

# THE ONE THING

## PART THREE – THE VEHICLE FOR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

### REVIEW

So two weeks ago, we began a new series entitled “The One Thing” where we are looking at the one thing that the LORD teaches us is the good part of our calling and our vital need – and that is our fellowship with God & spending time in His presence.

We began by looking at several Scriptures that teach us about the power of doing just this one thing like the 27<sup>th</sup> Psalm where David described dwelling in God’s presence as his one desire, and the myriad of benefits that it held in his life. We learned from other verses that it’s where joy comes from, how it’s what creates abundant satisfaction, and how it also yields protection & blessing! Wow, living in God’s presence is so powerful!

But living in the presence of God is not just beneficial; we learned that it’s a vital necessity to living the quality of life God has for us. Regarding this, we looked at the example of recharging our electronic devices and how most of us would not ever dare allow these things to go days or weeks without plugging them in and how this should be the same mentality we possess when it comes to plugging into His presence.

Again, we are not saying that you will *die* physically or spiritually if you don’t plug into His presence. But we are saying that you will not truly *live* if you do not learn to fellowship with God like we are describing.

Last week, we looked at how we are designed for this fellowship with God. Yes, this is what Jesus came to provide for us – eternal life. And we learned that eternal life is knowing God, not just existing forever. So Jesus came so that we can come into a personal & intimate relationship with the Godhead.

The apostle Paul makes this clear in **First Corinthians 1:9** when he says. *“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

What this verse is saying is that God Himself has called each of us for one specific and primary purpose, and that is to come into fellowship with Jesus. This means that above everything else God has called each of us to do to promote and expand His kingdom, He has called every one of us to fulfill this general calling first. This is important to understand lest we identify what we do for the Lord as being our relationship with Him.

So as we saw last week, this is our primary purpose for being here. It’s to know God. It’s to worship God. Yes, we are here “for Him” because He desires us!

And again, this is not just “for Him.” It’s for us too – for when we walk in this fellowship with God and fulfill our primary purpose for being here, we experience a life like no other! Yes, this eternal life yields the abundant, resurrection life! Amen!

So we do well to learn how to walk in this fellowship with God and capitalize on this life that is available to us, amen?

Saints, I cannot begin to convey to you fully just how important it is that we be “doers” of this one particular subject.

For example, this is why we read and study the Word of God. It is not just so that we can become more indoctrinated and have more head knowledge. No, we are to get into His Word in order to enhance our relationship with Him. This is to be the basis for even our study of the Bible – reading it as it is in truth, a love letter from our Creator and Savior to us. Amen!

You see, we always seem to read the phrase “the knowledge of God” as only being head knowledge of the Scriptures, but I challenge you to think of it differently. The word “knowledge” describes a personal & experiential knowledge, and not merely becoming more educated and intellectual. The Lord wants us to experience Him – even when we spend time in the Word of God. And the awesome thing about this is in **Second Peter 1:2-3** we are promised that as we come to know Him in this personal and experiential way that grace & peace are multiplied in our lives and we are given all things that pertain to life and godliness.

I love the Message Bible’s translation of Second Peter 1:2: It says, *“Everything that goes into a life of pleasing God has been miraculously given to us by getting to know, personally and intimately, the One who invited us to God.”* Amen! So don’t tell me that coming to know Him more intimately won’t yield good fruit in your lives!

You see, coming to know more about Him is not necessarily what produces the faith to receive from Him. In **Second Timothy 1:12**, the Apostle Paul said, *“... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.”* Notice that he did not say, “for I know what I have believed ...” He said, “I know whom I have believed.” And this is the place we all need to come to – knowing Him personally, experientially and intimately. This is what produces faith and all of the fruits of faith. Amen!

Now last week, I shared what I call the “Parable of the Poor Relationship” to illustrate how most of our personal relationships with God can stand to get a little better. And I felt led to share this again with you this week, particularly because of what we will get into today. So here you go ...

## THE PARABLE OF THE POOR RELATIONSHIP

Suppose you were able to watch a married couple in their daily activities together and you observed that while they spent their entire day by each other's side, you saw very little communication, particularly from the woman towards her husband.

You noticed that this man would try to talk with his wife countless times throughout the day, but it seemed as if the woman just had turned a deaf ear to him. It appeared like she couldn't even hear him, like she had blocked him out or something. However, you did notice that she spoke to him on three separate occasions during that day ...

The first time was earlier in the morning, when she asked him – “Honey, would you please take the dog out?” The second time was around lunchtime, when she asked him if he would do the dishes for her. Then, finally, she thanked him rather quickly for all he does for her and then proceeded to ask him – “Baby, would you please pick up this mess I made?”

Now, mind you, that particular day, they went everywhere together – almost like the husband was just following his wife around as she went to the grocery store, the gym, on her walk, etc.

So again, would you say that their relationship could you use some work? Would you consider that the woman needed to work on a few things from her end? Of course, you would!

Well, did you know that this is probably what the average Christian's relationship with God looks like? (And that's probably being very generous)

Friends, we are the bride of Christ and He who has promised never to leave us nor forsake us is with us everywhere we go. Yet most of the bride of Christ does something similar to what this wife did in this parable. We communicate with the Lord just a few times a day – basically when we just want Him to do something for us – and do our own thing the rest of the time.

Now again, I do not say this to condemn anyone. Like I said, we all could stand to grow in this area – gaining more of an awareness of His presence, learning to listen and speak to Him more frequently. And not just when we are making our requests to Him, but to simply commune with Him as a husband and wife would naturally do.

We are married to the Lord, saints. It's high time we start acting like it. And that is why we are on this particular subject – so that we can grow in our relationship with the Lord, learning how it is meant to be.

## THE VEHICLE FOR OUR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

So when it comes to improving our personal relationship with God, this week, let's move into some ways that we can do this. Yes, over the course of the next several weeks, I want us to look at some practical things that will help us pursue this one thing more effectively.

And the first thing I want us to look at is the subject of prayer. And why look at prayer, you ask? It's because I see prayer as our vehicle for this fellowship with God. Yes, it is what drives our relationship with Him.

You see, you are not going to have a good relationship or enjoy good fellowship with someone without communicating with them, right? Likewise, we will not properly fellowship with the LORD without sharing with Him and letting Him share back with us.

So, what is prayer? If I were to ask you this question, what would your answer be? To some, prayer is no more than a position or posture. To them, it is us getting on our knees, folding our hands, bowing our heads, and closing our eyes. To others, it is rehearsed or memorized statements that can be said with the person praying's heart and mind being completely detached. But is this true?

I am the type of person that likes to ask questions like—Why do we do this? Why do we get on our knees when we pray? Why do we close our eyes? Why do we bow our heads? Why do we say the things we say? Now I believe that some of these things are good to do when we pray, but I also believe that we need to know why they are good and not just do them out of tradition or habit.

For example, when we were children, our families might have said “grace” at the dinner table, saying that cookie cutter prayer, that “God is great, God is good, Let us thank Him for our food ...” but it never dawned on us that God actually was great and that He really is good.

You see, I believe people say a lot of things when they pray, but they do not truly realize what they are saying. Here is another example—a lot of us have it engrained in us that when someone sneezes, that we say, “Bless you.” It's just good manners, right? But why is that good manners? I know there is a back story to why we do bless someone when they sneeze, but are these things biblically based and necessary?

Now I am not trying to get you or your children to stop acknowledging someone who sneezes. I just think we need to ask questions like this so that we are not doing things simply out of tradition with no understanding as to why we are doing them. I think prayer has a lot of those “Bless you's.” I believe people do certain things under the guise of prayer simply because it's what was modeled to them, it's how they've been trained, or it's just tradition.

So, we need to understand that just because somebody prays, it doesn't mean that they know God or are a truly spiritual person. In fact, prayer is one of those things that even those who do not know God can do.

That's right—religion (the bad kind) loves to pray. We see this with the other religions of the world like Muslims, Hindus, etc., who pray much more religiously than most of us Christians do. Now based on what we know to be true, these other religions that pray do not know the one true and living God, right? So, the fact that someone prays does not make them godly or spiritual. In fact, Jesus taught us that hypocrites love to pray.

So, I say all of this to say that there are types of prayer that are absolutely ineffective and not a clear reflection of someone's healthy relationship with God. On the other hand, there is a right kind of prayer that holds tremendous power to move heaven and earth.

So, my heart in this teaching is for us to discover how prayer is not just a religious practice but rather is the means by which we simply fellowship with God. Let's now look at what prayer actually is so that we can let it drive us into this one thing. Amen?

### **WHAT IS PRAYER?**

First, let's look at the word commonly used for "prayer" in the New Testament ...

It comes from the Greek word *proseuchomai* which is derived from two Greek words:

1. The first word is *pros* which means "face to face." This describes the proximity of prayer. We come "face to face" with God. The Greek word for "worship" uses the prefix *pros* also. So this prefix denotes a place of intimacy.
2. The second word is *euchomai* which means to simply pray or wish, but if you dig a little deeper, it means "to make a vow or declaration." A good example of a vow or a declaration would be – "I devote myself to You. I desire to give You my whole heart because you are worthy of my all. You deserve all of me." And notice that a vow or a declaration is a statement and not a request. So what would *euchomai* describe? This word would describe fellowship, praise, or worship.

So I would define this New Testament word for "prayer" as "intimately approaching God (coming face to face with Him) for the purpose of fellowshiping with Him and praising & worshipping Him."

With this definition, I believe prayer can best be defined as communion with God. The word "communion" describes the union of two people. So prayer is simply our coming into union with God – or, in other words, the relationship that we have with God. Therefore, you could say that prayer is the relationship that we have with God. And, of course, as with any relationship, this relationship with Him is expressed verbally.

This is why Jesus, when His disciples asked Him how to pray, started off His model prayer with "Our Father." You see, this was a revolutionary concept of God to the children of

Israel. They always referred to God as “Yahweh, Elohim, or Jehovah” but when Jesus came on the scene He continuously throughout His ministry referred to Him as His “Father.” I believe the reason that Jesus taught us to pray by approaching Him as a Father is because prayer is primarily to be based upon a relationship.

So since prayer is literally communion with God (or, our fellowship with God) we could describe it as a conversation with God. And a conversation is not to be one-sided. It should not be a monologue but rather a dialogue. In other words, prayer is not only us doing the talking but it is also us doing the listening. If all we ever do in our prayer times is run our mouth then we are missing one of the most special parts of prayer – which is, hearing from God! (That would mean that meditating the Word of God is prayer because we are listening to what God has said to us) You would think that in a conversation between the Creator and the creation that the creation would be smart enough to shut up and listen to what the Creator had to say, seeing that He knows infinitely more than we do. But, as is the case with so many Christians, we run our mouths and never take the time to be still and listen for that still small voice in our hearts. Prayer is supposed to be a conversation between God and us!

Most people think of prayer as the requests we make from God, but this is an incorrect view of prayer. In both **Ephesians 6:18** and **Philippians 4:6**, Paul makes a distinction between “prayer” and “supplication.” The word “supplication” literally describes “requests” and “petitions.” So if Paul makes a distinction between “prayer” and “petitions and requests” then I think we need to re-evaluate our perception of prayer. Although petitions and requests are a part of prayer, they are not the basis for prayer. As we have seen, prayer is to be based upon a relationship. It is to be an intimate communication between the creature and the Creator and not a selfish, one-sided conversation. Prayer is a relationship!

### **PITFALLS OF PRAYER**

There are many misconceptions about what we call prayer that need to be dealt with ...

Prayer is such a common religious practice that we, as Christians, need to avoid making it just a fruitless ritual like the other religions do. We can fall into the same traditions of making vain repetitions that other religious people do. But again, Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship! Therefore, we need to avoid praying in a religious manner.

What do I mean by “praying religiously?” I mean, with the same mentality and concepts that other religions do. For instance, we are not praying to a God who is distant, in the heavens somewhere. No, our God is with us and He is in us! Therefore, we are not just throwing prayers into outer space somewhere, hoping they might reach our God. He is in our midst, living inside of all who are called His! So we need to pray with this mentality.

Also, another way to identify if you are praying religiously is does your terminology and tone change when you pray? What I mean is, do you change how you communicate when you are talking with God? You see, some people completely change when they start

“praying.” They use all kinds of spiritual terminology that they do not usually use and their tone changes to start sounding more “spiritual.” Now I most definitely agree that we should treat God with the utmost respect and not be overly casual with Him, as some err in doing. But we must also be conscious of not erring on the other side of the ditch that is being so fake and phony, that we are not being as effective as we can be in our prayers.

We need to not only pray the truth (that is, communicating with God what He has said concerning what we are discussing with Him from His Word); we also need to pray in truth. What do I mean by “praying in truth?” I mean that we need to be “real” in our prayers by praying out of our heart and not out of our head. When we pray out of traditions and rituals, we pray repetitive words and phrases. We need to pray from the heart and communicate with God genuinely and honestly.

I have had believers ask me how to pray before, and my response is generally and gently to point them to how they are communicating to me at that time. Did you know that is all prayer is? It is just simple communication with God. Therefore, it is similar to how we communicate with another human being, just with more respect and honor.

I would consider the best example of what prayer is how a child should communicate with their parents. A child communicates with their parents by talking about what they did on any given day – what they learned and what they experienced. They also have the opportunity to ask questions of their parents – seeking to grow and mature. My son used to ask my wife and I what were we going to do on certain days. He wanted to know what his parents had planned for him on that particular day. In short, there is a transparency and authenticity that a child brings in communicating with their parents. And when we learn to adopt this same mentality in our prayers to God, we will see the most fruit. For this is how God has called us to pray – in truth.

### **WHY WE PRAY LIKE WE PRAY**

So since having a relationship with God is the high call of every believer, then we need to act like it and not be religious in our ways of praying.

Again, prayer is not a position or a posture. Let me explain what I mean by this: Have you ever wondered why we do the things we do when we pray? Have you ever questioned why we close our eyes when we pray, why we bow our heads, why we lift our hands or why we end our prayers with “in Jesus’ name”? These are all good questions that we would do good to ask, in order to avoid just going through the motions and not understanding why we are doing what we are doing.

But all of these things that tradition has taught us, while having a valid purpose, are not what prayer actually is. Again, prayer is simply communication with God. Prayer is not ...

1. ... closing your eyes – The closing of our eyes is just us focusing on Him and tuning out the distractions that might be present around us.

2. ... having your head bowed and getting on your knees – Prayer is simply talking with God – whether it is walking, sitting, standing, eyes open, or eyes shut. And while sometimes it is appropriate to bow our head and knees in reverence when we are communing with Him, we do not need to get legalistic about it and say we have to do these things every time.
3. ... lifting our hands – We lift our hands because our heart dictates this response. In other words, we lift our hands because we are showing our total dependency on Him and because we are seeking to honor Him.

You see, we need to think about why we do some of the things we do. Are we lifting our hands out of some traditional habit? Are we bowing our heads because our Sunday school teacher, Sister so and so, said we should? And just because we begin our prayers with “Our Father” and end them with “in the name of Jesus” does not make it prayer either. We can go through all these religious formalities of prayer and it not be completely pleasing to Him. It is not these external rituals that make our prayers acceptable. It is the attitude we have in our heart that God is looking at when we pray!

### THE PRAYER CLOSET

Jesus taught us a lot about prayer in Matthew chapter 6. And I want us to pay particular attention to one thing that He said in **Matthew 6:6** – *“But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”*

So, after telling us how not to pray, He begins with the two words “But you, when you pray ...” By using the words “But you ...”, this is Jesus telling us how we need to pray in order to avoid these bad motives of the hypocrites. Then we see that He says, “when you pray.” Again, showing us that prayer in a Christian’s life is assumed and expected.

Jesus then goes on to tell us to go into our “room.” The original King James version uses the word “closet.” Now many have taken this verse literally to say that we need to clean out our shoes and clothes so that we can pray in our literal closet. Although this is an admirable attempt to fulfill Jesus’ instructions here, it is not what He meant. This word that is used for “room,” the Greek word *tameion*, does not describe a closet, but rather a “bedchamber.” (And, of course, this does not mean that we have to go to our bedroom every time we are going to pray either.)

So, what is a “bedchamber?” A “bedchamber” is a place of privacy and intimacy in a relationship between a man and a woman. So, since prayer is literally the overflow of our fellowship & relationship with God, we must see the importance of having our own place of privacy and intimacy with Him. And just as things done in a bedroom are to remain private and personal between a husband and wife, likewise, our prayer life is to be a private and personal thing between us and God and not to be shared with others. Every relationship needs this special place. In fact, it is a good idea to have a “holy” room in your house that has been consecrated to your alone time with God—not that you only need to pray there, but it is a special place where you meet with God.

But, of course, Jesus was not advocating that every time we pray, we must go to our private place because that would nullify the rest of the Scriptures that tell us to pray all the time. We cannot get away every time we need to pray because we have places to go and people to see. **First Timothy 2:8** says, *“I desire therefore that men pray everywhere ...”* So, we can see that it is needful to have that private place, but the vast majority of prayer must be done while we are out in the world.

We can learn this from the greatest example of prayer that there ever was—Jesus! Throughout the four Gospels we can see how Jesus spent great amounts of time in prayer away from the people. In **Mark 1:35** we are told— *“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.”* In **Luke 5:16**, we see— *“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.”* **Matthew 14:23** says, *“... He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray ... He was alone there.”* So, we can see from these examples that Jesus separated from other people in order to commune with God. He knew how to find that place of privacy and intimacy.

And then Jesus said something that is super important— “And when you have shut your door ...” There are at least two possible meanings to this phrase: One is “and when you have made sure that you have cut off any signs of hidden ulterior motives.” You see, sometimes Christians will leave their “door” (i.e. connection to people) open so that others can hear or see them praying. This is what the hypocrites of Jesus’ day did. They left their “door” open so that they could be seen of men. But the other possible meaning is “and when you cut off any possible distractions or interruptions.” This is very important to understand in regard to your alone time with God. When you commit to separate yourself with God the enemy will throw everything he can at you to distract you. The phone will ring, the baby will cry, the dog will start barking, etc. He will fight that alone time with God more than anything else. And he will not only do these external things, but he will also begin to war against your mind. Yes, during those times your mind will drift, and you will think of everything in the world that you could be doing, outside of fellowshiping with God. You will think about decluttering your garage, calling your aunt that you have not talked to in forever, or how your bedroom needs to be repainted. Things that you normally would not think of will just miraculously come to mind in these private times with God. So, what we must do is “shut the door”—close off any outside distractions and interruptions! If you must turn your phone off, then do it! If you must turn the lights off and pray in the dark, then do it! Do whatever it takes to spend time with God and to stay focused on Him during that time.

So, after you and I go to our place of intimacy with the Lord and close the door, Jesus said, “pray to your Father who is in the secret place ...” This phrase shows us that God dwells in that secret place of privacy. But this phrase “the secret place” carries with it a lot of awesome truth!

We learn from the 91st Psalm that the promise of divine protection and blessing is found by those who dwell in this secret place. **Psalm 91:1** says, *“He who dwells in the secret*

*place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*” You see, many claim the promises found in Psalm 91 as their own, but this first verse is the key qualifier for the rest of the promises contained in the Psalm.

Do you remember that passage of Scripture where Jesus said – *“the place that I go you cannot go...”* (**John 8:21**)? Well, while the common consensus was that He was talking about God’s presence in heaven, I believe Jesus was mainly talking about God’s presence here on the earth. In other words, He was talking about the secret place—that place of intimacy where no one could go with Him. Now they could certainly have that private place with the Lord—just them and Him. But they could not follow Him into His prayer closet because that was only reserved for Him and His Father alone.

So, we can see that the secret place is that spiritual place where the Father is. It is that place where just you and He go to spend time with one another. In other words, it is His manifest presence that you and I deliberately choose to enter into as we commune with Him. Amen!

We see this throughout the Psalms as well, where the Hebrew word translated “secret” in Psalm 91:1 is used. Let’s look at some of them:

1. **Psalm 31:20** says, *“You shall hide them in the secret place of your presence.”* This verse specifically teaches us that the secret place, the shadow of Shaddai as referred to in Psalm 91:1, is found in the presence of God.
2. If you compare what we just saw in Matthew 6:6 (that the secret place of prayer Jesus was referring to was where the Father is) with Psalm 32:7 & 119:114 where this same Hebrew word for “secret” is used, we are told— “You are my hiding place ...” Therefore, God (our Father) Himself is our secret place.
3. We see in both **Psalm 27:5** & **61:4** that this secret, hiding place is “in the Lord’s tabernacle”—which, to me, is an obvious reference to the presence of the Lord as the house of God was used by the Hebrews synonymously with the presence of God.

So, we can clearly see here that the secret place is the secret place of His presence! On top of that, this verse says that this is the place where we are hidden in this secret place.

You see, this shows us that one of the primary keys to living the blessed, victorious and abundant life God has promised us, is to live in this “secret place” of fellowship with the Lord. We must learn how valuable that time in the “secret place” is! This is the time where we can take a dip into the manifest presence of God and, as Psalm 91 goes on to say, we will live an extremely blessed and prosperous life!

Then finally, Jesus provides the promise to those who pray to the Father in the secret place at the end of Matthew 6:6 – “... And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” When we pray and fast in a secret manner so that it stays between us and God and avoid the temptation to broadcast it to everyone, God says He will reward us openly. That means He will give us the answer to those prayers in a public way for others to see. God rewards humility and then He broadcasts it! Amen!

## WHAT PRAYER IS ALL ABOUT

But I think we can look at **Revelations 2:4** to see what prayer is supposed to be ...

Jesus corrected the church of Ephesus because they had left their first love. Their first love was the love relationship that they had with God in the beginning of their walk with Him, and part of that love relationship was no doubt their prayer life.

You see, so many times we can drift from that prayer life that was just motivated by our love for Jesus. We can slip into legalism to where we pray just because we feel obligated to. But prayer, nor any other work, is to be done grudgingly or of necessity. God wants us to want to!

So what is the answer to the one who does not have that desire to pray? The answer is to fall back in love with the Lord again!

You see, God wants us to be so in love with Him that we will desire to spend time with Him above other things. Our times we spend in prayer should just fly by, but with so many, those times seem to drag by. Minutes seem like hours when we pray in the flesh. However, when we pray in the Spirit, the hours will seem like minutes.

It is like when we fall in love: When we spend time with someone that we have just fallen in love with, we look forward to and enjoy spending time with them and the time will just fly by. We don't count the minutes. We don't brag about hanging out with them for an hour. The reason is because we don't see it as work. The apostle Paul says, "Not of works, lest we should boast." We only boast about things when it was a work to us. Likewise, when we brag about how we spend three hours every morning with the Lord then we are making it clear that it is a work to us. We should just see it as having a good time. And that is what our motive should be in our prayer life – just fellowship with the One that we love dearly.

And church, this is what it's all about—having a vibrant, personal relationship with God! It is what the Lord intended from the very beginning when He created man. He wanted someone created in His likeness and image that He could come, walk and talk with. He just wanted a family—He wanted a marriage and He wanted children. This is why the New Covenant that we have with God is described as the relationship between a Father and His children and a Husband and His bride.

So since having a relationship with God is the high call of every believer, then we need to act like it, and not be religious in our ways of praying.

Church, I say these things today because we need to know what prayer truly is so that we can experience this one thing to the degree that we can. Again, prayer is the vehicle by which we have fellowship with God, so if we are going to experience the One Thing in our life, then how we pray is going to play a big part in it. Amen?