

# The Practice of Prayer

a sermon in the series  
The Apprentice: An Analysis of What it Means to be a Disciple

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John 11:41-43

*Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"*

This may seem like a strange text when speaking on the subject of prayer. But I assure you that it unlocks the very purpose and key to prayer. Prayer for many reasons can be difficult for the most devout Christian. There are many biblical injunctions and prerequisites to prayer. You must pray according to the will of God; you must ask in Jesus' name, which means you are asking as Jesus' representative; you must have "clean hands and a pure heart; and you must believe." There are others. But these are not the basis of prayer. If I do not pray according to the will of God I will not be heard. If I do not ask as Jesus' representative asking what He would ask for, then I will not be heard. If I do not have "clean hands and a pure heart" and my confession of sin is not up to date, then I will not be heard. Although these conditions of prayer are necessary they are not the foundation and reason for prayer.

There is one thing that must be real to you if prayer is real. Without this reality your prayer life will not be reality. You will not pray and pray without ceasing as we are commanded to do.

But before I address what this one thing is, I want to deal with prayer as a discipline in the life of Jesus.

## **I. JESUS' HABIT OF PRAYER**

Our text is one of the very few recorded prayers of Jesus. But we know He prayed much and was very disciplined at prayer because of certain texts like:

*“And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there.” (Matthew 14:23)*

*“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” (Mark 1:35)*

*“And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray.” (Mark 6:46)*

*“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” (Luke 5:16)*

*“And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’” (Luke 9:18)*

*“Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.’” (Luke 11:1)*

You get the idea. Jesus prayed and He prayed much. It was routine in His life. He practiced prayer. This is amazing when you stop and think about who He is. He is the sinless Son of God. My question is why would deity concealed in humanity need to pray? Why would the sinless, perfect, obedient Son of God need prayer? The answer is not only for our example but as a man He depended upon His relationship with God and prayer was the means of practicing that relationship.

If Jesus, who was sinless and perfectly obeyed, needed prayer how much more do you and I?

## **II. AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS WE MUST PRAY MUCH**

But we don't pray much, do we? In fact if we took an inventory of the amount of time you spent weekly in prayer you wouldn't want it to be shown on the large screen would you? And if you did you're too proud of it. No, we don't pray as we ought to, but today I believe God wants to open up a new avenue in this thing called prayer. I believe the reason for the message today is that despite your past failures in prayer God is offering a new beginning in prayer. I certainly have failed in prayer—my track record in praying isn't any better than any one else's. I pray regularly but oftentimes when I pray I find it hard to pray. Therefore, let us listen with a heart that says, “Although I may not have prayed well in the past, God give me a new beginning.” Let's leave those things that are behind and press forward to God through prayer.

Why must we pray? We already acknowledged that Jesus prayed and if we are to be Jesus' disciples and live as He lived we must do as He did. Because He prayed much, we ought to pray much. But there are more reasons.

### **A. The Importance of Prayer.**

Prayer is the greatest thing we can do for both God and man. Let me explain that statement. You all know that prayer can do much for mankind but what do I mean when I say prayer is the greatest thing you can do for God? I do not mean that God needs your prayers. He doesn't need me to talk to Him. In fact, He's already told us before we ask Him for one thing He already knows what we need. God doesn't need our prayers. God deserves our prayer but there's a reason beyond that. It's this—your prayers and prayer life say something about your love life with Jesus. Prayer is important because prayer is an actual reflection of your love for God.

It's important, secondly, because God in His sovereign wisdom has chosen to do very little in His kingdom's advancement without the prayers of the church. Without the prayers of Christians, the kingdom of God does not advance. So we can say more happens as a result of prayer than by mere ministry.

Today, most churches specialize in ministry and not prayer. We educate ourselves, train ourselves, and come up with programs in order to do the *work of the ministry* while forgetting that the most important work in ministry is prayer. God can do more in answer to your prayer than even by your work because without prayer whatever you do will not work.

A few missionaries in Korea decided to meet together to pray daily at noon. Nothing was happening. The ministry seemed dead. At the end of the first month of prayer, one brother proposed that since nothing had happened the prayer-meeting should be discontinued. He suggested that everyone pray at home as it was convenient. But no one agreed with him but insisted they spend even more time in prayer each day. So for four months they continued the daily prayer meeting. Then suddenly the blessing they had sought came. Several churches experienced their services interrupted by weeping and confessing of sins. A powerful revival broke out. In one church a leading man in the church stood up during the evening service and confessed that he had stolen one hundred dollars in administering a widow's estate. Immediately conviction of sin like fire swept through the audience. The service ended at 2 o'clock in the morning.

God's power was manifested and as a result churches were purified and many sinners found salvation. Multitudes flocked to the churches out of curiosity. Those who came to the services to make fun of the Christians would be gripped by a sense of fear and ended up in prayer. Amongst the "curious" was leader of a gang. He was convicted of his sins and converted. He left the church and went to the authorities and gave himself up. "You have no accuser," said the astonished official, "yet you accuse yourself! We have no law in Korea to meet your case." So he dismissed him. One of the missionaries declared, "It paid well to have spent several months in prayer, for when God gave the Holy Spirit, He accomplished more in half a day than all the missionaries together could have accomplished in half a year." In less than two months, more than 2,000 were converted.

Do you see what I mean when I say that prayer is the most important thing you can do for God and people?

A. J. Gordon said, "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed, but you can never do more than pray until you have prayed."

Prayer is important because this is the means by which God has chosen to do anything in and through your life. That's true individually and corporately. This is the means God has ordained. There is nothing more mysterious than prayer and there is nothing more God-exalting than prayer. When God moves in response to prayer it is obvious it was not the hand of man, nor his cleverness, programs, or ingenuity that brought about the answer. It was God's gracious response to the cries of people. That's why prayer is important. It exalts and glorifies God.

## **B. Jesus and the Apostles Commanded Prayer.**

Jesus expects you to pray:

*"And when you pray." (Matthew 6:5)*

*"In this manner, therefore, pray." (Matthew 6:9)*

*"Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." (Matthew 9:38)*

*“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41)*

*“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mark 11:24)*

*“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.” (Luke 18:1)*

Jesus expects us to pray.

The apostles expected us to pray as well.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 4:2)*

*“Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)*

Why all of these commands to pray? Because it's important and God knew the opposition we would have to prayer. He knew there would be forces trying to keep you from praying. Therefore, He commands prayer often as a reminder of its importance and our need for it.

## **C. Therefore, We Must Develop the Godly Habit of Prayer.**

We must do all we can to develop this habit. This is what spiritual disciplines are all about; you practice them until they become a normal, routine part of your life. How can we do this through prayer? How can prayer become a much more normal aspect of your everyday life? I believe every Christian wants to pray better. We want to pray more than we do and we want to pray effectual prayers. How do we do that and develop this godly habit?

### **I. Establish a Regular Time for Prayer**

For Jesus, His regular time was to get up before the disciples and go alone somewhere and pray. At other times He would go off somewhere and pray until late at night and often even until the wee hours of the morning. But He established regular times of prayer in His own life. We must do this also.

Why do that? Why be legalistic, as some will criticize this? For one simple reason, we have to fight the natural, fleshly tendency to not pray. This is a function of spiritual disciplines. God's grace is working in and through me to inspire, motivate, and empower these disciplines. It's not legalistic.

So why go to the habit of establishing a daily time of prayer, especially in light of I Thessalonians 5:17 that says we are to pray without ceasing? Can't I just pray all day? Of course, but Jesus also said, "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:6). God commanded private time as well as continual prayer throughout the day. A life of prayer requires both.

I know most of us in this room probably do pray throughout the day. We do send up prayers as they come to us, maybe when a problem arises during our day, or we may hear a song that motivates us to praise Him and thank Him. But how many of you begin a day without establishing a time to get alone with God? It is essential if you're going to develop a life of prayer and for prayer to become as normal as breathing.

There is something about getting alone with God at a routine time. God is certainly worthy of it. If you want to come and talk to me you need to schedule a time with me. If it's an emergency I will be there as quickly as possible, but I have a busy life and you have a busy life, therefore you can't just show up and say, "I'd like to talk to you for a few moments." There very well could be someone else in my office at that time or I'm out of the office on an appointment. But when I put you on my calendar what am I saying? I am saying that it is important to meet with you and I'm going to jealously guard that time unless an emergency comes up. Most of you know that Monday is my day off and I spend it with my wife. I guard that jealously because she is important to me. If you don't make room on the calendar for God, the calendar will never make room for God. If God is important to us then we should establish a time with Him and jealously guard it.

## **2. Establish a Place**

Why an appointed place? It is for the reason I've already established in an earlier message that we need regularly to be in a place that provides quiet and solitude. That can pose a problem for some of you who live in busy homes with lots of people where there may not be a spare room or closet where you can go and pray alone. But that doesn't matter. You can still have a place where

you get alone with God. Even Susannah Wesley, who had seventeen children in her brood, had an established place to pray alone with God. When it was her time to be alone with God, she took her apron and draped it over her head. That was her prayer closet and her time alone with God and every child knew when they saw their mother with her apron over her head, they were to leave her alone and be quiet. You need an appointed place and an appointed time.

### **3. Never Go Into a Place of Prayer Without Your Bible**

The Bible is your prayer manual, the prayer book of the Christian. I've referred to this many times and I'm sure in the days to come as new people come and get saved you'll hear it again. George Muller said he spent the first 10 years of his Christian life not praying with his Bible and found it very difficult to even get in the spirit of prayer until one day he took his Bible and began to pray the Scriptures back to God. He said it was amazing what took place. He said things he knew he should pray for that day would be in the Scriptures and always seemed to fit the needs. And then there were things that would come up in the Scriptures that he would pray and he didn't have any knowledge that there was a problem or need for but God did, and God would work. He called this—getting his soul happy in the Lord. Dear friends, I would whole heartily recommend that to you because I've found the same to be true. It's amazing what happens when you pray through the Scriptures and let them become the guide by which you pray. God responds to that when your heart responds to it.

These are some things you can do to develop a godly habit but there is one thing you must have as a foundation for all these suggestions.

### **III. THE REALITY THAT IS THE FOUNDATION OF PRAYER**

In John 11 we have the story of the death of Lazarus, a man dead four days whose body was already decomposing. Jesus stood outside of his tomb. More than four days earlier news came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was sick and He did not go to Bethany. He purposefully waited for Lazarus to die knowing this was God's plan. Then, before He initiates that plan and resurrects Lazarus from the dead He lifts up His head and prays this simple prayer not for His own sake—He doesn't need to pray this prayer—He prays for those listening that they may know He has God's ear. I'm so thankful He did this because His prayer is for us also. In reading this prayer, which is our text, I saw something that states the whole reason for prayer. It is this fact that will make prayer less difficult if you learn and believe it.

But I have to caution you before we proceed. This truth that is the real basis of all prayer is not just to be intellectually learned. I'm going to say things you already know, yet it has to be spiritually learned as well. The Spirit has to make this clear to you. So would it be okay if we prayed right now and asked the Holy Spirit to really help us? What I'm about to share with you, you mostly know, but there's something here I don't think we fully know and it's going to take the Spirit to help us.

*Father, I'm asking for You to help us right now. I'm asking for You to help me explain this as You've revealed it to me and illuminated my mind to see this, because, Father, it's so deep. Help my brothers and sisters to hear it, not just with their minds but with the soul and spirit, to grasp it and see it and rejoice in You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Very well then, let's proceed to look at the text.

*“And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me.” (John 11:41)*

“I know You always hear Me.” Here is the secret of prayer. There is the foundation of prayer and if you're not praying on this foundation prayer will be almost impossible to you.

### **A. Jesus Knew the Basis of Prayer is God's Love.**

It is God's love for Him that prompted Jesus to say, “I know You always hear Me. You're always with Me and You're always paying attention to Me because You love Me.” Prayer is not some legalistic duty wherein we pray and put in the time in order to get out of it whatever we desire. No. Prayer is not built on that foundation. Yet for so many of us that's the foundation or basis by which most of us pray. Let us bulldoze that structure and remove that foundation so that the true foundation of God's love will be the basis of why we bend the knee and utter our soul to God. It is this—God loves us.

Jesus believed prayer was not just a command but an invitation. I'm asking you now not to see it as a command but an *invitation* to loving fellowship. And God expects us to answer His invitation of love.



When I travel, my wife Karen expects me to call her, if possible, and if not, I am to text her. She even wants me to text her in the middle of the night when we land in an airport to catch a connecting flight. This expectation is not a demand of obligation, but an expectation of love. My fulfilling that expectation is not a duty or obligation—I want to communicate with her because I love her. God’s command to pray is exactly the same; it is a command of love. He wants to hear from you because He loves you. That’s the reason you are to pray. Your Father is anxious—in an anthropomorphic way—to hear from you because He loves you.

Augustine, “He that loveth little prayeth little, and he that loveth much prayeth much;”

Augustine learned what Jesus knew, we pray not because we have problems or because we’re supposed to in order to be spiritual, we pray because we love this God who loves us.

It has been truthfully stated, “No one can have very real and deep communion with God who does not know how to pray so as to get answers to prayer.”

That does not mean he or she has learned some hardly discovered secret to prayer but rather he or she knows God truly enjoys his or her fellowship. The person who has this reality living in their soul knows how to pray and enjoys prayer. I know I’m saying things you already know. Intellectually, we know God loves us. We know here, within the cortex of this brain, that God loves us and gave His Son for us, we have it proven in historical terms. Jesus died on a cross for me. I know that. I’m not asking if you believe or understand that, I’m asking if it’s a reality and way of life for you? Does it move your heart? Do your affections sense it, feel it, know it, and live by it? Is it as normal as breathing to you? If not, then you don’t know it yet and it’s just a fact that has no bearing on your life.

The person who has this reality living in their souls knows that God loves His people and that He loves answering their prayers. Did you know God delights in answering prayers? He enjoys answering your prayers. It is one of His great pleasures. There is nothing He enjoys more. He enjoys being good to you more than He enjoys you loving on Him. But if you don’t believe that, and some of us struggle with that kind of statement, then you will not understand prayer and I think you will have difficulty relating to God and enjoying His fellowship.

## **B. God Himself is the Invitation to Pray.**

It is natural for God to answer prayer. Answered prayer is not something extraordinary to God. He is more given to answer our prayers than we are to pray. Why? Because He is so immeasurably good to His children. Why would He be so good to us? We can understand why He always hears Jesus, He is the Son of God and He is the perfect, sinless, Lamb of God who is always obedient. But me? I'm not sinless, I'm not perfect and I'm not always obedient. Why therefore would He listen to me?

The reason God loves you is because He's loving. The reason God is good to you is because He is good. That's the great transformation that needs to happen in a lot of our hearts. He is so loving that He both wants us to pray and enjoys answering our prayers for not other reason than that's just the way He is.

I want to help us by taking us to a text. I want us to see with the eyes of the heart, not just the mind. The mind has to be involved but it cannot take you all the way to the goal line. The Holy Spirit has to get involved here as well as your spirit so true worship takes place. I'm going to give you the truth and now if the Spirit of God will work on your spirit then you will have worship as you hear this.

*“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*  
(Romans 5:6-8)

What does verse seven mean? The Apostle Paul is saying that men, human beings, will seldom—hardly ever—die for a just person. The word is *righteous* but it does not need to be translated holy or spiritual. It's not the way Paul is using the word. He's simply using the word as it was in the original language. It just means somebody who keeps the law or obeys. He's not an exceptional guy, but he obeys the law and stays out of trouble. He doesn't care for the neighbors or go out of his way to help, he just makes sure he keeps himself okay and right with the law. Paul says very seldom will you find anyone willing to die for that kind of person but you might just perhaps, maybe find someone more willing to give their lives for a good person—that is a person who doesn't just keep the law and keeps himself out of trouble, but one who reaches out and is kind to their neighbors and extends kindness to people who don't even deserve it. They're a good person. Maybe, perhaps, then for that kind of person someone would be willing to lie down his or her life, but not very often.

But look what God does. The reason for Jesus dying for you is not because you kept His commandments. The reason He died for you is not because you did what He told you to do and kept yourself out of trouble.

This is especially for you young people. Your mom and dad are always telling you what you must and must not do. Therefore, you grow up thinking, "Okay, I've got this set of laws or commandments. I've got to do *this* because if I don't do this I will get in trouble and that is never pleasant." In order to keep out of trouble you've got to keep the law or find a way to make it look like you did even though you didn't. You grow up thinking this is the same way God is with these commandments, laws, and rules.

But here in Romans 5:6-8 Jesus is saying to you and anyone else who tends to be extremely performance-oriented, "I didn't die because you were good at keeping My commandments. I died for you because it wanted to demonstrate how much I love you." Jesus' death is the demonstration, the proof, the argument, the evidence that God loves you and He didn't die because you kept His commandments. God didn't say, "If you do what I tell you to do then I'll love you."

Nor is He saying, "I will love you if you go beyond just keeping My commandments and serve your fellow man. If you will do good deeds and serve Me in the ministry, then I'll really love you." No, not at all. Paul says God proves His love to you by sending Jesus to die for you when you were still yet a sinner, an ungodly and unlovable person. The reason for His dying for us and loving us is not based upon us but upon Him.

You already knew that. But what I want to do is take you into the very heart and nature of God just for a few moments and then we'll be finished.

God loves us because He is love and is good, not because I am. I have to confess to you that I truly struggle with self. For me, there is always this struggle that I'm not selfless enough, which is nothing more than self. Therefore, I often struggle with *How can I ever just love Lord for Your sake and not what You've done for me?* It's not wrong to love God for what He does for you. John deals with that, "We love because He first loved us." It is certainly biblical to love and appreciate God for His love for us, but there is a higher degree of love. It is a love where you are lost in that person's goodness and you're enthralled with the worth and value of that person. It is much like the love of husband for his wife or a mother loving her children. It's purely for the sake of that

child, or spouse. I want that kind of love for God. I don't want to only love Him because He does things for me or because He saved me from my sins, I want to love Him for His own sake.

I was praying about this, this week. Yet everything I'm about to say you've already heard, you already know. I did too—but I saw it a deeper, richer way this week. It's too hard to explain unless you see and taste it. You can't just understand it intellectually; you have to taste it, that's why we prayed a few moments ago. Keep praying.

You need to know God loves you because He is that way. Before God made anything there was God. There was just God and that was enough. The triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God three persons—and the love and dynamic between those three persons in this one God is so infinitely good and perfect. God didn't lack anyone to love. His love is self-sufficient and not only is His love self-sufficient but neither does He need anything. He's completely satisfied within Himself. He didn't need to make the angels or any part of creation. He didn't need to make man. He didn't need anything. The very nature of God is to be self-sufficient, self-satisfying, and completely without need or want because God is satisfied in Himself. This is our God.

But in His infinite wisdom, not needing to do so, He did create. He made angels, He made a universe, He made an earth, He put animals on that earth and then the crowning achievement of His creation, He made man and woman. He didn't need anything from His creation; He didn't even need the praises of that creation. God doesn't need angels to worship Him, nor does He need us to worship Him. He is completely self-sufficient. There is no need in God.

Now imagine His creation. What is it in comparison to God? It's absolutely, totally nothing compared to God.

Here is where it gets difficult and I can't illustrate it but I'm going to try. But know at the beginning that this is a poor comparison. But it might help a bit although very little.

From time to time some of the children in the church like to draw pictures for me. They create their works of art and give them to me. There is one young lady in this church who does it more than any—Abigail. Her pieces of art mean a great deal to me and I keep them, but, let's be honest, when you look at these pictures, not to break any budding artist's heart, you won't see them in the Louvre in Paris alongside the Mona Lisa. They won't be found in any art galleries soon. But

they are the creation of her imagination. She makes her art. She creates her masterpieces. It's just scribbles on paper but nonetheless she makes them.

Recently on a Wednesday night, Abigail gave me a great big poster and even put rhinestones on it. Very classy. As beautiful and classy as it looks with very good artwork, the reason I value it is not for the value of the artwork but the value of the person who made it and expressed love to me. That's what makes it valuable. What is Abigail or any of these children in comparison to the works of art they create? What are they compared to their creation? There is no comparison.

You would never take one of those scribblings and value it more than the child, would you? It's infinitely different. There is such a wide gap between the importance of the creator, the artist, and the created, the art. The Mona Lisa, as valuable as it is, is not as valuable as Leonardo Da Vinci, the life that created it. What shall one man give in exchange for his soul? A million Mona Lisa's won't compare to the soul of Leonardo Da Vinci.

There is no comparison between the artist and the art and that's true with God, the Artist who made us, His art—only more so.

Abigail could have looked at that piece of paper she had drawn on and said, "Oh no, that's not good enough," and crumbled it up and tossed it away and no one would have said anything because she's so much greater than the art and that's the prerogative of a creator. Do you know when God made the universe, the stars, the angels, and man, if He said, "I don't like it," He could have crumbled it up and tossed it away and it would have been perfectly good to have done so? He didn't need it. It serves no purpose as far as adding anything to Him. But He didn't. He actually went one step further. We see this God, the Creator, coming into His artwork and making Himself one of the stickmen on the paper. That's what Jesus did. He became one of the pieces of art on the canvas of God.

Abigail often draws me a self-portrait and if she could literally become that stickperson she draws, with purple hair and everything, and make it come alive it would be amazing. Every person on the earth would hear about it! But that's nothing compared to Almighty God who doesn't need us, who is self-sufficient and could have crumbled us up and tossed us away at anytime, yet became one of us and then died for us! We're just scribbles on His canvas and He dies for us.

You say the illustration isn't good because we've been given a will and the ability to choose, we're created in His image, and we can think, unlike anything in the animal kingdom. But what does that make you compared to God? Nothing. You are still something made, something the Maker didn't need in the first place. Then He comes and dies for us.

Why? We've got to ask why. In Scripture we see it is not because He felt sorry for us, not because we pulled at His heartstrings, and not because if He didn't do something we would die and perish. Surely, He did pity us and if He did nothing we would perish. No doubt these motives are involved, but it's not the main reason. The main reason He came and died for us was because it is His nature to love and be kind to His creation. That's why God is so good! It's just who He is. Jesus died so God could marvel in His own love and goodness.

In Ephesians chapter one we read powerful words getting to the underlying motives for our redemption. These words have more meaning to me today as a result of this text than ever before. Paul is trying to grapple with his question of why would this God who created us do all of this for us. He says in verse five,

*“having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (What does that mean? It means because He enjoyed it. He enjoyed loving you in this way.)<sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”*

Then you go on a little further and it says in verse 14,

*“who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”*

Then go to Ephesians 2:7,

*“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

I've read these verses my entire life and I've thought, *I get it. God, You saved sinners and made them Your children because one day we're going to stand at your throne and we're going to praise You for this great grace.* That's true but until this week I saw that's not the ultimate reason. What do you think

your voice, lifted in prayer and adoration to this great God is going to add to Him? Nothing. He didn't save you for your praise. He did it for His own praise. Meaning that God exalts in Himself and that is His glory. God is the only person in the entire universe that can lift Himself up and it's not pride for Him to do so but it's good. One day God is going to look at all the children around His throne and take pleasure in Himself that He is so loving and kind that He would love His enemies even though they were nothing but little stick figures on a canvas He called earth.

I told you I wasn't going to say anything you probably didn't already know but here is what I saw that has changed me the last several days and is still changing me, and oh may God continue to change me, because I really need it.

The truth that we just stated is the basis for your prayer life. It's the basis for ministry. It's the basis for service. It's the basis of life. I'm not going to add anything to God. God is just so good and kind in Himself, and that's His nature, He doesn't love me for anything I do, not even my prayers. Though He delights in my prayer life and invites me to come because He loves me and enjoys answering my prayers, the truth is I don't add one thing to Him. He just loves blessing me. Period. That's who He is. That's the praise of His glory. His glory is His goodness and God rejoices in His own goodness to we His artwork.

### **C. True Prayer Seeks God Himself.**

When I understand that I don't need to pray because I am commanded to pray or because I've got to get things from God, I can pray because He loves me with no strings attached, then prayer is revolutionized. It's His nature and His goodness to be this way. This is the praise of His glory. Comprehending this, I can come and just be marveled by Him and that's what should fuel my prayers.

That's what has helped my prayer life in the last few days. I'm not insinuating that I know how to pray, but I've been blessed up by this one truth and tasting it—God is good.

David describes it as the lifting up of the living soul to God. "To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul" (Psalm 25:1).

In the book, *The Kneeling Christian*, it is stated, "Real prayer at its highest and best reveals a soul athirst for God — just for God alone."

That's what I saw this week. I saw it. When I pray it's not to get God's favor or twist His arm to bless me and give me something I think I need. No, I come to a God to whom I can't add or take away anything, a God who loves me just because He wants to. This is what Jesus understood.

Jesus was thoroughly convinced that God, His Father, accepted Him, cared for Him, delighted in Him, and loved Him. He knew on this basis He always had the ear of God because He always had audience with God. The Father was always with Him and never for a moment took His eyes off His Son.

But we belittle God because we treat Him like we treat one another. What happens when someone doesn't return your love, what do you end up doing? Or what happens if you injure someone you love? Do they ignore you, reject you, or try to punish you. Wives, if you wound your husband's honor and disrespect him, what will he do? He probably will just go off to the garage, go to the woods, go fishing, or maybe go back to the office. Why? It's the only way he knows how to deal with the rejection. He retreats and goes into silence. But when we injure our God He doesn't grow silent or try to ignore us. We still have His presence. We still have His ear. The problem is our hearts have disrupted our fellowship so we cannot hear God.

Am I saying sin doesn't matter? You know better than that. Of course I'm not saying that. I'm asking you this—how can you sin against a God who loves you like this? A God who loves you just because that's His nature?

Our prayers are so often powerless, in fact often our prayers are prayerless—we do not really pray—because we rush without thought or preparation into God's presence, without realizing God's majesty and glory.

*“The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry.” (Psalms 34:15)*

You can pray as Jesus did, “Heavenly Father, I thank You that You hear me and I know You always hear me,” since He is that kind of a God; always good, always loving. Let that be the foundation of how you pray and your prayer life will change. You will enjoy prayer when you understand that He loves you. Even though you are nothing compared to Him, He loves you because that's who He is. May God be praised. Amen.