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Ask Johnnie

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Ask Johnnie

December 01, 2008 | Johnnie Moore

Johnnie, is there one particular way we're supposed to pray? Some people tell me to talk to God like a judge and others say a friend. Which one is right? — Cassie

Cassie, you learn to pray by praying, and there are plenty of helpful tools to prepare you to do that more consistently and more effectively. You could read the writings of some of God's great prayer warriors, men like E.M. Bounds or Robert Murray M'Cheyne, or you can just start by studying prayer in the Bible.

Jesus' primary teaching on prayer is in Matthew 6. His "Lord's Prayer" was meant to be a model, not a mantra. Like Jesus, you should spend time in thanksgiving and praise; offer your requests to God, and ask for His help in your life and on behalf of others. Try to spend much more time praising God and praying for others than you do for yourself.

A lot of Christians believe the best praying involves an overly stoic persona seasoned with a bit of Elizabethan English. Actually, more than your properly placed words, God is concerned about your consistent communication with Him. You must find a place and time where you daily commune with God, and "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door" (Matt. 6:6). Behind that door, you leave your distractions and then give your entire attention to prayer and His word.

Actually, my prayer life is a bit like a conversation, and it is sometimes uncomfortably honest. Hebrews 4:16 says to, "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that [you] may receive mercy and find grace to help [you] in your time of need."

Jesus gives you the freedom to talk honestly to Him, to walk right up to His throne and say what's on your mind. You should feel the freedom to express your most honest thoughts and feelings, but you shouldn't barge into His throne room like you own the place.

Theologically, we call this the immanence (or closeness) and the transcendence (otherness/holiness) of God. You should feel close to Him and feel that He cares for you (because he does), but you should also recognize and respect his Holiness (because He is).

Sometimes I call this the "wow" and the "wooooo!" John 15:15 says that Jesus has called us "friends," but Hebrews 10:31 tells us it is a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This is why your friends are confused as to how to view God when they pray. A balance between the two views is what you're looking for and actually what makes our relationship with God so mysterious and so unique. He loves you, yet He is your Lord.

You will enjoy your access to God more when you begin to understand how holy He is.

Most of all, just pray, and remember the words of the great British preacher, Charles Spurgeon, who once said, “a neglected [prayer] closet is the beginning of all spiritual decline.”

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