

The aim of the soul must surely be to connect with God through honest communication; honouring God's awesome majesty, being truthful about sin, listening for God's Word, and so much more. Often, we do not feel like spending time doing this, but we must learn to dismiss such self-centredness. God is Maker, Creator, Redeemer and Friend.

Learning from the Psalms about prayer and praise

- We assume that praising God means honouring God through prayers and songs, by telling God how much we love Him, and the like. All this is true, but the Psalms reveal that praise is also something much deeper.
 - **The word we know as 'Psalms' means 'Praises'!** The Hebrew title for this book of the Bible is '*Tehillim*', which means '*Praises*'. We only call the book '*Psalms*' because this is the Latin word for '*Tehillim*', used for more than 1,600 years!
 - **But surely, only some Psalms read like 'Praises'** Some psalms obviously give glory and honour to God (e.g. Psalm 100, or 146-150), and read like 'praise', but others are very different. Many read like complaints (e.g. Psalm 10,13)! Yet they too are categorised as the rest, being called '*Praises*'. Why is this?
 - **Addressing things to God.** Praise is deeper than saying worthy and wonderful things to God. Psalms remind us that true worship and praise includes bringing our troubles and difficulties to God as well as our joy and happiness. All this is praise because at its heart, praise happens when we acknowledge God as our Creator and Lord, even within troubles.
 - **The psalms and real life.** So the Psalms with all their rich variety encourage us to bring the good and difficult things of life to God. When we do this in honesty and integrity, however tough the issues, God accepts this as praise; in so doing we are honouring Him and calling on His love, indeed, showing faith that He will help us.
 - **The Psalms and salvation:** In this way, some of the greatest Psalms (e.g. Ps. 22) describe situations of desperate need, out of which salvation comes. The specifics may be vague; perhaps famine (e.g. 22:14) or even war (e.g. 22:16), but the words of the psalm speak also of our own troubles, and if we follow each psalm, it will lead us to find hope in God (22:25f.), and then lift our hearts in contented praise!
 - **Praise in the N.T.** The word '*praise*' means '*to give honour or glory*' in a general sense, and so Paul speaks of praising people (1 Cor 11:2) as well as praising God (Phil 1:11). Fundamentally, God is praised in the New Testament through the Gospel which bears His message of hope for the world.
 - **Real Praise from the heart.** If we add O.T. revelation to N.T. revelation we find the fullest meaning of 'praise'. In praise, we give God glory and honour by bringing everything in complete honesty to Him, even life's difficulties. At their peak, our praises give thanks to God for the gift of life we have in Christ Jesus.

Using words in prayer and praise

- When you pray, you will naturally use your 'mother tongue', or perhaps the 'gift of tongues'. Praise God therefore;
 - **By telling God how much you love Him,** honour and worship Him, for everything from His creative power, to His presence, His salvation, His healing power, and much more.
 - **By telling God about yourself.** As we have already seen, God wants to know openly and honestly about us, so we must be ready to own up to the truth, confess sin, be ready to repent, and change!
 - **By letting your mind dwell on the things of God,** and other Biblical themes e.g. the mysteries of God's grace, His guidance, His empowering through gifts and the fruit of the Spirit ...
 - **By using tongues,** make sure tongues is spiritually motivated as tongues can be used in a worldly way. The true gift is as soul-consuming and God focussed as spoken praise, without the distractions of thoughts generated by known words.
 - **By using written material.** Praise can be hard because of the way the mind tends to wander. The discipline of reading prayers from a book can help, but cannot make the heart want God or address Him.
 - **By reading scriptures** such as the Psalms, which allow God's Word to have its way within your spirit, drawing you closer as you read words that have inspired generations.

Using silence in prayer and praise

- Instead of using language, praise whether happy or from our troubles can take place in silence.
 - **Silent prayer has the same source as spoken prayer.** Silent praise comes from the attitude of the heart within the believer, seeking to love and honour God, and being honest and obedient to Him.
 - **Silent prayer can be difficult.** This is because we are used to the sound of speaking nearly all the time. Resting the mind to let it dwell on the many features of God's love is the place to start; let go of being worried about words ...
 - **Silent prayer is listening prayer.** Of all the various forms of prayer, silence creates space for us to listen to God. If we constantly use words in our praise, we may not be ready to hear what He might wish to say to us; silence may well help.
 - **Silent prayer is of equal worth to spoken prayer.** Some feel silence is a higher form of praise, but it is not. God has no such gauge for our prayer, rather, He looks on the heart. Each one of us knows if our heart is truly engaged with praise whether in language or in silence.