

Seeking the Father

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We have entered into our Lord's teaching on prayer in Matthew chapter 6, and we return there again this evening. I invite you to turn there with me. As you do, I was reading a comment about one of the Scottish leaders from the 17th century, and the writer made the observation that in our day of activity-oriented Christianity, there is a serious loss of inner devotion and a deep knowledge of God is the thing that is sacrificed in that, and I couldn't agree with that comment more, even though I just paraphrased it loosely. Tonight, we kind of want to enter into the spirit of prayer, the knowledge of God that has inner consequences, that shapes inner affections, that causes you truly to sing that song that we just sang, "More Love to Thee, O Christ," and to try to shift away a little bit from the programs and the activities and all of that into the inner heart righteousness that Christ calls us to throughout the Sermon on the Mount. I was told not long ago that people wonder what the practice of righteousness looks like, and the answer to that is found in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the righteousness that God requires and unless you see that and see that it's a heart righteousness that Christ cultivates in his disciples, Christianity is not going to make a whole lot of sense to you in terms of what Scripture is saying that God wants from his people. And what Jesus gives us in the passage that we're going to look at here in just a moment, beginning in verse 9 of chapter 6, he is telling us what God wants from us in prayer, and more specifically, the attitudes that he is cultivating in us by his Spirit as we submit ourselves to his word.

Look at Matthew 6, verse 9. And by the way, what I said is intended to be a real collision, a frontal assault on the way that Christianity is largely practiced in Western culture today. I'm not just talking about making a little bit of an adjustment to, you know, Awana and door-to-door campaigns. I'm talking about a complete overhaul of what most people have known Christianity to be. The self-centered, outward-oriented manner of approach is not what Christ is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. You couldn't find any of that in the three chapters of Matthew 5, 6, and 7. And that carries over into prayer as well.

Matthew 6, verse 9, Jesus says,

9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11
Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also

have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Now, on Sunday, just two days ago, hopefully it hasn't completely escaped your memory at this point, we kind of looked at an overview of the attitudes, the spiritual virtues that are growing in a heart that is developing an attitude of prayer. All of the words that we see here, all of these phrases, are intended to be prayed from a sincere, engaged heart. This is not a prayer to be rote recited in liturgical services without any thought to the words that are being expressed. These are deep, profound words coming from a heart that has been transformed by grace. And we walked through them, and I just want to review that with you very quickly here. We saw six different attitudes of true prayer. There was the attitude of trust, of reliance on God, of a confidence in God, shown in the phrase, "Our Father." There was an attitude of reverence that we discussed as shown in the following phrase, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." There is a respect and a fear of God that is expressed in the very outset of prayer as we contemplate the person to whom we are praying. Next, we saw, "Your kingdom come," and saw that true prayer involves a sense of anticipation, of looking forward beyond present circumstances and making as a central aspect of our prayer the development and the praying for the coming of the kingdom of God in a way that transforms and transcends the circumstances in the life that we live just now. Beloved, that phrase alone is a complete contradiction of 95% of the praying that so-called Christians do. "God, help me in this problem. God, change this circumstance. God, change my spouse." All of those things just wrapped up in the here and now and Jesus says, when you pray, you be thinking about a kingdom to come. You anticipate something in the future. This is utterly transforming. This utterly changes the way that we pray. And let me add one other thing, just by way of a tangent here. This is not mystical praying. This is not someone, we're not praying in a way that's looking for some kind of secret, Gnostic sense of God, communion with God that is not grounded in rational thought. This is rooted in revealed realities, trust and reverence and anticipation.

Beyond that, there's the hard attitude of submission. Verse 10, "your will be done. God, your will be done. As I come to prayer, my attitude is your will be done." Now listen, once again, we come to something that contradicts 90 to 95% of most people's praying, because most people pray in a way that tries to get God to do what they want him to do and the spirit of true prayer is just exactly the opposite of that. "God, your will is supreme. What you want is best. What you have determined is the way that things should go. I submit my will to yours," rather than trying to impose my will on God. And so there's an attitude of submission and all of these things, you know, we'll see again as we go through the prayer.

A spirit of dependence. You know, this is not God helps those who helps themselves. What we see in verse 11 is a spirit of dependence that says, "Give us this day our daily bread. Father, everything that is necessary to sustain my life comes from your hand. Everything about material resources, my physical needs, and the other aspects of life, I ask it from your gracious hand, because I cannot supply myself. I do not exist by myself. My days are determined by you. My breath comes from you. I live and move, and in you have my being." And so true prayer is a conscious bringing of those things to mind and

praying accordingly. "God, be gracious to me. Even though the cupboard's full right now, Lord, I still ask you to supply the things necessary for my life."

And then the spirit of repentance. "God, forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Once again, that spiritual realm, that life lived in the presence of God, that life that is concerned with true righteousness. Scripture says, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Well, I ask you, how much does the modern church cultivate in people any sense of fear of God? How much does it cultivate any sense of sin or repentance? You know, those words are verboten because that might turn people away if you told them that they were sinners and under the wrath of God. And my goodness, you read what some 17th century pastors said to their flock about roasting in hell which is what Samuel Rutherford, a very godly man, said to his flock in a letter, you realize how much different things are today, where those doctrines are hidden, and the fear of God is replaced by entertainment, and God just wants to solve all your problems, and then he'll get out of your way as you continue to live life.

Now, beloved, what you should see as we go through this prayer is that there is a consciousness of sin and iniquity and transgression that informs true prayer that asks God to forgive you of those things, and not only to forgive you, to cleanse your conscience of the past, but such a desire for righteousness, seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness that you proactively pray, "Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. God, I don't want to walk in the paths of sin, but I know that my feet are prone to go in that direction, so lead me away from that and into the paths of righteousness for your name's sake."

Now, how long was that review? Five or 10 minutes? You can just see in just five or 10 minutes that the spirit of this prayer is contrary to what we've been cultivated in and what has been practiced in our past over years and decades leading up to it and so the thing is this, I realize that these words of the Lord's Prayer are familiar to you. I realize that I've preached on them in the past here, but I know that collectively together, individually and corporately, we have not at all plumbed the depth of this in our experience. We don't know and we don't practice the urgency of this in our experience and so it's important for us to go over this again as we are doing in these days.

Trust, reverence, anticipation, submission, dependence, and repentance. One of those would be enough to have us profitably examine ourselves for an extended period of time. All six of them in one place? You see how this must be the inspired word of God to bring such themes together of such a lofty and profound nature and to bring them in such an economy of words as what our Lord has done here in Matthew chapter 6. These are matters of the heart. This is righteousness being expressed in prayer. And, beloved, if you wonder what righteousness looks like, Jesus would point you to the way, the pattern that he has given us in prayer and say, "Just start here. Work on your inner man and cultivate this in your inner man, and a lot of other things will fall into place as a result."

The church today, far too concerned to use prayer for what it wants to accomplish. Individuals far too self-centered in what they want. "Get me out of my trial," rather than, "Lord, what would you have for me in this trial? Change this adversity," rather than, "Lord, what would you have for my soul in this adversity?" Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this, he said, "We tend to be so self-centered in our prayers that when we drop on our knees before God, we think only about ourselves and our troubles and perplexities. We start talking about them at once, and of course nothing happens. That is not the way to approach God. We must pause before we speak in prayer."

So what Christ is teaching us in this prayer is to be much more thoughtful, much more reverential, much more God-centered in our praying than what we are accustomed to, and what he shows us here, as we're going to look preeminently at verse 9 here this evening, is that God the Father is our first priority of prayer. God the Father is our first priority of prayer, even in the urgency of pressing circumstances. One writer says this, another writer says this. He says, "It is always wise before we pray to spend time deliberately recalling who God is. Only then shall we come to our loving Father in heaven with appropriate humility, devotion, and confidence." Humility, devotion, and confidence. That's the spirit of true prayer, and it is based on a response to the revealed realities of the utter perfections of God and who he is.

And so, beloved, the call this evening for you is to seek the Father as you pray. Seek the Father as you pray, which means that you need to know who the Father is and respond to him rather than wanting him to respond to you. You know, who is it that's at the center of the universe? Who is it that's on the throne of the universe? You know, you start with the Triune God, you start with God the Father from whom all blessings flow and who he is, and you start there and pray in response to that rather than trying to get God to respond to you. This is an utter revolution of which we are speaking and seeing here this evening. I repeat that and emphasize it simply so you won't be of a mind that says, "I already know all of this." And, beloved, when you contemplate the Father, and a very profitable study is to consider the New Testament description, even just in the gospels, of what it says about the nature of God the Father and who he is and what he says to us, is understand this, if you think about prayer as an act of worship, for example, to realize that God the Father calls you to that. In John 4:23, John 4:23, Jesus told the Samaritan woman, "The Father is seeking such people to worship him." Here this evening, beloved, through the word of God, God the Father is calling you in your heart by his Spirit and saying and calling you, "Come and be this person of worship described in the words of my Son. Come and be the person of worship who approaches me in trust and reverence, anticipation and submission, dependence and repentance." This is not a lesson, and the Bible does not give us tricks or mantras, special phrases that we can use and that we can invoke and chant and get God to do what we want him to do and just get what we want out of him. What a self-centered, selfish way to think about prayer. Who are we? Who do we think we are to use prayer to our own selfish ends in a way that is entirely earthbound in its considerations?

No, what God is calling us to is to this manner of prayer that involves worship of him. But beyond that, beloved, there is a sweetness, there is an unspeakable joy that is to be

known in true prayer, a sense of an intimate, particular love for your soul that the Father would shower upon you. Jesus said in John 14 verse 21, "He who loves me will be loved by my Father. You will be loved by my Father." If you love Christ, you are loved by the Father. This is not a remote and inaccessible God that is represented by the term Father. This is a term of close intimacy, of family expression. We are children of God adopted into his family by his electing grace, by the redemptive love of Christ adopted into the family of God, so much so that the Apostle John says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God, and we are," 1 John 3 verse 1.

The God who calls us into this prayer loves us, would have us know him in the depths of our soul as a loving, redeeming, sovereign God who knows the hairs on our head, and so, one other word from Jesus as he speaks about the Father and makes him known to us. Jesus said in John 15, verse 16, he said, "I chose you," speaking to his disciples, but there's a broader application to it, "so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." John 15, verse 16, "whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." Now, look, beloved, whatever else we say about these verses, the Father to whom we address our prayers, the Father is one who calls us, who seeks us to be men and women, boys and girls of prayer like this. Scripture reveals him as a Father who loves us and adopted us into his family. Again, speaking to true Christians, as I'll address in a moment. A father who is willing to give to us in response to prayer. Jesus said you don't have because you don't ask. And so there is this intimacy and this reverence and this access to the one true living God that is available to us as we approach him in the right spirit of prayer. And obviously, obviously, obviously, it must be the right spirit of prayer. Scripture says, you know, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear," Psalm 66, verse 18. And so this isn't something that's available to non-Christians. This isn't available to professing Christians who have a self-centered focus in prayer. This is directed to a smaller subset of the outward visible church of God that desires true righteousness and desires God for his own intrinsic worth, his own intrinsic glory, regardless of what's in it for us. This is prayer that is offered up by one who understands he is created in the image of God, created in order to bring glory to God, created for fellowship and communion with God, to enjoy him, as the first question of the Westminster Catechism says, to know God and to enjoy him forever. But these aren't the carnal delights of ungodly people that we're called to. This is intimate spiritual communion with the living God, the one who loved our souls and sent Christ to redeem them.

Now, having framed it like that, beloved, the question is, you know, do you number yourself among that group? Do you long to be in that circle of disciples? Do you want to be one like that? Because God opens the doors and flings it open for anyone who would approach him in Christ to know him and to experience this kind of deep spiritual private intimacy with him that inflames the soul with love and worship.

Now, one other aspect about this, I read this text on Sunday, but look at Matthew 7 also as we think about the Father, and we see just how good and worthy and lovely God the Father is, and the fact that he would be accessible and available to us in prayer would

draw us to him out of the sheer recognition of the surpassing nature of his goodness. Matthew 7, we'll read from verse 7 here.

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. If the lesser thing is true, if sinners know how to give good things to their children when their children ask them for something, in a lesser way, if that lesser thing is true, how much more must the greater thing be true that the infinite holiness of God the Father, the infinite goodness of God the Father would motivate him to give good things in response to his children who pray to him in a trusting, reverent, anticipatory, submissive, dependent, repentant spirit. How much more would the storehouses of heaven be open to such a one as that?

Now, beloved, all of that, the Father seeks worshipers, the Father loves us, the Father is gracious and giving and generous, all of that should be front and center in our mind when we come to Matthew 6, verse 9. Look at it there again with me when Jesus says, "Pray then like this, 'Our Father in heaven.'" Our Father in heaven. We think of the person to whom we address. We're not going through some outward form of recitation of words. We're coming to the presence of a living person who can be known, who has revealed himself, who has created us in his image, who has redeemed us in Christ for the express purpose that we might know him. Jesus said, "Father," he prayed that we would know him. And so, beloved, here tonight we see an invitation to seek the Father because he loves you and he will answer you, and all of these promises, all of this revelation of the good character of God leads us to trust him when we pray.

Now, one of the aspects and why I think in part that the Lord starts with this sense of addressing God as Father, is that we approach him in a spirit of trust. There's a sense of reliance. There's a sense of confidence in his revelation. The one who doubts, as James says in James 1, is one who's like the waves tossed about on the ocean. Let not a double-minded man expect to receive anything from him. Hebrews, we saw last time, says, the one who comes to God must believe that he is, and he's a rewarder of those who seek him. And so at the very gate of true prayer is, in a sense, guarded by the doorkeepers that open the gates of prayer are a trust and a belief and a confidence that God is who he says he is. And our stingy, resentful mindsets about God have to be laid aside. We have to repent of those things and say, "Father, even if I don't feel it in my heart, I believe your word and your word says that you're loving, that you're a giving God, that you call me to prayer. And so, Father, not because of what I feel, but because what is outside of me and the external promises revealed in Scripture, I come to you on your terms, believing what you say about yourself, and I trust your invitation in Christ to approach you and I respond

to your command to pray in this way." And then you're in a position to begin praying in the sense that Jesus says.

So I'm going to show you tonight from God's word three matters for seeking the Father in prayer. This is what righteous praying looks like. It's good to have books on prayer and all of that, but I just invite you to kind of set the things of books aside and just come with a simple, teachable spirit before the words of Christ, and we'll have the Holy Spirit as our teacher as we do. So the first thing that you need to know to seek the Father in prayer is this, number one: you must be a Christian. You must be a real, true, born-again Christian in order to pray in this manner and this is just the simplest, direct words of Christ that help us to see that. In John 14:6, John 14:6, a very well-known text, Jesus said this, speaking of himself, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me." No one comes to the Father except through me. And as we saw earlier from John 15, Jesus said, "Whatever you ask the Father in my name." And so when we come to God, we come not in our own righteousness, we come not on the persuasion of our own many words, we come in complete humble reliance on the merit and work of Jesus Christ alone in order to come to a holy God. You must be a Christian to do that. It is only through faith in Christ that you can call God Father. You must have a mediator. You must have one who goes before you into the presence of God if you are going to pray rightly at all, because we have no righteousness of our own. We have no right of our own to enter into the presence of God. The shed blood of Jesus Christ must be applied to your soul, received by faith, before you can begin to pray at all. Non-Christians might go through outward motions of speaking to someone that they call God, but they're not praying really and truly; they're not being heard and received favorably by God because there is only one way to God, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let that sink in, to sink in afresh how much we owe to our Savior, how all of these wonderful riches of access to such a good and gracious God would be denied to us and unavailable to us, the vault of heaven locked and closed and the heavy door closed shut against us without the combination necessary to open the door, open the combination, only through Christ do we enter into this vault of spiritual blessing that God has for those who call upon him. And so Christ, as our mediator, is central, is essential to calling upon the Father. And beloved, as you think about Christ in prayer, as you think about who the Lord Jesus is, understand that he is of one essence with God the Father, that when we see Christ, we see the Father, and that we are to honor Christ himself as we honor God the Father without diminishment. In John 5, we read this, Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him." And so if we're going to honor God, the Father, in prayer, if we're going to speak to God the Father in prayer, we must understand that that is so completely bound up in the person and work of our Lord Jesus, and that we are ever mindful that we are approaching God in his name, in the name of Christ, not on the basis of our own demands. And so we come back to that spirit of dependence, of depending upon Christ, trusting in him, relying on what he has done and who he is as the one mediator, the one bridge between sinful man and holy God. We're mindful of that and we honor Christ as we approach the Father.

That's what pleases God the Father is that we would come in the name of his Son. Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

And so, beloved, one of the many implications of the things that we're seeing in all of this is that there has to be an acquaintance and a growing knowledge and understanding of the word of God and the revelation of Christ and the revelation of God the Father in order to truly pray this way, because you have to know who the Father is to rightly speak to him. You have to know that you have to come through Christ and that means that you understand something about an atonement, a blood atonement made to cover your sins. And so there is such a profound depth just in the word Father, as we read it in the, you know, as we compare Scripture with Scripture to see what it says. Yes, he's a lovely Father. He is a gracious, giving Father. But he's, there are also boundaries around him. There's a fence around this intimacy, and the gate through which you enter that intimacy is found in Christ alone. And so we start there, you must be a Christian to pray this way and as a Christian, day by day, hour by hour, over time, cultivating that awareness and sense of dependence upon the work of Christ in order to be able to pray in the way that Jesus calls us to.

Now, secondly, if you're going to seek the Father, we said that you must be a Christian. We could say, you could rephrase that first point that you must seek the Father in Christ. Seek the Father in Christ. Now, secondly, to seek the Father in prayer, there is the sense of trusting the Father's goodness. Trusting the Father's goodness. And those friends that were raised in, say, Nazarene backgrounds, constantly threatened with the loss of your salvation if you stumbled into sin, the works-based approach of Catholicism or even worse, a false religion of Mormonism or Jehovah's Witness or any of that, you know, demonically inspired stuff, it's necessary for you to meditate deeply on the aspects of this second point about the goodness of God. This is not the superficial goodness that promises men to come without repentance, that says not to worry about a blood atonement for sin. It's not that kind of goodness. That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about the revealed goodness of God in the whole context of the things that we've been speaking about this evening, about coming through the name of Christ. But for those of us now speaking to those truly in the body of Christ, truly belonging to him, when we know Christ, when we're redeemed by him, we are invited into a contemplation of the goodness of the God who saved us and, beloved, Jesus is assuming the goodness of God in this teaching that we know as the Lord's Prayer. He's assuming it. He's already stated it. It's been informed. We've already gone down the runway and were taking off into the stratosphere of the grace of true prayer, but the runway from which we took off was already laid by Christ in the things that he said earlier about prayer. Jesus pointed to the goodness of God as he spoke in just the prior couple of verses on prayer.

Look at verse 6, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." What is that except the goodness of God, God, a good Father, who will reward you for praying in this way. He sees, he knows, he cares, he loves you, and he waits to reward you for praying in the spirit that Jesus lays out here. This is nothing else than the goodness and the kindness of God that though he dwells in unapproachable light, he would listen to the humble

prayers of his humble children. The stammerings of the youngest babe in Christ are as pleasing and, shall I say, far more infinitely pleasing to God the Father than the sweetest cooing of an infant in the arms of his mother. The sounds of beginning prayer from a young Christian are more precious to God than those things are to a mother.

He rewards those who seek him. This is an evidence of his goodness and not only that, look at the end of verse 8, and let me just remind you of this. Jesus says, "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." He's not the God of deism, deism saying that God created the world, wound it up, and left it on its own, and he turned and walked away. No, God is actively involved in his creation. Psalm 23 says that, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Why? Because as David spoke to God, as he prayed to God in that, why? "Because you are with me. I fear no evil, for you are with me. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Your discipline, your provision, give me a sense of security and safety, O God." And while in Psalm 23, he's using the imagery of a shepherd to convey the care of God, beloved, he's appealing to the same underlying reality, the same infinite perfections of God, of his love and care and provision for his children so much so that a right contemplation of those things leaves David with the conclusion, "Whatever comes to me, I'm going to be, I'll be walking through life attended by the goodness and grace and kindness and mercy of God with every step that I take." Because God is good to his children. God saved us in order to bless us. And, you know, I'd like to think that among many of you, if not at least a few of you, there's just an overwhelming sense of relief, of a burden rolling off of your shoulders in light of the goodness of God toward you as a Christian that just says, "This is really sweet. This is really wonderful. This takes the pressure off of me because God is my Father, he's a good Father, and he intends me to know that, believe it, and rely upon it, and to trust in his goodness as I pray to him."

Beloved, we're not talking in what I'm about to say, we're not talking in the shallow terms without a knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ that is, you know, cheaply said in other places. We are grounding the things that we're saying tonight on the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, who offered himself as our substitute, as a priest, offered himself up as a sacrifice in order to bring us to God, to bring us to a near and close and real knowledge of God and to be brought safely into his kingdom and safely into his family. We're basing it on that. What we're saying is rooted in that, not just bypassing Christ in order to give a temporary impression. Beloved, if you are in Christ, God protects you. God knows your needs. God provides for your needs, even if it seems for a while that the clouds have hidden the sunshine of his face; behind the clouds is the ever-shining sun of the face of God upon you.

And so, beloved, when we pray, when you pray, before you utter a sound, before you move your lips at all, you just take a moment, just take a moment to take yourself into hand and remind yourself of what you're doing. "I'm going to speak to my Father. This God to whom I pray is my good Father. He will bless me as I come to him. He will hear me when I speak. He has time for me. He's called me to do this. I'm responding and I'm obeying a command of God to pour out my heart before him. That's what I'm doing." And

so you take yourself in hand, you speak to yourself almost before you speak to God, and you say to yourself, "Yes, things are pressing, things are difficult, there are many things on my heart, but I'm setting that aside, out with the doubt. My Father will hear me as I come to him and pray to him now. My Father will care about everything that I say, even if no one else cares for my soul. Even if I'm walking through this barren land alone among men and I have adversaries all about me, there is an ear to my cry that is open in heaven that bids me to come and is in no hurry as I pour out my heart before him."

That's the spirit of true prayer. That's the kind of trust that we're talking about, the spirit that says, "One way or another, all will be well with me in the end." The spirit that says, "It's well with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come. Let this blest assurance control, That Christ has regarded my helpless estate, And has shed his own blood for my soul. And on that basis, I will pray to my Father with every great confidence that he will hear me, receive me well." And not only that, I mean, you know, we could dig out and mine out other gems in this, but the Holy Spirit helps me as I pray. Jesus Christ himself is at the right hand of God, interceding for me without fail. My name is graven on his hands. He bears my name on his heart as the high priest had the 12 tribes of Israel engraved on stones on the vestment that he wore as he went into the presence of God. In a far greater way, in a perfect spiritual way, Christ has already carried me and my case and my cares into heaven and presents them on an ongoing basis. On the basis of his redeeming work on the cross, I'm already being perfectly represented in heaven. And so these biblical theological realities inform the way that we pray and lead us to, all of the richness of that leads us into the simplicity of trusting God and saying, "I can pray to him and he will hear me." And so I pray with confidence, "I rely on this. I have every confidence of this coming out well."

Now, maybe, maybe you hesitate because of some recent sin in your life. Maybe you're saying, "Yes, I believe those things about God, but there is this aspect of sin in my life." Well, let me make an assumption that you're repentant about that and that there is a genuine turning away from that sin in order to seek righteousness based on the work of Christ. Let me assume that and then have you turn to Luke chapter 15. Luke chapter 15, because this is a real matter to address. "What about that besetting sin in my life, preacher?" Well, Jesus taught a parable to help us understand the perspective of God when his repentant children come before him. I'm not going to read the whole text on the prodigal son. You know the story. Let me just remind you that the son woke up, as it were, in the pigpen and said, "I have made a mess of things. I need to go back to my father and tell him that I've sinned against him. Just receive me as one of your servants." There was a repentant spirit in his heart and so he gets up and he goes to his father, in a pattern for us who have fallen short and are conscious of sin and going to our Father and wondering how he will receive us, let the doubt be cast out of your mind from the infallible teaching of our gracious Lord. Verse 20, that dirty prodigal son, "arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." Felt compassion upon. He didn't stand and wait for the son to come and to give an account of himself with his arms folded across his chest. "What do you have to say for yourself this time? No, you spent it all, didn't you?" None of that. The compassionate spirit of the father for his son impelled the

father to run toward the son and the son said to him, "Father." You see the word father? I want you to see that over and over again. The son said to him, "Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son." He had other things that he had planned out to say, but the father interrupted. It had gone on long enough. It was time for reconciliation. It was time for blessing. It was time for an expression of pent-up love, you might say. The son had been away, and the father was not in a position to give him the immediate blessings of his immediate presence because the son had chosen to go away, but now he's come back. And what does the father do? What's the spirit of this good God of which I speak to you here tonight? The father said to his servants, verse 22, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate." Later on, he explained it to the other son. He said in verse 32, "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found." The son came to him repentant, and the father embraced him and showered blessings upon him far beyond what the son even wanted to ask. That's the goodness of your Father.

The Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins encourages us to come in the pursuit of this mercy and to trust what God will do as we do. He says, and I quote, "Is God your Father? Let this encourage you against despair under the sense of your manifold sins against him. As Father, God will certainly receive you upon your repentance and returning to him." That's the goodness of God. He hears. He knows. He answers. He gives goodly. He gives freely. He gives abundantly. He gives wisely. And even in when you are approaching him with your hands stained with the world, he receives you and restores you without rebuke but having been pleased with his Son, he's pleased to receive you as well.

What a Father. What a God. You trust his goodness as you come. You come as a Christian, you trust his goodness, thirdly, quickly, you trust also the greatness of God. You trust the greatness of God as you pray. Go back to Matthew chapter 6 and we'll wrap this up in a moment here. Matthew chapter 6. In the prior verses, the things that Jesus said and briefly alluded to underlying all of that is the majesty of the transcendence of God. He alludes to the omnipresence of God in verse 6 when he says your father who sees in secret. He sees what happens that no one else sees. Why? Because he's omnipresent. He's omniscient. We see his omniscience in verse 8, he knows what you need before you ask him. You see his omnipotence in verse 6, he will reward you. And so he sees in secret, he's with you as you pray in secret by his omnipresence. His omnipotence is ready to be unleashed because he will reward you without any restraint on him, any restraint on God to reward you as he sees fit. And his omniscience is fully engaged, knowing before you speak what it is that you need and even what it is that you're going to say.

And so when you call your Father in heaven to mind, you remember his greatness, you remember his sovereign position as Lord of the universe. And I mean to think, to contemplate a reality, the way things really, really are, that you and I, based on the person and work of Christ, could enter into the presence of God, be welcomed as we do, without

any compromise of his exceeding infinite greatness, you start to see that this matter of prayer is of unspeakable privilege and prerogative to everyone that belongs to the Lord Jesus. You remember the greatness of God, and this is no weak feminine deity that we pray to. This is the exalted Father who has authority to carry out all of his good purpose towards you and has all of the heavenly power to accomplish his desires, who invites you, who calls you, who welcomes you, who promises to answer you, and we get to speak to him? It reminds me of the writer who said, "You know, I used to wonder how much I had to pray," when he started to understand these things he said, "Now I just wonder how much time I have to reserve for other things when I can pray like this and I can spend so much time praying in this way." When you understand prayer in this way, it's not an irksome duty. It's not a checkmark on your daily task list. It's not a matter of shuffling through a mindless repetition of a prayer list before you. This is diving deep into the ocean of the revealed goodness and greatness of God, surrounded in safety by the shed blood and the person of Jesus Christ, and diving into an infinite ocean of spiritual blessing and experience.

And so seeking the Father in prayer begins with knowing him and trusting him, and you can reduce it to the simplest of terms, "My Father is good, and I trust him. My Father is great, and I bow down to him." And beloved, the wonderful thing about this, as I close, Jesus was speaking this to ordinary people in a first century audience that gathered around him. Beloved, you don't need to be a scholar to pray like this. Truth is, being a scholar probably hinders it, but that's for another time. You don't need to be a church leader to have this kind of access. This is what God promises to every true believer. The humblest believer in Christ has full access to the vault because it's premised on the goodness and the greatness and the love of God, not upon the worthiness of the one who comes. Any one of you can pray well, you who are in Christ. Any one of you can enter into the wonderful intimacy of this kind of knowledge of God in prayer, because we all have the same Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Dear Father, dear, gracious, holy God, what manner of love have you bestowed upon us that we would be called children of God? And yet we are. You who dwell in unapproachable light, whom no man can see and live, you have provided access to yourself through your Son. Lord, we, in light of all of these things, and there's no need to rehearse it all again in a closing moment like this, in light of the wonderful things that we have seen from your word about you here this evening, we just join with those disciples who asked our Lord, "Teach us to pray." Let each one under the sound of my voice, Father, grow day by day, month by month, year by year, into greater intimacy with you, that the inexpressible joy of being in Christ might be the conscious experience of each one as you bless in the days to come. Thank you for our Lord, without whom none of this would be possible, but in Christ, full access, full reconciliation to a holy God. All praise be to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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