

R.T. Kendall: The First Thing You Should Ask God for in Prayer

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you” (Matt. 6:33).

This verse appears in the second half of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. It shows what is invariably the next step forward when it comes to our needs and wants. It is true 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We never outgrow seeking the kingdom of God first before we pursue anything else.

How to Approach the Throne of Grace

The first thing we should ask for in prayer is not grace to help us in time of need but mercy:

“Let us then come with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Too many of us approach God and lay our wants and wishes before Him without ever thinking of who He is or His honor. Because we know He is a loving and caring God, we tend to rush into His presence and begin to ask for this and that without any thought to the character of God. But Hebrews 4:16 instructs us to ask for mercy first.

You might say: “Surely not; that is what we ask for in order to receive salvation! After all, an integral part of conversion is to pray, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner’ (Luke 18:13b).” True. But whatever made you think you outgrow asking God for mercy?

Let the holiest and most godly reader of this article understand this: You never outgrow the need to ask God for

mercy. No matter how long you have been a Christian (I converted when I was 6 years old—that was 77 years ago), you must ask God for mercy before you begin putting your requests to Him.

- Do you feel prayed up and confident in your relationship with God? Wonderful! You must ask for mercy before you outline your needs to the Lord.
- Are you experiencing victory over a habit that has plagued you for years? Good! But you still need to ask for mercy first when approaching the throne of grace.
- Have you resisted sexual temptation, forgiven your enemy, been praying for an hour a day or do you have a Bible reading plan that takes you through the Word in a year? Excellent. But you still need to ask for mercy when you approach God.
- Do you attend church regularly, curb your hours of watching television and spend more time reading godly books? Splendid. You still must ask for mercy when you pray.
- Have you been worshipping God? I'm glad to hear it. You still must humbly ask God for mercy when you turn to Him.

The throne of grace presupposes some sovereign sits on that throne. Yes, it is King Jesus. A sovereign has the right to invite who comes into his presence. When my British friends enter the presence of their monarch, they bow or curtsy. How much more when we approach the throne of grace? We ask for mercy.

A very prominent Anglican clergyman said to me that virtually 100 out of 100 people who come to him want something from him. How many go to a man like that just to bless him, pray for him, and encourage him? Virtually no one.

God doesn't need our prayers. And yet He wants us to pray—not because He needs us but because we need Him.

God wants our worship and our praise. He wants to have His will carried out in our lives. He wants us to affirm Him for who He is: the one and only true God, sovereign of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth. {eoa}

*This article is adapted from More of God: Seek the Benefactor, Not Just the Benefits (Charisma House 2019) by **R. T. Kendall**. Kendall was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England, for twenty-five years. Born in Ashland, Kentucky, he was educated at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (.) and Oxford University (.). Kendall is the author of more than 60 books, including Total Forgiveness, Holy Fire, It Ain't Over Till It's Over, Prepare Your Heart for the Midnight Cry and Whatever Happened to the Gospel?*