

Week 6 ~ Singing and Chanting

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

(Hebrews 4:16, NIV)

Confidence is key. It puts us in line to receive. It stirs the hope within in us that causes us to say, “Maybe today is my game changing day.” Confidence gets us in the game.

When I was in high school, I was in Speech and Drama. It was something I loved and at which I excelled, but Speech and Drama wasn’t the “cool” extracurricular activity. Sports and sport related activities were where the popular people hung out. Secretly I always kind of wanted to be a cheerleader – I was loud, exuberant, fairly coordinated, and loved to cheer along – but I never felt quite pretty enough to try out. As a result, I had already pre-determined that I wouldn’t make the squad based on my appearance; therefore, it was useless to even attend try-outs. Instead, I cheered from the sidelines with the rest of the crowd, secretly wishing I was out there leading the fans loudly and proudly.

When we lack confidence, we don’t even show up to receive that which we secretly long for. When we lack confidence, we don’t even ask God to give us that which we need to carry us through and make it past whatever it is that going on in our lives.

This passage in Hebrews goes on to tell us that we can come confidently before God because of our example and mentor: Jesus. If Jesus could go before God in his time of need, receiving strength and grace to endure, how much more can we, must we approach the Father to help us in our time of need?

Don’t let confidence, or the lack thereof, keep you from receiving from God. You never know what awaits you in the presence of the Almighty!

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Singing and chanting our thoughts and feelings before God is an expression of prayer that has been around for ages. In many Jewish traditions, prayer (davening) is entered into through chanting or singing and even rocking and swaying so that one may bring to prayer an emotional intensity and focus that is expressed through these outward actions. Also well-known throughout history is the Catholic tradition of chanting the

mass, most notably the Gregorian chants. While chanting the offices (certain prayers said at specified times of the day) fell out of popularity for a time, a resurgence did occur and later made its way into protestant prayer and orders of service. It is from this long-standing tradition of prayer throughout the ages that we make this our personal prayer “experiment” this week.

While some of you may come from a church tradition where chanting is common-place, I did not. As such, when I came across this form of prayer not all that long ago, this was completely new territory for me and, might I add, quite a challenge. While I had friends who were familiar with chanting and singing, for their pastors often led their congregation in harmonious prayer, none were using the same expression in their individual prayers outside of church.

It is my experience that the vocalization of prayers requires a level of passion and humility that praying in one’s head and heart doesn’t even begin to tap into. Even further still, to sing and to chant one’s prayers before the Lord, especially for the hesitant and musically unaccomplished, the pray-er must, in some sense, abandon oneself to the task at hand. If one is to fully commit and engage prayer through musical means he/she need not be concerned with their talent, skill, or sound and set their awkwardness aside, forging ahead instead, no matter what may come out of their mouths.

For the person who is musically talented and accomplished, singing and chanting prayers can be a rather joyful connection to God in prayer. It’s not so much a practice in humility as it is an opportunity of bringing one’s gifts and talents to the exercise.

It is here that I offer some summarized principles that may be helpful to you as you discover your “voice” in singing and chanting prayer.

- In general, chanted prayers follow one note or tone that is comfortable to the practitioner, and the rhythm and pace are unhurried and even.
- The raising and lowering of notes, in the practice of chanting, should be natural to the verse and thought, but not so varied as to be considered melodic.
- In general, the singing of prayers is more varied than that of chanting with stylistic elements reflective of the mood and emotion of the pray-er and his or her prayers.
- Though not a rule, chanted prayers tend to be more formal while sung prayers tend toward spontaneity.

- If unsure of the words to use, the Psalms contain beautiful, emotive lyrics waiting to be sung and chanted.
- If you find a rhythm and style that works for you, stick with it. That's what really matters.

"Whoever sings, prays twice." ~ Saint Augustine

"That which deepens the observant's contemplation and that which increases the beauty of our devotion are, by definition, appropriate and good." ~ Phyllis Tickle

Reflection Questions

1. What did you most enjoy about prayer this week?
2. What was most challenging?
3. How did your "melodies" change throughout the week as you engaged in praying more musically?
4. Did you notice any differences in your moods throughout your days or specifically in relationship to your times of prayer? If so, what might be the reason(s) and could praying in this way be a possible cause?
5. What revelations, if any, did you receive in prayer this week? Were any directly related to praying in this way?
6. What are you most likely to take away from this prayer exercise?