

# Learn to Pray, Part 2

Jack Hughes

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 11, and if you don't have a Bible, you should be able to find one in the pew in front of you.

George Mueller, who was born into the home of a German tax collector, was often in trouble. Even at an early age, he learned how to steal and gamble. While a young teenager, [he] discovered how to stay in expensive hotels and sneak out without paying. At age seventeen, he was caught and thrown into jail. After spending a little time there, he was released and continued his wicked behavior. His father didn't seem to be all that discouraged about [George's] wicked behavior, but thought that it might be good [for George] to go into the ministry because ministers could make a good living.

So, for merely economical reasons, he encouraged his son to enter into the university to study to become a clergyman. Yet, when [George] was in the university, he got acquainted with some evangelical believers, and one Saturday in 1825, he met Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. Mueller [later] married and settled down in Bristol, England, growing in his faith, and increasingly having a burden for the homeless children who were running wild and ragged through the streets.

At a public meeting in Bristol on December 9, 1835, he presented a plan for an orphanage. Several contributions came in. Mueller rented Number 6 Wilson Street, and on April 11, 1836, the doors of the orphanage

were opened, and twenty-six children were immediately taken in. A second house was soon opened, and then a third.

From the beginning, Mueller refused to ask for funds or even to speak of his ministry's financial needs. He believed in praying earnestly and trusting God, who already said in His Word that He would provide what was needed.

During the course of his ninety-three years [of life], Mueller housed more than 10,000 orphans, "prayed in" millions of dollars, and recorded in his journals over 50,000 answers to prayer. One such example involves a morning when the plates, bowls, and cups were set before the orphans, [but] the problem was there was no food [or] milk. The children sat waiting for breakfast, and Mueller decided to pray for their daily bread.

A knock at the door sounded. It was the baker. "Mr. Mueller," he said, "I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast, so I got up at 2 a.m. [and] baked some fresh bread. So, here it is." A second knock sounded. The milkman had broken down right in front of the orphanage, [and] he wanted to give the children his milk so he could empty his wagon, jack it up, and repair it. So, the children ate and were satisfied, like every single other day. [In] the entire ministry of George Mueller, it didn't matter how many children were taken in, it didn't matter how many orphanages [were] started, all of them were always provided for. Finances were never discussed, and their needs were always met. Mueller never begged for money [and] he never told anybody about his financial situations. He just had faith in God and prayed.<sup>1</sup>

George Mueller was burdened for orphans. [There's a] little book [containing] some of his journal entries called *Answers to Prayer*<sup>2</sup> As you read that, you discover that George Mueller had come to a place, through a series of events, [where] God answered [Mueller's] prayers and [Mueller] made the decision in his life that he was no longer going to doubt the Lord. That was it for him. He knew God was going to provide and fulfill His

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from *On This Day*, April. 11th.

<sup>2</sup>Available at:

<http://www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Fellowship/Mueller.Answers.Prayer.text.html>

Word, [and] that was it. [Mueller] just said, “From that time on, I *never* doubted God again. I prayed in faith, and He always came through.” He refused to buy into the world’s methods of begging, writing letters, and hiring somebody to oversee [his] capital stewardship campaign. He prayed, he had faith, and God provided. God took care of George Mueller and his army of orphans—sometimes at the last minute, but He always pulled [them] through.

We live in a very affluent society and a very rich country. Most Christians in America go through life never once getting to the place where they have no other means of survival but God and God alone. We get into something that is a trial in our lives, and we just call Mom, or we call Dad, or we call [some other] relative. We just don’t get *really* desperate, and if we do, we might have to use our Visa and go into debt. (Even if we don’t need things, we use our Visa and go into debt.) Sometimes, if we’re really, really bad off, we might have to sell some of our stuff, [which is] destined to perish.

But there is this joy, this blessing [that] can only be had, and only received, when you put yourself into a situation, or God puts you into a situation, where your only means of survival is God and His miracles working in your life. Then you get to see God provide for you day by day, as He promised, and it builds your faith, it encourages you, [and] it makes you trust God more and more. Sadly, many Christians in America never experience that ever in their lives, so they never quite get to the place where they absolutely trust God for everything in their lives. After all, they’ve got their jobs, their houses, their money, their credit cards, and they are deceived into thinking that it is by their might, their industrious efforts, and their hard work that they have what they have. They [believe they] can provide for themselves; they don’t need God.

By and large, in America, the Church has forgotten the Lord. The difficult thing is not to pray when you have nothing. If some sort of economic collapse came over America, followed by a huge national earthquake, followed by a giant famine, [with a] shortage of food and water, we’d pray.

We'd pray *hard*. But the difficult thing to do is to pray when things are good, when God is blessing you, when you have an abundance, when things are just beyond what you could imagine, when you're not in debt, and your health is good, and you've got a good job, and you've got money for toys, and entertainment, and things. [That's when you need] to realize that [you] need to pray and [you] need to pray harder than [you've] ever prayed before because "to whom much is given, much is required" [see Luke 12:48].

In our society, if you're a Christian and you're a faithful person—you're not squandering everything you make on drugs, and alcohol, and worthless things—even if you're very poor, what happens? You go to the job service, [or] you hook up with welfare. Our country is a welfare state, [so, often,] the poorer you are, the better a blessing it is. I remember [that] when I was in college [and] I was working full-time and going to school full-time, I couldn't get any grants, but as soon as I quit my job, they gave me money. If you're poor, they give you money. That's how our country works. For many, their god is the government. They trust the government. They have faith in the government, [thinking that] the government will save them, the government will provide for them. The more money we have, the more difficult it becomes to trust in God because we have our money, our jobs, our things, our savings accounts, our retirement [plans], or whatever.

We know from the Word of God that God is the one who gives us the power to make wealth, that "all good gifts come down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" [see James 1:17]. As Paul asked, "What do you have that you did not receive?" [see 1 Corinthians 4:7] and the implied answer is "nothing." [In the same verse, Paul] says, "And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Calvary Bible Church, in order to be the kind of local church that God wants it to be, must become a church of prayer. If we want God's blessing, [if] we want to see and experience all that God has for us, to really use this church, we [have] to become a church of prayer. We have to go against the inclination to think that prosperity means we can forget God. This is why

we are taking some time to closely examine the Lord's Prayer, or Disciples' Prayer, found in Luke 11. We, like the disciples, need to learn *how* to pray, and [to] get into the habit of praying, and to make prayer part of our necessary lives, like food, or even more than food.

Last week, we started into Luke 11, which records the second occurrence of the Disciples' Prayer. The first one is in Matthew 6 in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, [in Luke], it's about a year later. The disciples come to Jesus, and say, "You know, we want to learn how to pray, like John taught his disciples to pray" [11:1]. They had seen Jesus off in the distance praying, and they thought, "Man, look at Him go! He is so faithful, He's so fervent, He's so regular! We want to pray like that." So they [said], "Teach us to pray."

Luke's version [of the prayer], though shorter than Matthew's, doesn't really leave anything out. Everything included in Matthew that is left out of Luke is implied in all the phrases in Luke, so Luke's [version] is just a little bit more dense. It's compact, but it's not lacking in anything.

I mentioned last week a bunch of things [that] I can't go into this morning, [so] if you weren't here last week, I'd encourage you to listen to that sermon,<sup>3</sup> and also to listen to two messages on prayer from Luke 5:16.<sup>4</sup> You can listen to them on the Web or get them from the office because I want to build in us not only the theology of prayer, but the how-to of prayer. Those previous sermons teach us about the theology of prayer—how prayer works, how prayer makes a difference, why we pray, and how a sovereign God who has already declared the end from the beginning [see Isaiah 46:10] answers prayer, and what that mean[s]. That is all covered in those previous messages. [Then] last week we looked at several things from the text [in Luke 11:1-4].

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<sup>3</sup>"Learn to Pray, Part 1," 09/16/07. Available at:

<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2007/20070916>

<sup>4</sup>"Sneak Away to Pray," 7/25/04. Available at:

<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2004/20040725>

"The Purpose and Practice of Prayer," 08/01/04. Available at:

<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2004/20040801>

I wish it weren't true, but I think Calvary Bible Church is pretty anemic in the prayer category. We have people who pray, and people who [pray] faithfully, but I think most people just pray a little bit, or rarely at all. I think even among those who are praying, and praying faithfully, few of them are really praying according to the text before us. We just pray because [it] is how, by chance, we have fallen into it. It is not purposeful prayer, or prayer directed by the Word of God. There's nothing wrong with bringing any legitimate request before the Lord. We know we are to pray about all things [see Philippians 4:6], and pray at all times [see 1 Thessalonians 5:17]. So, we pray for everything. But, the question[s are these]: Are there priorities in prayer? Are there ways we can pray that are actually sinful? If we do not pray correctly, then our prayers are worthless—they don't please God, they don't give Him glory, they are not answered. In fact, we could be sinning while praying. That's a scary thought, isn't it, to get to heaven and discover that all those prayers went in the trash?

In addition to knowing how to pray, we need to know *what* to pray. Yes, we need to pray according to God's will [see 1 John 5:14], that's clear. If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. But, since most people don't spend hours a day in prayer, are there priorities of things we should pray about? You see, if you're only going to pray, let's say, ten minutes a day, does it matter what you pray for? Does it matter to God that certain things are prayed for over others, or is all prayer the same to Him? Does it matter that the prayers of Jesus and the apostles [recorded for us] in the New Testament are primarily focused on two things—knowing the Word of God, and obeying the Word of God—when *our* prayers and our prayer sheets are primarily focused on the healing of the sick and finances? Is that OK? Does that make a difference?

If you're only going to pray ten minutes a day, does God care what you pray for? The answer is: absolutely. God is concerned with the *way* we pray and the *content* of our prayers. [The] text before us [in Luke 11] teaches us those two things. Look at Luke 11. We're just going to read the first four verses, though the first thirteen verses are all about prayer.

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.'"

Last week, we pointed out that Jesus' example teaches that we should be diligent in prayer. He was a man of prayer; we should be men and women of prayer. Jesus even got away in the middle of the night, a couple of texts say, while it was still dark. He sacrificed sleep to pray. In other instances, He chose not to minister to people with real needs in order to pray. Prayer was a priority for Jesus; it should be a priority for us. We also learned before that when Jesus had a big decision to make, like the choosing of the Twelve, He *really* prayed—all night [see Luke 5:16]. Secondly, we saw the disciples' willingness to want to learn how to pray [see Luke 11:1]. The disciples watched Jesus at a distance, watched [Him] daily engaging in fervent prayer, and they said, "I want that." The question is: Do we want that? If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you should want to learn how to pray, too. We [also] learned [last week] about [to whom] we are to pray, [which] is where we left off.

The object of prayer, or the one [to whom] we pray, is to be our heavenly Father, God. You hear people talk sometimes about [how] "there's power in prayer." Well, technically, there's not. There's power in God [to whom] we pray. You can pray to a statue and there's no power there. You can pray as an unbeliever, and there's no power there. You can pray as a believer in a way that doesn't honor God, in a sinful way, [and] there is no power there, either. So, really, it's not prayer itself that has power, but the One [to whom] we pray who is all-powerful to answer prayer. Prayer is powerful because God is all-powerful. Jesus says we are to pray to God the Father [see Luke 11:2].

There's a common question people ask at this point. I wasn't going to include this, but [then] I thought, "You know, if I don't talk about this, then all these people are going to come up afterwards [and ask about it], and then all the people who didn't come up are still going to be wondering what the answer is." [The question is] this: Can we direct our prayers to Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit, or should we always pray to the Father? Did you ever wonder about that? People are going, "Yeah, tell us about that."

When [Jesus] utter[ed] these words—this Disciples' Prayer—both in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, [it] was during the time of His humility. We need to keep this in mind: When Jesus [was] ministering on earth, He [was] a man. He [had] humbled Himself. He [was] living as a man in a sin-cursed world. We can't forget that. He came to only do His Father's will as a man. So, in order to keep linked up with His Father, so to speak, He was constantly in prayer, asking God to help Him in every part of His life and ministry, which is the model for us and what we should be doing. In becoming a man, [Jesus] laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes.

I'm trying not to confuse you here, but you've got to get this because this is critical. Jesus, in becoming a man, though fully God, chose not to exercise His divine attributes. You [ask], "Well, how does that work?" I don't know. I don't know how somebody who is everywhere present can choose not to be that, and [yet] still be that, [but let me give you an analogy that might help make it a little more clear]. Let's say you're a young man [and] it's your first year of college. Your father buys you a brand-new luxury sports car. It's washed, it's clean, and it's in the garage [with] a little soft cover over it. [Your dad] says, "Son, the car is yours, but you can't drive it whenever you want until you graduate from college. Periodically, I will come to visit you, and when I come I'll drive it and then you can drive it when I'm with you."

Well, that's kind of how it was when Jesus became a man. In becoming a man, it's like He parked all of His divine attributes in the garage, and He chose not to use them unless the Father's will said, "OK, you can do this divine thing." [As a man], He was totally subservient to the Father and

the Father's will. Having all the fullness of deity in bodily form, being the exact representation of God's nature, in all respects the one and only God, the second person of the Trinity, Jesus said, "Though I am the infinite God, I am taking the infinitude of all My attributes and parking them in the garage so that I can be a man, live among men, be tempted as men, suffer as men, die as a man so that those given to Me by My Father could be saved."

Because Jesus came to do the Father's will, He was constantly in prayer. Now, if I were to ask you, "Does God want us to do His will?" you'd say, "Oh, yeah." But what does that require? Constant prayer. Jesus came to do the Father's will, right? [Well, as a result], he was regularly, faithfully going away, sneaking away, sneaking out at night, [and] praying, praying, praying. He didn't even sin and He was praying hard, diligently, faithfully.

It is common, if you get into a discussion with a heretic who denies the deity of Christ that they throw this out: "So, you believe Jesus is God, huh?"

"Yeah."

"So, who did Jesus pray to? Was He praying to Himself? I mean, if Jesus is God and Jesus is praying to God, then He must have been praying to Himself, right?"

Wrong. They like to ask that question because most Christians don't know what to say. It's like, "I don't know. Yes. No? No? Yes? There's only one God, Jesus was God and He was praying to God, [so] then God was praying to God?" The problem is [that those who would ask that question] deny the Trinity. They deny one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity that the one true God, the only God, is a God of three distinct personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of those three persons [is] the one God. They not only have different personalities, they even have different roles and functions, [which you can see] as you trace [them] through the Bible and you look at each one. Though they are different personalities, though they have different functions within the Godhead, there is a rank of submission and not only that, each of them is, in essence, fully the one God.

If you're thinking, "How does that work?" I don't know, but that's what the Scriptures say. Jesus, in His humiliation, having parked, so to speak, His divine attributes in the garage, entered into the virgin's womb, and from that moment on was fully man and just like you and I. [He] was a human being with all of the limitations that humans have. [He was] the same as us. [He was] tempted the same as us. [He experienced] getting cold, getting hungry, getting tired, getting thirsty. [He was] just like us in all ways. If He wasn't exactly like us—fully human—then He couldn't atone for our sins because if you're going to be a substitute for a man, you have to be fully man. So, He was just like us in all respects.

In that state of humiliation, having parked His divine attributes in the garage, He prayed because He had needs, because He couldn't serve Himself—He came only to do the Father's will—and so, like us, He went to the Father, and said, "Father, help! Father, strengthen. Father, save. Father, let this cup pass from Me" [see Matthew 26:39]. He prayed, prayed, prayed (most of His prayers are not recorded) because He, being a man, had needs, and He was setting an example for us, [and] for His disciples, so that we would know, as humans, because we have so many needs, [that] we need to appeal to our heavenly Father. That is what [was] happening when Jesus pray[ed]. Jesus, who is often referred to as the second person of the Trinity, [was] praying to the first person of the Trinity in the power of the third person of the Trinity. You think, "Wow. So, in a way, God [*was*] praying to God." Yeah, in a way, [but] more specifically, [it was] the Son praying to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So what does this mean for us when we pray? It means that when we pray, we can pray to the Father, we can pray to the Son, or we can pray to the Holy Spirit because they are all the one God, and we are to pray to God. The reason we are to pray to God is [that] God is the only one who is ever-present, the only one who hears our prayers, the only one who has the power to do things about it, and the only one who, when we don't know how to pray as we should, intercedes by His Spirit so that we pray according to His will even when we don't pray according to His will.

Thomas Watson, in his work *The Lord's Prayer* wrote this:

Though the Father only be named in the Lord's prayer, yet the other two Persons are not excluded. The Father is mentioned because he is the first in order; but the Son and Holy Ghost are included because they are the same in essence. As all three Persons subsist in one Godhead, so, in our prayers, though we name but one Person, we must pray to all.<sup>5</sup>

That's how it is. So, if you want to pray to Jesus, fine. [To the] Holy Spirit? Fine. [To the] Father? Fine. So, that's how you can pray. The important thing is that you pray to God, not to a saint, not to Mary, not to statues, [or] carved images, [or] pictures hung on the wall, [or] crucifixes, [or] things like that, which just amounts to idolatry.

We learned last week that the term "Father" is a close, intimate term [that] is the equivalent of our term "Daddy" or even "Dearest Daddy." [It's] kind of a strange thing to think for the Jews at that time, who had so elevated God, so magnified God, and His transcendence, and His glory, that the average Jew pictured God as this massive, omnipotent being who is above the heavens. [They thought that] you [went] cowering to Him in fear and [did] what He [said] or you [would] get it. OK? A lot of people [today] have that same view of God, and if you're a Christian, that's the wrong view to have. The Jews would never feel comfortable speaking to God in such close, intimate terms as "Father," [or] "Daddy." That just would kind of freak them out.

It's amazing that Jesus had modeled calling God His "Father" all the time. Sure [the disciples and other Jews] had heard Jesus pray to the Father, but they [probably thought], "Well, yeah, that's easy for You to say, You're the Son of Man, You're the Son of God, You're the Messiah! Of course, You can pray to God like that, but we're just common folk!" No, [they were

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<sup>5</sup>Available at:

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/watson/prayer.iii.html>

not and] you are not, not if you're saved, you're not common folk. You're children of the King, you're sons and daughters of the King, you're not common folk. You are a "royal priesthood" [1 Peter 2:9]; you're different. You're not common folk when you're saved. Jesus was born of a virgin, and He was different, yes. Yes, He was the Son of God, and He was the Messiah, but listen, if you know Christ through faith, you are a son or a daughter of God. You are Jesus' brother or sister.

Think about that. That's who you are in Christ. That is part of the amazing thing—all believers have God Almighty as their literal Father. When [Jesus] says, "Now, when you pray, say, 'Father,'" in [Luke 11:]2, He's saying, "I am God's Son, and you are His sons and daughters through faith in Me. I have no fear in coming before My Father, and so you have no fear coming before My Father. I approach Him faithfully, regularly, without fear, and you should do the same thing because you're sons and you're daughters, too. I call Him 'Father' because He's My Father. You call Him 'Father' because He's your Father." That is a radical concept, but we've got to get that if we're going to have the closeness and intimacy in prayer that God wants us to have.

Most Christians have a very low view of themselves because of their sin. They see their sin as this big barrier between them and God. After all, we all know we're sinners. We all know our shortcomings. We all know that we fail to obey God and live up to His perfect standard. We can constantly feel downcast, [and that] we're just like the prodigal son [see Luke 14:11-32] while he was living with the pigs. But we need to make sure that we [do not] grieve as those who have no hope. While our sin should keep us humble, it should never keep us from our Father. It shouldn't cause us to forget or ignore that we are children of God by *His* choice. If you have been born again, you are a son, a daughter, of God.

You say, "Well, how does that work?" We are children of God in three basic ways. The first way is in a universal way: everybody is a child of God. You could even talk about the "universal Fatherhood of God" in that God is the creator of all men. In that way, if you are created—which you are—if

God gives you life—which He does—then He is your Father in a general way. Everybody fits under that category.

Turn to Acts 17. I just want to show you this. Paul is in the Areopagus, [which] is actually a little hill northwest of the Acropolis in Athens, preaching to the Greeks. The problem is [that] the Greeks are pagans. They're polytheistic, or they worship many gods—pagans. They're [very into] philosophizing, and the Areopagus is where they gathered together for their mental bantering and philosophical wrangling. [Now], here comes the Apostle Paul—short, maybe bald, maybe a little chubby, some Jew converted to some new religion. He has to [find a way to] connect with them, but he realizes they have a totally different worldview. If you come to people like that, and you say, “There is this God of the Hebrews,” they[‘d say], “Well, OK. We’ll add Him into the batch.” They just [didn’t] have a concept of one God.

I want you to notice here how Paul introduces these pagans, who worship many gods, to the one true God. Look at [Acts 17:]22[-23] and follow along as I read: “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship,’ a little dig there, “I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘*to an unknown God.*’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.” In other words, he says, “I’ve been going around looking at [these] statues you worship, and you know what? I saw an altar there even to an unknown god. Since you’re ignorant of who that God is, let me tell you who He is.” Verse[s] 24[-28]:

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined

their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, “For we also are His children.”

Do you see there? Paul is laying on them this whole theology of God: He is self-existent, He doesn't need anything. [Paul is] talking about what is called [God's] “aseity”—God is in control, He's sovereign, He made man, He made the nations, [and] He determines their boundaries. We're talking [about] a huge picture of the one sovereign Creator of heaven and earth. Paul says, “And even as your poet says—he got it right—we are His children.” Verse 29 [goes on]: “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.” So now he's pushing this whole idea that God is [a] universal Father to all people. Now, just stay there in Acts for a minute because I want to talk about something else, and [then] we'll get to the end of Acts 17.

So God, in one respect, is everyone's Father by mere creation. But in a [second], more specific way, God is a Father through election. God elects some—those who are saved then become His children by salvation, by spiritual birth, by being born again. If you were to read 1 John 3:9, or 4:7, or 5:1, 4, or 18, it describes believers as either being “born of God” or being “children of God” through spiritual birth. So, just as a mother would give birth to a child and that child [would then be] her child, so God, in causing us to be born again, [allows us to] become His children through spiritual birth.

[Do] you remember Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus in John 3, when [Nicodemus] snuck up to [Jesus] at night, and said, “We know that You're from God. No one could do the things that you do unless God is with him”?

Then Jesus says, “You must be born again.”

[Nicodemus says], “What, enter a second time into my mother’s womb?”

“No,” [Jesus answers], “if you aren’t born of the water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. You must be born again” [see John 3:1-21]. He tells him that because He wants him to know that, yes, God is, by creation, your Father, but if you want to have an intimate relationship with God, if you want to know God in a personal way, you must be born again.

This is what Paul drives at [in] Acts 17:30-31. After he talks about the universal fatherhood of God, now he’s going to drive to the more specific category:

Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Paul is saying this: Though He is the universal Father of all through creation, there must be repentance and faith in Jesus Christ in order for you to become His spiritual children—heirs of His, co-heirs with Jesus Christ. Finally, [third], God is the Father of believers through adoption. When we are saved, God adopts us into His family. He takes the initiative to make sinners His own children, equal to Jesus.

[You might be thinking], “That almost sounds blasphemous,” [but] turn over to Ephesians 1 [and you’ll see that it’s not]. I think these are all good things to think about because if you don’t understand the[m], you’ll have a wrong concept of God when you go to Him in prayer. You’ll think to yourself, “Oh, I’m such a worm!” You are [see Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 41:14], but you’re a *saved* worm! “Oh, but you don’t know how much I sin!” Well, do you think God doesn’t know? Do you think God said, “Oh, I wouldn’t have saved you if I knew you were going to be a sinner!” He already knows that. It’s nothing new to Him.

Look at Ephesians 1:3-5. This is just one of many examples that could be cited, but here Paul, in his opening words, says to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

God the Father, [to whom] you are to pray, took the initiative to save you, call you, choose you, and draw you to Himself. Knowing what a sinner you are, knowing how often you fall short of His glory [see Romans 3:23], He chose you because He wants to have a relationship with you.

What does all this mean? It means God loves you in a way that you can't even imagine. It means God loves you more than you can possibly even get a grip on. You see, a lot of times, we just think, "Oh, man! I just can't imagine that God would love me that way." Well, you need to, because He does. Don't think that God's mad at you. Don't be sitting there, thinking, "Oh, you don't know how much I've sinned. When I go to God in prayer, I can barely even lift my eyes to Him because I am such a worm."

Any good parent will tell you their children are sinners. Just go over to the children's building where all of those moms or dads are picking up their kids, and [ask], "Are your kids sinners?" [and] any mother will tell you that the bulk of her day is spent correcting, exhorting, admonishing, rebuking, and disciplining her little children. But, oh, she loves them. Think about that. [You can] see her there, holding them, squeezing them, and loving them and their little sticky hands, and chubby, warm bodies [even though] they're sinners—big time. Dad comes home after a long day at work, and he joins in the correcting, the instructing, the rebuking, the encouraging, and the disciplining. [But] there he is playing with them on the floor. "They're

sinners!” you say, “How could [he] enjoy them so? They’re sinners!” Yes, oh, but he loves his children, and no father and no mother would ever trade the world for one of their children.

Somebody could come, and say, “I’ll buy your children for \$1 million,” and any good husband or wife would say, “No way!”

“How about \$2 billion?”

“No!”

“I’ll give you Alaska!”

Some days you [may] think, “Well, how about a quarter?” but you love your kids. But [even so], God loves us more. He loves us more than any parent has ever loved his child. Take the best mom and the best dad who have ever lived—the most faithful, the most loving, the most committed human parents you can think of—and God loves you more than the best that humanity has to offer. He is the perfect Father. What’s amazing is [that] before the foundation of the world [see John 17:24], before the world was created, with omniscience, He knew what you were going to do, He knew all of your sin, He knew all of your sinful thoughts, your sinful deeds, your sinful actions. He knew all the sins you would commit before coming to Him, He knew all the sins you would commit after coming to Him, and He loved you while you were yet a sinner [see Romans 5:8] with the love incorruptible, and He will never forsake you, He will never leave you, He will never abandon you [see Hebrews 13:5]. Jesus says, “This is [to whom] we pray: our heavenly Father.”

Paul, in the climactic chapter in the book of Romans, asked this important question: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” [Romans 8:35]. Just think about this when you’re going to pray: “Who’s going to separate me from the love of Christ?” [Paul goes on to say]: “Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED’” [8:35-36]. He says, “Man, we’re sheep, and we are being sent out in the midst of wolves, and we are even to be slaughtered for your cause, but is that go-

ing to separate us?” He says: “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” [8:37].

I was just [talking to] one of the youth a while back, [and] I said, “You’re wearing some Nikes, huh?”

He said, “Yeah.”

“Well, in the Greek, the term ‘nike’ [means] ‘conqueror.’” Paul [takes that word and] actually invents a [new] word here. He puts on this intensive prefix “huper,” [making] “hupernike,” a “super conqueror.” We are “super conquerors” through Him who loved us. Then [Paul] goes on to say in verse[s] 38[-39]:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You have a Father to [whom you are to] pray, and man, He’s a good one. He’s the best. Jesus, in dying on the cross, paid the penalty for all your sins. He bore in His body the punishment you deserve. You have been justified, declared to be righteous, so when you approach the throne of grace, there is never any wrath toward you. God’s holy justice is never aroused by any sin you commit because all of His holy justice [was] poured out on the head of Christ when He was on the cross. Yes, He disciplines you, just like you discipline your kids. Yes, He will rebuke you through [a] preacher, a friend, reading the Scriptures, [or] a Bible study. Yes, He’s going to bring trials into your life, but those things are only there to correct you, to help you, to aid you in becoming more like His Son. After He works [on you throughout] all this life, and when you finally get to the end of your life, you’re still not going to perfect, but I’m telling you, He’s going to finish the job. When you die, you will be perfect as Christ is perfect, and you will “stand before Him blameless with great joy” [see Jude 1:24].

This is the Father [to whom] Jesus says we need to pray. But never think that your sin is going to provoke God in wrath against you. [It will] never happen. All that's taken care of. Why is your heavenly Father the best of all fathers? Thomas Watson, in his work *The Lord's Prayer*, gives this short list. [First, Watson] says: "He is the best Father because He is perfect." God never blows it. He never [says], "Oh! I'm sorry!" He never comes back, and says, "You know, I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" He never treats His children wrongly.

Second, "He is the best Father because He is the most loving." He is more loving than any [earthly] parent. No one out-loves God. Third, "He is the best Father because He can reform His children." God knows just what you need to fix you, and He will [do it]. He will perfect you until the day of Christ Jesus [see Philippians 1:6]. You will not escape. He's not going to have any rebels running around in heaven. Whatever He [doesn't] get finished on earth, He'll finish when you die, and you will be perfect—without sin, without the inclination to sin, without the desire to sin. You will be perfect because He knows how to reform His children.

Four[th]: "God is the best Father because He has more riches." That's good. [Imagine there is a] rich man [with several] sons. [The rich man] dies, and leaves his inheritance to them. One of the wicked sons gets control, and robs, and defrauds the other ones, and squanders it, or something [else] happens [to the money], and those that the father who has died wished to take care of with his inheritance [aren't taken care of]. That never happens with God. God never dies, He never grows old, He will always be there to bless those He has saved, forever and [for] eternity. His riches are unlimited, and so He gives us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [see Ephesians 1:3].

Fifth: "God is the best Father in that He is most wise." God knows best what to do in every situation in our lives. He knows what to bring into our lives, He knows what to take away from our lives, He knows what we can handle, and what we can't handle, and what we need to be what He wants us to be. He's going to get us there. Six[th]: "God is the best Father because he

never dies.” He never dies. He’s always there. He is the everlasting Father. He always lives to bless those who are His children.

When Jesus says, “When you pray, say, ‘Father,’” this is what He means and so much more. I am tempted to do another sermon on Fatherhood. I’m not going to—we’re going to move on—but I was having [a] hard time this week trying to decide what to say and what not to say.

You’ve got to get this in your mind. If you don’t know Jesus as your Savior, He’s not your Father. If you’ve never repented of your sins, been born again, if you’ve never experienced that life transformation that saving grace causes in a person’s life, God is not your Father, except in a universal, general way. [He is] not [your Father] in the way that Jesus is talking about in the prayer [in Luke 11]. You need to repent of your sin, you need to receive Jesus as John said in John 1:12-13:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

If you’ve received Christ as your Savior; if you’ve turned from your sin, and your pleasure seeking, and your own way of doing it; and you’re ready to have God control your life as your Lord, your Sovereign, your Savior; and you received Christ, you will be born again. You’ll have the best of Fathers waiting to hear from you in prayer whenever you pray.

For the rest of you who claim to know Christ, there is homework. Last week, I told you [to] try to pray [for] at least ten minutes a day. I hope you did that. You [may] think, “Well, that’s not very much,” [but] I did have a couple [of] people come up [to me], and say, “I’m not praying like I should. I’ve been trying to pray [for] ten minutes, and I’m having a hard time even praying [for] ten minutes.” Just keep it up. [Have] ten minutes of private prayer with God. Just ten minutes. Give God at least ten minutes. Develop the habit of ten minutes a day. Get up earlier, stay up later, go out to your car

at lunch, just spend ten minutes a day with your Father in prayer. Develop that habit.

[You also need to] make opportunities to pray. This is added homework. Sorry. It's going to get better. Look for ways to pray. Look for people [for whom you can] pray. You know how sometimes you see somebody and he's hurting, and you talk to him, and you try and encourage him, and you think to yourself, "I'm going to have to pray for that person," and then you forget? Well, why don't you just grab that person, and say, "Can I pray for you right now?" Pray for him in the hall, pray for him out there, pray from wherever you are—at work, at lunch, whatever. Just pray for people. Pray, pray, and pray. Get involved in corporate, community prayer. Pray to your heavenly Father. He is the best of Fathers, and He is waiting for you to pray to Him. Let's pray.

Father, we are glad that we can come before You, that we can boldly approach Your throne of grace [see Hebrews 4:16] to find help in a time of need, and boy do we need it. We need to be a church that prays. Father, even though there's some prayer going on, it's nothing like it could be. Our prosperity, in many ways, has caused us to forget You. Father, help us to learn how to pray in prosperity so that You do not have to bring trial and make us pray. Help us to be men and women of prayer who delight in entering into Your presence, knowing that even if we sin, all we have to do is confess it [and] You're faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [see 1 John 1:9]. There's never any wrath against us—there's only a loving Father waiting at the other end, waiting to hear from us. You just want to hear from us. You just want us to praise You, to thank You, to talk to You, to ask You for things so that You can then bless us. That [way] we can give You more honor and praise still. Father, help Calvary Bible Church become that kind of church for Your honor, for Your glory, and for Your praise. Amen.