

Cooperating With the Hand of the Potter

Loving God Completely

In the last several years, I have adapted and used this **prayer** by Richard of Chichester in my own quiet times before the Lord: “Thanks be to Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits which Thou hast given us; for all the pains and insults which Thou hast borne for us. O most merciful redeemer, may we know Thee more clearly, love Thee more dearly, and follow Thee more nearly; for Thine own sake.”

If we are to love God completely, it will involve our whole personality—our intellect, our emotion and our will. “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). The better we come to know God (“may we know Thee more clearly”), the more we will love Him (“love Thee more dearly”). And the more we love Him, the greater our willingness to trust and obey Him in the things He calls us to do (“follow Thee more nearly”).

1. “May We Know Thee More Clearly”

The great prayers in Ephesians 1 and 3, Philippians 1 and Colossians 1 reveal that Paul’s deepest desire for his readers was that they grow in the **knowledge** of Jesus Christ. The knowledge the apostle had in mind was not merely propositional, but personal. He prayed that the Lord would give them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened and that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 1:17-18; 3:19).

What does it take to know Him more clearly? The two essential

ingredients are time and obedience. It takes time to cultivate a relationship, and unless we make the choice of setting aside consistent time for prayer and the reading of Scripture, we will never become intimate with our Lord. Obedience is the proper response to this communication, since it is our personal expression of trust in the promises of the Person we are coming to know.

2. "Love Thee More Dearly"

To know God is to love Him, because the more we grasp—not merely in our minds but in our experience—who He is and what He has done for us, the more our hearts will respond in **love** and gratitude. God's love for us is spontaneous, free, uncaused and undeserved. He did not set His love on us because we were lovable, beautiful or clever, because in our sin we were unlovable, ugly and foolish. He loved us because He chose to love us.

3. "Follow Thee More Nearly"

As we grow to know and love God, we learn that we can **trust** His character, promises and precepts. Whenever He asks us to avoid something, it is not because He is a cosmic killjoy, but because He knows that it is not in our best interests. And whenever He asks us to do something, it is always because it will lead to a greater good. Our great task in the spiritual life is to do His will, to love the things He loves and to choose the things He sets before us for our good.

Loving Ourselves Correctly

1. Who Defines You?

We are constantly in danger of letting the world define us instead of God. It is only natural to shape our self-image by the attitudes and opinions of our parents, our peer groups and our society. It is only when we define ourselves by the **truths** of **God's Word** rather than the thinking and experiences of the

world that we can discover our deepest identity.

The Scriptures exhort us to look to Christ, not to self, for the solutions we so greatly need. To genuinely believe and embrace the reality of who we have become as a result of our faith in Christ demands consistent discipline and exposure to the Bible. It also requires **fellowship** and **encouragement** in a community of like-minded believers.

2. Seeing Ourselves as God Sees Us

I define the biblical view of self-love in this way: loving ourselves correctly means seeing ourselves as God sees us. Contrary to our culture, the biblical doctrine of grace humbles us without degrading us and elevates us without inflating us. It tells us that apart from Christ, we have nothing and can do nothing of eternal value. We are spiritually impotent and inadequate without Him, and we must not put our confidence in the flesh (Phil.3:3).

On the other hand, **grace** also tells us that we have become new creatures in Christ, having been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of His light, life and love (Col. 1:12-14). In Him, we now enjoy complete **forgiveness from sins** and limitless privileges as unconditionally accepted members of God's family. Our past has been changed because of our new heredity in Christ, and our future is secure because of our new destiny as members of His body.

Loving Others Compassionately

1. From the Vertical to the Horizontal

In our call to relationship with God and others, the purpose for which we were created is an **intimate relationship** with the infinite and personal God Who loves us. He is the initiator of this relationship, and we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

The better we grasp God's unconditional love and acceptance of us in Christ, the more we are liberated from the selfish quest of using people to meet our needs.

2. The Quest for Greatness in the Sight of Men

When Jesus celebrated the **Passover** with His disciples on the night before His own sacrifice, a dispute about who would occupy the best positions in His Kingdom surfaced again. Christ's rebuttal to their quest for recognition was that true greatness is found in those who are willing to **serve**. "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

3. The Essence of True Greatness

John 13 portrays a visual parable that communicated this precise issue to the disciples with poignancy and clarity. It was evident that there was no servant to wash the feet of the Lord and His men before they reclined at the table. Their embarrassment became acute when Jesus Himself rose from supper, laid aside His garments, tied a towel around Him and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel. His lesson was evident: if their Teacher and Lord became their servant, they should also serve one another (John 13:13-15).

The key to Christ's willingness to serve others in place of being served by them is found in the crucial truth that Jesus knew that "the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God" (John 13:3). He knew His dignity and power ("the Father had given all things into His hands"), He knew His significance and identity ("and that He had come forth from God"), and He knew His security and destiny ("and was going back to God").

4. Christ's Resources Are Our Resources

Just as Jesus knew who He was, where He came from and where He was going, so all who have put their trust and hope in Him should know the same. But few do. It is only as we frequently renew our minds with the spiritual truth of the Scriptures that we will move our thinking into alignment with the reality of who we are in Christ.

Like Christ, we have dignity and power; every spiritual blessing has been given into our hands (Eph. 1:3, 19; 3:16, 20-21). We also have significance and identity; we have become the children of God (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 3:1-2). And we have been given the security and destiny of knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35-39). These limitless resources meet our deepest needs and **overcome** the human dilemma of loneliness, insignificance and meaninglessness.

When these truths begin to define our self-image, they make us secure enough to love and serve others without seeking our own interests first. Because of our security and significance in Christ, we do not need to be controlled by the opinions and responses of others. We have nothing to prove because we know who and whose we are.

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