

Cicero Christian Church Men's Breakfast^{*}

The PAPA Prayer: Part Four

"Approach God as the 'First Thing' in Your Life"

We are now ready to approach God. Our first three steps – presenting, attending, and purging – free us to now boldly enter into our Father's presence and tell Him that we really do want to experience Him as our greatest good, as the unrivaled 'first thing' in our lives who by the sheer weight of His goodness reduces every other good thing to 'second-thing' status. - Larry Crabb

Present Yourself to God

Relate to Him! Be real, know your inner person and be honest with God. Come to God exactly as you are, no excuses. Simply say, "God I'm not the loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, gentle, self-controlled person I should be. I am not a Spirit controlled person, I'm a self-controlled person." He says, "I know, let's work on it."

Attend to How You Are Thinking of God

Understand that "real spiritual maturity means to enjoy God's delightful unpredictability." We need to study and seek to know all the attributes of God. For instance:

Numbers 15:41 "I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God."

Isaiah 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.

Jeremiah 9:24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

Purge Yourself of Anything that Blocks Your Relationship with God

Recognize God's Strength

John 14:1 – "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

Purge Yourself

Psalms 139:23-24 – Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Abandon Yourself to Holiness

1 Peter 1:15-16 – But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Approach God as the "First Thing" in Your Life

How Do We Relate to God

As Christians we say we put God first in our lives, but do we really? In your own minds honestly answer these four questions:

- Who do I relate best with?
- Who do I enjoy most?

- Who do I know best?
- Who do I love the most?

If we truly put God first in our lives we would have legitimately answered God to each of these questions. That doesn't mean we don't enjoy, relate with, love and know others, we most certainly should. But, if we are honest God probably is not first on our list most of the time.

- **Look at joy for example.** We were created for joy. God wants us to enjoy all He has given us. What we enjoy we go after. But, if we truly had our deepest joy in God then in stressful or hard times we wouldn't go to the refrigerator, the shopping trip, the pornography, etc, etc, the things that bring pain and guilt into our lives and the lives of others, we would flee to God.
- **Take love for example.** The Bible tells us that if we love God we will obey Him. How many of us have known God wanted us to do one thing and then did something else? Doesn't that prove we don't really love God? Not deeply enough to always trust and obey Him.

Discover the Sound of God's Voice

It truly is possible to have your deepest relationship with God, to love Him above all others, to enjoy Him more than anyone or anything, to know Him deeply. It's possible for God to be more real to you than anyone or anything; to know His voice and walk in loving obedience to Him. We know it's true because Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;" (John 10:27).

Yes, you can hear the Father's voice. But we won't hear it;

- until we discover the empty place deep within us that passionately desires to truly know God.
- until we admit the truth that all the good things God gives us won't ultimately satisfy.
- until we look beneath all the pain, sorrow and heartache this world brings and see the emptiness in our hearts that we won't allow God into.

It's a voice we begin to hear more clearly when we admit that we need Him and we want Him more than anything else. When we deeply desire to know His will and follow it we will begin to hear Him speak deep within.

A Question: If you were Job and your property, job, children, friends and health were suddenly taken away would you still be joyful and content because you know your Father and nothing can take Him away?

Removing the Mountains – Matthew 21:18-22

Let's take a look at two scriptures about putting first-things first.:

Matthew 21:18-22 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. ²⁰ Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. ²² "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Hosea 9:10 I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season. But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame, And they became as detestable as that which they loved. .

Here we see the joy of God finding a people who want Him. It's like being lost in the wilderness and being hungry and suddenly you find some big, juicy grapes. It's like finding the first fresh figs on the fig tree. It's a delight and joy.

What Jesus seems to be saying here is, "My Father made you for himself, He takes great delight when His children want Him and enjoy Him above all else. But they have become like fig trees with no fruit. Yes there are a lot of showy leaves. A lot of religious activity. A lot of worldly success. But there is no fruit. They don't want Me above all this other stuff. I won't let this happen! I will come into your life, I will live in your heart, so that you can know and please My Father. I'll help you get close to Him, Ask Me and I'll remove all the mountains in your life that come between you and My Father. Do you want to enjoy Him? Do you want to know Him deeply? Do you want to have His fruit in your life? It's what you were created for. Deep down it's what you really want!"

Learning to Put First Things First

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What is our heavenly Father, our Papa offering us?

- Everything to live the way we long to live, the way we were destined to live.
- Everything we need to become who we truly are; children of the King.
- Everything we need to hear our Papa's voice and hear Him joyfully turn to the angels of heaven and the demons of hell and say, "He wants Me more than anything else!"
- All the power you need to honor and glorify Him *no matter* what happens.
- A renewed mind and rearranged values that put first-things first and second-things second.

Let's learn to pray the PAPA prayer, to relate to God as our first thing and to trust Him with however He decides to handle the second-thing requests. Come to Him to receive what He's eager to give. Come empty. Come with your desires. Come believing. Learn to pray the PAPA prayer. You'll discover the sound of your Father's voice. - Larry Crabb

Putting it into Practice

Day 1 – Learning to Present Yourself to God

The Objective - Present authentically to God whatever you discover in yourself, whether good or bad.

Read Psalm 73:1-16. Reflect now and throughout the day on the following:

What am I thinking and feeling right now . . .

- as I'm talking with this person?
- as I'm walking through this store?
- as I'm watching television?
- as I'm praying or reading my Bible?
- other?

Present yourself to God in writing by writing out your own prayer.

Day 2 – Learning to Attend to How You are Thinking of God

The Objective – Attend to who God really is (as revealed in the Bible) versus who you think God is (based on life experience) or who you want Him to be (based on your felt desires).

Read Isaiah 30:9-11 and Isaiah 6:1-4. Now and throughout the day reflect on:

How am I picturing God right now . . .

- as I'm asking Him to bless me?
- as I'm facing this trial?
- as I'm sitting in church?
- as I'm arguing with a friend?
- other?

Attend to God in writing by writing out your own prayer.

Day 3 – Learning to Purge Yourself of Anything that Blocks Your Relationship with God

The Objective – Purge whatever is blocking your intimacy with God by acknowledging without excuse or explanation the self-obsession staining your motives that the Spirit chooses to reveal.

Read Psalm 139:23-24. Now and throughout the day reflect on:

How am I obsessed with myself (my needs, my feelings, my convenience) right now . . .

- as I'm struggling with discouragement?
- as I'm handling this tension with my spouse or friend?
- as I'm anxious over what might happen?
- as I'm feeling disillusioned and bored with my church?
- other?

Purge yourself before God in writing by writing out your own prayer.

Day 4 – Learning to Approach God as the “First Thing” in Your Life

The Objective – Approach God with confidence that what He loves to give you is what you want the most.

Read Hosea 14:4-9. Now and throughout the day reflect on:

What does my heart most long for right now . . .

- as I enjoy time with my family and friends?
- as I wait for the lab report from my doctor?
- as I face criticism from colleagues?
- as I search for a better job?
- other?

Approach God in writing by writing out your own prayer.

*** Lesson in Conjunction with Core Practice #9: Equip the Head of the Household**