

'Lord God, I know I am a sinner. I know that I have done things which are unethical and immoral. Would you forgive me Lord and come and dwell in my heart.'

The cry of hope in my soul is that you seize this opportunity.

“Anchor for the Soul”

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Text: Hebrews 6:17-20



Make Jesus the anchor of your soul. Let us pray.

Lord God we bow down before you this morning and we ask that you would bless us. Bless us Father with your presence. Bless us Lord with your Holy Spirit. Bless with your Word. Let us none of us leave here this morning without a greater picture of your power, potentiality and promise. We ask all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I have been doing a little car shopping lately, nothing urgent, I enjoy the pursuit least as much as the purchase. I bought the car I now drive from a website about seven years ago and it has been a great car so I have gone back to the same site again.

I found a great price on a car and I sent an e-mail to the owner and got a prompt response back from a certain Mrs. Edna Watson. But something did not seem right. The self-described “Omaha housewife” who wrote back used some strange phrases that raised a red flag. The car was in *minty* condition. It was the first automobile to have *rack and opinion* steering. And she was pushy. She wanted me to forward money right away to an e-bay account, without seeing the car. “Let’s start the process immediately” Mrs. Watson said, “so you can start enjoying your new car right away.”

Needless to say, I did not send her any money. I did write back and had a little fun as “Edna from Omaha” and I carried on an exchange for a day or so before I finally called Edna’s bluff.

Rarely is a mystery so easily revealed. Rarely is it so simple to see beyond the curtain of unknowing and ascertain exactly what is going on.

Life is full of curtains that cloud our view of reality and fog the future. There is, of course, the curtain of time. We don’t know what the next five minutes will bring let alone the next year or decade. There is the curtain of distance, who knows what is going on in next door, the next office or the next heart and mind? There is the curtain of pain that obscures reality. There is the curtain of sin that blinds us to our weaknesses and faults and obscures God.

Much of life is spent trying to get behind that curtain. During my brief and uneventful high school football career we had a drill where the coaches hung a plywood board from the goal posts. As the defensive player you would stand in front of the board and they would send some other player from behind the board running out from one side or the other with a football in their arms. It was your job to tackle whoever came running out. I always hoped I would get the kicker or maybe a trainer pressed into service sprinting out from behind the board but it was usually a defensive tackle or our fullback.

Life is a lot like that drill. We live with an impenetrable curtain dangling in front of us and we have no idea what dwells behind it—and sometimes it is 310-pound menace that wants to run us down. Paul writing about this curtain says, **“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even**



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as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

In this life the curtain is certain. What we can do is make sure we have the Right Person standing with us on this side.

Of course, a great curtain hung in the Jerusalem Temple. The largest room in the Temple was the Holy Place. The Holy Place was the room closest to the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God dwelt on the Holy of Holies, the two rooms separated from each other by two four to six ton curtains. In the Holy Place were 10 lamp stands—five lining one side of the Holy Place and five lining the other side. And there were tables with bread set there as an offering to God. But at the front of the Holy Place directly before the curtain was the Altar of Incense. It was built from the finest cedar and covered in gold. The Altar of Incense stood higher than any other piece of furniture in the Holy Place. It was three feet tall and eighteen inches square.

The Altar of Incense had a very specific purpose:

And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations.
Exodus 30:7-8

The incense was not burned to cover up a smell or create a pleasant mood in the room. The Altar of Incense was the place where the people believed that the Priest took their prayers and offered them to God. The wafting of the incense toward the ceiling embodied the prayers of the people floating their way on an updraft of grace toward the will of the eternal God.

O Lord, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you! Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!
Psalm 141:1-2

Here, once again, is our dilemma—the curtain—but behind this curtain is the Living God. How do we trust that our prayers get from the altar to God’s ears? The distance between the Altar of Incense to God’s dwelling place behind the curtain was only a few feet but it might as well be a million miles. How do we know that our prayers are not simply like great handfuls of dust that we toss up into a stiff wind and are scattered throughout all over the land?

Hebrews teaches we can know:

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. Hebrews 6:17-18

God doubly guarantee that our prayers will be heard. By two unchangeable, unshakeable, unbreakable things God assures that we can place our full, faith and trust and hope in Him.

First, God guarantees by His unchangeable promise. We are commanded not to make promises or swear oaths in Scripture. We are told to let our yesses be yesses and our no’s be no’s. Anything more than that, Jesus tells us, is evil because we are writing checks that our reality may not be able to cash.

problem is sometimes we do not ask for enough. We focus our gaze too low and we wonder why our prayers seemingly go unanswered and unheard.

Do you have some unresolved prayers? Are there some cries of your soul that have not yet turned from hope to gratitude? Are you still standing behind the curtain?

Maybe you should aim higher.

In the last e-mail I sent to “Edna Watson from Omaha” I told her that I would not be buying her used car. I told “Edna” to aim higher than making a buck.

Now, let me give you an opportunity. I have something I would like to sell you—although it is free, at least initially. I am a Christian and Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord. I trust in Him to provide all my needs. I am a sinner saved by His grace. You can keep living this life trying to cheat good people of their hard-earned money. You will never find what you are looking for doing that. I can promise you. I have already forgiven you for trying to steal from me. I don’t know your name but I have already prayed for you. I know that you probably don’t have much in your life in terms of wealth but I have seen many people in your circumstance who find amazing joy in Jesus. All the money in the world without Jesus in our life is misery. Trust me I see it every day.

- + Romans 3:23 says "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."
- + Romans 6:23 says "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life."
- + Romans 5:8 says "God shows his love for his in that he died for us while we were sinners Christ died for us."
- + Romans 10:9,10 says "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Quite simply pray, ‘Lord God, I know I am a sinner. I know that I have done things which are unethical and immoral. Would you forgive me Lord and come and dwell in my heart.’

I am praying you seize this opportunity.

I have the same prayer for you.

Jesus is the sure and certain, steadfast anchor for our soul. He is the one who stands with us on this side of the curtain and carries the cries of our soul to the ear of the Father.

Let me take a page from the book of Edna Watson—what would it take for you to start the process of asking Jesus to come into your life? What would it take for you to start enjoying your new life with Jesus right away? What would it take for you to seize the opportunity to become a temple for the Living God? What would it take to make Jesus Christ the anchor for your soul?

Would it take a disaster to come springing from the great unknown behind the curtain which leaves you no other choice? Would it take the mere promise of the Savior of the World, the Lord of the Cosmos, Jesus Christ delivering the cries of your soul to the ears of the Father? Would it take the prospect of knowing the Father’s will and dwelling in His the delight of His heart to pray:

There is not a prayer that God does not answer with one of three replies.

First, He answers yes. Before I met my wife Jen, I was feeling down about life. I was especially feeling down about the prospect of marriage. I came home one night from an evening with someone that I knew was going nowhere, but what bothered me the most about it was that it was a feeling that I was getting used to.

That night I prayed to God, "Lord, please send me someone who will love you more than she loves me." I met Jen the very next day. And I am happy to say that I come second in her life. Of course prayer does not always work that fast—but sometimes the truth of **James 4:2 "You do not have because you do not ask"** is dramatically displayed.

Sometimes, God answers not yet. We all have those prayers that remain on our hearts for years, sometimes decades. Jesus' teaching is clear. Do not give up. There is a great difference between unresolved and unanswered prayer. Unresolved prayers are the cry of the faith-filled soul; the soul that refuses to give upon God's grace.

Jesus told a parable to a His disciples while they were sitting in a small, country village:

"In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?, Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Luke 18:2-8

Some people do not pray because they think their prayers have to be perfect. They want their prayers to sound right or they think they need to be right in the heart for God to hear them. Untrue. Jesus is our perfect Great High Priest so when we pray no matter how much we stammer and stutter and misstate, the Father hears a perfect prayer. Perfection in prayer does not matter. Perseverance in prayer, however, matters a great deal. Unresolved prayers are the cry of the soul that trusts God.

God's third answer to prayer is "You need to aim higher." The rain broke and we did take Calvin to Silver Dollar City. I used to go there as boy with my parents but apparently they have raised their prices since 1986 because when I bought our two tickets I received the shock of my life! Nevertheless, we had already ridden the tram so I figured we had better just pay up and go in. Calvin had an absolute ball on the river rides, shooting water canons, riding the train, climbing around the giant tree house. He was literally running around the park from attraction to attraction skipping and dancing, something like the leprechaun from the Lucky Charms cereal box.

But do you know who had a better time? His Mom and Dad who were so blessed by just watching the joy exude from every pore of his little body. The expensive price suddenly did not seem quite so outrageous. Seeing his joy, I would have paid twice as much.

The Father, of course, paid an incredibly expensive price for you and me—His only Son. There is nothing that God who gave his only Son will not withhold from us. God revels in blessing his children. He revels in showering our lives with joy and goodness and blessings unearned and untold—so much that we would not possibly hold them all. The

We were in Branson this week and we promised Calvin we would take him to a very special place—Silver Dollar City. We told him all the amazing tales about the rides he would ride and the sights he would see. We woke up early to go and it was pouring down rain—Noah style. Three year olds don't understand the concept of rain spoiling a day outside—if anything it seems like a nice way to avoid a bath.

We may be very well intentioned. We may have every aspiration of following through—but the simple truth is we are not in control.

God, however, is. And, His promises are unchangeable.

There is an ironclad way to know that we are not trusting God's promises. There is a sure and certain way to know that we have made something else the anchor of our soul. Fear in our life. I know something about this because it happens to me more than I would like to admit. Every time I am fearful about my circumstances or life's uncertainties I am later shamed to admit that I have misestimated God's character and undervalued His promise.

You will look in vain in God's Word to find a passage which hedges bets on His character. There is no Psalm that reads, "O child of God, you were right to be afraid. You were wise to have a plan B. God is great but He could not overcome that terror you faced. But I am sure He will do better next time."

What you will find instead is a book like Samuel Clarke's. Clarke was a seventeenth century English pastor who compiled what is probably the first book of Bible promises. Clarke recorded thousands of promises in nearly any category you can think of—long life, health, peace, deliverance from trouble, wisdom, victory over the world, grace to persevere, promises for faithful spouses, promises for loving parents, financial promises, salvation, promises of Jesus return—and the last section, and the best in my opinion, Clarke details God's promises to be faithful to His promises—22 of them to be exact.

Among them are:

**God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?
Numbers 23:19**

Either God keeps His promises or He is not God and we are wasting our time.

Second, God guarantees he will hear our prayers by His unshakeable purpose. Again, God is not God if He is not faithful. And there is no more clear statement of God's purpose, no stronger guarantee of His unswerving intent—than who He has placed with us on this side of the curtain.

**We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.
Hebrews 6:19-20**

Jesus, our Great High Priest, stands with us at the altar of incense where we offer our prayers to the Father. Prayer is simply nothing more than the soul's cry of gratitude and hope. When we lay the cry of our soul on the altar, Jesus carries it behind the curtain to the Father and presents it as an offering on our behalf. This how we know that our prayers are not simply dust in the wind. This how we know that our hope is not in vain. Jesus delivers our prayers for us.