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Preface

This booklet is designed to establish a foundational understanding of prayer as the supreme gift of grace that flows from the gospel, namely communion with God. In short: Jesus went to the garden and prayed, and then he “came forward”¹ to the cross so we could pray in His name and know that we are heard.

The first portion of the booklet will be primarily directed to adults for their growth in the faith, for it is my conviction that it is most important that adults be changed as they, in turn, seek to love and lead children in prayer. This booklet will first establish that the ground for communion with God comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ, and then call the Christian adult to humility and offer a word of hope. The booklet will then provide practical guidance to those who lead children in prayer—primarily in the classroom, but also in the living room.

The second portion of the booklet should be seen as a springboard for creative and visionary thought. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but to stimulate thinking in a practical direction.

¹ *Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward...* (John 18:4)

Introduction

Stop and Respond to God in Prayer

From time to time, you will see Stop and Respond to God in Prayer underlined in this booklet. At various points as I was preparing this booklet, I was led to stop and pray. Perhaps it was to confess sin, to praise God, or to pause with Him in wonder over an amazing truth. (I will usually mention what moved me to stop and pray specifically each time, but perhaps the Spirit will move you in a different direction.) Please use these occasional prompters to slow down and linger with God in prayer, for the goal should not be to merely finish reading this booklet, but rather to walk with God as you read. May you commune with God as you read about communing with God, in Jesus' name.

Stop and Think This Through with God in Relation to Children

Additionally, I took these moments of prayer and then applied them to leading children in prayer. So at times you will see Stop and Think this Through with God in Relation to Children. I took what God had given me just then, and turned it back to him in prayer, thinking about children as I did. For example, if I was moved to repent and confess a particular sin, then I stayed on track with that thought and pondered what it might look like for children in classrooms to repent and confess sin. Take your time during these moments. Again, the goal should not primarily be that you finish this booklet or get to the practical part, but rather to commune with God, thinking with Him, knowing His presence, and being changed as you do. In that context, may God grant you insight about the ministry of prayer to children.

Part 1: Prayer, its Grounding and an Appeal to the Heart

The Foundation of Prayer

God Desires Communion with His Children

This is a most amazing truth, that God, being supremely glad in Himself, dependent upon nothing, and reigning over everything,² needing no one to sustain His gladness apart from Himself,³ desires communion with His chosen people! He delights over His people, and it is obvious. He does not need them, but in simple terms He loves to be with them! Doesn't this cause you to pause and wonder why?

God desires for His people to come to Him in prayer; He rejoices over them, welcomes them, and loves them.

He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me. (Psalm 18:19)

The LORD takes pleasure in his people...(Psalm 149:4)

Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. (Isaiah 43:4) (Take some time and welcome the Spirit of Truth to reveal to you the blood-bought realities found in these verses. See also Isaiah 43:1-13; 49:15-16.)

...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:5)

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

2 God is not served by humans, "as though he needed anything" from anyone (Acts 17:24-25). No one can add to what God has or is, for He is supreme in all good things without want, and He owns all things. See also Job 41:11 and Psalm 50:10-12.

3 Notice the fellowship of the Triune God in Jesus' words found in John 14-17. For example: John 14:31; 15:9-10; 16:12-13; 17:20-24.

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¹³*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

¹⁴*I will be found by you, declares the LORD..." (Jeremiah 29:11-14)*

The LORD Your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

Look at Jesus' own words and how they reveal His desire to be with His own whom He loves and how He desires that they would to see His glory:

And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also. (John 14:3)

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (John 14:21)

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:15)

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory... (John 17:24)

God has penned by His Spirit prayers found in Scripture, such as the psalms, for example, that encourage His people to pray. It is clear that He wants them to seek Him and commune with Him. Consider this truth as you read the following.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God; incline your ear to me; hear my words. ⁷Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand. (Psalm 17:6-7)

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. ⁶Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. (Psalm 86:5-6)

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! ²O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! (Psalm 130:1-2)

When one of Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, after having watched Him pray, He was willing to teach them,

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saying, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name...’” (Luke 11:2). Prayer is encouraged, expected, taught, and desired for us by God.

Stop and Respond to God in Prayer—Oh God, thank You for welcoming me into Your presence. Thank You for loving me and delighting over me. I confess that this gift of grace exceeds my comprehension, but I believe it and I must stop in this moment and praise You for Your goodness and grace upon me. Yes God, it is amazing grace...

Stop and Think this through in Relation to Children—God, am I obvious in being in wonder at Your amazing grace before the eyes and ears of children? Do they know that I experience great joy and peace when I settle on these great truths? How might I show this to my own children while at home? How should I pray? What should I sing? You love me; do they know that this truth amazes me? What about children in classrooms? Spirit of Truth, please reveal the truth of my heart; do I default to being in wonder and full of joy at these glorious truths when I am with the children, or are lesser things my primary concern? What would the children say to this question about me?

God Made the Way for Prayer: The Gospel of Jesus Christ

While it is true that God desires communion with His people, it is also true that all people are born in sin, and their sin creates a gap between them and Him because He is holy. This gap cannot be bridged by them. God Himself solved this seemingly impossible problem by bridging the gap through His Son. This is good news. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Prayer, communion with God, was purchased for us by Jesus’ bloody sacrifice and righteousness. The gospel simply and profoundly “is,” so that we could commune with God for our joy and His glory. As you read God’s Word in the following pages, invite the guiding and illuminating work of the Spirit, who teaches truth and glorifies the Son. Welcome His presence. May these familiar words bring new measures of conviction, joy, and thanksgiving to Your heart. Read slowly with God and resist the impulse to read quickly what is so familiar.

Communion with God is Hopeless—Because of man’s sin, and if he is left alone in his sin, there would be no communion between him and God.