

Sing the Table Blessing

When I was a child my Christian parents assigned to me the mealtime responsibility of thanking the Lord for our food and to ask His blessing upon it. They never required me to vary the few words I prayed, so before long the thrice-daily habit devolved into mechanical repetition. One time I went through the ritual so mindlessly that instead of starting by saying, "Dear Heavenly Father," I crossed wires with my phone answering routine and began my prayer with, "Hello?"

The traditional Christian practice of thanking God for food dates to biblical times. Jesus "gave thanks" to the Father for the loaves and fishes before He miraculously multiplied the food to feed thousands (Matthew 15:36). It was after "He had given thanks" that He distributed the bread at the last supper with His disciples (1 Corinthians 11:24). The book of Acts (27:35) records that the apostle Paul "took bread and gave thanks to God," and in 1 Timothy 4:3-5 he taught us to do likewise.

No one wants to bore or be bored when giving thanks to God in prayer. But when we thank Him for the same thing (our food) every few hours more than a thousand times a year, year after year, it's easy to find ourselves praying on autopilot (a practice Jesus condemns as "vain repetitions" in Matthew 6:7). Singing the table blessing can refresh the routine.

Where to begin? In one brief search I found several Internet pages devoted to this subject. Each posted lyrics and suggested familiar tunes. With very little effort you could bring one to the table with you on occasion. But you may prefer to create your own, perhaps adapting one or more verses of Scripture. A child taking music lessons might enjoy composing a short tune for musical thanks that's unique to your family. Or during a mealtime or two you could develop a table blessing as a family project.

Like any other method, a table blessing that's sung can also become a mindless routine if it's repeated without variety. Used wisely, however, singing your thanks to the Lord at mealtime can adorn the commonplace with a touch of simple beauty.

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