Research Unit
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Research Assembly
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Prayer Chart Lecture

By David Scott

Something happened to me several years ago on a weekend that addressed me so deeply that I've never forgotten it. Somewhere in the midst of that weekend, someone stood up and almost as if off the cuff said, "Prayer is a problem."

I knew prayer was a problem. I even suspected God knew prayer was a problem. But I didn't know anyone else knew that. And so when that person said that, my life was utterly changed. For at that point I was given permission to once again wrestle with my being with the activity by which and in which human beings are human beings. I want to underline what was said before, that every human being prays. There was a time in my theologizing when I used to like to do a little short course about no man is an atheist in our time---every man has a god before which he stands. I had the same similar kind of short course with prayer, that every human being prays to some god. But now I want to remind you of where my struggle has been--that that is wrong: that every human being alive prays to God,period. Not a god, but God. And this means that you and I are daring to involve ourselves in that activity which is raw freedom. It's sheer creativity. It's radical decision making. It's daring to pour your life out in concrete action on behalf of every human being. This means that since that person said "Prayer is a problem" things have not gotten better. They've gotten worse.

I'm not sure that that's bad. I think I would already have decided to cash in what chips I've accumulated in this thing we call the Movement but for one thing: and that was that someone dared to place before me a tool that allowed me to put into my own struggle what I knew and what I did not know about prayer. That tool is what we want to look at this morning.

Everyone should be within reach of the latest issue of Image. If you're not, reach now, because we want to spend the next few minutes talking about what we've come to call the prayer chart. You'll find it in two places. One is in the center fold where it's placed within the dynamic of what we've called the Solitaries. You'll find a more detailed picture of it toward the back.

I have a colleague many of you know. His name is Robert Fishel, and I've learned a great deal from that strange character, but one of the things is that the best way to begin to struggle with something like the prayer chart is that you always leave it blank. That for me is always a problem because I've observed that as people begin to look at something say like a prayer chart that they are immediately drawn to or excited by something interior, when in the first instance that's not what we're concerned about at all. In the first instance the only thing we're concerned about are the categories across the top and the categories down the side. Now as you glance at that you'll see that the categories across the top we've called the formal categories. You might want to call them the forms of the classical ways of dealing with this activity: confession, gratitude, petition and intercession. It might even be helpful for you to rehearse the daily office across this kind of a picture in terms of where these particular forms fall within the daily office. Down the side we've called the categories the phenomenological or the existential, the experiential in terms of you and I experiencing in the midst of our every day existence what it means to be those who pray.

I want to begin and just talk our way through this for a few minutes. And maybe just to say one other thing. The reason I've left my chart blank is again to try to short cut anyone pointing down here and saying "What does that word mean?" And you know this happens in Odysseys all the time. If you've ever been in an Odyssey or taught in an Odyssey (You don't teach in an Odyssey, do you?)--operated an Odyssey, you know that happens

all the time. You're right in the middle of an exercise and someone says, "What does succour mean?" And you see often what you need to rehearse is what you already know about methodology in terms of twentieth century language and twentieth century theological education. It's very clear what succour means. It means whatever petition means when it's shoved down to the intervention level, that's what succour is. Now you can go to a dictionary if you want to but you're going to be surprised if you look up some of these words, if they are even there. Which is to say that the way you and I fill that box or fill that category is to dare struggle with that kind of meaning in terms of the level of experience and the classical form. So maybe we could just work our way through a bit.

I suspect that in terms of my experience that this first little box up here became very claer to me when I began to self-consciously struggle with the daily office. That is to say, it broke through to me in a way that was almost over-powering that the Church was right in starting with confession. The Church didn't wait for the twentieth century to understand what life was all about: they did it a number of years ago in saying that the first thing you and I are faced with any time we stop and reflect on who we are and what we are about is that we have to dare to acknowledge our own propensity to escape--or, it's not even our propensity to escape. It's our ability to escape, our having trained ourselves to escape, and that that acknowledgement is the only place a human being can begin. Or finally, I'm almost infinitely capable of taking any situation, any set of relationships and using that to avoid the responsibility to be a human being. Which is to say when we're dealing in the category of confession we're dealing with the category of sin, and the first level of that is daring to say,"Yes, that's who I am as a human being."

But again as most of you probably have realized, even when you do the general prayer of confession, it's almost like you have to say it good and loud to try and drown out this next level, which is the very personal, the very particular aspects of that which I would call escapism--the category there being personal violations. That is to say, confession always comes to you and me in the very, very particular. Where is it that I have very self-consciously used my colleagues to avoid the decision of being a human being. Whereever that occurs, that kind of reality is there.

Again, it doesn't stop there, and that's why this move for me, in terms of levels, is very dangerous, because what that throws you and me over against is our own struggle of who we are ass a human being. That is to say, when I began to be conscious of those situations where I've self-consciously violated the life and humanity of another person, then what I'm thrown against is my own particular patterns of sin. Joseph Wesley Mathews and I have a very particular verse in the grace song: it goes something like this: "Year after year the longed for perfections...." Is that it, Joseph? That's what I mean in terms of you dare to enter into your own struggles of how you for centuries have dared to be the one who acts like, if I can use the word, a worm that worms out of the situation, and that when you and I dare to confess at this level, we're standing before that reality of our very, very own particular patterns. One of my colleagues said one time that the frightening thing about those patterns is that they reappear in different forms and in different ways.

The final level or expenditure here again for me is a rather recent one, and that's a little bit of a confession, I suspect, that this box has been relatively dark in my awareness until not too long ago. It has to do with seeing that when you and I struggle to be a human being and stand before life as it is, we are struggling the same struggle that every human being struggles. That finally when you and I experience the pain of being David Wayne Scott we are experiencing the pain of being humanity. Now I discovered I didn't realize that. In fact I discovered I had a very interesting kind of system in terms of pain. The way I recognized the pain in other human beings was if somehow or other it looked like my pain. If it didn't look like my pain, then somehow or other it wasn't

there. I carried that around for a long time until the Lord sent me to Irdia. I even was able to do it there until I got to Calcutta. We welked into a busti in one part that had been sectioned off and isolated because a family that lived there had a history of being lepers. We were being escorted around by a Jesuit priest who very intentionally wouldn't tell us where we were going. He just told us to come on, and you know, being obedient, we went on. We got into this courtyard and I realized that something was not right there, that I shouldn't be there. As I began to look around my eyes began to open, and I realized why I shouldn't be there, because I was scared to death of people who have leprosy. Now something happened to me. The actual situation was that a very young child, that may or may not be a leper, that's beside the point, walked up and put his hand i in mine. Now, mind you, I know everything most doctors know about leprosy in terms of not being complacent, but that didn't matter a bit. What I experienced there was that there was a pain that was not mine, and at that point something snapped in me and all of a sudden that pain that was not mine was mine. Then the suffering of the world becomes your suffering and you become the one for whom tears are not sentimentality but large drops of deep compassion for a world that's deeply in pain. That's what it means to finally be the one who lives the confessional life.

The Lord didn't leave us here. Again, maybe you want to rehearse the drama. Do you see what would have happened if the Church had given up right there and decided that they didn't have time to finish the rest of the liturgy? Do you realize what would have happened? I'm like some other people you'll hear up here. I'm prone to exaggerate. But I'll put it this way. If the drama had stopped right there there would have been mass suicide. In fact civilization would have disappeared in an instant, for when you stop at this point, you have nothing but an unbearable guilt, and it is at this point that the Church in its wisdom said the word, "You're forgiven!" As the one who's hated himself all his life, that can't stand lepers, you're forgiven." The word. And in terms of the prayer here, it's the daring to embrace that Word, daring to take it into yourself. I've begun to use old language lately. Do you know what a hard shell Baptist preacher is? Are you familiar with that category? I've got an uncle who's a hard shelled Baptist preacher who if he heard me say what I'm about to say would kick up his heels three or four times. That is to say, to dare to embrace that Word is to dare to let that Word wash you clean, And without it, you need not finish the chart, because where you're pushed in terms of this level is to turn again to who you are as a human being. I can hardly even put down splendid there. I'll just put down vices. But you see that's what happens. You know, it's like nothing is changed. It's just like it was, but everything is different. That is, those aspects, yes, every aspect of my being which I have said was a weight that could not be carried, in light of the Word becomes all I've got. Which means that I dare march through my life and let that Word say "Forgiven" to all the vices that I am. And oh, my! I mean personally, historically, sociologically, any way you want to look at it. In Confession I was very clear that the Lord has very little room for an egotistic, extroverted male, and in Gratitude the Lord says, that's what I want. In Confession the last thing the Lord needs is a citizen of the United States of America. In Gratitude, the Lord is crying for people to be citizens of the United States of America. You see, that's one of our splendid vices. And we could go on, I suspect.

And again, the category of counting your blessings. But mind you, when you count your belssings on this chart you don't sit down while you count them. You count them while you're doing them. I'm going to come to that in a minute but I thought I'd better get that in in case any one thought I was going to sit around the rest of my life counting my blessings, which is a temptation when you dare embrace the Word, to sit down and count your blessings. I find Bonhoeffer's "Community" paper very helpful at that point where he talks about daring to give thanks for what you have rather than what you don't have. Do you remember that part? One morning in collegium, I suspect it was during one of our Order Councils--I'm going to share a little secret. Some of you may not have been here during what we call Order Council. After two months of teaching out we gather for Order Council, and it gets a little bit hairy, particularly at the first part. It's like everybody has been scattered for two months and they've gathered up all their

complaints about having been called to do what they've been called to do. So when we gather back, for the first three sessions, that's all you hear, people complaining about having to do what they've been called to do. Well, one morning we were sitting there and one of my colleagues was demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that part of his heritage came out of a farm. Is that too cryptic? And the larger part of it, as a matter of fact. So I turned to my colleague who was standing next to me--that morning it happened to be my wife, and I said something like, "How did that guy ever get on our staff?" Do you see what kind of prayer I was praying there? I continued to listen to his horsiness, and finally I was intruded upon by an elbow in my ribs, which really caught me off guard, and my wife said to me, "Don't you realize he's the only colleague you've got? He's the only colleague you've got." Count your blessings. They're the only cadre you've got. They're the only congregation you've got. It's the only parish you've got.

In terms of gratitude and expenditure, what else can you put here but joy? But it's not simply joy; it's Unspeakable Joy. How do you talk about Unspeakable Joy?! Has it ever happened to you? I don't mean when all your comfort buttons get tuned up. Then it's not unspeakable. It's almost like I've got to make sure I've told everybody or whomever I'm relating with at that moment that it's really joy. What's being pointed at here is that-- this is speaking in tongues. Do you see that? Speaking in tongues. And I don't want to get off on that. It's daring to let that refreshed, washed clean, humanity that you are come out. That's the joy that's unspeakable, even at the risk of falling into subjectivity that you and I have been afraid of and rightly so for years. But when that happens, it's like electricity coming through. And mind you, that's a gift of God, and not something that you whomp up. That's a gift of God.

It's only here, after you've said yes to all that is and yourself and your situation in particular, that the question of expenditure or petition and intercession even come into the picture. Do you see how ridiculous it would be for you to go out to give yourself if you were still back over here in confession? I had a professor in seminary who had an illustration of this. He was one of the most gentle old men you'd ever want to meet. George Buttrick is his name. He used an illustration that fits here, that just rocked me in terms of this gentle old man saying this. He said that to go out and love your neighbor save that you've been addressed by the word, is like a tubercular patient licking the wounds of a cancerous victim. Do you see that? Until this has happened, what are you giving to your neighbor? You're giving something besides the word I'd want to submit. In terms of deciding to give yourself, one of the first things you encounter is helplessness, and Abject Helplessness I think is a helpful category there. Again, I don't think what we're talking about is when you and I find ourselves saying, "I can't do it. I can't do it." All of us know the trick in that one. Everyone of us know that faced with a situation where we start telling ourselves that we can't do it, down underneath we know that we're the only ones that can do it. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about abject helplessness. I mean when you weigh up that situation and you're helpless, period. Again, I found Bonhoeffer just a little bit helpful here. I almost want to share with you how I found this. Maybe it's helpful in terms of understanding that hymn about the Lord moving in mysterious ways. if I can sort of digress for a moment.

Fishel, Hilliard and Scott were assigned to New Orleans. That was a mistake to begin with. I don't think the cContenental Office ever got over it. We found ourselves a little time, and we really got missionally involved in New Orleans. Fishel and Hilliard went to an arcade and shot pinballs, and I couldn't stomach that so I made a tour of all the pornographic bookstores in New Orleans. While I was standing there my eye fell on a little narrow book between East Indian 96 ways and something else that just caught my eye. I don't know why it addressed me just then. What struck me even more as I looked down at it was that it said Bonhoeffer. I pulled it out, and I had to buy it out of guilt--just being caught. So I went up to the counter to pay the man, and he was greatly relieved that that book was being sold. He said he didn't understand, it didn't have any pictures in it. So I took it, and I put it away and didn't read it for a long time; but it's a very interesting little book. Bonhoeffer created a seminary. One of

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the things that he did was to start every morning's study off by sharing with his students his own theological struggle. And I mean some of those are just unbelievable. And this particular one deals primarily with the Lord's Prayer, primarily with that one phrase, "Lead us not into temptation." Now just very quickly, the point that he was trying to make in one portion was that all of us, all of us, are tempted. But probably what is the most frightening is that as what he calls natural man, we don't really pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Depending on which of the poles we're on, either the humility pole or the pride pole, we paay something like this, "Lord, lead me into temptation so I can show how strong I am." Or, "Lord, lead me into temptation so it'll be confirmed I'm a worm." Do you see that? Bonhoeffer says that what "Lead us not into temptation" is pointing to is that every human being, even the eschatological man, Jesus the Christ our Lord is faced in his life with that time when everything that he knows and has done and has been deserts him, even God himself. That's what helplessness is. When our high theolotical constructs desert us, when every word that you've picked up through the movement through 10 years turns to dust, that's helplessness. And it's in the midst of that that you dare to trust. And you don't trust in something, you trust in being itself--that even that one that's deserted you, you dare trust.

This means that in terms of passion, you become a sign, a sign of one who lives out of the word. For me it's in this box that I'm confronted with my propensity of being a cynic, because to dare to be a sign of the word takes your cynicism and drives it deeply, deeply into your heart. It's here that you're called upon to honor all men. You're called upon to honor the structures of society. This somethmes happens when we're calling news to mind. It's wrenching to hear the cynicism that reeks when someone says, "Nixon" and "Agnew." It's here that you dare to honor all men, not some men, but all men. You honor all structures. You honor all of creation, and become a sign of the vision of the resurrection, if I could use those kind of words.

At the level of intervention a sense of need is not so much external as it is internal. How in the world am I sustained in the midst of my saying I can't do it, I can't do it. I discovered a long time ago that physically, intellectually, I have limits. That is to say, I m fairly clear I couldn't pick up 500 pounds right now. I couldn't run 9 miles. But within those limits I discovered I had no idea of what I could do physically. And for all of you (--and I wish David McClesky was here because it's taken me 5 years to come up with a theological argument for football), if you're of that kind let me just witness to you that one of the places whrre I learned what it means to <u>hang in there</u> was playing football. The other place was in the army, but I don't want to talk about that one right now. But the point is, where do you gather that strength? How do you dare continue on when everything says you can't go any further? Is this when you cry for help?--deep, deep out of the far corner of the greatness that you are and the mystery that you are.

In terms of expenditure--oh, and I tell you, that word levitation. I've had almost as much fun with that word as I used to have with the miracles. I don't know whether if you were raised in the liberal context like I was--I had at least four million ways to explain away the miracles. I've got about that many to handle levitation--all the way from abstract mental stories beyond myself to whatever. But it's here and only here that you and I experience the possibility of doing the impossible. That is, the possibility becomes not abstraction but a reality. Again, one of my colleagues caught me off guard one day and just said, "You know if you stood right there on that table and decided to, you could levitate." In that long (snap) all my rationality flooded in, all the way from "What a stupid thing to do," to "He's crazy, he's had too much to drink," which meant might, I couldn't do it. But you see, he put a sign up which said, "Yeah! Yeah! I can do it." It's at this point that you dare pray that prayer that says, "Yeah! Yeah! I'm the one."

In terms of intercession, again I want to borrow from my friend Bonhoeffer. I never had experienced Paragraph Three of Bonhoeffer that we study on the weekends as being a paragraph about prayer until one weekend--and I don't know why this always happens, a little old lady came up after the seminar. (I'm always being deceived by little old ladies. I feel like Mountain sometimes; they all look like my mother and I can't hit them.) I've been asked questions before about prayer. Pedagogically I've always decided that the thing to do was to shove it back at them, but for some reason this little old lady came up and with great pain and struggle said, "That was a very helpful seminar. I see what's going on. But where's the prayer in there?" And because she said it that way, I couldn't do anything else but struggle with it myself, and finally I decided that it's all prayer. It's all prayer. And for me it's where that when you decide to dare be the one who as the man of responsibility operates without any support and at the same time with your eyes open wider than you've ever had them open before, knowing that you're always that close to selling out to one principle or another, while you observe, and judge and weigh up and decide about your own mixed up motives, without any clarity about the consequences, in the midst of dedidedg to be obedient to God and neighbor, in a universe where you can't tell the difference between good and evil and right and wrong because you've been denied as a human being what it means to stand at the end of history and look back and see what's going on: that is, when you stand there and decide what to do: that's prayer. And you get down on your knees if you decide to pray that way, not because of some piosity that you and I long to whomp up, but out of sheer burden. You're driven to your knees, because you're aware of your responsibility, both in the broad and in the particular.

For me the agony comes in terms of daring to be the predictor, or daring to predict. For me, this is where mortal combat with God comes in. I've struggled with how to say this. In Gratitude where you're called to say yes to all that is, it's very clear to me that what happens is, in your imagination, just like that (snap) you become God, and you look at what's going on, and in that position as God you say, yes, that's what ought to go on. That is, as a human being I decide out of the word, that if I were God then I'd have done it exactly the same way. In intercession you have the other side of that, the agony of daring to put yourself into the struggle of being the future. Knowing that that future is in God's hands, you dare stand there and decide, "If I was God I would do X." I tell you, that's combat. That's also what it means to participate in creation. I've gotten so sick of people trying to convince me that what it means to participate in creation was to have that little--thing--over there in infant school. I say, No, unless the decision to create that new life was one that standing here was a clear deicsion that if I had been God, I would have happened that. Do you see the difference? Then it's creation. Not before. That's what it means to participate in creation. And that's a combat, an agonizing combat, for all the reasons that you and I know from the start, that have been produced by that.

Finally, the promissorial aspect. For me this is where it's all thrown in. This is where "Go for broke" is written in gold letters. I've often wished that I had a bit more clarity about decision making, because that's what's going on here. Something happened to me last week. When we have weddings around here it's at the same time one of the most glorious happenings and also a time for everybody who's married and not married to go into almost schizophrenic panic. I was in on a conversation with a couple and we were going around the room saying just in two words or three words what it means to be married. One of my colleagues really rocked me. He said, "Being married is intimacy that produces decision." I tell you, I've struggled a long time with that aspect of relating to another human being. Mind you, we're all clear that you can be intimate with any number of peopke, but save that is out of a clear conscious decision about the future, there's no decision there. When you and I dare to pray in terms of creating the future, it's our articulation of the decisions that have already been made. That's why for me it's crucial that you and I pray publicly even when we don't know what we're doing. I've been kidding the people around here who say they can't pray any more. I've

got a solution for that. If you get hung up on prayer, go get some old ones, and pray them for a while. Some of my colleagues are getting tired every time we sit down to lunch hearing me say, "Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to receive from thy bounty through Jesus Christ. Amen." Let me tell you, until I get a bit more clarity about what it means to open a meal with prayer, that's the one they're going to hear. Daring to articulate in public your prayer is to dare to offer your decision out before all of history. Again for me the wedding is a prime example, or one that I find clearly articulated. I knew a long time before that wedding day that I was going to marry Patricia. I sense that she knew before I did that I was going to marry Patricia. But you see, decisions were being made there. Until we stood before that pastor and that church, and proclaimed before God and everybody--that everybody being the church and the state--then those decisions that we had already made did not come to be decisions--until we symbolized them and therefore reaffirmed the decisions that we had made. That's why when you get intimate with another human being, save in a conscious covenant articulated before God and everybody, there's no decision there. There's no decision, finally, that relates to the future. In intervention you dare, you dare to claim promises for the future. Again, I wish I had been hiding behind a rock when Jesus--and audaciousness? Godd heavens!--when Jesus audaciously walked up to that tomb where they'd laid Lazarus out. As I read that story I'm fairly clear there were a couple of things going on there. I'm sure that Jesus had one set of prayers for when everybody was gathered around him. He probably stood there something like this: "Lazarus, come out. LAZARUS, COME OUT." And after about six hours everybody else got tired and went home. And then Jesus probably went into another kind of prayer that went something like this: "Lord, I've been doing some preaching around here, and I've been saying some things that people've been listening to, and they're getting stirred up. Don't you see, if I don't get Lazarus up out of here--which is to say, if you don't get Lazarus up out of here, <u>you're</u> going to look horrible." And then one of the disciples would come by and--"LAZARUS, COME OUT." And then that disciple would wander off. "...Now, Lord, we don't have much time. He's got to get out before the sun rises." That is to say, you dare say, "Here I am, all that I am." And in terms of the future, "I throw it all in. I throw it all in. I go for broke." Which is to say that you and I finally are those who dare to be the ones for whom their life is one unceasing prayer: To pray before the Lord of all history in the word in Jesus Christ, to expend our whole lives on behalf of all men. Amen.