

Overcoming Difficulties in Prayer

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Lord, Teach Us to Pray

Matthew 6:1-16

A few weeks ago I started a series on prayer that I am titling “Lord, Teach Us to Pray.” I have felt led for some time to teach on the subject of prayer, in part, because I am convinced that we are not very good at it here in this church. The truth is, there are very few people and very few churches that are good at praying these days. There isn’t probably one church in 100 or one Christian in 100 that you could point to and say, “You know, there is someone who really has this business of prayer down well. They have really captured the heart and essence of prayer. And have put it into practice in their life in such a way that they are mature here. They have it down. They have learned the lessons.”

In some ways, we will probably be struggling with really understanding prayer and practicing it until the day we die because prayer concerns our whole life with God. Prayer is just another way of talking about the way we think about and relate to God. And that is something that we all will be growing in for the rest of our lives.

But, we could be better at prayer than we are. Even though it is a struggle, we could be better at prayer than we are. And corporately as a church, prayer could be more a part of our various ministries than it currently is.

A few weeks ago, I talked about prayer being an easy thing, one of the simplest things in the world, really. I said that prayer was nothing other than opening the door to God. Just opening the door and letting God into our lives, our struggles, our families, our work, into our studies. And I used Revelation 3:20 for this proposition that prayer is simply opening the door to God. Revelation 3:20 is a very well known verse in the Bible. In it Jesus speaks to a church in the city of Laodocia and says, *“Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”* Prayer is opening the door to God instead of keeping God out of your life. Instead of just trying to work everything out yourself regarding your emotions, your family, your future and to strategize and plan and striving, prayer is simply saying to God, “God, I invite you into this situation. My marriage is not going very well right now, will you come in?”

“God, I am going to open the door for you to help me plan my future.”

“God, I want your direction on this relationship to mold it and direct it as you see fit.”

“I think I know what is best for my life, but the fact is, I really don’t. So, I want you in. I want your wisdom.”

“God, I am having a whale of a time dealing with this banker, this boss, this person. They are just opposing me at every turn. I invite you to come in and give me favor in their eyes.”

A few weeks ago when I started this series on prayer, I said that prayer is one of the easiest things in the world. It is simply opening the door to God. You don't need great intelligence to open a door. You don't need hundreds of lessons. You don't necessarily need to study the mystical tradition of door opening or to get a Ph.D. in the mechanics of doors. We just need to do it. We need to open the door.

By the way, this idea of prayer being door opening, or simply opening up and inviting Christ into a situation was first suggested to me years ago by a little book on prayer that I read called, *Prayer* by O. Hallesby. Of all the books on prayer that I have read, I have probably found the most benefit from Hallesby's book. He is a Norwegian and wrote the book about sixty years ago. We have some copies of it in our bookstore. But if you are looking for a book on prayer, I really can't give you a better recommendation than Hallesby's book because in many ways it has influenced my thinking for 20 years on the subject of prayer. I had it recommended to me shortly after I became a Christian, so now I can return the favor and recommend it to you.

But, you know, even though prayer is meant to be one of the easiest things in the world, just opening the door to Jesus, any of you who have tried to set aside time on a regular basis to pray would immediately say, "Rich, it is simply not that easy. I encounter all kinds of difficulties in regularly opening the door to God. First of all, I am busy. I really don't have that much time to set aside a quiet part of my day to pray. I don't know where to find those moments. From the moment I get up, my mind and my schedule are going at a 1000-RPM. The baby is crying. Lunch needs to be made. I have to get to the office really early. I have exams. Just taking time is hard."

And of course, we also live in an activist culture that believes that life is lived best when it is lived busy. The most important people are people whose day timers are the most crowded. That is the message of the 90's. Jam your life and your schedule with more and more activities and make sure that your kids live the same way. Have them play on four teams and play three instruments.

Beyond busyness and our activist culture, of course, we have a spiritual enemy, Satan, who from the moment you get up in the morning, is in your face with one design, and that is to keep you from praying. I learned a little nursery rhyme, again, back when I first became a Christian 22 years ago. It went like this:

"Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees."

Prayer puts the Christian in touch with the controlling power of the universe. Prayer puts weak little people in touch with the one whose hold sways over all events. The one who can blast through all the tactics of the enemy, all his obstacles regarding sickness, depression, psychological disorders, financial disasters, relational fracturing and accidents. Prayer puts us in touch with the one who can fend off all of Satan's fiery darts.

Now, this morning I want to deal with several difficulties that you and I commonly encounter in prayer. I will not be dealing with the issue of time or busyness, nor will I be dealing with Satan's tactics. I want to deal with the common experience of not praying because we feel like we are not getting

through to God. Many of us have given up in prayer because we just feel like our prayers just bounce off the ceiling. We feel that it really doesn't make a whole lot of difference whether we pray or not. Many of us have given up praying because we feel poorer and more spiritually spent and exhausted after we pray than before. Ever feel like that? After 20 minutes of trying to get through prayer and you feel worse not better? Prayer sometimes feels like it takes so much exertion. So much energy is spent, that it is like siphoning off the quarter of gas that is left in our gas tank. When we get up from praying, we are left running on fumes. It is dealing with those times in our lives when prayer seems burdensome, when prayer seems exhausting, and when prayer, frankly, feels entirely useless and we are not getting through and our prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling that I want to deal with today.

I have called today's talk "Overcoming Difficulties In Prayer." Let's pray.

I would like you to open your Bible, if you have one, to Matthew 6. And the text that we are going to look at really precedes one of the best-known texts in the New Testament – Jesus' teaching called the Lord's Prayer. Over the next several weeks, I am going to be taking us through the Lord's Prayer. We will try to understand it.

I want to read to you now from Matthew 6:5,

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Now, Jesus in Matthew 6 is talking about acts of righteousness. Verse 1, *"Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven."* Matthew 6 is about acts of righteousness. And Jesus breaks down that phrase, "acts of righteousness" into three activities. Giving in verse 2: *"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites do."* Giving. And praying in verse 5: *"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogue."* And fasting, verse 16: *"And when you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do."*

As Jesus describes acts of righteousness, he talks about giving, praying and fasting. In many ways, these three acts of righteousness illustrate our whole duty as Christians. Our duty to others—giving; our duty to God—praying; and, our duties to self—self-denial, fasting. So Jesus focuses outward toward others, upward toward God and inward toward self.

When he deals with the issue of praying before he tells us positively how to pray, he tells us negatively what things to avoid. He says, first of all, do not be like the hypocrites. Verse 5, *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites."* And in verse 7, *"When you pray, do not be like the pagans."* Jesus sees two negatively ways to pray that need to be avoided. First of all, don't pray like the

religious people do. Secondly, don't pray like the pagan people do. He is assuming that we are going to pray, give and fast because he says, "When you pray", "When you fast," "When you give." Not "if" you pray. But when you are involved in these activities, there are some things that you need to avoid. Don't do this and don't do that.

Now, Jesus' admonition should immediately surprise us because we think that so long as we are involved in religious activities we are on safe ground. We say, "Whew, I made it home safely. I have avoided all the barking dogs and the muggers and thieves on the street. I am in my house. I have bolted the door. Whew, I am safe. I am now involved in religion. Sin can't follow me in here. Now, I am praying. Now, I am fasting. Now, I am giving. I have triple bolted the door. I am safe from the attacks of sin. I am no longer out there partying, having sex with my girlfriend or boyfriend, or involved in this or that negative relationship. I am not stealing, lying or gossiping. I have avoided sin. I am occupied with religion now." Safe.

And Jesus takes a bucket of cold water and throws it in our face and says that even when you have triple bolted the door without giving, praying, fasting and you think you are safe, sin can come under the door and through the little cracks by your window and through the mortar between the bricks. It follows you right into the safe place of religion and, in fact, sin follows you right into the presence of God.

You know what makes prayer so difficult? Because in the very act of praying, sin clings to us so closely that it goes right with us to the very presence of God. Do you understand that even prayer is not safe from our all-pervasive sinfulness? If we were safe in prayer, if we were safe in fasting, if we were safe in giving, then Jesus would never have to say, "Oh, by the way, avoid this, avoid that when you pray." All he would say is, "When you pray, do this and this and this." It would be all positive commands. But Jesus knows that sin clings to us so closely that we drag it into religion.

Again, we think we are safe because we are involved in religious activity, because we are on the worship team. Oh, sin wouldn't be dragged onto the worship team would it? Or in children's ministry? Or in our ministry to the poor, Fruit of the Vine. We wouldn't be dragging sin to those activities, would we? And Jesus is trying to get us to see that religion forms the perfect hiding place for sin. Sin is like a coiled snake that loves the blanket, loves the cover of religion. I mean, who would ever suspect that sin, would be underneath the pious phrases, the spiritual talk, and the religious atmosphere?

You know, the truth is that some of the scariest people I have ever met are people whose conversation is loaded with spiritual talk. Some of the most frighteningly evil people that I have ever been around are people who just drip with spiritual phrases and love all the stuff of religion. On several occasions I have had women grab my hand and say some spiritual thing to me. It sent shivers up my spine because underneath, I had the intuitive sense of profound hypocrisy and hidden wickedness. Have you ever had that sense that this spiritual talking person is at bottom not a nice person?

Sin follows us into the presence of God and this shows us how desperately every one of us needs a Savior. That we are not safe anywhere. We are not even safe in prayer, in fasting or giving our money away. If there is anything that tells us how exceedingly sinful sin is, and how desperately we need a Savior, it is these texts in Matthew 6 that apart from the renewing work of God in our lives, apart from the born again experience and the power of God on a moment by moment basis to purify us, apart from the blood of Jesus Christ, we are completely hopeless. If any text indicates to all of us our need to be saved, it is these verses here. Even when we pray we are often hypocritical. Even when we pray we can be like the pagans who don't know God.

The fact is, however, that sin is difficult for us to detect. Jesus says in verse 2, *"When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets as the hypocrites to in the synagogues and on the streets to be honored by men."* Historically, they probably weren't actually announcing their giving with trumpets. But, Jesus may have actually been talking about the notion of blowing your own horn when you give. Giving so that others will see it. So that your name can be on a building at OSU or on a wing at the hospital. So that your picture can be in the Dispatch. So that you can get the "Humanitarian of the Year Award" from the local Chamber of Commerce. Religion that is done to be seen by others.

And you know, this is a subtle thing because it is not always so ostentatious as calling up the newspaper and having them photograph our giving. It is not always so obvious as getting our name on a plaque and avoiding that kind of religious show.

Sin is so much more subtle in our lives than that. I recall meeting some folks who were going to be involved in mission work in a poor country overseas and they told me that the way their mission agency worked. They weren't going to solicit for money to carry on this project. They were just going to pray and the whole mission project was going to be based on faith giving. God just answering their needs – no pledge cards, no meetings.

I thought, initially, how spiritual, how wonderful. No advertisements. Just God meeting their needs. But then I noticed that every time these folks talked with someone in the church, they told others that they were involved in mission work and they were going to be relying on God to meet their needs because they believed in faith giving.

You see how subtle this business of advertising our spirituality can be? Oh, it is even subtler than that. It is not just regarding money that we tend to focus on other people rather than on God. It is even in prayer. How many times have you prayed in a public setting and wondered to yourselves "Am I sounding okay to others in the room?" Are they "amending" my prayer? Do I sound spiritual? Do I have just the right tone of voice and am I being smooth and eloquent? Am I addressing God with all the right titles? Is it not the case that our focus in prayer is on what others think? Those of you who are on our prayer ministry team, I will tell you, so many times our prayers are nothing other than words directed to the other person, to the person we are praying for rather than to God. Our efforts are to impress, to get them to acknowledge our spirituality to control them.

And you know what makes this whole business especially difficult? Because just a few verses earlier in Matthew 5, Jesus tells us to let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our father in heaven. We are not to hide our light under a bushel, but let men see. And here he says, "Beware of practicing your acts of righteousness before men to be seen by them."

One writer shot me between the eyes when he said that most of us hide when we should shine and shine when we should hide. We are on a tightrope according to Jesus. We are not to be ashamed of Christ in the workplace or in our neighborhoods or with our families, but to let our light shine. Jesus says He is the light of the world and if you are connected with Christ, his light will shine around you. But to stay on the rope, you will want to be careful to not draw attention to yourself. To not do things in an ostentatious way. To not deliberately try to gain people's approval and their congratulations, their admiration. We are to go about just being and doing what we do as Christians without a thought given to how am I looking, how am I doing?

This is a tough thing, isn't it? In a moment we will see how we pull that off. I just want to tell you right now, how much sin clings to us with our focus on others.

And here is where we will plumb to the depth of the matter. If you still don't feel the weight of sin and how even religion doesn't keep you safe, there are some of us who would say, "I feel like I really am not focused on others when I pray in public or when I give. I am past all of that. I don't blow my own horn or advertise. In fact, I hate self-promotion. I despise hype in religion. I run in the other direction from all of that."

I tell you, you are not safe yet. You may be exactly like the Pharisee in Matt. 18 who prayed to himself. As he looked at the tax collector, the Pharisee said, "I thank God that I am not like that guy." You are sitting there saying, "I thank God that I don't trumpet my righteousness. That I don't advertise my giving. I give in cash. I never give with a check so that others may know what I give. I refuse to give that way. I never pray in public. I only pray in my room and in secret." And all the while you are patting yourself on the back and all your self-congratulations are themselves sin. Your reviewing in your heart your acts of righteousness and storing it up, bolstering your self-esteem and confidence. You are saying: Look at me, I finally have my quiet time down. I am not advertising it, but isn't this great?

Jesus says in verse 3 when you give to the needy do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Not only don't do your acts of righteousness in front of men to be seen by them, but don't do it in front of yourself. When you pray, when you give, when you fast, our focus is to be entirely away from thinking about others and it is to be entirely away from reflecting on ourselves. We are to have such a self-forgetful attitude that we are not measuring it, we are not scoring it.

The perfect illustration of this in the Bible is the story of the sheep and the goats that Jesus told is portraying judgment day and he says that on the day of judgment some people will be told, "You fed me and you visited me and you

clothed me and you cared for me” and these folks response will be, “Lord, when did we do any of that?” And Jesus’ whole point in the story is that these folks have such a quality of self-forgetfulness, they do so little reflection on all of their good deeds, that God’s reward is going to come to them like a giant surprise. They are going to say, “When did any of this happen? We don’t even remember those prayers. We don’t remember that giving.” It comes as a complete shock to us. How few of us can say we don’t reflect on our goodness?

You say, “How do I escape this pervasive preoccupation with what others think?” And even more closely, what we think about ourselves—how do we escape?

Jesus tells two ways to purify our hearts. First of all, be completely preoccupied with God who sees. And secondly, focus on God’s reward. These two things will purify your heart. Be completely absorbed with God who sees you and focus on his reward. Jesus says, “When you pray go into your room and close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward.”

What is it then that purifies us? First of all, our focus must be entirely on the one to who prayer is offered rather than on ourselves or on others. We go to prayer to focus on Jesus, to focus on our Father, not to reflect on our capacities, and ourselves our sin, our ability. You go to prayer to focus on God. He is almighty; he has all power; he can do anything; he knows the future.

And it is very purifying to remember that God sees us—which I am going to pick up in a moment as we consider hypocrisy. We are going before one who sees the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Who can see through our religious masks? Who is not impressed by the form of our words or our phrasing or our tone? He sees into us.

I don’t know about you, but there are not a whole lot of things that are more purifying for me than the thought that God sees me, my inner me. God sees me when I am alone. God sees me to the point of being able to see the meditations and the ruminations of my heart. He sees it all. He is aware of it all. He takes notice of it all.

And the second thing that purifies us is the notion that our Father who sees us in secret will reward us. God sees us, but then there is a purifying thought of standing before God in judgment one day for rewards.

Christian, you need to hear this. Judgment in terms of salvation is past tense if you have accepted Christ as your Savior, received his free offer of salvation. Judgment in terms of heaven and hell is past tense. We are not facing God in judgment whether we go to heaven or hell. Whoever has believed in Jesus Christ has eternal life—period.

But we will face a judgment, Christian, we will face a judgment in terms of reward. And I don’t know about you, but it purifies me, it gets me to think about something more than how I am immediately being gratified by the adulation and praise of others or by myself, to think about eternal reward. And it scares the wits out of me, and it should scare the wits out of you, to hear Jesus say, “I am sorry, you have already had your reward.” I imagine myself being able to take a glimpse at my bank account in heaven right now. I imagine you being able to

open up your bankbook in heaven right now, looking at the account balance in your bankbook. The thing that scares me and I think that thing that should scare you is looking at our bank books and seeing 0 next to our names—absolutely nothing. You have had your reward.

Psalm 17:14 says: *“Lord, deliver me from wicked men whose reward is in this life. Jesus says, “Do not be like the hypocrites when you pray.”*

Do you ever feel like heaven is shut and that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and that you are just not breaking through? Why is that? Why do I feel like that sometimes?

Because we pray as the hypocrites do. Do you know what it means to pray hypocritically? It means that our words don't line up with our inner beings. That God who sees everything takes note of the fact that we are not what we seem. It is not the prayer of the mouth that God answers, but the prayer of the heart. God wants reality and truth.

Let me suggest a few things real quickly. Heaven is shut when we haven't dealt with hidden sin. Here are some verses for you to look at in your own time, alone with God.

Psalm 66:18 says: *“If I have cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”*

Isaiah 59:1-2 says: *“Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he will not hear.”*

Sin does not destroy your salvation, but sin absolutely does break our sweet fellowship with God. When we have hidden sin in our lives, we are no longer walking in the light. I don't believe God requires sinless perfection in order for us to pray, but I do believe that God wants us to stop playing pretend with him and to deal with an offense through confession and repentance.

I mean, if I went over to my neighbor's house and he was looking out the window and he saw me coming obviously wanting something from him. And on my way toward his house, I push one of his kids off their bike and had my dog mess on his lawn and stepped on his newly planted flowers, and then I came up to him and said, “Neighbor, could I borrow your ladder?” My neighbor rightly would say, “Well, Rich, we have some things to clear up before you ask me for a favor.”

And that is what God says to us when we have sin in our lives. Let's deal with that. Let's deal with that offense, and then you can ask me for something. Otherwise, you are being hypocritical.

God also wants us to deal with breaches in our relationships. The Bible directly tells us why heaven is shut to us at times. It is due to breaches in our relationships with each other. This is particularly so in our marriages. 1 Peter 3:7 says: *“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you in the gracious gift of life so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”*

That word “hinder” is a military metaphor. It means to have obstacles thrown in the way of an advancing army. To have an advancing army's path cut into, cut off, so that you can't break through. It is a very vivid picture of not being

able to break through in prayer. Husbands, and I believe the same thing applies to wives, you are not only joined at the hip with your spouse, you are not only one flesh with your spouse, and you are one spirit with your spouse. And to be in an unreconciled place with your spouse, to be unwilling to forgive or unwilling to acknowledge fault and to ask forgiveness, is to throw obstacles in the way of your prayers. God wants reality when we approach him. He wants us to stop playing pretend.

And so if you got in a fight as we sometimes do on our way to church, [that hurts for some of you this evening [morning] doesn't it?] but if you get in a fight, don't come in here and lift your hands up until you have turned to your spouse and said, "I am sorry. I want to clean this up. Let's deal with this."

A few of you, of course, are in the position of wanting to be reconciled, wanting to make things right, but having spouses who will not reconcile. And I think the word of comfort for you, friend, is in so far as it rests on you, you be at peace. Romans 12:18: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* Sometimes someone won't make peace with us. We have tried. But you have a reconciling spirit.

And of course, healing breaches in our relationship not only applies to our spouse before we go to God in prayer, but it also applies to each other in the church. It was Jesus who said just a few verses before this exhortation about hypocrisy, it was Jesus who said in Matthew 5:23: *"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift and go be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift."*

Now, we need to be careful. I am going to preach on this at much greater length in just a few weeks, our reconciliation with each other. I would say, just by way of caution so that we don't have a thousand people running to each other confessing things that they ought not to confess, stuff that is just between you and God, thoughts that you have are dealt with just between you and God. You don't go to another Christian and tell them something like: "You know, I never have really liked you. I've always had bad thoughts towards you and hated you in my heart. I have been praying about it and now you are okay. I just wanted you to know that."

"I have always had a hard time with you and the way you are, but I am dealing with it."

This business of leaving your gift at the altar and going and speaking to your brother, has to do with something that you know that they have against you. You have done something wrong and you need to clear it up. Or they have done something wrong to you. We don't tell people our private thoughts we deal with when we've sinned or been sinned against. You need to be reconciled before you come and sing and worship and carry on in prayer before God. It is a sham when we are not at peace with our brother and sister.

I think about it this way. The church in the Bible is called the bride of Christ. And there are so many people who love Jesus but they hate the church. They love Jesus but they hate his wife. Now, I tell you something, if you said something in my hearing against my wife, you are not going to get to first base with me unless you first clear up what you said about my wife. If you have done

something to my wife, you better believe that we are not going to have a good relationship until you deal with your sin against my wife.

And when we sin against the church, have a bad attitude or a relational problem with someone who Jesus says: “That’s my bride, we are not going to get very far with Jesus until we clear up the matter with his bride.”

A third area of hypocrisy, of course, is stinginess in giving. We want God to open his hand liberally to us while we close our hand to others. Proverbs 21:13 says: “If a man shuts his ears to the cries of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.” God says: You want me to give to you, then you be a giver.

Do you know how seriously we take the business of financial giving in this church? You cannot be a leader here unless you tithe. And I mean a full 10% of your income. And if you are a leader and you are not tithing, then one of our pastors has failed to talk with you. Because being a giver is such a basic part of spiritual maturity that you cannot call yourself mature without substantial financial giving any more than you can call yourself mature without prayer or Bible study or worship. The fact is God is a giver and he wants us to be givers. So we are hypocritical in praying if we are not financially giving.

Jesus says: Don’t be like the pagans. Verse 7: *“When you pray do not keep on babbling like that pagans for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

In terms of being like the pagans, the Greeks piled up as many titles for their gods and goddesses as possible to secure his or her attention. We pray to you, the almighty, great, benevolent, wonderful, powerful, holy, wise—they would go through a string of adjectives in order to flatter their gods and goddesses into giving them what they wanted. And typically, in Greek prayers, they would remind the gods and goddesses of favors that had been done by the prayers, sacrifices offered, all designed to get a response. Jesus is basically saying: Listen, when you are praying, this is not a business partnership where you offer something to God and God, therefore, gives you something back. You are not approaching your boss in heaven. You are approaching your Father in heaven. He is not a customer that you are trying to sell an account to or persuade to buy your product. You are not approaching an employer saying here is what I can do for your company if you give me a job.

Your relationship with God is not an arm’s length, contractual relationship at all. It is a relationship of intimacy. Between Father and child. You don’t have to flatter God into giving you something. You don’t have to persuade him into giving you something.

You know the problem of pagan prayer? The problem of pagan prayer is that they have too low a view of God and too high a view of themselves. The pagans approach God and they say: Somehow I have to pry something out of God’s hand, but he is not really willing to give it to me, so I need a lever, some mechanism, some tool to pull this out of his hand. I will butter him up. I will flatter him. I will say lots of nice things before him and worship him for a while and maybe I will go on a pilgrimage and crawl there on my knees. I will change

my tone of voice. I will throw dirt on my face. I will use a lot of emotion and enthusiasm in my prayers. I will get his attention somehow.

Jesus says that you don't have to try to get God's attention. He knows what you need before you ask him. You have too low a view of God. He is your Father. He is willing to give you what you need. God does not have to be persuaded. God does not have to be informed as if he is ignorant of your situation. He just needs to be asked. You have too low a view of God and too high a view of self, pagan.

Well, if I could just build myself up then God would give me what I need. If I could just stir up faith. Make my little faith seem bigger, then God would see something in me. If I could just humble myself low enough, God would see something in me and he would have to give me a new job. He would have to open a door to ministry. He would have to bless me financially or give me a spouse.

Prayer is not pulling something out of God's tight-fisted hands. See, God knows what we need before we ask.

So what is the struggle with prayer? The struggle is not inclining God to give us something. The struggle is with God maneuvering us to a place where we can receive from him. Much of prayer is I don't realize that my hands are closed to God. I don't realize that there are things in my life that keep me from being able to get from God and receive from God. The wrestling match that we engage in with God is not me trying to overcome him and bend his arm behind his back until he says "Uncle!" The wrestling match of prayer is that God often must remove something from our lives before he can fill us with awesome prayers.

Friends, the difficulty in prayer is that the door is bolted. But it is not on God's side, it is on our side. And we need to learn how to open the door to God.