

# Talking With God

## God's Ultimate Goal

Let's be sure we have first things first. Prayer comes before salvation, both spiritually and historically.

The parent of one of the new children on the team pulls their lawn chair up next to yours and says, "I really appreciate the way you prayed before the game."

"Oh, sure, no problem."

"No, I mean it. I could tell that you care about my child and it sounded like you were actually talking to God. I mean, it wasn't like a prayer; it was more like you were talking to Him. Anyway, I appreciate it and I was wondering how you learned to pray like that."

In the conversation that follows, you learn that this person is not only new to the community, but new in their relationship to God. The next Sunday, you meet them in the church parking lot and they accompany you to Bible study and worship.

What's their prayer experience going to be? Will they hear others 'talk' to God like you did at the game or will they hear public prayers that are little more than spiritual speeches aimed in God's direction? Are they likely to be led in such a way that they'll actually learn to talk to God for themselves?

Prayer is the heart of every Christian's relationship with God. Ask a hundred followers of Christ to relate how they came to have a personal relationship with Him and the testimony of every one will involve prayer. Ask an old saint to tell you how they maintained their faith

through years of trial and tribulation and at the heart of their enduring strength you'll find a personal relationship with God nurtured in prayer.

There's nothing more important to the growth and maturity of a Christian than learning to talk with God. To what greater goal can you aspire than helping others better communicate with their Heavenly Father?

Many lament the low priority given to prayer today, but few are prepared to do anything about it. The fact that you're holding this book indicates that you're destined to be one of those few. Whether you're a soccer mom, Bible study leader, or pastor, you can learn the skills to lead prayer effectively.

Before we go further, let's be sure we have first things first. You think I'm going to say salvation, but that's not it. Yes, if you are to lead others in prayer, you certainly must be a follower of Christ, but the truth of the matter is, prayer comes before salvation, both spiritually and historically.

Spiritually, all of us must come to God as sinners in a humble prayer of faith and repentance 'before' we receive the gift of salvation. True, many people come to Christ without saying a classic 'sinner's prayer', but they aren't saved without 'communicating' in faith with the Lord.

Historically, Adam and Eve were talking to God regularly before there was ever a need for salvation. Can you imagine them walking casually with the Lord through the Garden of Eden, discussing the beauty of a flower or the uniqueness of some animal? Ultimately, that's what prayer is, a conversation with God.

Ever since sin ended His daily walks with Adam and Eve, the Heavenly Father has been doing everything necessary to bring man back into that conversational relationship.

**Jesus' death on the cross was the climax of this redemption plan and made it possible for us to have a 'right' relationship with God. However, salvation isn't His ultimate goal - a personal conversational relationship is.**

Did you know that God instructed the ancient Israelites to build two altars in the Old Testament temple? Everyone's familiar with the bronze altar just outside the temple where sacrifices were made, but there was a golden altar inside. Of the two, it actually had the more prominent position, directly in front of the mercy seat where the presence of God was. This altar of incense and the sweet aroma that ascended from

it every day represented the people's prayers. It was the altar of prayer.

Do you remember what the Heavenly Father did immediately after Jesus died, even while his body was still on the cross? God ripped open the veil in the temple. The veil separated God's presence from what? The altar of prayer. Now, like Adam and Eve in the garden, every follower of Christ has access to the holy of holies and conversations with the Almighty. That's pretty amazing and that's His ultimate goal.

No matter how far you go as a prayer leader, never forget that the ultimate prayer is a personal conversation with the Heavenly Father. Never be satisfied to just make spiritual speeches aimed in God's direction.

The problem today is not that followers of Christ don't want to pray, they do. What they don't want is to be bored by stuffy public prayers or manipulated into praying out loud when they don't know how.

Like that parent at the ball game, people are looking for authenticity - searching for the real thing. We have it, so let's share it by becoming effective prayer guides.

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## STUDY GUIDE:

1. Ultimately, prayer is a \_\_\_\_\_ with God.
2. Of the two altars associated with the Old Testament temple, the altar of \_\_\_\_\_ had the more prominent position because it was located just in front of the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Jesus death on the cross made it possible for you to have a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with God, but His ultimate goal is to have a \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with you.

**Discussion question:** What do you think is the difference in an authentic public prayer and what the author calls 'spiritual speeches aimed in God's direction'?