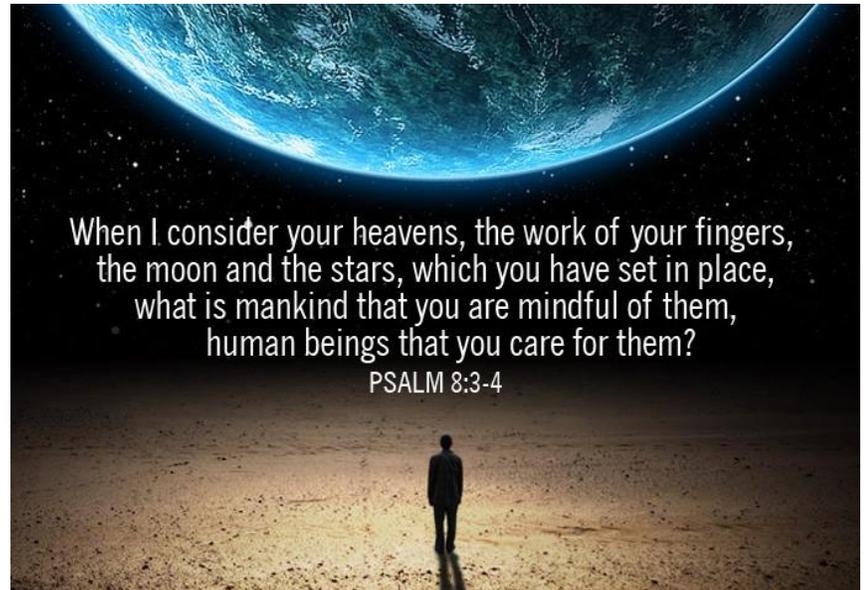


## The Beginning of Prayer

Whenever I read [Psalm 8](#), I am reassured by the message that we matter a great deal to God. I am particularly struck by verse 4 where the writer simply marvels at God's attention to us: "What is (humanity) that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

Yet, I am dismayed that we, though loved by God, also live in a world in which people just like us ignore, deny or actively oppose what God calls us to be and to do--namely, loving servants of God. We struggle to cope with people who may not recognize that many of us struggle with state(s) of apathy, depression, anxiety or some other burden. If we know that we are part of God's family, we need to remember that we are always loved by God no matter what state of emotion, spirit, mind, body or relationship that we currently experience.



Followers of Jesus Christ and that is what we are called to be, need to be vigilant in maintaining our faith in God. The alternative is to watch, or to later be told that someone else watched, as we slowly lost our faith in God. Yes, prayer is a way to maintain our faith in God, but how many of us pray about our actual relationship with God? It may be difficult to pray for anything but a list of what we want "fixed." We may be overwhelmed by what is happening to us and around us. Still, simply telling God our list or describing our current suffering is not all that we need focus on as we pray. Those are not wasted prayers.

However, there are other ways to pray for other reasons than fixing all that is broken in the world. It involves taking the spotlight off of us and our particular lists of problems and then directing our prayer to God as we seek to know more of God. Psalm 8 does this as the writer addresses God with words that seem to explode with wonder and joy: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." (Vs. 1a) It is a remarkable prayer of praise and wonder to God Who is truly aware of and loves each of us including you and me!

The Psalmist begins where prayer must begin by recognizing God immediately. The one who prays must not get tied up in flowery phrases to try to impress God or anyone else with the depth of our desire and ability to praise God. God is not impressed with our willingness to make a special effort to please God. God is much more interested in how willing we are to open our hearts to God so that we know that God knows how much we are hurting, how frightened we are and how very much we need to believe that God is with us.

We also encounter other types of problems in prayer that can interfere with our progress on our spiritual journeys with and towards Jesus the Christ. One of them is to be distracted by some of the prayers written by well-known people in the Church whether ancient or modern. The prayers that don't help me at all are the ones that do not speak directly to God.

Literally a few hours before I wrote this blog I read a devotional prayer that was written by a well-known and well-respected Christian leader. This writer has recorded some wonderful prayers, and he has also published several books on spiritual growth to teach us as we seek to love and serve God and to love all of God's people.

However, I found it impossible to use the prayer that I read this morning because it was not a message from a person's inner spiritual self to God. It was a description of what prayer can be like. In other words, it was a brief message about God. It was not a message to God. It sounded like something that a person might use in a classroom. It did not seem to be a way to express our deepest inner feelings about God and all God has done and is still doing.

Finally, I know that many of us find it difficult to pray. Sometimes that is because we were taught that we must come to God by first remembering, reviewing and sometimes re-experiencing the guilt that comes with sin. Only then can we take the next step and ask God to forgive our sins. OK. That is a good thing to do. However, we don't always hear or read much less remember any of the wonderful words of God's grace that we are forgiven. Instead, we may find that part of our mind is repeating, even as we try to pray, a mantra that sounds something like this: "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3 NIV). That inner urge to give voice to our unworthiness as we begin our prayers can be helpful, but sometimes it also needs to be silenced by God's grace so that we can continue to trust God to heal our souls.

How can that happen especially if we cannot forgive ourselves for what we have done or failed to do? It happens through God's grace sometimes when we are least expecting it! It happens when we ask for grace to let go of the underlying self-hate and self-judgment that many of us carry within our souls. Each one of us who has unresolved guilt can take another step on our spiritual journey by reading and listening carefully to the rest of [Psalm 51](#). Especially in verse 10 we can join with the author in a very positive prayer saying, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. "

There are many steps on the road with God and towards God. Beginning to pray is an important one. However, remembering to pray to God and not just about God is actually vital. Among the Psalms that I have used to help when I am emotionally, spiritually or physically fragile I find Psalm 8 and Psalm 51 to be very helpful. When all is said and done, we can only start where we are. The Good News is that God has already cleared the way for us to continue our journey to and with God.

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre