

**Coming to Know and Trust God #6;  
Our Prayers Reveal Our View of God**

**2010 Feast of Tabernacles, Sixth Day  
September 28, 2010; Yachats, OR**

Jon W. Brisby  
Edited Sermon Transcript

Well, good morning again to all of you, brethren. And I'll get right into the main message today, which is the continuation, now, of this series that you have been receiving with my eight sermons—my eight messages—on the topic of "Coming to Know and Trust God." What does it mean to really know this God we claim to acknowledge, and even to revere? And beyond just a knowledge of Him—a superficial understanding or acceptance of Him—what does it mean to love Him and to trust Him? You know, as we have seen, so many people in the world make a claim, but there is a whole lot more to it, as God defines it, in really coming into a close personal relationship with this God, our heavenly Father, and with our elder brother Jesus Christ.

And so I started in the last message by addressing the judgments of God. We are drilling down, now, and we are taking it out of the higher-plane principles and bringing it down. So, today I'm actually going to give you a message on the topic of prayer. We are going to talk about prayer. Your first reaction might be, "Wait a minute, what does that have to do with getting to know God?" Am I changing course and theme on you in midstream? I don't think so. But why are we going to talk about prayer, and what does that have to do with the concept of getting to know and to trust God? I think it's very possible that, unintentionally, we carry some gross misconceptions around with us about God—ones we are not even aware of—and what I want to do is to test that, concerning our thoughts and our orientation toward prayer.

Why does this have anything to do with getting to know God? Well, when you know and have a close relationship with someone, what's one of the key ways that is manifested? Isn't it with communication? Now, when you are close with

someone—a human being, whether it is a family member, a friend, or whatever—what is one of the things you do with that person that you don't do with strangers? You interface and commune with them, isn't that right? Sure. You communicate, you talk to them. When you know someone, and you love them, there is a desire to communicate. You like to be with them. Isn't that so? That's exactly what prayer is all about. Prayer is one of the primary ways that you and I communicate with God. That's why I believe strongly that our thoughts and our concepts about prayer, and the way that we pray, and the way that we think while we are praying to God, says a lot—I mean a lot—about our real concept of God. So, I want to test what are maybe some assumed, or long-held, concepts that I suspect a lot of God's people have about prayer, and the way we go about it.

I've made changes in the way I think about prayer, which I believe, gives me a much stronger connection of respect in praying to God, and those are the things I want to share with you. Because I've always had kind of a concern, and I have heard certain people talk commonly, since the time I was a child, and growing up in the church, and there are certain concepts within the church of God about prayer, and the way people pray, and the way they think about it, and there was something that bothered me about it, and I never could put my finger upon it. And then a few years ago, I felt like I started putting my finger upon it more.

The input of Mr. Raymond Cole over the years, and learning from him, was the catalyst that helped me to do a lot of that. His experiences, having been raised basically, spiritually, at the feet of Mr. Herbert Armstrong was a catalyst, but there are a number of things that Mr. Armstrong taught, and that Mr. Raymond Cole confirmed, which I believe have been lost, or missed, or underestimated.

Now, I did a message a few years ago in Vancouver, Washington, that really didn't go out to all of our members around the world, on the subject of intercessory prayer, and so some of you have heard some of those principles. But I want to cover that today in this context and I hope that it will be meaningful.

How should we think about prayer, and what is required in order to receive answers to our prayers? If praying is communicating with God—talking to Him—what are we saying? Don't you know that when you talk to other people, what you say and how you say it demonstrate whether or not you are showing respect for that individual, and whether or not they are receiving, basically, signals

from you that demonstrates your confidence in them, and your respect for them? Or, maybe, we are communicating something else. How does God view how we are thinking about Him when we pray? What *are* we thinking about Him when we pray? Let's test that.

So, to begin with, we need to be sure that we are not praying as the unconverted heathen do. That's my big number one point here, and this was, I think, the foundation of my trouble over what I have seen and heard over the years in the church of God. Because without knowing it, I am afraid that many have emulated and brought a heathen orientation to prayer into the church.

Let's start with Matthew 6, verses 7 and 8, because Christ was very clear in warning the church not to pray like the heathen. So let's notice that first. Matthew 6, beginning in verse 7: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions [use not vain repetitions], as the heathen do . . ." Now, very often I've heard that only interpreted as praying like the Aborigines, who chant, you know, while they are dancing around the fire, or whatever else, and they say the same thing over, and over, and over, and over, and over again. Okay, well, so we are not supposed to do that. That's certainly got to be a part of it, but I suspect it's a little deeper, and more involved than just that.

You know, we can be praying in a very vain way, even if we may be using much more of a variety in our vocabulary. We are not supposed to get into a rut, where we just kind of recite the same words, and the same concepts, over and over again. You know, if you do that to a friend of yours, do you think he will see through it? Yeah, he will know that you are tuned out. You are just kind of speaking something, but your mind is somewhere else. If you say the same thing every time you talk to them, they will think, "Wait a minute, he is not really focused on me. He is not really intent on an exchange of communication." So, we need to be careful that this is not what we are doing with God, either.

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." So, by virtue of just the amount of time they spend in the act of prayer, or by saying certain words in certain combinations, and reciting things over and over again, they think they somehow are pleasing God and bringing Him into some acceptance of them.

Verse 8: "Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." *There* is the other concept: God does not need us to tell Him what our needs are. Don't misunderstand: He wants us to tell Him, but again, my point is, how are we thinking about it when we are doing it? Remember when we talked about the attributes of God earlier in the Feast? He is omnipotent, He is omnipresent, and He is omniscient—He has all knowledge, past, present and future. Is there anything that you and I can tell God in prayer, or otherwise, that He doesn't already know? Of course not. So, when you and I are praying, even when we are asking for something, do we think we are informing God? Do we think we are enlightening God as a counselor, with something He does not already know? And what is the potential that this is the way we, inadvertently, are treating Him?

This is why prayer, I believe, is critical in the test for you and me in assessing: "Where do I really stand, right now, in my relationship with God?" Do you know Him? Do you trust Him? Well, let's think about our prayer lives and the way we are communicating with Him, right now, and I think that is going to tell us all a whole lot. I think it is a wonderful acid test for each one of us, privately, with God, to say, "Where do I really stand?" I can't think of a better one than to address this issue of prayer.

God does not need us to tell Him that we have needs. He already knows. So the purpose of prayer is not to inform God of things He has missed, or perhaps that He chooses to ignore. Remember, this is a God of love. We have already seen that. He is the personification of love, and mercy, and compassion, and the epitome of everything good. So our prayers can never be for the purpose of twisting God's arm and getting Him, finally, to do the right thing. That is not the purpose of prayer, because in fact, thinking about prayer in that way is a disrespect and a dishonor to Him. If we think the purpose of our prayers is that we are going to admonish God to see something He has missed, and to finally do the right thing, which He hasn't been doing, *that* is not an honor to God, at all. That assumes—without us saying it, or even realizing it in our own minds—that God is not paying attention, that He is not really an attentive Father, and somehow He has missed something, or He is being distant, or maybe He just doesn't care. And now we are going to tug on His coattail and say, "O God, please, please, please, pay attention." And that is not what we want to do with our prayers.

How do the modern heathens, today, pray? Some of you know this, especially those of you who have come out of other "Christian" assemblies. How

do they pray? If you want a number one way of identifying how *not* to pray, look at how the unconverted pray—the ones who don't have the Holy Spirit, the ones whom God is not working with right now, the ones who have not been called. Look at what they do, and how they do it, and that's probably a good sign of what you don't want to be doing, wouldn't you agree? Now, how do they pray—these that call themselves "Christian"? And I am going to especially pick on the Protestant evangelicals. How do they pray—what is their concept of prayer?

Have you heard about prayer circles? Prayer circles are a big thing among the so-called Christian community today, and I'm not sure that many of God's people are even questioning it. I think that some of us think that prayer circles are a good thing. Well, I have a quote, just for simplicity. It's a condensed kind of definition that is really short. I don't want to spend a lot of time on it, but I got this off the internet from wikipedia.com, and this is under the heading of "Prayer Circles." Here's a technical description of a "prayer circle":

Ritual prayer in a circle around an altar is not unique to Christianity. Ritual ceremonies around an altar are common in paganism, and ritual prayer dances around an altar were practiced by early Christians, especially Gnostics, before the practice was condemned as a heresy by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 A.D. Much later, Protestants began conducting informal prayer circles. Sometimes these communities are developed online.

Here is one that is Catholic based: It's called [prayercircleonline.com](http://prayercircleonline.com). Another nondenominational one that I found is called [beliefnet.com](http://beliefnet.com). And, basically, what they are trying to do is to get lots of people participating in prayer—intercessory prayer. Now, why are they doing this? Oh, I'm going to give you all of the texts where God says that we are supposed to pray for one another. The question is why, and why not? These uncalled people who do not have God's Spirit, should they be our example for how we pray, and the way we think about prayer? I doubt it. So, what are they doing, and how do *they* think about it—these uncalled individuals who are separated from God right now?

What do they do? They are very big into intercessory prayer and networks of people. When somebody has a need—somebody is sick, somebody has an economic problem, or whatever personal crisis—"Let's get it out to all our friends on the prayer circle, and now let's *all* pray." And we think we are going to get a

miracle because we get lots and lots, and more, of people together and involve them in this process, so that this person can have a blessing.

Well, you know, a lot of that doesn't sound wrong, but what are some of the underlying ideas going on in the minds of the people who are doing it? This is what I want to test. You know what I see in it? I see an orientation where these very sincere individuals really think that they are going to gang up on God through their collective prayer in order to finally get Him to be nice: God won't bless you unless you have a hundred people praying for you. You see, the orientation is that it's not that God is a loving Heavenly Father who desires to give us the good things. What do they think is the key to an answered prayer—to getting a blessing or a miracle to happen in your life? Get it out to a big group of people and have them all collectively pray for you, and that's how you get an answer to prayer. Do you know what that says to me in my mind? These are people who don't know God, and they certainly don't respect Him. They desire to be, but I don't think that's respectful to God at all.

The concept is that God won't do good unless we get enough people to sign the petition. Does God need anybody to pray for someone else in order for Him to love and desire to help that individual? No way. Was Adam absolutely without the capacity of having God's help, and mercy, and intervention in his life because there were no other human beings on the earth to pray for him? No. Even while he was alone, was not God his loving Father? Would He not have given Adam anything, if Adam had followed the rules? Or, because there were no other human beings in the garden at the time, was Adam without the capacity to have his prayers answered? That's an extreme example, I know, but again, which philosophy is showing respect for God, and which one is showing, even inadvertently, disrespect for God? And when you come to understand how the heathen pray—and I've become very confident in this—you will see that the whole idea of prayer circles is nothing but a glorified modern manifestation of the ancient pagan practices. As we just read in that example, they are basically circling around the altar, and they are lifting up their voices, and what are they doing? They are using words, and chants, and a collective orientation, to try to tap the "power of the gods." That's what they are doing. They think they have to go through a ritual—a collective ritual—with as many people as they can get around the circle, saying the magic words, and then, BOOM, they get the miracle—they tap the "power of the gods," and then they get the blessing.

Is that the God you are worshiping? Is that your idea of God? I don't think it's a respectable orientation to the Creator, at all. Please don't get me wrong, I'm going to reconfirm to you what the Bible says. He says we are to pray for one another. Mr. Armstrong certainly confirmed that, as did Mr. Cole. What I am addressing is the "why" and the "how." What is your mental orientation when you pray? And what I want to emphasize is: Do not allow yourself inadvertently to be praying and thinking about God the way these pagans, and even these Protestants, who are also pagans, spiritually, are thinking about God.

They, by and large, believe in the "power of prayer." They believe in the "power of prayer." But what does that really mean? It is not the same as the power of God. Do you understand the difference? They think the very act of prayer itself is what gives them the power to get a blessing—that the ritual itself is a powerful thing. Not true. The power lies with God. Prayer is only a means to communicate with that God. I refuse to use, at least I refuse to use consciously, the term the "power of prayer." Prayer is not the power. Prayer is only communicating with the powerful God, and it is His volition to bless, or to curse. Prayer is only a vehicle to achieve a close relationship with the source of power. They don't view it that way. They think prayer itself—the act of prayer—is the source of power, and especially when they can get a big prayer circle going. They think that automatically gives them control. In other words, basically, it's like a talisman. That is really what it is to them. It is a pagan exercise to call down power from heaven. By virtue of their act of praying, and praying in a certain way, with certain words, they think they can automatically "tap the power."

Where is God in this? Where is the volition of a loving Creator God? Where is recognition for Him? Subtly, brethren, I think it's very heathen, and I think it's very pagan. We don't want to pray that way, and yet, we are commanded by God to ask. Let's notice those texts, beginning in Philippians 4:6. Philippians chapter 4 and beginning in verse 6:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God [*There* is the command. He wants us to pray, and He wants us to make requests, and to ask Him—but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God]. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So, no doubt, a key part of our prayers, daily, should be asking God for those needs. Now, obviously, that shouldn't predominate. You know, we can get into that trap: "O God, please give me this, and please solve this problem for me," and whatever else, when a big part of our prayers really should be showing respect and honor for God, and thanking Him. That is why thanksgiving is noted here. It's not inconsequential. We should be reserving a lot of time in our prayers to acknowledging His power, His authority, His perfect character, and to thank Him.

You know, I find that when I make sure that I do that, it helps me incredibly to cleanse my mind, if that's a good term, and to really get my mind focused appropriately. When I don't—when I am just focused on whatever pressures or burdens that I am under, and I pray, "My God, please help me. I need this, I need this, I need this, and I need that," I am not focused correctly. They may all be good things, hopefully they are, but when I haven't stopped and made a priority of actually saying, "O God, thank you. In spite of whatever problems and difficulties I am having, thank you, most of all, for all the daily blessings you are providing for me that I know I do not deserve," and spending that time really counting the blessings, if you will, I have the wrong focus.

It sounds trite, but it's not trite to try to count our blessings. "Thank you, Father. You are glorious. You are the personification of love and mercy. Thank you that you are a good God." That's really one of the things I've come to say to Him a lot: "Thank you that you are a good God." It helps my focus a lot to acknowledge that, and it helps center me when I *do* ask, "Now, God here is my list of things I am asking of you." If I start by assuming that He is a good God—that He is love, and mercy, and compassion, and longsuffering—then I am not trying to cajole Him into being good. That's not the reason I am asking. But I am asking because He says He wants us to ask—He wants us to make the request. But I try very carefully never to do it in a way that assumes that I am telling Him something He doesn't already know. I'm not informing God of anything. What can I inform Him of? He knows all, not only the things I know and the things I think I know, but He knows all the realities of the things I may not even know myself, in my own mind. So I am not informing Him of anything, at all.

But notice Matthew 7 and verse 7—just another confirmation here. Matthew 7, beginning in verse 7 and reading all the way through verse 11. What did Christ command to the disciples? "Ask." He told us we are supposed to ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be

opened unto you . . ." Why? Why, when we ask, will He give, and why, when we knock, will He open, and why, when we ask, will we receive? Not because we got ourselves and a whole bunch of our closest friends in the church together in a prayer circle to badger Him, and then finally, God says: "Well, okay. If you are not going to stop until I give in, alright, here you go, here is your blessing." That is not why He is going to give us what we ask.

Why will He answer our prayers? Well, Christ follows through and tells us in verse 9: "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" So, He uses even the comparison of carnal human love as an example—that which is intrinsic, naturally, in human beings: a love of a parent for a child (mothers and fathers for their little children).

Now, there is a whole lot less of that today than there should be, or than there used to be, at given times, and one of the signs that the sins of the world, or the people, are coming to the full is that even natural human love is becoming scarce, and those things are breaking down. We have an incredible increase in the number of people who are not showing even a natural desire to take care of, and to nurture, their children. If that is not satanic, I don't know what is, because God gave even carnal human beings, by nature, a natural affection for their children. So when you see many families, and an increasing number of young people growing up and having children—either within or without of wedlock—and they have no conscience, whatsoever, or sense of responsibility or love for their children, there is something seriously wrong. That is not even human. That is demonic. But it is becoming more and more normal.

But here God is asking, "Don't you, even as carnal human beings, have a love and a desire for the good things for your children? Don't you have that feeling and that desire for them to do well?" You want to pour yourself out to help them, don't you? And you don't have to have the Holy Spirit to do that. That's just human. God made us all that way, by nature. That's what He is talking about.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? [Verse 11] If ye then, being evil [carnal, cut off from God. But even in that cut-off state of carnality, He says, well, that we are evil. "If you, being evil"], know how to give good gifts unto your children, how

much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

If even carnal human beings have a sense of love and a desire to help their children, shouldn't God's love be astronomically higher and more complete, even? You bet it is. So, the reason God is going to answer our prayers is not because He is indifferent, or that He hates us, or that He doesn't care, but if we badger Him enough He will finally give in, just to get us off His back. It's not the "power" of the prayer circle that is going to get an answered prayer. The reason He answers prayers is because He loves you. He loves you, and He desires for you to be blessed, to be happy, to be fulfilled, and to have all of your needs resolved. He wants it.

The prayers of God's people, likewise, brethren, should be private. Those prayers, primarily, should be private and not done in groups. That is another thing that the evangelical Protestants like to do—they like to have group prayers.

Now, we have group prayers, as Mr. Armstrong taught us in the true Church of God, and mostly they are opening and closing prayers within services—just like this one that we are a part of today—or also maybe when we ask God for a blessing upon a meal, like we did last night. But, you see, we weren't taught to have prayers where people get together in their homes and we all pray together. That wasn't the example we were taught, but that is very, very common with a lot of these other so-called Christian groups. Again, stop and analyze what they are really doing, and what they are really thinking, and what all these activities say concerning their ideas about God. Again, what I have concluded in my own mind, and you make your own judgment, but I think they are doing just like the ancient pagans, and I think they believe that because they get a number of people together in one place, and they all chant together—even if they don't think they are chanting, they are really engaged in a heathen prayer circle—they will summon the power of God by the act of prayer itself, and I don't want any part of that.

You know, I have had people who have come out of the Protestant orientation and, you know, it takes a while to learn the Truth, as opposed to the false. I have visited people in their homes, and they are just kind of learning the fundamentals of the Truth, and it has happened that before I leave they will ask, "Can we pray together?" And that always makes me uncomfortable. I don't want

to be rude, and I don't want to give the impression that "well, no, I don't want to pray." Okay, how do I answer that, and what do I say? Well, I do say: "We don't do that. We were not taught through Mr. Armstrong to do that in normal cases." Are there some cases when it is appropriate? Yes. I'm not saying you should never do it, but you should be very, very careful about engaging in this common practice of: "Oh, there is a group of us together in this home. Oh, let's pray." No.

What did Christ tell us in Matthew 6, verses 5 and 6? Here is the fundamental orientation, and the practice, that we should be using for prayer. Matthew 6 and beginning in verse 5: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are . . ." This is not saying that every single person who prays should simply avoid praying as the Pharisees and scribes, who were literally on the street corners praying as hypocrites—trying to bring attention to themselves. That's just the most extreme factor, and Christ was certainly using that as an example, but I think it goes deeper.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets." Well, what is wrong with praying in a synagogue? I mean, isn't that a place where you can go to worship God? Where is a more natural place to pray than there? But, again, what was the orientation of mind—which is really what Christ seems to be addressing here? It is the idea of people getting together to have a prayer session—a collective thing—and they all kind of summon the power of the gods, or at least make themselves look good by virtue of the fact that they are participating.

. . . for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest [and here is what we are supposed to be doing, in opposition and contrary to that idea], enter into thy closet . . .

Enter into your closet. That doesn't mean it has to be a closet. Now, when I was at Ambassador College, you know, they literally had designed the dormitories with prayer closets. They were really kind of cool little cubicles that had doors on them, and a little bench where you could kneel down. They were very comfortable, and very private. They would also have little light switches outside each one of them, and when the light was on, that light switch would light up, and

you could tell somebody was in there. So don't open that door, because somebody is using that prayer closet. It was well thought out. But it doesn't have to be a closet. It can be wherever you go in private to talk to God. That's the key thing.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door [when you shut your door], pray to thy Father which is in secret . . ." Pray to your Father which is in secret. It's a private, intimate conversation that you have with God. It's not a group thing, at all. It is private—it is personal—because a group doesn't have a relationship with God. Yes, the Church as a whole does, but don't misunderstand. Basically, the Church is made up of individuals who individually are cultivating that close relationship with God. That's what counts: *your* faith, *your* belief, personally, with the same Creator. And the fact that we all believe the same foundational doctrines makes us a family, but our praying is done, primarily, one-on-one with God, because we are talking with God, one-on-one.

"[P]ray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." This doesn't say that God is not going to answer your personal prayers, that He is not going to acknowledge your personal needs, your worries, your strife, your pain, your sufferings, and that He is not going to be nice to you, unless you have a whole bunch of people in the church praying for you. That's not what He said. And if that's true, what does that say about God? I don't think that is respectful to Him, at all. You disagree? And yet, how many of us inadvertently have been treating Him that way? Have you?

Now, we do prayer requests, and we will continue to do prayer requests for individuals in the Body who have need. Why? Well, because He does want us to ask, and when you are comfortable with the circumstance, it's fine, and even desirable, for you to share it with your brethren, and to ask for their prayers. I'm not challenging the act of praying and intercessory prayer. Intercessory prayer is required, as we are going to see. I am addressing the "why"—what is in your mind when you do it? Not only when you pray for someone else, but when you ask for the church to pray for you. What are you thinking? Why are you asking for those intercessory prayers? What are you thinking about God? That's what I want to get to.

What is the fundamental requirement for answered prayer? What did Mr. Armstrong teach us? Is it having a large number of people pray for you? Is that

what is required to get an answered prayer? That's not what we were taught. What is the fundamental requirement for answered prayer? First John 3:22. 1 John 3:22: "[W]hatsoever we ask [not as a group, but individually, one-on-one with God, in your relationship with Him], we receive of Him [why and how?], because we keep His commandments." Ooh? You mean *that* is the key to answered prayer? Sure. Isn't that what Mr. Armstrong taught us? "[W]hatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." *There* is your key to answered prayer: Obedience.

But do you know what I hear in the words and the concepts of many of God's people? It comes off as a very humble thing, and that's good, and I know we desire to have the right orientation, and to do the right thing. That's why I'm trying to test the underlying thought behind this, which we may not recognize. Have you ever thought, or have you ever known someone, who has asked you to pray for them? Why? "You know, I've got so many problems in my life, and I know I am making a lot of mistakes, and I'm not obeying like I should, but I have this serious problem, and I really need God's help with it, but I don't think He is going to answer me. But if you pray for me, I think you are closer to God, and I think He will listen to you. I don't think He will listen to me. But I think He will listen to you." Have you heard that? Have you said that?

Let's analyze that for a minute. Isn't that denying what we just read here in 1 John 3:22? Here is an individual who, for whatever reason, is up against the wall, and acknowledges it: "You know what? I'm my own worst enemy. I got myself in a trap, and I know I'm not doing everything I'm supposed to be doing in keeping the Sabbath, the Holy Days, or any of the other commands of God." You know, and it is wonderful to acknowledge those weaknesses. We all have to do that privately before God: "God, I am the sinner. I deserve nothing good from you. Please have mercy upon me." We all should be doing that. It is part of that evaluation we do in the spring—well, we shouldn't just be doing it in the spring, for Unleavened Bread and Passover, it should be a year-long thing we are doing all of the time: that personal evaluation, and acknowledging to God our weaknesses and our sins. But there is something wrong with the idea that we are caught up in a trap of sinning which we have not overcome yet, and maybe we are not even fighting it as much as we could, or should, be doing, but we do have this particular serious problem now, and we want a miracle from God: "But I'm not deserving enough for God to answer me, on my own merits, according to my own personal relationship with Him, but if I get enough other righteous people in the

church to pray for me, maybe I can kind of use their collateral to get this good result that I need."

Now, if that's true—if that makes sense—what does that say about God? He can be bought off. Isn't that what it would say? Here is an individual who is distant from God—not close to Him. And what separates us from God? Disobedience to the Law. We are not making enough of an effort in doing the things we should be doing in order to obey—which is how we show love for God. Remember what Christ said? "If you love me, keep my commandments." So, "I'm not keeping the Commandments even remotely like I should be doing, or know that I need to be doing, and I've got this great need, and because God is at a distance from me because of my disobedience, and I really need His help, I'm going to ask these others to pray for me." That's treating God like a politician, or a judge, and so, we need to hire a good lawyer who has sway or pull with that judge. "Well, I'm nobody, so if I come before His bench and make my request, He's probably going to turn me down. But if I have powerful friends who have sway with this judge, then, yeah, He's likely to be nice to me on their account." What would that say about God, if that's true? I don't think He would be a good God if that worked, do you? I don't think so, at all.

"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments . . ." That's a personal thing. That's a very personal thing. And what would happen if it were possible for you to call in "the power" of your more "righteous" friends—even to whatever extent they are righteous? I mean, you can't know someone else's heart and mind, and I can't know yours. So who knows, really? But you are going to call in the help of the prayers of the ones you think are closer to God, and more spiritual? And if that worked—if that's the reason God answered prayer and created miracles to help you, or to help me—what would that say? That our obedience and our overcoming are not really that critical. I am just gathering enough righteous people together who have enough sway to get the miracle. Wouldn't that undermine everything God really set up in this plan to accomplish in our lives? Sure.

First John 5, verse 14—1 John 5:14 and 15:

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing [here's the clincher] according to his will [if we ask anything according to His will], he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us,

whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

There was nothing in here about having the church make the announcement of a prayer request, or calling or emailing your friends, and saying, "Please pray for me." Everything you are reading here is a one-on-one thing: the individual and God—loving Father with beloved child. And here is what He is telling us we need to do in order to have His benevolence, and to receive those miracles and those interventions that we need:

[I]f we ask any thing according to his will [that's ninety percent of it, right there], he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we [receive].

Now, don't get the cart before the horse and say, "Well, whatever we ask, we get." Anything we ask. You know: "God, please give me a red corvette." No, again, the key is "according to His will"—that's the clincher. That controls everything. What is God's will? He is a loving parent who knows what is good for you and good for me, even when you and I don't know it—He knows it. Okay? As a loving parent, you are not going to give your children something you know is bad for them, are you? You go into the grocery store, and you are walking down the aisle: "Mommy, I want the cocoa puffs." Now, if you are a diligent parent, and you are watching the diet of your children, you are not going to buy the cocoa puffs, because they are poison, right? They are full of processed sugar and chemicals. But your little child says, "But I want the cocoa puffs because I like the box, and I see the commercials on TV." But because you love them, and you have their best interests at heart, and you have more knowledge than they do, you don't give them what they ask, because you know it is bad for them. And that child—unless he is well-trained—may throw a tantrum in the store. Do we throw tantrums, as well, in our own way, before God, when we don't get our requests—because we didn't receive an answer in the way that we thought we should have received it? And when God doesn't respond, our natural assumption is that "God is being mean to me. Why isn't He giving me this specific request? What did I do wrong? Why is He at a distance? Why is He so far away from me?"

Keep this in mind. Here is the key: God is never unloving; God is never distant in mind from you; He never desires your harm. In fact, He wants your good, all of the time. So, if He doesn't answer your prayer in a particular way, at a

particular time, within a particular time frame, the answer is not, and never will be, that there is something wrong with God, even though you and I often feel that way.

One of the problems that you and I have is that we don't know what His will is. From the limited position that we are in, we may not, and often don't know, His will, because He doesn't always show us that. So, we want to ask within His will, but we don't always know what that is, so there is always the potential that if we ask for very specific things, it may not be something that He will give us—it may not be within His will.

The way I try to deal with that in my own prayers, is always to say, "Father, you know the circumstances perfectly. I don't have all the facts, you do. Please, according to your will. If it be within your will, please give me this result, but if not, show me what is your will, so that at least I know where you want me to go, what you want me to do, and how you want me to respond to the circumstance which is plaguing me. If I'm not reading all of the facts correctly—if I don't have all of the facts right—please show me what I need to know, so that I can pray appropriately." You see, to me, that is giving Him respect and honor. That assumes the best about God and His character. I feel confident, personally, with that kind of prayer, and that is how I try to remember to do it.

But we have to be cultivating a close relationship with Him because we are obeying Him. You can't have the benefit of having God take care of your problems, and fight your battles for you, and intervene for you, and your needs, if you are "dissing" Him by showing disrespect for His Law. Now, I'm not talking about perfection. Which one of us is perfect? Which one of us still doesn't have a long way to go in overcoming and being like Jesus Christ? But are you on the road to that? Are you aggressively trying to get better at obeying than you have been? Are you taking positive steps forward? I've seen some people give up, and just bail out of the church, because they say, "Well, I'm so far away from perfection." And they just walk away from the whole thing. Don't do that. That perfection is a progressive accomplishment in your life that is done one step at a time.

Now, the faster you and I get there, the fewer curses we are under. But you can't receive good things by giving up. You will just go from the frying pan into the fire. Regardless of where you are, though, you have to set a plan for yourself

and start walking forward. God will honor that, and it doesn't matter how far away from it you are right now. You and I have all kinds of problems, idols, and addictions that we haven't yet overcome, but are we fighting it, are we working on it, and are we aggressively trying to get an action plan together to go forward, even if we are very deficient? God gives us credit for that, He gives us credit for the effort, if it is sincere, and if it's starting to bear fruit—even a little bit. He will give you credit for that. But if you are not, and you are really at a distance from Him because of that lack of effort, how can you expect that when you make a request of Him, He is going to answer and respond, and give you miracles? Wouldn't that undermine the very Master Plan that we are a part of?

Would it really work, just to call up all of your friends in the church who are more spiritual, and say, "Hey, would you get some pull with God and help me out here?" I don't think that's respectful to God, at all. And I don't think it's going to work, either. We have to be obeying the commands, and we have to ask according to His will. And if those two factors are involved He says, "I will give you what you ask for."

1 Peter 3 and verse 12. 1 Peter 3 and verse 12: "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers"—not to the prayer circle, not to the people who have enough other people in the church praying for them, but to those who personally are pleasing God by their activities in trying to overcome and to grow. That's who He calls the righteous—not somebody who has already arrived, who has already achieved it—but someone who is on the path. They are going in the right direction.

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto *their* prayers [not your friends' prayers on your behalf, but to that individual's prayers]: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

If you are disobeying—if you are showing disrespect for God because you are ignoring Him, and you are not even trying to do better—you can get all the friends together to pray for you that you want, it isn't going to work.

"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" Do you think you need other people praying for you in order for God to be nice to you? Who is going to harm you if you are doing what God wants you to do

in overcoming? You don't need other people's prayers. Does that startle you? But God said that we are supposed to pray for one another. We are going to see that in a minute.

Why don't we get our prayers answered? James 4, verses 1 through 3. James 4, verses 1 through 3: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" That's what is against us: carnal minds that pull us in the opposite direction, and away from God.

Verse 2: "Ye lust, and have not." Oh, you have an inordinate desire. That's what lust is. You have an inordinate desire for something that you crave, and you want it so badly that you are obsessed with it. But it's something that God says is not good—it is not right. In fact, entertaining it, and cultivating it, is a violation of the Law. "Ye lust, and have not." So you have these desires, but you can't achieve them. It doesn't work out, and it doesn't make you happy, so you are miserable.

"[Y]e kill . . ." I don't think you guys, or any of us, are actually committing murder, physically. That's not the point. Remember, Christ expanded the Law—He magnified it—and He says that if you hate (if you hate someone) you are already guilty of murder. Are you seething with rage, with hatred and ill feelings toward others—family members, friends, people in the church, employers, or whomever? Are you a cauldron of emotional outrage, boiling over at one or more individuals? God says it is not a state of mind He honors.

"[Y]e kill, and desire to have . . ." "If my boss would just get off my back, my life could be so much happier." Is that a common one? You "desire to have": "I just want peace. Why can't people just leave me alone and let me live my life?" But if our orientation is wrong, even *that* God will consider a lust—an inordinate desire for something that is not His will to give us. And in fact, maybe He is allowing us to be in that situation so that we can grow, but rather than to grow, we want to take away that factor so that we can have peace without growth. In that regard, asking for God to take it away is actually undermining His purpose for character development. In many cases, what He wants us to do is to accept the challenge and say, "God, help me to have my peace of mind in spite of whatever this agitation, whatever this outside force is. Help me to respond better so that I still maintain my positive approach, even under pressure." *There* is your constructive way. I guarantee you that if you are serious about *that* request, He will help you. You can't go wrong with that request in your prayer.

But if all of your requests are like: "God take away this irritant, and take away this negative thing," it is like you are asking for Him to give you the Feast of Tabernacles on earth. You know, you want the Millennium right now. "God please let me live in a Millennium in this present life." That is not His will, because you and I are going to develop character through the crucible of trial. That's what we are called to do as Christians. So, if your focus is getting rid of all the negative things in your life, you are probably going to be highly disappointed and frustrated.

If instead your focus is: "God, help me to respond to this situation that I can't control. Show me how I am supposed to respond. How should I think constructively about it? What should I say, what should I do, and what should I refrain from saying or doing? Please guide me—help me through your Holy Spirit." He will answer *that* prayer. You can't go wrong with that kind of prayer.

"Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain [absolute frustration]: ye fight and war [here are two issues], yet ye have not, because ye ask not." There are some who won't even ask Him. What is the potential that there are certain things that God would give us, if we would just ask Him? He knows we have need of them. We don't need to inform Him of our needs, but He wants us to ask: "God, please help me to solve this problem. Show me how I'm supposed to think about it. I don't know what to do. I don't know how to respond." Ask.

What's the other road block, though? Verse 3: In some cases, we just don't ask, and in other cases, "Ye ask [oh, you do ask, alright], and receive not." But He doesn't give us what we ask for. Why? "[B]ecause ye ask amiss." You ask for the wrong reason, with the wrong orientation, "that ye may consume it upon your lusts." You see, if our orientation is wrong, we won't get it. "God, please let me have the cocoa puffs." That's a wrong orientation. You might be able to go to the store and get them on your own, but He is not going to help you do it. If you ask amiss (for the wrong thing), He is not going to help you to sustain your idols—your lusts. "God, please let me eat this Ben and Jerry's ice cream and not get sick." No, He is not going to suspend His Law of cause and effect just because we are too weak to obey the Law. He's probably going to let us suffer.

But if you ask Him, "Father, help me to overcome this addiction" (to whatever it is). "Help me to overcome this addiction. Help me to stop having to have the television on twenty-four/seven in my home. Help me to stop and to

overcome this desire to run for the remote as soon as I walk in the door, or to spend hours on the internet"—or all of these other things which are idols and distractions. He will help you to do that, if you are serious about it. *That* is when we get answers. That is personal—that is you, that is me, one-on-one with God, cultivating a personal relationship with Him based upon respect.

We must come to know God, to believe in His righteous character, and to pray to Him in that way—to pray to Him in that way: "God, help me to honor you more. Show me what I need to do. Help me to act upon what I know is right, but which I just have not been able to do, up until now. Help me to finally get off of dead center and to start obeying. I don't want to show disrespect for you. I'm tired of showing shame and disgrace to the blood of Jesus Christ. Help me finally to make some strides forward." And then be serious about it—be serious about listening and acting. *There* is your way to grow close to Him, and to start to receive more of your requests and have your prayers answered.

But, boy, with all of the time I just spent explaining all of that, it sure seems like I just kicked in the head the concept of intercessory prayer. "Oh, Jon Brisby says we're not supposed to pray for one another." And that's not what I am saying, at all. Oh, He *did* command for us to pray one for another. Let's look at that. Ephesians 6 and verse 17. Ephesians 6 and beginning in verse 17:

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints . . .

*There* is a command to pray for other members of the Body. You are supposed to do it. Verse 19: "And for me . . ." Here Paul speaking to the Ephesians said to "pray for all of these other beloved members of God's Church, and please also pray for me." So Paul is asking the Church to pray for him. That's intercessory prayer—that is prayer on behalf of someone else other than yourself. We are supposed to do it. The question is, why? For what purpose were we commanded to pray for one another? Because the heathen with their pagan prayer circles are going to stir up the power of the gods as they dance around their fires and their altars, so that they can get what they want on their terms? I don't think so. There has to be a reason God commanded it because He doesn't command anything for no reason.

Why intercessory prayer? Well, let's look at 1 Timothy 2 and verse 1. Just a confirmation of that. 1 Timothy 2, verses 1 through 4: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men." We are supposed to pray for everyone, not just people in the church: even the national leaders who are absolutely spiritual pagans. We are supposed to pray for them, not that they are successful against the Law of God, in their rebellion, but we are supposed to pray for them. Now, how am I supposed to do that if I'm not supposed to ask God, "Please help our president to be successful"? That's not what I pray. But if I am supposed to pray for our national leaders, what am I supposed to pray? How am I supposed to do it? How do I fulfill this command?

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority [we are supposed to pray for them]; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

Actually, what we are asking for is that we will receive peace under their governments. Now, that's not going to happen forever, according to the will of God, but we have sure enjoyed it up to now, haven't we? Most of us have. That's going to change sometime in the future, according to the prophecy of God. What God is saying here is that we are not supposed to take for granted the peace that we enjoy because of living within the national configurations that we have right now—whichever country you may be in. Thank God for, and ask God for, that peace to continue within their regimes, according to God's will, mainly for the benefit of the church. And it also shows respect for the offices, which gives you a hint about the real reason we are asking on behalf of the kings and the prime ministers, and the national leaders.

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Why? Because all of those deceived human beings, even including the national leaders, are beloved children of God, and they have a place in His future plan, too. And He wants us to remember that, no matter how heinous and abominable some of their behaviors might be, right now, in their uncalled state.

What's the benefit, then, of praying for them? It helps to remind you and me not to be disrespectful of offices which God has placed—because *He* sets up and takes down every one of those leaders, according to His will, not ours. And we don't want to go against the will of God. He put them there. By praying for them, we show respect for God who put them there.

Also, by virtue of our asking in our personal prayers on their behalf, it reminds us not to allow ourselves to get into a wrong orientation of showing disrespect, and that can be very easy to fall into, if we are not very, very careful. By fulfilling this command to pray for our national leaders, it reminds us daily to respect the office, in spite of the misbehavior. And there's no better way to remind ourselves of that than to go through this exercise of actually praying for them, within the will of God.

For whose benefit, then, is it that we pray for national leaders? Is it for the leaders? God is working His perfect will in their lives, with or without our prayers. That's not why we pray for them—because God needs us to pray for them in order for Him to do something with them. Uh-uh. Our prayers for national leaders helps whom? Us. *Us!* The exercise of praying for them helps *us* to have a right orientation, and it reminds us of the way *we* are supposed to be thinking about these things.

It is true of our intercessory prayers in every other venue, as well—not just on behalf of national leaders, but even for your brethren. Even for your brethren. The purpose of your prayers for them is not for their benefit. Really, some of you may consider this blasphemous because it's different—you haven't heard this: It's not for them, it's for you. It's not for them, it's for you. God doesn't need your prayer for your brother or sister in order to be nice to them. If they are obeying—if they are pleasing God—He is going to bless them, with or without your prayer. Why intercessory prayer, then? Why do we pray one for another? To remind us of the requirement to love, and to serve, and to pour *ourselves* out for them. There is no better way to be reminded of that than to take the time to actually pray for them—to pray for them.

If we are all praying for the same thing—like when you get one of those prayer requests when one of our particular brothers or sisters is in serious need, or there is a crisis in their lives, and the church prays for them—we are not ganging

up on God to try and talk Him into something, or twisting His arm into finally doing something nice for them. That will be dependent upon that individual's own relationship with God. What it is really doing is that it is helping you and me to become aware of the need of one of our beloved ones, and then, guess what? We have an opportunity to thank God, to care for, and to show outgoing concern for that individual. Praying is only the first step. Taking time in your personal prayers to ask God to help them should not be the end of it, and if it is, you are missing the mark. 1 Peter 4 and verse 7. 1 Peter 4, verses 7 and 8:

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity [or love] among yourselves: for [love] shall cover the multitude of sins.

You and I are supposed to show outgoing love and concern one for another, and we were commanded to do it, as we are going to see, by Jesus Christ, who said, "that's how you show love for me"—for God.

Now, I'm afraid that we are too shortsighted on this idea of intercessory prayer. I'm not against intercessory prayer. In fact, I'm trying to amplify the principle, and for the right reasons, so that it will not be disrespectful to God, but that it will be more respectful to God, and more helpful for us. Is it really the end of our responsibility when we give somebody fifteen seconds, or thirty seconds, in our prayers in the morning? My brother or my sister is sick and afflicted, or weighed down by a serious personal crisis, and I pray, "God, please help them." Okay, I give them fifteen seconds and I go on, and then I put them out of my mind. Now it's God's business. We can have a prayer list a mile long: "God, please help so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so, and so-and-so. Amen. I'm done. God said to pray for them, and I prayed for them." Do we do that? Why does He really want us to pray for them? Maybe He expects us to stop and to think about them and their needs. And what if—what if—you or I happen to be one who has a way of helping that person in need? If you think about it long enough, and you meditate upon it, and you give it more than fifteen seconds, you might discover, with God's inspiration to you through the Holy Spirit, in your prayers, that "Bingo! You know what? I should call him or her. Maybe I can't do anything—I live across the country, on the other side of the world—but guess what? They probably would really be helped with some encouragement in knowing that people are thinking about them. I'll take a few minutes and actually

give them a call, or maybe I'll write a card, or send an email." Just say, "I'm thinking about you, and praying for you, and if there is anything I can do, let me know." Do those things help?

How have you been encouraged and uplifted when you have received the outreach of your brothers and sisters in the Body, in your time of need? And they may not have been able to do a single thing, physically, to help, or to intervene and solve your problem, but, boy, just to know that there are others who care about you enough to stay in contact, and to reach out to you, doesn't that make a difference? What if that's what this is really all about? What if intercessory prayer is really for the purpose of reminding you and me to show love for others? What if there are other things we can actually do to help solve the problem, or at least to lighten the load, of another individual's burden, whatever it may be—if we are only willing to put ourselves out enough to do it?

James 2 and verse 15. James 2:15: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled . . ." Do you know what another way of saying that is? "I'll pray for you. I know you have all these serious problems. Boy, I sure hate that you are suffering, but I'm going to pray for you. I'm going to give you thirty seconds in my morning prayer, so don't worry." But God knows you have the opportunity, and the capacity—it's within your control—to do more than that, to actually help relieve the suffering of this beloved individual. Now, maybe you don't, or maybe it's not wise. I'm not saying that if somebody has financial need, you just automatically give money. In some cases, it's not a good thing to do. But, it sure is a good thing to stop and to consider, and say, "Hmmm. Is there more that I can do? Can I help?" Can I help?

And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

What does it profit, brethren, if you and I say, "Okay, I'll pray for you. I hope everything works out. Bye." I think God is saying—Jesus Christ is saying—you know, "what good is that?"

What is the standard that He wants to see from us? Christ said it in Matthew 25. Matthew 25, verses 33 through 40. Let me read it quickly before I run out of time. Matthew 25, beginning in verse 33:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. [Here is the parable describing this division between the sheep and the goats. Verse 34:] Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . .

And in this parable, they are kind of confused. They don't understand why, or how, they qualified. They understand humbly: "I'm not worthy. I'm grateful, but I'm not worthy." But what did Christ say? Verse 35:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord [they are confused], when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Doesn't this tell us that there is a formula—that one of the key ways in which you and I have an opportunity to show love to Jesus Christ and the Father is to pour ourselves out as a living sacrifice to our brethren in the Body? Is that not, very likely, a strong reason for intercessory prayer?

We announce to the church when there is a need for prayers, but there are some people who will call, and they want the ministry to pray for them, but they are more private, and they really prefer not to have something announced, and we work to respect that. And some will ask for the prayers of the Body, and so we will put those, usually, into our weekly announcements that go out to many by email, or into the *Announcement Letter* that goes out on a monthly basis. Why, and for what purpose? The more of you that are aware of the challenges that your

beloved brothers and sisters are enduring, the more you and I have an opportunity to actually think about, and to show care and concern for them, and maybe to provide some support. And maybe, in fact, you might know more. You might have, within your experience, and all that God has given to you in blessings, the means to actually help that person, with wisdom, or knowledge, about a way to help solve their problem. But guess what? It may take a little effort. You may actually have to set aside some time, and reach out to that person. Isn't that a whole lot more in the spirit of what Christ is commanding us in the church, as opposed to the idea of prayer circles, or to give each other fifteen seconds in a prayer, and then go about our own selfish business?

You know, one of the things that we endure as a scattered, remnant body in this particular time is that many are alone much of the year, and when we have the special blessing of coming together at the Feast of Tabernacles, like right now, what a blessing it is. But much of the year, many of us don't have that. It is hard to be alone, it is hard to be cut off, day-to-day, living in Babylon. But, you know, we have all this technology, and the postal system still works—even if you want to use snail mail. Even if you use phone calls, letters, emails, carrier pigeons, smoke signals, or whatever, what about a little extra time to actually reach out, rather than just saying, "Depart in peace, and be warm and filled"—and giving them fifteen seconds in a prayer, then going about your selfish business?

Is it possible that intercessory prayer is for a different purpose? And yet, here we have these Protestants, now, and Catholics with their online internet prayer circles. They want you to become a part of it: "Sign on to this prayer circle," and you don't even know these people. But they have their name on the list. Oh, it's a magic list, you see. "Here is somebody who needs help, now everybody pray for them." Voodoo. I don't want to be a part of that kind of voodoo. It's pagan.

What I feel like God wants me to be a part of, however, is showing outgoing love, concern and compassion for those who are in need, and that includes, yes, asking God in my prayers for their benefit. But then it requires me to take a step further than that—a big step further than that—and put myself out for that individual. We have a lot of individuals in our fellowship, right now, who are alone, and they would love more contact. It's a simple way to serve—a simple way. It will require your time in order to do it, and some of you have done really

well at this—you keep regular contact with certain individuals who are isolated. But how much more could many of us do, in that regard alone, than what we are doing now?

Romans 8 and verse 26. Romans 8 and verse 26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought . . ." Don't we often find that is true? I don't know what to pray for. I know I am suffering, or I know one of my beloved friends or brethren is suffering, but I'm not exactly sure how to pray. I don't want to pray for the wrong thing; I don't want to pray amiss, what do I do?

. . . for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Have you ever had one of those times in your life when you are so oppressed in mind and spirit—and maybe in pain of body—and words won't even come? You can't even utter them—you don't know what to say, but you bow down before God. He knows—He knows what you are going through. You don't have to say a word, and He knows fully and completely what you are enduring. It isn't the words that matter. Words are not voodoo talismans that by uttering, or chanting, or reciting them, you can summon the power of some pagan god. We are talking about a loving communication with the heavenly Father who we believe is *real*, and who we believe is a good God, and our communication in prayer should reflect that belief, and the way we think about what we are doing. You don't even have to say the words, but your thoughts are transmitted to Him, and even your groanings, when you don't even have words to express what you are feeling. When you don't even know what you are feeling yourself, He knows. That's how complete is His knowledge and His love for each one of you.

[B]ut the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And His will *is* perfect, if we believe that He is a good God. His judgments are right and true, every single time, even when we don't understand what He is

doing, or why. Verse 28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God . . ." What is the proof of your love for God? "If you love me, keep my commandments," said Jesus Christ. Those who are working to overcome the self are showing respect for God. You are applying yourself in an activity to come out of Babylon, and to put on the very mind of Jesus Christ. He loves us, even though we are weak—we are all, as the Psalmist said, like grass: we are weak, we are insignificant, and we are insufficient in every way, and there is no way that any of us is worthy of any good thing from God, and He would be fully justified in wiping us out, and putting us out of our misery, and out of His, too. But He loves us, and He desires to give us that eternal reward, and to have us with Him forever as members of His Family, in spite of our failings, and our flaws, and our gross inadequacies. And if we will acknowledge that humbly, and honestly, and fully before Him, and say, "O God, please help me. Please show me, and help me to take those steps that I need to take."

And then, when you ask on behalf of others in need, say: "O God, if there is some way that I can help this beloved sister or brother who is suffering, please show me. I'm not asking for you to be nice to them. I know he or she is your child and that you love them already. You don't need me to pray for them to get you to be nice to them." I actually say these things in my prayers to God. "God, you don't need me to tell you how to be nice. You love them perfectly. My prayer is not for you to help them, but to help me to see if there is something that I can do to serve them, something that will lighten their load and their burden, which will show honor to you." That's the way I pray, brethren, and I think it is a whole lot more respectful than the way the pagans are praying to their false gods.

If you believe that God is not only powerful, but also good, then your prayers will *always* give Him credit for His love and His mercy, and you will never try to harangue Him, or gang up on Him, through these, what I call, occult prayer circles. We had better be praying for the brethren—intercessory prayer *is* required—but how we think about why we are doing it, and what our further obligations are, I think, means a whole lot in our closeness with God and in fulfilling our obligation to show respect and love for Him.