

## The Trinity and Christian Prayer

Sam Allberry – April 12, 2015

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**Matt Chandler:** How are we doing? Are we all right? Excellent! Excellent! Well, let me introduce you to a friend of mine. This is Sam Allberry. Sam is from Maidenhead, England, which is about 40 minutes west of London. He is an associate minister at a church called St. Mary's Anglican Church there in Maidenhead. He also wrote a small book (a *really* small book) called *Is God Anti-Gay?* When I was researching several years ago for our, kind of, culture and theology on homosexuality, I just found Sam and the way he sees and talks and explains to be extremely helpful.

We've brought Sam in not just to preach this weekend, but on Wednesday night from 7:00 to 9:00, Sam will be doing a forum (that's at all of our campuses) on the same title as his book: *Is God Anti-Gay?* Now I'm not a novice to navigating these waters. Usually whenever the church tries to say anything about homosexuality, the retort, kind of, the attack, is, "Why do you guys always have to single out this sin to be the one you attack?"

Well, I would just simply and lovingly say the church is not the one driving this to the forefront of our culture right now. We are, though, as elders responsible to help equip and shepherd you and help you navigate the world in which you live. Since this is *the* topic of our generation... It is leading the headlines. It's on every news program. It's on the cover of almost every magazine. We want to just lay before you what the Word of God has to say and how we are to navigate this.

I said several weeks ago in one of my messages that we know we're not to be bigoted. We know we're not to be afraid. We know we're not to be hating types of people. So how *are* we to navigate the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ in this climate on this topic? Sam is going to teach. We're going to do some Q&A. I want to encourage you, if not outright implore you, to join us Wednesday night from 7:00 to 9:00.

The reality is this subject touches all of our lives, right? It touches all of our lives. How do we minister into this? Come and join us on Wednesday night if you can possibly make that work. Just so

Sam can win you over, let me just ask him a question. How far is Maidenhead from, say, Downton Abbey?

**Sam Allberry:** About 30 minutes.

**Matt:** *Boom!* Thirty minutes from Downton Abbey. So do you know them? Do you ever go over and have like a tux-like meal with them?

**Sam:** Yeah, we hang out.

**Matt:** All right. Excellent. Listen. Some of you don't even know what we're talking about right now. I'm going to pray for Sam. I want you to join me in praying for Sam and over Sam. Then he is going to open up the Word, and we'll marvel at the triune nature of God together.

Father, I thank you for my brother. I just pray even in this moment, strength and, God, that you would speak to our hearts. Holy Spirit, you would do the work of illumination. As Sam points out what is true and good and right about you and how that should lead us into a deeper communion, reliance, and relationship with you, you would stir up awe and marvel and encouragement in our hearts. You're a good, gracious God. We praise you. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

Would you guys welcome Sam?

**Sam:** Friends, it is a joy to be with you. I was sharing earlier that it's lovely to have that feeling of being on a plane for 10 hours, arriving somewhere new and unfamiliar, and feeling at home and among brothers and sisters. It's great to be able to join my Christian family with you today.

We're going to be thinking about prayer and specifically how understanding the fact that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit helps us to pray. Just, quickly, kind of a bit of a recap on what we believe as Christians. We believe in one God, and that one God has shown himself to be three persons. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three distinct persons. God has always been Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The fact that God is triune is to shape our entire Christian life.

Do you remember when Jesus called his first followers to make disciples? He said the disciples should be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The name of God

the Trinity is to be the framework for our entire life of disciples of Jesus. It defines who we are as believers, and it is to shape us and fuel our love for God.

Specifically, we want to think about how that triune reality helps us to pray. It's not a distraction from prayer. It's not trying to make prayer more complicated. Actually, it helps us to know what is happening when we talk to God. I often think it's a bit like if you lift up the bonnet of the car. The hood. Sorry. I'm in America now. *Bonnets* are something else over here, right? If you lift up the hood of the car and someone explains all the kind of mysterious stuff underneath, that is what goes on every time you've been driving your car.

What we're going to see is what has been going on every time we have prayed. I came across this quotation from C.S. Lewis recently. He said, "Prayer is irksome." I think no one has used the word *irksome* since about 1930. I think it means difficult. "An excuse to omit [prayer] is never unwelcome. When it is over, this casts a feeling of relief...over the rest of the day. We are reluctant to begin. We are delighted to finish."

I'm sure he speaks for many of us. We need help with our prayer lives. Typically, when I know I need help with my prayer life, I might look at good examples of prayers. I might read a biography of a George Müller or a Hudson Taylor. I might think about my technique and think, "But if I were to pray at this time in this place in this way with this posture with this format with this kind of atmosphere, that will be the key to my prayer life taking off."

But it struck me that when the New Testament wants to encourage us to pray, it doesn't tell us about techniques. It tells us about God, because prayer is defined not so much by what we do but by who God is. In the Bible, prayer is the natural response to the God who has revealed himself. If we need help in our prayer lives, the best thing we can do is to be reminded of to whom it is we're praying. If we are clear on God, that will help us to pray.

We're going to be looking at a number of different passages this morning. There are Bibles, I gather, in your seats if you want to pick up one of those. We'll look at a few different passages. We're going to begin in Ephesians, chapter 2. It's a verse that kind of, I hope, sets the scene for what we're thinking about over these next few minutes, a verse where Paul tells us what the posture of the whole Christian life is to be. Ephesians 2, verse 18. Paul has just been proclaiming what Jesus has done, and he gives us this wonderful, kind of, bullet point in verse 18.

He says, "**For through him** [Jesus Christ] **we both...**" By *we* he means both Jewish believers and the readers who are Gentile believers, all of us together. "**...through him...have access in one Spirit to the Father.**" Okay, so Paul is saying, as Christians by the Spirit through the Son, we have access to the Father.

Our entire Christian life is lived by the Spirit through the Son to the Father. That's going to be the framework for how we think about prayer over the next few minutes. We're going to think about how prayer is by the Spirit, how prayer is through the Son, and how prayer is to the Father. Okay?

1. *We pray by the Spirit.* We're going to begin by thinking about how prayer is by the Spirit. The main take-home point from this is that no Christian prayer happens apart from the work of the Spirit. We may not be mindful of that as we pray, but it is true. We pray by the Spirit, and we're going to see that from Romans, chapter 8.

Paul wants us to see how the Spirit helps us to pray. He is showing us the kind of impact the Spirit has in our lives. I'm sure we know people who have an unmistakable presence. I can think of a friend of mine back home. He just has a massive personality. He is an enormous man anyway. When he walks into a room, the whole room knows he has walked into it. Paul wants us to see the Spirit also has an unmistakable presence in our lives.

Have a look with me at verse 15. Paul says, "**For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'**" Paul shows us what the effect of the Spirit's presence is *not*, and then he shows us what it *is*. He is not the Spirit of slavery. In other words, the effect of the Spirit's life is not that we go back into living in unremitting fear of God's judgment.

No, we haven't received the Spirit of *slavery* but a Spirit of *adoption*. It is through the Holy Spirit that we have a sense that God has adopted us. It's wonderful, isn't it? Our sins have been forgiven, but we're not just pardoned. I mean, being pardoned itself is amazing, but we've not just been pardoned as sinners. We've been adopted as sons.

Friends, we need to know that, because I gather you can be pardoned by the president. That's one of the perks of the office. You can be pardoned by the president. But if you are pardoned by the president, that does not give you a relationship with him. You can't just walk up to the White House and knock on the door and walk on in and sit around the meal table.

But the Spirit is a Spirit of adoption to take the truth that we've been adopted by God the Father and to massage the reality of that into our souls and into our hearts. Paul says it is by the Spirit that we cry, "Abba! Father!" Some of us, kind of my age and a bit older, when we hear, "Abba," we think Sweden. We think some classic tunes. We think of people dressed in Spandex or whatever it was they used to do their stuff in.

Readers of Romans, I'm sure, when they heard the word *Abba*, they would be thinking, "That's what the Jewish lad would call his father at home." Abba father. It's intimate. It's familial. It's cozy. It's warm. Here's the thing, friends. As we hear the word *Abba*, we are to think, "This is what Jesus called his heavenly Father." Do you remember when Jesus prayed, he prayed, "Abba Father"? The work of the Spirit is to show us we can now approach God the Father with the same intimacy as the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Verse 16: **"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God..."** Paul is saying two things here. He says by the Spirit, we cry, "Abba! Father!" Through the Spirit, our own soul and spirit are assured of the fact that we are children of God. I want to suggest those two things go together.

It is as we cry, "Abba! Father!" by the Spirit that the Spirit is testifying with our spirit that we are children of God. As we pray to the Father, the Spirit is showing us that is the right thing to do. He is using our prayer of addressing God as Father to show us this is right. It's fitting. It is seemly now for us to approach God in that way. If I'm right on that, it means prayer itself becomes a means of assurance. As we pray, we are enacting the gospel to our own hearts.

Now if I meet someone who says they're struggling with assurance, one of the questions I want to ask is, "Are you praying?" Well, it's great, because it doesn't end there. The Spirit doesn't just start us off and then leave us to it. The Spirit continues to help us as we pray. Have a look down at verse 23, still in Romans 8. Paul writes, **"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."**

Okay, that might seem a bit confusing at first. Paul is saying we groan inwardly. When you hear groaning, you generally think that's not a happy place to be. Then he says we groan **"...as we wait eagerly..."** You're thinking, "Well, which is it, Paul? Am I groaning or am I eager?" The fact is the

two things go together. Paul has already told us that we've received the Spirit of adoption. God is our Father. That is a reality. That has happened through Christ.

But now he is showing us that we wait for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. We're not fully there yet. It's like we're running new creation software on old creation hardware. We wonder at what we have in Christ, and at the same time, we yearn for what we still await. That is why we both groan and wait with great eagerness. Because we live in that tension between what we already have and what we still have to wait for, we need the Spirit's help. We're weak. So often living in this world confuses us.

Look at what Paul says in verse 26. He says, "**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought...**" Friends, isn't that often the case? We find ourselves in some situation. We hear about a particular circumstance, and we think, "I don't know how to start praying for that. I don't know where to begin."

Maybe a dear Christian friend receives a dreadful diagnosis from the doctor, and we think, "Do I pray for their deliverance from the sickness, or do I pray for their endurance through it? Do I pray for both? Do I pray for something else entirely?" You see something horrific on the news, and you think, "Lord, I don't know where to start with this whole situation."

Yet Paul says, "**For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.**" Friends, here is some just wonderfully encouraging news for us to ponder today. In all our befuddlement and confusion, as we pray to the Father, the Spirit of the Father is praying for us. Isn't that encouraging? He doesn't take over and pray instead of us.

The Spirit isn't sort of coming alongside and saying, "Well, you're pretty hopeless. You just shut up. I'll take it from here." No, the Spirit partners with us as he prays with us and for us. It's a bit like a dad teaching his son how to play golf. The dad won't say to the son (I'm sure), "Son, you stand over there. I'm going to play golf over here, and you just take notes and write down what I do. Okay? Then that's you learning how to play golf."

No! He will position his son and get him lined up and ready, put the club in his hands, get the ball teed up. The father will put his own hands over his son's, and together they will swing the golf club.

You can't say which of them took the shot because both of them did. As we pray in our weakness and confusion, the Spirit comes alongside and prays with us and prays for us.

He does so in verse 27 in a way that lands our prayer so it lines up with God's will. **"And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."** Through the Spirit, our prayers are presented to the Father in accordance with God's will.

Friends, all Christian prayer is by the Spirit. We are prompted to call God *Father* by the Spirit. Therefore, God is involved at both ends of the prayer. C.S. Lewis, I think, goes a bit far when he says in one of his books that prayer is a divine soliloquy, God speaking to himself through us. But it does remind us that God prays with us as we pray to him. If that is the case, no prayer is ever wasted.

If prayer is by the Spirit, prompted by him, helped by him, then, friends, it means we never ever *just* pray. I find myself using that language from time to time, and I'm sure many of us do. We need to repent of it. "Oh, I'll just pray. You know, the really useful jobs are taken, so I'll just pray." Friends, we never *just* pray if we are praying by the Spirit. No prayer is ever wasted.

It's all good fun if you're with other Christian believers just to ask the question, "Should we have a moment of prayer now? Would this be a good time to pray?" Because you cannot say *no* to that question. There's never a bad time to pray. It can never be a bad time to pray if we're praying by the Spirit. It doesn't matter how asleep we're feeling. It doesn't matter how confused we are. We pray by the Spirit. We're not praying on our own.

2. *We pray through the Son.* We pray by the Spirit. We pray through the Son. Now let me remind you, friends, the most intimate, the most beautiful, the most exquisite relationship that has ever existed in the whole of eternity is between the Father and the Son. Let me read a few verses from the Bible that show us just the perfection of joy that exists, the pleasure the Father and the Son take in one another.

Jesus said on one occasion, **"...I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."** Jesus wants the whole world to know he loves the Father. Another time he said, **"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands."** The Father himself said, **"This is my Son, whom I love."**

Friends, I mention that because the work of the Son is to open up that relationship to us, to give us the kind of relationship with the Father that he, the Son, has enjoyed for all eternity. Come with me to John 17. I want to show you this because it means what Jesus has got going with God, we can have going with God ourselves. This whole chapter is a prayer. Jesus is praying to the Father.

We get to eavesdrop on this kind of inner communication within God the Trinity. It's like the most amazing DVD bonus feature ever. We get to go behind the scenes of the Trinity. Verse 22. Jesus says, **"The glory that you have given me I have given to them..."** That's his people. **"...that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and..."** Get this. **"...loved them even as you loved me."**

Verse 26. Jesus continues, **"I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."** Do you hear that? The love with which the Father has loved the Son, the love which prompts the Father to say, **"This is my Son, whom I love,"** we can bask in that same love ourselves through the Son.

Friends, this was brought home to me a number of years ago. I went on a flight, and I knew the pilot. I had booked the ticket. I knew a mate of mine who was a pilot. I knew he worked for that airline. When I booked the ticket, I dropped him a line and said, "Just thought I'd let you know, I booked a ticket with your airline. This is the route I'm doing. I don't know if that's one of the ones you fly, but any chance you'll be flying on that particular occasion?" He wrote back and said, "I'll have a look at the timetable. I'll see what I can do."

A few days before the flight, he emailed me and said, "I'm going to be flying you on Monday. I'll catch you in the departure lounge, but I'm going to be the captain of the flight that time." I turned up in the departure lounge, and I just happened to be wearing a shirt, a tie, and a jacket. I was thinking, "Just in case he needs me to sit anywhere near the front of the plane, I will look as upgradable as I possibly can, just to kind of hint that I would be at home in that environment. I would blend in beautifully." You never know.

Anyway, he turned up. He was dressed all kind of captain-y. He said, "Okay, Sam. Here's what's going to happen. You need to be the last person to board the plane. When you get on the plane, say to the cabin crew, I'm the guest of the captain." I thought, "This sounds like something promising is

going to be in the offing. This is good." I straightened up my tie and buttoned my jacket. I waited for everyone else to get on the plane. I get on the plane.

Before I say anything, one of the cabin crew says, "Ah, you're with the captain, aren't you?" I said, "Yes." She said, "Well, follow me." We turned *left*, which is a sweet moment that has ruined every flight I've been on ever since. We turned left, carried on walking, carried on walking again. I was thinking, "We're walking through first class now. This is really good. What could be better than first class?"

Well, we carry on walking, and it turns out the cockpit is the one thing you get next after first class. She knocked on the door. The captain welcomed me in and said, "Hello. Sam, just take a seat there." He sat me down in the jump seat behind him and the co-pilot, and I stayed there the entire flight! I'm a bit of a plane geek, so this was amazing to be in the cockpit of a proper kind of enormous jet. From before takeoff till after landing, I sat in that seat.

Now they've changed the rules a fair bit since then, specifically to keep people like me as far away from the cockpit as possible, but it was an amazing experience. The cabin crew could not do enough for me. They would give me the first-class menu and say, "Anything you want, let us know. We'll be so happy to get it for you." A couple of times they said, "If you just want to hang out in first class for a bit and watch a movie, you're very welcome to." I was thinking, "I'm never going to get a movie that's better than this. This is awesome!"

At the end of the flight when I reluctantly had to get out of the plane, the flight's purser came up to me and gave me a goody bag as a thank you for being on the plane (a bottle of champagne, presents) and said, "Thank you for joining us today." I said the only thing I could think of saying, which was, "Anytime!" You know? "I can be available. I can be very flexible if it comes to this kind of thing. Just let me know if I can ever help again. I could put myself out by doing that."

Well, as I left the flight and started to reflect on what an amazing day I had just had, it occurred to me that because I came in as a friend of the captain, I came in at his level. All the courtesy that would normally be shown to him was extended to me as well. If I had just come in under my own name, I would have been shoved right to the back of the plane where I should have been. But because I came in in the *captain's* name, I came in at his level.

Friends, Jesus is showing us here in John 17 that when we come to the Father through the Son, we come in at the Son's level. Do you see that? Jesus says, "**...that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.**" When we come to the Father through the Son, we're not kind of in some bottom-rung level of access. We are coming in at the level of Jesus himself. I don't know about you, friends, but there is not a day in my life where I don't need to be told that again, where I don't need to try and get that into the deepest parts of my soul.

It makes a wonderful difference to our prayer life to know this, because it means prayer is not me trying to drum up a rapport with God. It's not me trying to break the ice with some God I don't really know very well, and it's all kind of a bit awkward. It's not me trying to get a good vibe going. No, the fact is, there has been a beautiful rapport between the Father and the Son for all eternity, and we're invited to join in.

We're not trying to create a dynamic between us and God. We're joining in the perfect dynamic that has always existed for eternity. As one writer said, it's like turning up and discovering the party had already begun long before we arrived. Friends, that is why we pray in the name of Jesus. It's not a magic formula, or it's not a secret password. No, we pray in the name of Jesus because it reminds us that we don't pray in our own name.

Again, pretty much every day of my life, I am tempted to do just that. So I need to remind myself I'm not coming on the basis of my own spiritual performance. I'm coming on the basis of what Christ has done, not of who I am in myself but of who I am in him. In fact, I need to know that every day, because I might have a day that is just awful as a Christian. I oversleep. I don't have time to spend with the Lord and walk with him and read his Word and pray to him.

I get in the car, and every other motorist is my sworn enemy. They have clearly had a meeting just before I got out of the house that they're going to obstruct me at every point. I get to work, and I'm just unpleasant to other people. I miss opportunities to witness. I succumb to temptation. I give in to sin. I get home, and I kick the cat. I don't even have a cat. At the end of a day like that, I don't feel I can look God in the eye and pray to him. That's because I'm trying to come to God in my name.

The flipside is true as well. I may have had a blinder of a day as a Christian. I woke up early, straight into the Word. I read a testament before breakfast, just kind of plowing my way through books of the Bible, loving it, lapping it up. I get in the car, and I just let all the other motorists in first. I get to work, and I am a ray of sunshine to the people around me. I have opportunities of speaking of Christ

to people, and they're interested. They seem to find me compelling. I experience temptation, and I resist it.

At the end of that day, there is every bit of danger that I will try to come to God in my name and think, "Well, of course I can pray to God today. Man, he is going to love it when I knock on the door." Friends, we can never come in our own name. We come to the Father not by the sweat of our brow but by the blood of his Son. Because we do so, we can come. We pray through the Son and in that precious, sweet name of Jesus. Then finally, friends...

3. *We pray to the Father. We pray by the Spirit through the Son and to the Father.* Come with me, if you would, to Matthew, chapter 7. Some famous words of Jesus help us to know how to do this. If you recall when Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, Jesus said, "**When you pray, say, 'Our Father...'**" That doesn't mean we can't pray to the Spirit. The Spirit is every bit as divine and personal as the Father and the Son. It doesn't mean we can't pray to Jesus. There are examples in the New Testament of people praying directly to Jesus.

He is not saying we pray *only* to the Father, but I think he is saying we do pray *mainly* to the Father. That is the model of prayer Jesus gives us. He shows us the kind of Father we pray to and why we can pray to this kind of Father. Now I'm very conscious that when we start talking about the fatherhood of God, it's hard to think about other than through the lens of human fatherhood as we've experienced it. Therefore, we are on tender ground.

There will be some of us this morning who have never known our fathers. There will be some of us who have been rejected by our fathers. Some of us may be mourning our fathers, and I'm sure some of us are struggling to forgive our fathers. Others of us, of course, are thankful to God for our fathers. But the fact is whatever our experience of human fatherhood has been, we need to define fatherhood by who God is rather than the human fathers we've encountered.

Jesus wants us to see two wonderful things about our heavenly Father. The first is that he is *accessible*. He is available. In verse 7 of Matthew 7, Jesus says, "**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.**"

Okay, so we're not to think we're over *here* and God is distant and remote somewhere else, uninterested, disconnected from Jesus. Jesus is showing us that the God who made us is the God

who knows us. The God who had the idea of you is interested in you. He is not just theoretically around. This God is available for us to pray to.

Not just once. Jesus is saying here in verse 8 (it's all present tense), we keep on asking, we keep on knocking, and we keep on seeking because our God loves to respond to us. He is a God far more willing to answer and hear our prayers than we are to offer them.

As well as being accessible, Jesus shows us this Father is *good*. Verse 9: "**Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?**" Those are the two kind of staple foods in the time of Jesus, and Jesus is saying, "That would be absurd! Okay? That's not how the world works. If your son needs nourishment, you provide it for him."

Jesus can say (verse 11), "**If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!**" Just notice verse 11. By the way, Jesus just assumes we're evil. You see, that was just a given. Right? "**If you then, who are evil...**" That's a given. He doesn't have to unpack that. He doesn't have to try and demonstrate or prove that. That's just his assumption.

The fact is, if even dopey and wicked human fathers have figured out how to give a good basic thing to their kids, then how much more will the perfect Father in heaven love to give good gifts to his children? He is a good God. He loves to provide. He loves to help. He is not irritated when we come to him in need. He is not there kind of folding his arms or wagging his finger, saying, "Man, you just cannot get your life together, can you?" No, he loves to be approached, and he loves to help.

Well, as we think about this good heavenly Father, we need to avoid two mistakes. This will be our last Bible reference. Come with me to James, chapter 4. I think you're going to be looking at this passage a bit more next week, so this is the movie trailer for next week. James shows us in James, chapter 4, verses 2 and 3, two mistakes his readers were making about prayer, and I'm sure we easily make them too.

The first is there at the end of verse 2. James says, "**You do not have, because you do not ask.**" In other words, the mistake is *we forget God loves to give*, so we don't ask. I don't know if you remember this, but a couple of Christmases ago, an airline did the most amazing Christmas advertisement.

The passengers were in the departure lounge. There was what looked like a kind of Father Christmas vending machine. You'd scan your boarding card, Father Christmas would appear on the screen to greet you and say, "And what would you like for Christmas?" and the passengers would then say whatever came to mind.

Someone said a pair of socks. Someone else said a widescreen TV. Someone else said, "I'd love some flights to go to visit my parents." Then they all got on the plane and thought nothing more of it. As they were flying, the airline staff at their destination was running around a shopping mall buying every single one of the things they had asked for.

When the passengers arrived, they stood at the baggage belt. It wasn't their luggage that suddenly appeared. It was wrapped presents with their names on them. Does anyone remember this? I remember watching that. They would unwrap it, and it would be the thing they had asked for just two or three hours earlier. It was all very kind of weepy. Everyone was sharing it on social media. I remember my reaction being, "That was lovely. That was lovely!"

Then after a few moments, I was thinking, "The guy who asked for the socks, how big an idiot does he feel now? He is holding a pair of socks. The person next to him has a widescreen TV. The person next to them has a plane ticket. He is holding a pair of socks." I remember feeling very cut to the heart and the Lord saying to me, "That is a picture of your prayer life, Sam." **"You do not have, because you do not ask."** We forget our God loves to give.

The other mistake we can make in verse 3 is *we forget this God is good*. Therefore, we ask him for the wrong things. Verse 3. James says, **"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."** In other words, the danger is we treat prayer as a way of getting God to rubberstamp our agenda for our life. "God, this is my plan. Please check it, do it, provide it." We treat prayer kind of a bit like room service. "This is what I've decided I need. If you could just get it all sorted out for me, that would be great."

Because God is good, he doesn't always give us what we want. We don't know what is always good for us. There may be things our hearts are desperately set on, things we know are morally good, things we feel must be right. Yet there are times when, for the sake of our ultimate goodness, God does not give us what we want. He loves us too much.

As Tim Keller says in his book on prayer, God gives us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows. Our Father is good, and he is committed to our ultimate good. For the sake of our ultimate good, he may bruise us in the short term. He doesn't give us what we want, but he does give us what is good.

Friends, as we finish up, as we pray, every time we pray, we are praying by the Spirit. It is the Spirit who prompts us to call God *Father*. It is the Spirit who comes alongside and helps us as we pray. As we pray, we pray through the Son. We now have the gift of sonship ourselves through him. He has opened up that relationship to include us.

We can now pray in his name. We can now come to the Father at the Son's level. As we do so, we are coming to a Father who is unfathomably and always good, a Father who loves to hear us pray, a Father who is there for us, who is never unavailable, and a Father who is more dedicated to your goodness than you are. Well, let's pray as we finish.

Our heavenly Father, we thank and praise you. We love you for the God you have shown yourself to be. We thank you that our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Father, we thank you for the gift and presence of your Spirit in our lives. We thank you for his work of showing us that we have been adopted, that we are your children, that you are our Father.

Oh Lord, we praise you for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you so much that he laid down his life and took it up again, that through him, we might come to know you. We thank you, our Father, that you are a God who loves to hear us pray, a God who loves to help us and to provide for us. Help us to be those who pray. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

**Matt:** Yeah. Amen. Thanks, Sam. We're going to end our service this morning like we always do, celebrating the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ. We provide Communion primarily for our covenant members. If you're a guest with us this morning, though, who is a believer in Christ in good standing with the church you're visiting us from, we want you to celebrate this with us. You are brothers and sisters in Christ, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ. We'd be fools not to rejoice.

I would like to ask this. If you're not a Christian, not a believer in Christ, not quite sure what to do with all of this Jesus stuff, would you just abstain? Will you let the elements pass? Again, I'm not trying to make you feel like an outsider. If anything, what you have heard today is an invitation to sit down with us and celebrate the forgiveness and mercy and invitation of God to come.

I've oftentimes joked that if I say to my kids, "Ask me one more time," that's a threat. I am not literally saying, "Keep asking me." If I say, "Keep asking me," I'm saying, "There are ramifications if you keep asking me." Yet what we see in the Bible is it appears it's impossible to get on the nerves of God. He *wants* us to keep asking him. You have Jesus giving the parable of the persistent widow who just asked and asked and asked and asked until the judge just gave her so she would stop asking.

Jesus posed, "If the judge is wicked and I am not, how much more do I long to hear from my children?" If you're in that weird spot where you have elevated yourself to the point that your sin and what you struggle with is just too dark to come to Christ and to pray, then I would point out that Jesus also extends the really crazy invitation of, **"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."**

Think about it. Where else do you get that invitation? "Are you socially awkward? My kind of people. Come to me. Do you struggle with depression, anger, loneliness, parts of your world on fire? Are you struggling with doubt? Are you confused? Are you angry? Come here. You're who I came for. You're who I want to hang out with." Again, in a loving way, get over yourself.

I want to give us a couple of minutes here as always just to consider what's been preached today, consider what the very Word of God says to us. Here's what I want to do. Here's what I want you to consider for just a couple of minutes. Is there a breakdown in what you believe about the nature and character of God? What I mean by that is, if you don't pray, if you don't, what is it that keeps you from praying?

I would agree with Lewis that prayer can be irksome. But what I find in prayer being irksome is that I tend to fail to believe something about the nature and character of God. I don't pray because I feel like God isn't going to hear me, I don't pray because I don't feel like he is good, I don't pray because I don't believe the gospel enough to understand and acknowledge that he sees me like he sees the Son, that the affection he has for the Son he has for me.

Is there a breakdown in how you understand God and how you see him as triune that's affecting how you pray? Here's the opportunity. I'm giving you an opportunity to pray and to confess and to ask for help. Let me give you just a couple of minutes here, and then we'll come and we'll take the Lord's Supper together as a family.

The Bible tells us that on the night Jesus was arrested he took the bread, and he broke it. He said, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal, the Bible tells us he took the cup, and he blessed the cup. He said, "This is the blood of the new covenant." See, he knew we were going to be prone to forget the new covenant. We were going to try to set up rules and regulations for ourselves, hurdles to have to jump over. We were going to try to bank on our own self-righteousness.

The cup, the blood, is there as the reminder that it's all been paid in full. We can't pay in a debt that is no longer owed. This is the point Paul makes in the book of Colossians when he says he canceled the record of debt we owe. He nailed it once and for all to the cross of Christ. Since we were going to be prone to forget, he said, "This is the blood of the new covenant. Do this in remembrance of me."

Father, we thank you and praise you for your goodness and grace. Thank you for Sam, who loves you, who opened up so faithfully your Word and just boldly proclaimed to us what is true and right and good. I pray you would encourage our hearts, build up our faith, and that we might leave here understanding, being awed by gazing upon the magnificence of your triune nature. You are good and gracious. We love you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Let me just end our time together like this. I feel like probably the biggest fight we get in in Dallas, Texas (this sprawling Metroplex), is that, if we're not careful, we can get painted into this kind of, "I have to be okay. I have to pretend everything is okay. I have to wear the veneer of having life together and happy marriage and great kids and great business and great..." I want to start every week imploring you in this direction.

We'll dismiss here with a song. It will be great. Then afterward, there are going to be men and women here, and they're here for you. They're here to pray with you. They're here to encourage you. They're here to help connect you where you can get some legitimate help if you need it. I'm not a fool. There are those of you in here right now really struggling with doubt. Like you've been a Christian, you follow the Lord, and you're just in a desert season. It's dark and difficult. I'm here to say, "Great! Come. Let us pray with you. Let us walk with you. Let us encourage you in that."

Others of you, you have a relationship that's on the brink. It's in a dark spot. Let us help you. Some of you have kids who are wild'n out. Well, let us encourage you. Let us walk with you. You think you're the first person with kids who are wild'n out? Shoot! That's been happening since the

Industrial Revolution...if not earlier, Cain and Abel. Why don't you come and let us pray with you and help you and walk with you?

To buy into the idea that you have to have all your stuff together is from hell. That's not who Christ came to save (those who have all their stuff together). In fact, his very coming is this very public acknowledgment that we won't. We're going to sing, man, and if you need something, let us walk with you. Let us walk with you. First, let's stand and make much of the Lord in song.

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