

## True Importance of Prayer: Getting to Know Him

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think it was on Wednesday, we were going to a restaurant for supper with one of our suppliers that make some of our products for us in Taipei. It was quite wet and the road was slick, and we were driving along and then we saw a bus stopped right in the middle of the road. Behind it was a poor little cart that was all squashed and the fruit was lying all over the road. And then up in front of the bus, there was a bundle of clothes lying there; and there was no driver in the bus and there were no people around at all. And then Dan McCarty explained to us that the bundle of clothes was the little old man that was driving the bicycle with the cart of fruit behind him and that he actually was lying there dead -- and he was dead, but nobody would touch him in case the ghost came out of his body and came into them. So, everything was just left there and he could be left for two or three hours until the family came and picked him up and then took him home and they buried him.

And you and I think that it's just primitive and it's just savage. The important thing that I want to remind you of is that whether you will end up lying in that spot or not, or whether you will die in one of our sanitized hospital beds, doesn't really matter. Sometime you are going to die; sometime you are going to die. And all of us who have any gray hairs at all realize that it could come anytime but I think many of you who are even younger now realize it can come like that. And whether it comes like that or not, whenever it comes it's going to seem sudden to us. We are going to be surprised by it, and I just want to make it realistic to all of us again this morning.

Loved ones, you are going to sooner or later, face your Maker and you better get to know him now before you have to face him then; it's just commonsense. And so, you need to talk to God; you need to talk with God. You need yourself to talk with God; that is, you need to pray. And I urge you most strongly as I have urged you on several Sundays now, please don't say you men, don't say you are not that kind of guy, you ladies don't say you are not that kind of woman. Loved ones, this church going does us no good unless it introduces us to God and you start talking with God yourself -- you need to talk with God. You need to do it in the best way that you can and if you are sitting there and saying, "Pastor you seem to know how to talk to him. That's why we come to church so that you can talk to him on our behalf," loved ones, it's no use.

I won't be with you when you die; and your mom won't be with you, or your dad or your son or your daughter. Nobody will be with you when you die. It's no use saying, "Yeah I plan to have a real party, a real Irish whoopity-doo when I die, so that I will have all kinds of people around me and the stuff will be flowing like water. Loved ones, it doesn't matter what kind of a wake you have, nobody will be near you when you die. They may be all close around you, they may be touching your hand, but you'll know that they are a world away from you. You are entering an unseen world that they know nothing of. And a second after you lose consciousness you will be face to face with the dear Creator who made you. And it's vital that you have talked with him before that moment; otherwise, he will say to you, "Depart from me, I never knew you; depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That's it, loved ones.

It's vital that you talk with God, it's vital that you start praying to him, it's vital that you start going home and praying to God yourself personally. And you remember what I shared with you, I think a lot of you have been in the same spot as I have; and thought "I am not that kind of mystical person." Or we say to ourselves, "I've tried prayer and for me it doesn't work" or "I've tried prayer and it's just like a banshee wailing in the dark. It just is not real at all to me; it's just

like talking to nothing and I don't get anything from it." I think that's one of the big disadvantages we all labor about today. We are not getting anything from it. Because of course, we are brought up to get things from people, get things from church services, get things from our jobs and we will say I don't get anything from prayer -- loved ones that is all irrelevant. A person does not need to be a mystic in order to pray, a person doesn't need to be emotional in order to pray, a person doesn't need to have visions in order to pray, a person doesn't even -- here is it, a person even doesn't need to feel God's presence to pray.

Only one thing is needed loved ones, and it's in Hebrews; and I know we have looked at it before, I think it's good to look at it because a lot of us have trouble about this business of praying. It's Hebrews 11:6 and it's just as down to earth and practical as any businessman or any mathematician or scientist or commonsensical person could want. Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." That's all you'll need in order to pray. All you need to do is believe that God exists. Believe that this whole universe, those trees out there in that blue sky, that hasn't come about by chance plus time. I frankly think evolution is as hard to believe as creationism but even if you believe in evolution, you know somebody had to start the evolution, somebody had to create the first single cell amoeba that evolved. Somebody had to plan and program the evolutionary process. But for those of us who believe in creationism, it is obvious to us that those trees did not come about by themselves. It's obvious when you look at yourself, your own personableness; that had to be made by a person who is as personable as you.

Now in order to pray, all a person has to do is believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him. That he will hear you, that he will keep his promise, "Him that calleth to me I will hear." And all a person has to do is believe that. Loved ones, that's what is necessary for prayer. It means you are going home and into your bedroom tonight or this afternoon and just believing that God is there and closing your eyes and saying, "Lord God, I do believe you are there; and Father I bring these things before you that I am concerned about." And then you mention them to God, that's where you start. You don't need to start anywhere more exulted than that. You can just start there and say it and then say, "Amen." You don't need to wait for angels to come floating down. You don't need to wait for lots of wonderful feelings of warm waves of rapture coming over you, that isn't what prayer is about.

Prayer is talking with God; and all it needs is, you to believe that God is there. Now if you say to me "Well, how do I know if anything happened or not?" You know it because you believe that God is there and that he hears you, you just believe. If you say to me, "Oh what if I go on ten years like that?" Then you go on ten years like that. You keep on eating whether you feel it's doing you any good or not, you keep on eating because you know eating is a real thing that people do. You keep on doing it loved ones, you stop looking inside to see if you can perceive God's presence and you stop looking at your own life to see if there are any answers. Don't you see loved ones, that the moment you start looking at your own life to see if there are answers to your prayers, that moment you are walking by sight and not by faith and therefore you will see nothing?

Prayer is believing God. It's just believing that God is there and it's praying to him in that belief. Really, the old Chinese would put us to shame. They keep on going to these temples and laying money before these altars year after year after year and there is little or nothing that they can see for all their work and they keep on doing it. We were walking on the street I think on Thursday and you could hardly breathe, there was that kind of inversion over Taipei there, it must be the most polluted city in the whole world. And they were burning incense because it was a special

day, and they were religiously burning that incense as they'd done for years before, whether it did any good or not. Loved ones, God calls us to be at least as faithful as the pagans are. To be at least as believing as the pagans are; praying to God simply requires that you believe that God is there.

Now I would just ask you to pause for a moment; do you talk with God? Do you pray each day? Do you pray each day? And then I would point out to you the number of hours that are in the day; 24 hours and probably 16 of them, for most of us, are waking hours. And then I would ask you, how much of those 16 hours do you spend talking with God? And then would say, "Brother I cannot find time to pray. I can't find time to talk with God." Then I would say to you, "Loved ones, waken up, waken up, none of the rest of us will be here probably when you die or very few of us. None of the rest of us will have power over your destiny. I can't tell where you will go after you die. Have a bit of sense! What's the point of spending 16 hours talking to all the rest of us and never talking for five minutes with the one Significant Other in the universe who can control your destiny?" Do you see? It's vital that you talk with God. It's vital that you spend a little time each day talking with him. You have to, loved ones, otherwise this life is foolishness.

Can I remind you how much time you could count that you have wasted already in this life? I mean when I think of some of the time and the hours I have spent on things that I may as well never have done -- you must be the same. When you think of all the hours we have spent in our lifetime so far on stuff that hasn't paid off at all and hasn't been worth it. Brothers and sisters, it's vital to spend some time each day talking with the one person who is going to have absolute power over the way you spend the rest of eternity. It's vital to talk with God. Now if some of you say, "Brother I am not churchy, I am not religious, I don't know how to do it or I was Catholic for years and I really left it all to the priest, I don't know what to do." Loved ones, there is no beautiful way to do it, there is no set pattern. Be real, be honest. God made you, he knows you. He knows how stupid you are or how bright you are. He knows how experienced you are, or how inexperienced you are. He loves you far more than the rest of us love you. And he understands you; he will hear you however you put it and whatever words you use, he will hear the cry of your heart. So talk, begin to talk with God.

Now there is one problem we all come up against when we talk about prayer; and I will point it out to you. We have talked about it before but it is very important. Matthew 6:7 to 8, and it's the heart of theism and all belief in a passive life in regard to God. Matthew 6:7 "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." So there it is; don't pile up empty phrases because your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So why ask him? And many of us come up against that. Why ask God, why pray, if God already knows what you need? And you remember we have answered it over the past Sundays.

God knows what you need in your life. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows whether you need a trial tomorrow or whether you need a little encouragement. He knows whether you need a new job or whether you ought to continue with the present job. He knows whether you need healing or whether you need strength to bear the pain. He knows whether you need the family's conflict solved or whether you need to learn something through patience and love in that conflict. He knows, loved ones; he knows what will happen to you tomorrow. He knows that. And he knows what you need. But God will not send it to you unless you ask him. He will not send it to you unless you ask him. And the reason is that he respects your freewill and he wants to preserve your freewill. And if he sent you what you need whether you asked him or not he would eventually begin to run your life, do you see

that? Can't you see that? If he sees that you need a new job and he brings you the new job whether you see you need it or not and whether you asked for it or not, then it isn't long before he is beginning to run your life absolutely independent of you completely. So that it doesn't matter what you are thinking, it doesn't matter what you want, it doesn't matter what you are asking for, it doesn't matter what you understand, he just makes his will happen in your life.

Now God will not do that. He cannot act against his own will and he will not act apart from your will. God will not act unless you ask him. If you say, "Do you mean, if God saw that I needed healing from cancer that he would not heal me unless I asked him?" Yes, that's right. If you say, that's a cruel and wretched God that he would allow me to experience the worst in this life rather than make me well. No, the worst in this life is that you would become a robot. Cancer is not the worst thing in this life. Death is not the worst thing in this life. The worst thing in this life is that you would become an inanimate object, a robot that could not do anything that you yourself wanted to do because then you are incapable of loving and then you are incapable of heaven and then you are incapable of the whole purpose that God had in mind when he created you.

So loved ones the Father will not act on your behalf unless you ask him, that's true, that is right. I would point you to Ezekiel 36:37 that states that principle very clearly. God knew that the Israelites had been decimated you remember in the second exile, when they were in exile to Babylon and that there were very few of them and that they needed to be increased in number. And yet even though he saw that that was necessary, you see what he says in Ezekiel 36:37. "Thus says the Lord God: This also I will let house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock." In other words God is saying, I want to increase their number and I will let them ask me do that for them but I cannot increase it unless they ask me to do it. That's it, loved ones. God allows us to ask him to do for us what he knows is right and best for us.

Now do you see why our own prayers are often so futile? Do you see why we are so often frustrated in our own prayers? Because you know we are all praying what we think we need, we are all asking God for what we think we need. In fact many of us are trying to persuade him to do what we want him to do, and here God is working on an absolutely different principle. He knows already what we need and he wants to let us know that so that we can ask him to do that for us.

You see, a lot of us feel, yeah but he probably wants me to marry somebody who is absolutely wretched looking, whom I won't like at all, who will be a complete and absolute burden and torture to me because that's what God is like. Look at that miserable sunshine out there, look how terrible he is. Look at those wretched waves that he has breaking on the shores in Florida. Look how miserable he is with those swallows soaring in the air and singing. I mean he is a miserable wretched God, you can see it all around you. He just wants the worst for us. Loved ones that's where we get caught. We take this so far and we say, okay we can see that God has a will for us and we can see that he wants us to ask him to do it for us but there is the rub. We are not sure that we want him to do for us what he sees we need because we think that he is sitting up there saying, "What that guy needs is cancer. What that girl needs is a bit of good hardship. What that boy needs is some more sweat and perspiration."

Loved ones, the Father isn't that kind of father. The Father has put us here because he wants to love us and express his love to us and he wants us to love him and to live with him and enjoy him forever. The Father wants the best for us.

Moreover do you see that God knows what will fulfill you? Now you must admit you have in your life

thought that certain things would be ideal for you and you have tried to bring them about. And you have come into absolutely different situations in your life and sighed a sigh for relief that you didn't get what you wanted. Because you have seen that what you wanted was not suitable for you at all. Often we are the worst people at knowing what will fulfill us. Loved ones, God made you. Have you ever looked at your appendix? Or maybe some of you have but most of us haven't. Have you ever looked at your gall bladder? Eventually if I keep on asking you I will get something that you haven't had taken out of you and you will have to say no. Because there are parts of us that we just don't know. There are many parts of us that we don't know and we don't understand. Now God knows all of them. God has seen every part of you. He has seen every bit of your personality. He has seen every secret desire that you don't even know you have. The Father knows you better than you know yourself. He knows how you will be fulfilled far better than you do and the Father knows what is right next for you. But he is not able to bring it about unless you ask him. And that's why you have to know God's will.

For prayer to be real you have to know God's will, that's it. I will show you where it says that. In 1st John 5:14. "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him." That's it. You can only pray if you know what God's will is for you.

How will you find out God's will? Well how do you know your mom's will? You know you know it. If I suggested a certain movie that your mother might like to see you know you could pretty well tell me whether she would like to see that movie or not. And certainly you could do it with your husband or your wife or with the person who is probably sitting beside you this morning. If I suggested that certain movie that they see, you could pretty well tell me no, they wouldn't like to see it or they would like to see it. If I suggested a Chopin concert that they would love to go to you could pretty well tell me whether they hate Chopin or whether they like him. You could tell pretty well what the other person's will is, why? Because you know them, you know them. You have been with them for hours at a time. Some of you have been with them for years. You have talked with them. You know the kind of people they are. You know the kind of thing they like. You know the kind of thing they enjoy doing. You know the kind of thing they want to do. That's how you know their will.

It's the same with God. How will you get to know his will for you? Get to know him, himself. Get to know him. Get to know the kind of person he is. And that means talking with him. You see that's what the Bible says: "This is eternal life, to know God and him whom he has sent, even Jesus Christ." Getting to know them, that's what prayer is about. Getting to know God and then as you know him, he reveals his will to you and you ask him to do that in your life and he does it, that's it. That's why Jesus guided us in the way we should pray and here it is if you look at it, it's in Matthew 6:9.

"Pray then like this:  
Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors;

And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil.”

I know some Catholics who could beat me at this but he didn't say

“Pray then like this: (he speaks the words rapidly)

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

He didn't say that. He said pray “Our Father who art in heaven.” Start with thinking of who you are praying to. I don't know if you have ever done it. I wakened one day in my 20's and realized that I had no idea who I was praying to. I was so taken up with the things I was saying. And it was then that I started to think, now wait a minute, where is God and what is he like? And I wonder what he is thinking at this moment? And I started to try to think where God was, and I thought of him as in heaven, and I know it's supposed to be unsophisticated to think spatially, but most of us probably think that way. And I thought yes, he is in heaven, he is up there and he is looking at me. And then, what is he like? And then I remembered how I used to be taught by my parents “Our Father who art in heaven” and I thought he is my father. He is my father, he is looking down at me and he thinks of me as his son and he is my father. He is a kind person like my dad. He is an understanding person like my dad. He has affection for me. I remember my dad used to say every time I got the cold, “I wish I had it instead of you.” And I thought that's what my Father is like in heaven. He would rather be bearing this thing than me. Lord, you are like that, you are my father. And I started to talk him and express my love to him for being my Father.

And loved ones, that's where you start in getting to know God. Spend time, the saints call it, spend time in adoration, or in praise but really you know praise and adoration is not all putting your hands up in the air and singing all kinds of hymns or saying all kinds of words, it's just looking at the other person. It's looking at them. The way when you fall in love it's enough just to stare into each other's eyes it's so wonderful. Even know the eyes aren't very interesting, suddenly they'd become wonderful to you. And you just stare at each other like dummies but you just do because you love each other. That's what praise and adoration is, you see. It's not necessarily saying a whole lot. It's just looking at God and beginning to think of him himself and giving him your attention. And as you do that more and more so he begins to reveal himself to you and to make himself known to you. It does help to use this dear Book at times. And so Psalms like 90 and 91 are good. Psalms that talk: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.” And it's good to think that Father, you are the one who forgives me and who heals my sicknesses. Lord, I thank you for being that. Loved ones, a great deal of prayer is involved in getting to know God first and getting to know God means thinking about him and looking up to him and really realizing that he is there.

Now, steer well away from looking into yourself to see, am I having any wonderful experience? Not a big deal, it doesn't matter whether you are having a wonderful experience or not. But spend time thinking of God, that's what real love is, isn't it? Real love is thinking of the other person and wanting to know and understand the other person. Now that's the beginning of real prayer.

And you see all of us can do that in our own miserable clumsy ways. And I suppose I think of the men here but really I am sure there are ladies that are very down to earth and practical and have

difficulties with this too but men or women, loved ones it doesn't matter how clumsy or how inexperienced you feel in this, begin. Do it your way, do it your way but begin to do it, because all of us are here on earth for one reason and that's to get to know our Maker because we are going to spend forever with him. And we have just seventy years if we are fortunate. We have seventy years here to get to know him and then begins the real life. So I would just encourage you once more. It's the last time we'll talk about prayer in this session. I'd encourage you now to begin to pray, begin to talk with God each day in your own way. And he will begin to show himself to you and you will begin to know what he wants for your life and then the moment you ask him to do that, he'll do it. And you will begin to find your life moving forward by leaps and bounds, that's the Father's will for us. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we would pray now that you will hear us when we come to you this evening and Lord we may not be very good at this but we are going to get started and we are going to start talking with you. And Father we thank you that we can know that you are there because of all these things that we see around us. We know they didn't come by chance and we know you have to be there somewhere. And Father you have said through the years that even if a little unimportant person will cry out to you, you will hear them, so here we are Lord crying out to you. And we believe that you hear us. And Father we thank you that you are a Father. We thank you that you are warm and comforting and you are thoughtful and loving like a Father. In fact Lord, we thank you that you are even better than our own fathers. And we thank you that you care about us. And Father we ask you to begin to reveal yourself to us in our prayer times so that we will start to understand your will for our lives. We ask this so that you will be satisfied and pleased with us. And so that we ourselves would be ready for real life when it begins, we ask this in Jesus' name. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and ever more. Amen.