

# Loving God as Life's Primary Connection

Series: First Love: Forming Our Love for God  
Brad Bailey – March 19, 2023

Intro

As we continue in the season of Lent... that remembers the final sacrifice of Christ... and what is referred to as the "Passion" week... referring to his ultimate sacrifice and love... we are focusing on the call into that very love which he knew.

When asked how we can align our lives... Jesus said first and foremost...

***"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."***

This is **our true "first love"**... and **life's primary connection**.

> **And that is our focus this season.**

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 affects 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.

**But prayer is the very source of connecting with God...** of becoming **rooted in His love.**

- It has been described as relating "Spirit to spirit."
- Served well by realizing that we are spiritual beings... just as truly as we are physical beings.

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

***Without maintaining our spiritual connection to God... we become disconnected from the source of ultimate life... like a car without fuel... a boat with a sail... a mansion without electricity... human bodies rather than living souls.***

C.S. Lewis wrote [1]:

**If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die. - C.S. Lewis**

**Jesus was united in that love...** lived out of that love.

**Those around him saw** that first love.

- He would explain his life saying "I do only ... my Father's will... what my Father is saying and doing." The Father was his central point of life connection.

I recall watching how when someone would visit us... stay at our house... if they were married ... and their partner was back at home... they often check in with the other every day when possible. Leah and I do the same.

This other being has become a primary reference point... a primary connection. It doesn't matter if we are connected physically... there is a relationship that roots us... that we naturally desire to stay current with... and process decisions with. It is simply a natural part of staying aligned. Jesus... that's but echo of our true primary connection.

If we say how much we love someone...but don't care about what they think...what they want... it's not love. It may be some idea we like...or idea about transcendence... hope... or companionship...but not love ...because love gives itself to another.

***As our ultimate "First Love" ...our love for God should become our primary reference point in life ...and our most consistent point of connection.***

**There are many ways we could seek to grow... times of study... spiritual retreats...but few will prove more valuable...than a daily pattern.**

This past week... [Jenna Bush Hager](#), daughter of 43rd president of the United States [George W. Bush](#), shared with her TODAY co-hosts [Hoda Kotb](#) and [Savannah Guthrie](#) on Thursday (March 16, 2023) that her father texts her a [Bible verse](#) every morning.

*Bush Hager said the tradition actually started with her fraternal twin, Barbara, after she experienced a bad relationship breakup. Since then, Bush hasn't stopped sending Bible verses and has since begun texting Jenna every morning as well.*

*"I actually wake up every morning to a text from my dad that's a different Bible verse," Bush Hager revealed. "I wasn't included at the beginning. It started when my sister had a bad breakup and my dad just started texting her every morning. And it was something really small but something very steady that she'd look up to." [2]*

*It's a connection... every day...that has shaped her life. (The 41-year-old mother of three sometimes shares the verses her father sends her with others, including her co-workers.)*

## **The Power of Daily Patterns**

### **1. Daily patterns have the greatest impact on our spiritual formation.**

**We live in a world that is given to the stores of heroic epic feats... rather than the formation of such greatness.**

The truth is that we are **formed most by our daily habits.**

***"Habits are like a cable. We weave a strand of it everyday and soon it cannot be broken."***  
**- Horace Mann**

***"Sow a thought, and you reap an act; Sow an act, and you reap a habit; Sow a habit, and you reap a character; Sow a character, and you reap a destiny."*** — Samuel Smiles

***"First we form habits, then they form us."*** - Rob Gilbert

We may be inspired in a moment...but we are shaped by our daily habits. Some do life blown about by moments of great ideas and quick ideals... but real formation...in physical or mental ...comes with smaller daily work.

The smallest daily habits...have the most impact on our **physical health**.

- I can dream of completing a triathlon... but 20 minutes of daily exercise would change my health dramatically.

The smallest daily habits have the most impact on our **financial health**.

- Some think that financial planning is buying a lotto ticket....some is a small regular deposit

And the smallest daily habits have the most impact on our **spiritual health**.

We need that which centers us in the true source of life...which is God...and not ourselves.

It's been said... if there is one truth that will serve us most...it that we are not God. That is deemed the greatest of all theological truths... the greatest of all psychological truths. What should be striking to us...is that an hour after declaring that I am not God...and I can be back to carrying the weight of God... the glory of God. In other words... spiritual formation understand that I need that which roots me in consistent patterns and rhythms.

It understands that the difference between information and formation is very wide.

**Jesus did not arrive at the garden before his crucifixion...** in which he faced being sacrificed on a cross... and praying "not my will but yours be done".... without all that came before... **nor will we.**

## **2. Daily patterns protect us from relational "drift"... by staying "current."**

Throughout even a days time... we go through various experiences which effect us...our hearts navigate various choices which may pull us...and try to shape us. And if we don't return to our primary connection, we can drift... we can begin to develop some distance.

It can happen in a marriage. **When a week goes by** and we haven't really sat face to face. What happens? **The connection drifts**... there is **more unspoken**... what is going on in us is separated from that primary connection.

**And this points to the value** of what is described as **"staying current."**

My wife and I try to talk every day...and when a couple days go by...there is a distance... with every day....I am less rooted in that primary connection.

And so it is with God.

**The enemy of our souls** knows that **when a soul wanders off**... it becomes vulnerable. And many of us know how true that can be.

And we can be deceived into thinking....

**"Well if God sees everything....and knows everything**...even what is in my heart...then what difference does it make if I come before His Spirit?

We may feel that if God knows our needs... our actions... and our hearts, **what difference does it make whether we come before him... and express them?**

**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. **If something has arisen between us... we need to restore the relationship by choosing to acknowledge what is not right...and that is what confession is.**

Confession is an opportunity to come out from the “hiddenness” where shame alienates us from God. The Father knows our struggles. **His desire is for our agreement**, placing ourselves “**on the same side**” of the struggle. Only in such open agreement can His relationship empower us.

**And if a child has a need**.... you may be aware of that need...but if they don't share it... a distance will grow as they direct that need elsewhere.

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***

**Daily patterns protect us from relational “drift” ... by staying “current.”**

Here's a basic truth:

You are **only as connected to someone** as you are current with them.

Like a parent who doesn't want their child to go off to school without a chance to connect ... or go to bed without connecting at the end of a day...far God the Father wants to connect with you. That is why there is no substitute for the value of daily patterns of connection.

**3. Daily patterns don't get lost in “busy schedules” ... or changing moods.**

Daily patterns have the power of overcoming transcending the nature of our circumstances ...feelings. The reason we don't carry out so many good intentions...is that we expect to do then when we have time... and that time never really comes... we always feel busy.

And the same can be due to our feelings... our mood.

And this is **the pattern we see Christ**... he made God his **primary connection**. When we would imagine he was **most exhausted**.... And **feeling pressed in on**... he stayed connected.

As Mark described in his account...

***"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." - Mark 1:35***

*Mark tells us that while it was still dark, Jesus slipped out of the house and went to a secluded place to meet with His Father. Mark doesn't tell us what morning this was. But we do know this prayer time followed a full day of healing the sick and casting out demons.*

*After that kind of day, you would think Jesus might have slept in ... I would have. But Jesus had a relationship that rooted him deeply.*

*This is who he connected with in the mornings...and evenings. He knew that His Father's presence would be there.*

*Sometimes it's hard to awaken early. Hard to focus. And most of all, it's hard to fathom that the God of the universe, who holds the entire world in His hands, has time to hear our little prayers. But not only does He have the time, He calls us to come to Him. [3]*

### **Connecting Morning and Night**

**There is a unique dynamic to the connection that takes place in the morning and evening. [4]**

If ultimate life partners... there is a natural point of connection...in the morning...and at the end of the day. It involves simply saying... "Good morning"...and "Good night."

**My wife Leah and I** – she will note when I get up and don't say "good morning"... and I will note when she falls asleep without saying "good night."

Why? Because it acknowledges the place the other has in our life... that we do not function as wholly independent of the other.

**Not surprisingly, there is a long tradition of building a daily life that begins and ends every day in prayer.**

God spoke to those who went before us. He said that his words should be meditated upon "day and night." [5]

We know from the Mishnah ...which is the oral tradition of the Jews compiled into written form in 200 A.D... that the fundamental daily devotion of Jews in the first century, both in Palestine and those scattered... was to recite a creed known as the Shema... accompanied by prayer in the form of fixed benedictions as well as free-flowing prayer. And the custom was to do this twice a day, 'when you lie down and when you rise.' [6]

Note: Not that of a ritual...in which we begin to correlate the practice as having power in itself. When that happens we lose the power of God... we begin to go through the practice with routine.

The power lies in the genuine connection... God with us... and we with Him.

As such...we offer ourselves to Him in the morning... and come before him in the evening... to give account....and find rest. [7]

### **Morning**

- Acknowledge God is over the day
- Align ourselves with God's will
- Ask for what is needed

King David set the example in

**Psalm 143:8**

**Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,  
for I have put my trust in you.  
Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I entrust my life.**

And in Psalm 5:3,

**"In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." - Psalm 5:3**

**Evening**

- Confess any way we have not been aligned with God
- Entrust needs that arose to God
- Rest in God's goodness

**Psalm 4:8**

**In peace I will lie down and sleep,  
for you alone, Lord,  
make me dwell in safety.**

What a profound truth.

In God we find rest.

In God we find peace.

That simple acknowledgement when we lie down every night...will change our lives.

**So this week I want to invite you to join me in a daily connection....**

Such prayer is intended to create a point of connection with God at the beginning and end of each day. While more extended prayer may continue from it, the point is to develop a short but significant connection with God as our "first love"... our center and source of life"...a connection that can root the start and end of our day.

The goal is not to prove perfect in creating such a habit, but to take new steps in the process. To create new daily habits is not easy...and can be served by being thoughtful in planning and using triggers to connect to.

It has been found that connecting to a simple task that is part of your morning and evening routine can help. So begin by placing plans to pray into your calendar...especially if it is a smartphone or similar device with an notification or alarm. Choose something that you already do in your morning and evening rhythm, such as brushing your teeth, making or turning down the bed, to connect when you will pray.

If this is new, plan to pray for as short as 5 to 10 minutes. Focus on these simple elements.

**Embrace the significance of small and steady... long term....**

We see those who serve a king... bow as they approach... a ritual... perhaps... but something which creates a consistent clarity about who they are in relationship to the other.

We see the soldier who carries his spouse's picture to draw his thoughts back to home.

**Embrace the significance of just being present... genuinely present.**

I want to offer the shortest prayer that has served me....

**God, I belong to you.  
May your will become my will.  
May your love become my love.**

(Read aloud together, then with eyes closed...pray it together.)

CLOSING PRAYER

**Notes:**

1. From C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

2. From: [here](#)

3. Drew from <https://proverbs31.org/read/devotions/full-post/2014/10/20/my-morning-prayer#:~:text=Our%20Morning%20Prayer%3A&text=Help%20me%20to%20anchor%20myself,to%20point%20others%20to%20You>.

4. Paul spoke of praying continually... and indeed we should live with a prayerful spirit...always attentive...always connecting. "Rejoice always, <sup>17</sup> pray without ceasing, <sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 There is certainly a sense in which prayer should never be merely something for the start and end of a day. However, these are unique points for forming our connection with God... and being rooted in a consistent way.

5. "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." – Joshua 1:8; Also: Deuteronomy 6: 4-9; Anna in Luke 2:26-27; the man in Jesus' parable, found in Luke 18, who is responded to because he pleads "day and night;" and Paul says "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." 1 Thessalonians 3:10)

6. We know from the Mishnah (oral tradition of the Jews compiled into written form in 200 A.D.) and the Talmud (commentary on the Old Testament by the Jews compiled in 500 A.D.) that the pattern of devout Jews was to pray two or three set times per day during the first century A.D. Professor of Liturgy at Notre Dame University, Paul F. Bradshaw, provides historical context in his book, Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office:

Although it is not strictly a prayer but rather a creed, the recitation of the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41) is well attested as the fundamental daily devotion of Jews in the first

century, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora. The custom of reciting it twice a day, 'when you lie down and when you rise' (Deut. 6:7; 11:19), according to the Mishnah in the morning between dawn and sunrise and in the evening after sunset, is first mentioned in the Letter of Aristeas (145-100 B.C.)... (Bradshaw, p.1)

The twice-daily recitation of the Shema was accompanied by prayer in the form of fixed benedictions as well as free-flowing prayer:

According to the Mishnah the Shema was to be accompanied by a series of fixed benedictions: 'In the morning two benedictions are said before and one after; and in the evening two benedictions are said before and two after, the one long and the other short'. (Bradshaw, pp.1-2) – From Does the Bible Say How Much I Should Pray?, Feb 09, 2018 - [here](#).

7. Other examples of expressions of seeking God in the morning:

- Psalm 143:8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.
- Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with your loyal love! Then [we will shout for joy](#) and be happy all our days!
- Psalm 5:3 In the morning, O LORD, hear my voice. In the morning I lay my needs in front of you, and I wait.
- Psalm 119:147 I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word.
- Psalm 57:7-10 My heart, O God, is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
- Psalm 59:16 But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.
- Isaiah 33:2 LORD, be gracious to us; we long for you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in time of distress.

#### **Week 4 - Personal Spiritual Exercise**

This week is an opportunity to create daily patterns of prayer. Such prayer is intended to create a point of connection with God at the beginning and end of each day. While more extended prayer may continue from it, the point is to develop a short but significant connection with God as our "first love"... our center and source of life"...a connection that can root the start and end of our day.

The goal is not to prove perfect in creating such a habit, but to take new steps in the process. To create new daily habits is not easy...and can be served by being thoughtful in planning and using triggers to connect to.

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#### **Morning**

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- Align ourselves with God's will
- Ask for what is needed



## **Evening**

- Confess any way we have not been aligned with God
- Entrust needs that arose to God
- Rest in God's goodness

If helpful, you may always pray this short prayer:

***God, I belong to you.***

***May your will become my will.***

***May your love become my love.***