

The Word of Jesus on Prayer

Second Series – Sermon Sixteen

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Surely, after three sermons on “things,” we must rethink prayer as fellowship and communion with the Divine. This Love that has entered our house, and begins with our participation to sweep it free from the care for things! Prayer is much less a subject to be studied and understood, but rather one to be experienced in relationship with Them. Prayer acknowledges and surrenders to our Origin in and through this communion and receives whatever Their response may be.

So, participation in prayer reflects and is in proportion to our awareness of our need and God’s willingness to answer. Not receiving the answer we want, in the time frame that we want it, is no reason to think God does not hear or answer! On the other hand, if we cannot receive a “NO,” we do not know and are not praying to our loving Father! This prayer acknowledges our childhood in relation to the vastness of Their knowing! Our gracious Father will give us what is good, not just what we want.

Here in this sermon, MacDonald has a fantastic reflection on the human condition, its limitations, and the foolishness of going it alone.

Outline

Jesus on Prayer – A being that could not understand, or answer prayer, could not be God at all!

Prayer Experienced – I cannot believe in a God who would fail to hear, receive, and respond to the weakest or worst of prayers.

Unanswered Prayer – If we understand that any answer that was not of love, and not for our good, would be unworthy of God.

Why Pray? – Communion begins with talking to God, a union with Him, which is the sole end of prayer.

Needs – There could be no true riches except for needs. God enriched by man’s necessities. In this, God is blessed to give, and we through receiving are made rich!

Luke 18:1-8 NLT

“One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up. ‘There was a judge in a certain city,’ he said, ‘who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, “Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.” ‘The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, “I don’t fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!”’

Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?”

The impossibility of doing what we want, as, and when we want, drives us to look for help. There is a reality of being where all things are plain and easy. This Oneness, this union is with the Lord of Life. This union is the first purpose of prayer. Every difficulty directs and narrows our focus in order to accomplish this purpose.

Here I am trying to address something about the general nature of prayer. I plead with you to remember that in all things, it is for the sake of actions, not speculation that I write. If prayer is anything at all, it is something to be done. Why would your agreement or disagreement matter if we don’t pray? I want this discussion to help you pray, not improve your understanding of prayer!

Jesus on Prayer

Here is what Jesus has to say about prayer. It is helpful to me that He acknowledges the difficulty, seeing we need encouragement to continue. He knows that it looks to us as if we are not heard. It is not a mystery to Him why we are struggling and want to quit. So, He tells a parable in which the petitioner repeatedly goes to the man who can help her. Her persistence finally pays off with help in the end. The actual delay from the remaining story is not God’s inaction. He does, however, recognize how it looks to us, to whom He asks to continue in prayer. Here as always, He reminds us not to judge by the appearances, but by the reality behind them!

The Truth, the character and nature of God, is enough reason to stand up to a whole army of appearances. It looks like He did not hear you but never embrace that He does not. Keep going like the woman did, and you too will be heard. She, in the end, was heard because of her persistence. No, God hears at once and responds quickly. The unjust judge cared nothing for the woman. But those who call to God are His children. Clearly understood by the act of their calling to Him. He has created us to seek Him, and we do. Does He not hear us?

For this fellowship, we were created. God chose us that we might, in turn, choose Him. **He calls to us that we would find Him in our pursuit. That there would be communication. The exchange of life that belongs to children and their Fathers!** A gulf of indifference lay between the woman and the judge. However, for our Father and His children who seek His help, we are closer than two hands joined together in love. This bold statement made in the face of what seems a significant delay. The apparent delay acknowledged in the very opening of the parable.

Would we be God's children enough to realize He is hearing and working for us? Even though we cannot hear or see Him working? Believing the ways of God are so vast that we could get lost in them. That what we see is so small a part of His actions, that we could be clueless about their ends? That the purposes of God are so big that we might not recognize any movement at all towards His goals. The story shows our slowness in believing and our part in troubling God by not trusting Him.

If there is a God and if I am his being then there should be and must be open communication between us. If you believed in a god, a god not good enough to care for His creatures, it would be reasonable not to pray to such a god. But the idea that with all the right desires in us, we could be children of a cold-hearted deity, is so horrible a thought in its contradictions that I would ask the person, what disgusting and cold-hearted dismissal of the truth makes him capable of such a belief! God's alarm, or, if not His alarm, God's sorrow will speak to this person. The divine love revealed from Him, even if the love goes unheard!

- If my position, my awareness, is one from home, no, from some sort of prison?
- If I find, I can neither rule the world I love nor my own thoughts and desires.
- That I cannot control my passions, dictate my desires, determine my outcomes, create my increase, forget what I want, or remember what I forgot.
- That I cannot love what I want, or hate what I choose.
- That I am not sovereign over myself.
- That I cannot supply my own needs, or even know the difference between a want and a need.
- My own life summed up is too much for me!
- If I cannot understand it, be satisfied with it, nor better it. Would all this not cause me to hesitate? This hesitation not ending in prayer?

- When my life's scale is too large for me:
- When I recognize I cannot account for my existence and have not even a small part in its creation.
- Neither, if I do not like my existence, can I do anything about ending it.
- When I realize I can do nothing to change the hurt and sorrow I have caused those I love and hate.
- That in myself, there is no wholeness or unity.
- That life is not a blessing to me, for I despise myself. When I think these things, can it be a surprise if I also think there should be a being somewhere to judge for me, one to account for himself and make the course of my life just?
- One whose very being explains and is necessary to give explanations for my own life.
- Whose presence in me is essential, not just helpful, but makes for me a good life?
- For if I am not complete in myself, but dependent on that which I don't know and can't know. When good is not recognized as good, as a thing of reason and well-being.
- Then my life will be one longing for a "Word" to be the interpretive center of my cosmos. The center I do not have in myself. To know God is present in me, to have the consciousness of God that He is the essential part of my life, as absolutely necessary to Life!

- We that are created in the image of God must come to know Him or be nothing!
- Children must have their Fathers!
- Observe my dissatisfaction, and the emptiness of my soul. My soul is miserable, alone, and incomplete without Him!
- My soul cannot act alone, except in union with God.
- Working from what is understood as without God is no achievement at all. It is but a mere response to the situations of life.
- All within me is disorder and dysfunction.
- There is a call from behind me and a voice before me.
- My instincts for improvement tell me I must rise above my selfish-self; rise above, perhaps, all my possible selves.
- I do not see how to surrender, how to live this Life.

I am present in a world of consciousness, an unknown self in an unfamiliar world. Admittedly, this world is not of my creation; this unchosen and forced existence cannot be outside of God. Could this world be unknown to Him, be impenetrable, unreachable, or absent to the God from whom I come? Certainly not! Is it not His thoughts in which I think? Is it not His consciousness in which I am aware?

Whatever movements in me are known to Him, as they are to me, and even more. My thoughts open to Him. If He knows my thoughts, how can I hide them from Him? If I should spread my wings towards the dawn, and travel to the ends of the sea, even there you would lead me, and your hands hold me! If He has created my being, how can anything be hidden from Him? If I speak to Him, even ever so quietly, or think the words, no, just think. **Surely, God, my Original, in whose life, will, and everything I now contemplate in Him, hears, knows, and acknowledges it!**

Will I not then engage Him? Do I not tell Him my troubles, how He has troubled me by making me? How I am inadequate to be what I am. That my being is not yet a good thing to me? I need instructions that will transform my life in goodness, reveal to me the right path, how to be good, and not evil.

Shall I tell Him I need His comfort? I need His breath to move upon the waters of the Chaos He has made? Shall I ask Him to be my rest and strength? Ask Him to quiet the anxious movements called life and help me truly live? Ask Him to deliver me from my sins, make me clean and grateful? Such asking is from the Father's child. Yes, He hears and will let you know He hears! **Every need from God, the lifting of the heart is a seeking of Him, is a searching for Him. This is heartfelt prayer and the inspirer and root of all other prayers.** If it is reasonable to call out this way, if all I can do is ask. Is it not reasonable to expect God to hear? A being that could not understand, or answer prayer, could not be God at all!

Prayer Experienced

Admitting all this, I ask, "Does what we call necessary truth exist?" You say, "It must." I say, "What if there is no God! Is prayer heard? Convince me so I can know!"

I reply, "What if God knows you can't understand it secondhand? That there would be no help in that?"

The only assurance worth having, no matter how much evidence you might have, is your own experience. Real assurance in yourself cannot come from another and is incapable of being adapted as evidence for someone else. The historical evidence of Jesus Christ could not take your experience's place.

This truth is of substantial importance to life, a life of heart, conscience, and will. It is of little significance as a fact related to understanding. God may hear every prayer, and a man may believe He does and be no better for it. Nothing gained as long as the man offers no prayers of his own and receives no answers from God. Nothing is achieved here by investigation alone.

If you are in any trouble, ask God to help! If you have no need, why ask questions about prayer? True, we know little about ourselves if we don't realize we are unhappy, brokenhearted, blind, and naked. **But until awareness of our need comes, how can we pray?** If we don't want to pray, what difference does this discussion make whether God hears prayers or not? You are free to think what you want. It matters nothing in heaven or earth, whether in hell I do not know.

As for the study, the supposed scientific one. The one that was supposed to prove the effectiveness of prayer. The method of looking for results from a side-by-side comparison of requests. This study, I am ashamed to acknowledge. **A god capable of manipulation in one direction or the other is not worthy of believing. This God could not be the one known and believed in by Jesus Christ! I cannot believe in a God who would fail to hear, receive, and respond to the weakest or worst of prayers.** In contrast, a god that would grant every request from everyone would be a demon and no God at all!

Unanswered Prayer

"But I want to believe in God. I want a God that answers prayer, one in which I can believe. There was a time when I believed. I prayed in a time of great trouble, and He did not answer me. I have not prayed since."

Here is my response. Intervention in our time of crisis and prayer does not define our relationship with God. Should He answer to prove something, knowing He will regret it later? If we cannot receive a "no," cannot receive love's refusal, then what we wish may be given to us to teach us a lesson. One we may regret. But not to provide us with what we want because we want it, without a higher purpose for our good. This would be the cruelty of a devil. That would be letting the ignorant child take his fate into his own hands. Yet, all prayers are heard, and their motives examined. The answer to the request may be no, at least in its form.

You may say, "To have something in another form would be the same as not having it at all."

If you knew the Father, you would leave that to Him. God is not fooled and He does not ridicule. He knows you better than you know yourself and would keep you from being deceived. **He does not engage with His children with a short-term view, but with a long-range one of the eternal ages. You will be happy if you will let Him have His way with you. The real issue is between your will and His.**

God is not one to give those who have prepared, what they value least. He only wants to give His best or what will prepare them for it. It may not be long before you say, "You are the God who hears and answers." You may come to see your deepest desire would have been frustrated by your request given

at the moment. **It is to me enough that God, as a loving Father, should listen, consider, and answer my prayers after the perfect tenderness of His heart.** It is nothing for me to do without what I request.

If we understand that any answer that was not of love, and not for our good, would be unworthy of God. This part of God's love and insight is watching over wayward and naïve children. This awareness would lessen our troubles with seemingly unanswered prayer. Letting hope and comfort take its place in the child-like soul. To hear is not necessarily to say yes, God forbid! To listen is not necessarily to give something; it may require at times to refuse.

Three times Paul says, *"...I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.' So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me."* God had a better plan than answering his prayer as he asked and removing his difficulty. He planned that the power of God would come and remain on him. God would make him stronger than his suffering. Paul would become a sharer in God's power.

Why Pray?

If God is as good as you say; if He knows all that I need better than I; why would I need to ask Him for anything?

My answer, "What if God knows prayer is what we need? The thing we need first and most. **What if the main goal in God's idea of prayer was to supply our vast and endless need for Himself?** What if the great purpose of all our needs is to help drive us to Him?"

Hunger can drive a runaway child home. But what he needs first is not food, but his mother. Communion with God is the greatest need of the soul. Prayer the beginning of communion. The recognized need for prayer as the motivation. Our wants the incentive for coming into fellowship with God, our eternal necessity!

If love and gratitude were our response to the supplying of our needs, then we might not need to ask for anything. We would seek Him who supplies them all and finds His gifts as a window into His heart. But, we take their supply for granted thinking they came from nowhere, the earth, or our thoughts, instead of from God's heart, will, and actions. This awareness on our part is the basis for us feeling some of our wants.

Communion begins with talking to God, a union with Him, which is the sole end of prayer. Yes, a union in itself of infinite phases. We must ask that we may receive. But to get our everyday needs met is not God's end in having us pray. He could give us everything without prayer. But it is to bring His child to His knee that God withholds that we may ask.

This need for prayer is, of course, to give God what He asks for and push us towards Himself. How can God give to us while we cannot receive it? The readiness for receiving is in the asking. We ask when our hunger for light and truth awakes, when our desire awakens our higher instincts, thoroughly inspiring our wills, bringing us into action. The action of prayer is the only readiness for receiving the things of God. Then God can give. Then He can be as He wants to be towards us. **The glory of God is in providing Himself!** All thankfulness is to Jesus, that in His sacrifice alone, we rise to the knowledge of God's character as His Father and ours.

There are two essentials for blessings to be received in every gift. First, that the giver be in the gift, as God always is as Love. Secondly, that the receiver is aware and receives the giver in the gift. God's every gift is an indicator of the great and abundant gift of Himself. No gift from God unrecognized is at its best. Therefore, many of the things we need that God would give us, must wait for our asking. **Asking that we might know they are from Him. When we find God in His gifts, then with Him, we will find all things.**

Sometimes, when we pray, we get the feeling rather than the question, "Is it better not to ask? If the gift is good, will He not just give it to me? Would God be more pleased if I left it up to Him?" This thought, I think, comes from a lack of trust and childlikeness. Fear is the form this takes in us. The fear of asking for what is not good and receiving it. Peter says of such a thought, "*Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares for you.*"

It may even come from ambition about spiritual things. In every request, my heart, soul, and mind should reflect, "*Thy will be done.*" But the making of any request brings us nearer to Him, in more communion with the source of our Life. It also helps us be mindful of Him in everything, learning to give thanks in all things. Anything large enough to light a wish upon is large enough for prayer. Thinking of God, to whom all prayers are offered, will help us correct and purify our desires. To say, "Father, I would like this or that?" The request enough, if the wish were terrible, to alert us and cause us to turn from it.

A simple prayer like this, about things, brings about a better relationship with Him causing us to consider Him when His will is unknown. Surely it is better and more trusting of us to tell Him everything without fear or anxiety. Is this not what Jesus did when He prayed, "*If it possible, let this cup pass from Me.*" There was something He cared more about than His fear, His Father's will. "*...Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.*"

There was no uneasiness here about His Father being displeased with Him for saying what He felt and thought. Jesus' willingness to leave it, in the end, all to His Father. Neither did He feel His Father's plans so rigid that He could not pray about them. The faith of the Son was so bold and fearless with His Father. He was trusting His Father would do nothing that was not fatherly, patient, and full of loving-kindness. We must not attempt to appease Him by any self-discipline, even of the spirit. We must speak honestly to Him. His children should not fear, but lay their hearts open to their perfect Father. Their Father may decide otherwise, but His grace will be sufficient for them!

Needs

There could be no true riches except for needs. God enriched by man's necessities. In this, God is blessed to give, and we through receiving are made rich!

Any idea of prevailing by persistence over an unwilling God is heretical. This thinking belongs to those who think God is a hard Master or one like the unjust judge. What could extinguish prayer more than believing unwillingness in the ears of the hearer! When prayer is lifeless, nothing makes it flow like thoughts of God's willingness to give! He wants to provide us with everything! "*So let us boldly come to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive mercy, and find grace to help us when we need it most.*" God will say no, if it is better for us, but what is best He will give with divine goodwill! To this end, the Lord spoke a parable, "to the effect that they ought always to pray, and not lose heart."

CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

But if I try to set forth something of the reasonableness of all prayer, I beg my readers to remember that it is for the sake of action and not speculation; if prayer be anything at all, it is a thing to be done:

Jesus on Prayer

he has called them that they may call him—that there may be such communion, such interchange as belongs to their being and the being of their Father.

If there be a God, and I am his creature, there may be, there should be, there must be some communication open between him and me. If any one allow a God, but one scarce good enough to care about his creatures,

surely he, my original, in whose life and will and no otherwise I now think concerning him, hears, and knows, and acknowledges!

Then shall I not think to him? Shall I not tell him my troubles—how he, even he, has troubled me by making me?—how unfit I am to be that which I am?—that my being is not to me a good thing yet?

Every need of God, lifting up the heart, is a seeking of God, is a begging for himself, is profoundest prayer, and the root and inspirer of all other prayer.

Prayer Experienced

But until he begins at least to suspect a need, how can he pray?

A God capable of being so moved in one direction or another, is a God not worth believing in—could not be the God believed in by Jesus Christ—and he said he knew. A God that should fail to hear, receive, attend to one single prayer, the feeblest or worst, I cannot believe in;

Unanswered Prayer

He will not deal with you as the child of a day, but as the child of eternal ages. You shall be satisfied, if you will but let him have his way with the creature he has made. The question is between your will and the will of God.

That God should as a loving father listen, hear, consider, and deal with the request after the perfect tenderness of his heart, is to me enough;

If it be granted that any answer which did not come of love, and was not for the final satisfaction of him who prayed, would be unworthy of God;

Why Pray?

What if the main object in God's idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of himself?

So begins a communion, a talking with God, a coming-to-one with him, which is the sole end of prayer, for the glory of God is to give himself.

For the real good of every gift it is essential, first, that the giver be in the gift—as God always is, for he is love—and next, that the receiver know and receive the giver in the gift. Every gift of God is but a harbinger of his greatest and only sufficing gift—that of himself.

that we may know whence they come: when in all gifts we find him, then in him we shall find all things.

Needs

There could be no riches but for need. God himself is made rich by man's necessity. By that he is rich to give; through that we are rich by receiving.