



Prayer is a natural, human instinct ...

George Herbert (1593-1633)

Prayer is the ultimate test of a person's true spiritual condition . . . Everything we do in our Christian life is easier than prayer.

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones

“We must learn to pray. We have to ...”

Tim Keller

Issue: If prayer is so natural, so instinctual – if prayer is being human, why is it so hard?
... why must we struggle with prayer?



Common struggles in prayer:

- **Experience:** ... *“I tried prayer and it didn’t work.”*
- **Worldview:** ... *“God is real, but He’s not personal.”*
- **Self-reliance:** *“I’ve got things under control.”*
- **Contentment:** ... *“Life is good – I don’t need anything.”*
- **Busyness:** ... *“I really don’t have time to pray.”*
- **Fear, Guilt & Shame:** ... *“The last person God wants to speak with is me.”*
- **Purpose:** ... *“Prayer is for emergencies, and best left to the professionals!”*

Last Week:

Understanding prayer is not the issue ...
Knowing God is the issue!



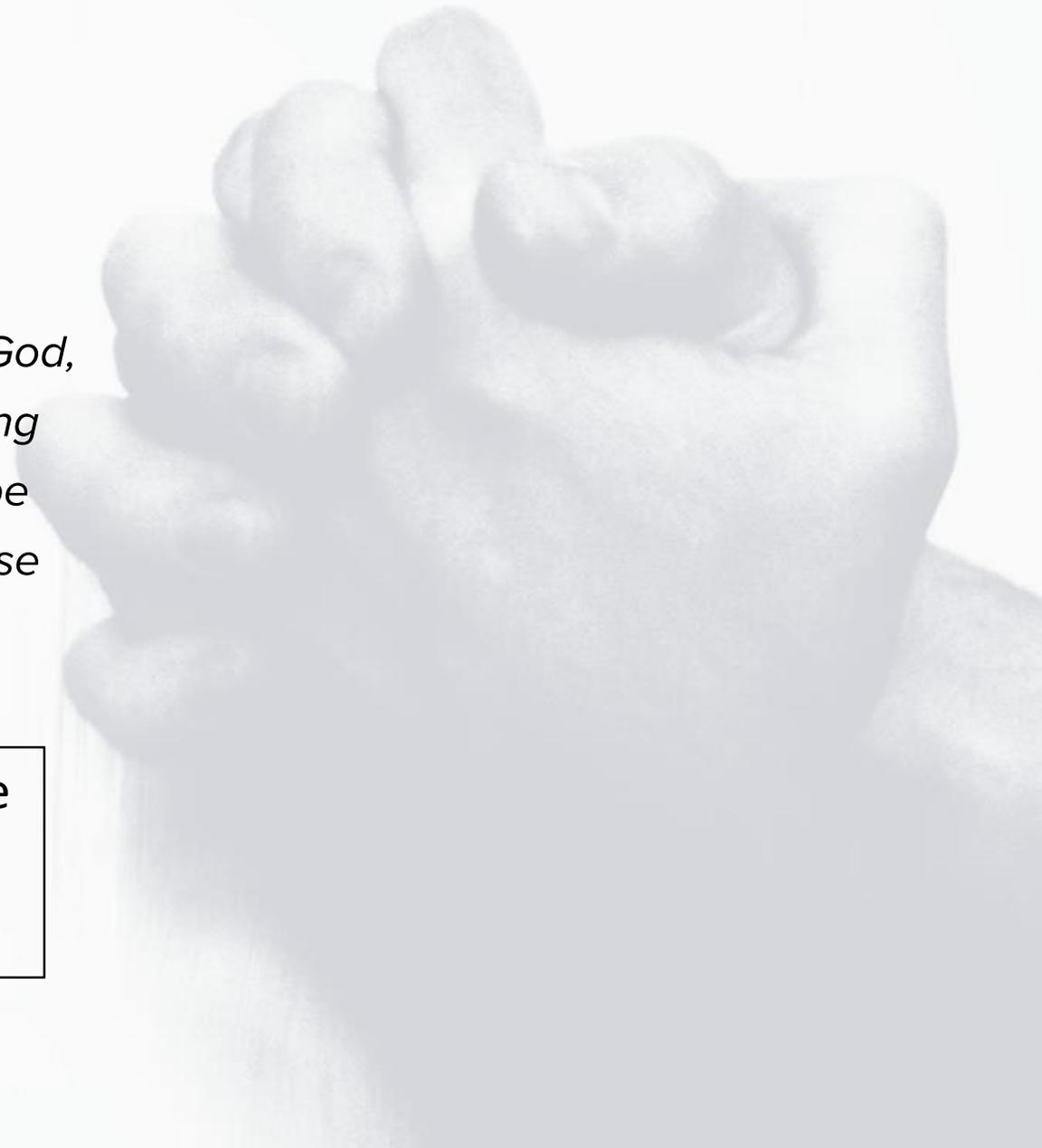
Prayer begins with our humanity
encountering God's divinity.



1. *“Blessed...” (to be congratulated ...)*
2. *“are the poor in spirit”*
3. *“for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

“When you come to point of internal poverty – when in your spirit you know that you are like a beggar before God, pleading for His help, completely powerless and knowing that even your best is not good enough ... “You are to be Congratulated, full of joy and envied by others!! Because you have arrived at the gates of God’s Kingdom!!”

Spiritual poverty is where prayer begins, because spiritual poverty is where knowing God begins ... but this is not where we remain.



12 One day Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Take these people up to the Promised Land.’ And you have told me, ‘I know you by name, and I look favorably on you.’ 13 If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor.” ...

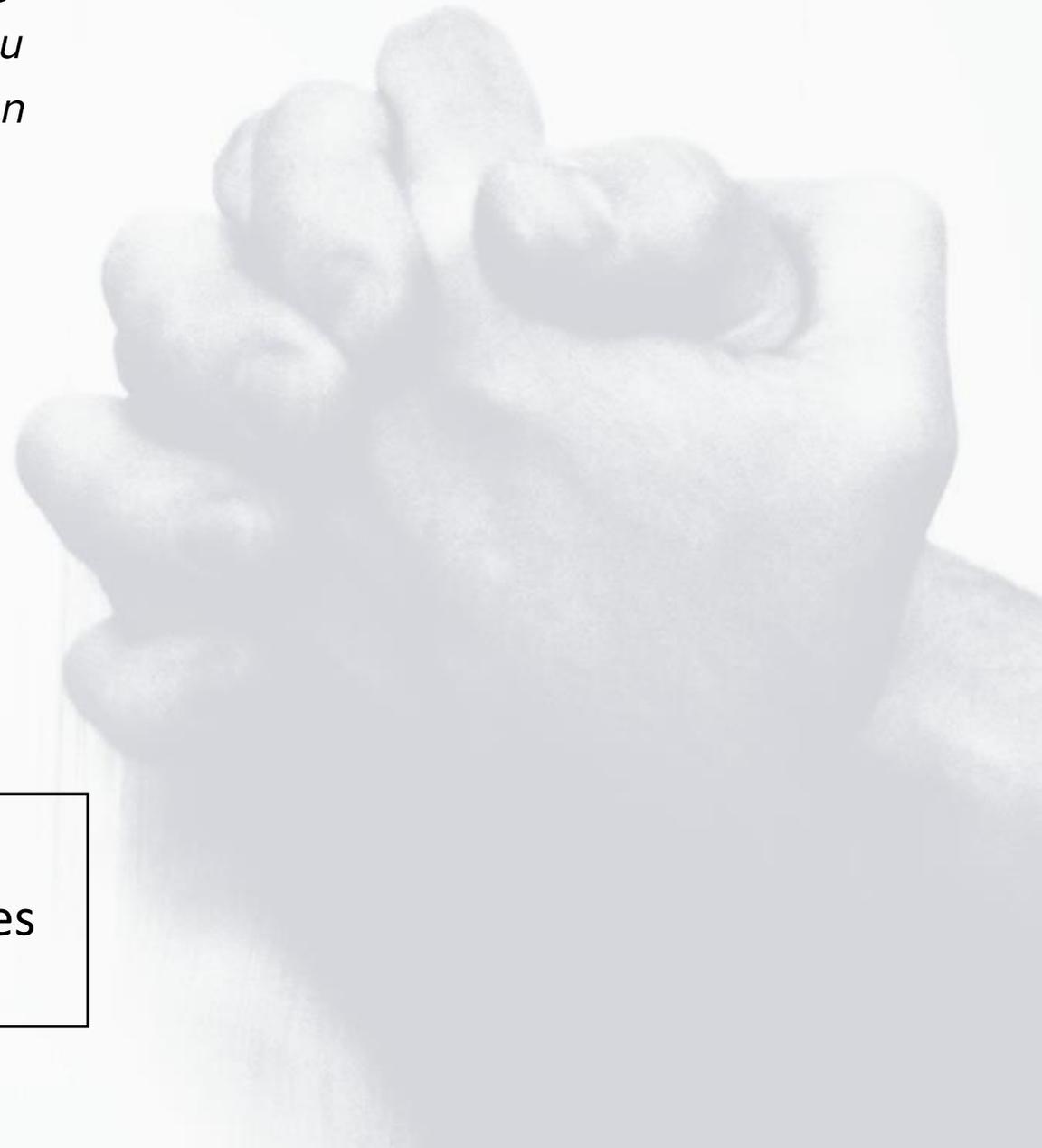
17 The LORD replied to Moses, “I will indeed do what you have asked, for I do look favorably on you, and I do know you by name.”

18 Moses responded, “Then show me your glorious presence.”

Exodus 33

This Morning:

Knowing God (and learning prayer) also requires that God’s divinity encounters our humanity.



Truth: It is not enough to know who *I am* in the presence of God ... I must also know who *God is!*

The character of our prayers will be deeply determined by the character of God as we know him, and have experienced him. It is true to say, "Tell me who your God is, and I will tell you how to pray."

James Houston

Our humanity encountering God's divinity may elicit from us, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*" ...

... BUT what is God's divine response?

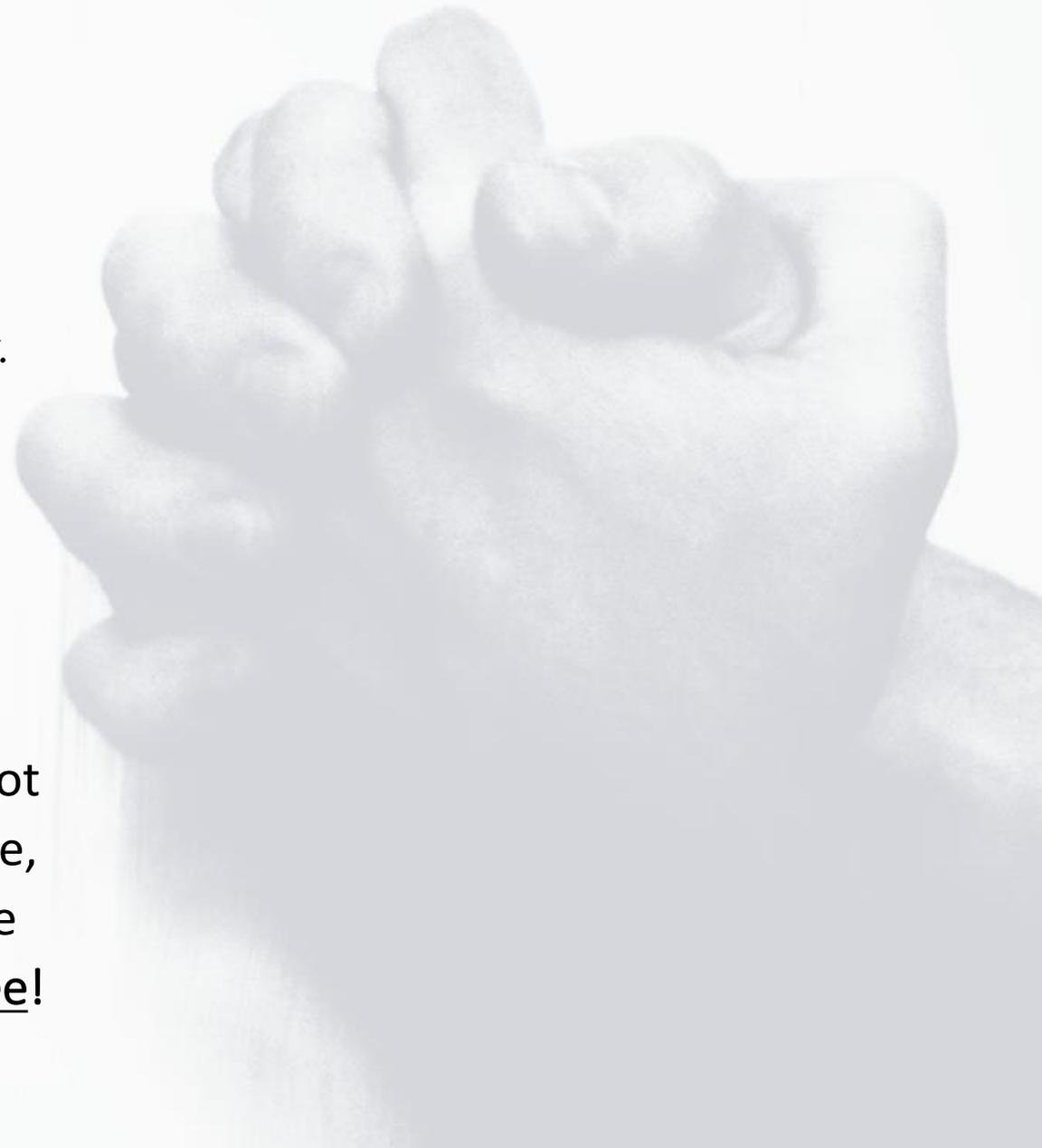


19 The LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy and compassion to anyone I choose. 20 But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live."

21 The LORD continued, "Look, stand near me on this rock.

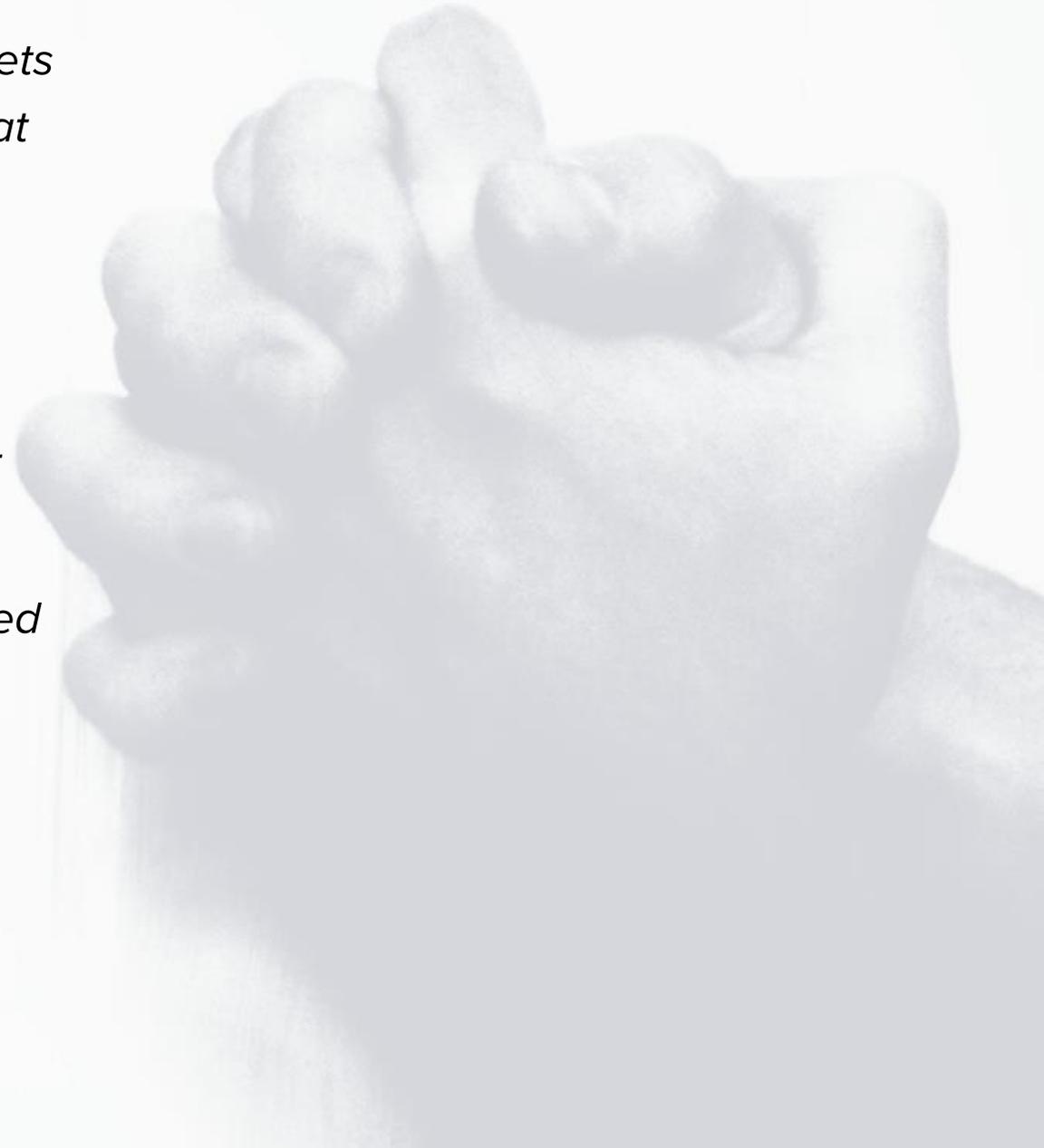
22 As my glorious presence passes by, I will hide you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and let you see me from behind. But my face will not be seen."

The Point: God is stating that His greatest glory is not even His power that created the Universe, and that delivered Moses and the people from the Egyptians ... There is more to see!



34 Then the LORD told Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones. I will write on them the same words that were on the tablets you smashed. ² Be ready in the morning to climb up Mount Sinai and present yourself to me on the top of the mountain. ³ No one else may come with you. In fact, no one is to appear anywhere on the mountain. Do not even let the flocks or herds graze near the mountain.”

⁴ So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He chiseled out two tablets of stone like the first ones and early the next morning he climbed Mount Sinai carrying the two stone tablets in his hands.



⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'I AM, the LORD – the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin, yet not leaving the guilty unpunished ..."

Exodus 34

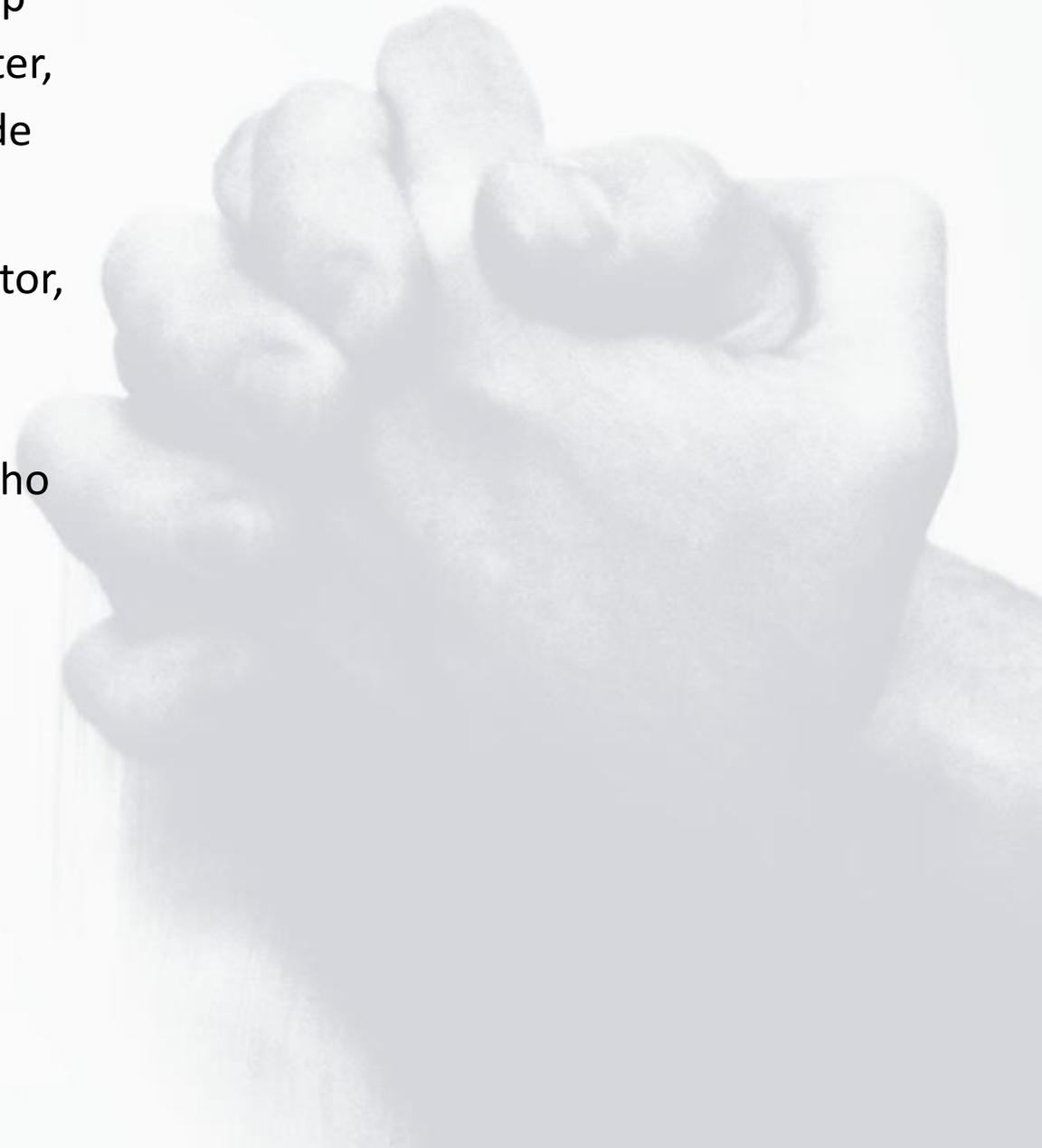


This is the first time in recorded Scripture that God opens up His heart and reveals to the human race His nature, character, disposition and temperament ... Who He really is deep inside Himself, at the very essence of His Being ...

Up to this point, God had only revealed Himself as the Creator, the Almighty One, the Self-Existent One, the Eternal one, the Supreme One, the Sovereign Ruler, the Judge of all the Earth, the God of Heaven & Earth, the God who sees and who provides ... the LORD, Yahweh, I AM.

But now, God gives us the first glimpse into His inner Heart, and the very center of Himself – the glory of His goodness.

John Hutchinson



What the LORD reveals about Himself:

- *I AM God.*
- *I AM full of mercy.*
- *I AM full of grace.*
- *I AM full of patience.*
- *I AM overflowing with goodness.*
- *I AM overflowing with truth.*
- *I AM faithful to keep my covenant of mercy.*
- *I AM eager to forgive every kind of sin.*
- *I AM full of justice, through all generations.*



The Point: We approach God morally bankrupt and stained with sin ... *BUT God approaches us* resplendent in love & affection, forgiveness & compassion, grace & truth.

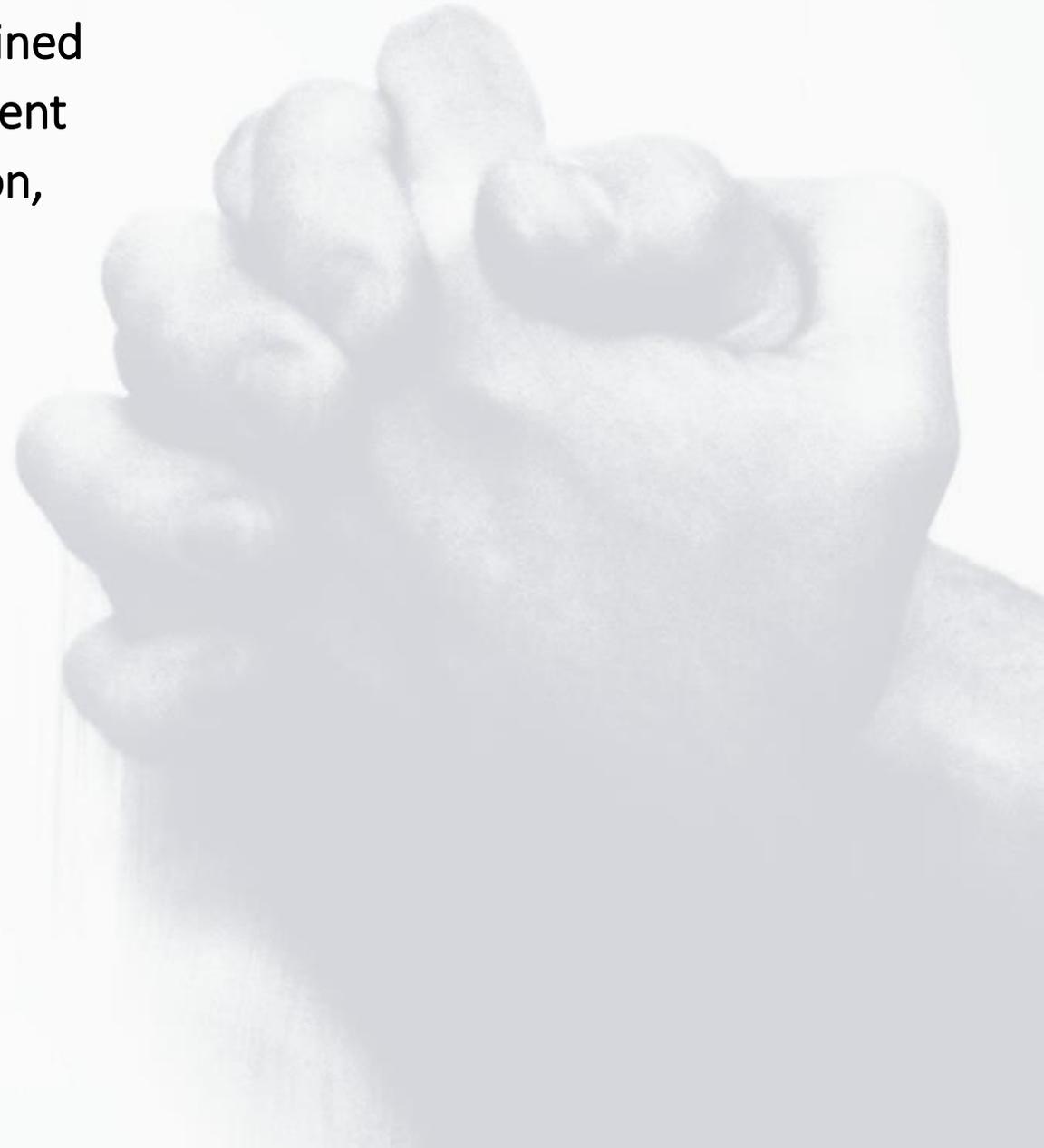
*⁸ The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

*⁹ The LORD is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.*

Psalm 145

*⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Blessed (to be congratulated!) is the one
who puts their trust in Him!*

Psalm 34

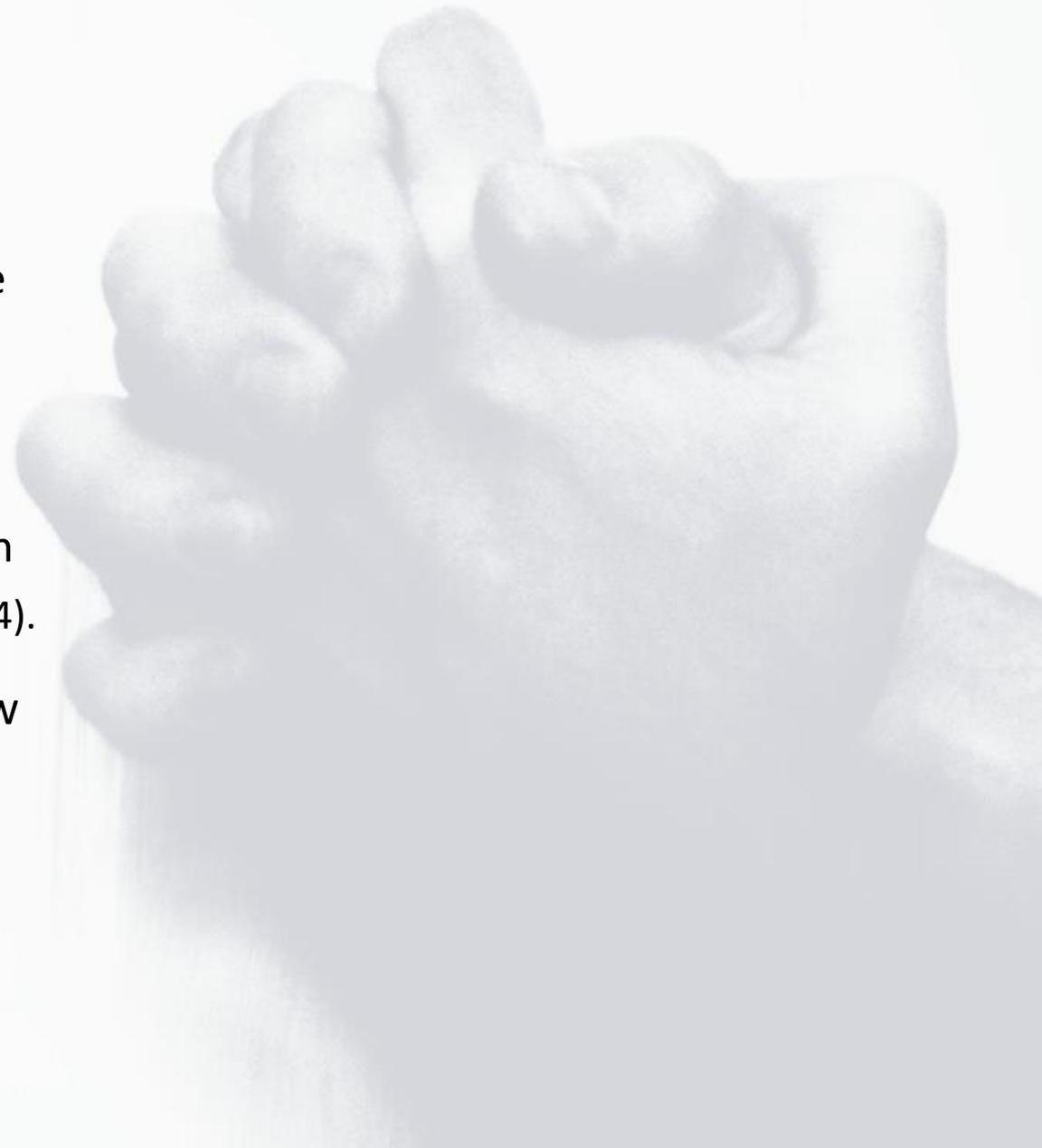


The 10 Commandments that God had spoken previously (Exodus 20) reveal His main standards for human behavior, but they do not provide much insight into God's wonderful love and goodness – His Heart.

When God spoke those 10 Commandments, Moses and the people were very afraid and trembled. But when He spoke His nature, His character and His temperament – who He really is deep inside His heart – God's glory so powerfully came upon Moses, that his face was still shining like the sun forty days later when he returned from the mountain (Ex. 34).

What a difference there is between these two: God's law produces fear, frustration and failure. But God's glory produces grace, freedom and love.

Hutchinson



God's fullest revelation of His goodness is in Jesus!

1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. 2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son (Jesus). ...3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.

Hebrews 1



What does this have to do with prayer?

¹⁴ So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. ¹⁵ This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

Hebrews 4



Question to Ponder: How well do you *know* God?

- Is He to you the Stern Judge, who despises sin, and those who walk in it?
- Is He to you the Demanding Parent, who reminds you that your best is never enough?
- Is He to you the Heavenly King, who abounds in kindness, and is rich in love; who is eager to forgive you, and who will never abandon you?
- Is He your Good Father, who loves you with all of His heart, comforts you in every circumstance, heals your hurts and provides all you need?

Which One is the God of your prayer life?



¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ... and pray that you ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3

