

Prayer 2 — Prayer and Grace

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Introduction (Connection):

[Invite to Ephesians 2]

I'm guessing you parents are grateful to get away from your kids for a few minutes after this four day weekend?

Tension:

This morning I want to start out making some notes about the category of relationships called "friendships."

I'll admit that there are times I've looked up the book "Friendship for dummies" and seen if it was worth the price.

I guess friendship isn't that important to me because I never bought it.

Actually a few months ago I bought a book on friendship and have it on my to-read list.

One of the things I've noticed in friendships, is that, if the relationship isn't reciprocal, it won't remain.

Relationships that lack balance breed resentment.

Even in friendship, you usually enjoy and keep those friends around who seem to put as much effort into the relationship as you do, right?

I mean, if you're the one always reaching out, always trying to hang out, always texting to check in, always accommodating their schedule at the cost of your own, always asking questions about their life and how things are going with nothing in return that relationship can get so draining that you start to weigh out if that person is someone you want to keep in the category of friend.

On the flip side, if you have someone you really like who just seems to care about you a lot and is always texting you and reaching out and trying to schedule things with you and always asking about what's new... and then they slowly stop reaching out and texting and trying to hang out with you and asking...

Here's your sign!

You probably aren't reciprocating the relationship and they've gotten worn out from you letting them do all of the work.

Most coaching on friendship these days says you just need to cut off those draining friendships where you're putting in all the effort and hardly anything is reciprocated back.

What if God took that advice?

Praise God that his thoughts and ways are higher than ours!

Praise God that he needs no human to counsel him or be his advisor, that he doesn't need relationship coaching or take our advice...

Why? Because if he did I'm pretty sure he would have dropped us a long time ago.

No, for some reason God puts up with our silence, he endures our lack of interest in him, he patiently waits for us to come hang out with him and when we finally do, he's ready to warm our hearts with his friendship.

You know what that is? That, brothers and sisters, is grace.

And this morning we're going to explore how God's grace impacts prayer and how we pray.

Exposition:

We're going to be looking at one verse specifically but let me build some context so we know where we're at.

Eph. 2:1-10 is all emphasizing God's grace, how though we were dead in our sin, following the world, following Satan, doing whatever our flesh, body, or mind wanted, and were children of wrath... God came after us because he is merciful and because he loves us!

Therefore He made us alive by his grace!

He raised us to with Jesus by his grace!

Seated us with Jesus, so he can show off how immeasurably rich his is in grace and kindness... all because of grace!

Now let's pick it up in v. 11.

Eph 2:11-22 — Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and

without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.¹

In this passage there are two main categories of people listed: those who are far off and those who are near, the uncircumcised and the circumcised, meaning Gentiles and Jews.

Those who were far off were separated, alienated, strangers, without hope and without God.

That was once us, brothers and sisters, as gentiles, non-jews, we were far off, as was the rest of the world that wasn't ethnically Jewish.

Throughout the centuries ancient lands and cultures built temples; in fact some of the greatest wonders of the world are these temples.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Eph 2:11–22.

Humanity built these temples because they once knew innately that there was a gap, a massive chasm, between humanity and the divine.

It's obvious, isn't it?

We are so small and God is so great.

God is perfect and we are broken and flawed and messy.

So these temples were places where an effort was made to bridge the gap between perfection and imperfection.

Sacrifices and offerings were made and rituals observed by professional "mediators" (a.k.a. priests) who sought to bring the divinity near.

But all of the efforts we made were commonly understood to be partial and fragmentary.

There were no religions that claimed the gap could be closed.²

Even the Greek Philosopher Aristotle, for example, said that while it might be possible to venerate and appease the gods, actual intimate friendship with a god was impossible.

He reasoned that friendship requires that both parties share much in common as equals.

They have to be alike.

² Timothy Keller, *Prayer; Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 74-75.

But since God is infinitely greater than human beings, Aristotle concluded “the possibility of friendship ceases.”³

Can you see how hopeless that sounds? Of course we’d feel strange in a created world that cannot know its Creator.

That is no longer our world.

v. 13 — “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Praise God for the Gospel that bridges the gap between us!

We have the ultimate mediator and highest priest who ended the need for priests.

Jesus eliminates the gaps that we can know God as friend and interact with Him in friendship!

Heb. 4:14, 16 — “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, . . . ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of **grace**, (Why?) [so] that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Can’t you see just how crazy this is?! Can’t you *feel* just how crazy this is?!

We Christians get to say that the God who used words to fashion together oxygen atoms and holds infinite space in the palm of his hand, who created the concept of music and mathematics, He made a way for his prized creation, once estranged, to be brought near so that we can be back in friendship with Him.

³ See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VIII.7, trans. W. D. Ross, Digireads, 2005. Quoted in Keller, *Prayer*, 75.

He came after us, never stopped pursuing us, and never gave up on getting us back.

That is crazy! That is outrageous! That is irrational.

“Aristotle and all the other philosophers and religious teachers of the world would say it's crazy, it can't be, it's illogical therefore impossible.

How could God be our intimate friend?

How could we ever approach God with complete confidence?

It is because God became like us, equally mortal and subject to suffering and death.

He did it so we could be forgiven and justified by faith apart from our efforts and merits that attempt to get back to him.

That is why we can draw near!⁴

“Because in Jesus God became human, which means God isn't just the God on the other side of the chasm, he is himself the bridge over the gap.

“Therefore He is the mediator of a new relationship with God that cannot fail because it is based on his [grace], not [our efforts!]”⁵

All of this is based on his grace!

Remember what grace means? Unmerited favor!

⁴ Paraphrased Keller, *Prayer*, 75.

⁵ Keller, *Prayer*, 75.

Meaning, I can't explain to you why he likes us; there's nothing in us that deserves God's affections or blessings or love... but we have his affections and He keeps liking us and wanting to bless us and always loves us no matter how dirty or messed up we are and for some reason he wants us near to him!

Look at **v. 18** — ***"For through [Christ Jesus] we both (who were far off and who were near) have access in one Spirit to the Father."***

See how every person of the trinity wants you to be with Him?

Circle the word **access** in this verse.

That word was mostly used when an ancient king granted someone an audience.

No one could just simply walk into the presence of a powerful monarch.⁶

If you've been keeping up with the church's year-long bible reading plan you'd know because you read Esther, where she risked her life by walking into the presence of the king.⁷

Brothers and sisters, that's just describes the power differential between a human being with a superiority complex sitting on a throne and a commoner.

The gulf between a holy God and broken and sinful humanity is infinitely greater.

1 Samuel 6 — "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?"

⁶ Keller, *Prayer*, 76.

⁷ Esther 4:9-16

So for Paul to say in this verse that we, through Christ Jesus, now have access to God's very presence should knock our socks off; we should be wonder over this.

In Christ, we are qualified for access to God.

We always have an audience with God because of what Jesus Christ has done; his death on the cross reconciled us back to God and made him our Father.⁸

What Paul is primarily saying here is that all of this has nothing to do with your own qualifications; you cannot formulate or do anything to qualify yourself for access to God.

Only God's grace can do that in the saving work of Christ.

Romans 5:2 says something very similar — [“Through \[Jesus\] we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”](#)

We cannot stand before God if it were not for his grace in Christ Jesus.

All this to say, this is the main truth for today, what I want you to remember...

[We pray by grace alone.](#)

This means that grace isn't just simply something that we experience initially in salvation; it isn't just that we're saved by grace, we live by grace.

⁸ Keller, *Prayer*, 77.

Only seeking the saving grace that initially justifies but not constantly going back to that same grace for everything else Christ has won for us is like being so dehydrated you're dying, coming to the bottomless well of pure water, and taking just a sip...

There is so much more available in God's grace... and prayer is putting the bucket down again and again and again to draw up fresh grace for every day life, and we can only put our buckets down because of God's grace!

Application/Challenge:

There's thousands of ways this truth can apply to our lives, I can only show you one.

Pray by grace alone in His name alone

Three different times in the gospel of John, Jesus instructs us to ask the Father in the name of Jesus, and it will be done for us.

D. A. Carson says, "Prayers in his name are prayers... in recognition that the only approach to God... the only way to God is Jesus himself."⁹

Remember what a name represents? Jesus' name itself is shorthand for his divine person and saving work.

Andrew Murray in his book on prayer said Jesus' name "is the symbol of his power."¹⁰

⁹ This is D. A. Carson's explanation in *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 496-7, quoted in Keller, *Prayer*, 76.

¹⁰ Andrew Murray, *In the School of Prayer*, 166.

To come to the Father in Jesus' name, not our own, is to come fully cognizant that we are being heard because of the costly grace in which we stand.

Jesus' character and work is what makes it possible too be heard by God.

So does this mean that we always have to say, "In Jesus' name" at the end of our prayer?

No, because it isn't a magical formula; those words aren't a signal flare shot up to heaven to get God's attention to listen to your prayer.

It is a conscious awareness and trust in Christ for our salvation and acceptance not relying on our own credibility or record.

It is, essentially, to reground our relationship with God in the saving work of Jesus over and over again.

How many of you have ever been in line at a club and there's a bouncer outside keeping people from getting in?

No one raised their hand because you're like, "Even if I did I can't confess that here!"

I can't speak from experience, just from movies; it's like you get up to the bouncer and he asks, "Name?"

If you give your name, you ain't getting in because there's only one name on the list that's qualified for access... Jesus, and because of His grace alone you can use his name alone to enter.

In the same way, every single time we pray, we ought to pray conscious of the magnitude of God's grace in Christ.

Here's the challenge: Don't let a single prayer to God come out of your mouth that isn't coming from a mind that is aware of and a heart that is in awe of the Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus.

Praying in the name of Jesus, with this understanding, is the most important part of your prayer.

Jesus says, "Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive."¹¹

So we pray by grace alone in His name alone... not ours or anyone else's.

Conclusion (Cast Vision):

Can't you see everything that Christ bought for us at the cost of his life?

Jesus won for us access to approach and request of the Father.

Jesus bought for us the ability to pray.

His blood paid for you to have the gift of knowing God, and in response, have personal communication with God.

What price tag can you put on prayer? Christ is the most valuable possession we have, and prayer is the chief prize he won for us.

So then, let us draw near to the throne of grace and ask of our good king the things we need in the name of Jesus alone.

Communion:

Therefore...

¹¹ John 16:24