A Prayer Workshop

*Morning Edition*

Discovering and Applying Biblical Prayer Principles

Profiles in Faith from Hebrews 11

*Session Two: Faith at Worship--Praying in Awe*

Or, How do we pray the faith of Abel?

Hebrews 11:4

Hebrews 11:4 (ESV) *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.*

When worship “short-circuits,” it does so around the issue of acceptability. An acceptable sacrifice is one God so defines, and nothing else will do. The Bible shows how the Invincible Faith of Abel contrasts with every other kind:

1. *iFaith*, or Self-Worship: You act like you are god.

It is possible to act as if God does not exist, and to demand for oneself the worship due Him and Him alone.

Examples: Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:31, 32; Sennacherib (King of Assyria),

2 Kings 18:32-35; Satan, Matthew 4:8-10

Prayer ideas: Father, deliver us from pride and self-love.

Father, create in me a God-consciousness in all I do.

2. Idolatrous Faith, or misplaced worship: You choose your own god.

It is possible to ignore the one true God and substitute another. Whether we go with the flow of our culture or choose independently, the evil result is the same.

Examples: Dagon (Philistines), Judges 16:23; 1 Samuel 5:1-8; Baal (Canaanites), 1 Kings 18:16-40

Prayer ideas: Father, keep us from all idols.

Father, help me meditate upon your uniqueness.

3. Insolent Faith, or Counterfeit Worship. You worship God your way.

God alone can tell us how to worship Him, and He has.

Examples: Cain, Genesis 4:1-7; Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:1-3; Saul, 1 Samuel 13:7-14; Uzziah, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21

Prayer ideas: Father, help us approach you only through your Son, Jesus.

Father, help us never stress creativity over commandment.

4. Indolent Faith, or Half-hearted Worship. Your worship is distracted.

It is possible to go through the motions of worship without worshiping.

Examples: Israel, Isaiah 1:10-31; The Church at Laodicea 3:14-22

Prayer ideas: Father, help us not be fans, but followers of Jesus.

Father, help me never outlive my zeal for You.

5. Invincible Faith, or Obedient Worship. Your worship is God-approved/accepted.

Just as God had revealed to Abel (and Cain) how their worship would be acceptable to Him, so also He has done today, in the one and only Savior, Jesus. The message of the Bible is grace, which is Gospel, which is God’s covenant love for all who seek refuge in Him. Any other “worship” degrades Him, for it seeks in either to repay Him or add something to Him, or merit His favor, any of which is impossible. Any other “worship” stems from pride and/or self-righteousness.

Psalm 50 is a perfect prayer for an Abel-like worshiper, who understands that our sacrifices are only thank-you responses to His grace. Since Jesus, we know fully just how God fulfills His promises. But the principles were established long ago in the TANAKH, and are reflected wonderfully in this psalm of Asaph.

Let’s pray. . . A Model Prayer of an Accepted Worshiper Psalm 50 (ESV)

**1**The Mighty One, God the Lord,  
    speaks and summons the earth  
    from the rising of the sun to its setting.  
**2**Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,  
    God shines forth.

**3**Our God comes; he does not keep silence;[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+50&version=ESV" \l "fen-ESV-14672a" \o "See footnote a)]  
    before him is a devouring fire,  
    around him a mighty tempest.  
**4**He calls to the heavens above  
    and to the earth, that he may judge his people:  
**5**“Gather to me my faithful ones,  
    who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”  
**6**The heavens declare his righteousness,  
    for God himself is judge! *Selah*

**7**“Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
    O Israel, I will testify against you.  
    I am God, your God.  
**8**Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
    your burnt offerings are continually before me.  
**9**I will not accept a bull from your house  
    or goats from your folds.  
**10**For every beast of the forest is mine,  
    the cattle on a thousand hills.  
**11**I know all the birds of the hills,  
    and all that moves in the field is mine.

**12**“If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
    for the world and its fullness are mine.  
**13**Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
    or drink the blood of goats?  
**14**Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+50&version=ESV" \l "fen-ESV-14683b" \o "See footnote b)]  
    and perform your vows to the Most High,  
**15**and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
    I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

**16**But to the wicked God says:  
    “What right have you to recite my statutes  
    or take my covenant on your lips?  
**17**For you hate discipline,  
    and you cast my words behind you.  
**18**If you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
    and you keep company with adulterers.

**19**“You give your mouth free rein for evil,  
    and your tongue frames deceit.  
**20**You sit and speak against your brother;  
    you slander your own mother's son.  
**21**These things you have done, and I have been silent;  
    you thought that I[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+50&version=ESV#fen-ESV-14690c)] was one like yourself.  
But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

**22**“Mark this, then, you who forget God,  
    lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!  
**23**The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice

glorifies me;  
    to one who orders his way rightly  
    I will show the salvation of God!”

**An Acceptable Sacrifice**

**A Biblical Checklist and Prayers of Response**

1. Revelation: Abel sought God and followed His instructions.

God has not been silent. In this psalm, all the earth and the heavens too are summoned to witness that God has revealed Himself to His people.

2. Grace: Abel knew that his own sacrifice did not save him.

Hebrews 11:4 tells us that he was righteous, and for sinners, that means that God alone had provided that righteousness. It was not a self-righteousness or works-righteousness, but rather “by faith,” and therefore, Abel understood God’s grace.

3. Covenant: Abel had believed God’s promises.

Note in Psalm 50:5 that the covenant comes with sacrifice. Just as God had slain animals to cover Abel’s parents, and provided a ram to substitute for Isaac, God always is the provider of the true sacrifice, which we know now is fulfilled in Jesus, the “Seed” promised to Eve and later to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Saving faith saves because of the Savior, and not by what we have done. (Contrast this with any of the world’s religions, all of which teach forms of self-righteousness, not free grace.)

4. Thanksgiving: Abel knew that God did not “need” his sacrifices.

Psalm 50 echoes that true faith gets the idea that our sacrifices add nothing to God, but only reflect what He has done. The “vows” we pay are in response to G**o**d’s grace, not payment to earn it. See Psalm 50:14, 15, and 23. We exalt God by acknow-ledging our total dependence upon Him and trusting His grace, not by earning our way.

5. Judgment: Abel knew that he was accountable to God for his actions / motives.

Psalm 50 warns all who would “forget” God or ignore His grace that there are consequences for hypocrisy and going through the motions of worship without a heart turned towards Him. Cain’s works reflected His unrighteous heart. 1 John 3:11, 12

“Father, we have nothing to bring to you but the faith of Abel, and just as He sought your righteousness, as do we. As he believed your promises, so do we. Help us never to trust our own works or sacrifices, but always be turning to you in our neediness and brokenness. And help us to obey you out of hearts filled with your grace, knowing that one day we will give an account for all we have thought, said, and done. Thank you for providing the Covenant Sacrifice in your Son, Jesus.

In His name. Amen.”