



Prayer (Part 1) – A Call to Prayer

Mason King – January 4, 2015

Good morning. If you have a Bible, if you would, please turn to Luke 11. If you don't have a Bible, in the seatback in front of you, there should be a Bible. You can take that. That's our gift to you. As you're turning to Luke 11, my name is Mason King. I'm one of the pastors here. It's good to see you. Happy New Year. If you're new to The Village or have been here for a while, you may not be aware of kind of a rhythm we have throughout the year.

This time of the year, everyone is talking about rhythm because it has been the holidays. Everybody is ready to get back to work. No? Okay. Ready for a few more weeks off. A rhythm we have here... If you're a Home Group leader, you know that in July, we kind of take the month off. We say, "Take a break." We come back in August and start our fall series. The fall series is 12 weeks long. It takes us kind of up through the fall through Thanksgiving.

This last fall, we did *A Beautiful Design*. We talked about manhood and womanhood. After Thanksgiving comes... We just did it guys. Advent. After Thanksgiving comes Advent where we spend a month as a church coming together and intentionally thinking about the incarnation, thinking about what it means that Christ was foretold, that he came, and as Christians, we know he is coming again.

Then New Year's comes, and we begin the new year with a month of prayer. We head into each new year knowing we're going to spend the month of January praying together. We know we're going to pray about three specific topics. We're not surprised about, "Hey, what are we going to do this spring?" or, "What are we going to do in January?" We're going to pray. We're going to pray together as a church.

After this month, we'll head in, and Lent will run concurrently along with the spring series, which will be the book of James. Then we'll had back into the summer. That's our rhythm here in the year. Now, the three topics we pray about are racial reconciliation, we pray about the nations, and we

pray about the right to life or the sanctity of life. Those are the three things we believe are close to God's heart, should be close to the hearts of God's people.

We want to pray about them together, and we'll be preaching on them, spending concerted time praying, thinking through, speaking about them this month. We talk about racial reconciliation because we believe that with the implications of the gospel, there is one race, those in Christ. You're in Christ or you're in Adam. We say within the body, you're in Christ.

Where people have been separated, where they have been divided, they've been brought together under the blood of Christ. We want to celebrate the rich creativity and diversity and unity of God's people. It's not just a cultural hot topic for us. This is the body of Christ. You who were not a people have been made a people. There is no distinction among us within the body under Jesus.

Then we talk about the nations, where we want to push forth the Great Commission, that the gospel might go out to the ends of the earth. You hear of courses like *Perspectives* where people go and learn about what God is doing all over the world. We want to encourage people to say, "Hey, maybe the Lord is calling you, sending you out."

If you look on the wall out there, we have a map with about 14 to 16 people in different countries, families, couples, individuals, different countries all over the world, places we can talk about and then places we can't. Numerous people aren't on that board because we have to protect them for where they are, but God has raised them up and sent them out.

We want to be about the nations, and we want to have a tenderness to the fact that there are people who do not know Jesus in Southeast Asia, in parts of Africa. We want to be tender to the fact that there are people who don't know Jesus who are in the cubicle next to us, in the house next to us, the neighbors we haven't gotten to know yet.

It can be really easy to get insulated to the fact that there are people dying without hope because you're not on the mission field. We don't want to forget that they're our neighbors, people we grew up with, people we work with. We are a nation. The call is to all nations. We preach about going to the nations. Then we preach about the right to life, the sanctity of human life.

We want to pray about this because in a culture that devalues life, we look and know God is the Creator of life, and specifically with human life, he has made mankind in his image. Therefore,

human life matters from the embryo upon conception to the dying breath in old age. We want to champion human life. This is what we're talking about for the month of January.

We'll be talking through these things, preaching through them, praying through them together as a body. We know we pray all year long. It's not like we fast from prayer from February to December and come back in January, but we think a right way to begin the new year is to pray together. You think about Christmas. You think about New Year's. You get through Advent, and New Year's comes, and you think, "Oh, a new year. Let's make our resolutions."

Everybody has made resolutions, right? I was watching Pooh Bear with my daughter, and Christopher Robin tells Pooh that New Year's resolutions are where everybody gets a chance to be a better you. This is what we're doing. "I'm going to be a better X, Y, or Z. I'm going to read more. I'm going to pray more. I'm going to diet this time. I'm going to exercise. I'm going to get out of bed. I'm going to work harder." That's most of us just trying to be a better us.

What I want to contend is that we begin the new year as Christians, not putting a bookend on 2014 and then trying to gird up our independence and self-reliance moving into 2015, but we come humbly into the year dependent on God, and we pray, and we plead for him to move in his world about things we know are near to his heart, and then to help us in our own lives.

This is our life. This is what we do as Christians. We pray before him, and we want to begin time thinking, "Hey, I'm not just going to be a better me, but hey, God, what do you want from me? How can I be more near you? What do you want for your world?"

As we get started this morning, I want us to pray together before we dive into Luke 11, and we're going to pray a prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer*. It's about 400 years old, and it is a collect for this Sunday, the first Sunday of the year, the first Sunday of Epiphany. I'm going to put it on the screen, and we're going to pray it together just out loud, and then I'll pray for us again, and we'll get started. Okay?

"O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen."

Heavenly Father, as we dive into Luke 11 this morning talking about the topic of prayer, would you give grace? Even in this text, I ask now that you would give the good gift of yourself, that you would give the Holy Spirit to us as we think upon your Word, as we look and respond. Would you be with us? I ask because of Christ and his name, amen.

In the last year or so, I've been trying to understand prayer, mostly coming from a deficit of feeling like I'm not really good at it. I don't know if anybody can relate. I feel like I struggle with it. It's kind of awkward for me. I want, and I know I should pray more, and there should be more to my prayer, but I really wrestle with what to do.

It has been a hard place for me. I feel like it has been a dry spot in my life for the last year, of wanting to have more of a sense of who God is in time with him. I've been reading. I've read two books this year that were really helpful for me, and I wanted to recommend them to you guys this morning. One of them is by a guy named Paul Miller. It's called *A Praying Life*. It's a really good book. It's very helpful. The other is Timothy Keller's new book *Prayer*.

Now, I quoted Dr. Keller's book a few weeks ago in service. I'll use one of those quotes again today. I actually finished it last week. My wife Carly and I were on the way back from Houston after Christmas on Wednesday, and Anthony called me and said, "Hey, can you preach this weekend? It's on prayer." I said, "Let me call you back."

Carly and I began to talk. I said, "It's going to change the next three days, but I feel like what this is is a gift from the Lord to really try and anchor some things in my heart, some things I've been reading and feeling and going through," and it's a blessing and an opportunity to share with you. I'm under no misconception that I have this nailed down. To me, this is like standing on the edge of an ocean with people behind me trying to describe what is in front of me down to its depth.

That is the mystery of commuting to God in prayer. Today, we will talk about some general things in prayer, some characteristics of prayer, and some things that keep us from it, but there is much to learn. I know I'm a young man. There is much to learn over a lifetime pursuit of God through prayer. Over the last year, there have been a few texts I've come back to.

Our text for today is one I've come back to time and again where I've had to wrestle with my own cynicism, my own doubt with God, that he cares over the minutia of my life. I think he cares about the big things, but when it gets down to particulars of my life, I begin to doubt really quickly, and I

become really cynical. "No one could care that much. It's just me here going through this." I begin to doubt and distrust his goodness toward me in Christ. Time and again, I've come back to Luke 11:11-13. The Lord Jesus says:

"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

A couple of presuppositions and a couple of disclaimers before we get too deep. Like I said, this feels like an ocean. Today, I want to focus on characteristics of prayer in the heart of the Christian, more motive than action. I'm not going to prescribe a bunch of things for you to do so you can go nail down your resolution. Everybody is primed at this time of the year. If I gave you a list of stuff to do, you would kill it for three weeks. In February, we would just be struggling.

There are a few points I want to clarify. For the Christian, as a believer in Christ, we acknowledge that we are not the center of our lives or of anyone else's. God is the center of everything. That means there is a God, and we're not him, and he has made himself known to us through the Bible, through the prophets and the Old Testament, and then fully in his Son, Jesus Christ.

This is the Son who, in Hebrews, it says is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. Now, Christians believe God hears our prayers and wants to talk with us because when he looks at us, he sees the Son he loves, Jesus. Because of this, we can trust that God is for us and hears our prayers, even when we feel like they're hitting the ceiling. Those in Christ are God's children, and the Holy Spirit lives in them.

For the non-Christian, if you believe in a god, or you may pray from time to time when things are really desperate or scary, or you are of another faith, you need to know that what we're talking about today, the fact that God wants to talk to us and hears our prayers, is only because of Jesus. There is no way around him. Outside of Christ, you are under God's judgment with no cover and no hope of rescue. You can't help, and you can't rescue yourself. That's the nature of being in need.

The good news is that you can believe in Christ and who he is and what he has done for you. If you trust him with all you are, you know he has rescued and redeemed his people from sin and death. The Bible says if you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that he is Lord, then you

become a child of God. What we're talking about today is how to grow in our relationship with God as one of his children.

My daughter, Piper... (For you readers out there, not after Pastor John, just Piper. We just liked the name.) My daughter is just less than 2 years old. Right now, our conversations aren't really in-depth. It's a whole lot of, "Put that down. Sit down. Don't touch that. Come here. Don't throw your bowl." That's what we're dealing with right now, trying to help her understand the world around her.

I'll tell you what, man. My delight in her, even without getting to have a long conversation with her or know what she's thinking... I could not delight more fully in my daughter. She is and will always be my little girl. She is precious and near to my heart. I tell you I long for the day when I know what is going on behind those blue eyes. I just want to know. I want to know what she's thinking and how she sees the world and what kind of spirit the Lord has put in her, how she responds to God and to the world when it presses in on her. I want to know, and I want to be there for it.

Our prayer lives begin much like this, with learning to speak and learning how to act and understand the world as God designed it, but they're also meant to grow into a beautiful and deep relationship with God, a God who is all-knowing and all-present. We spend time with him in prayer. That means it's important that we talk about and practice prayer, both as we just did corporately as a body and then individually in secret.

I want to give you just a simple definition of prayer as we get started this morning. Prayer is a response to God. It's to look at God and respond to him, to see his self-revelations in the Scriptures and respond. It's to look at God in his beauty and respond to his beauty, his God-ness. It's to know he is present and near because of Christ, to know he is immanent. He is close. He is here for us in Christ. He is transcendent. He is beautiful and worthy of all and holy and righteous. It is to be near to him. Prayer is the daily lifeblood of a Christian who is walking in relationship with Christ.

Three characteristics of prayer. In prayer, we respond to God because he's already speaking. Our speech is always secondary to God's. Pastor and author Eugene Peterson puts it like this. He says, "Language is spoken into us. We learn language only as we are spoken to. We are plunged at birth into a sea of language. Then slowly, syllable by syllable, we acquire the capacity to answer. 'Mama. Papa. Bottle. Blanket. Yes. No.' Not one of these was a first word. All speech is answering speech. We were all spoken to before we spoke."

He goes on to say, "The massive, overwhelming previousness of God's speech to our prayers, however obvious it is in Scripture, is not immediately obvious to us, simply because we are so much more aware of ourselves than we are of God. We are far more self-conscious than God-conscious and so when we pray, what we are ordinarily conscious of is we are getting in the first word with God, but our consciousness lies.

So it requires effort—repeated, imaginative, biblically-shaped effort—to acquire and maintain our awareness of this unqualified, thoroughgoing previousness of God's speech to anything and everything that comes out of our mouths." We then see that our time in Scriptures is listening to God and looking at what he said. We read the Scriptures until our hearts respond to God's revelation of himself, of who he is. The Scriptures inform our prayers.

I'll put it in another way. Tim Keller, in his book on prayer, says our prayer is profoundly altered by the amount and accuracy of our knowledge of Scripture. We should listen to what he said before we open our mouths and assume we get the first word. We respond to God, and we become our real selves by spending time before who he is.

Nearness to God helps us keep the scales off of our eyes, doesn't it? It's hard to forget our weakness, our ability to make anything into an idol. It's hard to become apathetic to the character and things of God when there is a healthy awe of who he is. It comes from being with him. It's also hard to forget who we are called to in Christ when we're seeing clearly. Being near God shows us who we are in light of who he is.

Think about it. Are you anxious? Do you worry over the things in your life and try to control them? Hear the Lord's words in Matthew 6. **"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"** Are you beginning the new year tired from what feels like an unending battle with your flesh, with your sin? Hear the apostle Paul in Romans 7.

"So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Do you forget the hope in you and the hope ahead of you? See, we pray not just to remember our need, not just to be sobered, but we pray to remember who we are becoming and to delight in who we have been called to, which is the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Colossians 1. **"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."** Second Corinthians 3. **"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."**

Then in chapter 4, he says, **"...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [...] For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God..."** Where? **"...in the face of Jesus Christ."** See, we come to Scripture to see God and to respond to him in prayer. Here, we become our true selves. We become our true selves with him.

When we are sobered from self-centeredness, self-justification, and our pride, we remember ourselves and our place before God as his child. In this relationship, we become who we really are in greater degrees. As the text says, from one degree of glory to another. In prayer, we respond to God because he is already speaking. In prayer, we become our true selves, changed in light of who he is. In prayer, we experience God's beauty through Christ.

One of my favorite pastors in history is Jonathan Edwards. He wrote a sermon which I would really recommend you read called *A Divine Supernatural Light*. It's a beautiful sermon, and it's well worth your time. In this sermon, Edwards talks about the experience of regeneration, of coming to faith in Christ. I just want you to read this. It's so good. Here it is on the screen.

He says, "There's a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious and having a sense of the lovingness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the

former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind.

So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty. The former may be obtained by hearsay..." Someone could tell you it's good. "...but the latter only by seeing the countenance." You have to see it for yourself. Through seeing and responding to God, through seeing ourselves in light of who he is and through the work of the Holy Spirit, we're given a sense of God's beauty.

We get to see him. We get to taste him, and we know he's good. He's better than the things we chase. We begin to chase him. It's not just head knowledge anymore. This is where I struggle so hard. It's not just head knowledge anymore; it has engaged your heart. You know him to not just be good but to be *your* good. He has become our good. We see God's beauty in Christ.

This often comes in times of thinking upon the character of God as revealed in the Scriptures and responding in prayer. How can you think upon the character of God if you're not in the Scriptures? Where will you get a picture of him if you've not looked to his revelation of himself? And responding in prayer, which moves us from cynicism to trust.

Look at Luke 11. We hear Jesus say you can trust God to give what you really need. What does Jesus say God is giving here? The Holy Spirit, a member of the triune God, to live in you, and his job is to make much of Christ. His job is to help your heart not just away from sin but to Jesus, to the glory of God. Why isn't this our daily experience of prayer? Why doesn't this characterize our life of prayer day in and day out? I have a few suggestions for us.

I would suggest that it's because we assume we have the first word, we forget ourselves, and we distrust God on a daily basis. We assume we have the first word, we forget ourselves, and we distrust God on a daily basis. Look again at Luke 11. Christ is encouraging trust in the character of God. He says, **"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"**

Even still, I don't know about you, but I can read something like this, and my cynical heart will say, "How can I trust God to be a good Father? He says he cares, but probably not over this area or this area of my life." For me, if unchecked, if I do not speak to myself... As the psalmist says, "Why are

you downcast?" If I don't upbraid myself with the truth I know of God, if it is unchecked, my heart will think at a deeper level, "Can I trust God with who he says he is? Can I believe him?"

My worry and assumption of his character can lead me to doubt and distress. Most often, doubt and distress are ushered in not by responding to God but by my responding just to my circumstances, just to what is going on around me, not who he is and who I know him to be. Again, look at the text. You can see and hear the unspoken question, "How can I trust God is who he says he is?"

Think back on Matthew 6. Why are you worried about what you're going to eat and drink? Look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. God has clothed them in splendor. They are here today, gone tomorrow. Will he not take care of you? Are you not worth much more than they, you who have an eternal soul? We assume we have the first word.

Throughout life, we mostly respond to life as it happens. You can be type A, and you can plan out all you want, have your road map. Something is going to happen. It's going to throw you for a loop, and you're going to have to respond. When stress or surprise comes, our belief in God's character proves itself. It does. You see what you really believe. With each need, with each stress or surprise, we can easily think we need a specific word from God about our circumstances.

We go to the Bible or to prayer, and we say, "Here is what I'm dealing with. Speak to this specifically." We look for a detailed answer for what we're facing. About seven years ago, I spent a lot of times in white-tiled rooms, watching bags of chemo drip into my dad's bloodstream. We spent a lot of time together as he received treatment. You just can't get in a hurry with it. If you've ever been in those rooms, you can't make the IV bag drip any faster. It just has to do its work.

It gave us a lot of room for conversations and really forced the hand on a lot of conversations between father and son. I'll never forget. My dad and I talk about it to this day. We'll walk through it. The fact that when he was going through the treatment, he didn't respond, "Why me? How am I supposed to handle this? God, speak just to this where I am." His response was to press into what he knew to be true about God's character, what God had already revealed about himself, and to relinquish himself, to trust himself who God is.

When we ignore his revelation, either by failing to read the Scripture or remind ourselves regularly, we demand a new word, arrogantly assuming he hasn't cared for us by already speaking to our

deepest needs. "Hey, what about this today?" No, what about his character? That's the real deeper need here in what you're worried about, in the stress or surprise that is coming at you.

This is why for me, Luke 11 and Matthew 6 ring in my head almost daily. They're two mainstays for me the Lord has given, where in my head, I hear, "God will give the Holy Spirit. He will give himself. God knows. God is a good Father. God hears. God has made provision for your need." This is his first word, not ours. Ours is always an answering word of response and trust. We assume we have the first word, and we forget ourselves, and we distrust God.

When stress or surprise come, or when we just get back in our rhythm of daily life, and we are pressed in by the world around us, our focus can easily narrow, can't it? What's in front of you for your day, your task list, what you're expecting of people around you, the traffic you're in, what you have to get done in the limited 24 hours you have, right? Prayer for us is dependence upon the Father, but I'll tell you this. It's only dependence when we come to see who he is and who we are in light of him. Otherwise, we're, what some people have called, worrying in God's direction.

That's where prayer can come for us easily. We're really functionally believing that we're self-sufficient, that we can provide for ourselves, and we're asking him to bless what we're doing. What we're talking about here is there is a time when we're lulled out of trust with him by dependence on ourselves. If you look at your heart, I would think and suggest you're becoming more conformed to the world than being transformed into the image of Christ.

It's a subtle drift. It's something that clothes itself in Western values of individualism, productivity, and image. "I'm going to look right and be right. I'm going to get it all done." We treat prayer as something to get done before we go to work rather than prayer as the work itself. Often, we don't pray for our daily bread. Many of us don't pray for it because it has been so long that we're just driven to get it when we need it.

We forget the implication behind the original request, that we're dependent upon God for everything. We look to him. We look to his hand for our daily provision. In December, at the end of this last year, my heart was pretty unsettled. It was a hard month. The list of tasks in front of me and the requests that were on me were at the forefront of my time in prayer.

Really, I think I can tell you. It's a safe place. It's just us in the room, right? It's a safe place. Most of my concerns in prayer were pretty self-centered. They were about me and my little kingdom, my

little world. I was wrestling with discontentment, with entitlement, and with pride, but all under the good-seeming thing and theme and the fear and worry of wanting to provide the best I can for my family.

I spent days just trying to pick apart my heart, pretty introspective and analytical, just trying to pick apart my heart, and I kind of got to a point where I was just fatigued and tired, and I wish I had gotten there sooner because I took it to the Lord in prayer and said, "I need help. I don't so much right now need for this to be solved, but I just need you." It was in prayer that my discontentment, entitlement, and pride were laid bare for what they really were, distrust in God and trust in money.

They weren't magically removed. I can tell you that right now. They don't just get plucked away because you spend some time in prayer, but they were exposed. The Holy Spirit took me to Hebrews 13. He said, "**Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'**" I assumed my complaints were the first word. I had forgotten myself in light of who he is, and I distrusted his concern for me.

In prayer, in responding to God's revelation, I was reminded that contentment is found in a person, in Jesus Christ, not what I can provide for myself or for those I love. How, on a daily basis, can we keep from forgetting ourselves and from distrusting God? Let me put it a different way. How can we daily remind ourselves of who God is and who we are in light of him? I suggest it's by beholding the beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Remember Edwards' words? There is a difference between having a rational judgment, an understanding that honey is sweet, and having a sense, a belief, a firsthand knowledge of its sweetness. There is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious and having a sense of the lovingness and beauty of that holiness and grace.

Second Corinthians 4, that we read earlier. "**For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God...**" Where? "**...in the face of Jesus Christ.**" The book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the radiance, the beauty, the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature. We look to Scripture to see him, to fix our eyes, our attention on him until our heart responds in faith.

We ask God for capacity to see him. We echo Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, that we might have the ability to comprehend and know the breadth, the length, the height, the depth of God's love for us in

Christ. Don't even get me started on what we can talk about with attention span. I could preach a whole other sermon on how distracted we are in life and how we justify it.

I read a tweet yesterday that was pretty funny. It said, "'I wish I had more time to read,' he said, as Netflix automatically played the next episode." It's a whole other deal of how we can regain attention in our lives and where we need to redirect it and reclaim our God-given imagination and use it to look in the Scripture and see what God has said about himself. The most worthwhile and beautiful thing in the entire world is Jesus Christ.

He is the radiance of God, the exact imprint of his nature in his glory and beauty, far more entertaining and beautiful to your soul than anything else you can give yourself to. We behold the beauty of God in the face of Christ, and we ask God. We plead with the Holy Spirit that we would taste him and know him like we know the goodness of honey.

I'm encouraged that Christ himself prayed this very thing for us in John 17. You look at the High Priestly prayer, and Christ begins by praying for the apostles and those with him. Then in verse 20, he shifts and says, "I want to pray for those who will come to believe in their word." He asks God the Father that we may also be with him where he is. Why? To see his glory, the glory God has given to Christ because he loved him before the foundation of the world.

Christ prays that we might see his face and delight in the glory of God. John Piper (to mention Pastor John again) tweeted out yesterday, "The greatest gift of God's love is the gift of God's beauty," and he has given it in spades, in full in Christ. How do we fix our attention? It's New Year's. You want something to do. How do we fix our attention? How do we behold the glory of God in the face of Christ? As we say around here, how do we put kindling around our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to come set flame to our hearts?

They're really simple answers, but they take time and effort. In short, they take work, but I'll tell you, every relationship I've ever had in life that meant something to me has taken work, hasn't it? It has taken me trusting the other more than I'm initially comfortable with, overcoming my self-doubt, my cynicism, my distrust. I'll tell you, believing God, walking with God takes all that and more. It's far greater than any human relationship.

That's the Lord's call in Luke 11. Believe that God is who he says he is. He's a good Father. He not only knows what you will need but will surely give it. In New Year's resolutions, for your list, I want

to suggest one, that you and I would do the hard work of becoming our true selves. We can do this in two ways. It's a lifelong pursuit for us.

One, we can read the Bible. Simple. It takes time, effort, and work. I want to encourage you to learn what God has said about himself through reading the Bible and reading it on a daily basis. You talk with your spouse, your kids, your family, your coworkers, your friends on a daily basis. Look and listen to who God is on a daily basis.

I'm not trying to burden you with an expectation. I don't think you're a bad Christian if you read six days out of the week and miss the seventh one. Your life should be characterized by being a person of the Book, not by someone who is out of it. There are numerous reading plans. There are lots of different suggestions. You can read them on our website. You can go to many different places.

We'll put some on the weekly email that will go out this week, some suggestions for you. You can read in snippets. You can read in long parts. You can read several times a day. There are different things you can do, but here's the point. The point is to redirect your attention to focus on God, to delight in who he is and see who he is and trust him with who you are and allow him to speak into who you are and who he's making you to be.

You might say, "I get it. I've tried this. It didn't work." Again, I'm coming after the motive, not the action. I want you to want to taste Jesus in his beauty, to see the most worthwhile thing for you in all of your life, and to know that the primary place God has revealed himself is in the Scriptures and in Jesus. We read about him in the Scriptures. We read the Bible, and we pray.

You fix your attention, you behold the glory of God and the face of Christ by looking to God, listening to him and responding. If you're in Christ, in prayer, you remind yourself of who you once were. Don't forget who he saved you from, where he saved you from. Remind yourself of who you are now. You let your heart be stirred in gratitude and thanksgiving, and use Scripture as fuel to inform your prayers.

If you don't do this, your prayers will be what is on the forefront of your mind, you. It will be your concerns, your worry, your daily press. It will not be a response to who he is in his beauty. You will find yourself more self-centered. Use the Scriptures to inform your prayers, looking and responding to God, spending time with him alone daily if not multiple small points throughout the day. Direct your attention to him.

See, the corporate gathering is vital to Christian life. This is a vital part of the Christian life, but if you are not praying individually in secret, you are in dire trouble. There are again numerous methods, suggestions of what prayer can look like in your daily life. We'll put some in the email this week that you can look at and think through and maybe prayerfully try one or two of them.

This is a plug for Keller's book. The last chapter in Keller's book is on daily practice. There is an appendix over different ways of how to pray that are informed historically. I really enjoyed reading it, and I'm going to begin to try and put some of those in my life. Find something that works, that has you in the Scriptures.

A hope of mine for our body as we begin 2015 is that we would do the hard work of becoming our true selves, that we would be a people of the Book, that we would look and listen and respond to God in prayer where our hearts are daily reminded of who he is and who we are in light of him, where our conversations, our understanding and delight with and in him grow in depth as we grow up in Christ.

Our language with him changes. No more 2-year-old understanding, but an ever-deepening trust and delight in God, a response in his beauty, in Jesus, and a heart that trusts that he is a good Father who gives good gifts to his children. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, where would we be if you had not revealed yourself in the Scriptures, if we couldn't learn about you, if you had not moved toward us in our helplessness and met our need? We would be without hope. Thank you, God, that you have shown us who you are, and you continue to, and you want us to know who you are. Eternity will be a place of delighting in who you are and praising you.

Father, through the power of your Holy Spirit, would you grant us eyes to see, a capacity to begin to look at and to know and delight in your beauty and the face of Jesus? Would you help us where we have struggled with reading the Bible and praying? Would you help us by calling us forward to greater joy? May we see it as a delight, coming to you. Father, would you mark us and make us a congregation that loves you, delights in you, knows your Word. It informs our prayers and our daily lives, and we depend upon you. We pray in Christ's name, amen.