

"COME ON, LET US ADORE HIM"

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In our family, we celebrate birthdays by sitting down for a meal of the honoree's choosing. We light candles on a cake—red velvet for Jeff, strawberry for Matt, yellow cake with chocolate frosting for Nana—and we sing with harmony-laden gusto. And as we pass around the sugary slices, the sweetest part of the meal commences: One by one, we tell the honoree what we love about them.

It is our annual act of adoration. We take our time with it, multiplying words, watering the soil of a soul for another year of fruitfulness. Lord willing, we remind them—and ourselves—of what is true and lovely about them and of who knows and believes these things the longest and the deepest.

And in this human-to-human expression of adoration, I have come to think about our adoration toward God in a more expansive way. It has changed the way I think about prayer.

Adoration, the offering of worshipful praise, is widely recognized as a key element of prayer. But arguably, it is the aspect of prayer we are quickest to neglect or rush by.

When we pray, no one needs to remind us to prioritize making our requests known to God. Like kudzu, our requests tend to take over our prayers, with a little thanksgiving and confession fighting for sunlight here and there. But our adoration is often abbreviated to an opening statement like, "Lord, you are holy. We praise your name." It's more salutation than adoration, a quick hello before we are off to the real business of asking.

What if we savored adoration the way we savor it at a celebratory meal? What if we paused long enough to let it grow high and long, wide and deep? At a birthday dinner, no one follows up their praise of the honoree with requests or confessions. Adoration holds the full agenda, as it should. So here's a thought: What if we sometimes prayed prayers that did nothing but adore?

Here are three things I have learned about adoration in prayer:

Adoration is exuberant. It does not have to be coerced or contrived. Adoration knows its object and has made a careful study of its object's praiseworthy attributes. Adoration delights to meditate on the character of the one it adores, and out of the overflow of its heart adoration speaks. It cannot wait to express itself, and it is not short on adjectives. It is never at a loss for words.

Adoration is humble. It can't believe it actually gets to converse with the object of its admiration. It focuses all of its attention on its object. It is filled with you's and empty of me's, celebrating the character and actions of the one adored. It keeps the adored one the center of attention, refraining from praise that might reflect back on itself.

Adoration is unqualified. It is offered for no other reason than because it is true. It is not flattery. It has no agenda, no angle. It is not selling something or seeking to gain. It has no thought of garnering favor or putting another in its debt. It is given without seeking to receive adoration in return.

Think of the exuberant, humble, unqualified adoration found in the Book of Revelation. Upon beholding God on his throne, all of creation responds not with requests or confessions, but with unmitigated praise:

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13)

It occurs to me that in heaven, confession of sin will no longer be needed. Requests for daily bread will have come to an end. All of eternity will remain for adoration to flow from our lips.

It has been said that if the sole purpose of prayer were adoration, that would be reason enough to pray without ceasing. One day we will gather around a table crowded with those who have loved God the most and the longest. And on our lips will be unmitigated adoration. Why wait until that day? Tell the most praiseworthy of all what you adore about him. And take your time.

