

The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. Overlaid on this are several white circular elements: a large scale on the left with markings from 140 to 260, and several smaller circles with partial arcs and arrows, suggesting motion or rotation.

# KEEP IT REAL

WONDERFUL MERCY CHURCH

21 NOVEMBER 2021

## OUR JOURNEY WITH PRAYER

- The Rock From Which We Were Cut
- Normal & Necessary
- Keep it Up
- Prayer and Presence
- Taizé Prayer Experience
- Praying in Agreement
- The Waiting Place

An hourglass with red sand is the central focus, set against a dark background with faint technical diagrams and circular patterns. The sand is falling from the top bulb into the bottom bulb.

## LET'S TRY AN EXPERIMENT

- Two minutes of prayer
- Just you and God

## HOW IS YOUR PRAYER LIFE?

- Do you look forward to prayer?
- Is your prayer time rich and rewarding?
- Are drawing closer to God?

PETE GREIG

- Keep it simple
- Keep it real
- Keep it up



## THERE WILL BE TIMES OF DRYNESS

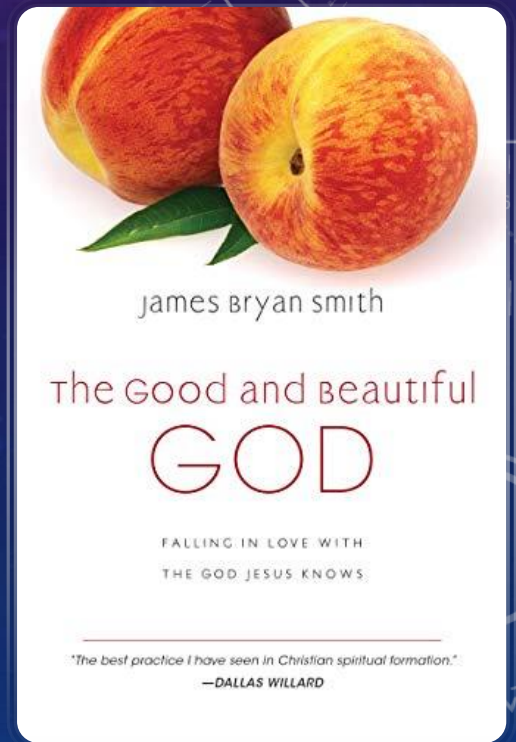
“Never give up prayer, and should you find dryness and difficulty, persevere in it for this very reason: God often desires to see what love your soul has, and love is not tried by ease and satisfaction.”

Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591)

# NARRATIVES: THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

“Narrative is ‘the central function...of the human mind.’ We turn everything into a story in order to make sense of life...We are storied creatures. Our stories help us navigate our world, to understand right and wrong, and to provide meaning...”

James Bryan Smith, “The Good and Beautiful God” pp 24-25.



## NARRATIVES: THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

“We are shaped by our stories. In fact, our stories, once in place, determine much of our behavior without regard to their accuracy or helpfulness. Once these stories are stored in our minds, they stay there largely unchallenged until we die. And here is the main point: these narratives are running (and often ruining) our lives. That is why it is crucial to get the right narratives.”

Smith, p. 25



# NARRATIVES: THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

- To keep our prayer life from becoming a lifeless shell we must find and “un-learn” our false narratives about prayer and God.
- Just as importantly, we need to learn new narratives, ones that will help us keep prayer real.

# CHANGING OUR NARRATIVES ABOUT PRAYER

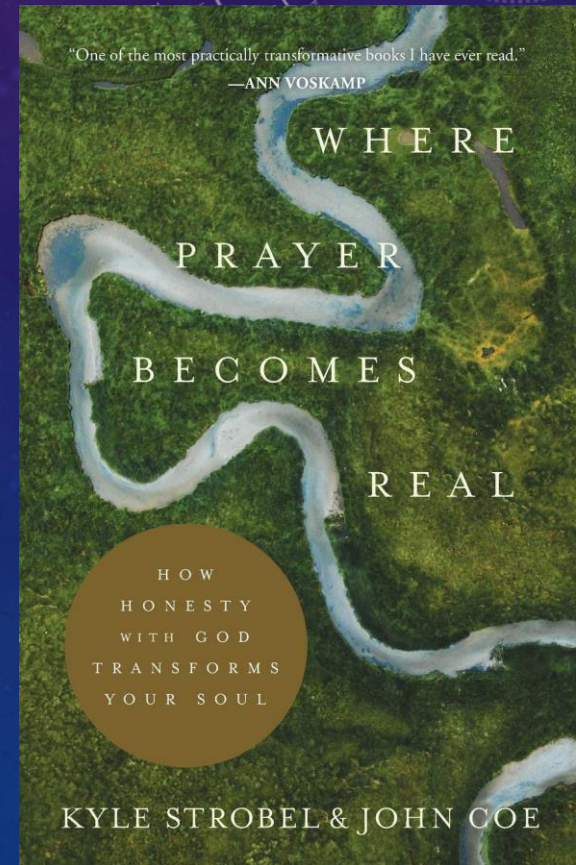
“Prayer is not a place to be good, it is a place to be honest.

Prayer is not a place to perform, it is a place to be present.

Prayer is not a place to be right, it is a place to be known

Prayer is not a place to prove your worth, it is a place to receive worth and offer yourself in truth.”

*Strobel and Coe, “Where Prayer Becomes Real.” p. 25*



# BEING “GOOD” OR BEING HONEST

Our false narratives:

- We need to tame and control our wandering minds.
- We should only pray about the things a “good Christian” would pray about.

# TAME THE WANDERING MIND?

God's narrative: Listen to your heart.

- Mt 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (ESV)
- Ps 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” (NLT)
- “Mind wandering is a gift; by it the Lord shows us the treasures of our hearts.”

*Strobel and Coe, p. 27*

# PRAY ABOUT ONLY THE “RIGHT” THINGS?

God’s narrative: Be brutally honest.

- The holy and perfect God is also the God who chose to be born in stench of a stable, live life among us as one of us, and suffer torture and death for us. Those things are now made holy, too.

## LUKE 18:10-14 (ESV)

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

# PERFORMING OR BEING PRESENT

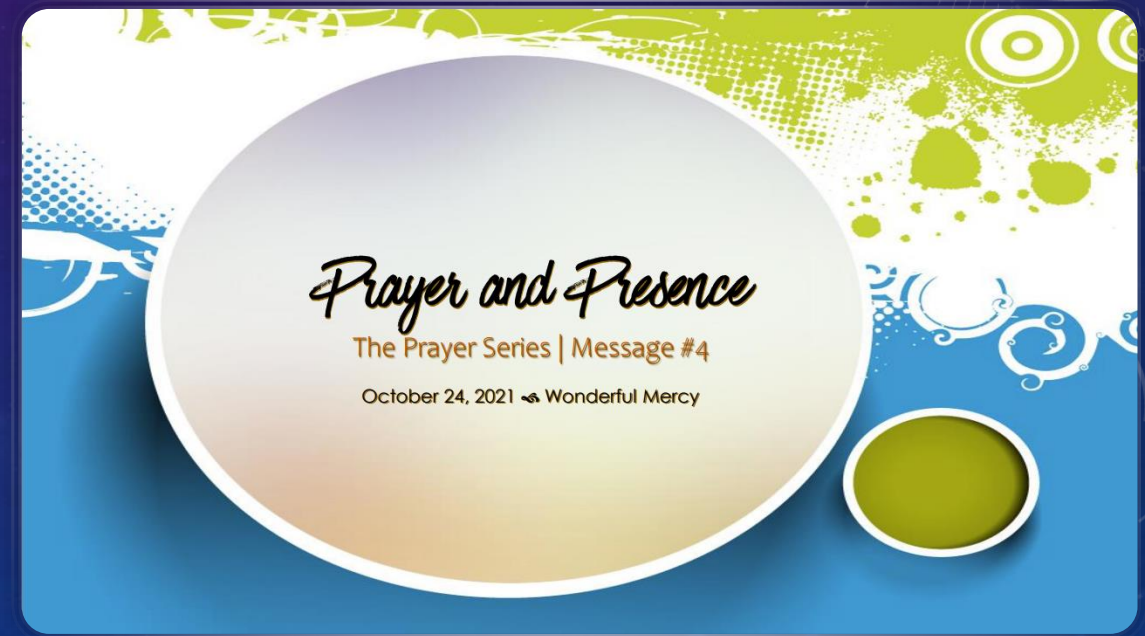
Our false narrative: I have to do something in Prayer.

# PERFORMING OR BEING PRESENT

Our false narrative: I have to do something in Prayer.

God's narrative: I know you and love you and want you to be with me.

- Go back and listen to Graeme's message "Prayer and Presence"





# BEING RIGHT OR BEING KNOWN

Our false narrative:

- I have to get myself “right,” or clean up my act before I talk with the Lord. God is not interested in my sin and pain.

## SHARE MY SIN AND PAIN?

God's Narrative: I know and care about your sin and pain.

- More than 25% of Psalms are Psalms of lament!
- When we withhold our sin and pain from our prayer lives we are not fooling God.

## SHARE MY SIN AND PAIN?

God's Narrative: I know and care about your sin and pain.

- More than 25% of Psalms are Psalms of lament!
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"The self that God persistently loves is not my prettied-up pretend self but my actual self—the real me."

*Benner and Pennington, "The Gift of Being Yourself." p. 57*

## SHARE MY SIN AND PAIN?

When we are mired in sin and pain there is only one way back out: we get back to the father through the cross. If we think we have to clean up the mess before we come to God, we are blocking the only path home!

# PROVING YOUR WORTH OR RECEIVING YOUR WORTH

Our false narrative: I need to make sure God knows I am worthy.

- This is the culmination of the first three false narratives.
- Are we trying to prove our worth so that we can, oh so subtly, manage God?

# PROVING YOUR WORTH OR RECEIVING YOUR WORTH

God's narrative: I know your worth; you are worth more to me than you can imagine.

# PROVING YOUR WORTH OR RECEIVING YOUR WORTH

- Luke 12:6-7 “What is the value of your soul to God? Could your worth be defined by an amount of money? God doesn’t abandon or forget even the small sparrow he has made. How then could he forget or abandon you? What about the seemingly minor issues of your life? Do they matter to God? Of course they do! So you never need to worry, for you are more valuable to God than anything else in this world.” (Passion)

# PROVING YOUR WORTH OR RECEIVING YOUR WORTH

- God's narrative is that he already knows us, the real us. He knows our hearts, our sins, our desires, sacred and profane, our hopes and our fears, and he values us above all else.
- That is the story we should have lodged in our minds as we approach prayer.



## KEEP IT REAL

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Prayer is a place to be honest.

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Prayer is a place to be present.

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Prayer is a place to be known.

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Prayer is a place to receive worth and offer yourself in truth.

The background of the slide features a central hourglass with red sand falling from the top bulb into the bottom bulb. The hourglass is set against a dark, textured background with faint, light-colored technical drawings, including circular gauges with numerical scales and various geometric lines. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on the central hourglass as a symbol of time.

## LET'S REPEAT OUR EXPERIMENT

- Two minutes of prayer
- Just you and God
- Keep it Real
  - Be Honest
  - Be Present
  - Be Known
  - Offer Yourself to God

The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. Overlaid on this are several white circular elements: a large scale on the left with markings from 140 to 260, and several smaller circles with dashed lines and arrows, some containing partial solid lines, suggesting a technical or scientific theme.

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