

EVERYBODY TALKS TO GOD

Gn 2:7; Eccl 3:11

I. OUR CREATED STATUS/NATURE EXPLAINS IT: ensouled body (Gn 2:7), unique fusion

- A. Greeks' "featherless biped"
- B. Thomas Bowne: "the great amphibion"
- C. Student Kennedy: "I'm a man, and a man's a mixture, / Right down from his very very birth, / For part of him comes from heaven, / And part of him comes from earth."
- D. Edward Saphir: "Man was created to look upward."

II. BY NATURE WE CANNOT HELP DESIRING DEMONSTRATIVELY REAL GOODS

- A. Breathing implies oxygen-rich air; can choose whether or not, when and where
- B. Thirst implies water-based liquids; can choose whether or not, when & where
- C. Hunger implies nutrient-bearing foods; can choose whether or not, when & where
- D. Exhaustion points to rest/sleep; can choose whether or not, when & where
- E. Aloneness ("not good for man to be alone") indicates conjugal union; can choose whether or not, when & where
- F. Thinking (making assertions, asking questions) implies causes, correlations, meanings; can choose whether or not to exercise reason
- G. "Homing instinct" implies final home; can choose whether or not to journey—from Dante's "having strayed from the right path" to Andrew Klavan's "journey home"

III. BY NATURE (*HOMO RELIGIOSUS*) WE CAN'T NOT PRAY (Eccl 3:11)

- A. Observations:
 - 1. "The best answer to all the objections urged against prayer is the fact that man cannot help praying, for we may be sure that that which is so spontaneous and ineradicable in human nature has its fitting objects and methods in the arrangements of a boundless providence" (E.H. Chapin).
 - 2. "Every good and holy desire, though it lack the form, hath in itself the substance and force of a prayer with God who regarded the very meanings, groans, and sighing of the heart" (Richard Hooker).
 - 3. "How few men know that man is naturally a 'go-to-meeting animal,' to use your definition of a New England-man; or in other words, that he is naturally a praying as he is a breathing animal. Sailors, soldiers, Indians, nay more, Deists and Atheists, all pray by an unsubsidized instinct of neighbor when in great danger or distress" (Benjamin Rush urging James Madison, re calling a day of prayer in 1812).
 - 4. "To wish to pray is a prayer in itself" (George Bernanos).
 - 5. St John of Damascus: "Prayer is the raising of ones mind and heart God or the requesting of good things from God."
 - 6. "Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idle or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).
- B. Archaeology: ubiquitous temples, shrines, altars—always & everywhere: Sumerian, Egyptian; Hindu, Buddhist; Greek, Roman; Meso-American; Romanesque & Gothic cathedrals; Muslim mosques; Mormon temples
- C. Anthropological Evidence affirms "eternity in their hearts," hunger for Ultimate
 - 1. Astronomy widely practiced—looking upward to fathom ultimate reality, reasons, predictions; wise men from the East come to Jesus in Bethlehem
 - 2. Mathematics probes infinity—Pythagoras & Plato
 - 3. Genealogies & histories note sacred past—lost "golden age"
 - 4. Constant desire to know more (i.e. Aristotle) suggests Infinite Mind
 - 5. Ceaseless quest for "more"—houses, lands, experiences, art works,
 - 6. Lovers endlessly pledge endless love, giving diamonds, rings
 - 7. Both primitive & advanced societies have religious rites—art, chants, dances, prayers
- D. Sacred Writings: Sumerian; Egyptian; Indian; Greek; Roman; Mayan; Nordic; Hebrew; Christian; Muslim; New Age

PRAYER IS NOT

Along with affirming what prayer is—communion with God—we should note what prayer is not. **First, prayer is not a matter of creative self-expression.** In John 4, Jesus, speaking to the woman at the well, said that those who worship the Father must do so “in spirit and truth” (v. 23)—which means we worship God according to who he is and the “truth” he has revealed in his Word. We are not allowed to approach God in any way we see fit. He is holy and exalted, and we know how to come to him only by virtue of his revealed will. Prayer is not an act of spiritual self-expression, nor is any other aspect of worship. **Second, prayer is not an act of therapy.** We should not seek some sort of curative kickback when we pray. Some scholars of psychology of religion suggest that people pray because prayer produces serenity and alleviates anxiety and fear. Prayer certainly does often accomplish these things, but prayer also sometimes disrupts our tranquility. God uses prayer to radically reorient our hearts, which can be disturbing. Prayer can sometimes be “anti-therapy.” This is because prayer is not first and foremost about us, but about the glory of God. **Third, prayer is not an act of manipulation or persuasion.** We are not simply trying to find the right formula or secret code to force God to answer our prayer as we want it to be answered. Nor are we trying to persuade or bargain with God as if he were one of his creations. Prayer is not persuasion. Prayer is about God’s will being done—not our own. We must come to God and learn to pray “your will be done” just as Jesus did. If God’s will is truly perfect, then why would we want to persuade him to do something that is less than perfect? It is true that Scripture encourages us to bring our deepest concerns, anxieties, and needs before God—the Bible, in fact, is full of illustrations portraying as much—but we must not bring our needs to God thinking that we do so to break down a wall of hostility or complacency. We must bring our needs before God humbly, willing to submit to his perfect plan. **Fourth, prayer is not a news report to the Creator.** God knows everything perfectly. This is what Christians mean by saying we worship God as omniscient—he is all-knowing. We must resist the temptation to use prayer as a way of alerting God to what he otherwise does not or would not know. Not only does God know everything—past, present, and future—he even knows our hearts and minds better than we know ourselves. We pray, confident of God’s full knowledge but needing to remind ourselves of all our concerns in order to confess our sins, to admit our dependence, to lay out our hearts, and to pray for others. We do not pray to give God our daily briefing, but to bring everything that concerns us before the one who made us. **Finally, prayer is not an act of bargaining.** We have all heard prayers that sound like a negotiation meeting: “Lord, I will work on this sin if you will help me with this blessing. Also, I will try to do this for you, if you promise to do that for me.” This type of prayer reveals huge theological misunderstandings. Prayer does not inform God of what he does not know, nor does it get him to do what he is reluctant to do. Prayer does not change God; it changes us. This is not to say that God does not command us to pray or that he does not take our desires in prayer seriously. Rather, we must remember that God is sovereign at all times over all things while simultaneously being loving toward his people. Prayer is not our bargaining chip with a reluctant genie. It is our opportunity to commune with the Creator and Redeemer who loves us.

Mohler, R. Albert. *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down* (pp. 14-17). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.