Prayer is a natural, human instinct ...

George Herbert (1593-1663)

Prayer is the only entryway into genuine self-knowledge. It is also the main way we experience deep change – the reordering of our loves ... Prayer is simply the key to everything we need to do and be in life.

We must learn to pray. We have to.

Tim Keller
There are parts of our calling, works of the Holy Spirit, and defeats of the darkness that will come no other way than through furious, fervent, faith-filled, unceasing prayer.

Beth Moore

Is prayer your steering wheel, or your spare tire?

Corrie ten Boom

It is not well for a man to pray cream and live skim milk.

Henry Ward Beecher
There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life. It 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 ...”

**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 stumbling blocks 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!”

A minister may fill his pews, his membership rolls and the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more.

John Owen 1616-1683
People talk as if *prayer is the way we get God to give us what we want*. Those who think this way seek prayer promises, prayer techniques, prayer locations, prayer mediators, and other methods they believe will influence God or place Him under obligation. But the Bible points in virtually the opposite direction, indicating prayer, communication with the living God, as a means *He uses to give us what He knows we need.*

Daniel Henderson

**Message in a Sentence:**
Understanding prayer is not the issue ... Knowing God is the issue!
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them ...

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority – quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

Matthew 5 - 7

Truth: What amazed everyone about Jesus was his spiritual authority . . . how he knew God was different . . . radically different!
This Morning:
Prayer begins with our humanity encountering God’s divinity.

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:
3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5
1. "Blessed..."

Gk. - markarioi - “happy”; “fortunate”; “to be envied”
- literally: “to be congratulated is the person ...!”

Blessed (markarioi) are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, and meditate on it through the day and through and night.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

Psalm 1
1. “Blessed...” (to be congratulated ...)

2. “are the poor in spirit”

   Note: 2 common Gk. words for “poor”:
   
   i. *penes* - you have nothing in reserve... and must work very hard to scratch out enough for each day.
   
   ii. *ptochos* - you have nothing in reserve, and no ability to earn anything ... your poverty is so crushing that all you can do is beg.
       
       • no resources, no abilities, no hope ... you are utterly impoverished.
       
       • solely dependent on the kindness of others.
       
       • if you had any pride ... it’s gone, and has been replaced with resignation & desperation.
Typically in the ancient world it would so humiliate a man to be a beggar that he would crouch, cover his face with a garment, and hold out his hand ashamed to let even the giver know his identity.

MacArthur
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 … shipwrecked … finished!

… “You are to be Congratulated, full of joy and envied by others!! Because you have arrived at the gates of God’s Kingdom!!”

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

New Living Translation
**The Point:** You want into God’s Kingdom?…. *this* is where you must begin... understanding clearly that you are not capable of entering:

- You are not smart enough to enter.
- You are not good enough to enter.
- You cannot work hard enough to enter.

**Note:** Jesus is saying that even your *best* is not good enough!

---

This is where prayer, too, begins ... *because* this is where your journey with God begins.
Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God.”

Luke 18
Truth:  God generously welcomes those who seek Him ... but the path to knowing Him is narrow, and found only by those who come to the end of themselves.

... and this is where prayer begins!

6 God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
7 So then, submit yourselves to God . . . 8 Come near to him, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners! Purify your hearts, you hypocrites! 9 Be sorrowful, cry, and weep; change your laughter into crying, your joy into gloom! 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

James 4
Prayer begins with our humanity encountering God’s divinity.
Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, \( ^5 \) made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.  

(Ephesians 2)