

Let's Fall in Love with God
Spiritual Teaser#1: Prayer - Spontaneous Dialog
(John Henry Alan, edited by Bob Clarkson)

Prayer is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied of all human communications. It may even be the least effective. I say this, not to discourage anyone from prayer. It is important, however, whenever you attempt to communicate, that you actually express your message in such a way that the listener, not only hears your words (and body language), but also understands what you intended to communicate in the same way as you understand it. This having been said, expression must of necessity be *two way*. It must be a dialog which gives feedback to the speaker which informs him as to whether or not his message was properly understood. The dialog continues until both parties think that they understand what the other has expressed.

Now, prayer, as it is used in religious circles, regardless of the religion or denomination of which you are a part, tends to be *one way*, directed at God, usually requesting (or begging) God to do something without any thought for what God might prefer to do in the circumstances from which one is praying. Mostly, we forget (or never even consider) who it is that we are talking to. Worse, yet, is that we treat God more or less like a lucky charm or magician or a doting parent who wants to indulge us and that He exists primarily for that purpose.

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much!" James 5:16 Well, don't we all, think that our prayers will be effective because we are desperately

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desiring to be *righteous* or God owes us something? Maybe we think He will say, “yes” because we go to our religious meetings and scripture studies frequently, or because we actually manage to obey the commandments of God most of the time.

Prayer might best be characterized as a spontaneous conversation between myself and God.

“This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His Will, He hears us ... and we know that we have what we ask of Him.” 1 Jn 5:14-15.

The more intimate I become with God, the more my desires will coincide with His and my prayers will be more and more effective.

Anything that hinders our spiritual growth is bad and not good. This is how God defines good. Worse yet, it might keep them from the very intimacy with God which they truly desire. I might also be praying for a result which would distract me from my relationship with God. *Everything and every experience in my life is either an attraction to God's love or a distraction from it.*

A gap between what we pray for and our receptivity to God's answer, either *yes* or *no*, comes by way of unrealistic expectations or selfish desires. We may, for example, pray for courage. We expect God to give us courage, because that is a *good* thing to pray for. However, the proper expectation would be that when I ask for courage, God will introduce circumstances into my life which will give me the *opportunity to be courageous* or to see my cowardice more clearly.

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I had an interesting and revealing experience in prayer with a dear Brother from Cameroon Africa. I had experienced, more than once, terrible accidents on the highway. Fortunately in all of these cases I had walked away virtually unscratched while the vehicles were completely demolished. As I was leaving the home of my dear brother, he prayed over me. This is commonly prayed. One part of his prayer was that God would give me a trouble-free, safe journey home.

When Gilbert finished his prayer for me, I prayed for him. When I finished praying, I asked Gilbert not to pray for my safety in the future. But rather, I asked him to pray for opportunities to bring glory to God through divine appointments which might actually be produced by a terrible accident on the highway.

Actually, after one of those devastating car crashes, my divine appointment was to deliver the love of God and the message of salvation to the EMT's who attended to me on the fast ride to the hospital in their ambulance! Even the Apostle Paul was plagued by various calamities in his journeys. And each of them produced opportunities to promote the message of Jesus and the love of God.

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Nothing short of a radical reformation or transformation can bring us to intimacy with God which is deeply passionate enough to bring heaven to earth in the space where we sit, walk or stand.

The sum and substance of prayer is that it becomes as natural and frequent as breathing. It is as connecting to God in relationship as is human marriage to an earthly mate. It is a relationship in which we can finish His sentences and He ours. Our passionate desire for Him supersedes every other relationship we have. And our thoughts of Him are as constant as our heartbeats.

When our prayers become as spontaneous and genuine as the conversation with our family gathered around a holiday meal together, we will likely forget many of the things spoken, but we will never forget the wonderful feelings of being together with and in conversations with those we love dearly.

The single best defense against Satan, is intimacy with God. God has entirely defeated the enemy, Satan, through the victory of God's Son Jesus through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension. Therefore we have no need to fight battles in a war that is over. *Let us be about our Father's business.* This business is the great commission which is to make disciples of Jesus, which in essence is to make *lovers of others* out of *lovers of self*. A disciple is one who has the heart of his master. When one loves the things his master loves, he will do what his master did, in every situation. Stop trying to imitate the actions of Jesus (WWJD) and rather love like Jesus loves (LLJL).

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Another thought to take away from this word about prayer, is this. *Self is never as extremely selfish as when it is on its knees begging God for things.* You and I are *selfish* enough so as not to need Satan's help or anyone else's help for that matter. The sooner we stop blaming Satan and others for our own evil motives, the sooner *we will know the truth (about ourselves) and that truth will set us free.* Am I, in the likeness of my Savior, willing to be used, abused, overlooked, ignored, humiliated and forgotten? *If I do the work, while you get the credit, and I am fine with that,* I am on the right pathway to intimacy with God!

Jesus did *not*, I repeat, did *not*, sacrifice Himself for any reason other than the joy in anticipation of an intimate love affair with anyone and everyone who would take His hand in marriage! Do not be deceived for one more moment. Love is not actions. Actions speak the words of truth in contradiction to the words of my mouth. Jesus endured the most brutal and humiliating of all deaths because, and only because, of His deeply emotional desire for you and me! His actions screamed to the ends of the universe, "I love you so much that I am dying so that you might live in love with Me!"

The most powerful prayers are those of which we can remember the least detail. That is because the prayer isn't formulated in our own minds, it is prayer by the Holy Spirit through our lips entering our minds by way of our hearing it as it comes from our lips.

I was recently approached by a man while visiting his church. He came to my pew and asked if I remembered having prayed for God to sell his house over a decade before. I told him that I remember praying for

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him, but not what I had prayer for. He told me that I had prayed that God would sell his house. And he said that God had sold it the very next week. The week after his house sold, the bottom dropped out of the real estate market. He was elated at God's miracle on his behalf in this regard. But he seemed almost crushed when I did not remember praying that his house would sell. Well, the amazing revelation to me in that moment was that I actually had not prayed for his house at all. I had prayed that God would encourage him and walk with him through the process of moving. That much I know to be certain. I almost never ask God for any specific earthly result, only that the person for whom He has called me to pray might find a deeper, richer and fuller relationship with God. That is something I can count on to always be in the will of God!

The weapons of our *warfare* listed in Ephesians 6 are all *defensive* pieces of armor except for the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which does not destroy the hearer, but rather discerns the motives of the hearers to their own point of surrender to the truth about themselves and surrender to the love of God for them.

Prayer is not:

- pious monologues on current events with an earthly vision desiring earthly results
- wish lists of what I want or what I want for others
- part of my daily *lucky charm* moment with God so as to bless my day
- an expectation of God that I do this prayer thing on a schedule

Prayer is:

- an awareness of God's presence with me day and night
- a heart eager to dialog with God who desires me
- desiring to be more intimate with my *most significant other*
- desire to know what God wants and *agreeing with Him*
- to bring God pleasure by my expressing of affection
- God and I expressing our inner thoughts and affections
- an opportunity to know His heart and mind better
- an inclusion of God in everything I think and feel
- learning how to love God and others *selflessly*
- developing unity with God in both purpose and desire

Prayers *whisper tender words* of love as they surrender their very lives to those enemies who would kill them. Loving to the end, so that lives will be redeemed by love alone. Jesus prayed for, *not against* anyone!

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Spiritual Teaser 2 —What's in your wallet?

When I refer to your wallet, I am also referring to your electronic equivalent, such as smart phone or tablet and so forth. I am not talking about your money or valuable credit cards. Although how you spend your money does speak volumes about your love for God and love for self.

Are there pictures in your wallet (smart device) of persons about whom you would brag? We often say that “We love God more than anyone else.” But the Bible states, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” and “Out of the abundance of what is in your heart, your mouth speaks.” So I ask you, “Do you talk frequently and proudly about God?”

Are there images of Jesus in your heart that cause you to brag about Him as much as you brag about your family and friends?

I firmly believe that the first century believers could not be silenced because their love for Jesus was so very great. It had to be an enormous love, as it compelled belief even when that belief would bring almost certain death to themselves and their families.

I pray with God that, if nothing else comes of this global pandemic, Christians would find a deeper love for Jesus such that when they return to the work place they will no longer be silent about the *lover of their soul*, but **live the love of Jesus** such that their coworkers are compelled to come into the family of God.

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Spiritual Teaser #3: Passion for God

For many years after embarking on this journey to intimacy with God, I conducted conferences, retreats, seminars, and Bible studies. I taught that we need to elevate God to the place of highest passion in our souls. I may have been correct in this teaching but God suggested that I try a different approach. Obviously, except for *love at first sight*, we generally take quite a bit of time to develop new relationships. So, God's idea was strikingly brilliant.

As I was standing in my shower one morning, God suggested this approach. I began teaching it immediately and found it to be very helpful for every one of my students and mentees. What God told me that morning was this. "If you can encourage people to just elevate Me to the *top ten list of their passions*, I can help them finish the priority rearrangement as they begin to *fall in love* with Me. I can and will get to the top slot, once I am in serious competition with their other loves."

For most Christians, even those who would insist that they love God the most, God is way down the list of their passions. Usually, a passion for God ranks somewhere below the thirtieth one. If you are serious enough and honest enough, I would bet that an extensive list of the things or persons that you value the most, would actually reveal that your love for God is way down your list. Remember: "What's in your wallet?"

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Spiritual Teaser #4: Mirrors & Litmus Tests

There are ways and means you can develop which will act as *mirrors* to reflect how others see you and help you become more truthful about yourself and become more like the Master, Jesus. You might also develop *litmus tests* which enable you to determine how caustic (like burning acid or poison) your expressions are such that you can moderate them. I have listed only a few here. I suggest that you create a list of your own and use them frequently to discover more truth about yourself, which will accrue to greater spiritual freedom.

One *mirror* which I use is this: I ask the question in *Spiritual Teaser #9*, “What’s in your wallet?” I was referring to people about whom I brag proudly? This helps me see how much or little I am proud of Jesus and speak delightedly and frequently about Him.

Three *litmus tests* I use to help me know the motive behind an expression are these: Am I expressing this, in order to *indulge* my desires?
in order to *impress* others?
so that I might *manipulate* or coerce you?

My selfishness might be revealed by asking this after speaking from the lectern:

“Well, how was the lesson, good or not?”
a *mirror* as something that reflects what you hold as *idols*.
a *litmus test* measures your *selfishness* which harms others.

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Spiritual Teaser #5: Advisory Admonitions

One Step Back, Two Steps Forward — Tozer speaks:

Allow me to go out on a limb and state something that I have no way of knowing for sure. It's an educated guess based on knowing spiritual laws and my experience in ministry. This is simply that once a person begins this journey of living abandoned to intimacy with God, in the first phase of that journey, he will experience some of the worst weeks or months of his life. It is at this point that many will get discouraged and give up. Those who persevere will find that instead of breaking into the clear bright sunshine, just ahead of them are more discouragements, doubts and deceptions. Instead of lifting you up, this kind of teaching may discourage you from this journey. But those who have been thus discouraged, those who have lost their reputation or been scorned or rejected by the church or have otherwise been pushed away, are the very ones who will become intimate with God.

Those who can still be worldly and not mind it, have made the least progress. But those who have found things going against them, those who in their longing and yearning for intimacy with God, wonder if He is actually discouraging them. They probably don't realize that they are very close to the very intimacy with God that they have wanted.

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It is the giving up of all that the world holds dear, these very trials, that are making you into the likeness of Christ. Remember that the religious leaders of Judaism kept trying to discredit Jesus and called Him a blasphemer and finally killed Him.

A Little Bit of Glory

We conduct our Christian lives so that we get a little glory and our desires fulfilled our own way. Fenelon made this observation. "We are strangely ingenious in perpetually seeking our own interest and what the world does nakedly and without shame. Those who desire to be devoted to God do also, but in a refined manner." Tozer sums it up this way, "Evidently a man who could not invent anything, can, while claiming to love God, invent a way of seeking his own interests."