

## Perception radically affects Prayer

AW Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ..."

### The power of our perceptions.

Tozer went on to say, "How we perceive God will determine our lives." That is, what we think he is like, will affect the way we live and the whole direction of our lives. Do you think this is true? If it is, then we need to think deeply about how we perceive God.

A further thought came to me this week. "How we perceive who God is, will radically affect how we pray." That surely is true! Is he distant, or is he close? Is he kind or is he crabby? Is he merciful or is he intolerant? Is he generous or is he stingy? Is he loving or is he often angry? Is he too busy to care or does he care about everything in our lives? Our answers to these questions will radically affect how we pray.

And here is an extension of that...How we see ourselves in relation to our view of him – will radically affect how we pray. Do we ever say "I won't bother him. This matter is too small for him?" "I don't think I deserve his help. I have messed up." "He's got better things to do than listen to my whinging." Our view of ourselves, and how we perceive his reactions and responses to us will be, will radically affect how we pray.

### Progressive revelation

Our perceptions of God change as the Lord reveals himself progressively. This is meant to happen, and is a delightful part of our walk with God. I was reading of Mark Stibbe's progressive revelation of God in his book "From Orphans to Heirs." He said he was saved in his late teens and was deeply impacted by a wonderful revelation of Jesus. But a few years later he encountered the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit and so much more opened up for him and his praying changed markedly. He saw miracles of healing and of people being set free as he learnt to pray in new ways through the Spirit.

Some years later he realised he was nevertheless still afflicted by a deep insecurity, due to the fact that he was abandoned and adopted as a baby. Then at a conference the Father touched him very deeply and healed his wounded heart and filled him with his tender love. And everything changed again as he learnt to live and work from a place of resting in the Father's love. Again, his prayer changed as his perception and experience of God enlarged.

Each new experience we have of God - as we discover Jesus as our Saviour, as we come to know the Spirit, as we discover the Father's enthusiastic love for us, will change how we pray. Because we become different people – more free, more open, more aware of who he really is. This is spiritual growth – to know him better – to receive more and more insight and awareness of him and how he is at work. We can read a lot and have lots of awareness of truth and know about God, but may not have actually encountered the person of Jesus, the person of the Spirit, the person Jesus called Abba, Father. It is these meetings of the heart that actually change us and cause our growth and of course affect how we pray.

### Paul's perceptions of God and ourselves

Paul said a lot about how he saw God and how we are now that we have believed in Jesus. And his prayers reveal so much to us about how his beliefs and perceptions affected his prayers. Look at this passage from Ephes. 1:11-20

*In him we were chosen... in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a*

*deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.*

*<sup>15</sup> For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all his people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.”*

Paul describes in that passage some amazing things about us.

- We were chosen! What a powerful word – meaning favoured, valued, cherished.
- We were ‘included in Christ’. He is our hiding place, our safe place, our place of completion.
- We are loved by the Father as Jesus is loved.
- We have been ‘marked with a seal – the Holy Spirit - who guarantees our inheritance...’

This is how Paul sees who we are as God’s children. What a marvellous picture. Does your heart leap for joy when you read these words?

And in his wonderful prayer he reveals his views or perceptions of God. He calls God – ‘The Glorious Father’ - who can send us the Spirit - who in turn can give us wisdom and revelation and open our eyes to see wonderful things that we did not know before.

Do you see God in that way? Do you want to ask him to do these kinds of things in your life?

“How we perceive who he is, and who we are in relation to who we think he is,  
will radically affect how we pray.”

### **My changing prayers**

Prayer has changed for me over the years. I grew up in a church and knew about God and Jesus, but they were remote, not personal. Mostly I felt guilty, disobedient, bad about myself. And prayer was what other people did – or simply ‘saying a prayer’ before a meal or bedtime.

Then in my teens prayer changed to become “help... I need to change.” My sense of disorder was getting unbearable – and I was now seeking. But no-one showed me how to have faith in Jesus. I didn’t really know who I was praying to – or how to trust in him.

Then one day I felt I was being called, drawn into something. And I eventually said “OK Lord – whatever you want.” And I knew then that he wanted my whole life given over to him. And that meant going on the mission field with David who became my husband. But still, I did not feel really different, or that I was comfortable with God. Prayer was to someone remote – not close – I still felt inadequate, a failure – not acceptable, that I would be caught out any moment and made to feel humiliated and ashamed because God was holy and severe. I felt in my serving God that I was acting out something I was not really experiencing inside.

Then one day when I was thirty he called again, through the life and example of a neighbour, and through a story in John’s gospel. He called me this time to himself, to surrender my whole heart to him. And I did – and everything changed. I was astonished, flabbergasted, overwhelmed. I never knew it was supposed to be like this. And prayer changed radically. Jesus was real and there constantly. I just kept talking to him. It was an incredible joy to be alone with him. The word became alive and the Lord spoke to me constantly through it. I couldn’t get enough of it.

A couple of years later I became aware of the Spirit – that it was the Spirit who had revealed Jesus to me and caused the Word to become alive for me. Before then was afraid of the Spirit – of weirdness – of no longer being myself. I had bought in to the fears and prejudices of others I had heard. I was too lazy to do my own study of Scripture... but one day I encountered him and everything changed. I actually became my true self. I did not lose anything worth keeping! And prayer has never been the same since.

Later I had to learn to pray through a desert time – through great trials... but again I discovered things about prayer and about him that would probably not have come any other way. I especially discovered that when he doesn't seem to answer the obvious things that I want to change or go away... that he was actually at work doing something else in my life. He was waiting for me to become open to new discoveries. During this time I learnt to ask two very helpful questions: *What new thing do you want to show me about yourself? What do you want me to discover about myself?* (He was growing my perception of him and my perception of myself.) And he showed me over a period of time. He loves to answer these kinds of prayers. It is not always comfortable being open in this way, but it is the way of growth. I became totally convinced during that time that he always wants our good. So I am no longer afraid to ask these kinds of questions.

A couple of years ago I felt drawn to ask him *'How can I enter your rest?'* Hebr. 4:11 *"Let us make every effort to enter that rest..."* and over the last year or so he has shown me a series of things about this question of being at rest in him – whatever the circumstances. Have you discovered that he loves to answer these kinds of prayers?

Recently I was reading Matt 11:27 *"No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom he chooses to reveal him."* My prayer has become – *"Jesus will you please reveal the Father to me?"*

“How we perceive who he is, and who we are in relation to who we think he is,  
will radically affect how we pray.”

### **Seeking to know him better**

Prayer is not just about him meeting our needs - even though we are encouraged to “come boldly to the throne of grace where we will find help just when we need it.” (Hebrews 4:16)

But it is about us seeking to know him better - and to learn what is in his heart for us, and for the world we live in. Look at these prayers of Paul. Ph.1:4 *"I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel... being confident ...that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion..."*

And 9-10 *"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless..."*

And Col.1:9 *"We have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding..."*

About a year ago a woman who was a believer came to talk with me and shared many confusions and struggles... and health problems that were a result of her turmoil and anxiety. And she said after some time of pouring this all out... ‘What do you think? What should I do?’ I was a bit startled at suddenly being put on the spot! There was only one thought in my mind, and it was a question.

“Where is your safe place? How do you take refuge in God?” She didn't know... she had never thought in that way before. It was really a question about how she perceived God – and how she turned to him in all her distress. It takes us back to our basic statement... “How we perceive who he is, and who we are in relation to who we think he is, will radically affect how we pray.” She was clearly struggling to pray at all.

## Perceptions that will change us

I read a great little description of God as Father, Son and Spirit recently.

*“The early church thought of Jesus and the Spirit as the two arms of the Father by which he reached down to us, laid hold of us, cleansed us, and brought us home.”*

What a delightful picture of the Trinity. What would change in our praying if we saw God like this?

Mark Stibbe wrote the following in his book “I am your Father.” Read it aloud, and see how it affects your prayer.

“Jesus said in John 8:36, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Paul pronounced in Galatians 5:1, “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” Jesus’ death and resurrection have liberated every single person who has chosen to put their faith and trust in Jesus. As far as the New Testament writers are concerned, the followers of Jesus are supposed to live as sons and daughters, not as slaves to sin, because we have been set free from the enemy’s rule and ownership.

We are no longer the sons and daughters of the father of lies, we are the sons and daughters of a loving Father. We no longer strive to earn the Father’s affection; we rest in the revelation that we are greatly loved. We no longer live by the lies, “I do, therefore I am”; we live by the truth, “I am, therefore I do.” We are no longer fearful of punishment; we are assured of our position of favour. We are no longer driven by whips of law; we are led by cords of love. We are no longer uncertain of who we are or where we stand; we know we are royal children of the High King of Heaven and we are welcome in his presence. We are no longer bound by guilt and shame; we are forgiven and we live as honoured members of God’s family. Christians are ... free people.”

A simple way to keep our prayers true to God’s perception of us is to pray the Scriptures. Declare them out loud as prayer, and you will find your heart turning to the truth and not sinking into the old lies about yourself or about God. Make this a daily habit and your heart and words will align with his glorious revelations of himself and your wonderful place in his heart and his purposes. This is what it means to “worship in spirit and in truth.” Such a delight! May it be yours always.

Kath Wells

[www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz](http://www.prayerchangeslives.org.nz)