

June 18th, 2017

PRAY, THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL

John 16:23-24

The most deceptive and effective lie that Satan whispers is that *God doesn't want you to be happy*. And this is felt perhaps no where stronger than in the area of prayer. I suspect that some of you feel guilty because you sense you are falling slothfully short in your prayer life. Sure, you pray before meals, you say a quick 10 second prayer before you read your Bible, and then of course you have your "Oh God help me" prayers when everything is falling apart. But you know that God wants more from your prayer life. And so you feel guilty. Why don't you change? Because prayer for many of you does not look like joy. It looks like a root canal, or paying your taxes. If you believed Jesus' words in v. 24 "Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full*," you would be earnest in prayer. Who doesn't want to be happy? Who doesn't want their joy to be full?

That's where Jesus is taking us today. He's showing us that prayer is for our joy—for our *full* joy. Why is it that so many Christians live mediocre lives today? Joyless, loveless, passionless, praiseless lives? 'God we're doing the stuff. We're paying our tithes. We're sitting in church. We're singing the songs. We listen to Christian radio. We do Christian things. What's missing?' We weren't saved to do those things *mainly*. We were saved to commune with the Living God. **1 Peter 3:18** says "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, *that he might bring us to God*," Becoming a Christian cannot be reduced to subscribing to a set of orthodox beliefs. The devils can do that (**James 2:19**) Being a Christian is being brought to the throne of grace and crying out "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (**Psalm 73:25-26**)

Prayer is not a passing along of information that you think God needs to know. **Psalm 139:4** "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you

know it altogether.” God know every word to every prayer—spoken or unspoken—that every human being will ever pray.

Prayer is not designed to alter God’s pre-determined decrees that He ordained from before the foundation of the earth. **Ephesians 1:11** says that God “works all things according to the counsel of his will.” God’s will is perfect. He doesn’t need you to pray in order to come up with a better plan.

There is not a help-wanted sign hanging on the door of heaven.¹ God doesn’t need you or your prayers to help Him be God. “He does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (**Daniel 4:35**)

God gave us prayer because He is an infinitely kind Father. Prayer is our umbilical cord to haven. We need prayer. Prayer is to our souls what food is to the starving man. It is what water is to parched throat. Prayer is air to the drowning victim at sea. It is insulin to the diabetic. But prayer is more than mere rescue. At it’s best, prayer is spiritual ecstasy. It’s what sex is to the body. It’s what sleep is to the insomniac. It’s what rescue is to the P.O.W. Prayer—communion with God—is why we were saved.²

Jesus is not merely giving us the strategy for how we survive this troubled life—He is doing that. He’s also giving us the very marrow of life itself. He’s giving us access through His redemptive work to the Father Himself. Jesus died so that you could pray. So that you could commune with the Father, so that your joy may be full.

The Big Idea...

Jesus gave you prayer so that your joy may be full

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 171

² “Prayer is the very essence of religion.” Wilhemus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 3: The Law, Christian Graces, and the Lord’s Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1994), pg. 459

Here's my plan for this message. **First**, I want to look at the farewell discourse as a whole and connect everything that Jesus has to say about prayer together. This is more of a big picture sermon, rather than a strict exposition. **Second**, I want us to see how prayer combines two things together: God's glory and our supreme joy. **Third**, I want to ask and answer the question: how does prayer make our joy full?

1. Prayer is paramount in Jesus' mind

First, let's look at the four places Jesus speaks about prayer in the farewell discourse.³

John 14:13-14 Whatever *you ask in my name*, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If *you ask me anything in my name*, I will do it.

John 15:7-8 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, *ask whatever you wish*, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that *whatever you ask the Father in my name*, he may give it to you.

John 16:23-24 In that day you will *ask* nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, *whatever you ask of the Father in my name*, he will give it to you. Until now you have *asked nothing in my name*. *Ask*, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

I think this emphasis on prayer is rather shocking. Jesus told the disciples the hardest things they would ever hear. "I am leaving the world and going to the Father." (**John 14:28**) "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and

³ There is a fifth place as well—John 16:26

burned.” (**John 15:6**) “If the world hates you , know that it has hated me before it hated you.” (**John 15:18**) “The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” (**John 16:2**) “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.” (**John 16:20**) “In this world you will have tribulation.” (**John 16:33**)⁴

Jesus tells us the hardest things that we will face in this war called the Christian life, and His emphasis, His antidote, His prescription for us is this: *pray*. I don’t know about you, but my flesh says ‘Jesus, that’s like telling me to arm myself with a squirt gun to shoot down scud missiles.’ ‘Jesus, how is that the solution?’⁵ How will prayer help you face terminal disease or divorce or the death of a child? How will prayer help you endure the betrayal of a friend, depression, unemployment, irrational anxiety or poverty?

Prayer is the declaration that you are helpless

Because prayer is not a squirt gun, it’s an infinite atomic bomb. Jesus has already told us “Apart from me, you can do nothing” (**John 15:5**) Becoming a Christian doesn’t change you into superhero, it opens your eyes to your spiritual paralysis. Prayer is saying “Yes Jesus, apart from you, I can do nothing, so please do it for me.” And this is what Jesus promises to do for us. Look again at **14:13-14**. “Whatever you ask in my name, *this I will do*, [v.14] If you ask me anything in my name, *I will do it*.” Jesus promises to do what we can’t do on our own.

Susanna Wesley depended upon promises like this. Susanna born 1669, died 1742 was the mother of the famed John and Charles Wesley. She gave birth to 19 children with her husband Samuel. Nine of them died as infants. Between the overwhelming grief and the suffocating responsibility of raising the other ten children, where did Susanna find strength? In prayer. But of course where does a mother of ten find a place to pray? This is what she did. She

⁴ The disciples were facing beatings (**Acts 5:40**) imprisonment (**Acts 8:3**) betrayal (**Acts 5:1-2**) infighting (**Acts 6:1**) and execution (**Acts 7:59**) and Jesus tells them to pray?

⁵ It’s noteworthy to point out that the last thing Jesus does with His disciples is pray—John 17

would pull her apron over her head when she needed to meet with God and her children would know that it was time to leave her alone. That was her prayer closet. That was when the cry of her heart was heard “God, I can’t do this.” But she trusted what Jesus said “Whatever you ask in my name, *this I will do.*” ‘God I can’t. But you can.’ And Jesus did. He answered those prayers, and thousands upon thousands can trace their spiritual birth back to Susanna’s children. God answered her prayers far beyond her expectation.

Why *must* we pray in Jesus’ name?⁶

But the all important qualifier for God answering your prayers is at the beginning of the verse: “Whatever you ask *in my name.*” And we see Jesus say the same thing in **16:23** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father *in my name*, he will give it to you.” There is no such thing as prayer apart from Jesus’ name. Because we have no right to anything from God apart from Jesus. There is no relationship with the Father, no forgiveness of sins, no perfect righteousness provided, no salvation in any other name under heaven by which we must be saved.⁷ “In Jesus’ name” is not a slogan that we add to the end of our prayers. It is a declaration that I can come boldly before the throne of grace *because* Jesus my surety, my Redeemer, the Captain of my soul, has purchased that right for me by His own blood. “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God...let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (**Hebrews 5:14, 16**)

So that’s the overview of prayer in the farewell discourse. Prayer is not a squirt gun against the scud missiles of this life. It is calling on the God who loves to work for His people. And it is knowing that because of Christ, He will answer your prayers.

⁶ See pg. 450 in Wilhemus A Brakel’s *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 3: The Law, Christian Graces, and the Lord’s Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1994)

⁷ Acts 4:12

2. Prayer unites the glory of God and our highest joy

The second thing that we need to see is that pursuing God's glory and pursuing our highest joy are not two separate ends when we pray. Jesus connects them together. Jesus is concerned with two things mainly in our prayers: God's highest glory and our supreme joy. Look with me first at **John 14:13** "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" Second, look at **John 16:24** "Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*" So this is the crystal clear teaching of Jesus. Jesus gives us prayer so that God would be most glorified and we would be most satisfied.

John Piper calls this phenomenon Christian Hedonism.⁸ It is the theology that says our deepest and most satisfying pleasure is God Himself. That wherever and however and whenever God glorifies Himself—that glorifying of Himself is *itself* our highest most supreme joy. And since we have a duty to glorify God, we therefore also have a duty to pursue our supreme joy. Because the Christian's supreme joy *is* the glory of God.⁹ **Psalm 43:4** "Then I will go to the altar of God, *to God my exceeding joy,* and I will praise you...O God, my God."

Christian Hedonism marks the boundary between the Christian and the non-Christian. Everyone sees God's glory. Stephen Hawking sees God's glory. **Psalm 19:1** says "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." *But* Stephen Hawking doesn't rejoice in God because of it. God is not honored *as* God if you don't rejoice in Him.¹⁰ Christians don't just believe that God is glorious. They love His glory.

⁸ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2003)

⁹ Or as the Psalmist says it "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (**Psalm 37:4**)

¹⁰ This is why Jonathan Edwards has said "God is glorified not only in His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in." John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 22

They adore His omnipresence in being their ever present help in times of trouble
 They value His eternity, knowing that from everlasting to everlasting He is God
 They love His wisdom in ordaining and governing all things perfectly
 They treasure His power in actively working all things for their good
 They cherish His holiness convinced there is no one like the Lord our God
 They respect His justice satisfied that He does all things for His name's sake
 They admire His goodness in desiring to put happiness into the heart of man
 They trust His truth aware that they worship a God that can never lie

That's the difference between a Christian and everyone else. The highest, best, most rewarding satisfaction of a Christian is God's great glory. And prayer, according to Jesus, unites those two things together: God's glory and our joy.¹¹ **John 14:13** "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" **John 16:24** "Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*"

How is God glorified in your prayer?

So how is God glorified in your prayers? One of the reasons I think that Christians struggle with prayer is because we think we are offering a service to God when we pray. We conclude *wrongly* that God is glorified when we *serve* Him in prayer. But it is just the opposite. God is glorified when He *serves* us. You are not doing God a favor when you pray. He wants to show you favor. Listen to how God says it in **Psalms 50:12** "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." That's God's poetic way of saying: 'Even if I needed something, which I don't, I would *never* tell you. You have nothing to offer Me. That's not how I am glorified in prayer. I'm glorified by giving you what you need. He makes this abundantly clear in **v.15** "call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." Charles Spurgeon very succinctly explains this text:

¹¹ "The most precious truth in the Bible is that God's greatest interest is to glorify the wealth of His grace by making sinners happy in Him—in *Him!*" John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.,: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 159

“God and the praying man take shares...First here is your share: “Call upon me in the day of trouble.” Secondly, here is God’s share: “I will deliver thee.” Again, you take a share—for you shall be delivered. And then again it is the Lord’s turn—“Thou shalt glorify me.” Here is a compact, a covenant that God enters into with you who pray to him, and whom he helps. He says, “You shall have the deliverance, but I must have the glory.” Here is a delightful partnership: we obtain that which we so greatly need, and all that God getteth is the glory which is due unto his name.”¹²

What a motivation to come to God in prayer!¹³ He wants us to pray, so that He will deliver us and show that He alone is all-wise, He alone is all-powerful, He alone is all-loving. This is the best news about prayer. God will not relinquish the glory of being our Deliverer. **Isaiah 64:4** “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.”

3. How does prayer make your joy full?

What is it about prayer that brings fullness of joy? Remember that is what Jesus says in **John 16:24** “Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*” This joy certainly comes when we see God glorified in delivering us. There’s no doubt about it. But is there more?

I was wrestling with this passage this week, because I did not have joy. I was depressed. I had irrational anxiety. And I argued this passage with God ‘Lord, you said “Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*” I don’t feel joy. I’m asking for it God. Where is my joy in you? How can you promise joy and not deliver?’ Dear congregation, Jesus doesn’t promise a time when this joy will come. He doesn’t say ‘Ask, and you will receive, that you will be joyful *instantly.* Or tomorrow. Or next week. He doesn’t promise a time. But He

¹² John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, (Colorado Springs, CO.: Multnomah Books, 2003), pg. 163

¹³ God is glorified in our prayers not by us serving Him, but by Him serving us. (If a doctor saved your life through a surgery that only he could perform, would you praise him?)

does promise a *quality* to the joy—namely that it would be *full*. Question: What must happen to us in order for our joy to be full? We must be conformed to the image of Christ. **Romans 8:29** says “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*.” The reason why we were predestined *ultimately* is so that we could become more and more like Jesus. That is where the fullness of joy is. And that doesn’t happen in 5 seconds. Every affliction, every trial, every tribulation that we face is meant to make us more wise like Jesus is wise. More patient like Jesus is patient. More righteous like Jesus is righteous. More compassionate like Jesus is compassionate. That is where the fullness of joy is—conformity to Jesus.

Prayer is communion with Jesus

Yet this is not the only thing that Jesus meant when He promised that prayer will bring us fullness of joy. There is an more immediate joy that comes from prayer. Recall, that in our context, Jesus told the disciples that He was leaving them. He said in **v.20** Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” And then again in **v.22** “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,” The essence of the disciples sorrow was that they would be separated from Jesus. And the return of their joy happened when they were reunited to him. But Jesus left, and will not return until the Second coming. So what became of their joy? What becomes of ours?

Charles Templeton was a friend and fellow evangelist with Billy Graham back in the mid 1940’s. He pastored a church and helped start Youth for Christ and went on evangelist crusades with Graham in Europe. But their paths would soon turn in very different directions. By 1957, he walked away from the faith and declared himself an agnostic. Lee Strobel, several decades later, when writing his book *A Case For Faith*, interviewed Templeton about his experience with Christ. There was no sign that Templeton ever repented, but he did say some things that deserve our attention. This is what Strobel recorded. Templeton said:

“...Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. Yes . . . yes. And tough! Just look at Jesus. He castigated people. He was angry. People don’t think of him that way, but they don’t read the Bible. He had a righteous anger. He cared for the oppressed and exploited. There’s no question that he had the highest moral standard, the least duplicity, the greatest compassion, of any human being in history. There have been many other wonderful people, but Jesus is Jesus....’ “Uh . . . but . . . no,’ he said slowly, ‘he’s the most . . .” He stopped, then started again. “In my view,” he declared, “he is the most important human being who has ever existed.” That’s when Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him. “And if I may put it this way,” he said as his voice began to crack, ‘**I . . . miss . . . him!**’” With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept. . . .”¹⁴

Templeton missed Jesus. This agnostic man who spent decades running away, in the end *missed* Jesus. Dear congregation, that is why Jesus gives us prayer. Because life is simply unbearable apart from Him. Prayer is communion with Christ. Through His Word. Through His Spirit. And there are times, when prayer can only be described as spiritual ecstasy. That’s what I believe Jesus had in mind in **Matthew 6:6** “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Reward you with what? Communion with Christ. A greater knowledge of your sins being washed away. A greater understanding of the suffering He endured for you. A greater appreciation for His gift of righteousness. A greater admiration for His patience with you, His protection of you, His pleasure in you. In earnest secret closet prayer, Christ shows up. This is the promise of Scripture.

Psalm 145:18 “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”

¹⁴ <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2013/05/09/charles-templeton-missing-jesus/>

Jeremiah 33:3 “Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known”

Don't overhear me. I'm not saying that this type of soul soaring prayer will happen every time you engage in secret prayer. The Psalmist makes this clear. He says in **Psalm 13:1** “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” I was not soaring over the peaks this week in prayer, I was in the valleys. But, dear congregation, there are peaks! There are vast mountain tops that have yet to be explored by you. This is what Jesus promises. “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” What is it that Jesus would have you ask for? Even Templeton knew the answer to that. More of Jesus. “Ask for more of Me, to see my glory, to understand my cross, to share in my suffering, to be conformed to my image, to love your neighbor even as I have loved you, to know the joy that the Father and I share. Ask for these things, these eternal things, and your joy will be made full.”

Application

Our Doctrine: All duty is delight in Christ's kingdom

After two consecutive weeks without a command from Christ in our text, we come to a very clear command today. Praying is not a suggestion. It is non-negotiable. It is an imperative. We have no right to negotiate with God over which commands we want to obey. We have a duty to pray. Prayerlessness is disobedience and is a sin. The problem with making a statement like that often in our times, is that people often cry out “legalism.” ‘Pastor you are making me feel guilty. Why are you giving me law?’ Dear congregation, imagine sitting at a wedding ceremony, and the minister starts reciting the vows to the soon to be husband and wife. “Do you promise to take her to be your wedded wife, to have

and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, 'til death do us part?" And then some one stands up and says "That's legalism!" That's unthinkable. Who would do that? Yet often in Christ's kingdom, many of us hear commands and the devil whispers in our ears "legalism." We have a duty to pray. But it's not the joyless insipid type of duty that the devil will enslave you to do. John Piper puts it like this.

"It's a duty the way it's the duty of a scuba diver to put on his air tank before he goes underwater. It's a duty the way pilots listen to air traffic controllers. It's a duty the way soldiers in combat clear their rifles and load their guns. It's a duty the way hungry people eat food. It's a duty the way this people drink water. It's a duty the way a deaf man puts in his hearing aid. It's a duty the way a diabetic takes his insulin. It's a duty the way Pooh Bear looks for honey. It's a duty the way pirates look for gold."¹⁵

I would add, it's a duty the way a husband and wife must give themselves to each other. All duty is delight in Christ's kingdom. Any other view towards obedience must be abandoned. If you are obeying without delight, you're not obeying.

That's our **doctrine**: All duty is delight in Christ's kingdom. Therefore...

Our Duty: We have a duty to secret prayer

The assumption I have when I see v.24 is that Jesus is speaking about secret, closet prayer. Meaning, not the prayers that you would simply say before a meal, or with others. But prayer where it's you and God one-on-one. The Bible calls for this type of prayer. **Matthew 6:6** "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." So how do we pull this off?

¹⁵ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/put-in-the-fire-for-the-sake-of-prayer>

First, you must have a plan to pray

We often live our lives under the tyranny of the immediacy. If you don't have a plan to pray, you most likely will not set aside time with God to do so. Habits in life do not automatically. You don't fall out of bed one day and start habitually playing the violin. You plan for it. You purchase it, you schedule lessons, and you practice. The same is true in prayer. If you don't plan, you won't pray. Jesus said "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" (**Luke 14:28**) You must plan to pray.

Second, you must neglect good things to pray

Jesus Christ neglected ministering to people's needs in order to pray. **Mark 1:35-36** says "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." Do you think Jesus didn't know that? Ministering to people was why He came to planet earth. Yet one thing was even more needful—communion with the Father. Dear congregation there a lots of good things that we can do. That we ought to do. But what good are clean homes, or fit bodies, or educated children, or serving other people, if you never commune with God. For many of you, it's likely that good things stop you from praying more than blatant sins. You must practice neglect in your life if you are to pray. That's why Jesus said "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door", or in Susanna Wesley's case neglect your children and put the apron over your head. Or in King David's case, neglect your sleep. **Psalm 119:62** "At midnight I rise to praise you." Whatever it is, you will have to neglect some good things in order to pray.

Argue with the Lord through His Word to pray

One of the reasons why prayer is so hard, is because we try to pray apart from God's word. Scripture is the fuel to prayer. Read some Scripture, then

pray it. Read pray, read pray. You wouldn't try to drive to the store with an empty tank of gas. Neither can you go before the throne without a mouth full of Scripture. And you can use Scripture as a holy argument with the Lord.

Argue God's attributes: "I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." (Malachi 3:6)

Argue God's commands: "Pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

Argue God's promises: "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Holy argument is a secret to prayer.

That's our **duty**: We have a duty to secret prayer. Therefore...

Our Delight: You will fail in prayer but Jesus will not fail you

I hope this message convicts you. I hope you feel how far you fall short in your prayer life. I hope you change. Because I want you to experience what Jesus promises in this passage. "Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*" The one secret I have found in prayer is knowing that I will fail at it. When Jesus returned to find Peter and the others sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane, he said to them "So, could you not watch with me one hour?" (**Matthew 26:40**) I think about that verse a lot when I am praying. Because I often will start to fall asleep, or be distracted with frivolous things, or start thinking bad thoughts. And I confess, 'Jesus I can't even keep watch with you one hour.' Oh God I thank you that you know my frame; and you remember that I am dust. (**Psalms 103:14**) Jesus anticipates our failures in

prayer. That's why He says our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. Dear congregation, praying is not what makes God pleased with you in His Holy courtroom. Jesus Christ is what makes God pleased with you. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21) The cross of Jesus Christ shows that you are far worse than you think you are, yet more loved than you can possibly imagine. You were so wicked that Jesus had to die to wash away your sins, but you are so loved that Jesus was willing to die to wash away your sins.

You will fail in prayer, but Jesus will never fail you. And that is the secret to sustainable, joy-filled, spirit-empowered, kingdom-shaking prayer. Knowing that whether you are perfectly distracted or perfectly focused, it is not your performance that makes you acceptable before God. It is Jesus's performance. His blood. His righteousness. Come boldly before the throne because of what He has done. He promises that you will receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16) "Ask, and you will receive, *that your joy may be full.*"