

Praying, Part 2 - The Path and the Bypass

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Preacher: Canon Dr. J.I. Packer

[0 : 0 0] Gracious God, every time we turn to study your truth, from any angle whatever, we need the help of your Holy Spirit to give us light and get our hearts into the right shape, keep our hearts in the right shape for what we're doing.

Grant us that blessing now, we pray, that we may understand and learn by your grace to pray your right. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. Well, friends, straight down to business, if you don't mind. This is the second in a series of talks, out of which I'm hoping, in collaboration with another person, to make a book.

And that means that this talk has been conceived as the second chapter of a book.

Last week's talk was the first chapter. And when you conceive a talk as a chapter of a book, you tend to pack material rather tight.

[1 : 1 6] And because, as you know, when material is presented in print, you can pack it tighter than when you're speaking by the Boece.

And I realize that I am going to demand sustained attention and sustained thought with it for these next 60 minutes in which I present the material to you.

I hope you're happy to cooperate with me at this point. I give you fair warning and ask you to come along with me as the Lord enables.

So, away we go. And the first thing I have to do is to correct a misprint. In the church program for today, and actually on the notice that Bill drew and displayed outside this room, it is said that my topic for this morning is the path and the bypass.

And it isn't. It's the path and the bypass.

[2 : 4 7] And I'm sorry, Bill, I expect that I was just indistinct in what I said to you. But there is a big difference, actually, between the two titles, because a bypass is a road which you take, thankfully, when you're driving.

It takes you somewhere and speeds your journey. But a bypass, at least in the sense in which I'm using the word now, is for people who are walking, and it doesn't actually lead anywhere.

At least, it doesn't lead anywhere good. It's... And it might well have displayed.

Bypass don't always, but they might well have displayed. The sign that you sometimes see on the road, dead end.

No true road. You don't get anywhere by following a bypass. You move along, thinking that you're taking a shortcut and it's going to be quick and easy.

[4 : 0 2] And then you find that your advance is blocked and you can't get any further. Well, it's in that sense that I'm using the word bypass in the title of this talk.

Because there are bypass in the world of thinking about prayer and some Christians get onto them and then get stuck.

Well, the purpose of this talk is to see how that happens so that we may, by God's grace, make sure that it doesn't happen to us. I got the image of the bypass, I might as well tell you, from a very vivid section of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

Just by saying that, I probably bring this section to mind for at least half of you. But I'd like to read you a bit of it. Christian and Hopeful have been walking beside a river and it's been very pleasant.

But now they have to leave the river. The path takes them away from the river. And here I begin to read, the way from the river was rough and their feet tender by reason of the travels.

[5 : 22] So the soul of the pilgrims was much discouraged because of the way. Therefore, still, as they went on, they wished for a better way. Now, a little before them, there was on the left hand of the road a meadow and a stile to go over into it.

And that meadow is called By-path Meadow. Then said Christian to his fellow, if this meadow lies along by our wayside, let's go over into it.

Then he went to the stile to see and behold, a path lay along, by the way, on the other side of the fence. It is according to my work, said Christian. Here is the easiest going.

Come, good hopeful, and let's go over. So they did. And when they were gone over and were got into the path, they found it very easy for their feet.

And so they went on for quite some time until the night came down and it grew very dark. And now it began to rain and thunder and lighten in a very dreadful manner.

[6 : 35] And the water rose again. The meadow was getting flooded. Then hopeful groaned on himself, saying, Oh, that I had kept on my way.

And Christian said, Who could have thought that this path should have led us out of the way? But yes, it did. So they said, Let's go back.

But by this time, the waters were greatly risen, by reason of which the way of going back was very dangerous. Then I thought, this is Bunyan, then I thought that it's easier going out of the way when we're in than going in when we are out.

Yet they, they adventured to go back, but it was so dark and the flood was so high that they're, that in their going back, they had liked to have been drowned nine or ten times.

Neither could they with all the skill they had yet again to the stiles that night. So they slept under the tree and giant despair caught them next morning and incarcerated them in doubting cattle.

[7 : 55] Which Bunyan took this, you see, as the result of going out of the way. And that applies, I think, I hope to make good at this declaration, that applies as much in the matter of prayer as in any aspect of the Christian life.

So my aim in what I say to you this morning, remember, we are discussing in this series prayer as an activity, we are not stopping short on theological questions, we are thinking about ourselves doing it.

My aim in this series, addressed to my fellow members of the Strugglers Club, as I said last week, is, at the moment, ground clearing.

Change the image. there are weeds that grow up and choke proper plants. Well, I'm going to try and clear the ground of the life of prayer by getting rid of some of those weeds.

And that's, as I said, the aim and the goal and the purpose and that's what all this material is focused on, one way or another. So I'm going to try and detect ways and attitudes and beliefs in regard to prayer that operate as a stumbling block and frustrate the reality of praying and mean in life that whereas praying also a means of grace and of fulfillment of the heart, it doesn't operate as such.

[9 : 49] Why not? Because we're doing it wrong. But now, the first word of my title is the word path, the path and the by-paths.

And I want to spend a little time on the path before we get to the by-paths. And the first thing I want to say is that that word path in my title is actually covering three things and I'm going to distinguish them because I don't know which of them you're likely to have in your mind as you hear this title but it will be one of the three and it might be one of the three to the exclusion of the other two.

when I talk about the path I'm thinking about all these three things one the way to life as taught in the scriptures that's instruction and you get the word used that way in for instance psalm 27 and verse 11 where the fullness prays teach me your way oh lord and lead me on a level path teach me your way path but then secondly the word path covers the way of life that is the way of living in accordance with the teaching that gets you there and it's in that sense that in the book of Acts we learn that being a Christian in those first

Christian years was called the way you were on the way being a Christian was the way and the thought is you see of the path of life actually living according to the teaching and you can see the image used that way in psalm 16 and verse 11 for instance you the word where the psalmist says you made known to me the path of life that is you made known to me the actual way that I am going now because the whole psalm is celebrating the fact that he's on track by the grace of God you made known to me the path of life and so my hope and my prospects are clear in your presence there's fullness of joy at your right hand are pleasures forevermore that's the life to which the path leads that's the life indeed which I begin to enjoy from the time I begin to travel the path praise the

Lord well that's the second thought the way to life is instruction the way of life is the actual living according to the instruction following the way and then the third thought is the one that particularly concerns us today it's the way of prayer as one dimension of that way of life the path of prayer in the sense of the actual practice of prayer on a day to day basis and here is an old fashioned Englishman with a long memory I think of the one time photoville and film star in Britain Gracie Fields has anybody here ever heard of Gracie Fields oh very good she was a star in a stage show with the title

[14 : 05] Sing as We Go that actually was the key choral number in the show which they all sing together towards the end and I want to adapt that phrase and say that the clue is pray as we go so the song began in a way which I now adapt pray as we go and let the world go by praying a prayer we walk along the highway say goodbye to sorrow there's always tomorrow to think of today and so on that's the thought in positive terms which I'm trying to give substance to not just this morning but in all these talks praying as we go and that's the path of prayer which I talk about part of the way of prayer which is part of the way of life which is life according to the way to life as God teaches it in the scriptures right and now on the same principle that medical students are taught physiology the proper functioning of each part of the body before they're introduced to pathology the study of the malfunctioning of the bits and pieces of physical makeup

I am going to ask your indulgence for a few minutes as I paint a picture or establish an image of the Christian life in positive terms it's the framework within which I shall then look at the pathology of this matter that is the slip that we make and the errors about praying that we fall into so here's an image of the Christian life which I build up in three stages stage one is a single word hiking yes I know that most of us are pretty much past the stage of hiking but you know what hiking is it's walking yes you do it on foot and you'll remember that throughout the bible walk is the regular picture for living you walk wisely or foolishly you walk according to

God's word or against it but you walk that's the picture and a great picture it is well hiking is walking and hiking is traveling over open country so that there are ups and downs the rough and the smooth are both involved when it's rough country over which you're hiking you have to clamber when it's smooth when it's meadow meadowland something like that then you can stride out that's hiking and I've already referred to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress it's a book frankly which I read and re-read I'm sure I read Pilgrim's Progress at least once a year it seems to me to be the classic on the Christian life above all other classics and it pictures the journey of life from the beginning of spiritual concern right through to glory as a hike it's called a pilgrimage but hiking is the idea there's a path and

Christian and his friends have to hike it and Pilgrim's Progress is divided actually as a composition into a number of separate sections episodes each with its own motif if you've read Pilgrim's Progress you'll know this if you haven't and some of you I'm sure haven't well it's about time you did you know and I'm going to try and encourage you to do it by telling you quickly what the sections are there's the first section where Christian the person called Christian seeks and finds converting grace each section ends with a little lyric it's doggerel really but Bunyan is very good at doggerel and the spiritual message of his bits of doggerel is rather telling so I'm going to read you some of them so that you'll know

Christian has come up to the cross Christian has found his burden gone from his back he looks up the cross he's conscious of being a new man in Christ and this is the lyric that rounds off that episode Christian gave three leaps for joy and went on singing this is what he sang thus far did I come laden with my sins nor could off ease the grief that I was in till I come here this what a place is this must here be the beginning of my bliss must hear the burden fall from off my back must hear the strings that bounded to me crack blessed cross blessed sepulcher blessed rather be the man that there was put to shame for me so he goes on and comes to the house beautiful which is a picture of the church and its fellowship and there he learns many things that he needs to know and he goes on from there and conflict is the theme of the next episode he fights with the devil called

[20 : 41] Apollyon and he travels through the valley of the shadow of death where all kinds of depressing thoughts crowd in upon him and he wonders if he'll ever get through but he stands off through the two forms of conflict and eventually comes out of the valley of the shadow and this is the song that he sings at that point then sang Christian O world of wonder I can say no less that I should be preserved in that distress that I have met with here O bless me the hand that from it hath delivered me dangers and darkness devils hell and sin did compass me while I this veil was in yea mares and pits and traps and nets did lie my part about that worthless silly eye might have been caught entangled and cast down but since

I lived let Jesus wear the crown he saw me see and then comes the third section companionship is the motif here and Christian picks up with faithful and very soon he's going to lose faithful but then he has another he finds another companion a man named hopeful living in fellowship and being sustained by the fellowship is the source here everyone needs at least one fellow Christian with whom you walk closely in what nowadays they call an accountability relationship each of you looking after the other spiritually I mean and being quite self-conscious about it you pray for each other you inquire of each other how you're getting on and so on and so forth and faithful sings this song the trials that those men do meet with all that are obedient to the heavenly call are manifold and suited to the flesh and come and come and come again afresh that now or sometime else we by them may be taken overcome and cast away plenty of rust you see as well as some smooth oh let the pilgrims let the pilgrims then be vigilant and quit themselves like men pilgrims in the plural they're traveling together which is a great means of grace but thankful doesn't last too long he gets martyred in vanity fair which is the world the cruelty of the world on display and as

Christian having escaped vanity fair goes on this is the song he sings well faithful thou hast faithfully professed unto thy lord with whom thou shalt be blessed when faithless ones with all their vain delight that crying out unto their hellish clight sing faithful sing and let thy name survive for though they killed thee thou art yet alive as I told you it's dogger roll but it's very thrilling dogger roll sometimes and that's one of the thrilling lines it's my least as far I'm concerned then comes a long episode where compromise with the world is explored through contact with a misleading man compromiser named by-end from the city of fair speech eventually they take him off and once again there's a little song that is sung by

Christian to mark the end of that episode it's not by the way just by-ends it's also a man named Dimas scriptural name he's become a silver miner and he has a passion for mining and mining and hunting for silver just like the people who hunted for gold in gold rush days in BC 100 years and more ago but Christian has got past both of them both of them wanted him and hopeful to join in what they were doing they wouldn't do it so Christian sings by-ends and silver denast both agreed one calls the other runs that he may be a sharer in his lucre so these two take up in this world and no further go spiritually they get stuck and the implication is that they never get to the celestial city on go the pilgrims and carelessness is the next motif carelessness and collapse that's the reality which is pictured in the story of bypass meadow and giant despair which I read you a bit before they get out of that eventually though somewhat scarred by their experience and together they sing this little song out of the way we went and then we found what was to tread upon forbidden ground and let them that come after have a care lest heedlessness make them as we to say lest they for trespassing his prisoners are whose castle doubting and whose name despair we have been warned and then finally comes the crossing of Jordan something for which all of us must prepare life is going to stop and we must be ready for it to stop whenever and in whatever way in the providence of God it happens the pilgrims don't sing the doggerel this time round but Bunyan prints it in his margin and this is how it goes now now look how the holy pilgrims ride clouds of their chariot angels of their guide who would not fear for him all hazards run that thus provides for him when this world's done that's the comment on the duels to which christian and hopeful finally arise well that's the christian life of hiking according to

Bunyan and i tell you again i think that this is realistic i think this is wise i think that all the problems remain problems for you and me the pressures are the same and the pitfalls are the same so i recommend that you make pilgrims progress one of your staple books in the way that i found it good to do myself but now i said i was building up the picture in three stages and now i moved to stage two christian life is hiking ups and downs and so on christian life is hiking with god that's not a point that Bunyan can make in the story he tells but i make it now with god the god of whom we were speaking last week when we thought together about the god that we pray to i won't go over all of that again but if you remember i did arrange the material and there are seven heads each beginning with p god is personal god is plural god is perfect god is powerful god is purposeful god is a promise keeper and god is praise worthy and picking up on the fact that god is tri-personal i say at once that hiking with this god is hiking with the father and the son and the holy spirit j b priestly wrote a novel titled the good companions i nick his title and apply it to the father the son and the holy spirit this is the company with which to be traveling and traveling with the trinity means that day by day we seek to please our triune god and day by day we receive help and pleasure and all kinds of good things from our triune god he's holy he calls us to holiness he that's the he who is they there isn't any tidy way of referring to the trinity you don't say they without saying he or else you're speaking tritheism the doctrine of three gods that's not the truth but equally you don't say he without saying they or else you are speaking unitarianism and that isn't the truth either no you're speaking of a god who is as truly three persons as he is one god you're speaking of a god he is the god of whom one must say he is they and they are he and at the moment i'm talking about the three persons god above the father god within the holy spirit and god beside us the lord jesus who walks with us and who said to those whom he sent on mission lo i'm with you always even to the end of the world you remember those words they're the last words of matthew's gospel and this holy god is in his tri-personal being husband-like i could have said i suppose father-like but i want an image that will fit all three husbands care for their wives at least that's the bible picture

[32 : 03] and the father the son and the holy spirit care for us but at the same time this triune god is a god who hides he is holy he is husband-like but he is often hidden hidden in the simple sense that you don't always see what he's doing things happen that surprise and bewilder you and he doesn't tell you why he's done what he's done why this has happened he only reiterates lo i am with you always and will keep you going through whatever it is there's a good deal in scripture about god hiding himself in this sense and we have to be prepared for it that's the point i'm making here and the only point you hike with god sometimes you find you're being taken through strange and unwelcome countries but you are being led your god is with you he knows what he's doing and we must learn to walk with him and trust him so it is that the christian life is getting solider and fuller this is what it means to be hiking with god as a way of living and then the third source zeroes in on something that i just hinted at the third thought is that hiking with god is quite specifically hiking with jesus christ your friend you'll hardly say before i'm sure that i find that the notion of friendship is as rich a notion as any for explaining the nature of the christian life of fellowship with god fellowship is a rather colourless word we make a great deal of it but actually it's it's not a very vivid word anymore if it was but i think that the word friendship still has its colour and its vividness and its warmth and remember the lord jesus said to his disciples on one occasion no longer do i call you servants i call you friends he says that having just said greater love has no man and this to lay down his life for his friends and he wants them to understand that that's what he's doing as he goes to the cross friends yes and abraham in the old testament was called the friend of god and abraham in the new testament is cited as the model for faith just think of romans chapter 4 and hebrews chapter 6 and 11 and galatians chapter 3 all those places and more so i beg you take the category of friendship very seriously and think of the lord jesus as the friend quite specifically in whose company you make your progress as a pilgrim and a traveler hiking in company with the triune god but more specifically in fellowship with jesus christ your friend who promises his presence as i said

as long as life shall last well now you've got my image of the christian life and within that frame it's possible for me to speak quite briefly but i think quite clearly about the by-paths which is really my purpose to nail and try and take out of the way as you try to identify and then remove the weeds from your yard i'd better begin with a provisional definition of prayer you say you've been talking about prayer all this time wasn't it about time for you to produce a definition well it was and it is i've been assuming so far that in broad terms you know what prayer is and therefore can come along with me as i reflect on how to do it but now i'm going to give you a definition and it's a two word definition prayer is asking help have you ever heard it said that help that one word is the best prayer of all help they say is the best prayer of all because it's an only expression of the need an expression of the thought i can't get on the way i am i need help now here we need to draw a distinction this is what prayer has always been throughout the human race from the time things started but you know what general revelation is it's the phrase that we use for that awareness of god's reality which is inescapable and universal and comes through to everyone although everyone less of themselves falsifies what comes through to a greater or less degree and paul talks about that at some length in the first chapter of romans you will i trust be able to pick up that reference so we haven't time to turn it up and let me show you in detail but the broad the inkling shall i say that there is one above as people say who has it in his power to help that's universal to the human race and when people are in trouble

Christians and others too write down to the most primitive of idolatrous cults that there have ever been people turn to God in sincere although self-centered plea a sincere though self-centered plea for help in the time of need Donald Blesch writes about this in relation to what he calls primitive prayer characterizing tribal religion it's egocentric since the petitioner primarily seeks divine aid to ensure his or her own prosperity and protection and the motivation is twofold gain and fear gain in specified ways and the avoidance of that or protection from that which one fears primitive people seek deliverance not from sin but from misfortune and danger and so on well yes and when they say there are no atheists in the trenches that's the kind of prayer in the trenches which warrants the generalization just about everybody in trouble pray as to whoever might be there to listen well that's one level of prayer and it's not actually all the prayer ought to be because the people who cry out for help under those circumstances are not the people that

God wants them to be but nonetheless they cry for help and that's my only point now Christians have a special revelation a supernatural revelation from God it's given in his word it's all in scripture it was embodied in Christ it's there and so in the light of the God about whom we know the truth because the Bible tells us we pray for help and yes God the promise keeper has declared that he will help and he's a prayer answering God who does help Jesus is very emphatic indeed about that just let me remind you of some words from the Sermon on the Mount there's no higher authority in matters of this kind than the

Lord Jesus and this is what he says ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and it will be opened to you everyone who asks receives the one who seeks finds and to the one who knocks it will be opened which one of you and this is you his disciples to whom he's talking those who believe in him already which one of you if his son asks him for bread will give him a stone question on of itself none of he would if he asks for a fish will you give him a serpent no of course he won't if you then who are evil or sorts of things wrong with you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father who's in heaven give good things to those who ask him that's Jesus giving us every encouragement to expect

[43 : 23] God to give help as a father will give help when his child asks for help well it's very emphatic and we need to take it very seriously the bible picture of prayer is asking God asking the father and the son and the spirit but the father being one of the three on whom you focus asking the father for help asking the father to supply a need and we are to expect that our heavenly father will do it in that sense it seems to be important that we should say to each other according to the new testament there's no such thing as unanswered prayer from a child of God but the but is very important God our heavenly father perfect in wisdom reserve the right to answer our pleas for help in the best way and at the best time and it is when

Paul pleaded that his thorn in the flesh might be miraculously healed and it wasn't the Lord Jesus said to him so he tells us my grace is sufficient for you my strength is made perfect in weakness you're to carry on Paul as you are I promise you that you'll be kept going despite the thorn in the flesh and your ministry won't suffer but you'll live with the pain all your days most gladly then says Paul will I boast in weaknesses in pains in sufferings and so on and so forth that the power of Christ may rest upon he's got the message the Lord Jesus has answered his prayer in the best way and he accepts that although it wasn't what he first asked for nonetheless it's an answer to his prayer when we pray like the

Lord Jesus himself we must be submissive to our heavenly father's wisdom and will just as Jesus in Gethsemane prayed not what I will but what you will when we pray we must be patient in the way that so many of the Psalms model patience for us Lord how long how long do I have to wait for you to do something about this need which I'm bringing to you and in which I'm praying for help Jesus tells the story of the unjust judge to say man ought always to pray and not to faint remember the poor widow had to keep bothering the judge in order to get the justice that she was entitled to and the lesson is that when we pray we may find that

God takes longer to move in answer to our prayers than we expected but keep going says Jesus that's the point of the parable keep going I'm just judging the story said alright because she bothers me so much I'm going to do what she asks how much more then this is the implication how much more will your heavenly father at the right time what he knows to be the right time answer our prayers do what we ask he'll answer prayer in the best way and at the best time also and that may well mean that things come out rather differently from what we expected here is something which you may have heard I may even have used it from this desk I'm not sure about that but you may have heard it or seen it in print in other places but just listen to this he asked for strength that he might achieve he was made weak that he might obey he asked for health that he might do greater things he was given infirmity that he might do better things he asked for riches that he might be happy he was given poverty that he might be wise he asked for power that he might have the praise of men he was given weakness that he might feel his need of

God he asked for all things that he might enjoy life he was given life that he might enjoy all things he perceived nothing that he asked for all that he hoped for his prayer is answered great wisdom there well now that's what real prayer is at last we come to the bypaths which I can speak of quite quickly because all the positive principles now are before you all the bypaths are matters of failing to face facts and so missing the truth about God and about ourselves and about praying as a life activity first of all failing to face facts about God there are people who doubt whether

[49 : 26] God is pressing they doubt whether God is interested in them they doubt whether God is reliable however interested in us he may be they think God is a great enigma and so they conclude it's not worth praying what good can come in they don't understand the will of God they have not faced the fact that his will for everyone is holiness and in fact they are not themselves seeking holiness they don't face the fact that the will of God is God entered living for God's glory he is to them the focus of our life and they're not living that way they're not facing the fact that God's will for them as for everyone else is saving faith in

Christ here you have it in terms from the lips of Jesus himself John chapter 6 and verse 40 this is what he says this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the son and believes on him should who looks on the son and believes on him should have eternal life and then I'll raise him up at the last day this is the will of him who sent me says Jesus that people don't come to Christ in saving faith they don't recognize their need of salvation they just cry out to whoever's there and thus they miss the will of God for their lives and Christians sometimes don't face the fact that God's will in his world is the maximum of good now that's the phrase which I'd love to stop and explain and I can't do it this morning

I haven't got time but the general idea of the maximum of good as distinct from less of good than there might be if what God is after in all his ordering of things in this world as it moves along as the battle against the rebel force the rebel angelic forces Satan and his hosts continues and as the church is called out and built up despite the pressures which Satan and his company exert and the problems therefore the Christians face in all of it God is overruling in his sovereignty for the maximum of good part of the faith of God's people is that when we get to glory we shall see this although we aren't in a position to see it down here and God doesn't give us the details down here but when you read a passage like 1st John chapter 5 verse 14 this is the confidence that we have towards him that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us and if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask we know that we have the requests that we've asked of him well we've got to remember that

God's will is the maximum of good in his world and that may involve aspects of situations which we know nothing about it may involve for you and me experiences that we never have anticipated God knows what he's doing he is as I said earlier on the God who is often hidden in the sense that we're not sure what he's up to but nonetheless that's his will and he answers prayer within the frame of his will as did God in that little extract that I read to you just now where the man received nothing he asked for but everything that he recognized he was hoping for and oh I have a story that I tell often and often

I believe I've told it to you some of you anyway about the time when I hoped my parents would give me a bicycle for my birthday and they gave me a typewriter which turned out as the years went by to be a much better present for me their son than the bicycle would have been well I'd like to have time to tell you the whole story as a story because it's a sort of fun story it happened and it was very much a place of wise parenthood but we can't stop on that I'm making the point that God answers prayers for help in his own way and having established that I now see God answers prayers for help in terms of his purpose to bring about the maximum good in his world now stand back from all that and you will see when God is confronted by petition people crying for help without devotion well people are not in tune with his will at all and they're on a by-path which is why their experiences of prayer are really satisfying and fulfilling petition without devotion is a by-path result of not facing facts about

[55 : 59] God and then people fail to face facts about praying itself there are the people who think that petition is needless why because God already knows what he does what we need and so you've got wise acres like the philosopher Kant saying let me read his words Christian prayer is a superstitious illusion for it is no more than a stated wish directed to a being who needs no such information regarding the inner disposition of the wisher therefore nothing is accomplished by it and it discharges none of the duties to which as commands of God we are obligated hence God is not really served by prayer now that's

Kant one of the architects anyway of the movement called the enlightenment which despite its name has brought so much spiritual darkness into this world well people think that's wisdom to think as Kant thought and treat prayer as needless because God already knows truth is the parents usually know what their children need before their children say anything but nonetheless for the building up of the relationship which is the important thing for the parent they want the boy or the girl to come and tell them what they need and then they do something about it in answer to the request for help and so I wouldn't say two birds are killed with one stone but two benefits are gained by a single action the relationship the child's certainty that his dad or his mum loves him that's deepened and at the same time

God gives the gift that he suspected all along that his child needed that wise supposedly wise people think oh petition is neat then there are the other people who think that petition is all that is needed and they never get around the praise and thanks and celebration of God and intercession for others and so their prayers are too narrow altogether in their focus to please the Lord and then there are the people new ages among them who really are on the mystical track mystical is or mysticism is a word for what results when you follow mist in the mind and the mystical idea is that the purpose of prayer is to realize realize the reality of

God without making any requests for his help because the prayer of realization is a higher thing altogether they rather look down on the rest of us who bring requests to God in the old fashioned way well all of this constitutes by parts people off the track realization however good in itself realization of God's reality without requests for help is a bypass they're not getting there maybe you could say they're on the way but they're not getting there it isn't real prayer yet and then with regard to the effect of prayer there are the people who think that they're twisting God's arm and somehow getting onto the throne of the universe when they pray because they're able to say to

God my will be done and because they're praying it'll happen that's a very superstitious and mistaken idea no it's not for us to twist God's arm it's not for us to suppose that we are managing the situation when we pray we aren't prayer is less a how can I say a means of getting from God what we want than it is a means whereby God gives us what he purposes to give what purposes to give you see in answer to prayer and not apart from prayer he waits in other words to be asked well we understand that and scripture makes it plain that God is like that he intends to give good things but he waits to be asked so that he knows that we shall value the gift when it's given well that means that once again people get onto bipads with regard to the significance of the act of praying

[61 : 42] I've had my full 60 minutes I'm afraid they've become 65 never mind I'm going to read you hymns one hymn by John Newton the amazing grace man but it's a hymn that's not too well known and one by a hymn writer you may never have heard of named Joseph Hart I'll start with Hart the hymn is not actually wonderful poetry because it's so heavily didactic but listen prayer was appointed to convey the blessings God designed to give long as they live should Christians pray for only while they pray they live if pain afflict or wrongs oppress if cares distressed or fears dismay if guilt deject if sin distress the remedies before him pray depend on Christ thou canst not fail make all thy wants and wishes known fear not his merit must prevail ask what thou wilt it shall be done and this is

John Newton maybe you know it maybe you don't but just listen behold the throne of grace the promise calls me near there Jesus shows a smiling face and waits to answer prayer my soul ask what thou wilt thou canst not be too bold since his own blood for thee was spilt what else can he withhold beyond thy utmost wants his love and power can bless to praying souls he always grants more than they can express teach me to live by faith confirm my conform my will to thine lead me victorious too in death and then in glory no let me victorious be in death and then in glory shine that's it the by-paths to be avoided the path to be followed we've got a few minutes we can hatch some of this to and fro but that's what I have to share with you today please comments reactions yeah

I just a comment conform my will to mind there's folks that say you know psalm I think 3-5 it says trust in the lord with all your heart and he will give you the desires of your heart and he will grant what you want but he will also cause you to want the right thing do you believe that yes I do and the story of the man who got nothing he prayed for and all that he hoped for and whose prayer was answered do you remember that's an illustration of precisely that truth as I understand it we don't always know what the real desires of our heart are but when God answers prayer his way we are able again and again to say yes I now realize this was what I wanted deep down even more than the thing I asked for see we're not always very well in touch with ourselves we ask for things believing that that's what we want and then God gives something slightly different and we realize then yes this really is what we wanted more than what we asked for so when you read the phrase desires of the heart it means you must remember it means more than the desires of which we're conscious of the moment which we think of as the desires of our heart at this time does that model it up or does that make something plain a lot of our problems actually result from not being as much as well in touch with ourselves as we think we are and as the psychologists and so on tell us that we can be if we follow their good example there's a hand up the back please

I would say I'm asked what I would say about enthusiasm as a factor in praying prayer I believe must be from the heart and the heart means the real center of you you put as much of your heart as you know into your prayers that's the Bible way to do it if you read the Psalms you find that the Psalmist is putting his heart into what he's doing in very obvious ways he's utterly uninhibited in the way that he expresses lots of things the kind of restraint which we associate with

Western type politeness isn't at all in order when we pray no it's for us to get to dig down as deep into our own hearts as we can and put as much of our heart as we are in touch with into our praying so it will be earnest enthusiastic serious passionate use whatever word you like to express this but it will be prayer from the heart and not just prayer from the head the cool head supremely the thing that ought to make us passionate is our passion for the glory of God and we pray as we do when we get to going over the Lord's Prayer I should be making a big point of this we're to pray as we do in order that God's name may be hallowed

[68 : 42] God may be glorified in other words that's the way the Lord's Prayer expresses the thought of God being glorified that's where we start and then all our petitions for particular things are offered because we believe that they'll bring glory to God if he answers the prayer and gives what we're asking we it could be another of the by-paths to suppose that we may warrantably lose sight of that and just be self-centered in our praying and still expect God to answer no that would be actually to ask in the wrong way and we wouldn't do it so thanks for that yeah do you think you could sit down at your computer and write all the things about which you would like to pray make a complete list and then put a stand and leave the room

I'm not sure I'm going to repeat the fullness of the question for the microphone I am simply going to respond by saying no no prayer cannot be mechanized simply because as we said a moment ago it's to be the expression of one's heart heart it's that sort of relationship that we're in with our God a nearest analogy parent and child and spouse with spouse speak from the heart yes that's right let me say for the microphone's benefit my friend has just reminded us of the

Buddhist prayer wheel with the bells which are supposed to bring the prayers before whatever deity there is and so the people sending the prayer don't have to pray yeah yeah well that's Bob Christian is an idea and one mentions that only to dismiss it thank you very much for bringing that up to where we're doing with now when we're actually praying to God obviously well not obviously but this is a secure line maybe what we can expect The question is, when we Christians pray, can we be confident that we have a secure line to the heart of God?

My answer is yes. The secure line is the promise. That God makes to his own children that he will hear and answer our prayers.

And the principalities and powers may gnash their devilish teeth as much as they like, but they can't overthrow the promise of God.

[72 : 46] They can't stop God keeping his word. And the way that God answers prayer will certainly take account of what the devil and his forces are up to at the moment.

That will be one of the factors that applies when, as sometimes, God answers prayer in somewhat different terms to those in which we make it.

But from the standpoint of you and me praying, the line is secure. The promise to answer prayer is given.

It's guaranteed. The only question, assuming that we are asking, asking the way Christians should.

me, this has been the truth to you. Come to the vern of God, whoever his■■■ and will go away because he will remain our coração helping them slow.

[74 : 26] I luke the backbone by wanting Israel to Sims, let him go to werden there if he wants to come in there. Thank you.