

General Topics :: Learn to Pray Like a Puritan - Isaac Watts

Learn to Pray Like a Puritan - Isaac Watts - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 10:51

[Image: http://www3.telus.net/st_simons/IsaacWatts.jpg]

Brethren, this thread may revolutionize your prayer life. The content is being taken judiciously from the Isaac Watts' book "A Guide to Prayer", in which, according to Watts, the nature of prayer can be divided into the following categories: invocation, adoration, confession, petition, pleading, profession (or self-dedication), thanksgiving and blessing. A healthy prayer should contain all these elements, he proposes, and in the course of the book he speaks of each particularly and how they are incorporated into prayer. I'll try to capture the essence of each one of these categories in this thread and list them in a clear, concise way for your further meditation in the closet.

Saints, I believe with all my heart that if we learn to discipline our minds and deliberately collect our thoughts - *and pray with a conscientious purpose*, that we shall soon notice more of an outpouring, more of a lucidity, more of a divine union and flow of thought in all our conversations with God, both verbally in our closets and in the spontaneity of heart-prayer throughout the day. To give you a flavor of what to expect, we can begin with this sobering petition by Watts:

"Who would not be ambitious to correspond with heaven? Who would not be willing to learn how to pray? This is the language in which God has appointed the sons of Adam, who are but worms and dust, to address the King of Glory their Maker. Shall there be any among the sons of Adam that will not learn this language? Shall worms and dust refuse this honor and privilege? This is the speech which the sons of God use in talking with their Heavenly Father. Shall not all the children know how to speak it? This is the manner and behaviour of a saint, and these the expressions of his lips while his soul is breathing a divine air and stands before God.

"There are indeed some sincere Christians who daily worship God, and yet they are often laboring for want of matter and are perpetually at a loss for proper expressions. They only have a low attainment of this holy skill. There are children who can only cry after their father and stammer out a broken word or two by which he can understand their meaning. But these are ungrown infants. The Father would rather see his children advancing to manhood and occupying themselves daily with that broad and free conversation with Himself He allows and to which He graciously invites them. Prayer is a sacred and appointed means to obtain all the blessings we want, whether they relate to this life, or the life to come. Shall so glorious a privilege lie unused through our own neglect?"

Saints, this is a taste of what is promised to be taught, as he instructs step-by-step through each category how to effectively pray and prepare the heart for prayer. This instruction guide is most incredibly rich and wholesome; you really get a feel - firsthand - of how Puritan children were taught to enter into and address the Father of Lights. I pray this blesses you as greatly as it has blessed...and still blesses me.

Brother Paul

*** to come in installments ***

Re: Invocation - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 11:50

The first part of prayer is known as **invocation**, or the calling upon God. It includes three things:

1. A mention of one or more of the names or titles of God. In this way we indicate and acknowledge the Person to whom we pray. There are abundant instances in prayers that are recorded in Holy Scripture:

"O Lord my God, most holy God and Father"; "O God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubim"; "Almighty God, the everlasting King"; "Our Father which art in heaven"; "O God that keepest covenant" and many others.

2. Next is a declaration of our desire and design to worship Him:

"Unto Thee do we lift our souls"; "We draw near unto Thee as our God, We come into Thy presence"; "We that are dust and ashes take it upon us to speak to Thy majesty"; "We bow ourselves before Thee in humble addresses," or such like.

And here it may not be amiss to mention briefly one or two general expressions of our own unworthiness.

3. Also, we should mention a desire of His assistance and acceptance, under a sense of our own unworthiness and insufficiency, in such a language as:

"O Lord, quicken us to call upon Thy Name and assist us by Thy Spirit in our access to Thy mercy-seat"; "Raise our hearts toward Thyself"; "Teach us to approach Thee as becomes creatures of dust and draw Thou near to us as a God of grace". Notice in Psalm 5:2 we read the words, "Hearken to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for unto Thee will I pray" and it is here all three parts of invocation are expressed.

Re: Adoration - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 18:21

The second part of prayer is **adoration**, or honor paid to God by the creature. It contains four things:

1. A mention of His nature as God, with the highest admiration and reverence. This includes His most original properties and perfections, namely, His self-sufficient existence - that He is God of and from Himself; His unity of essence, that there is no other God besides Himself; His inconceivable subsistence in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a most proper object of our adoration and wonder, since it so much surpasses our understanding. His incomprehensible distance from all creatures and His infinite superiority of nature above all them that claim a place here. The language of this part of the prayer runs thus:

"Thou art God, and there is none else: Thy Name alone is Jehovah Most High. Who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord, or who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto our God? All the nations before Thee are as nothing, and they are counted in Thy sight less than nothing and vanity. Thou art the first and the last, the only true and living God; Thy glorious Name is exalted beyond all blessing and praise."

*** part 2 of adoration coming soon ***

Re: Adoration, part 2 - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 19:00

Along with a mention of God's nature, it is also good to mention His many attributes, with due expressions of praise at His power, his justice, His wisdom, His sovereignty, his holiness, His goodness and mercy. There is an abundance of this sort in Holy Scripture as saints down through all the ages have addressed: *"Thou art very great, O Lord, Thou art clothed with honor and majesty. Thou art the blessed and only potentate, the king of kings and Lord of Lords. All things are naked and open before Thine eyes. Thou searchest the heart of man, but how unsearchable is Thine own understanding, and Thy power is unknown. Thou art of purer eyes to behold than iniquity. Thy mercy endureth forever; Thou art slow to anger, abundant in goodness, and Thy truth reaches to all generations."*

These meditations are of great use in the beginning of our prayers, to abase us before the throne of God, to awaken our reverence, our dependence, our faith and hope, our humility and joy.

*** part 3 of adoration coming soon ***

Re: Adoration, part 3 - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 19:31

O blessed saints of God, another aspect of adoration we can engage in is the mentioning of God's many works. Here we mention His glory in creation, of providence and grace. God is glorious in Himself, his nature and attributes, so by the works of His hands He has manifested that glory to us. And it becomes us to ascribe the same glory to Him, that is, to tell Him humbly that we are aware of His many perfections revealed to us by His hands. We may use such a language as this:

"Thou, Lord, hast made the heavens and the earth. The whole creation is the work of Thine hands. Thou rulest among the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth and Thou doest what pleases Thee. Thou has revealed Thy goodness towards mankind, and hast magnified Thy mercy above all Thy Name. Thy works of nature and of grace are full of wonder, and sought out by all those that have pleasure in them."

*** part 4 of adoration coming soon ***

Re: Adoration, part 4 - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/7 20:20

Brethren, the fourth part of adoration is the mentioning of God's relation to us as Creator, as a Father, as a Redeemer, as a King, as an Almighty Friend and our Everlasting Portion. And here it will not be improper to make mention of the Name of Christ - in and through Whom alone we are brought nigh unto God and made His children, and by Whose incarnation and atonement He becomes a God and Father to sinful men and appears as their Reconciled Friend. And by this we draw still nearer to God in every part of this work of adoration!

(* Note by Brother Paul: Notice here, dear saints, Watts gives us no examples of language for this portion of adoration. This is because, I believe, this particular section of prayer is too personal to be put in didactic format; it is, instead, to be led by heart-breathings sovereignly inspired by the Holy Ghost. Babes can soar here instinctively and here the very rocks can cry out!)

Ah, when we consider His nature, we stand afar off from Him as creatures from a God, for He is infinitely superior to us. When we speak of His attributes, a great acquaintance seems to grow between God and us while we tell Him we have learned something of His power, His wisdom, His justice and His mercy, and when we proceed to mention the works of His hands - by which He has tangibly revealed Himself to our understanding - we seem to approach yet nearer to Him. *But when at last we can arise to call him our God, from a sense of His special relation to us in Christ, then we gain the nearest access and are better prepared for the following parts of this worship.*

Re: Confession - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2008/3/8 8:58

[Image: http://www3.telus.net/st_simons/IsaacWatts.jpg]

The third part of prayer consists of **confession**. This may be divided into these four heads:

1. A humble confession of the lowliness of our original nature; our distance from God, as we are creatures; our subjection to Him, and our constant dependance on him:

"Thou, O Lord are in heaven, but we are on the earth; our being is but of yesterday, and our foundation is in the dust. What is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou shouldst visit him? Man, that is a worm, and the son of man that is but a worm! It is in Thee that we live and move and have our being: Thou withholdest Thy breath and we die."

2. A confession of our sins: both *original*, which belong to our nature, and *actual*, that have been found in the course of our lives. We should confess our sins under the guilt of them, as well as under the deep and mournful impressions of the power of sin in our hearts. We should confess the sins we have been guilty of in thought, as well as the iniquity of our lips and of our lives; our sins of omission and sins of commission; the sins of our childhood and of our riper years; sins against the law of God and sins more particularly committed against the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes it is convenient and necessary to enter into a more particular detail of our various faults and follies. We should mourn before God because of our pride and vanity of mind; the intensity of our passions; our earthly-mindedness and love of this world; the indulgence of our flesh, our carnal security and unthankfulness under plentiful mercies; our fretfulness and impatience, our sinful dejection in time of trouble; our neglect of duty and lack of love to God; our hardness of heart; our slothfulness and decay in religion; the dishonors we have brought to God, and all our failures towards our fellow creatures - all these may be aggravated on purpose to humble our souls yet more before God by reflecting on their variety and number.

How oft have these been repeated even before and since we knew God savingly? How oft have we committed them against much light and sinned against much love? This part of prayer is very frequently insisted and enlarged upon among those examples that are left us in the Word of God:

"We are ashamed, and blush to lift up our faces before Thee our God, for our iniquities are increased over our head and our trespasses grown up to the heavens. See, we are contemptible; what shall we answer Thee? We will lay our hands upon our mouth and put our mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope."

Prayer - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/3/8 12:57

Quote:
-----Saints, I believe with all my heart that if we learn to discipline our minds and deliberately collect our thoughts - and pray with a conscientious purpose, that we shall soon notice more of an outpouring, more of a lucidity, more of a divine union and flow of thought in all our conversations with God, both verbally in our closets and in the spontaneity of heart-prayer throughout the day.

Could not agree more ... Looking forward to absorbing this brother.