

Spiritual Prayer 2: How to Pray

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

What I'd like to try to talk a little more about is prayer. One brother came up last Sunday and said, "Now isn't there a place for some other kind of prayer besides the one that you shared about last Sunday?" And obviously there is. There are fox hole prayers and there are other kinds of prayers where a person just cries out in desperation. You can see loved ones, if you look at Luke 23:40, and it is the situation where Jesus had two thieves you remember, one on each side of him on Calvary. And one of course criticized him and then Verse 40, "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' And he said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'"

God hears a sinners prayer so there are plenty of situations where a person cries out even like Charles Colson [politician involved in the Watergate scandal] -- not really knowing very clearly why he was crying out but cries out in desperation to God and God answers because the person is at that moment throwing his whole self upon God's mercy. So obviously God answers all kinds of people who know nothing about prayer. But I would just point out to you loved ones, that what we're sharing about on these evening services is the normal way that God wants his children to cooperate with him in this present world. And so we're not talking about the special graces that he gives to people who are not his children out of his sheer generosity. But we're talking about the way he wants us to cooperate with him daily in our own lives.

And it ties up, you remember, with that verse in Psalm 103 where it says, "God made known his works to the children of Israel." All they saw was the Red Sea splitting, or the manna coming down on the ground, but he made known his ways to Moses. So just as he made known his works to the children of Israel, so the people who don't know God see the mighty works. But the people who know him, the people who are his servants, are meant to know his ways, the ways he works, the ways he operates so that they can cooperate with him. And so that's the kind of prayer we're talking about on these Sunday evenings.

We're not saying that there is not another kind of prayer that God often answers out of sheer mercy but we're talking about the kind of spiritual prayers that his children are meant to use day-by-day in their work for him. And I would just remind you that the purpose of God's putting us here on earth was so that we would be conformed to the image of his Son. And that's how we got on to this subject of prayer. You remember we said what people need in our world is not to become nicer people, they don't need that. They don't need to be happier people, though I suppose that would help them. They don't need to just be people with better and nicer friends, they need to be people in whom Jesus is fully formed -- and that's a miracle.

That's a miracle that is worked by God's Holy Spirit. And you remember, we said that what they need is revelation to see what God has done for them in Jesus and that revelation can only come through our prayers. And you remember we quoted Ephesians 1 where Paul says, "I bow my knees to the Father and give thanks for you in all my prayers, praying that you may receive a spirit of revelation in the knowledge of him, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you." And that's

the only way that loved ones will finally see that they have been put into Jesus, utterly destroyed there and completely recreated in Jesus' resurrection, and are new people, free from themselves.

You cannot persuade them that by your talking, or your preaching, or your writing, or your speaking. Only the Holy Spirit of God can reveal that to them and he reveals it in response to our prayers. So, that's the kind of prayer we're talking about, the kind of prayer that is the work of God. Maybe I should just say it once more to you. You know your mum or dad, or your brothers and sisters -- I have a dear brother in Ireland and you know what they're like. You can tell them, you can speak to them, you can do all kinds of things; they are like as if they have blinders on really.

Can I just share a little thing because you probably won't meet my brothers for years, he just will not come to America. He's not married and I get our receptionist Joanne to send him bulletins and I asked one of the brothers to send him cassettes of the sermons for a while. And I called him three weeks ago and said, "How are you doing?" He's in the police in Ireland and that's a dangerous kind of job at the moment. He so we talked back and forward and then I said, "Do you get any bulletins?" And he said, "No, no I don't." And I said, "Okay, I'll ask JoAnne to send them." I then said to him, "Do you get any cassettes?" And he said, "No." And I said, "Would you like me to send some?"

And you know you've often had the same reply from your loved ones. He said, "Well, no they'd just sit around the house. I don't listen to them anyway." And you know, your mind boggles but you know it so well. Our relatives are like that, aren't they? They're dears but they won't receive anything from our lips. And actually it's interesting, many of our colleagues at work are the same, they just won't receive anything from our lips. And even those who hear us, loved ones, no work is done by what you speak with your lips. The only final work of forming a person in Jesus is done through your prayers and the Holy Spirit working in them. And of course, what we have said is that God cannot work unless we ask him.

Now, that's a stumbling stone I think that hit many of you. The rain will fall on the just and the unjust whether we pray or not. God will give us health and strength whether we pray or not. There are many gifts of common grace that come to everybody but the gifts of redeeming grace can come only if some little soul somewhere in this world prays that God will do a work in your heart. Now, the verse for that, you remember, is Ezekiel 36. Maybe you should just look at it and we can begin then to talk about prayer. Ezekiel 36:37, "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock." Now that's it, you see. God is saying, "I know you need increasing because you diminished in numbers through this exile and this is what I will let the children of Israel ask me to do for them, to increase their number."

But it's such a strange way to put it, isn't it? I mean why does he say, "This is what I'll LET them ask me to do for them." We feel like saying, "Lord, why don't you just do it?" And of course God answers, "I refuse to override the free will of you men and women. I refuse to act and intervene in your world unless one of you exercises your free will to ask me to do it." Now, I know some of you wondered, "Oh well what about all the people who have nobody praying for them?" But do you realize there are saints, there are dear old saints, both men and women all around this world who are in touch with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is able to lay on them all kinds of burdens for people that they have only a vague notion exists and God can use that prayer.

Loved ones, you cannot tie it down – do you know all the people that have prayed for you? You cannot tell. You cannot tell all the Sunday school teachers, all the people, all the people that passed you in the street and prayed for you without you knowing it. The truth is that God can only

act in a person's life if someone else prays for them. Now what I'd like to share with you tonight is the key to prayer because some of you were not present when we talked about prayer in depth maybe two or three years ago so at least we should talk in a little depth about it in regard to the key to prayer.

In other words, how do you get prayers answered? That's it. How do you get prayers answered? And why are some prayers answered -- and some prayers are apparently answered "no" because "no" is an answer -- and "wait" is an answer. But why are some prayers answered "yes", some are answered "wait", and some are answered "no"? Well, the key is 1 John 5:14-15, "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."

It's quite interesting that second verse, isn't it, the way it's put? "If we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the request made of him." And that's the mark of an answered prayer. There comes a time in your prayer when you know -- God has heard me, he has heard me -- and therefore I have already obtained the answer to the prayer. And the normal state of a person who has had a prayer answered is that he goes to the situation absolutely confident that the prayer has already been answered. He goes not to see if it's been answered but he knows that he's obtained the request.

Now, how does he know that God has heard him? If we ask anything according to his will he hears us. The key to answered prayer is praying according to God's will. Loved ones, could I assure you that nothing, nothing can come of a prayer that goes, "Lord, will you give this to me? But, only if it's your will." God can't deal with that kind of a general copping out prayer. "Lord, I'm asking you for this. If it's your will, give it to me. If it's not, okay -- no big deal." That kind of stuff.

The Father says, "If it's no big deal to you then it can't be a big deal to me. I'll be as sincere with you as you are sincere with me. I'll treat things as seriously as you treat them. But, if you come along to me with this kind of copping out prayer, 'Lord would you do this for my friend if it's your will?' Really, you don't really care about this. You don't care very much and you don't even care enough to find out if it is my will." Loved ones, don't pray like that. It's different with Jesus when he prays, "Lord, if you can possibly find another way in which I can redeem the world, if you can remove this particular cup of trial and give me another one, then do it. But Lord, it's you I want; it's whatever you want."

That's different. That's a total commitment to God's will and simply saying, "Is there another way to do this?" But it's utterly different than this other kind of copping out prayer where you throw all your requests at God that you think of and then you say, "Answer the ones that are your will; forget the rest. I'll take whatever I can get." It just isn't prayer, you see. There's a lightness about it, there's an irresponsibility about it that the Father in heaven cannot respect. So loved ones, the key to answered prayer is praying for what God has shown you he wants in a person's life. That's it.

And there are two sides to that key. One is the general will of God and the second is the particular will of God. So there is a particular will of God that he has for the people in your office tomorrow. Do you realize that for everybody in your office and your work tomorrow, God has a certain plan? He has a certain plan for them. He has certain things he wants to show them, he has certain things that he wants them to do. But, he has a general will also.

Now, what is God's general will? Well, it's Romans 8:28. "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." And his general purpose is then in verse 29, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." That's God's general will. God's general will is that we will all become like him and his son -- that Jesus will be the first born among many brethren. So that's God's general will.

So God will not answer any prayer of yours that opposes that general will. So if there is something in your life that is preventing you being like God and like his son, that will prevent the Father answering a prayer of yours. Do you see that? See, God wants you to be like himself so he wants to make you stop and examine anything that you're harboring in your heart willfully that he doesn't want you to have. So when you ask for something else from him, he will say, "No." Therefore forcing you to ask, "Lord, is there anything in me that is not like you or that is not becoming like you that is preventing you answering this prayer?"

Now, there are several verses, loved ones, that express that. One of them is Ezekiel 14:3. So one reason for a prayer not being answered is your own unlikeness to Jesus. The fact that you're harboring something willfully that is preventing you being like God. Ezekiel 14:3, "Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces; should I let myself be inquired of at all by them?" And God says, "I cannot receive requests from people who have set idols in their hearts." And so some of us say we want God's will above everything else, and we want Jesus to be fully formed in our friends but the idol that we have in our hearts is a wife, or a husband. Or the idol we have set in our hearts is a job, "First I must succeed in my job. First, I must be successful financially and then I am certainly concerned about the heathen not knowing Jesus. But first, I have something that comes before all of that."

Loved ones, if you have an idol in your heart God cannot answer your prayer. Because an idol is something that is more important than him to you and the Father will say, "That's another god before me. You carry on with that. But when you're prepared to turn from that to me then I am prepared to deal with you and answer your prayers." That's one reason, loved ones, why I've always felt, if there was some prayer that wasn't just being answered the way I thought it should be, I've always felt, "Boy it's my responsibility to say, 'Lord, what is there in me that's preventing you answering this prayer?'" I've never felt it's up to me to say, "Well, being pretty perfect Lord, tell me why you're not answering my prayer." Because it seems to me, "No, God is always right. It's always me that's wrong. It's me that's wrong."

And if the Father is not answering a prayer that I've prayed than there's something in my life that I need to deal with. And you find it again, just another instance, in Proverbs 21:13. And it's again another of these things that prevent God answering our prayers because it's something that is preventing us being like him and God's general will is that we should all become like him. Proverbs 21:13, "He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself cry out and not be heard." So if there's a lack of generosity in your life, God himself will not show generosity to you, you see.

I know the Father dealt with me about tithing in that connection. If a prayer is not being answered, "Lord, am I tithing?" But, not only, "Am I tithing," because it seems to me that's a minimum from the scripture -- but giving to other people generously -- not in the spirit of looking out for myself but in a spirit of trusting God to give me whatever I need after I have given everything away. But the Father says, you see, "If there's a lack of generosity in your heart I

cannot answer your prayers.” So loved ones, the first part of the key to prayer is God’s general will – which is to make us like himself. So if there’s anything in our lives that isn’t like Jesus, that will prevent God answering our prayers.

So often I know I came to the Father at the beginning, “Lord, will you show me if there’s anything that you want me to deal with in my life?” And really, you don’t have to search much, do you? I mean, our conscience is pretty active and we usually have three or four questionable things lined up there, you know, on the sidelines. And really, what the Father wants is to bring those right into the middle and deal with them. “Whatever is not of faith is sin”, so doubt is certainly not of faith. So if you’re doubtful about something and you’re really serious about having God work in your life and in others and really anxious to see prayers being answered, then get the thing out. Don’t fiddle around with it.

So loved ones, that’s one part of the key to prayer. The other part of the key to prayer is John 17:3. “And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” That’s God’s particular will, that we would come to know him, that his nature would be revealed. That’s it. So first that we would become like him, that our nature would become like his and his particular will for the people in your office tomorrow is that his own nature would be revealed to them. That’s what God is trying to do all the time; he’s trying to reveal his nature, to show himself to people. What they do with that is up to their free will but what the Father is anxious to do with the birds, and the trees, and the snow, and the lakes, and then with our prayers is to reveal what he is really like to every person in this whole earth so that everyone has an opportunity to say, “Ah, that is our Creator. I want him, I want to submit to him.” Or, “I don’t want him and I rebel against him.”

But God wants every creature in this world to have an opportunity to see him as he really is. And so God’s particular will in separate instances all through this week in your life and in mine, is that his nature would be revealed and he answers prayers on the basis of that. He answers prayers on the basis of revealing his nature. Now, I’ll show you one instance of that in 1 Kings 18, and those of you who know the Bible a little will know what that story is about. You remember of course, it’s about Mount Carmel, and Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and the fire coming down from heaven and burning up the sacrifice.

1 Kings 18:36, “And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, ‘O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O LORD, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back.’ Then the fire of the LORD fell.” That’s why God will answer prayer.

That’s what makes sense of what seem to be dreadful tragedies, such as when the two Wallace boys drowned. It seemed hard to understand. Why would that happen? Why would it happen? And do you see that the Father has reasons far beyond anything that we know and he didn’t bring that about, and he didn’t bring the cold water upon them. But having got themselves into that situation he was free to decide -- do I let this continue -- because I can work it into my plan for Jane, and for the dad, and for the mum -- or do I stop this?

But do you see that God is after other things in answers to prayers than just healing this sickness, or saving this life? Do you see that it’s hard for us to think, “Oh, there’s nothing more important than saving our lives.” But loved ones, this life is 70 years long, it’s nothing, it’s nothing.

There's an eternity, there's a life forever that is far, far more important than this. And our little sicknesses, and our little lives, and our little jobs are nothing compared with all of that and God is building for that future. And he has plans in his mind, and things that he wants to bring about that govern the way he answers our prayers and they're all based on that: making us like him and revealing his nature to his world. And he can do that in all kinds of miraculous ways that seem to us ironically paradoxical at the time.

Now, could I show you then the way that this governs your prayers? You remember the situation in Sodom and Gomorrah. You remember that God had determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and that of course Lot, who was Abraham's dear relative, was in Sodom and Gomorrah. And oh I wish you really would receive this because I do think a lot of you not only wear yourselves out, but really do bore God with some of your prayers. Now, Abraham did not go to God and say, "Lord save Lot, save Lot, save Lot. Lord save Lot, save Lot, save Lot. Lord, save Lot, save Lot, save Lot. Lord save Lot, save Lot, save Lot."

He didn't. I mean think of how the Father feels when he hears that; he must think, "Stop, stop!" Oh, and really that's what many of us do, isn't it? We just keep on, and on, and on, and on. Now, I know that Jesus gave the example of the importunate person who asked the Judge, but that was just because she continued to press her case -- not that she bored the poor judge by the same words -- as if he couldn't hear the first time. That is not prayer loved ones, that's not prayer.

Here's the way Abraham dealt with it and you'll find the key was Hebrews 1:9. The dear old saints knew the keys to prayer and they used those keys when they went before their Father. Hebrews 1:9, this was the part of God's nature that Abraham knew the Father was anxious to reveal at that time in history, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." Abraham spent time with God, spent time in his presence and he knew that God wanted to establish, "I hate lawlessness and I love righteousness." So do you see the way he prayed? It's in Genesis 18:23, "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" Lord, it's your nature to love righteousness and to hate lawlessness. Well then Lord will you destroy the righteous with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah?

And you see, that's what prayer is about, loved ones. When you read on there we all think, "You're impertinent, Abraham. God is going to strike you dead if you keep on." But do you see our Father is reasonable and has given us reasons and minds. And he is far, far more content with us treating him for real and treating him as a real person, and being really concerned about what his will is and about what he wants to do in this world than if we treat him like some kind of a slot machine where we put in a prayer and get out an answer. God yields to those who take him seriously.

Look at the way Abraham goes on there in Genesis 18:23, "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing.'" You see, this isn't your nature, "To slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, 'If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.'"

And then you feel like tapping the fella on the shoulder and saying, "Back off -- you are pushing it." "Abraham answered, 'Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Wilt thou destroy the whole city for

lack of five?’ And he said, ‘I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.’ Again he spoke to him, and said, ‘Suppose forty are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of forty I will not do it.’” And loved ones, do you see we would give up long before that. Why? Because we’re not too sure. “Lord, would you like to do this or would you not? If it’s your will, do it. I have to get on with some other things.” But Abraham got before the Father and talked with him, and shared with him, and looked at him, and studied his will, and listened to him until he knew God is concerned at this point in history with establishing the fact that he is righteous and that he hates wickedness and so Abraham kept on.

And the next verse, “Then he said, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.’ He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.’ He said, ‘Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.’ Then he said, ‘Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.’ And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.”

Loved ones, do you see the way the dear old saints prayed in the light of what the key to prayer is? The key to prayer is that God wants to make you and me like himself so if there’s anything in us that isn’t like him that will prevent him answering our prayers. And then he wants to reveal certain parts of his nature in different situations in your life and in the lives of your friends. And our task is what Abraham’s task was, to get to know our dear Father so well that we will know in each situation what God wants to show of himself. And that’s the Father’s will, that we should ask him to do the things that he sees needs to be done so that he is then free to do them. And that’s the only way his kingdom will go forward.

But loved ones, it’s not our job to tell God what to do. It’s our job to discover what he wants to do. And then if we ask him to do it, then of course there are other things that follow from that because there are certain things that we have to do in the light of that. There are certain actions that we have to take so that God can then do his part so that’s part of it you see. It doesn’t work in absolute chaos; we are co-workers together with God. The Father sees something in someone’s heart that needs to be changed. He knows it can only have any chance of being changed if he reveals a certain part of his nature to them. So he wants to impress something upon them with his Holy Spirit but he needs some living human being in whom he can incarnate himself as he did in Jesus so that that human being can say a certain thing to this person that will cause that person to think a certain thought that will enable the Holy Spirit then to reveal an answer to them.

Now, do you see the way it all works together? And the only way that can come about is if we, who are here on earth, are in touch with the dear One who is operating the whole massive operation of salvation in our world. Do you see why Jesus spent all night in prayer? He had to know the Father, he had to know, “Lord, what are you trying to do? When I face these Pharisees tomorrow what are you trying to bring forth of your own nature to them? And Lord, what are you unable to bring forth because of the attitude of some of my disciples?” And that’s why the Father spent nights in prayer with his son and that’s why the son Jesus, even though he was so close to his Father, spent time seeking God’s will.

Now loved ones, that’s what prayer is about and that’s the kind of prayer that will be answered. Now, there are countless examples of it. You find one for instance in regard to our nature in connection with the City of Ai. Do you remember that Jericho just went flat like that, they just

mowed right in, walked around the walls as God guided them and the walls of Jericho fell flat and they moved right in and took it. Now, do you know that Ai did not? Ai was a smaller town and easier and it did not fall like that.

You'll find it in Joshua 7:4-5. "So about three thousand went up there from the people; and they fled before the men of Ai," having had the great victory of Jericho you see, they were overcome by the relatively few people in Ai. "And the men of Ai killed about thirty-six men of them, and chased them before the gate as far as Shebarim, and slew them at the descent. And the hearts of the people melted, and became as water." And of course Joshua knew that for some reason the Father had not answered prayer.

So you see in Verse 6, "Then Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel; and they put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, 'Alas, O Lord GOD, why hast thou brought this people over the Jordan at all, to give us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would that we had been content to dwell beyond the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, when Israel has turned their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land will hear of it, and will surround us, and cut off our name from the earth; and what wilt thou do for thy great name?'"

And then even in asking, "Why Lord?" he brings before God, "Lord what about your own great name? What about the revelation of your own nature?" And then God answers in verse 10, "The LORD said to Joshua, 'Arise, why have you thus fallen upon your face? Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, and lied, and put them among their own stuff.'" And then in Verse 19, "Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and render praise to him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.' And Achan answered Joshua, 'Of a truth I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did.'" And then he describes it.

Then in Verse 22, "So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in this tent with the silver underneath. And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the people of Israel; and they laid them down before the LORD." Loved ones, if you do something that is against God's will in your life, he cannot answer your prayers.

So now, there is so much more, and really we ought to have about an hour, I think, for study on Sunday evening, but let me just try to summarize it this way. Do you see that prayer is you might say a science, but prayer is a precise relationship with God. Prayer is not this easy going chance thing that we're talking about when we offer up some request of our own, "Lord, I'd like a Honda 500, no 650, 650 if it's your will." It's not that kind of thing. Prayer is not that. Prayer is knowing your Father's heart, being utterly committed to his will to make all of us like himself and then going before him to ask him for the things that he already intends to do.

You see, it's not that we change God's action or God's intention at all. What we do is make his action possible. God always wanted to say certain things to the people of Israel but until Isaiah said, "Here I am my Lord, send me." God could not do it. God always wanted to bring his word and his gospel to Africa but until Livingstone prayed, "Lord, help me to paint this black continent white" then God could do nothing. In other words, we do not change God's intentions, they remain the same. But, we make possible his actions and therefore make possible fulfillment of his intentions.

So loved ones, it really makes prayer interesting because instead of this scattershot approach that we have -- throw about 25 prayers up to God and the ones that come back down again, those are the answered ones and you just forget the rest -- instead of that, you begin to live your life with your friends, and colleagues, and your relatives with God as your dear friend and your Father. And you begin to get to know him and talk with him, and find out what he wants to do in your family's life and then you begin to pray for that.

And here's the thing, you continue to pray for it until either God gives you an assurance that your prayer is answered or until he changes your prayer. But you keep on praying for it and asking the Father. You don't keep on praying, "Save John, save John, save John." But, "Lord, what did you want to show him of yourself? And what can I do so that will be possible? And then will you show me what you want to show him so I can ask you to do that? And then Lord, is anything preventing you doing it?"

I think I should keep quiet and you should ask questions if you would like to.

Question from Audience:

Do you think in general we should not ask for how we think something should be done?

I'm sure that's true. I'm sure often the Father will direct us. I think often he does things like he did with Abraham, get him to set up the sacrifice and all that kind of thing and say, "I will provide the sacrifice" and doesn't tell the final details. That's why I think we often ought to be prepared to walk in faith at times even though there seem to be some gaps in the plan. Yes, I'm sure that's true. But, I think that normally the Father wants us to be very precise in our prayers and to ask for definite things because part of his glory is us seeing that he answers prayers. Part of his glory is in us seeing his generosity and his kindness.

Okay, shall we pray loved ones? Dear Father, will you share with each one of us in a way that we will understand, the truths that we've tried to share from your word this evening? Lord, we know that you have to teach us those and to work them into our lives and indeed we have to work them into our lives. And Father we see how God-centered prayer is. We see that it's a concern with what you want, not with what we want, and it's such a concern that we're prepared to spend hours on our knees to get to know what you want. But Lord, we would rather live that kind of ordered life that has plan in it than the chance life that we so often end up living.

And so Lord, we would ask you to begin to bring order into our lives. And when we think of the loved ones in our offices and our schools, Lord we think how we've tried scattershot prayers and how many of them have gone on and we've never seen them saved or converted. Lord, we ask you to bring order into our prayer lives so that we will begin to see results in our friends. Either a clear turning you down -- in which case we'll know that they've seen -- or an open clear acceptance of you as their Savior. But Lord, we would begin to commit ourselves to definite particular prayers and to looking for the answers or receiving from you an explanation of why you cannot answer.

Lord, we thank you that you want us to be like this. You want us to treat you as a real living Father who loves us and who wants us to understand our ways. Lord, we thank you for your kindness and generosity to us. 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 throughout the days of this week. Amen.

