship, but also in their lives. They had forgotten God's commandments but concentrated on their human traditions. The Lord said, "in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15, verse 9). Now, genuine praise to God comes from a sincere devotion and obedience to the Lord.

Third, worship is vertical. Yes, true worship will edify the church; but the primary purpose of worship is vertical. Worship takes place when our hearts and our spirits show our thanksgiving and praise to God our Father. We sing praises to God. We're not worshipping to please ourselves but to adore and glorify God. While we may sing to edify or teach others, the primary focus is to praise God. The Bible says in Hebrews 13, verse 15, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Fourth, worship is momentary. Like eating, it has a beginning and an ending. While worship is something that we do throughout our lives, it's an intermittent, heartfelt act wherein we put everything else aside and we focus our minds and our hearts for a time on God. Now, someone says, "Well, Phil, the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that we are to pray without ceasing." Well, that's true, but no one can pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What this passage is saying is that we ought never to quit praying to God. We should pray every day throughout our lives.

Our lives are spent in momentary acts; and since worship is intentional we must choose to spend our time in worship. We must make the moments that we worship our Father in heaven important. Jesus said in John 4, verses 23 and 24 as we mentioned that, "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." God wants you to take the time to give Him your heart, and to glorify His name.

Have you considered how important God regards worship? The Lord said to the people of Israel through the prophet Malachi in Malachi 1, verses 6 to 9 that, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then, (God says) if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, (that is the priests speaking) How have we despised Your name? (Well, God answers) You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, How have we defiled You? (And then He says) In that you say, The table of the Lord is to be despised. But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly? says the Lord of hosts. But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly? says the Lord of hosts."

It is common these days for Christians to come to worship late, sometimes dressed as if they didn't know they were coming into the presence of God. Many Christians habitually come in late to worship. How does this show respect and awe for God? Some people have the attitude: "Well, God ought to be glad that I came. Chill out, Phil! God ought to be satisfied that he got anything from me at all." Well, is this the attitude of true worship? Where is the love? Where is the humility? How is God honored in all of this?

I fear that some have little sense of holiness about coming into the presence of God. God deserves our best; and we should not give what's common or profane. God deserves to be respected in our hearts and in our appearance. I'm not here trying to make laws or tell you what you must wear to worship but to encourage you (now, listen to me) to consider whether you have honored God in your worship.

In the tabernacle and the temple, how one appeared before God mattered. The Bible says in Exodus 28 and verse 2, "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty." You see how the high priest dressed mattered to God. The Bible says in Psalm 29, verses 1 and 2, "Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to

the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." Now, the New American Standard says that the angels are to worship "in holy array." Why would angels need to put on holy garments?

Consider Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2, verses 9 and 10, "that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works." When we assemble to worship, we are coming into the presence of God. And what we do there, gathered in His name to worship, is holy and reflects our attitude toward Him.

When the Israelites gathered for worship at the temple, they didn't simply show up. They lived in a world of ceremonially clean and unclean. And what we have today is little sense of that concept. Israelite pilgrims who traveled to a feast in Jerusalem in ancient times first went to a ritual bath to become ceremonially pure before they ever entered into the temple area according to John 11 and verse 55. Now, archaeologists count as many as eighteen ritual baths surrounding the temple mount today. The purification rituals of Judaism stressed cleanliness and worthiness to serve and worship the Lord. In fact, Jehoiada the priest stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the Lord so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean according to 2 Chronicles 29, 23 rather, verse 19.

Now, Isaiah tells us of his experience in the presence of God in the year that King Uzziah died in the book of Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 to 8. Seraphim proclaimed of the Lord God, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" The Lord was sitting on his throne, lofty and exalted. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at his voice, while the temple was filling with smoke.

Well, Isaiah responded, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Isaiah was humbled by his own sense of uncleanness before God. He expected to die because he was unclean, but God forgave him as the Seraphim touched his lips with the burning coal.

When the apostle John came into the presence of the Lord Jesus on the island of Patmos, he fell at his feet as though he were dead. He understood the awesome and special nature of the occasion. Many worship assemblies have become so worldly and so common that there is little sense of being in the presence of God or of the reverence of the occasion. The Hebrew writer urged his readers, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." I fear we've lost a sense of the awesome nature of God.

In many worship occasions I find things that reflect an environment of little respect for God. Things like putting a Bible on the floor, people putting their feet up in the pew or song racks, people who are repeatedly and needlessly late, constant going in and out to get a drink or to go to the bathroom, constant talking in the foyer, constant talking in the pews, texting on the phone, passing notes in worship or clipping fingernails during the sermon. Yes, I do care about everyone, and I want everyone to come for worship. But I wonder if God feels honored when our hearts and lives are so far away from Him.

We must think of our lives as we approach God in worship and how we worship. The Bible says in Psalm 66, verses 16 to 20, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. And if I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or

removed his steadfast love from me!" When people cherish sin more than they do God, it should not surprise them that God closes His ears to their prayers.

The New Testament says in James 1, verses 26 to 27 that, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." If we wish to worship God in private or in public, we need to serve God by living holy lives every day. A man's songs and prayers are worthless on Sunday, the Lord's Day, if his mouth is vulgar the rest of the week. My friends, prepare for worship. Let's pray. O Father, my our hearts and lives show forth our love and our respect for You. In Jesus' name, Amen!

The apostle Paul was concerned about the unruly assemblies at Corinth that kept people from worshipping properly and from taking the Lord's Supper in a way that pleased God. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:27 to 30, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

We ought to please God in our worship for two reasons. First, it honors God to worship the way He desires. Second, true worship calls us to live a purer and nobler life. And so let's prepare to praise and glorify God before we come into His presence. Let's get our hearts and our minds focused on God. Israel worshiped in vain by living immoral and ungodly lives according to Isaiah 1, verses 12 to 20. They needed to repent of their sins before they came to worship God. What will please God most is a heart that's right with Him! Is your heart right with God?

To get right with God one must believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. He must regard Jesus as Lord and turn away from sin in repentance. And anyone who loves the Lord will not remain in willful sin. He wants to change his life and to confess Jesus as the Christ. He'll also be baptized as quickly as possible for the forgiveness of sins as the Bible teaches in Acts 2 and verse 38. If a person loves the Lord, he won't want to spend a single moment outside the love and grace of God.

## "The Nature of Worship"

Our reading from God's Holy Word today comes from Psalm 103, verses 1 through 5. "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." Oh, how wonderful it is to read from God's Word. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we are grateful to be Your children, and we hallow Your great and precious name, and we are so thankful for the honor of being able to know You as our Father. And Father, as we think of worshiping You, help us to humble ourselves and to exalt You. In Jesus' name, Amen! We must take the holiness of God seriously. To be holy means that one is separate from others. To be holy means to be set apart for a special and a higher purpose. Something that is holy is special in that it has no contamination. We must never treat what is holy as if it were something that was common. God is not just holy; He is utterly holy. He is worthy of reverence, of awe, and adoration. For instance, the Lord's name is so holy that one must never take it in vain.

Holiness is the absence of evil and the presence of righteousness. God's holiness means that He is absolutely pure in being and in nature. He also is completely pure and righteous in His will and in His acts. Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. The God of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament is utterly holy—He sets the standard for morality. And unlike the Roman gods, He is not warlike, or adulterous, or spiteful. Unlike the gods of the pagan cults popular in the first century, He is not bloodthirsty or promiscuous. He is the one and only God of mercy and justice who cares personally for each of his followers.

The Bible says in 1 John 1, verse 5 that, "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." There's nothing impure or common about God. Habakkuk 1:13 says about God that, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor." Our God, whom we worship and serve, is holy. He is sacred, not common; He is pure and clean; and we can never treat Him as if he were human, or weak, or flawed. He is holy and perfect, far above us!

Isaiah describes what it's like to come into the presence of a holy and awesome God in the book of Isaiah chapter 6, verses 1 to 5. The Bible says, "In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called out to another saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

How we approach God in worship matters greatly. We should not presume that God will accept whatever we have to offer. God has always distinguished between what He desires and what man dreams up. And just because someone calls something an act of worship doesn't mean that God accepts it. What men think is worship may not be what God regards as worship.

To worship God acceptably we must ask God what He requires for worship. True worship always thinks of pleasing the One Whom we worship, and only God can determine what acceptable

worship is. After all, He is God and He is the One that we're worshipping. Shouldn't He have a say in how to worship?

The Bible says in Leviticus chapter 10, verses 1 to 3: "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, (that is that held incense) and after putting fire in them, they placed incense on it and offered strange (or unauthorized) fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, It is what the Lord spoke, saying, By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored." This event in the Scriptures is there, so that we might learn from it.

Now, Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron, the high priest. They were nephews of Moses. For several days before this incident they had participated in their own consecration and the consecration of the tabernacle with many sacrifices. Leviticus chapters eight and nine tell of this beginning of Israel's worship in the tabernacle. And ten times Moses had given them instructions, telling them what the Lord commanded them to do. And they did just as the Lord commanded until they decided to act on their own authority. Carelessness did not excuse Nadab and Ahibu; hearts wanting to praise the Lord didn't excuse them from going beyond the authorized commands. You see, they acted on their own authority and they paid a dear price.

They presumptuously took their firepans and placed incense in them. Then they went to an unauthorized place to get "strange" fire for their incense. They offered up something different than what God instructed. They offered it spontaneously in response to the glory of the Lord coming down. Well, the Lord didn't command them to do this and didn't give them permission to use "strange" fire. And so God punished them for acting on their own authority.

God has never accepted worship that ignores what He instructs and He never has accepted what's invented by man. People are not always interested in what God desires; they think they have something better than what God wants. They think they need to do something to tickle the ears or to draw a crowd.

The Lord Jesus, you remember, in Matthew 15 and in Mark 7 clearly condemned using the traditions of men. The Lord said that when people follow the traditions of men, they transgress the commandments of God. In those days they were taking money that should have been used to support their elderly parents and declaring it "Corban" or devoted to God. And by pronouncing this money Corban, the Pharisees could use this money selfishly in their worship and offering gifts.

Well, in Matthew 15, verses 6 to 9, the Lord said, "So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; and in vain do they worship me, (listen to this) teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

When people act on their own initiative they show that their hearts are not right with God, because they have not listened to Him but to men. Listening to men rather than to God makes our worship vain. Why? Because in listening to the teachings of men, we stop listening to God. We treat God as less than men. We haven't given Him the holy place in our hearts that He deserves.

In Colossians chapter 2, verses 20 to 23 the Bible says, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch! (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) — (and they are) in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? (Why are you doing that?). These are matters (he says) which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in

self-made religion or will worship and in self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but (he says they) are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

“Self-made” religion or will worship is when people act on their own authority and do not regard what God teaches. God doesn’t permit “self-made” religion, because it does not show Him the reverence that He deserves. Now, they may appear to have value to people, but they have no value to God. People may enjoy what they call worship; they may think it draws a great crowd; but forms of worship that ignores God’s teaching and originates in the mind of men violate God’s will. True worship to God always comes from listening to the teaching of God.

The churches in the New Testament did not have choirs or special music. You see, they all sang from their hearts as a congregation. To worship means “to adore or pay divine honors to a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration.” They didn’t fall prey to the notion that worship was for them. Worship was how they gave of themselves to God rather than what they received from others. They didn’t think of themselves as an audience or spectators. They came to worship, not to see a performance.

God wants all His people to worship Him and to praise His name. He seeks for true worshipers. True worshipers worship Him in spirit and in truth. The New Testament has no special class of worshipers such as the Levites under the old covenant. According to 1 Peter 2 and verse 5 all Christians are members of a holy priesthood and their place is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Early churches did not have theatrical performances, light shows, or bands. They didn’t hire professional musicians to perform for them. There’s a difference between worship that comes from the hearts and lips of everyone in the pews and a performance that comes from professionals on the stage. The Bible says in Hebrews 13, verse 15, “Through Him (that is through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” God doesn’t choose the talented and then exclude everyone else.

To worship is to revere God; but to entertain means “to engage the attention with anything that causes the time to pass pleasantly; or to amuse.” Entertainment may be interesting, it may be fun, it may be diverting, it may be amusing; it may be a wonderful show or performance. Now, entertainment in and of itself is not sinful. But God never intended for a form of entertainment or a performance to replace the worship of the church. The purpose of worship is to glorify God, and in many places what some call worship focuses not on God but on the performer or performers.

Some assemblies at churches today contain very little worship of God and a great deal of show. Performers become religious “stars.” We now have an entire entertainment industry devoted to Christian praise music. Why have Christians made an enterprise out of worship? Why have we focused on the talent of the performer, glorifying people rather than glorifying God?

Worship is an expression of reverence and adoration toward God. Worship is our response to a gracious and holy God, and it needs to be placed in this context if it’s to be properly understood. It’s right to remind ourselves in church that we’re not the audience. God is! He is there to receive our praise and adoration. And we’ve met there to honor Him, and our task is to “please Him.” And this is why we can never cheapen our worship by turning it into entertainment. We must glorify God and Him alone.

Some folks don’t find any value in worship; they prefer something more exciting or appealing. They think worship is supposed to be for their benefit; and they come to worship to “get” rather than to “give.” Well, there are certainly many things in church that bless our lives; but we get out of worship

what we put into it. One man endures worship and leaves bored and empty, while another leaves blessed and refreshed by the experience.

Why? Well, the man who leaves empty has his mind on himself, while the man who leaves blessed has concentrated on God. He's taken time to count his blessings, to remember the cross, to meditate on what God has done, and to be thankful. He can see the value of singing songs of praise, and he values speaking to God in prayer. He grows spiritually by remembering Christ in the Lord's Supper. And he cheerfully gives of his means! He loves to hear God's counsel in the Word, because he loves God; and love makes the difference. Worship is declaring our love, our praise, our adoration, our thanksgiving, and our commitment to our gracious God in heaven. Let's pray together. O Father, may our hearts be filled with love and may we humble ourselves always as we praise and adore Your name for all the good things that You have done for us. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen!

Before we worship, let's prepare our hearts and spirits to praise God and glorify our God. Let's enter worship with praise and thanksgiving. And in worship let's devote ourselves to God with loving hearts. When we leave worship, let's show Him that we love Him by living holy lives. The Bible says in Hebrews 12, verses 28 to 29, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

God seeks people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God is seeking for you to make your heart right with Him. We truly worship when we revere the right Person, doing the right thing with the right heart. Does the worship where you go to church please God? Is that worship according to the teaching of Scripture or does it involve the traditions of men?

Is your heart right with God? To get your heart right, you must approach God in faith and love. You must be willing to obey Him in all things. You must be willing to repent. This is to give up what is sinful and human and to embrace what is Divine and what is true to God's will. With your faith, and love, and repentance, you must be willing to confess Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized. Baptism is the time when the blood of Jesus Christ washes away your sins according to Acts 22 and verse 16.

When you are baptized, the Lord causes you to be born again into the family of God. He forgives you, adds you to His church, and gives you eternal life. Such blessing ought to make you want to worship and praise Him all the days of your life. Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in the area served by this station. They strive to worship according to the teaching of God. They focus on worship not on performing, and they want everyone to participate. And so they would love for you to worship with them in spirit and in truth.

## "Problems in Worship"

Our reading today comes from Genesis chapter 4, verses 1 through 5. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord. Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell." That's a reading from God's Holy Word. Let's pray. O Father, may the meditations of our heart, the words of our lips, and all of our worship glorify You always. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Genesis 4 presents the very first example of worship in the Bible. The two brothers, Cain and Abel, came before the Lord with their different gifts. Now, we don't know exactly what God required of them in their sacrifices. The Bible says, "So it came about that in the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground." We know that Cain tilled the ground and brought some of its produce. We don't know if his offering contained the best fruit or his first fruit. The text suggests that he was just discharging a duty.

"Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." Abel brought the first and best of his flock. And Hebrews 11 and verse 4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he also obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks." Abel apparently showed a faith in God that Cain didn't show. Abel went out of his way to please God. And as a result, God regarded Abel as righteous, because he offered an acceptable sacrifice.

Now, the next verse says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard." Did you catch that? God did not have regard for Cain or for his offering. There was something lacking in Cain's faith. We learn from 1 John 3 and verse 12 that Cain's deeds were evil, that is referring to his life, his offering, and his attitude. God, you see, made a distinction between an offering from a righteous and faithful man who wanted to please and an offering that was just merely a discharge of duty.

When God did not accept Cain's sacrifice, well, Cain got angry and eventually killed his brother Abel over it. When people learn that they've failed to live up to God's expectations, rather than getting upset they should repent and change their ways. No one likes to hear that they've failed, but Cain's life would have been so much better if he had changed his ways.

In the book of Exodus chapter 32, the Bible tells of the rebellious Israelites who gave up on the Lord and Moses and they demanded idols. And, you remember that, Aaron took their gold rings and he made an idol in the form of a golden calf. They said that this golden calf that they fashioned into a god had brought them out of Egypt. Now, the next day they called a feast to the Lord. They sacrificed offerings, they sat down to eat and drink, and the Bible says they rose up to play. Now, they began behaving like the idolatrous nations that surrounded them with drunken dancing that was filled with sensuality. You see, idolatrous worship often ended up in sexually immoral behavior. They rose up to play, and they thought playing was worship.

You see, ancient idolaters thought their drinking and immoral dance was worship, and the Israelites said the calf that they made was the Lord. But they were wrong on both accounts, and the

Lord grew angry at them. You cannot be on the Lord's side and worship the way that the idolaters did. You cannot serve a holy God with impure behavior.

What they thought was worship was actually a great sin. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, verses 6 and 7, the Bible says, "Now these things took place as examples for us, (that is, us Christians) that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must learn that only acceptable worship to the true and living God is right.

In Isaiah the prophet's, in his day the people thought that they could worship God acceptably while they willfully lived wicked lives. And after a while God wearied of their sacrifices and feasts because of their iniquity. The Lord said in Isaiah chapter 1, verses 15 to 17 that, "When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."

Because they chose to live ungodly lives, God would not hear their prayers. Now, I realize none of us can live a perfectly sinless life. You can't and I can't. But God desires that when we do sin, we repent of our sins and humbly ask for forgiveness. David, after his sin, wrote in Psalm 51 and verse 17 that, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." But if we approach God unbroken and impenitent, how can we imagine God is going to accept us?

You know, as we turn to the pages of the New Testament, we find other problems with worship. The Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount devotes eighteen verses, eighteen verses, to the problem of displaying righteousness to be seen by others. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." And He described this behavior as hypocrisy. Now, hypocrisy takes place when a person pretends to be something that he does not intend to be. People in those days were pretending to worship, but in God's eyes they were only showing off their righteousness.

The Lord applies this principle to three acts of devotion: giving alms, praying, and fasting. The hypocrites would blow a trumpet before the people to call attention to their gifts, their alms giving. Why they weren't giving to God; they were showing off. The Lord teaches us in Matthew 6, verses 3 to 4, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

The people also proved themselves hypocrites in their prayers. Hypocrites "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, (the Lord says) they have received their reward. But when you pray, you go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matthew chapter 6, verses 5 and 6).

Third, when the hypocrites fasted they put on gloomy faces and they neglected their appearance, "so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. (Jesus said) Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (Matthew 6, verses 16 to 18).

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees and others were tempted by the flesh to make a show out of their worship. I fear the same kind of thing is happening today. When people become enamored with Christian music stars, they've taken their eyes off of God. Even some preachers today believe their calling is to promote a health and wealth gospel. They promise blessings that have nothing to do with discipleship to Christ and it has everything to do with the crass materialism of our time. Other preachers believe that their calling is to be stand-up comedians, using the pulpit for their stage. This is not the Lord's way.

God said through Paul in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." My friend, it's the Word, the gospel that saves (Romans 1:16). It's the Word of Christ that brings faith (Romans 10 and verse 17). It's the Word that nourishes our souls (1 Peter 2 and verse 2). We need the Bible to grow strong and spiritually healthy.

The apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that savage wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock. And they will speak twisted or perverse ideas that will draw disciples away from the Lord's way. This false teaching will split the church, he said. What did Paul recommend? The Bible says in Acts 20, verse 32, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." To follow Christ, we must have the Word and nothing else will do.

So Paul warns Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, verses 3 to 5 of the time when churches would leave sound or healthy teaching about Christ for ear-tickling experiences and myths. The Bible says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and they will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, (Timothy, you) be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Some churches today have forgotten the importance of the Word and have replaced it by preaching comic routines, or having dramatic skits, or self-improvement rallies. We ask, "Where is the Lord in all of this?" Jesus did not waste His time showing off or trying to exploit people with outlandish claims. The Lord said in Luke 19, verse 10, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." He preached a message of repentance, of love, and of salvation. Christianity is more than just another course in the power of positive thinking.

Some churches today separate their worship services into traditional and contemporary in an effort to please everyone. Perhaps they feel that pleasing people is more important than the unity of the congregation; or perhaps they've bought into a consumer mentality where the customer is always right. In the latter case what people want overrides even what God wills. Is it really the will of God that people worship and have they had their various desires, and that becomes more important than what God requires of us? Is pleasing people more important than pleasing God?

The Lord prayed to the Father in John 17, verses 20 to 21 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." God wants His people to be one. And if we cannot assemble with each other because we have so many different tastes in worship, why we become a house divided against itself.

In some churches women have taken a role of leadership in worship that God does not permit. Several denominations now have women pastors and preachers. In 1 Timothy 2 and verse 8, the Bible

still says, "Therefore I want the men (that is, males of full age and stature) in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." Wherever the church meets, God expects men to take the lead.

God says in 1Timothy 2, verses 11 to 14 that, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."

My friend, this is the Lord's way for His people. And cultural change does not change the Word of God. The Lord desires men to take the lead in the worship of the church. And to support this, Paul appeals to creation and to the fall of Adam and Eve. Paul uses events from the beginning to show that this is a fundamental principle for all time and all cultures. It's God's will that men lead in the worship of the church. And so let's commit ourselves to the will of God. Let's pray. Father, may our hearts always set upon serving You in a way that pleases You and doing Your will. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

Showing God love and respect in worship requires listening to God to find out what He desires and requires. Cain lived on his own terms without due faith or thought about God, and so God had no regard for Cain or for His sacrifice. If we live life on our terms and lose sight of the Lord's will for our lives, what makes us think God will accept our worship?

The Lord expects us to have our hearts right before Him if we are to approach Him in worship. As we've said, God did not accept the worship of Israel in Isaiah's time because they were living wicked lives. You can't live like the devil six days a week and expect the Lord to accept you when you approach Him to worship on the first day of the week. God expects His people to repent when they sin. He expects us to take our sins seriously and to forsake them.

The Lord said in Matthew 5, verses 23 and 4, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

Are you right with God? Perhaps today you need to establish a relationship with the Lord, because you want to worship and thank Him. To become His child you must have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, you must repent of your sins, you must confess your faith before others, and you must be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins. Today is the best day to get right with God. Worship with one of the churches of Christ served by this station and let them know that you want to get right with God. You'll be so glad that you did.

## "Worship in Song"

Our reading today from God's Holy Word comes from the book of Ephesians chapter 5, verses 17 to 21. "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God." That's from God's Holy Word. Let's pray to the Father. O Father, may our hearts and our voices always praise You and give You the honor that is due Your name. In Jesus we pray, in His name. Amen!

To learn the truth about Christian worship in song, we must go to the New Testament. So let's review the relevant passages pertaining to musical worship among Christians. The first mention of singing a hymn in the New Testament is found in Matthew 26, verse 30 and Mark 14:26; two passages very much alike. The Bible says that the Lord instituted that night the Lord's Supper; "And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

In Acts chapter 16 and verse 25, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison with their feet in stocks for healing a servant girl. And the Bible says, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Now, so far all we have is just simple statements of people singing.

In Romans 15 and verse 9 Paul speaks of the Gentiles glorifying God; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to thee among the gentiles, and I will sing to thy name." Well, this quotation emphasizes how a congregation in one accord and with one voice should glorify God (Romans 15, verse 6).

Later in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, there are two references to singing. Verse 15 says, "What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also." Here the emphasis in singing is on the mind and the spirit. Verse 26 says, "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." The early church edified each other by teaching songs.

In Psalm, in the book of Ephesians rather, Ephesians 5, verses 18 and 19 as we read, the Bible says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, (that is moral looseness) but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." The emphasis in this passage is on speaking to one another and in making melody with the heart to the Lord. The idea of having concerts or of playing instruments in worship is absent. There were no choirs, because everyone was to sing.

Colossians 3 and verse 16 is a similar passage: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." The emphasis again is on singing words that teach and admonish. Now, these were activities that require the heart, the mind, and the lips.

The writer of the book of Hebrews twice mentions praising God in song. First in Hebrews 2, verse 12 he quotes from Psalm 22, verse 22. He says, "I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." Again the idea is verbal, proclaiming and singing. Second comes from Hebrews 13, verse 15 which says, "Through Him (that is through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Now, the last mention of Christian worship in song is found in James 5 and verse 13, which says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."

In each and every instance, the music described in Christian worship emphasizes verbal communication: singing, speaking, teaching, admonishing, making melody with your hearts, confessing, giving thanks, proclaiming, and the fruit of lips. The clear instruction of the New Testament is that we should sing from our hearts praise to God. Now, instruments of music cannot speak, teach, admonish, give thanks, praise, proclaim, confess, or make melody in your heart. Instruments of music fail to do any of these. And this is why they become additions; they go beyond the instructions of the New Testament.

Now, no reference to instrumental music is startling to me! Neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded them. The New Testament gives no example of churches using them in worship. You see God desires music of the mind and the spirit. God purposely did not include them.

You might wonder why we're discussing instruments of music in Christian worship at all, because most people think churches have always used instruments of music in worship. And they're surprised to find out that some churches today have never used instruments of music, and they begin to think that peculiar. Churches, however, didn't always use instruments; and some churches, like the Orthodox churches, have never used instruments. The word a cappella is a reference to singing unaccompanied and what it means in Latin is "in the manner of the church."

Early Christians actually rejected the use of instruments in worship. In fact, for several centuries they were adamantly opposed to using instruments of music in worship. Not until the thirteenth century did churches widely begin using instruments of music. Both Jews and Greeks used instruments in worship. And converts to Christianity surely knew this, but still Christians didn't use harps or organs or anything else in their worship for centuries. They consciously said no, because they had no God-given reason to use them.

Dr. Everett Ferguson, who is an authority in the early church, said, "It's quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. And recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of the late innovations of the medieval Catholic Church."

As late as 1250 AD, Thomas Aquinas said, "Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize." You see, he understood that harps were for Jews not for Christians. Instruments of music came along as an innovation brought in because people liked them, not because the New Testament gave instructions for them.

God has spoken to us in His Word. The Lord promised the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth in John 16, verse 13. Well, "all the truth" means the New Testament teaches us everything God wanted us to know to have eternal life and to live the Christian life. Well, nothing is missing. And we shouldn't imagine that God has forgotten something.

When God revealed all the truth, He intentionally stopped. Since God has revealed all the truth, He didn't need to say any more. To add more or to pursue additional practices says to God that His teaching was not sufficient. So, how is God honored when men are not content and then decide to add practices to their worship? To start new practices, going beyond God's teaching, is presumptuous. It fails to listen to God and does what it wishes.

The Lord said in John chapter 8, verses 31 and 32 that, "If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Christ here reveals one

of the marks of a true disciple. A true disciple abides in the Word. He doesn't add to it, take away from it, reinvent it, or change it. He stays in the boundaries of the teaching and instructions of the Word. The person who stays with the Word will know the truth, and the truth will set him free. When you leave the Word, you begin to tamper with the truth. You buy into half-truths and man-made religion.

Someone says, "Phil, don't you know that David played the harp?" Yes, I am aware of passages like Psalm 150 and 2 Chronicles 29, verse 25. I also know that David lived a thousand years before Jesus Christ. David was not a Christian, and we're exploring how Christians worshiped, not how the Israelites a thousand years before Jesus worshiped. We don't offer animal sacrifices as David did. You see, David lived under the old covenant, while we live under the new covenant. According to 2 Chronicles 29:25, God approved of harps in the worship of the temple under the old covenant; but the New Testament never speaks of the use of instruments of music in Christian worship.

Some say the word "psalm" and the Greek word psallo, used in Ephesians 5:19 for "making music in the heart," permits us to play instruments. And while it's true that many years before the time of the New Testament the Greek word psallo meant to pluck on a string or play a harp, the word changed in its meaning over time. Well, how did this happen?

The Jews sang psalms with instruments in the temple but sang without them in the synagogue. Musical worship in the temple was limited to the Levites who had choirs and many instruments, but the worship of the synagogue had no musical instruments. From day to day, and Sabbath to Sabbath, in their homes and in the synagogues Jews regularly sang psalms for hundreds of years without any use of the harp.

So when the word psallo or the word psalm was used, they normally thought of singing the words of the song unaccompanied. It never occurred to early Christians, who know Greek better than we do, that these words psallo or psalmos meant that we should or could use instruments of music in our worship. If those words had pointed to instruments, why didn't the early church use them? Why did the early church refuse to use them? Why did it take many centuries before someone started using them?

Others ask, "Well, Phil, aren't people playing harps in heaven?" Yes, John's visions found in the highly figurative book of Revelation speak of harps in heaven. Saints in heaven also wear crowns and cast them before the throne of God. Angels and people in heaven say many things in heaven that we're not allowed to say on earth (2 Corinthians 12, verse 4). Heaven and earth are very different.

Our task is not to imitate what's done in heaven but to be obedient to Jesus and His teachings in the New Testament. If harps in heaven means the church ought to play harps, why didn't the apostles and the early church understand that they were supposed to play them? Why did they refuse to play them for centuries?

Someone says, "The Bible doesn't condemn playing an organ!" That's true; it doesn't say that. But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense, or praying to Mary, or using roast lamb in the Lord's Supper, or offering animal sacrifices today, or substituting sprinkling for immersion in baptism, or baptizing infants. My friend, just because the Bible doesn't specifically condemn something doesn't mean that God approves of it.

All of these things I've mentioned, just like using the instrument of music in worship, come not from God but were innovations of men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but "Where does the Word of God authorize using instruments of music in Christian worship?" To act without God's permission or instruction is presumptuous.

If the Bible were to include everything that God condemned, why it would be too large to carry. The Lord has chosen to instruct us in positive terms what His will is for our lives and our worship. He has shown us the way, which rules out all other ways. There is “one baptism” (Ephesians 4, verse 5); and that means there cannot be another approved baptism. The Bible says there is “one gospel” in Galatians 1, verses 6 to 9. Well, that means that all other gospels are condemned. The Bible says there is “one body” or church in Ephesians 4 and verse 4; and also we also know that from Ephesians 1:22 to 23. That means there cannot be other approved churches.

The specific instruction to sing means that one should sing. There’s no authority for us to add other forms of music. When God instructs us through His Word, He tells us what He wants. We shouldn’t expect God to exclude all other possibilities with a series of “don’ts.”

If I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes at my favorite restaurant, I expect the waitress to bring just what I ordered. If she brought me liver and onions, I’d say to her, “Well, this is not what I ordered; I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes.” Telling her what I specifically want excludes everything else. Wouldn’t it be ridiculous if I had to go down the whole menu at the restaurant and tell her everything I don’t want? My friend, we should hear and do what God wants. Let’s pray. Father, may our worship to You always be acceptable and may we always listen to You in the context of what You want for Christian worship. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen!

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24 to 27, the Lord told this story: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Wisdom is hearing God’s Word and doing it. Foolishness is hearing God’s Word but doing something else that you want to do. I can read clearly in the New Testament the Lord’s instructions about singing in worship. Not one word is said about using instruments of music in worship. They weren’t used in any church for hundreds of years. Now, let’s put singing in worship on one side and singing with instruments on the other. They’re different, aren’t they? Which one is wise and follows the Lord’s teaching and which one is foolish? Which is wise and which is foolish? Which does the Lord’s will and which is an innovation of man?

In the same way, we should come to God in faith and obedience. If there’s sin in your life and you’re not yet a Christian, a child of God, why not become one today. You can do so by believing Jesus is the Christ, by repenting of your sins, by confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). That’s how people became Christians according to the Scriptures, and how you can become one, too.

## "Worship in Prayer"

Our reading today comes from the book of Matthew chapter 6, verses 9 through 13.

"In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and  
the glory forever. Amen."

This reading comes from God's Holy Word. Let's pray together. Our Father, hallowed be Your name. We're thankful that You have loved us and blessed us in so many ways. And, Father, for the privilege of prayer we're indeed grateful. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Private prayer is one of the sacred moments of life. Prayer is personal time with our Father in Heaven, in which we reveal our hearts. In prayer we honor and recognize the place of God that He has in our lives. We hallow the name of our Father. To hallow is to honor as holy. Now, God's name is already holy. But we need to say that with our prayers, and we need to say what the twenty-four elders who surrounded the throne of God said. They said, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

Jesus prayed often and He prayed fervently. Luke 5:16 says that, "Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray." In Luke 6 and verse 12, before He appointed the apostles, Jesus "went off into the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." When Jesus was crucified, he began His death with prayer, saying "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And He ended His time on the cross in prayer, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." That's from Luke 23, verses 34 and 46. Now, if the Lord, the Lord Himself, had such a need for prayer, certainly we need to pray as well.

The Lord Jesus taught us to pray "Our Father." When we pray as Christians, we're able to approach God's throne because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't say, "My Father"; He said, "Our Father." When a person becomes a Christian, he also becomes a child of God.

The Bible says in Galatians 3, verses 26 and 27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." We have our access to the Father through Jesus Christ. And when we pray to the Father, we should pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said in John 16, verse 23, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you."

Our Father lovingly and wondrously invites us to pray. Now, God already knows what's on your heart. The Lord said in Matthew 6 and verse 8 that, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." But the Lord wants us to pray, because it's important for us to approach God for our needs, and

to thank Him for what He has already done, and to remind ourselves of our utter dependence upon our Father in Heaven. There are many times in life when we need reminding of our need for God.

You know the Lord said in Matthew 7, verses 7 to 11, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he won't give him a snake, will he? If then, you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

We don't have a reluctant God who cares little for our needs. And we don't have to beg God to let us pray. Our God is not like the pagan gods of the Gentiles who cried out with "meaningless repetitions." Oh, no! God wants us to pray, just as any father wants to hear from his children. God wants to bless our lives.

But when you ask of God, ask in faith. Jesus, you remember, said in Mark 11, verses 22 to 24, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, that whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. (And so the Lord says,) Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you."

Again, the Bible says in James 1, verses 5 to 8, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Sometimes people pray for the wrong things. When we ask God to bless us, we should consider whether what we're asking for is God's will. Our desires and God's will are not always the same. The Bible says in 1 John 5, verses 14 to 15, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests of which we have asked from Him."

When you pray, do not ask with selfish motives. The Bible says in James 4, verses 1 to 3, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

When people ask God to bless them so that they can fulfill the desires that arise from their conflicts and envious ways, God refuses to help. You see, He is not interested in blessing people just to further their wrong motives and sinful attitudes. God doesn't help people sin or fulfill their lusts. Their prayers (that is, people who pray selfishly) crowd God out, because they're thinking more of themselves than they are of God's will.

Now, God does will that we pray for material blessings. After all, Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." But in praying that, we're not praying for cake but for bread. God will give us bread, which is necessary for life but He doesn't always give luxuries.

Some preachers this day and time, to hear their message, think the most important thing is to be lavishly blessed in this life. And in the name of God they make outlandish promises while they hope to exploit people. Don't be deceived by these preachers. God provides for our needs to do His work, but the Lord is not interested in supplying selfish desires.

The Lord teaches us to pray, "Thy will be done." Jesus prayed that in great sorrow while in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord knew of the pain that He would bear in the scourging and in the crucifixion. And Jesus knew that He had to bear the punishment for the sins of the whole world. And so He prayed in Matthew 26, verse 39, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." He didn't want to bear that cup of wrath; yet He knew that He must.

For Jesus doing the will of the Father was more important than His own desires or comfort. He wanted to serve His Father and to bless you and me with forgiveness more than He wanted freedom from pain. You see, there's something worse than physical pain, and that's for anyone to be lost in sin. And Jesus was willing to bear the terrible pain of physical death so that He could deliver us from spiritual death that was caused by sin.

We too, should pray "Thy will be done." Wouldn't this be a wonderful world if everyone prayed for God's will to be done and then practiced the will of God? We need the will of God to be done! And if people did God's will, they would cease to be criminals; they would cease to be violent; and you know what, they would learn to forgive. And this would bring so much healing. If people would repent of sin and follow the Lord's way, we would see a tremendous change in our lives, in our homes, our communities and our country.

On the other hand, Psalm 66, verse 18 says that, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." That is if I allow sin to be the focus of my heart, I cannot imagine God is willing to hear my prayer and bless me with a positive answer. Sometimes people imagine sin will bring them happiness and explain their sinful behavior with the statement, "Well, God just wants me to be happy." No, God doesn't want that kind of happiness. The Lord desires that we find lasting joy in righteous living, not the temporary happiness of sin.

When you pray to God asking for forgiveness, my friend be ready to grant forgiveness, too. If you have an unforgiving spirit, you can't expect God to forgive you. The Lord said in Mark 11, verse 25 that, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, and if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive your transgressions." Matthew 6 and verse 14 says, "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

Our prayers can be hindered if we mistreat our loved ones. The Bible says to husbands in 1 Peter 3, verse 7, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." We can't mistreat each other, husbands, wives, parents or children; no one can mistreat others and expect to be able to live in harmony with the will of God.

Our prayers do matter with God! The Lord told His disciples in the Garden in Matthew 26 and verse 41, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." When we want to do the right thing, God is there to help. Psalm 34 and verse 15 says that, "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry."

When we pray, let's wait on the Lord to answer. He knows the right time to answer a prayer, but His time may not be ours. We may not be ready for His answer. I love the faith of Jeremiah who suffered much for his faith but he kept close to the Lord. He wrote in Lamentations 3:25, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him." The Lord wants us to persevere in prayer and not lose heart (Luke 18, verses 1 to 5).

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4, verse 19, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Oh, I love that passage and I also recall 2 Corinthians 9, verse 8, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in

everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed." Give yourself to the will of God; and His grace will abundantly supply your every need.

And when you're troubled, pray! The Bible says in Philippians 4, verses 6 to 7, "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, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God will set a guard around your heart and give you amazing peace when you take your concerns and worries to Him.

When Darius, the king of Persia, made a law against praying to anyone but him, Daniel disobeyed. He knew that he needed God. Daniel would rather spend a night in the lion's den than to lose one day in prayer to God. Oh, friend, don't let even one day go by without prayer. Let's pray together. O Father, we're so grateful that You hear our prayers and that You love us and that You bless us by providing for our needs. Help us to so live to give glory and honor to Your name. This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen!

God will always act wisely and in our best interests. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." We can believe God will help us through every struggle. We may not always understand what, how, or why God is doing what He is doing. But God knows what we don't know, and He sees what we can't see. Trust God!

An unknown confederate soldier was found dead with these words in his pocket: I asked God for strength that I might achieve; He made me weak that I might obey. I asked for health that I might do great things; He gave me grace that I might do better things. I asked for riches that I might be happy; He gave me poverty that I might be wise. I asked for power that I might have the praise of men; He gave me weakness that I might feel a need of God. I asked for all things that I might enjoy life; He gave me life that I might enjoy all things. I received nothing I had asked for; and He gave me all that I had hoped for.

Let's pray God's will be done in our lives. Friends, please pray for this gospel ministry. Ask God to open a door to us for the word, that we might declare the gospel clearly, boldly, and with love. Ephesians 3 and verse 20 says that God is "able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." Prayer puts the power of God to work in our lives.