

Honest Prayer

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How do you pray? With eyes closed, hands folded, head bowed? Do you follow a formula like the Lord's Prayer? Do you ever worry about saying the wrong thing? Are you afraid to offend God? Afraid to express your true emotions before Him? Do your prayers every look like those of the Psalmist?

"Do you indeed decree what is right, you gods? Do you judge the children of man uprightly? No, in your hearts you devise wrongs; your hands deal out violence on earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies. They have venom like the venom of a serpent, like the deaf adder that stops its ear, so that it does not hear the voice of charmers or of the cunning enchanter. O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted. Let them be like the snail that dissolves into slime, like the stillborn child who never sees the sun. Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away! The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth." (Psalms 58:1-11)

The prayers God loves the most are the prayers that come from the heart. The prayers that seem wrenched from the depths of our souls. The prayers that express our deepest longings. Our greatest fears. Our sharpest pains. All our hopes and dreams. When you read the Psalms, you are reading the prayerbook of the Bible. You are reading a record of the written prayers the people of God have been praying for centuries. They often include anger and rage. They often call for vengeance and the death of enemies. And these things run so counter to the gospel.

How should we read the Psalms? My encouragement is to read them less as ethical instructions and more as an invitation to be honest before God. To bring all your emotions and feelings and reactions before the Lord and lay them at His feet. God is a big boy. He can handle whatever you throw at Him. He is not afraid of your feelings and He is not easily offended. His love for you is truly unconditional and there is no condemnation in His presence. There is only grace and mercy and righteousness and peace. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever so you can count on Him to always be faithful. His promises are sure. His love is eternal. Trust Him enough to be honest with Him in prayer.