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Introduction to Why Bother?

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Introduction to *Why Bother?*

This e-book is the summary of a sermon series that I preached at The Caledonia Gathering (TCG). TCG is a growing network of house churches called 'house gatherings' who gather together for worship in a local brewery on Sunday mornings. The house churches live a rhythm of life that includes spiritual growth, serving their neighbors and developing a community where people can learn to live and love like Jesus together.

In one of our house gatherings, during one of our Spiritual growth nights, we were discussing Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. During his teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-13, one woman in the gathering asked a question that has been asked by many: *If God knows everything: all I'm about to do, say, and think; everything I've done, thought, or said; if he knows everything I need, want or will ever ask for and knows it before I ask for it - then why bother praying?*

This question then prompted what became the sermon series *Why Bother: Prayer*. And in order to make that content brief, portable and accessible, I have taken up the task of putting it into an e-book format.

Beginning with(out) a final word...

Before we launch in, I want to be the first to say that I am in no way attempting to say something that hasn't already been said by others. Just about every idea you will find in this book can be traced back to some early church father, reformer, sage, pastor, author and many others who are wiser and smarter than me. This effort is about putting together a simple and accessible resource for our people to help answer this question: Why bother praying?

At the same time this is by no means the final word on Prayer. In fact books, upon books, upon books have been written about prayer - and I recommend that you consult them. I will give you a few suggestions at the end of this book. I will also to the best of my ability give you suggestions throughout this book as to where ideas came from, and how you can explore some of them further.

Why Bother?

Getting God to Do What I think He Should Do

Sunglasses and Murky Water

A couple of years ago my wife Alanna and I were away at the cottage with her family, swimming in the lake. The swimming area wasn't all that large, about 50 feet of beach front. The water its self stayed between waist and shoulder height all the way down to the end of the dock. As we were playing in the water next to the dock, Alanna's Dad lost his prescription glasses. They fell off of his face and down into the water. Even though it was shallow enough to stand, it was murky enough water that we couldn't see the glasses once they slipped below the surface. We searched with hands, toes and what ever else we could find to scour the area. We searched and searched until it was time to give up and go have lunch.

While seated around the picnic table, ready for lunch, somebody prayed to bless the meal. I don't remember who, but somebody mentioned the lost glasses, and expressed hopes to God of finding them back. I remember this very clearly, because I remember thinking to myself - what a silly thing to pray for. Is God really in the business of finding lost glasses? I quickly moved on from the thought as the food was dished up, and we ate our meal.

For the next two days, my father-in-law had to wear his prescription sunglasses everywhere and at all times. It was humorous.

About 2 days later, while playing out in the water again... someone found the glasses! A highly unlikely event, which for some people, might be a cause for celebration, and deepening of their prayer life. But for many people, me included, it simply raises a ton of questions. Did prayer actually work? Did God really take time out of his busy schedule of running the universe to help us find a pair of glasses? How often can you count on prayer to work like that? Or is there some other explanation? Maybe once the water settled, and the murkiness due to sand being stirred up, cleared— maybe then we could see the bottom more vividly, and that is why we were able to find the glasses.

Lost Keys, Wallets and Parking Spots?

If God did help us out, why was he willing to help us find Dave's glasses but not my Mom's sunglasses a few years ago when she lost them in a very similar fashion while playing in a lake? Why did God choose to answer the prayer this time and not that time? And on the topic of God answering prayers, why does God choose to answer some prayers and not others? Is he really helping us find our keys, sunglasses, lost wallets or better parking spaces and yet at the same time ignoring our prayers about cancer and world

hunger?

How in the world does this prayer thing work? Is it just luck? Is it a game of chance - sometimes you win big, and sometimes you don't?

Is there a strategy to it? Is there something more you need to do? Is there a particular formula or code, sort of like a combination of the right words, the right amount of breaths between those words, the right music in the background and enough candles? Is it using the right language, or tempo like a rhythm that your to supposed to use in order to get God to answer?

And on the topic of getting God to answer, why do we ask other people to pray for us? Why do we offer our prayers for other people? Is God like a politician, and the more people we can get to call in and leave message on his phone - the more likely he will be to vote on the upcoming bill in our direction? The more people who ask - the more likely God will give the people what they want? Is it about getting the right kinds of people to pray? Is it because I've been asking the wrong kind of people to pray for and with me - that I've not been getting the answers I was hoping for? Do we need to ask more qualified people to pray for us and share our requests with God?

Speaking of prayer requests, why do some Christians sit in a circle in someone's living room or in a church service and share their prayer requests out loud to one another, and then bow their heads to pray - and then repeat the very same conversation? Was God not listening the first time?

Its Really About Me

And then the more I think about all of those questions and more, (and I'm sure you would share this feeling) the more I realize that my prayers, your prayers, many of our prayers - are really all about us. Maybe you're like me. If you really examined your average prayer life it would probably look like,

Dear God, thanks for this day - now here is all the stuff that I'm up to today, could you put your magical God-touch on it to make it go well?
Thanks. Amen.

I heard a pastor point this out once, and it struck me right between the eyes: He said "Isn't true that many of our prayers are really just *us trying to get God to do the things we think God should do?*" Our prayers are just filled with a quick thanks, and then help me, bless me, give me, help me, bless me, give me. Its really just about getting God to do things for me. And sure the circle widens sometimes to the people that I love and care about - but its mostly just for me. And for the most part it feels like a crapshoot as to whether he comes through or not.

And look, I've heard some people say "God always answers prayer. He has three answers: Yes, No or Wait." But the truth is people only ever say this when God isn't doing the things that we think God should be doing.

Which all really brings us back to this original question - What is prayer about? What is it for? Is it really just about asking God for things? Is really just about getting him to do what we think he should do?

Because if it is, either I suck at asking, or He sucks at answering.

And here's why this matters so much, not just for me, but also for those of you reading this: Some of you have given up on prayer, some of you have given up on faith and given up on God. Some of you have loved ones who have walked away from the church or left faith behind for a good and simple reason: a God who seems to help us find lost keys, sunglasses, and better parking spots but ignores our prayers about world hunger and cancer - is not a God worth praying to.

Your Doing it Wrong

But what if I told you that prayer is about something else what if it's about something more? Is it possible that you and I have been wrong when it comes to prayer? What if that's it?

You're wrong about prayer!

This might feel offensive to hear because prayer is such a personal thing. But I'm comfortable to say it because it wasn't any less offensive when Jesus said it. Jesus actually started his teaching on prayer off by letting people know that they were *doing it wrong*. Matthew 6 tells the story. Jesus was sitting on a hillside, and teaching what we have come to know as the "Sermon on the Mount." And during this sermon, he broached the topic of prayer. And as he begins his teaching on prayer - he starts out by offering 3 corrections. Here's how Matthew tells it:

⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 6:5-8.)

It can be simplified into these three correctives: Don't pray in front of others, don't worry about what you'll say, and don't spend the whole time asking for things.

Don't Pray in Front of Others

Jesus starts off by saying, "don't pray in from of others." In other words prayer is not about looking spiritual. If the goal of your prayer is to be seen praying, Jesus says

“congratulations, mission accomplished - you wanted to be seen praying, you prayed in front of others, they saw you - mission accomplished.” That’s why he says the hypocrites have received their reward. The reward was to be seen - if you prayed in public - you were seen. But if you really want a rewarding prayer life, go behind closed doors to pray to your Father in heaven. Its going behind closed doors that will result in you being truly rewarded. We’ll talk more about that reward a little later, but let me say for now, its not about getting everything you wanted. Jesus is not telling us here the formula for how to get God to do the things you think God should do. Its not as though your mistake in prayer so far in life has been asking for a bigger house and nicer car *in public* - and instead what you need to do is pray for those things in *private*. That’s not what Jesus is saying. So then what is he saying?

He’s instructing his listeners to place themselves in an intentional space and state for communicating with your Father in heaven. How you engage in a relationship with you heavenly Father in secret is the most honest showing of the character of your relationship. Its the same as any relationship that you might have in this way - real relationships are cultivated behind closed doors. To never take time alone, away from distraction to talk to God, and still expect a healthy line of communication, would be like me never talking to my wife, Alanna, in private. If I am attentive to her only in public so that others can see (ie. opening doors, serving her, etc.) but completely ignore her behind closed doors, you’d probably say that I lacked integrity. You are not who you are in public - you are who you are when nobody is watching. And it is what you do in private that gets rewarded.

So Jesus says, don’t pray in public places to look spiritual. Prayer isn’t about looking spiritual its about cultivating a relationship, and that happens behind closed doors. Can you pray anywhere? On the go? In the car? Before your meals? Absolutely, just like you can talk to a close friend or spouse on the go, in the car and at meals. But Jesus says prayer is not just an on-the-go thing, it requires focused attention, behind closed doors.

So if it is not about looking spiritual, but it is about getting away from distraction to cultivate a relationship - then you may be wondering *what do I say once I’m alone with God?* Good news, Jesus answers that question.

Don’t Worry about What You’ll Say

His answer is “don’t worry about it.” That might not have been all that satisfying so let me explain. Jesus says that the pagans, people of other religions, babble thinking they’ll be heard for their many words. To babble is to say words over and over and over agin. In other words they keep filling the space with words. This is the temptation for many people. We all fear the awkward silence in conversations, especially those with whom we don’t share a deep relationship. That pause comes naturally in most conversations every seven to eleven minutes or so. We don’t like silence though. And so some of us feel the need to fill the space with words. One of the signs of a deep relationship, however, is the ability to sit quite comfortably in the silence. To not feel compelled to fill the space with

words. And that's part of what Jesus is saying here. Once you get out of the busy distraction of life, and close the door behind you - don't worry too much about what you'll say, don't feel the need to start talking and talking and talking.

I think the other part of what Jesus is saying here, is that there is no special combination of words that you need to figure out in order to get God to do what you think God should do. Sometimes we can feel compelled to just throw all kinds of combinations of words up at God hoping that the more we throw up at him, the more likely it is that something will stick. But Jesus is saying don't worry about what you'll say, there is no verbal formula. There is no secret code. There is no combination that you need to figure out in order to get God to answer. Besides, prayer is not *just* about getting God to do the things you think he should do.

And then Jesus utters the most comforting and frustrating words of all time when it comes to prayer. The words that launched this little book.

Don't spend the whole time asking for things

If you feel like I have, that most of your prayers are really just about getting God to do stuff for you - this is going to be frustrating - but at the same time its comforting. Jesus says that you're Father in Heaven *already knows what you need, before you ask him*. This is comforting. Don't spend the whole time asking for things, he already knows what you need. To think that God, the creator of the universe, knows me, knows what I need, what I'm going to ask for, what I'm longing for most in this life - and he knows what I'm going to ask Him before I even ask it is comforting. Its comforting to think God knows and loves me that much. However...

If God knows what I need, and knows what I'm going to ask for, before I ever ask for it THEN WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD WE BOTHER ASKING IN THE FIRST PLACE? WHAT IS THE POINT OF PRAYER IF HE ALREADY KNOWS EVERYTHING? WHY BOTHER?!?!?!?

Unless prayer is supposed to be about something else, something different, something more. What is that *more*? What is *the reward* of prayer? What is the reward that Jesus said the Father will give?

It's about Satisfaction

To understand what the reward is we'll have to back up to the beginning of Jesus' teaching in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, and then back to the beginning of the whole sermon.

This section where Jesus is teaching on prayer is actually the middle of a three part teaching on what Jesus calls *practiced righteousness*. His idea of practiced righteousness falls into three different categories: charity, prayer and fasting. Charity is about giving to the poor and generosity. Fasting is about withholding food from yourself to remind us of

God's provision. And the middle section is prayer - communication with God. Communicating with God is practiced *righteousness*.

Now pull back to the very beginning of the sermon on the mount. Jesus begins this whole sermon in Matthew 5 -7 with an introduction that many have referred to as *The Beatitudes*. Another way to title it would be *The Blessed Life*. In the middle of Jesus' teaching on the blessed life, he says that those who hunger and thirst after *righteousness* will be - and here is the reward - filled. Perhaps the word filled doesn't mean that much for you, but what Jesus is doing is creating a word picture of a person who pushes back from the table after eating a good meal. Not over eating. Not still hungry. Filled. When you are hungry, the best way to solve your hunger is to eat. Another translation of the word *filled* is to be *satisfied*. Those who hunger for righteousness will be satisfied. It should be no surprise that later in this message Jesus says, here's how you practice that righteousness. And the goal, the reward, is satisfaction.

Don't pray to look spiritual - that won't bring satisfaction to your life.

Don't worry about what to say - the right words are not what is going to bring satisfaction to your life.

Don't spend all your time trying to get God to do the things that you think God should do - that won't satisfy you. The reward for prayer is not that you'll get everything you asked for, it is that you will be satisfied. Those aren't the same.

But you already knew that. You know that being satisfied and getting everything you want are not the same thing. Think of it terms of food. In this moment, I may want to scoot out of the EB Coffee & Pub where I'm sitting now, and head down the street to the McDonald's for breakfast. I might want that in this moment - but if I do, I can almost guarantee it won't satisfy. Needs and wants aren't the same.

Or think of it terms of relationships. The most satisfying relationships are not the ones in which you get everything you want - but when you get what you need, along with the other person in the relationship. And the best relationships are cultivated not in public for all to see, but in private behind closed doors. The most satisfying relationships are the ones where you aren't worried about what you'll say, you aren't concerned about saying things just right, or feeling like you have to fill the space with words. And the most satisfying relationships are definitely not the ones in which the conversation constantly revolves around the needs and requests of one person.

The Communication of an Intimate Relationship

Prayer is not about getting God to do the things we think God should do - its not just about asking God for stuff. In fact "help me, bless me, give me" is almost unnecessary. But instead, prayer is *the communication of an intimate relationship that brings satisfaction to your life*. Let me say that again. *Prayer is the communication of an intimate relationship that brings satisfaction to your life*. If you want to pray satisfying

prayers, you need to close the door, don't worry about what you'll say or spend all your time on your own needs. Pray to your Father in heaven who will reward you. Not with a prize for prayer, but with the natural outcome of investing time into an intimate relationship: satisfaction.

That's what Jesus had. It's what his disciples saw, and wanted. They wanted the kind of satisfying relationship that he had. So they asked him to teach them. Which, if you think about it, is really why Jesus came in the first place. To restore the relationship between you and God. To teach us to communicate with our Father in heaven. That's what he's inviting you into.

Now, how do we make the move from our prayers being about getting God to do stuff for us, to *the communication that brings satisfaction*?

Great question. Jesus answers it next.

Shifting Your Perspective

Finding Your Place in Something Bigger

A Sanity Saving GPS

A few years ago my wife and I were driving across the country on an end of the season vacation. We had just finished a summer of work at a church in Austin, TX. I was filling in for the pastor who had a baby, and Alanna was working for the Children's summer camp. That experience could be it's own book. After our time there, we decided to take the scenic route home. Neither of us had really seen too much of the west side of the country (actually, none of it). So we planned to drive from Austin, north west, up through New Mexico, into the rocky mountains of Colorado. We stayed a couple of days in Colorado Springs and then made the "riveting" drive straight across the heart of the USA. Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois - the most exciting states.

Our drive was guided by our GPS. And I am so grateful for that little GPS. Because so much of that drive, once you start heading east is terribly boring. Once the rocky mountains are in your rear view mirror, it is nothing but straight and flat driving. Even though we drove 75 miles an hour for four or five hours at a time, it felt like we weren't moving at all. It was enough to drive me crazy. Sure there were some ups and downs, lane changes, and speed adjustments, but for the most part the moment to moment experience of the drive felt monotonous and, at times, meaningless. So every couple of hours it was nice to be able to zoom out on the GPS and see that we were in fact making progress. And not only were we able to see that we were making progress toward our destination, but zooming out also gave us some sense of what was to come along in the drive. We could anticipate some traffic, or change routes if necessary.

The biggest sanity saver of the GPS was that it gave us the ability to zoom out on our journey. We could, at least for a second, take a step back from the experience in the moment - from the turns, lane changes, speed adjustments, traffic and bumps - to see that all of those seemingly monotonous, meaningless moment to moment experiences on the road were actually a part of a much greater journey. Truth be told, it didn't really change the actual drive - we still had to deal with traffic, lane changes, bumps and turns and speed adjustments... we still had to go through it... but changing the perspective changed our experience of the journey. Shifting our perspective, shifted our experience. It gave us the satisfaction of knowing we made progress, the hope of a final destination and the grit to keep driving.

When we talk about making the move from Prayer being about Getting God to do the things we think God should do, towards a kind of communication that brings satisfaction, Jesus offers some instructions that can in effect be like zooming out on the GPS. Its

almost like the first three parts of what many have come to know as the *Lord's Prayer* are really 3 steps to shifting your perspective and, as a result, praying more satisfying prayers.

Jesus Zooms Out

After explaining how his listeners might be wrong about prayer, and offering three correctives to prayer, Jesus launches into his instructions on how to pray. Matthew records it in Matthew 6:9-13, but we're going to focus on the first half in this chapter. And we'll take up the second half in chapter 3. Jesus said,

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

" 'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven. (*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 6:9–10.)

Each of these phrases are like rungs on a ladder that take you to a different vantage point - shifting your perspective on life. Sort of like hitting the minus button three times on your GPS, to zoom out.

Our Father

Jesus begins his instruction by inviting us to consider who it is that we're talking to. And by contrast, who we're not talking to. Jesus says when you pray, don't start with *you*, but start with *who* it is your talking to. Start by addressing God as our Father in Heaven. In order to make that shift to zoom out, the first thing to do is take the focus off of ourselves and our moment to moment experience - and put it instead on the one we are talking to.

We aren't praying to ourselves - to our inner ego, or true self - and we aren't praying to some distant deity, who doesn't care, or who makes ridiculous demands for personal sacrifice in order to gain favor. We're talking to our Father in heaven. NT Wright, a bishop in the Anglican Church and author, points out that at times prayer can feel like we're just shouting into some universal void hoping someone will hear us. It can feel like we're tossing up a prayer to the universe hoping *something* or *someone* will take notice. Often prayer like that can function as an ineffective good luck charm. But Jesus wants us to begin to shift our prayer life by considering the fact that God is not like a universal void, or distant deity - but that he is our Father.

Perhaps for you, considering God as Father is a new idea that may take some time to get used to. This was not the case for Jesus' listeners. For Jesus' mostly Jewish crowd the idea of God as Father was not new. In fact, it would've brought to mind for them the idea of their protector, provider and savior. The first time God referred to himself as the father of Israel, was in connection with the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. They were familiar

with the idea of God being Father because every year, celebrating passover, they were reminded that God was protector, provider, and savior.

In Heaven

The idea of specifying that Our Father is *in heaven*, serves a dual purpose. First off, it corrects any thought of God being an earthly god or idol made by human beings. We're not talking about a statue, temple, or special energy... or even earthly father. To pray our Father in heaven, is to recognize that God is not like the flawed and broken fathers we know on earth. He is our Father *in heaven*.

Secondly, to call him our Father *in heaven*, is to in some ways affirm the fact that God has a very different vantage point from which to view all of reality. We tend to see things as we experience them moment to moment, but God holds everything all at once. God sees the past, the present and the future all at the same time. He has a ten thousand foot view so to speak, the zoomed out screen of the GPS. What's amazing about this Father in heaven, is that at the same time knowing all, he still cares about all of the twists and turns and traffic, and speed changes and ups and downs of *your* journey. He cares about your heart break, loss, disease, and difficulty. He sees the bigger picture, but still cares for you and me.

So Jesus says, to pray the kind of prayers that bring satisfaction, you've got to change your perspective - and instead of starting with *you*, start with *Who*, considering who it is you're talking too. Which really leads to the next step, pushing the next zoom out button.

Hallowed Be Your Name

Hallowed be your name. This is definitely not a phrase that we're used to using in our every day language. We don't often ask that people would hallow anything. The only cultural reference I can think of would be the last book of the Harry Potter book series - called the Deathly Hallows. To hallow something is to make it holy. That doesn't actually clarify for us what it means for a name to be hallowed. The other time you might hear the word hallow is when its connected to *halloween*. Is Jesus telling us to ask for something spooky here? Its definitely not something we'd ever ask of each other - can you pick up the following items from the grocery store, and in the process - would you hallow them please. We never go through the drive thru expecting the clerk to ask us if we'd like to have our meal *hallowed* for an extra 75 cents. So what does it mean?

First of all, to hallow something is to make it holy. I think often holiness in our minds is closely associated with the idea of perfection - but that too isn't necessarily true. To make something holy - means literally to *set it apart* from all others.

For example, Alanna and I have a very special set of dishes that we got as wedding gifts - and we never use them. They're white bone china with a silver trim. We have hallowed those plates. We made those plates holy. We set them apart from all the other plates for a special purpose (not that I know what that purpose is - all I know, is that they have to be

hand-washed, ugh!). So to make something holy is to separate it, and honor it apart from all others.

So what does it mean to pray “set your name apart” and what does that have to do with shifting our perspective in order to pray more satisfying prayers? Well the idea of a name in scripture is always related to reputation. Name equals reputation. So when we say hallowed be your name, what we really mean is “your reputation is unlike anything or anyone else’s reputations throughout all of history.” What Jesus is doing in this second step to shifting our perspective is inviting us to consider not just who we’re talking to - but the reputation of the one we’re talking too.

In other words, spend a moment considering the works and and words of our Father in Heaven throughout history up until this point and praise Him for them. He is the creator of the universe. Every complex organism, every ecological system; he designed it all. He’s the author and architect of the universe! And He’s continuing to sustain it. The only reason it hasn’t spun out of control is because its in His control.

And aside from being the creator of the universe He has involved himself in the lives of his people. That is what the Old Testament is filled with - stories of God’s interactions with his people.

Jesus, in this petition, is inviting us to consider God’s works and words throughout all of history in order to take the next step, to zoom out in a sense, to see all of creation throughout history as God’s story and work of art. All the way up to the present.

Which truth be told, we don’t really do that often. Instead we are, understandably so, typically focused on our everyday moment to moment experience. We’re often focused inwardly on the difficulties and disease and desires of our day to day, minute to minute lives. Our point of view is consumed by the lane changes, speed adjustments, traffic jams, and wrecks.

Jesus is inviting us to consider God’s whole journey up until this point. To take another step up towards a different perspective by thinking about his words and work throughout all of history.

And then, the final step to shifting your perspective in order to pray more satisfying prayers is to consider not just the past and present, but the future.

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be Done

This final step to changing our perspective, is a doozey. Jesus invites us to pray “your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” What on earth (and in heaven) does that mean?

By “kingdom come”, Jesus is talking about the heavenly reality of God’s rule and reign coming crashing into our existence. God’s Kingdom is where everything is right, the way their supposed to be. We all can recognize within our existence that things in this world

are not the way they're supposed to be. Flip on the news, scroll your newsfeed, listen to friends - things are a mess in this world. Things are mess in our country and in our county. Whether its disease, poverty, injustice, racism, greed or the like. And truthfully, when it comes to our own lives, we can see things are messed up. From the things within our control - like selfishness, anger, or sexual sin... to the things that we can't control - like pain, emotional or mental illness, and disease. But God's kingdom is the reality of heaven breaking into earth meaning: when God makes everything right. This is the end of the Christian story: God returns to earth, and makes all things new - he fixes everything. And you and I are invited to be a part of that final destination purely by his grace.

That's really why Jesus came, to share God's mission to fix everything that is broken in this world - starting with his relationship with you. All of his miracles were an attempt to give people pictures of what the kingdom of God is like, and even his death was about forgiving the sin of mankind so that they could freely enjoy that perfected future. And so when we pray your kingdom come and your will be done, we are asking that God's rule and reign, that the reality of heaven, would come here.

In making this request we are taking a moment to zoom out and not only look back on everything God has done up until this point, but also to look ahead and see the destination - and in the meantime re-align ourselves with God, and with his mission in this world. Its about reminding ourselves where this is all headed - to the Kingdom of God.

This third perspective shift requires quite the humbling of ourselves, which is why I called it a doozey. When we pray your kingdom come, your will be done - we are releasing God from doing the things that we think God should do, and we are submitting ourselves to allowing God to do what God thinks he should do. Praying *your* kingdom, is at the same time praying "Not my kingdom." Praying *your* will is at the same time praying "not my will."

The Kind of Prayer that Handles the Ups and Downs

These 3 steps really do change your experience in the moment. Like zooming out on GPS. Normally we consider life though our own limited view. In fact, one of the chief things sin does in our lives is keeps us focused on our little world view, and experience.

In his book *The Screwtape Letters* C.S Lewis talks about this phenomenon. He describes life as a series of ups and downs - and one of the things that sin does to us in the moment is that it keeps us so focused on the present moment that we forget that life has been different in the past and will be different again in the future. For example the destructive effects of sin make us feel as though when we are in a low spot, that this low spot is probably where we will be for the rest of our lives - and we forget that life is a series of ups and downs. This point of view will drive our prayer lives to be focused on the here and now, on the search for our own happiness, relief and pleasure in life.

But when you take a step back, when you change your perspective to see the whole of life,

you will see something very different. You will see that much like the GPS shows, life is filled with ups and downs, lane changes, traffic jams and even wrecks. Zooming out allows you to see each event as part of an ultimately larger journey; a larger story being played out on a universal scale. And when you shift your perspective in this way it gives each moment to moment experience meaning, and gives you the perseverance to keep driving.

When prayer begins, ends and centers on you, your needs, your experience, and therefore the goal of prayer is just about you getting God to do what you think God should do - it will not bring you satisfaction. What Jesus is inviting us to do in the first half of the Lord's Prayer is to begin with Who we're talking to, taking the steps to a different perspective - *don't start with you, start with who you're talking to*. Pray to your Father in heaven, praise Him for His reputation, and consider His Kingdom.

These steps end up giving us a view of something much greater than ourselves - we catch a glimpse into God's story. The grand narrative that spans all of history. It is interesting, if you check out psychological and neurological research, both will tell you that people who chase happiness, rarely find it. The person who is constantly seeking out pleasure does not end up living a very fulfilling or satisfied life. Those life plans connect well with prayers that are about getting God to do stuff for us. But instead, it is those who understand that they are connected to, a part of, something bigger than themselves who live satisfied lives. It is knowing your place within that larger story that brings meaning and satisfaction to life.

This matches up well to what Jesus is saying here about prayer. Listen, if your prayer life is you chasing pleasure. If it is all wrapped up in you trying to get God to do the things you think God should do - you won't be satisfied in life. But if you are willing to, instead, begin with who it is you're praying to, consider his reputation and mission in the world; in a sense if you would take a moment in your prayer life to zoom out and focus on your Father in heaven and what he is doing in the world; it will bring meaning and significance, it will bring you satisfaction. When you pray this way, shifting your perspective, you can begin to see your place in that larger story that God is writing.

This is the kind of satisfying prayer that can handle life's ups and downs, and twists and turns, traffic jams and car wrecks. The kind of prayer that sees the big picture of our Father in heaven, your relationship with him and your place within his story.

That's the kind of prayer that brings satisfaction to your life.

So, once again, put this book down. Go into your room, close the door, pray in private. Don't worry so much about what you'll say, or spend all your time on your requests and needs. Instead, consider who it is your talking to,

think about his reputation

and his mission - the ultimate destination. Praise Him for the larger story that he is

writing and the journey that you are on.

Now, you may be wondering, wait! is that it? We just resign ourselves to being a part of the story? God's going to do what God's going to do, and we just need to shut up and ride along? Do we ever get to ask for stuff?

Great question. Jesus answers it.

He Cares

Tell Him What You Need

In the last chapter, we discovered together that part of what Jesus is inviting us to do in prayer is to shift our perspective and begin seeing God's overarching narrative, the big story that he's writing from beginning to end, and then to find our place within that. No, it doesn't change the moment to moment events that you and I experience, the ups and downs, and bumps and wrecks. The good and the bad. It doesn't change the fact that you still have to go through all of it, but, it does change your experience - like zooming out on the GPS on a long drive allows you to see your place within a larger journey, that gives you the hope perseverance and grit to keep driving. The same can be said of investing in this kind of communication with God: It is the kind that brings satisfaction, that gives you the hope, the grit to keep going in life. To know that it is all part of the journey.

When you invest in this kind of satisfying communication, and cultivate it behind closed doors it grows your relationship with God. A relationship of trust. And it is from that place of trust - that we can bring our requests before God.

This is important to point out here. At the beginning, we said prayer is not just about getting God to do the things that we think God should do - in fact when we pray your kingdom and your will be done - what we are really doing is releasing God to do the things that God thinks he should do. But that being said, Jesus does not want us to think that we just shouldn't ask God for stuff. In fact, we are encouraged to tell God what it is that we need.

Once we've been pulled out of our self-focused point of view, when we change our perspective, and have released God from doing what we think he should do - Jesus invites us to tell God what we need. And there are really three need areas in which Jesus instructs us to pray. If you want to pray satisfying prayers, consider who you're talking to, praise him for all he has said and done, submit yourself to his plans, not your plans, and then - in light of all that - tell him what you need. Your needs still matter. Jesus breaks our needs down into 3 categories: Physical, Relational and Spiritual. He says,

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, ^s

but deliver us from the evil one.' (*The New International Version*
(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mt 6:11-13.)

Physically

The first request is for God to provide for our physical needs: Give us this day our daily bread. This is a request that on the surface doesn't make much sense to us. In our modern world, to get bread on the table, is as difficult as walking over to the cupboard and pulling the bread out. And if, by chance, you don't have bread in the house, its as easy as hopping in the car, or walking to the corner store and purchasing some bread. Our bread, our food, is so easily available to so many of us at anytime. On top of that because of the way our world works, we actually don't see what goes into making our bread. We're so removed from the process of how a lot of our food winds up on our tables in the first place - that we don't really think to ask for provision.

For the people Jesus was addressing, however, the idea of asking for daily bread was a deep and meaningful request. The kind of request that brought to mind for all the Jewish listeners memories and stories of when their ancestors wandered the desert. They remembered the tales of their people receiving bread from heaven, and being instructed by God to take just enough for the day. God was always providing enough for what they needed. And so Jesus taught his listeners that to pray satisfying prayers included asking God for what you need for today. What food, what drink, what clothes, what housing, what do you need physically for today?

In a sense bread was the most basic food for people living in the first century - and that is really what this request is about. Its about asking God to supply your basic needs. Its not about asking for luxury. In fact, many of the Christian writers throughout history, pointed out that we're not asking for luxuries in this request - we are instead recognizing God as the one who provides for our needs. Many ancient Christian writers have pointed out the connection to Proverbs 30:8 "Give me neither riches, nor poverty - only the bread I need." Not riches lest I forget God, and start to believe I got this on my own. But neither give me poverty, lest I despair and assume that God has cursed me - or in our day, doubt his existence.

While this is a request that God supply our daily needs, its important to point out that Jesus teaches us to pray "give *us* today *our* daily bread". When you change your perspective, and step out of your own moment to moment experience, and align your will with his will - looking to see his Kingdom, a world made right. Suddenly it becomes important not just to pray "give me my daily bread" but to pray "give *us*". Martin Luther, in the 16th C. points out that this petition has with it an added meaning of social reform. That when we pray give *us our* daily bread, we are really asking for the provision of all the physical needs of our community, country and world. This prayer, that God would provide for our specific necessities, is also a prayer that he would provide for everyone's needs. Its a request that looks ahead to that day when there will be no more hunger, and nobody will be deprived of their physical needs.

This means that its also the kind of prayer that ought to move us to action. That at the same time that we lift our hand to heaven asking God to provide for our daily needs, we are at the same time lifting our hand as a volunteer. We are volunteering to be the answer to someone else's prayer. We are volunteering to be used by God to provide someone

else's daily bread. We acknowledge that He may just be looking to use us to provide. And in this way, we can start to connect to that overarching story we talked about in the last chapter. If, as we said above, God's Kingdom come is a place where everything is made right and nobody is deprived of their daily needs, then we can connect to that larger story by giving people pictures of that Kingdom come in the ways that we love others, providing for their daily needs. The prayers that are satisfying not only connect us to something bigger than ourselves but they also help to connect our relationship with God - to our relationship with other people. This is perfectly clear in this second petition. Not only do we bring our physical needs to God - but also our relational needs.

Relationally

Jesus immediately ties our relationship to God with our relationship to others. First of all, at the risk of pointing out the obvious - to pray this prayer asking for the forgiveness of our debts as we forgive others assumes that you and I have got some stuff that requires forgiveness. It is interesting that Jesus teaches his disciples to have a regular confession time. You've got to realize the fact that you do indeed require forgiveness. Luther once said, you cannot enter into forgiveness, without ducking through the low door of humility. In other words the one who resists confession and acknowledging his or her need for forgiveness is the one who lacks a humble heart - and as we're going to see in a minute - if you lack a humble heart before God, your relationships are going to suffer. So Jesus encourages his disciples to seek forgiveness from God. Just as, and here's the connection, they need to forgive others.

And here's why this regular confession matters: In order to show grace to others, to forgive others, you must have some level of humility and self-awareness to see your own need for the same. If you are completely unaware of your own need for forgiveness you will struggle to show mercy to others and live in relationship with them. Forgiveness is necessary for any relationship to flourish and be healthy. I had a conversation with my grandfather not too long ago about this. I asked him about how he and my grandmother - who are going to be celebrating 60 years of marriage this summer - how in the world they could make their marriage last so so long? Especially in our day and age.

His answer was actually so simple, he told me that you have to learn to say two things over and over and over again: "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you."

The kind of communication in an intimate relationship - a relationship that's formed behind closed doors - and brings satisfaction to life - is the kind that says I'm sorry, and I forgive you. And Jesus teaches us here that how you're able to relate, how you're able to confess to and to forgive those who have wronged you - is entirely wrapped up and connected to your ability to humble yourself and confess to God, receiving his forgiveness.

And when you think about it, if you want God's will over your will, his kingdom over your kingdom, if you think about the fact that the ultimate destination is the reconciling of all

things to himself. The vision for the kingdom come, is a vision of everything that is broken in this world being set right. And for your relationships, that begins by being willing to say “I’m sorry” and “I forgive you.” So Jesus says if you want to pray satisfying prayers, the kind that connect you to something bigger than yourself, and bring satisfaction to your life, you’ve got to pray for forgiveness and the ability to forgive. Once again, when you forgive others you are connecting to that larger story that God is writing, and your prayer compels you to action in your life.

Spiritually

And finally the last request is Spiritual. The request is really about the spiritual direction you want in your life. Its about telling God what kind of life you want to live. Before we get into what it means, I want to point out something interesting. Typically, telling God how we want life to go is where most of us start our prayers. “Dear God, thanks for this day - here’s how I want my life to go today.” But rather than putting it first, Jesus decides to put it last. I don’t think it is because the request any less important. I think it is because Jesus knows that how we want our life to go, will change after we move from getting God to do the things that we think God should do, and start praying prayers that bring satisfaction to our lives. Our prayers for how we want life to go will change when they are first curated by our previous request for God’s kingdom and will to come and be done, rather than ours.

In this last request we are praying for our spiritual need for guidance in life. The two verbs here in most translations of the Bible are *lead*, and *deliver*. But a more direct translation gives a slightly more gritty picture. The verbs are *do not carry*, or *bring me into temptation*, but *drag me away from evil*. The picture here is of a journey down a path that has tempting off shoots in any and every direction. Imagine that you were walking down a road that had all kinds of little sinful temptation shops along the way. The prayer is that you not even be lead to enter those shops, shops of evil, shops of sexual immorality, shops of greed, shops of pride, shops of rage, etc. but that instead if you enter on your own, God would drag you from them by your shirt collar.

We don’t pray this with the belief that God might actually actively bring us into temptations, as though if we forgot to pray this last phrase God might bring us into temptations due to our negligence. Instead, we are asking that *rather* than carrying us into temptation - if we happen to enter the shop on our own - we pray that God would *drag* us from evil. The word has in mind this idea of being grabbed by the collar and pulled away from something. So the request is that we not be led towards a life of temptation, but instead that we are dragged away from evil toward good.

If you want to pray satisfying prayers - first consider the one you’re talking to, praise him for his unique reputation throughout all history. Spend some time there. And then bow your will to his, your kingdom to his kingdom. And then in light of that - tell him what you need: physically, relationally, and spiritually.

You see God cares about your moment to moment experience of life, so tell him what you need. Not luxury, but necessity. Allow your requests to be shaped by his will and the final destination of his story. I promise you, when you pray this way - when you stop trying to get God to do the things you think he should do, and you go into your room, close the door, and invest in the communication of a personal relationship with your Father in heaven - you will be *satisfied*.

That's why Jesus came in the first place. To reconnect us to the God who loves us. So try it. Don't take my word for it. Pray. Your heavenly Father absolutely cares about your needs.

Now, perhaps you're thinking to yourself: ok, Corey - thats all great.

Got it.

Close the door,

consider God first,

submit to His will, not my will,

His kingdom, not my kingdom, shift my perspective... see my place in His bigger picture,

then tell Him what I need... physically, relationally, spiritually... great! But what about when He doesn't answer? What about when I do all that Jesus taught and my request is in line with His will, and does make sense with His kingdom as far as I can tell, and yet it seems like He doesn't answer, it seems like heaven remains silent and God is quiet... what then? What about when God doesn't answer?

Great question. Jesus answers it.

Character and Persistence

Ask, Seek, Knock

So, what about when I pray like Jesus - when I go into my room, and I consider his vast reputation throughout history, and his future kingdom? What about when I pray to my Father in heaven, and tell him what I need *and he remains silent? What about when heaven stays quiet?* Well, this is the question - isn't it?

And I want to begin this chapter by saying that the stakes are high in this question. Its not like we're all up in arms about God staying silent on our lunch requests. No, its when heaven remains silent about the diagnosis. Its when heaven stays quiet about marriage matter. Its when heaven stays quiet in our deepest darkest worries and fears. When heaven stays quiet in our grief, pain, and wonderings. Its when God seems to say nothing in the midst of some of our most difficult pain and suffering. That's when we find ourselves asking this question: *What about when God doesn't answer?*

The Story

The good news is that Jesus actually answers this question. Jesus answers it in two different stories that Luke tells in his account of Jesus' life. The first comes in Luke 11 when Jesus was praying alone. As Luke tells it, his disciples were waiting for him to finish up his prayer time, but there was a question burning inside of most of them. There was something about the way Jesus prayed, something about the way it impacted his life that they wanted. Maybe it was the satisfaction that Jesus seemed to live with; maybe the resolve; maybe the apparent intimacy with God; whatever it was, it prompted them to ask Jesus, "teach us to pray."

A little timeline context here: Up until this point in the book, we've been talking about Jesus teachings on prayer primarily from the Sermon on the mount found near the beginning of Matthew's gospel. At that point in his ministry, Jesus had only 4 disciples: Peter, Andrew, James and John. Four fisherman who had experienced Jesus do some incredible things, like heal a mother-in-law and help catch a boatload of fish in the middle of the day. So those first four disciples have already heard some of Jesus teachings on Prayer. They've heard everything you've read up until this point. But at this point in Luke's gospel, Jesus now has eight more disciples. And they have not heard any of Jesus teachings, and so they ask, "Jesus, teach us to pray like you."

So Jesus says,

"Ok, pray like this,

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your Kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone indebted to us.

Lead us not into temptation.”

Now, I kind of wonder what the first four disciples were thinking at this point. Peter, Andrew, James and John have been with Jesus for a little while and they've heard Jesus' teachings on Prayer - in fact they've been saying his prayer everyday for the last little while. Imagine what they're thinking, “um, excuse me Jesus. I'm not quite sure how to tell you this - but you missed a bunch! You missed a few of the parts. I mean, you forgot to say *Our father... in heaven... you forgot to say Your will be done... or deliver us from evil....* I'm don't really know what to say Jesus - you kind of messed up your own prayer!”

But Jesus, breezes right into his next part where he wants to teach something specific about prayer. Something that matters deeply to you and me. So he continues by telling this story. Before we look at the story together, I want to point out that due to the translation from original greek into english, and the transportation from first century middle eastern culture into 21st century life here in the U.S - we miss *a lot* of the force of what Jesus is saying. So if its ok with you, we're going to do a little work here - to understand what it is that Jesus says.

Here's what is in most english translations:

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose you have a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶ a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have no food to offer him.’ ⁷ And suppose the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need. (*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 11:5–8.)

The first thing to notice is that our translations have Jesus seems to be telling a story. Our translations say things like “suppose you have...” or “imagine if...” But these constructions miss Jesus original teaching tactic. He's actually, in greek, beginning by asking the question “who of you would have a friend like the one I'm about to describe? who of you would have a friend like this? That if you went him at midnight and said,

I've got some visitors from out of town coming to visit and I've got no food to feed them - can I borrow some?

Who of you has a friend who would respond like this?

No, not me, go away and stop bothering me. My kids are asleep, the door is shut - get out of here.

The answer is assumed to be no one. No one would respond that way. The reason no one would respond that way is because hospitality is one of the highest values of first century middle eastern culture.

And we'll come back to that in a minute.

So Jesus asks this question that assumes the answer is no. Its crystal clear in the greek grammar that he himself is assuming that the answer is going to be *no, none of us would have a friend like that*. Phrasing the question that way, is sort of like if I said to you - you wouldn't kill my dog... *would you?* The answer is *of course not*. And you can tell the answer I'm expecting by the way I posed the question. The same is true of Jesus here. Who would have a friend that would respond that way? Nobody. But why not?

Hospitality in the Middle East

As I pointed out before, nobody would ever respond that way, and the reason is because hospitality is of the utmost importance not just for the individual doing the hosting, but for the entire community in which a visitor is hosted. Showing hospitality was not simply the responsibility of the individual, but every other individual in the community as well. This means that if one member of the community does a bad job welcoming in a visitor, feeding and housing them poorly - it reflects bad on the whole community. Which you understand. In fact one of the biggest reasons people don't attend church, frequent a restaurant chain, or shop at a store is because they had a bad experience with a person representing that church, restaurant or store. And so while we might assume that it is a ridiculous request at midnight, and think that it is no wonder the man inside won't answer - Jesus' listeners would've assumed the exact opposite.

While it seems like an odd request, (and as best as most scholars can tell it is out of the ordinary) its not an impossible situation. Someone might come at midnight to a neighbor and ask for food to offer there late night guests. And while we might be annoyed, the person in Jesus story would never respond that way. The reasons given for not answering are weak at best. Children will fall back asleep and the door being shut is not that hard to open. No one would deny this request.

Character and Persistence

Jesus and his listeners would both have assumed that no one would respond that way, and so Jesus moves on to give the next part of the teaching, which has more difficulty importing into our language and culture. He says,

⁸“I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you the bread because of friendship, yet because of your **shameless audacity** he will surely get up and give you as much as you need.”

Here's why your friend would never respond that way but would actually get up and give

you what you need. It is because of shameless audacity. Some translations say *persistence*. Now what we can't tell from the English, but is actually the case in the Greek, is that it's ambiguous who the shamelessness belongs to. Is it the shamelessness of your friend sleeping inside? Or is it your shameless audacity for coming at midnight? To know the answer to that question we have to understand what the word behind shameless audacity really means.

The Greek word *an-uh-day-on* (ἀναιδειαν), can mean the absence of shame, or shameful behavior. In other words, a general concern for one's own reputation. But it can also mean shameless, or not caring about what is proper or socially acceptable. Perhaps you can see the ambiguity here. The truth is, it doesn't matter which one it is - or who it belongs to, because both are true.

It is either the persistence of the knocker at midnight, in his shameless audacity, that causes the sleeping friend to get up and give his friend whatever he needs; or it is the concern of the friend inside for his own reputation, that causes him to get up and give to his knocking friend whatever he needs. Since the reputation of each individual within the community is on the line, the sleeping friend helps - not because of friendship, but because he does not wish to have his own name dragged through the mud, to be shamed. Both are true.

All of this, highlights the point that Jesus wants to communicate: God will give you what you ask for. He will provide for your need because to not do so would in some way violate his own reputation, opening Him up to have his name dragged through the mud. And at the same time, we the knocker, are encouraged to go to him, even if it's at midnight and not a socially acceptable time - and tell him what we need. And then almost as though he was anticipating our question, *what about when he doesn't answer* - Jesus says,

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (*The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Lk 11:9–10.)

Persistence

Sometimes we can have a tendency to read these words and assume that Jesus means for these to be one and done instructions. We are mistaken if we take these to mean

Ask once.

Seek once.

Knock once. And if you get no answer - assume God doesn't care. But that would be again missing something in the translation. The Greek here that Jesus uses implies an ongoing action. He doesn't say you should've asked once - he says keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. What if God doesn't answer your prayer right away? Keep praying.

I was talking with my friend Joanne about this not too long ago. She's a youth director and spends most of her time loving on high school students and those in their early 20's. Joanne was telling me that sometimes she finds that many of us don't pray persistently because we think that God is like a McDonald's drive thru. We pull up to the speaker box. We put our order in. We drive around to the second window and expect God to have our order, our request, ready. But God is not a drive thru. And besides, a drive thru rarely offers food that truly satisfies.

According to Jesus, if you want to pray prayers that bring satisfaction to your life; if you want to invest in the communication of that intimate relationship that will continue to bring satisfaction to your life no matter what part of the journey you are on - you have got to keep praying.

What Happens When We Persist

Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Because if you do, you will receive, you will find and you will have a door opened to you. It does not mean you will absolutely get what you asked for, sought, or knocked on. Remember, satisfaction is not getting everything you want - it is getting everything you need. So Jesus' response to the question: what do I do when God doesn't answer right away? Keep praying. Be persistent.

Later on his ministry he'll highlight this again when he tells the story of a poor old widow and a judge. The story is that the widow somehow lost everything when her husband died. Something shady went down with the estate and somebody took everything from her. So day and night she pleads with the judge for him to hear her case. And eventually he listens, and restores her lost valuables. She cried out to him day and night, and the judge finally decided that he was tired of listening to her - so he gave her justice.

Which is kind of a weird picture of God. Is God really just listening to us whine, and then giving in to make it all stop and go away? No. And that's not the point of the story, the point of the story is the persistence of the prayer. Jesus is instructing you to be persistent in your prayer. When heaven is quiet and God is silent - keep praying. If you do, there are really three things that can happen in the midst of persistent prayer.

God Answers

The first thing that can happen is God might answer your persistent prayer. He might grant your request - but only in *His* time. God's timing and our timing is a lot different. The difference between our timing and God's timing is a little bit like the difference between my timing and my dog's understanding of timing. When I hold a treat in my hand and want him to stay for a few seconds - it feels like an eternity to him. He can't bear waiting four whole seconds. But for me four seconds is nothing. I imagine that is the case in the difference between God's timing and ours.

He may answer, but in his own timing. Perhaps you have your own story where you have experienced this to be true. One that sticks out the most in my life is with my friends Joel

and Rachel. Joel and Rachel asked God persistently in prayer for a child. And they became discouraged quickly. But, with shameless audacity, they continued to beg God for a child, and after three years of praying, in His own timing, God answered their prayer.

Our Hearts Change

The second thing that can happen in the midst of persistent prayer is that rather than God giving you what you are asking for, you may find that perhaps you were not asking for the right thing. How could you ever know if what you were asking for wasn't what God wanted for you?

J.I Packer, theologian and author, offers this suggestion: When you are persisting in prayer for something in your life or the life of someone you love, argue with God. If you're uncomfortable with the idea of arguing with God, I'd encourage you to read most of the Psalms. I'd also promise you that God is a big God - he can handle it. So Packer suggests that you argue with God. Tell him why you think he ought to listen to you. Talk to Him about how this request is in line with his will. Explain to God how your request fits in with his Kingdom, and is a display of it on earth as it is in heaven. Argue your case with your Father in Heaven. What you may find, is that overtime if He doesn't answer you, the more you pray, the more you will come to realize that your request is not in his will. And your heart will change, your will gets shaped by his will, and you are drawn closer to your father in heaven.

We Grow in Trust

The third thing that happens in persistent prayer, is that as you relinquish your will to his will, you begin to grow in your trust of God. Trust that if you saw things from his vantage point - you'd chose to do what he does. Trust that if you knew what He knew, you'd choose to do what he did. And as your trust in God grows, so will your peace, and satisfaction knowing that your Father in heaven, while he is running the universe - still cares for you.

When God Says "No"

Which leads to one final thought for this chapter. The fact that God cares for you, means that sometimes he might say no. Much like a parent, who wants the best for their child, your heavenly Father wants whats best for you. Which means he may say no. And while that can hurt in the moment, you can be sure that he has something greater in store for you on the other side of your suffering, if not in this life - certainly when his Kingdom comes fully.

The reason I know this is true is because at one point even Jesus, the one who taught us about prayer and how to pray, had God say "no" to his prayer. Jesus knows what it is like to be in the midst of suffering, for heaven to remain silent, and for God to be quiet. Jesus prayed for it to all stop, go away - to find some other way to make things right. Jesus asked God, quite reasonably, that his cup of suffering would pass. And God said no. But

he said no so that he could give you and I what we truly needed most in this life. He said no to Jesus so that you and I could have the only thing that would ever bring us deep satisfaction. A relationship with Him.

So go close the door, and this book - shut off your screen - and pray to your Father in Heaven.

Don't worry about what you'll say.

Don't spend all your time on your own stuff.

Communicate with the One who's reputation is unlike any other, and who's future kingdom is everything that you and I could ever hope for - and tell him what you need.

And when you feel like heaven is quiet and God is silent - Keep praying, keep persisting, keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. You will receive, you will find, and you will open up to the satisfaction that only comes from an intimate relationship with your Father in Heaven.

Final Thoughts

More Reading and the Gospel

Aside from simply saying here that you should try it, I wanted to point out a few resources and one final thought. There are a million books on prayer out there, but at the end of the day - practicing what Jesus taught will bring a tremendous amount of growth to your life. That being said, three of my favorites are

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Tim Keller

The Lord and His Prayer by N.T Wright

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

These three books informed a lot of what I've written above in these chapters.

The final thought I want to leave you with is the gospel. Please know, that no matter where you're at with prayer; whether you think you're good at it, or not good at it, do it enough or don't do it enough - know that your Father in heaven loves you and longs to be with you. Jesus is proof of that. Its not as though you can gain his love and acceptance by investing in a more robust prayer life. Your prayer life is not evidence that God loves you more or less based on the frequency of your prayers. The evidence of God's love for you is that he was willing to send Jesus to die for you. He thought you were worth dying for. If you have put your faith in Jesus, you already have his love and acceptance. Prayer is your opportunity to talk with him, openly, honestly and to cast your cares on him - and to enjoy him forever.