

## **PRAISE AS PRAYER**

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When was the last time you received a compliment? Why did you receive it? Were you being recognized for something you did? For the way you did it? For the skills you demonstrated? Did someone want something from you and thought that flattery would soften you up? Were you complimented because of who you are? If so, was it because of the position you occupy, the resources you command, the favours you could dispense? Or was it because of your essence, who you are as a person?

In a society driven by outcomes and achievement we seldom are complimented because of our personality or character. More often it's because of what we have done or can do. So often compliments carry with them a certain sense of obligation. To receive one is somehow to be indebted to the one giving it.

That's unfortunate, because compliments appropriately given are a sincere form of recognition and praise. The one being complimented is seen as one who has certain attributes that lead to "success," however the issuer defines success in that particular context.

More than that, compliments also serve to remind both the receiver and others of things that are important: personal qualities of character, a set of skills, a discerning mind, a helpful attitude, grace under pressure, or any of a myriad of other characteristics. Compliments serve to point to the person, rather than the outcome, even if it is the outcome that generates the compliment in the first place. They remind us that life is, at its core, personal. Life consists first and foremost of people; only secondarily is it actions and outcomes. Sincere compliments celebrate the individual, not the deed.

When it comes to our relationship with God we use the term “praise” rather than “compliments.” Regardless of the word used, however, we are about the same thing – recognizing that God is first and foremost personal, and celebrating His Being rather than His acts.

Paul E. Billheimer, in *Destined for the Throne*, describes praise as “the highest form of prayer because it combines petition with faith.” In prayer we are talking with the One who has the capability of responding to our deepest needs out of His infinite knowledge of what is best. To approach that One in an attitude of praise is to remind us of Who we are dealing with. Praise requires that we recognize the character of God, His qualities, His magnificence and capabilities.

Billheimer adds “the missing element that is necessary to energize triumphant faith is praise – perpetual, purposeful, aggressive praise.” Praise is the means by which we rise above ourselves, move outside ourselves, shift our focus toward Another. It is impossible to be self-centered and praise God simultaneously, just as it is impossible to extend a compliment to someone else and remain absorbed in oneself. At the moment we are speaking, our attention is all on the other person. So when we praise God our attention is all on Him.

To praise God as Creator of the universe is to recognize that we are dealing with One who is much “bigger” than we are. It helps us to overcome the temptation to try to reduce God to human size. To praise God as Redeemer is to remind ourselves that He has already initiated a relationship with us and made it possible. We need not fear that the separation from Him that we may feel at a particular moment in time is a permanent condition. To praise God as Sustainer is to understand that the very breath of life comes from Him and we are sustained by Him during our time on this earth. To draw breath is to be the beneficiary of His grace, and such beneficence deserves a positive response from us.

What a contrast to much of our prayer time! So many of our prayers stem from self-absorption rather than focus on God. They come from a desire for changed circumstances for ourselves or others, rather than a commitment to changing our attitude toward God. God is seen as at best our servant, at worst an indulgent genie. Our tendency is to let praise flow after answered prayer rather than before, to make it conditional on our satisfaction with God's response rather than an essential component of our approach to God.

We need to reorient our prayer life, to diligently practice praise as prayer.

As a person of prayer, King David understood that praying through praise can revolutionize both one's relationship with God and one's understanding of the circumstances and situations of life. In an introspective moment near the end of his life, when one would expect him to be self-absorbed, he gives us a model of praise as prayer. In part, he said,

“Praise be to you, O LORD,  
God of our father Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power  
and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,  
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.  
Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;  
you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you;  
you are the ruler of all things.  
In your hands are strength and power  
to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks,  
and praise your glorious name.”

*1 Chronicles 29:10 - 13*

The rest of his prayer moves back and forth between petition and praise, praise and petition.

We find the same pattern in many of the Psalms, as well as in the prayers of other great Old Testament leaders including King Solomon and Nehemiah. The apostle Paul follows a similar approach in several of his letters in the New Testament. And many of the great prayer warriors of today have learned the power of praise as prayer.

If you don't already praise God as a form of prayer, isn't it time you started?

If you want triumphant faith in the midst of overwhelming challenges, praise the One who sent His Son to overcome the world.

“The secret of effective prayer is a massive program of praise.” (Billheimer)