

Prayer: Rooted in Revelation

Review

- The Bible shows us four categories of prayer:
 - Adoration/Praise – celebrating God for who he is, what he’s done, & what he promises.
 - Confession – admitting to God our fears, limitations, and sins.
 - Thanksgiving – acknowledging to God that he’s the source of all gifts & good things.
 - Supplication/Petition – expressing our desires to God.
- These four categories form four pathways into the “totality of our reality”:
 - Creature – adoration/praise reminds us that we are not God (Ps. 103.14)
 - Sinner – confession reminds us of our limits and flaws (Ps. 130.3-4)
 - Receiver – thanksgiving reminds us we are utterly dependent (Ps. 90.3, 104.29)
 - Believer – supplication/petition helps us to live by faith (Ps. 119.154)
- We find a God-inspired prayer book in the Psalms: “The Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated... whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.” (Calvin)

Rooting Prayer in God’s Self-Revelation

- The importance of the Psalms underlines a point made previously, when we saw Keller’s definition of prayer as: “continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word.”
- If prayer is continuing a conversation begun by God in his Word, then it must be rooted in what God reveals to us of himself in his Word. Think about it: *if you want to engage in a real conversation with somebody, you need to pay attention not just to what you want to tell them about yourself, but to what they tell you about themselves.*
- The Bible isn’t just our source of information *about* God; it’s our bridge to communion *with* God:

God acts through his words, the Word is “alive and active” (Heb 4:12), and therefore the way to have God dynamically active in our lives is through the Bible. To understand the Scripture is not simply to get information about God. If attended to with trust and faith, the Bible is the way to actually hear God speaking and also to meet God himself. (*Keller*)

Edmund P. Clowney wrote, “The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer.” We should not decide how to pray based on the experiences and feelings we want. Instead, we should do everything possible to behold our God as he is, and prayer will follow. The more clearly we grasp who God is, the more our prayer is shaped and determined accordingly. (*ibid.*)
- How should this reality influence our prayer life? Here is Keller’s own testimony:

In the summer after I was treated successfully for thyroid cancer, I made four practical changes to my life of private devotion. First, I took several months to go through the Psalms, summarizing each one. That enabled me to begin praying through the Psalms regularly, getting through all of them several times a year. The second thing I did was always to put in a time of meditation as a transitional discipline between my Bible reading and my time of prayer. Third, I did all I could to pray morning and evening rather than only in the morning. Fourth, I began praying with greater expectation.
- Although we need not implement the exact same strategy, the overarching plan is solid:
 - 1) Be intentional, 3) be expectant, *and*
 - 2) be biblical, 4) cultivate meditation as the means of moving from Bible reading to prayer.

The Importance of Biblical Meditation

- In some religions, “meditation” means emptying the mind. For Christians, it means filling our minds with the truth of Scripture – moving from the details of the Bible to its doctrines:

“Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God.” (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*)

“To read the Bible ‘theologically’ means to read the Bible with a focus on God: his being, his character, his words and works, his purpose, presence, power, promises, and precepts.” (J.I. Packer, “Reading the Bible Theologically”)

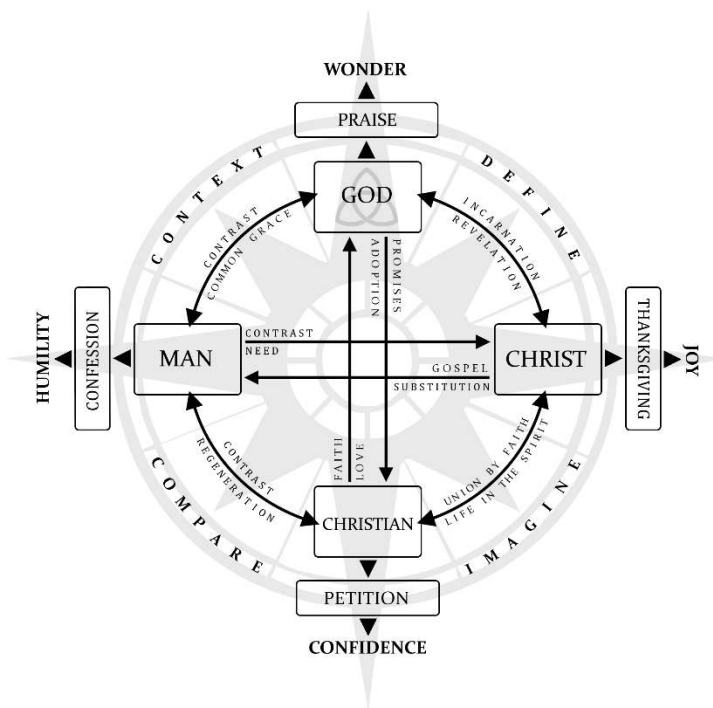
- The key to practicing biblical meditation is to ask good questions:
 - 1) What does it teach or imply about God?
 - 2) About man (as creature or sinner)?
 - 3) About Christ?
 - 4) About Christians?

note: One question’s answer may imply another by contrast, foreshadowing, fulfillment, etc.
Ex. “You are the light of the world” (Mat. 5.14) implies the world is in darkness!
- Martin Luther suggested that as we answer such questions, we can immediately turn the truths into prayers of praise, confession, thanksgiving, and petition. Thus meditation becomes a bridge: we move from the *details* of the Bible to the *doctrines* of the Bible to *doxology* (prayer).

Putting It All Together: the Devotional Compass

Instructions

- The four inner boxes represent the four meditation questions.
- The arrows between the boxes represent possible ways of using one question to answer another.
- The four boxes on the rim represent the four categories of prayer we can make from the answers to the connected meditation questions.
- The four words on the outer edge represent the sense that such prayers should produce in us.
- [The four words on the rim are extra helps for Bible study.]



Example (Psalm 139.1-6)

- God is all-knowing (vv. 1-5).
- By contrast, we are finite (v. 6).
- Jesus possesses all wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2.3).
- Our all-wise Father and Savior work all things for our good (Rom. 8.28).

Activation Tip #5: Try using the compass diagram during your Bible reading this week to move from the details of the Bible to its doctrines and on to doxology/discipleship.

Request for this Week: Ask the Lord to help you meditate on and apply his Word (Ps. 119.18).