

A COURSE IN PRAYER

TAZEWELL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Part One

Desiring Prayer

The Necessity of Prayer
The Greatness of Prayer

Part Two

Understanding Prayer

What is Prayer?
Conversing with God
Encountering God

Part Three

Learning Prayer

Letters on Prayer
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Part Four

Deepening Prayer

As Conversation: Meditating on God's Word
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Part Five

Doing Prayer

Awe: Praising God's Glory
Intimacy: Finding God's Grace
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Practice: Daily Prayer

Part Two

Understanding Prayer

What Is Prayer?
Conversing with God
Encountering God



1. What Is Prayer?



George Herbert's Prayer (I)

**PRAYER the Churches banquet, Angels age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;**

**Engine against th' Almightye, sinner's towre,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six daies world-transposing in an houre,
A kinde of tune, which all things heare and fear;**

**Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted Manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,**

**Church-bels beyond the stars heard, the souls bloud,
The land of spices, something understood.**



*Are the innumerable forms of prayer in the world
all at heart the same?*

*If not, do we say some are “righter” than others?
How so?*

- *A Global Phenomenon:*

- monotheistic religions

- Muslims (5 times a day)

- Jews (3 times a day)

- Christians (common prayer, private prayer, pastoral prayer)

- other religions

- Buddhist prayer wheels

- Hindu prayer to any of several gods, ultimate goal is union with the Supreme Being, Brahman, and escape from the cycles of reincarnation

- Native American peoples (prayer flags; through singing)

- nonreligious people

- 2004 study found nearly 30 % of atheists pray “sometimes”

- another study found that 17% of nonbelievers pray regularly

DOES EVERYONE PRAY?

NO.

Though prayer is not literally a universal phenomenon, it is a global one

- All cultures
- Overwhelming majority of people at some point in their lives



- There has always been some form of attempt to “communicate between human and divine realms.”

- There seems to be a human instinct for prayer. Swiss Theologian Karl Barth calls it our “incurable God-sickness.”



- To say prayer is nearly universal does not however mean that all prayer is the same.



• “Types” of Prayer

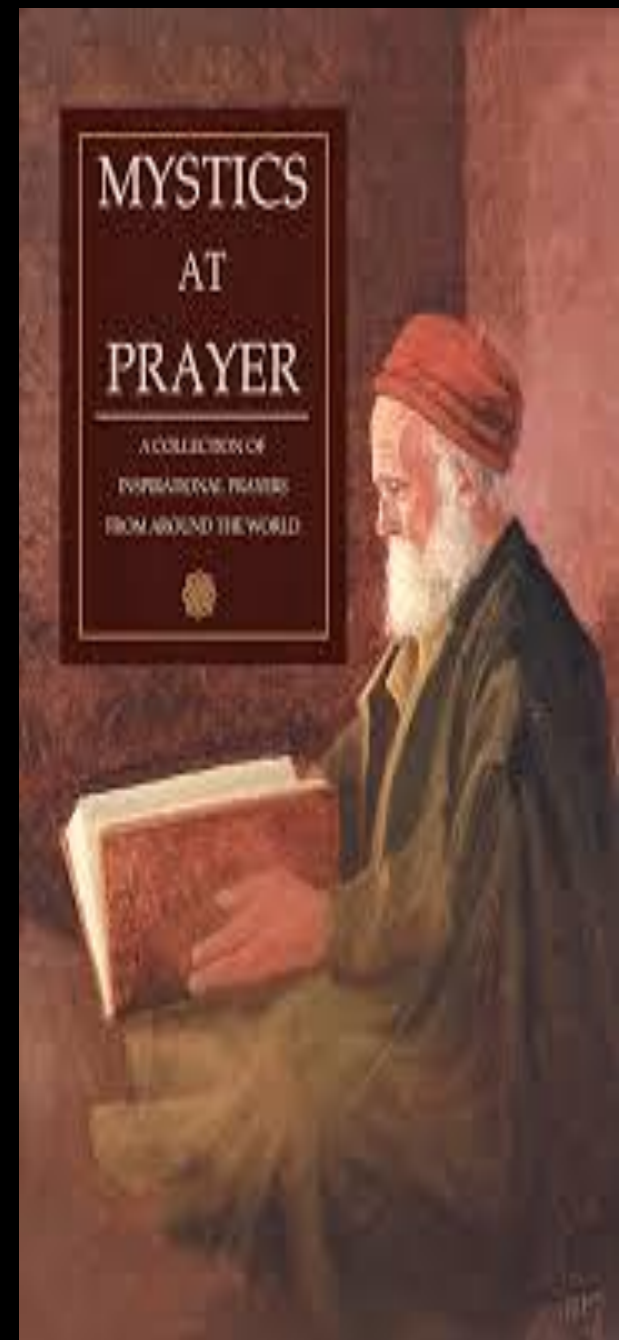
• “mystical” prayer

- inwardly focused
- emphasizes God as more immanent than transcendent (i.e. God is within us and within all things)
- (the main way to connect to God is to go down into yourself and sense your continuity/ oneness with the divine)

• “prophetic” prayer

- outwardly focused
- God is outside us, transcendent above us, holy, glorious, and “Other”
- grace opens the way to nearness/intimacy with God

• the “mystical prophetic”



An Instinct, a Gift

- *“the image of God”* (Gen. 1:26-27)

- designed to reflect and relate to God*

- *instinctive prayer*

- “the indelible sense that we need something or someone who is on a higher plane infinitely greater than we are. Prayer is seeking to respond and connect to that being and reality, even if it is no more than calling out into the air for help.” --- Timothy Keller*

- *“divinitatis sensum”* (John Calvin, 16th cent.)



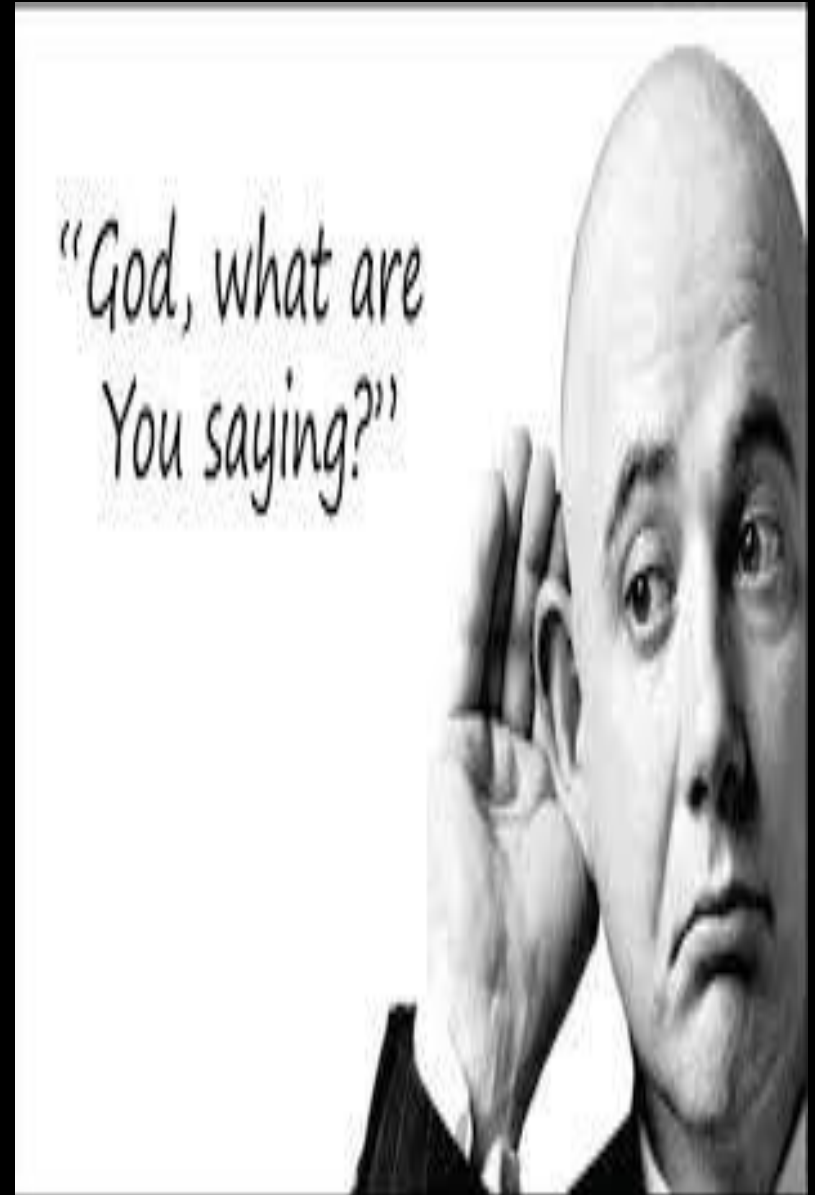
While everyone may have a *sensus divinitatis*, Calvin observed that we all refashion that sense of deity to fit our own interests and desires unless through the Spirit and the Scripture our view of God is corrected and clarified.



“A Conversation, an Encounter”

Through *Word* and *Spirit*,
prayer becomes
answering God ---
a full conversation.

- God is the initiator
- “hearing” precedes “asking”



What do you think?

“All prayers are not alike or equally effective in relating to God. The clearer our understanding of who God, the better our prayers.”



“Listening and Answering”



Listening well and answering well is one of the greatest perfections that can be obtained in conversation.

~ Francois de La Rochefoucauld

2. Conversing with God



“Prayer is both an instinct and a spiritual gift.

As an instinct, prayer is a response to our innate but fragmentary knowledge of God. It is like a note in a bottle to “whatever gods there be.”

As a gift of the Spirit, however, prayer becomes the continuation of a conversation God has started. If that conversation proceeds, as in the best conversations, praying becomes meeting with God --- heaven in the ordinary.”

-Timothy Keller

Meeting a Personal God through the Word

- a biblical pattern entails meditating on the words of Scripture
- prayer through immersion in the Word
- the “*previousness*” of God’s speech to our prayers
- Verbal and Varied Prayer as Response



“Finding the Heart to Pray”

- David’s desire to build a temple for God
- God: “No, I will build *you* a house.”
- David responds, “Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you”

-2 Samuel 7:27

The Hebrew text literally says that God’s Word enabled David to **“find the heart”** [*Hebrew leb*] to pray this prayer to you.”



The principle:
God speaks to us
in his Word, and
we respond in
prayer, entering
into the divine
conversation, into
communion with
God.

3. Encountering God



GOD
ENCOUNTER

Whom We Encounter: *A Tri-Personal God*

Matthew 28:19

*‘in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit’*

-- not “in the names”

*--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all
have a single name*

*A “name” in biblical times
denoted the very nature and
being of a person*



Implications :

***(1) Within God there exists perfect friendship.
So God created us (not to get love/ relationship) but to share it.***

(2) Prayer is our way of entering into God's own happiness/life.

(3) Whom We Encounter :

“Our Heavenly Father”

“The Spirit of Adoption”

“The Mediator”

Prayer in Jesus' Name

Should I pray in

JESUS
name ?

Knowing God for Who God Is

-instead of for what I can “get”



Peace on the
outside comes
from knowing
God on
the inside.

BibleGodQuotes.com

The Cost of Prayer



**A sacrifice to be real
must cost, must hurt,
must empty ourselves.**

**The fruit of silence is prayer,
the fruit of prayer is faith,**

**the fruit of faith is love,
the fruit of love is service,
the fruit of service is peace.**

**Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta
Roman Catholic Nun of Charity and Love**

**The reason so many
people do not pray is
because of its cost.
The cost is not so
much in the sweat of
agonizing supplication
as in the daily fidelity
to the life of prayer.**

Samuel Chadwick