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WHERE AMAZING HAPPENS

Tim O'Hearn

♩ = 70

I want - ed to do some - thing quite a - maz - ing; To change the world or to be - come a star. Then
A - maz - ing can be found in God's cre - a - tion; A drop of dew, a don - key, or a tree. A -
If I were to see some - thing like an an - gel, Now that would be a - maz - ing, this is true. But

God re - plied a - maz - ing is not some - thing You do; it's what I made you, who you are.
- maz - ing can be shown in his sal - va - tion; Be - see some - one a - maz - ing, and it's you. cause of grace he is for - giv - ing me. Where
when I see you meet a need you can fill I

God makes him - self known to me, That's where a - maz - ing hap - pens. At home, in my life, in his church, That's where a - maz - ing is.

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This song was written for Spiritual Explosion XII (also known as Spiritual Explosion 12 for those Roman numeral challenged among us). This year's theme is "Where Amazing Happens," which happens also to be the name of the song, by some coincidence. Spiritual Explosion is an annual gathering in Albuquerque of young people, principally from New Mexico. I have written songs for these events every year since 2009.

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A TRADITION OF PRAYER

In the real estate world the old cliché is that the three most important things when selling a property are “location, location, location.” Perhaps one could say that when talking about traditions in prayer the two most important considerations are “attitude and attitude.” That word has two distinct meanings, and both can apply to how we view our traditions in prayer.

Attitude: Posture

Throughout time different traditions have developed around the posture for prayer. Ancient Egyptians are pictured standing with their hands raised toward the sun god, Ra. Most non-Muslims think Islamic prayer must be face down on a prayer mat, with the feet, knees, elbows, hands, and head touching the ground. While that is certainly one of the most important postures, showing absolute humility, Islamic prayer moves from standing to kneeling to such a prostrate position. The most common position in current Christianity is seated or kneeling, with the head bowed. Those Christians who

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currently emphasize the emotional approach sometimes raise their hands in prayer. Some Jewish people sway or rock when they daven (pray), although some rabbis object to the practice.

Some people pray looking upward “to heaven.” Others close their eyes, presumably to block out distractions. There is even an old joke about a child who whispered to his mother after a prayer, “Mommy, I counted eight people who had their eyes open during the prayer.” (The mother presumably restrained herself from asking if he included himself.)

While many people will say that our bodily attitude while praying does not matter, others (like the young boy) take the position that position matters. In Islamic prayer, for instance, each attitude assumed during the prayers has a certain significance. In Jewish, and some Christian, practice certain prayers must be said standing, and certain prayers must be said either aloud or silently. There are still churches that have pews with a low bench

on the back for those in the next row back to kneel during specific prayers.

With all these various traditions, some might ask what attitude of prayer we find in the Bible. Is there a truly biblical position for prayer?

Jesus sometimes prayed with his face to the ground. But in some places he also mentions praying in other postures, and does not condemn the practice. In Mark 11:25 Jesus said, “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any.” In Luke 22:41 it says, “And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed.” If Jesus could kneel or stand to pray, then it appears that the posture is not as important as what is said in the prayer.

Another issue that has created quite a controversy over the years is the proper dress for prayer. Some traditions have even grown up around this.

The Jewish people pray wearing a *tallis*. This is a four-cornered garment, sometimes called a prayer shawl. On each corner are specially knotted fringes, known as *tzitzis*. (The *tzitzis* are actually a biblical requirement, found in Numbers 15:38 and Deuteronomy 22:12) Jewish men also wear a *kippah* (also called a *yarmulke*) when praying (and in some traditions at all times), to show their subservience to God. It is notable that many Christians who insist on keeping certain parts of the Law of Moses, such as kosher foods, circumcision, or sabbath observance, do not insist on the biblical use of the *tallis*, nor the second century BCE rabbinic requirement of a head covering. Consistency in belief would require that they pray with a *tallis* if they require the other aspects of the law. In fact, Maimonides (a great Jewish scholar of the middle ages) stated that the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* was on the same level as Passover or circumcision. Anyone who insists that non-Jewish men be circumcised (in opposition to Acts 15) must also insist that men cover their heads, especially when praying or reading scripture.

Modern Christian tradition is that men, and in most places women, pray uncovered, and without any special articles of clothing. Some of the most conservative Christian groups insist that women pray with their heads covered. This is based on 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, in which Paul says that a woman who prays with her head uncovered dishonors her head (husband). The discussion throughout this passage about head covering is either about a full veil or about hair. If it is about being fully veiled, any woman who simply wears a hat, scarf, or doily is not meeting the requirement of covering the head; if her hair and face can be seen she is not veiled. If, as verse 15 indicates, it is about hair, then any additional head covering is unnecessary. Further, those who follow this

tradition ignore that in verse 16 Paul states: “But if any man seem contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (Some translators incorrectly say “no other custom.”)

In most places Christian men, though, use this same passage to require that men pray uncovered, without a hat. Some would be scandalized if someone were to refuse to remove a ball cap during a prayer at a sporting event. This is a major difference between the Christian and Jewish traditions. Yet in both cases, it is tradition. If a man insists that other men pray uncovered he must necessarily insist that women pray veiled, for the only biblical basis for this tradition is the aforementioned passage in 1 Corinthians.

Attitude: Mindset

A number of other traditions have been developed that might fall under the category of attitude as a mindset. How we view prayer may be more important than how we do prayer. Even so, we are people, and people make traditions about everything.

Jewish and Islamic tradition designates specific times of prayer. The monastic tradition did so as well, with such times as vespers (day’s end), matins (sunrise), vigils (during the night), and sometimes other set times. In addition, certain events prompted prayers. Perhaps the best known of these is meal time. Many Christians say grace before each meal. The Jewish tradition is grace after meals, because thanks for food before it is consumed might become an empty prayer if for some reason you don’t eat. (There are certain blessings before eating as well.) Many Christian groups who take up a collection during the assembly also set aside that as a time of prayer, although both the collection and the prayer before the collection are purely tradition. The Bible certainly advocates frequent, even unceasing, prayer, but it does not set any particular time or circumstance as a required time for prayer.

Another tradition is that of specific, pre-written prayers. Some have taken the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples (Matt 6:9-13) and made it into a part of the liturgy rather than an example. Other prayers come from the scriptures or have been written since. The Catholic Mass, the Book of Common Prayer, and other traditions require specific prayers at specific times, as also does the Jewish Seder. Some others who do not pray set prayers may, out of nervousness or for other reasons, write out a prayer before they are called upon to lead prayers in a public assembly. Even those who practice spontaneous prayers often repeat the same phrases. There is nothing wrong, in itself, with praying such prayers as long as they do not contain doctrines in violation of scripture. Many such prayers are written to direct the person praying in a specific thought. There may even be an advantage if by praying pre-written prayers at set times it creates a habit of

prayer that may be expanded. The danger with pre-written prayers is that one may repeat it without actually understanding or meaning it. In some traditions, with some people, such prayers are little better than the Buddhist who ties a prayer to a string or within a prayer wheel, in the hope that every time the wind blows or the wheel rotates the prayer will be heard, with no effort on the part of the one making the prayer.

Although the Jewish tradition includes a whole book of prayers to be said at specific times or on specific occasions, the idea is not to pray by rote. It is even *halacha* (doctrine, law) that one must add one’s own supplications to certain prayers to show that one is praying with intention.

This points out the one requirement needed to counter the dangers of traditional prayer. Whether we pray someone else’s prayer, including those we hear in a spontaneous assembly, or pray at set times, prayer must be done with intention. That is a modern catchphrase, perhaps, but it is a good word for prayer. If one says the Lord’s Prayer by just repeating the words, without

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thinking about what he is saying, his prayers may go no higher than the ceiling. James said one reason prayers go unanswered is because we ask for the wrong reason. (Jas 4:3) Some have proposed that we don’t get because we don’t ask. Perhaps another reason, though, is that we mouth the words, but God is listening to our heart, and hearing nothing. When we do not pray intending to pray and trying to formulate our prayers, we may be no more effective than a computer: GIGO (or in this case, “garbage out, nothing in”). Prayers do not need to be long; they do not need to be specific (in most cases). However, if God does not realize it is honestly a prayer instead of nonsense syllables, he may have no reason to listen.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The Spirit will help us pray. But if, when he searches the heart, all he finds is emptiness then he has nothing to work with. Whatever the tradition of prayer, we have to want to pray.

WHY THE DOORPOSTS?

And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. ... And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. (Ex 12:6-8, 11-13)

This was God's instruction to the Jewish people in Egypt before the plague on the firstborn. This was the institution of *Pesach* (Passover, which begins April 7 in 2012). God gave them several very explicit instructions. He told them how to cook the meat (roasted, not boiled). He told them how to eat the meat (all of it, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, dressed for a journey). He even told them to put some of the blood on the doorposts and lintels or their houses, where it could be seen by God. But why the doorposts? Does God have to come through the door? Or can he, like Santa Claus, come down the chimney or maybe through the windows? Surely there was a specific reason for the blood being on the door posts.

Actually, the door of a house, and particularly the doorposts, had a very specific meaning in Jewish life. As the principal entrance to a house certain things happened at the door.

This particular *pesach* was not the only time that blood was associated with the posts of the door. The law of jubilee allowed all who had sold themselves into servitude go free in a certain year. However, God realized that some people would not want to be freed. Some would

be happy with their circumstances, and he allowed for that.

And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever. (Ex 21:5-6)

In the case of *pesach* the people were set free by blood on the doorpost. In the case of the slave, people were bound forever by blood in the same position.

Speaking of the words of the law, God specified, "And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates." (Deut 11:20) This may not have required blood, as did the other instances, but it may show more perfectly the reason for the choice of the doorposts. At the entrance to every observant Jewish home a *mezuzah* containing certain passages is attached to the door (at least the principal doors, and sometimes interior doors). The common practice is to kiss the fingers and touch them to the scroll each time one goes through the door. When done properly this stands as a reminder that as one goes out into the world, or returns from the world, God's law is to govern life. The doorway is the passage from one room or one world to another.

On a more spiritual plane, the doorway represents our passage from this world to the world to come. It is our passage to freedom in God, or slavery to sin. As we walk in this life, and as we pass to the one to come, we should always keep God's word before us. In freedom or in slavery, we will be set free to be with the one without whom we are incomplete. He will meet us at the doorpost.