

Spiritual Prayer 1: Our Right

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, we would ask you to teach us from your own heart to our heart what you want us to hear, each one of us. And Lord we would lay ourselves before you, acknowledging that man can teach us nothing but Lord you can implant life as well as truth in our hearts. Lord, all that men can do is give us truths, but you can make the truths live in our hearts. Lord, we ask you to do that by your Holy Spirit for your glory. Amen.

Loved ones, what we try to talk about in the evening services throughout the year is the spiritual life. And that's the general title that we give to the series and it usually takes us three years to get through it, loved ones. And what we talked about two or three years ago was the spiritual man -- or the spiritual man or woman. And it's very easy to define for you what kind of person that is. Your dad promised you that you would go fishing and I don't know what the girls do in the States about age 13 or 14, but your dad promised you'd go out shopping maybe. And you were all set on it and you were looking forward to it, "Ah, just that fishing or that shopping expedition."

And then he came home the night before and said, "I can't go. I have to work." And you know the disappointment that hit you at that moment. That's because you were living by the flesh. You see it? Not flesh in the sense of all kinds of sexual immorality but you were just living by the messages that came from outside inside and you were living for the excitement you'd get from that fishing expedition, or the excitement and satisfaction you'd get from that shopping expedition. So you were all disappointed because you weren't going to have the fun of going through Dayton's department store with all the lights and all that kind of stuff, or have the fun of going out on the lake and catching some fish.

You weren't going to have the fun and satisfaction of that. Is that what you get? I'm worse than football. And I'm glad my wife isn't here and don't tell her please. But you look forward to the thing and it didn't come off and you were just cast down. And that's a kind of childish thing but the years passed by and you got to run life the same way with going out with a girl or a guy. You looked forward so much to it and then the girl or guy said, "No, no I can't make it." And whatever was the real motive behind them not making it you were utterly disappointed.

That's living by the flesh. It's living by what comes in from the outside rather than by what comes in from the inside from God. And when you live by what comes from God alone it doesn't matter what happens on the outside. It doesn't matter whether your dad fails to take you on the shopping expedition or the fishing. It doesn't matter whether the guy or the girl goes out with you or not. It doesn't matter actually whether you get lots of presents at Christmas time. It doesn't really matter whether you get home for Christmas or not. Because there is a joy, and a delight, and a peace, and a satisfaction in your love relationship with your dear Father who made you that gives you continual joy and continual peace.

That's the spiritual man or woman, you see. A person who lives by what they receive from God rather than by what they receive from men and women. Now, that's what a spiritual man or woman is, loved ones. And I don't need to remind you again, that most of us, of course, do not live like that at all. But we were meant to live from God, from his Holy Spirit, coming down into our spirits, and

into our souls where our will would obey our conscience and our mind would understand what God has told us and our emotions would express that joy out through our bodies to the world. And that's the way we were meant to operate. But the way most of us operate is the opposite way.

We live from the outside in -- so actually, in a sense our life has been turned upside down. And that's why our will has such problems. If our will tries to work the way it was meant to work from our spirits -- that is, if our will tries to be governed by our conscience and tell our mind and emotions what to do -- it's as if it's working up hill. It's as if you're working against yourself.

The will is trying to work up against all this stuff that is falling down on top. And so the conscience tells the will, "Now, cast your mind onto Jesus. What sort of things are lovely? What sort of a thing are of good report? If there be any praise, if there be any virtue, think on these things."

And the will tells a man to do that but the dear mind is overwhelmed by the weight of the emotions that are upon it. And the emotions are being fed by the body and the body's eyes are glued to something that is not of God. And so the effect of what the body sees, or what the body touches, or what it feels is crushing the will and crushing the spirit. And that's why loved ones, you'll often try to exercise your will and to do something that you want to do and you find it impossible to do it because your whole personality is running the wrong way, it's all programmed the wrong way.

Now, here's what most of us try to do: most of us try to change that. Most of us try to read the right books, and whistle a little tune and concentrate, "I'll think good thoughts today, I'll think good thoughts. Yeah, Jesus, there's Jesus. I can think a good thought. Yeah, I won't think that bad thought, I won't think that bad thought." And we try to reprogram our minds by the power of this little will. That's the way most children of God try to live. They try to rectify this whole thing by the exercise of the will.

It's impossible. I mean, the thing is upside down. It has to be a work of God to turn it the right way up. That's what Jesus did on Calvary. Jesus allowed all that upside down personality to be crucified with himself and he turned it up the right way. That's what happened on Calvary. God destroyed that old self that works the wrong way and turned it up the right way and now believe it or not, you are able to exercise your will. You are. You're actually able to exercise your will. And faith is exercising your will in the absolute belief that God has done that in Jesus.

Now, do you see where some of us fall into difficulties? Some of us say, "Yeah, well I believe God has done it in Jesus and I'm sure waiting for it to be made real in me. Yes, I believe as Jesus died to the insults of the Roman soldiers and to the things that came through his eyes, so have I died to those things too. And I know that I have died to the insults and the criticisms that other people level at me at home, or in the office. I know that but boy, I'm waiting to feel that inside." Well, do you see that isn't faith? Faith is believing that and exercising your will in accordance with that.

In other words, somebody says something to you in the office that is critical. Having faith is the will exercising itself in love towards that person. It's not sitting there and waiting, "Lord, give me love for this person. Give me love, because I don't have love Lord. Give me love." That isn't faith. Faith is the will exercising itself in accordance with what God has done to you in Jesus and that's what produces a spiritual man or a spiritual woman.

And of course, what we talked about last Sunday was that spiritual work is the bringing about of

that in others' lives. Spiritual work is seeing Jesus made alive in other people's lives. And that you remember you get in Galatians 4:19 if you'd like to look at it. Spiritual work is Galatians 4:19 where you remember, Paul expresses the real heart of spiritual work, "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" That's spiritual work.

It's interesting you know, to give out tracts. It's good and I think God can use that and it's good to preach and I'm sure God can use that, and good to sing, and go to meetings, and all of that stuff, and God can use all that. But real spiritual work is what Paul says in Galatians 4:19. It's a person wanting above all to see Jesus formed in others. That's what spiritual work is. And it's really do you see, that God can't actually do it unless you want it. God can't do that unless you want that above everything else. And do you see how corny many of us are? I mean, we're all taken up with the Honda 650 motorcycle, or the girl, or the guy, or when we're going to get married, or when we're going to get a new house, or when we're going to get a new car, or when we're going to go on vacation, or how the bank account is going, or how the stocks and shares are going. We're all taken up with thousands of different things. And of course, on the side, we want to do some spiritual work.

Well, that's dumb, you know. The great Creator of the universe is not going to be able to do anything through that kind of side effort on our part. In other words, God can only answer the prayer of people who are in travail. That's what Paul said. He said, "I'm in travail unto Christ be fully formed in you." And I'd just ask you, what really takes up your interest day-by-day? Really? What are you really concerned by each day? Well, do you see you've preached to yourself as you've answered that question because you know that most of us work ourselves up on Sunday, or try to work ourselves up on Sunday into a lathered frenzied enthusiasm to see Jesus fully formed in people because it's thrown before us by the preachers, and by the hymns, and by the lessons.

And so we try to work ourselves into a frenzy with enthusiasm on a Sunday and we pray that the Lord will save the heathen and that he'll save our mother, and our father, and all our friends. And then we go back to Monday morning and we get back to real life and we get back to being involved with all the things that we really think are important. Now loved ones, spiritual work can only be done by men and women who have died on the cross with Jesus to everything but their dear Father. That's it.

And we can bluff ourselves and create lots of smoke and all that kind of thing, but really, we're not involved in spiritual work until we've come to a place of death to everything in Jesus but what he wants. And only when that's the dearest thing in your heart will God begin to use you and that's why we have so much shallow work going on, do you see that? We have a lot of shallow work, a lot of people talking madly about Jesus and Christianity and all that kind of stuff but it's amazing how few saints we have, isn't it? And it's amazing how few mighty answers to prayer we know about. And it's because very few of us are really in a place where we care only about seeing Jesus fully formed in other people. And until you come to that place God can't use you -- until you and I have a single eye.

So you know, it's like Tom and Ann, or Bob and Marge, or Irene and me, or Stan and Emma -- those are husband and wife situations in our church -- and then it's the same with all of us who are guys and girls, all of us who are friends, all of us who live with other people who are dear to us. Loved ones, until Jesus means more to us than our dearest one, until Jesus means more to us than the little bit of fun we get from being with each other, until Jesus means everything to us, we aren't involved at all in spiritual work because spiritual work is Paul's kind of thing, "I'm in travail."

And you ladies know when you're in travail you don't have too much time for all kinds of other things, you don't. If you're having a baby you can't play many chess games on the side, it's a full-time occupation. And that's what Paul is saying. Being in travail until Christ be fully formed in somebody takes all your attention and is a laborious task and involves a single eye and a single mind.

Now, what it does involve loved ones is prayer and what I would like to try and talk about just very briefly is prayer. I was hoping to deal with prayer and warfare but I think we'll probably have to deal with warfare next Sunday or the Sunday after. But, I'd like to talk a little about prayer and the kind of prayer that God uses is the prayer that is talked about in Ephesians 6:18. "Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." So a spiritual man and woman does spiritual work through spiritual prayer. And spiritual prayer is different from soulish prayer. Soulish prayer is, "I've got a flat tire. Lord, will you help me fix this flat tire?" Soulish prayer is, "The bank account is down. Lord, will you help me with my bank account." Or, it's interesting, soulish prayer too is when you have a fight with somebody at home, or the person you live with, "Lord will you do something in that person's heart."

Soulish prayer is prayer that issues from the situation around you, it comes from the outside, it comes from some need that you just feel yourself. Spiritual prayer is – well, the principle of it is in Ezekiel 36:37. Some of you know the verse by memory. 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." So do you see it, loved ones? "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."

The Jewish race had been diminished by the exile and they needed to be increased in number. But do you see how it came about? God said, "This also I will let the children of Israel ask me to do for them." In other words, it wasn't the leader of Israel looking out and seeing, "Lord we need this, bring us this. And Lord, I see we need that, bring us that." It wasn't that, it was God looking from his position in heaven and seeing, "Oh, I see what's needed here. They need to be increased in number." And then he said, "Now, I'll let you ask me to do that for you." And God revealed his will to somebody here on earth and then they prayed that he would do that. That's spiritual prayer.

Do you see how crude we are? Some poor soul has a problem with drugs, or some loved one has just got into some immorality -- so we get our old minds going and we work out what they need and then we ask God to give them that. It's madness; we have no idea what they need. We don't know at all whether that's the right move at all or not. Do you see that the important thing is not that all of us were put into Jesus and renewed and regenerated but the important thing is that only one person has the right to apply the benefits of Calvary to the human race and that's the Holy Spirit and he knows exactly in what order to do that.

And you see the messes we get into with our oil spills in California when we go about developing the world in the order and the way we think we should. We do everything upside down. Now, you see the mess we would make if we had the right to apply the benefits of Calvary. We would heal all kinds of people that really don't need to be healed at this point; they need to go deeper into Jesus. And we would convert all kinds of people against their wills. Only the Holy Spirit is able to guide us in the application of the benefits of Calvary and only he can tell us what God wants to do next.

So in your home and in the place where we work there's a right step for a loved one and God knows what that right step is and he's ready to answer them if they'll bend their will. But in order to present it to them he needs one of us to pray that he will present that to them. And his hands are tied behind his back until one of us gets that and prays that he will do it. That's right. Even with our prayer God cannot overcome their will.

But you see that what most of us need is light. We need light to see some specific truth of what Jesus has done for us that we have never seen before. We can only see that, God can only present that to a person, if one of us prays that he will. That's how important, loved ones, spiritual prayer is. And it's the way prayer worked in the Bible. There are different instances if you'd like to look at Genesis 18. It always works this way, that first of all God reveals what he wants to do to an ordinary human being. Genesis 18:16, "Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way. The LORD said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice.'"

And so God told Abraham what he was going to do to Sodom and Gomorrah. And then you see in the light of that then Abraham prayed in Verse 23, "Then Abraham drew near, and said, 'Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?'" But first of all God told Abraham what he was going to do and so it is loved ones, everywhere in the Bible, God always speaks to one of his servants and he explains to them what his will is. And so of course, the first step in spiritual prayer is not to go in with your shopping list.

And that's the mistake we make. We just go into God's presence and we just say, "Lord, we have some things here we want you to do, okay? My mother is sick, will you heal her? And number two, my friend is beginning to break away from the church, will you touch him? And number three, I'm having a little trouble with my job, as you know, will you show me what I should do?" And we're utterly taken up with the shopping list. That's why prayer is such a bore to so many of us because it's primarily autosuggestion, it's primarily intense concentration on our problems which is why many of us get up from prayer so depressed.

Really, because we pray ourselves into a hole and then we get up and we're more burdened with the things than when we went before God. And of course, the reason is that we're not praying spiritually -- because spiritual prayer is first of all looking to God. And you'll find that in Exodus 15 where people go before God not to tell him what to do but in fact to ask him. Exodus 15:23, "When they came to Marah," the Israelites you remember, "They could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' And he cried to the LORD."

That's the first step. Not going before God to tell him what he should do, "Lord, I think you should work this miracle to change the water into sweet water." But going before the Lord and crying to the Lord. "And the LORD showed him a tree, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet." And you notice that that's the most outlandish thing that you could ever dream of doing. I mean, heaving a big tree into the water? And that's what happens with spiritual prayer; God usually tells you something that you wouldn't think of with your own common sense. He reveals something to you that is his unique way of dealing with the situation.

And you find it again -- because the Israelites seem never to learn -- you find that in Exodus 17:3, "But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?' So Moses cried to the LORD, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.'" And loved ones, that's spiritual prayer. It's not going before God with all the answers in your mind knowing what you're going to ask him to do, but it's going before him really ready to listen to him, to hear what he has to say.

And so the first step in spiritual prayer is to go before him with praise and oh you can use any of the Psalms for praise. If you'd just like to look at say, Psalms 1, and look at how it begins, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." And those of you who don't know how to praise God can start off with a verse like that and just say, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners." Or, start with Psalm 103, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." "Bless the LORD, O my soul who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live."

But go into God's presence thinking of him and looking up to him and waiting for him to speak to you. But not, loved ones, with this shopping list of things you want him to do. But go before him and enjoy him. Oh you know, there's that verse in scripture, "This is eternal life, to know God and him whom he has sent, even Jesus Christ." And really eternal life is being able to stand before God and love him, and praise him, and enjoy him, and listen to him. And then God begins to let his will be known to you so that you know what to pray for.

And I'd just ask you that: have you got to the place where you enjoy God? No? I think where some of us make a mistake is we go before God and we have only got 10 minutes and we whip right into it and we whip over a few verses of the Psalm and then we bring out our shopping list and we give that to him and then we say, "Amen. Help me through the day." And then we leave him. Now, do you see that that isn't waiting on the Lord? That isn't waiting on God. That isn't even doing what you do with Jimmy Carter [American President, it isn't even what you do with an earthly king or a queen. You go into their presence and you let them take the initiative in the conversation and you'd be prepared to wait. And of course, the older they are -- and God is very old -- the older they are the more respect you'd have for them and the more you'd be prepared to wait for them to speak and to give them the right to speak.

Do you see there's an appropriate way to go into God's presence and it is to go in as the little creatures that we are and say, "Lord, when you're ready to speak that's good enough for me. And Lord, I'm not just giving you 10 minutes, or 15 minutes, Lord there's this hour and I'm laying it aside, and I'm turning aside from everything else and Lord I'm just going to think about you and I'm just going to listen to what you have to say to me." But that's the beginnings of spiritual prayer, loved ones.

And then as you do that, God will let you know what he wants you to ask him to do. And then it is your place just to thank him for that and you can see that's why people like George Muller and Rees Howells didn't keep badgering God. The time they spent before him was in praising him and thanking him for the answer that he was going to bring. Because once he revealed to them what he was going to do they knew he would do it and all they had to do was thank him for it.

And then spiritual prayer involves walking in faith that that will be done. Walking in absolute faith that it will be done. So you go into the office the next day and the boss is ranting more madly than he was last week and you prayed for him and faith is thanking God that he is working the thing out even though to human eyes it appears that nothing is happening. Faith is absolute confidence, even when you see that Sarah is so old. She's ninety and how can she bear a child? Yet you're not put off in any way by the outward physical appearance; you have absolute confidence that it will be done. And you walk in that confidence, and you express that love, and that concern, and that joy to the boss in the office.

So loved ones, that's something of what spiritual prayer is. And I would just ask you, are you involved in it? Is there anybody you're praying for at the moment regularly in that way? I think there may be a lot of people that you're praying that they'll become a Christian but do you see how weak that is? Do you understand, loved ones, that you going before God day-after-day saying, "Lord, will you make my mother a Christian?" Do you see that God can't do much with that? Do you? Do you see that God has all kinds of things that he wants to reveal to your mum and he knows what they are but he can't reveal them to you until you become as interested in your mum as he is?

And it's only when you begin to die to your own concerns about your mother, and your own concerns about your own life and become interested in what he's thinking of your mum that God begins to reveal to you, "Well, you know she is really unable to see me because she's always had a doubt about scripture. She's always had a doubt about it." And God reveals to you what you need to begin to pray about for your mother. Now, that's what spiritual prayer is.

Now, I would ask you, do you have anybody that you're praying for spiritually at the moment day-after-day? Now, could I tell you a horrible truth? Probably there must be three or four hundred of us here. Probably thirty of us have prayed for a person every day for the past three weeks; perhaps fifty of us. Probably thirty of us have any experience of regular prayer -- that means every day over at least a month or three weeks -- probably only about thirty of us have any experience of praying spiritually for a person over that period of time. I could be wrong, but I think that's probably the situation.

Now, do you see why so little is being done by God? Because, there are very few of us who are praying spiritually at all. And loved ones, if the three or four hundred of us here would begin to pray spiritually, revival would take place now in Minneapolis, really. Revival would take place now. So I'd start right at the beginning. Have you died to everything but what Jesus wants for your friends and for you? Have you? And that's the key to everything.

Shall we pray? Dear Father, we are humbled when we see what you have planned for us and Lord when we see you really have put us in Jesus and you really do expect Jesus to be able to pray through us the way he did in his own body. Father, we're humbled when we see the piecemeal approach that we've taken towards prayer. Father we see what the way is for us, that one spiritual prayer would be worth all the time we're wasting in our soulish prayers. So Father, we want to get to know you.

And Lord, when we think of all the time we give to the sports, and all the time that we give to eating, and all the time we give to having fun, and all the time we give to other people, Lord we realize we give nothing to you at all. So Father, we want to begin to set aside time each day to come before you not with our shopping list but to get to know you and to give you time to get to know us and to wait upon you as we would with any earthly monarch. And so Father at this moment, those of to whom you have spoken about our quiet time, we would make a vow now at this time, we

would make a promise to you and we would establish the time at this moment, we would establish the hour that we're going to give to you.

And now Lord we ask you to give us grace and help tomorrow as we get up at that hour, or we set aside that hour after we come home at night and Lord we will begin to be involved as spiritual workers involved in spiritual prayer so that Jesus will be fully formed in others as you have formed him in us for his glory. 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.