

A GUIDEBOOK

# Praying

FOR PRAYER

~ *in* ~

IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

# Public



*Pat Quinn*

*Foreword by Kevin DeYoung*

“We miss so many opportunities when public prayers in our churches are ill-prepared, uninformed, scattered, unbiblical, or nonexistent. Pat Quinn has served us immensely by providing a theologically informed, pastoral, Christ-exalting, clear, and insightful book that will serve anyone who has the privilege of leading God’s people in prayer. Loaded with examples of actual prayers, *Praying in Public* will make your public prayers more biblical, thoughtful, and God glorifying.”

**Bob Kauffin**, Director, Sovereign Grace Music

“The contemporary church desperately needs to recover a vision for the reformation of the pulpit pastoral prayer. Though well-intentioned, the pastoral prayer too often descends into something that is shallow and ill-conceived and reflects the spiritual poverty of the one praying. Pat Quinn’s book is a gold mine of reflection and practical aid to improve the pastoral prayer. I am convinced that if pastors and other leaders follow the instructions given in this marvelous book, congregations are going to be immensely blessed. I believe that many Christians, especially young Christians, learn to pray following the model of the pastoral prayer they hear on Sundays. My prayer is that this book will aid in the reformation of Christ’s church.”

**Derek W. H. Thomas**, Senior Minister, First Presbyterian Church;  
Chancellor’s Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary

“*Praying in Public* is a unique book and a very needed book. While we have many books on private prayer, few books walk us through a practical pastoral theology of corporate prayer—praying in public. Pat Quinn not only guides us through seven biblical principles of corporate prayer, he also illustrates these beautifully for us throughout his writing.”

**Bob Kelleman**, Academic Dean, Dean of Students, and Professor of Biblical Counseling, Faith Bible Seminary; author, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*

“As the modern church seeks to reach the present generation, it needs old solutions, not new solutions. Awakening in our day will occur as the church itself is revived. And that reviving will stem from a renewed spirit of prayerfulness. Here is a book to help lead the church down this path upon its knees for its own good and for the good of the world it seeks to reach. Pat Quinn provides practical help and rich examples to ignite prayerfulness in the life of readers and their local church. I have the honor of serving alongside the author at University Reformed Church. I can testify that Pat Quinn can write so adeptly about praying in public because he is a man whose life is suffused with praying in private. He has taught me much over the years and you will find him to be an able guide as well.”

**Jason Helopoulos**, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church; author, *A Neglected Grace*

“This book delivers on its promise. Any Christian leader with the responsibility of praying in public will discover both guidance and resources in this helpful and instructive book. If you find *The Valley of Vision* useful in preparing for prayer in corporate worship, you’ll want this book. I know of no better volume on this important subject.”

**Donald S. Whitney**, Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Associate Dean, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Family Worship*; *Praying the Bible*; and *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

“Decades ago, when I was a youth pastor, I had the opportunity to preach at the local Christian high school’s chapel services. When the teens had all returned to their classrooms, Pat Quinn sat down with me and gently and pastorally provided me with a much-needed correction to how I approached the passage I had taught. Now I’m a middle-aged pastor, and Pat has done it again, but this time through a book. I encourage you to let this godly pastor sit you down and challenge you to humbly lead your congregation to the throne of grace in prayer.”

**Noel Jesse Heikkinen**, Teaching Pastor, Riverview Church; Regional Executive Director, Acts 29; author, *Unchained and Wretched Saints*

“While Jesus condemned those who parade their private prayer life publicly (‘to be seen by men’), he also taught his disciples how to pray rightly in public by both his example and precepts—even as they requested for him to ‘teach us to pray.’ So with Paul’s exhortation—‘I desire that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands’—I heartily commend this volume as a distillation of biblical insight on how to pray ‘everywhere rightly.’”

**Harry Reeder**, Senior Pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church

*Praying in Public*



# Praying in Public

*A Guidebook for Prayer in Corporate Worship*

Pat Quinn

Foreword by Kevin DeYoung

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*To Tom Stark, Kevin DeYoung, and Jason Helopoulos—  
three beloved pastors who have faithfully  
practiced and promoted public prayer*





# Contents

Foreword *II*

*Kevin DeYoung*

Introduction *15*

## PART 1: SEVEN PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE PRAYER

1 Adoration, Confession, and Supplication *29*

2 Bible-Saturated Prayer *37*

3 Trinitarian Prayer *43*

4 Thoughtful and Reverent Prayer *49*

5 Gospel-Centered Prayer *55*

6 Theological Prayer *61*

7 Well-Prepared Prayer *67*

## PART 2: SAMPLE PRAYERS

8 Prayers of Adoration *83*

9 Prayers of Confession *105*

10 Prayers of Supplication *121*

11 Composite Prayers *153*

General Index *167*

Scripture Index *173*



# Foreword

*Kevin DeYoung*

Acts 6 has long been seen as a great encouragement to preachers. Here you have a pressing need in the church: widows not getting their daily bread and, to make matters worse, the situation looks like ethnic favoritism. And yet, the apostles refuse to be diverted from their calling to preach the gospel. “We will devote ourselves to the ministry of the word!” Teaching the Bible and preaching about Jesus was something that took time—time in front of people and time in preparation. If gospel ministry was meant to happen willy-nilly, the apostles would have waited on tables and squeezed in word work whenever they got the chance. The example of the apostles in Acts 6 reminds us that preaching is a priority in the church, and priorities take time.

But of course, the apostles didn’t devote themselves just to the ministry of the word. They also devoted themselves to prayer (6:4). Preaching and praying were the twin turbines providing the church with gospel power. Just like the ministry of the word, the ministry of prayer was something that took time. No doubt, the apostles were thinking mainly about gatherings of corporate prayer like

we see in Acts 4. But it's hard to imagine they didn't also have in mind times of private prayer and time spent preparing for prayer. If prayer is to be a vital part of the church, it requires leaders who are not only committed to prayer in their own lives but are also thoughtful and deliberate in how they lead others in prayer. Sustained patterns of rich, biblical corporate prayer don't just happen. They must be planned, and they must be led.

There are lots of good resources available for planning and leading the church in corporate worship. There are books for pastors on how to preach. There are books about leading in song. There are books about how to read Scripture and how to carefully construct a gospel-centered liturgy. Surprisingly, however, there aren't nearly enough books aimed at helping Christians to pray in public. Whether the role is filled by the pastors, or by pastors and elders, or by a worship leader, or by several mature Christians—whatever your context dictates as the right person to pray—surely, that person ought to work hard to think about what and how to pray. We would never dream of getting up to preach unprepared week after week, but in too many churches, that's exactly what we do when it comes to prayer. We have equated a good heart with good prayers and have confused spontaneity with spirituality. There is hardly a church or a Christian out there that couldn't use help in praying more deeply, more biblically, and more thoughtfully in corporate worship.

That's why I am immensely grateful for this new book. I've known Pat Quinn for more than twenty years—as a high school Bible teacher, as an elder, as a biblical counselor, as a worship leader, as a colleague, and as a friend. I had the privilege of serving with Pat at University Reformed Church, and now as the pastor of

## FOREWORD

Christ Covenant Church I'm honored to commend this excellent volume. Part instruction and part example, this book is a timely resource for pastors, elders, worship leaders, and any Christian who has the privilege of praying in public. Pat gives us seven principles to guide our public prayer, and then gives us dozens of examples from his own public prayer ministry. I heard many of these prayers in person throughout my years in East Lansing, and I can tell you that Pat is as genuine and thoughtful about his public prayers as anyone I know. I'm glad to see the fruit of his labors now in print. Whether you use this book as a pastor in training, as a lay leader in the church, or simply in your own devotional time, I know you will be helped to think more carefully, more biblically, and more doxologically about prayer in the life of the church. May God revive in us once more an apostolic commitment to the word of God and prayer.



# Introduction

*I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation  
I will sing your praise.*

HEBREWS 2:12

## What Would Jesus Do?

For a few years in the 1990s many people found it a helpful physical reminder of their faith to wear a WWJD bracelet. The question “What would Jesus do?” was meant to help us remember Jesus’s way of life and then try to do what Jesus would do in our own circumstances. Most of the time that looked like loving our neighbor, forgiving people who hurt us, telling the truth even when it was costly, sharing the gospel, and making courageous moral choices. I wonder, though, how many of us wearing those bracelets thought about doing what Jesus did with regard to prayer?

Prayer was central to Jesus’s life and ministry. We get a glimpse into Jesus’s personal prayer life in Luke 6:12: “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and *all night he continued in*



*prayer to God.*” We see him instructing his disciples about prayer in Matthew 6:9: “Pray then like this. . . .” And in John 6:11 Jesus prayed a familiar mealtime prayer: “*When he had given thanks*, he distributed [the loaves] to those who were seated.” We are comfortable with personal prayer, giving thanks for food, and teaching others how to pray, but there is one other kind of prayer Jesus practiced that we may not be as familiar with and which is the subject of this book: congregational or public prayer. Hebrews 2:12 refers to Jesus, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” Here is Jesus the worship leader leading the congregation in declaring God’s name (“I will tell”) and singing his praise (“I will sing”).<sup>1</sup>

Jesus fills this worship leader role at the Last Supper as well. As he prays, he:

- *Reveals the Father’s name to the disciples to increase their love for him.* “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).
- *Leads them in a song of praise to the Father.* “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt. 26:30).
- *Petitions the Father on their behalf.* “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15); “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

1 Alistair Begg and Sinclair Ferguson helpfully develop this point in their book *Name above All Names* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 66–67.

If we add to these three elements the petition from the Lord's prayer "and forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12), we could define congregational prayer as *public prayer by a Christian leader in which he represents the gathered people of God in adoration, confession, and/or supplication and by which he instructs them in God's ways*. Throughout the Bible we see God working for the good of his people through the representation of duly appointed leaders as they lead, protect, teach, and pray. Besides Jesus, examples of leaders praying for God's people include Moses (Ps. 90: adoration, confession, and supplication), Solomon (1 Kings 8:22–61: adoration, confession, and supplication), Ezra (Ezra 9:6–10:1: confession), Daniel (Dan. 9:1–19: confession, adoration, supplication), and the apostles (Acts 4:23–30: adoration, supplication). All of these prayers both represent and instruct the saints. Representative or congregational or public prayer is thoroughly biblical and, as we will see, has been an important part of Christian worship from the beginning of the church until now. And this has important implications for our worship today.

### What Is This Book About?

First of all, this is not primarily a book about prayer in general. There are many wonderful books to help us learn to pray, but the specific topic of this book is congregational prayer.

But this isn't merely a book *about* congregational prayer. Though part 1 looks historically at public prayer and gives guiding principles to follow, this is largely a book *of* prayers. In that sense it's a little like the classic book of Puritan prayers, *The Valley of Vision*.<sup>2</sup> I am not,

2 Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2005).

however, a Puritan. I am a twenty-first-century servant of Christ in a PCA church. I am an elder, the Director of Counseling Ministries, and a former worship leader at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan. Under the leadership of former senior pastors Tom Stark and Kevin DeYoung and present senior pastor Jason Helopoulos, our church has sought to make congregational prayer a regular and robust part of our worship services. I decided to write this book because we believe the Lord has graced us to take this responsibility seriously and to strive to do it as well as we can. My prayer is that this book might stimulate and guide you (and others) to do the same.

We have good reasons to do congregational prayer well. First, it's hard to imagine a worship service without some kind of public prayer. Prayer in the Sunday service is a given, but it is not always done in a clear, concise, and compelling way. The glory of God, the history of the church, and the edification of believers mandate that we take prayer as seriously as other elements of worship, like singing and preaching.

Second, congregational prayer is powerful because God is mighty and has promised to answer our prayers, especially those we ask together (Matt. 7:7–11; 18:19–20). A former pastor once led our congregation in prayer for a little girl facing serious health issues. He prayed clearly, compassionately, boldly, and specifically for her. The congregation was challenged to believe, the parents were encouraged to hope, and, best of all, the prayers were answered!

Finally, good congregational prayer actually models and teaches the congregation how to pray. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he didn't pontificate on prayer—he prayed

(Luke 11:1–4). It's not unusual for people in our church to later ask the one who led in prayer for a copy of the prayer. More than one person has commented that our prayers of confession in particular have helped them confess more intelligently and deeply.

I hope this book will help you and others who might fall into any of these following groups:

- Pastors, elders, worship leaders, and campus and youth workers who desire to lead and pray well over the long haul, but who sometimes feel weary and uninspired and are looking for stimulating, useful, and flexible resources to help.
- Seminarians and interns who are inexperienced in leading worship or public prayer and want a resource to help them plan ahead and grow.
- Seminary professors who want to equip their students for pastoral ministry.
- Growth group or Bible study leaders who desire group prayer to be a regular and vital part of their gatherings.
- Parents who want to revive family worship and lead their families well in prayer.
- Rank-and-file congregants who sometimes find personal prayer tedious, boring, and repetitive, or who might lack confidence and want to be stimulated to fresh prayers of adoration, confession, and supplication.

Let's begin by surveying congregational prayers from church history to see what we can learn about content and practice. I will focus on prayers of adoration, confession, and supplication because, as we will see, these three are the primary types of prayer historically employed in congregational worship.

## Liturgies and Prayers of the Church

### *The Latin Liturgy (Fifth Century)*

*Adoration:* “Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace to men who are God’s friends. We praise thee, we bless thee, we adore thee, we glorify thee, we give thee thanks for thy great glory: Lord God, heavenly King, God the almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, only-begotten Son; Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father . . . thou alone art the Most High: Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit: in the glory of God the Father. Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

*Confession:* “I confess to almighty God . . . that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed; through my fault, through my own fault, through my own most grievous fault. . . . Take away from us our iniquities, we entreat thee, Lord, so that, with souls made clean, we may be counted worthy to enter the Holy of holies: through Christ our Lord. Amen.”<sup>4</sup>

*Supplication:* “Deliver us, we pray thee, from every evil, past, present, and to come . . . , be pleased to grant peace in our time, so that with the help of thy compassion we may be ever free from sin and safe from all disquiet.”<sup>5</sup>

### *John Calvin (1545)*

*Adoration* (after the Lord’s Supper): “Heavenly Father, we offer thee eternal praise and thanks that thou hast granted so great a benefit

3 Bard Thompson, comp., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1961), 61.

4 Thompson, *Liturgies*, 57, 59.

5 Thompson, *Liturgies*, 79.

to us poor sinners, having drawn us into the Communion of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whom thou hast delivered to death for us, and whom thou givest us as the meat and drink of life eternal.”<sup>6</sup>

*Confession:* “O Lord God, eternal and almighty Father, we confess and acknowledge unfeignedly before thy majesty that we are poor sinners, conceived and born in iniquity and corruption, prone to do evil, incapable of any good, and that in our depravity we transgress thy holy commandments without end or ceasing. . . . Nevertheless, O Lord, we are grieved that we have offended thee; beseeching thy grace to relieve our distress. O God and Father most gracious and full of compassion, have mercy upon us in the name of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

*Supplication:* “Wherefore we pray thee O heavenly Father, for all princes and lords, thy servants, to whom thou hast intrusted the administration of thy justice, and especially for the magistrates of this city . . . for all those whom thou hast ordained pastors of thy faithful people, to whom thou hast intrusted the care of souls and the ministry of thy holy gospel . . . for all men everywhere. As it is thy will to be acknowledged the Savior of the whole world, through the redemption wrought by thy Son Jesus Christ, grant that those who are still estranged from the knowledge of Him . . . may be brought by the illumination of thy Holy Spirit and preaching of thy Gospel to the straight way of salvation.”<sup>8</sup>

6 Thompson, *Liturgies*, 208.

7 Thompson, *Liturgies*, 197.

8 Thompson, *Liturgies*, 199–200.

*Matthew Henry and the Puritans (1712)*

*Adoration:* “We pay our homage to three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: for these three are one. We adore thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth; and the eternal Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that was made. . . . We also worship the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, whom the Son has sent from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceedeth from the Father, and who is sent to teach us all things, and to bring all things to remembrance.”<sup>9</sup>

*Confession:* “Every imagination of the thoughts of our heart is evil, only evil, and that continually, and it has been so from our youth. O how long have those vain thoughts lodged within us! From within, out of the heart proceed evil thoughts; which devise mischief upon the bed, and carry the heart with the fool’s eyes into the ends of the earth. But God is not in all our thoughts; it is well if he be in any: Of the Rock that begat us, we have been unmindful, and have forgotten the God that formed us.”<sup>10</sup>

*Supplication:* “We pray, as we are taught, for all men, believing that this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth, and of Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for

9 Matthew Henry, *A Method for Prayer*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1994), 24–25.

10 Henry, *Method*, 36.

all. O look with compassion upon the world that lies in wickedness, and let the prince of this world be cast out, that has blinded their minds. O let thy way be known upon earth, that barbarous nations may be civilized, and that those that live without God in the world may be brought to the service of the living God; and thus let thy saving health be known unto all nations: Let the peoples praise thee, O God, yea, let all the peoples praise thee.”<sup>11</sup>

*Contemporary Prayers*

*Adoration:* “Indeed, O God, You are love. Your mercies are great. You are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; You keep lovingkindness for thousands, You forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin; and You so loved the world that You gave Your only begotten Son that whoever believes should not perish. . . . We praise Your unfailing love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

*Confession:* “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, be the God of your people today! We confess that we have worshipped all too many other gods. We have devoted ourselves to all too many different values. . . . We confess that we have visited all too many sanctuaries. We have tried to find the sources of life in all too many other places. We thought it was pluralism, but it was the serving of one little Baal after another. . . . We turn to you, and to you alone, to be our God, our only God.”<sup>13</sup>

11 Henry, *Method*, 103.

12 Terry L. Johnson, ed., *Leading in Worship* (Oak Ridge, TN: The Covenant Foundation, 1996), 27.

13 Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 108.



*Supplication:* “O Shepherd of Israel, enthroned on the cherubim, we pray for all peoples. Particularly we pray for street people. . . . We pray for those who are enslaved by drugs, by alcohol, by prostitution and fornication. . . . We pray for the civil authority, for our mayor, . . . for our governor, . . . and for our president. . . . We pray for those in nursing homes. . . . Restore us, O Lord God of hosts!”<sup>14</sup>

### **Seven Guiding Principles**

From this sample of congregational prayers throughout church history we can glean seven principles to guide our own prayers, each of which is explained further in subsequent chapters.

Congregational prayer should aim to accomplish the following:

1. Center on adoration, confession, and supplication
2. Freely use biblical language and allusions
3. Invoke the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
4. Be thoughtful and reverent
5. Focus on the gospel
6. Have a strong theological foundation
7. Be well-prepared

### **How to Use This Book**

The rest of the book will follow a simple format. Part 1 comprises seven brief chapters that elaborate on and explain each of the seven guiding principles of good public prayer.<sup>15</sup> Part 2 provides

<sup>14</sup> Old, *Leading in Prayer*, 220–21.

<sup>15</sup> The seven principles will often be appropriate for both personal and public prayer, but the emphasis will be on public prayer.

## INTRODUCTION

samples of God-honoring prayer to help you pray personally, study, and prepare effective public prayers. The sample prayers are ones I have written and prayed in services at University Reformed Church from 2009 to the present. These prayers can be prayed as is (congregationally or individually), modified to fit specific congregations or needs, or used as models to inspire and guide original prayers.

Again, it is my prayer that this book may contribute to the pursuit of the same excellence in prayer that we instinctively aspire to in other parts of our worship services, such as music and preaching. Paul exhorts us, for the sake of God's glory and the good of the church, to "do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).



PART 1

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SEVEN PRINCIPLES  
TO GUIDE PRAYER



## Adoration, Confession, and Supplication

*Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. . . . But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. . . . But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. . . . Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day.*

NEHEMIAH 9:5-6, 16-17, 32

## Comprehensive Biblical Prayer

This prayer of the Levite leaders of Israel after the wall was rebuilt in Jerusalem is notable in that it contains *adoration* (“Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessings and praise”), *confession* (“But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments”), and *supplication* (“Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us”). As such, it is a good model for those who lead and pray in worship services. The point is not that each prayer needs to include all three but that all three should be the steady diet for worship services. While there are other types of prayers that are appropriate in a service (calls to worship, offering prayers, prayers for illumination, Communion prayers, hymns, benedictions, and specific occasion prayers), they are all variations on these three main types.<sup>1</sup> Let’s look briefly at each of these three types of prayer.

- 1 For the purposes of this book I decided to combine praise and thanksgiving into the single concept of adoration instead of following the acronym ACTS—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication—for three reasons. First, the psalms often mix praise and thanksgiving together in the same psalm. An example is Psalm 106:1: “Praise the LORD! / Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, / for his steadfast love endures forever.” Second, the historical liturgies quoted in the introduction also frequently mix the categories of praise and thanksgiving in the same prayer. This is true of the Latin rite, John Calvin, Matthew Henry, and contemporary prayers. Third, while the ACTS acronym is very well known and has been helpful to many, my sense is that it is used more often in personal or small group prayer than in corporate worship services. My church, University Reformed Church, has traditionally incorporated prayers of adoration, confession, and supplication into our services.

*Adoration*

Wholehearted admiration, honor, and love for God are foundational to our relationship with him. They reflect the beauty of his character and the essence of who we were created to be—worshippers. Adoration is the first and most basic kind of prayer. This was especially true before the fall. Imagine the joyful intimacy Adam and Eve experienced with “the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8) before the awful intrusion of sin. How their hearts would have continually overflowed with glad adoration in the Father’s presence and provision.

Even after the disruption of sin, God’s grace has motivated countless prayers of adoration throughout history. In fact, we have more reason to thank and praise God as redeemed sinners than if we had never fallen! So it is fitting that the psalms and prayers of the church are full of captivated hearts overflowing with passionate devotion to God. I especially love Psalm 36, where David writes,

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,  
 your faithfulness to the clouds.  
 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;  
 your judgments are like the great deep;  
 man and beast you save, O LORD.  
 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
 The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of  
 your wings.  
 They feast on the abundance of your house,  
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.  
 For with you is the fountain of life;  
 in your light do we see light. (Ps. 36:5–9)



Two things stir my heart here. One is that David intimately knows and passionately loves a beautiful God. He is intoxicated by the glory of the Lord. Second, David describes this beautiful God with beautiful words. This exquisite imagery not only informs the mind but enflames the heart with adoration. The “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1) is a skillful worshiper and worthy model of adoration.

### *Confession*

If adoration is the most basic and appropriate posture of man before God, confession of sin is the most basic posture for *fallen* man. Since Genesis 3 we cannot rightly think about or approach God except as redeemed sinners.

Several writers have lamented the increasing superficiality of many evangelical worship services. To use an old word, many services lack *gravitas*. Why is this? Of course our entertainment-driven and media-saturated culture bears some of the blame, but I believe there is a deeper reason. Many churches have lost a sense of the holiness of God and the horror of sin. Therefore, corporate confession doesn't seem like an important element of worship. Where is Isaiah's “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” and “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:1, 5)?

We need to be reminded often that sin against a holy God is not merely making mistakes or breaking some rules; it is *blasphemy* (we set ourselves up as rival gods), *treason* (we rebel against the only legitimate authority . . . in wartime!), *adulterous betrayal* (we regularly cheat on our divine bridegroom), *corruption* (our uncleanness stinks to high heaven), and *contempt* (we despise the Lord who created and redeemed us). Sin, both original and actual,

is serious and, even though we have been born again and become new creations, we have much to confess every day.

Please understand: this is not to encourage pathological self-hatred or abject despair, but to “come clean” with God (Ps. 51:1–2), to receive afresh his wondrous love and forgiveness (Ps. 130:7–8), and to get on with growing in love for him and our neighbors (Col. 3:12–13). Public confession is an opportunity each week for a congregation of redeemed sinners to get back in touch with reality and revel in the unsearchable riches of Christ. Biblical confession is always done in the context of the gospel and is usually followed by a clear and life-giving assurance of pardon. What a joy to hear “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isa. 6:7).

So while some would say that including confession in our worship services is negative and damaging to self-esteem, the truth is that without a time of confession, a worship service has no real integrity.

### *Supplication*

This is the relatively easy part, right? Prayers of petition and supplication are the prayers we pray most naturally, both personally and corporately.<sup>2</sup> We know we are needy, and we know God graciously invites us to bring these needs to him (Matt. 7:7–11). Even better, we know he promises to supply all our needs in Christ (Phil. 4:19). So we pray. However, because this kind of prayer comes

2 Some think of petition and supplication as different—petition for ourselves, supplication for others. Others see supplication as a more intense form of petition. I treat them as basically synonymous.

so naturally, it is important to make sure our supplications are balanced with adoration and confession. This will keep us from the “grocery list” syndrome of merely praying for our felt needs.

We need to be aware of another prayer imbalance as well. In his book *Speaking Truth in Love*, biblical counselor David Powlison encourages us to pray three types of supplications: prayers to change *circumstances*, prayers to change *us*, and prayers to change *everything*.<sup>3</sup> We could call them circumstantial, transformational, and kingdom prayers. We tend to major in circumstantial prayers (i.e., prayers for healing, travel mercies, marital or work or school issues, etc.), minor in transformational prayers (especially if the circumstantial prayers aren’t answered!), and take a pass on kingdom prayers. It’s important that public prayer include all three types of supplications for the health of the church and the effectiveness of her mission.

The Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 is a model of clear, concise, and comprehensive prayer. Notice how Jesus touches on kingdom requests first, circumstantial second, and transformational third.

Pray then like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
 hallowed be your name.  
 Your kingdom come,  
 your will be done,  
     on earth as it is in heaven.

3 David Powlison, *Speaking Truth in Love* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2005), 122–25.

Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
    as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
    but deliver us from evil.

Adoration, confession, supplication. Remembering and practicing these three essential types of prayer will protect us from the imbalance that often skews our prayers, promote more mature discipleship, and help leaders “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

### **Reflection**

1. Which of the three types of prayer are you most comfortable with? Least comfortable?
2. Read Nehemiah 9, noting all the different topics and themes the Levites developed in this prayer. How could this chapter shape your prayer life this week?

God commands his people to pray together and answers graciously when they do. The Bible specifically calls on church leaders to guide this essential form of corporate worship, but it can be challenging to pray boldly and confidently in front of others.

This practical, step-by-step guide was created to help pastors and church leaders pray thoughtfully and biblically in public. Through seven guiding principles, Pat Quinn illustrates how to lead prayers of adoration, confession, and supplication to God, and covers the history of public prayer in Scripture. He also includes elegant, reverent, gospel-centered examples from the Latin Liturgy, John Calvin, the Puritans, John Wesley, and others, as well as many examples of his own congregational prayers. Pastors and church leaders will learn to glorify God more passionately, effectively intercede for the church and the world, and find joy—not fear—in praying publicly.

*“Pat Quinn has served us immensely by providing a theologically informed, pastoral, Christ-exalting, clear, and insightful book that will serve anyone who has the privilege of leading God’s people in prayer.”*

**BOB KAUFMAN**, Director, Sovereign Grace Music; author, *Worship Matters* and *True Worshipers*



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