

# Getting Connected to God in Prayer

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer

January 17, 2016 – Brad Bailey

## Intro

Imagine you could ask Jesus one question...what might it be?

Imagine if you could ask Jesus any question about how to live like he lives...and become like he was. What might you ask him?

If you were one of those who Jesus chose to be his disciples... you **might be really intrigued** by a number of things.

Jesus...how do you **cut through so much of the false religious** nature with **those one liners**?

- ‘Give to Caesar...’
- ‘He who is without sin...’

How do you **bear such authority** that even demons obey?

How do you **speak healing** that we see miracles?

How do you have **such compassion** for those we have all tended to deem as cursed...and treated them as such?

I imagine they **may have asked such questions**...I am sure **they wanted to**. But when they did choose to ask...they asked this:

**“Lord, teach us to pray.” – Luke 11:1**

Lord, teach us to pray. How can we learn to pray like you? [1]

I think **they realized** that **all of what flowed from Jesus...flowed from this connection to the Father in heaven**...it flowed **from prayer**. Prayer it’s at the center of Christ’s whole life and ministry... it was **the wellspring and source** for the way of life he calls us to.

Prayer is the connection...it’s where **our spiritual nature connects with the Spirit of God**...the very Spirit which created the world...the very Spirit breathed life into our material nature.

So prayer is our connection to the very power of life itself.

**Without that connection, we are like the living dead....zombies. Without that connection we** disconnected from the source of life...**like a car without an engine**...a boat with a sail...a mansion without electricity... so is our human nature without prayer.

While prayer is at the very core of spiritual life...it is not something which may easily develop. Most people state that they believe in prayer...most state that they pray. But most people don’t expound much about it...because most of us have a hard time developing a life in which prayer is a regular and consistent center to our lives..

The disciples asked Christ this question because **they saw something different**.

They saw the presence of God...and the work of the Holy Spirit. No wonder they pleaded, "Lord, teach us to pray." These men had been going to the temple—all of their lives. They had recited hundreds of prayers and had heard the priests pray out loud. Yet when they saw Christ, they knew they were missing something.

Jesus knows that **we have inherited an independence...a disconnection...** at every level of our being. Our longings for connection have gotten redirected... and it effects our whole being...**our minds, bodies, and hearts...are no longer naturally oriented in relationship to God.**

**Jesus came to reconcile us...and reorient life back to God.**

So what we find is that prayer is both **central and challenging...** it's **both natural...and not natural...**because we are not oriented in relationship to God. [2]

**So they ask... Lord, teach us to pray. So we are wise to ask...Lord, teach us to pray.**

And Jesus responds.

**Matthew 6:5-8 (NIV)**

"... when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup> And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Isn't it **interesting that the first thing Jesus says** about prayer...is **how misguided** our approach can become. There is something that goes terribly wrong in the midst of religion...**something in the human heart that must be overcome.** In these words he tells us we need to do a "reset."

**"...when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites..." - Matthew 6:5**

**Hypocrites...** the Greek work used, is that which reflects the actor. The hypocrite is the actor portraying a make believe **false character... before an audience...** that is what the religious leaders were doing.

That is what we can do.

**It's why the world around us stands and watches...**and it sees something that claims to reflect God...but so often doesn't...but it also **watches for signs of God and goodness...**and **sees that which transcends human nature.**

And so Jesus describes the nature of our choice... **a choice between religion and relationship.**

## **Matthew 6:5**

**"...when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.**

Jesus isn't challenging a place for public prayer per se, but what can become of it.

The formality of the Jewish religion included that of praying while standing with hands stretched out, palms opened and heads bowed, 3 times each day, at 9 a.m., Noon and 3 p.m., WHEREVER ONE WAS. [3]

It was easy for a man to be sure that they would find themselves at a busy part of the marketplace or the top step of the synagogue and there, offer lengthy and demonstrative prayers as a sign of piety.

Even though our less formal manner affords us less opportunity, **we all know** that we can begin to **care more about appealing to others than God.**

Jesus makes clear the how much is defined by this one choice...whether to seek the approval of others or God.

## **Matthew 6:5**

**"I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."**

**His point is simple...** if what you want is the honor of other people... you can have it... but that will be your 'reward in full'... **that's all you get. If the audience you want to impress is that of other people...then that is what you will get.... And ALL you will get.**

**It's easy...but it's empty.**

We will just be **actors among actors... never able to escape the false selves we have formed.**

**Brennan Manning describes this all too well...**

Have you ever felt baffled by your internal resistance to prayer? By the existential dread of silence, solitude, and being alone with God?

Beware the impostor!

The false self specializes in treacherous disguise. He is the lazy part of self, resisting the effort, asceticism, and discipline that intimacy with God requires. He inspires rationalizations, such as, "My work is my prayer; I'm too busy; prayer should be spontaneous so I just pray when I am moved by the Spirit." The false self's lame excuses allow us to maintain the status quo.

The false self dreads being alone, knowing "that if he would become silent within and without he would discover himself to be nothing. He would be left with nothing but his own nothingness, and to the false self which claims to be everything, such a discovery would be his undoing."

Obviously, the impostor is antsy in prayer. The false self is frustrated because he never hears God's voice. He cannot, since God sees no one there. Prayer is death to every identity that does not come from God. [4]

Jesus sees our true condition. It is what had been revealed long ago in the Book of Genesis. In those first chapters where we are told of trying to be like God.... And becoming separated from him. The result is depicted as that of those first human lives trying to hide from God....and sowing fig leaves to cover their nakedness. For apart from God we are naked and ashamed. Jesus sees that there can be **religious fig leaves**. We can try and cover ourselves with religious activity that is actually just an outer form which tries to cover us up.

But there is an alternative...

### **Matthew 6:7**

**“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”**

**Choose to make God your focus...and you will find life.**

**A personal life of prayer brings reward... because there we choose not our social self....but our true self. There we find God...our Father...who alone can name us and claim us. When that is the reward we desire...relationship with God our Father...we discover it is the reward that really matters.** It is the source of peace...of love...of hope... of all that will last forever. Social acceptance may seem a better deal to strike—the awards are immediate, but the rewards are paid in full and they don't include the rewards and riches of prayer... and all that God offers. [5]

SO the first of the two major points which Jesus wants us to hear is this...

### **1. Pray with the right focus...God our Father rather than people.**

**We must make our priority God more than people. [6]**

And it is important to realize this...it is not merely God's provision but God's very presence we should seek.

The writer of the Psalms writes,

**“You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.” - Psalm 27:8**

**What are we to seek? Not just his hand but his face. Not just his provisions but His person and presence** What is in a face? If you pay close attention to someone's face you can see a lot of things. (...their countenance....their heart...)

This is why if you are holding a small child in your arms and become engaged in a conversation with someone else...or distracted...they will take hold of your face and turn it towards themselves. They are say: "attend to me...give me your attention."  
A face represents someone's attention...their focus....and their presence.

**Connecting with God must reach through His provisions to His presence.**

We do well to ask ourselves... Do we seek **God's help** or **God himself** ?  
Consider the **difference between being connected to someone for what they can do for us....verses who they are.**

Naturally we can't fully separate them...they are **bound up in the same person**... one's **provision reflects their nature**. But it's **reaching through another person's provisions to** what lies in the person that defines whether the relationship **functional or truly relational**.

**Illustration:** I could tell **my wife** all the things I appreciate about what she does for me....and it would be a sincere and meaningful compliment... but missing something.  
So with God....we may naturally desire His help... but we won't really know Him until we desire His presence. [7]

**In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy, C. S. Lewis** described approaching God in a similar way. At a young age, **when C. S. Lewis learned that his mother was dying**, he remembered that he had been **taught that prayers offered in faith** would be granted. When his mother eventually died, Lewis prayed for a miracle. Later, he wrote:

"I had approached God, or my idea of God, without love, without awe, even without fear. He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Savior nor as Judge, but merely as a magician; and when he had done what was required of him I supposed he would simply—well, go away. It never crossed my mind that the tremendous contract which I solicited should have any consequence beyond restoring the status quo." [3]

**Anytime we expect God to fix our problems, restore the status quo, and then go away so we can live without him, we've treated God like the Geek Squad.**

There is a very **subtle but significant distinction** between **seeking God as the end...and using God as a means to an end**.

Not uncommon for us to say something like:

***"I am waiting on God to bring me my husband...or wife."***

It might **sound like** one is **putting God first**...but is that what it may really imply? If that is the ONLY THING that we are waiting on, we have an incorrect perspective.

**Picture this:** You are at a **restaurant** and have **just ordered a pizza**. A friend walks in and sits down with you and asks, "What are you doing?" And you respond with, "**I am waiting on the waiter to bring me my pizza.**" (Does this sentence structure sound familiar?) In this example, you do not have much regard for the waiter. The **waiter is only the vehicle** by which you get what you are truly there for: your pizza. You are not expecting the waiter to come and sit down and talk with you, but to simply deliver the pizza.

***"I am waiting on God to bring me my husband...or wife."*** [5]

He is not our waiter... to fulfill what we are really giving our greatest worth to. God is not simply a means for us to receive things.

God is our ultimate reward.

**Psalm 16:11 (ESV)**

***"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."*** - Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

**God has always wanted to be close to you.**

In the Book of Genesis there is the story of God making man. Gen 2:7 . 7And the LORD God formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person.

God took a deep breath in the creation story. God breathed deeply and infused Adam with life. To Adam, the first human, God gave a breath of life, a breath with a spark of divinity. In the original meaning, there is a sense of intimacy, God breathes into the nostrils of the formed human.

**If you've ever taken a CPR class** you have learned that to help give life back to someone you had to get pretty intimate. Face to face, mouth to mouth giving my breath to someone else.

**When God created man he didn't create him from a distance**, he created man different than anything else he created. **That creation was an illustration** about how he wanted man different than any other living thing.

**> God wants your presence...to meet with His presence.**

**This is why Jesus tells us to enter a private space...and close the door.**

But let's be clear...**Jesus is not calling us into our own private religion.**  
He is not dismissing public prayer. He constantly prayed in public...

This is **not justifying** the **individualism of our current culture... which** says that spiritual life is just a private matter which ... *“I don’t need to be a part of organized religion... have my own thing.”* Be careful of the narcissist in us that makes up our own religion.

That is farther from the mind of Jesus than we can imagine. His entire life was shared in a small group...and with crowds. The very model of prayer he will then give begins...

“Our Father...” and is marked by “us” and “we.” Life with God is meant to be a shared life.

**The problem is not other people....the problem is making people a priority over God... and that’s our problem.**

We all need focus. That focus involves finding some personal space when we can shut the door and develop our own relationship with our father in heaven. **While Jesus’ intent** was not about how literal such a door might be...**there is something about creating a private life with God.**

- **The power of privacy.**

The nature of a relationship is defined by how it’s set apart. Friends will start meeting for coffee...or couples at a place that becomes their ‘special place.’ When we begin to spend time set apart from others it’s creating something special.

Jesus said that we should make similar appointments with our Father in Heaven; create a special place and meet there regularly.

Setting apart time is simply foundational to any relationship. The simple truth that many of us discover, is that no set time soon diminishes to no time at all.

- **The priority of privacy.**

Time and time again, the disciples note Jesus slipping away... before it was light, when the crowds around him had wearied His soul. I wonder if at times they felt left out? Perhaps... but it was the source from which Jesus lived and ministered... the source of strength out of which he served and ministered to them.

They too would learn the value and priority of the private world...so should we.

Praying as friends, as couples, should be an EXTENSION of our PERSONAL TIME, NEVER A SUBSTITUTE. We should not only learn to pray together, but encourage and even protect the special times others have set apart for their relationship with God.

And then of course, there’s

- **The practicality of privacy.**

Distractions seem to have a special liking for attempts to talk to God.

Any noise seems to draw my focus...suddenly we hear not only the telephone... but the washing machine, the neighbor’s music... we may have to be creative.

Jesus knows the value of finding a quiet place.

**When we get alone with God...it allows us to be ourselves.** We don't have to pray to impress others, and we don't have to worry if we used big enough words and spoke long enough. It is just you and God, and He just wants to hear your heart. He covets that time together no matter how long and what is contained in your prayers.

**The second thing that private prayer allows** is for us **to hear from God.** When you are in a group setting, it is so hard to hear the still, small voice of God. As you enter into your quiet place, you will find that you will frequently be able to distinguish the voice of the Lord.

**Stop—take a minute to think.** Consider your own unique lifestyle and rhythms. What might be the most natural time and place for you to have time set apart with God?

---

**Jesus goes on to address the other fundamental choice... which is the *purpose* by which we come.**

**Matthew 6:7-8 (NIV)**

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

**Don't pile up meaningless phrases,** thinking length of words will help, like "the pagans." (May have been referring to the prophets of Baal tried such a stirring through repeated chants... and were confronted by the prophets who simply called upon the power of the true God.)

Jesus saw this **developing among the Jewish people** as they developed rich and beautiful prayers that were to be spoken daily: Most central was what is called the "Shema" — consists of 3 scriptures... and the Shemoneh'esreh—which means 18 and consist of 18 prayers. For some, this daily expression became a means to impress God, the meaning becoming secondary.

The problem is that they thought that they would be heard because of their many words. They were **trying to impress God.**

It reminds me of my "research papers" that I wrote as a child. I could make them tenfold the length required...thanks to the World Book Encyclopedia. I got an A+ every time... I impressed the teacher with the amount of work regardless of substance. Jesus is telling us that God isn't impressed with such meaningless length.

We too can start to string together common phrases and call it prayer.

> **The whole premise is wrong...the whole purpose is wrong.**

It is a **complete misunderstanding of prayer** to think that prayer is **an exercise I do to get a reluctant God to somehow help me.** And if I can say enough "Hail



Mary's" or "In Jesus Name" or some other magical formula, then maybe it will work. That's the mentality the pagans had.

> Jesus said,

***"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him"***

Prayer is not informing God what we need.

The second point Jesus teaches us is this:

## **2. Pray with the right purpose.... alignment with God rather than coercion of God**

We have a tendency to think of ourselves as the center of the universe...and want God to come into our orbit...our gravitational pull. But in truth...He is the center and it is we who will only find life when we are drawn into His orbit.

Or to describe it another way, ....If I throw out a boat-hook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? **Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God. [8]**

I'll share with you one thing that can help us develop a meaningful life in prayer... Realize that: **What's most important is not that we are bringing words before God...but that we are bringing our wills before God.**

It's our hearts and **wills, not our words** that are ultimately before God.

Praying is about transformation more than information. Praying is not about informing God of what He doesn't know, but of allowing Him to shape and form us around what is true and good.

Jesus says,

***"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"***

We may feel that if He knows our hearts anyways, **what difference does it make?**

**It can help to reflect on what every parent has experienced about what happens when a child comes to them about things the parent already knows. It changes everything.**

**If your child is anxious**, and you know it, does it make a great difference if they talk to you about it?

> It makes all the difference relationally....because **only then** can you freely **enter with them** and **bring perspective and peace.**

**If your child lies** and you know it, what difference does it make if they come and tell you?

> You might know all the details... even more than they knew about the circumstances....so what difference does it make? They are not going to add any information. It makes ALL the difference to what matters most...which is the state of the relationship. Until they share it with you.... there is a **wall of separation** has been placed between you. If persistent... you may have

to address it as a parent...but **restoration of trust comes only when the child genuinely agrees** with what is right. It is the same with God.

As **Myron Augsburger** expressed so well...

**“Prayer moves the hand of God by giving Him the freedom to do in our lives what He has been wanting to do.” - Myron Augsburger**

**Your Father wants to spend time with you...He wants your presence to spend time in His presence.**

**Conclusion:**

As we **launch into this new season**...he calls us to make a priority of God rather than people. He invites us to realize that God is not the one we pull to ourselves...but the one who we are to be drawn into.

For some...

- Maybe you realize that you have not known God as your Father...as the One who gives life.
- For others... you may realize a need to restore that special place of spending time in prayer with God.

**This week:** Ask God...Father, what is one thing you have wanted to speak to me about?

...As we close, let us consider that little phrase Jesus uses... “WHEN you pray...” not “if we pray...” as if it was optional.

**I want to invite us to close in prayer together. Following the words of Jesus which we just heard... he offered a good pattern for prayer. Often referred to as the Lord’s Prayer. "This, then, is how you should pray:**

**Matthew 6:9-13**

"This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

## Notes

1. In the Gospel accounts of both Matthew and Luke, we are told of Jesus teaching about what living life in the reality of God's Kingdom involves...and including prayer. Luke includes the disciple's initial request: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Bob Deffinbaugh notes..."In Luke's account, a certain unnamed disciple sees the Lord's practice as a pattern, one which each disciple should follow, and thus the Lord is asked to teach the disciples to pray as well. The prayer life which characterizes our Lord will, in the Book of Acts, characterize the disciples as well. Luke is paving the way, laying the foundation for that constant communion with God in prayer.

The disciple asked Jesus to teach them to pray because he knew that this was an area of ignorance and inexperience. I do not know of anywhere in the gospels where the disciples were characterized as men of prayer. Jesus' prayer life was, even in the garden of Gethsemane, something which He practiced alone, without the help (at least for very long) of the disciples. The petition of this one disciple was an open admission that prayer was not only needed, but was a deficiency in his life and in the lives of his fellows.

Once again, the disciples reveal a child-like quality in which our Lord delighted, and for which He praised the Father (cf. [Luke 10:21](#)). The scribes and Pharisees, the wise and learned, were too smart, at least too proud, to admit their need to ask Jesus anything, other than to show where His authority came from, and thus they learned nothing from Him. A child has no reluctance to admit that they don't know something, and thus they hound adults with their questions. The ability to learn begins with the ability to admit one's ignorance and to express one's desire to learn. While the one disciple asked Jesus to teach, he asked Him to teach the disciples as a group ("teach us to pray ..."), rather than to teach him as an individual. The coming of the kingdom of God, the provision of daily needs, and the forgiveness of sins are something for which all saints can pray together, daily."

2. C.S. Lewis offer great insight into how we should consider why prayer is a challenge.

"If we were perfected, prayer would not be a duty, it would be delight. Some day, please God, it will be. The same is true of many other behaviors which now appear as duties. If I loved my neighbor as myself, most of the actions which are now my moral duty would flow out of me as spontaneously as song from lark or fragrance from a flower. Why is this not so yet? Well, we know don't we? The very activities for which we were created are, while we live on earth, variously impeded: by evil in ourselves and others. Not to practice them is to abandon our humanity. To practice them spontaneously and delightfully is not yet possible. This situation creates the category of duty, the whole specifically moral realm, it exists to be transcended. I am therefore not really deeply worried by the fact prayer is at present a duty"- C.S. Lewis; Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer by C. S. Lewis. In a similar way, we can appreciate the point G.K. Chesterton made when he note: "Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried."

1. Helmut Thielicke, "Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer" New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953; page 14

2. Regarding how "The Prayer That Has It All" Ray Pritchard notes further:

"God is in this prayer. We are in this prayer. The past is in this prayer. The present is in this prayer. The future is in this prayer. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in this prayer. Everything is here. Let me share a simple outline for the Lord's Prayer. The first half of the prayer talks about God-his name, his kingdom, his will. The second half of this prayer talks about man-give us, forgive us, lead us. So God and man form the two great subjects of this prayer. Look now at the second half of the prayer. You've got the past-Forgive us our debts. You've got the present-Give us today. You've got the future-Lead us not into temptation."

3. Among the Jews, though prayers were always appropriate, there were set times for prayer, when the pious were expected to attend to their devotions. Thus, there were morning, afternoon, and evening prayers (Ps. 55:17; Dan. 6:10; Acts 3:1). According to Josephus (Antiquities XIV.65) sacrifices, including prayers, were offered in the temple "twice a day, in the early morning and at the ninth hour." - Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953-2001). Vol. 9: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew. New Testament Commentary (322). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

From M. Hunt: The first hour of prayer: 9AM is the first hour of prayer [see Acts 2:15] when the Temple gates opened. The Hebrew is "Shacharit"(morning)The second hour of prayer: Noon is the second hour of prayer [Acts 3:1; 10:9]. The Hebrew is "Minchah" (gift-offering) The third hour of prayer: 3PM is the third hour of prayer [Acts 3:1; 10:9] The Hebrew is "Ma'ariv" (evening; our afternoon is the Jewish evening). This hour of prayer was known as the "hour of confession." The next day began at sundown, or about 6PM.

For more information on the three hours of prayer see the *Talmud: Mishnah Berakhot* and *The Jewish New Testament Commentary*, page 228.

4. Brennan Manning, "Abba's Child", p. 39-40

5. Regarding reward, N.T. Wright notes:

"Jesus also assumes that there is benefit to be had from doing these things. Many people imagine that he is asking us to do everything with no thought of reward, and are then rather shocked when he repeats, three times, his belief that our heavenly father will repay us (verses 4, 6, 18). Clearly, Jesus is not so bothered about the notion of disinterested behaviour, or 'altruism', as we sometimes are. In fact, what he says is far more realistic. If we struggle to clear our hearts of any desire to do something, so that we are acting from totally pure motives, we will always find a little corner of desire somewhere—even the desire to behave altruistically! Then, instead of looking away from ourselves and towards God, we find ourselves focusing back on ourselves again, wanting to please not God but our own ideal of lofty, disinterested action.

Jesus, instead, wants us to be so eager to love and please God that we will do everything we should do for his eyes alone. Other eyes will be watching from time to time, and it's very easy, particularly for clergy and others who are involved professionally with leading worship, to 'perform' for them rather than for God alone."

Wright, T. (2004). *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15* (55). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

6. Regarding making our focus God more than people, here are two fun stories:

The story is told around Washington about former presidential assistant Bill Moyers who has a strong Baptist heritage and is presently a popular political commentator. Moyers was giving thanks at a lunch with President Johnson. His prayer was interrupted by the President, who said, "Speak up, I can't hear you." Muttered Moyers, "I wasn't speaking to you, Mr. President." Moyers knew that we must transcend people.

Two young brothers were spending the night at their grandparents. At bedtime, they knelt beside their beds to say their prayers. The youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs: "For my birthday, I pray for a new bike, an iPod, and a new Playstation." His older brother leaned over and said, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't hard of hearing." His little brother replied, "No, but Grandma is." Friends, you don't have to yell out these three requests because God is not hard of hearing.

7. Over the years I have reflected on the difference between need and want. So much of what goes on in the name of love between people...is more about need than love. They are not opposites. Need for another is part of our bonds. Need is NOT a bad thing...but if we become attached to the provision more than the person... we begin to reduce the person to an object of provision. I wonder how much more true that may be of God? Naturally we want God because of our need for Him. It's a wise sense...but is it the whole sense? God told Abraham, "I am your exceedingly great reward". - Gen. 15:1

8. Myron Augsburger describes this particularly well when he states:  
Prayer is opening one's life to God. It is inviting Him to act in our lives. Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, it is being willing to accept His will in our lives. Prayer moves the hand of God by giving Him the moral freedom to do in our lives what He has been wanting to do. God, in His sovereign practice, does not impose His will upon us. Consequently, He can function in our lives in accordance with the degree of freedom we surrender to Him. Prayer is therefore relational; it is not merely a psychological exercise of self-fulfillment, nor is it a mental review of God's principles, nor is it coercing God; rather, it is a free personality inviting the Personage of heaven to share with us. [Augsburger, M. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). Vol. 24: Matthew. The Preacher's Commentary Series (18). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.]

Similarly, Mother Teresa writes,  
"Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts."

A humorous example of trying to get God to serve our reality...  
A fifth grade boy who had heard a sermon on persistence in prayer was praying by himself in his room one night. As his dad passed his door, he heard the boy praying over and over again, "Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo." The next morning, the dad asked the boy what he was doing the night before. The boy replied that he had given the wrong answer on a test for the capital of Mexico, and he was praying that God would make Tokyo the capital of Mexico.  
I think we may do that more than we'd like to think.