

Research Paper:  
John Calvin's Pastoral Approach to the Practice of Prayer

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John Calvin recognized that the central theme of the Bible is the glory of God and this understanding impacted every aspect of Calvin's understanding of the Christian faith. For Calvin, God's glory is displayed in sovereignly governing all things. The objection inevitably arises that if God is sovereign, then prayer is superfluous or unnecessary. One might expect that in light of Calvin's understanding of God's sovereignty, the topic of prayer would receive little attention in the Reformed theologian's work of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin, however, devoted over a hundred pages in the *Institutes* to this single topic, making it the single largest subject dealt with throughout the eighty chapters of the *Institutes*.<sup>1</sup> For Calvin, prayer was anything but unnecessary. Calvin's treatment of prayer was a consistent outworking of the theological convictions that he embraced with regards to the sovereign rule of God and the depravity of man, but it was with a pastoral concern that caused Calvin to write about the exercise of prayer in the Christian's life. In other words, Calvin addresses the question of why to pray by showing practically its necessity as well as the benefits that result from it. Calvin's treatment of prayer looks at the need for prayer, the basis for prayer and practical guidelines that should govern prayer life.

### **The Necessity of Prayer - Reasons for Prayer**

#### *What is Prayer?*

Prayer can be briefly defined as a conversation with God.<sup>2</sup> For Calvin, this gift of prayer is an intimate conversation with God (*familiare alloquium*).<sup>3</sup> At the same time,

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<sup>1</sup> David Hall, *Tributes to John Calvin : A Celebration of His Quincentenary* (Phillipsburg N.J.: P & R Pub., 2010), 344.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.4; 565.

Calvin wanted to make clear that this gift of intimacy with God should not be distorted in a such a way that abandons any reverence for God. Calvin writes, “Although prayer is an intimate conversation of the pious with God, yet reverence and moderation must be kept, lest we give loose rein to miscellaneous requests, and lest we crave more than God allows; further that we should lift up our minds to a pure and chaste veneration of him, lest God’s majesty become worthless to us.”<sup>4</sup> Central then to an appreciation of the gift of prayer is recognizing both the intimate fellowship with God in Christ and the constant need to recognize the greatness of the one whom is addressed as Father. Prayer needs to be captivated by God’s glory. In the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches the disciples to focus exclusively on God’s glory before turning to their own needs. Calvin stresses however that even in asking for personal needs, such as daily bread, that Christians would not ask for this at all, unless it were to turn to His glory.<sup>5</sup>

Prayer is strongly connected with faith. Intimate communion with God in prayer is based on and responds to what an individual has come to discover by faith. It is for this reason that Calvin explains that prayer is the perpetual exercise of faith.<sup>6</sup> After someone has come to discover that “happiness”, and whatever is necessary is found in Christ, it is left to prayer to ask of God for those things that they have learned to be found in Him.<sup>7</sup> The same Spirit of God, that works in the heart and will of man to respond to God’s promises, works in the believer through prayer. Prayer then must be understood in

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<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *On Prayer : Conversation With God*, 1st ed. (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 3.20.35; 592.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 3.20.1; 559, 563.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.1; 563.

light of the believer's new standing in Christ and so to pray is to give proof and evidence of faith.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, prayer aims at building up the believer's faith and trust in God. This exercise of faith is expressed in terms of petitions (requests) and thanksgivings. Calvin believed that both must constantly be present in prayer.<sup>9</sup>

*The Necessity of Prayer – Why Pray?*

Why should anyone pray to God if He already knows everything and has already determined all things according to His will? Calvin answered this question by asserting that prayer isn't for God's sake (although God is worshipped through prayer), but for the Christian's benefit.<sup>10</sup> Through prayer, Christians acknowledge both their need and source of comfort and through this exercise are being strengthened in their faith as they trust in God's promises. Christians should also recognize the need for prayer based on God's command. Calvin writes, "Those who call on God and pray to him receive remarkable comfort, for they know that by praying they are doing something which pleases him. Being sure of the promise, they have, in addition, the certainty of being answered."<sup>11</sup> While Calvin believed that God does not change or vary in purpose, nevertheless, Scripture provides examples of believers, like Elijah and Joshua, who changed the very order of nature through their prayers. Calvin also turned to passages like Psalm 145:19, Luke 18:1-8 and Matthew 18:19-20 to stress that in no way should prayer be considered

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Tyler TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), 271.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Truth For All Time : A Brief Outline of the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh Scotland: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 52–53.

<sup>10</sup> J. Mark Beach, *Piety's Wisdom: A Summary of Calvin's Institutes With Study Questions* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 229. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.3; 564–565.; *Ibid.*, 3.20.3; 564.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Truth for all time*, 52.

as unnecessary.<sup>12</sup> Calvin believed that while prayer does not change the will of God, it does change things. This emphasizes not only the need of prayer, but also that prayer must be expressed in line with the will of God.<sup>13</sup>

Calvin believed that God, who commanded His people to draw near to Him in prayer, gave this commandment in accordance with His intention to work all things for their good (Rom 8:28). God has given the gift of prayer for the benefit of believers so that they would be built up in their faith and turn to God for their strength. It is in the interest of the Christian to draw near to God in prayer so that their heart is always inflamed with a serious desire of loving and serving God, while depending on Him as a sacred anchor in every necessity.<sup>14</sup> Calvin gives six reasons for the need of prayer: (1) to turn to God with every need and find God as their sacred anchor; (2) to learn to desire only what is right before God; (3) to prepare Christians to receive God's blessing and acknowledge His goodness in thanksgiving; (4) to learn to meditate on God's kindness; (5) to appreciate more the things that God has given; (6) to confirm God's providence to the Christian's weakness and show that He will never fail anyone who calls upon Him.<sup>15</sup> Calvin's pastoral approach to prayer addresses two different obstacles that prevent Christians from prayer. The sovereignty of God is the first of these obstacles as Christians feel that prayer is ineffective. Calvin has shown that prayer remains a great benefit to the Christian and consolation that their Heavenly Father hears.

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<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 290–291.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.3; 564.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.3; 564-565.

## The Trinitarian Basis of Prayer

A second obstacle of engaging in prayer comes from a lack of biblical understanding of the basis of prayer itself. Many Christians who become convicted of their sins will feel unworthy of coming before God. Calvin's aim is to provide an objective basis to address the subjective feelings that prevent Christians from exercising this gift of God.<sup>16</sup> The gift and basis of prayer is Trinitarian from beginning to end. "Prayer originates with the Father, is made possible through the Son, and is worked out in the soul by the Spirit, through whom it returns via Christ to the Father. The triune God gives, hears, and answers prayer."<sup>17</sup> Calvin points out that prayer originates in God the Father who could not have given a more precise command.<sup>18</sup> He draws attention to Psalm 50:15 which says, "And Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me." The Scriptures also teach that prayer is built upon the promises and character of God (2 Sam 7:27; Psalm 65:2).<sup>19</sup> These promises find fulfillment and further expression when God the Father sends the Son into the world to save them from their sins.

The Lord's Prayer teaches Christians to pray to God as "Father". Calvin writes that even in this address the believer is relieved of all distrust and is assured of God's great love that He has toward His children for the sake of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> Calvin's Trinitarian understanding of the basis of prayer is not stated just as a theological truth, but as the basis for removing any hesitation that prevents someone from the practice of

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<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.13; 560.

<sup>17</sup> Joel Beeke, *Taking hold of God : Reformed and Puritan perspectives on prayer* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 36.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.13; 573.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 3.20.36; 593.

prayer. “Whenever, therefore, we are restrained by any feeling of hesitation, let us remember to ask of him that he may correct our timidity, and placing us under the magnanimous guidance of the Spirit, enable us to pray boldly.”<sup>21</sup>

Prayer originates with God the Father and is made possible only through the intercessory work of Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that sin separates human beings from communion with God and it can only be reestablished through a mediator. Calvin’s biblical understanding that there is only one mediator that stands between God and man serves to distinguish true prayer from false prayer.<sup>22</sup> In true prayer, the mediator is the Lord Jesus Christ. In false prayer, the mediator is anyone or anything other than the person and work of Christ. The pastoral implications of this are tremendous, as a person’s unworthiness does not discard them from coming to God in prayer so long as they recognize their dependency and give glory to God by trusting in Christ as their mediator.<sup>23</sup> For those who disregard the one way made available through Christ, God’s throne presents nothing but wrath, judgment and terror to those who seek another way.<sup>24</sup> To pray in Christ’s name will give more and more confidence to the believer as they honor and glorify the Son.

The Holy Spirit also plays a crucial role in the life of prayer in working in the soul of the individual. First, the Spirit gives assurance of salvation. Second, the Spirit gives a testimony so that the believer can express truth as an outward form of speech and address

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.20.38; 594.

<sup>22</sup> Ford Battles and Robert Benedetto, eds., *Interpreting John Calvin* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Books, 1996), 196.

<sup>23</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*. vol. IV The Book of Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), Psalm 115:1; 341-342.

<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.19; 579

God as *their* God and *their* Father.<sup>25</sup> The Spirit impresses the believer's new status as an adopted child of God. Calvin explains that Spirit cannot give confidence in prayer without also sealing a gracious pardon from our sins.<sup>26</sup> This same Spirit teaches us how to pray. Calvin writes, "no one can of himself premeditate even one syllable, except God by the secret impulse of his Spirit knocks at our door, and thus opens for himself our hearts."<sup>27</sup> God's glory is manifested in reconciling sinners to God through Jesus Christ. The believer is not only dependent upon the Spirit of God to change their heart and will, but even as a Christian, the believer remains dependent on God's Spirit to know how to pray.<sup>28</sup> In John Calvin's 1542/45 *Catechisme*, the question was asked if this means that a believer is to be passive and idle as they wait for the Spirit to stir them to pray. The Catechism replies, "By no means. The meaning rather is, that when believers feel themselves cold or sluggish, and somewhat indisposed to pray, they should forthwith flee to God, and beseech him to inflame them by the fiery darts of his Spirit, that they may be rendered fit to pray."<sup>29</sup>

The practice of prayer then is based on Trinitarian work of God who blesses believers with the gift of prayer for their own good. Neither should Christians hesitate to call upon the name of God because of uncertainties of whether they are elect. Calvin summarizes the basis of the believer's confidence by showing that believers are to rest in

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<sup>25</sup> Hall, *Tributes to John Calvin*, 347–348.

<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries. Vol. XIX. Epistle to the Romans*, Rom. 8:15; 296, 299.

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries. Vol. XIX. Epistle to the Romans*, 314.

<sup>28</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*. (Grand Rapids Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989), Epistle to the Romans; Rom. 8:26; 313.

<sup>29</sup> John Calvin, *Treatises on the sacraments, catechism of the Church of Geneva, forms of prayer, and confessions of faith* (Fearn Scotland: Christian Heritage, 2002), 72.

the promises of God and thereby make a right use of what has been written for the benefit of the believer.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Proper Approach- Calvin's Four Rules**

Calvin is not only concerned with removing any barriers that may dissuade Christians from the practice of prayer, but also with assisting others in developing a proper perspective on the exercise of prayer. It is for this reason that Calvin provides some guiding principles, or rules, which provide a framework that should position the believer's heart and mind so as to speak to God in a way that is honoring to Him. Calvin's rules apply in a positive fashion how one's understanding of the Bible shapes their approach to God.

Calvin's focus on the glory of God helps frame the manner in which Christians should come to God in prayer and is summarized by way of four rules for how a Christian should pray. First, Christians must have a heartfelt sense of reverence.<sup>31</sup> They must be so impressed by the majesty of God that when they pray that this understanding directs them in how they approach God.<sup>32</sup> This great blessing of being able to converse with God must win our affections and direct thoughts. Calvin writes, "God does not suffer his condescension to be thus mocked, but vindicating his own light, places our wishes under the restraint of his authority."<sup>33</sup> Not only must the redeemed not take the gift of prayer lightly, but they must not take lightly the one they address.

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<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.24.5; 641.

<sup>31</sup> Burk Parsons, ed., *John Calvin : A Heart for Devotion, Doctrine & Doxology* (Lake Mary FL: Reformation Trust, 2008), 236.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.5; 565-566.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.5; 565-566.

While the first rule exalts the greatness of God, the second rule for prayer stresses the neediness of the individual. The second rule is that there must be a heartfelt sense of need and repentance.<sup>34</sup> Not only must there be a sincere sense of need, but there must also be a serious desire to obtain what is asked.<sup>35</sup> Experience testifies how easy it is to ask for divine aid in a cold manner while the heart and mind remains unmoved. Calvin was exposing this pattern and emphasizing the need for preparation as one comes to God in prayer. As a person comes before God, he should take the position of a beggar.<sup>36</sup>

A third rule for prayer is that there needs to be a heartfelt sense of humility and trust in God, which discards all self-confidence and humbly plead for pardon.<sup>37</sup> The third rule for prayer then revolves around the notion of unworthiness. Commenting on Psalm 51, Calvin writes,

“However rich and liberal the offers of mercy may be which God extends to us, it is highly proper on our part that we should reflect upon the grievous dishonor which we have done to His name, and be filled with sorrow on account of it... And pardon being the first thing we should pray for, it is plain that there is no inconsistency in having a persuasion of the grace of God, and yet proceeding to supplicate his forgiveness... God’s pardon is full and complete; but our faith cannot take in his overflowing goodness, and it is necessary that it should distil to us drop by drop.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Parsons, *John Calvin*, 236.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.6; 567.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.7; 567-568.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.8, 568; Parsons, *John Calvin*, 236.

<sup>38</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*. vol. IV The Book of Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), Psalm 51:9, 297.

Calvin's final rule for prayer draws attention to the promises of God. Prayer is to have a heartfelt sense of confident hope.<sup>39</sup> Praying believers must feel a sense of unrest within themselves, which is only resolved when by faith the goodness of God shines upon them.<sup>40</sup> As one acknowledges and experiences their own unworthiness, Calvin directs believers to find relief outside of themselves in the promises of God. The rules of prayer focus on glory of God in His greatness, provision, worthiness and grace.

Calvin's view of the depravity of man and sovereignty of God in salvation has a practical application in prayer by adoring God and trusting in God's promises and works for salvation. All four rules must be maintained and to remove one of these rules is to distort Calvin's intention. Calvin is not suggesting that a believer wallow in their sins indefinitely as an end point in prayer. For Calvin, as believers are weighed down with the feeling of their own unworthiness, they must be raised up with confidence in the promises of God. Calvin writes, "Repentance and faith go hand in hand, being united by an indissoluble tie, the one causing terror, the other joy, so in prayer they must both be present."<sup>41</sup> God is glorified in prayer and the believer is benefited as the Spirit of God impresses their source of hope on them more and more.

### **The Proper Practice of Practice**

#### *Structure & God's Word*

Calvin believed that prayer should be governed by the examples that are set forth in Scripture. Scriptural examples of prayer are filled with appeals to God's promises by

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<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.11; Parsons, *John Calvin*, 236.

<sup>40</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.11; 571

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.11; 571

God's people. Calvin believed that this was also fitting for Christians. They should appeal to God's promises themselves as a means of kindling their hearts to pray and revitalize their heart in prayer when they become tired. Calvin noted how often in the Psalms, the continuity of the prayer is broken as the Psalmist turns to consider God's goodness, or faithfulness or promises. Meditating on God's nature and word serves a great aid in stirring up the believer with reinvigorated enthusiasm to seek God.<sup>42</sup>

Calvin highlighted the importance of praying God's word because of the great comfort that comes from it. This is particularly the case with the Lord's Prayer. Calvin explains that in praying through the words and structure of the Lord's Prayer, the believer receives the comfort of knowing that in using Christ's own prayer, the believer is praying only things that are pleasing and agreeable to God.<sup>43</sup> For Calvin, the Lord's Prayer serves not only *an* example of how to pray, but the very form for how a Christian is instructed to pray. "For he has given us a form in which is set before us as in a picture every thing which is lawful to wish, every thing which is conducive to our interest, every thing which it is necessary to demand."<sup>44</sup> Calvin does not intend to suggest that the words in the Lord's Prayer are the only words that one can say. His concern is that people do not begin to consider prayer as an opportunity to ask God anything they like.<sup>45</sup>

#### *Times for Prayer*

Not only should prayers be structured by the certain rules, but Calvin believed in setting aside certain periods of time for prayer. Christians are to always have their minds

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<sup>42</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.13.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.34; 592.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> David Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin : The Institutes in Summary* (Jenison MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 256.

directed upward to God, but because of weakness of the flesh, Calvin believed that it is necessary to set aside particular times so that the believer could be completely focused on God. Calvin identified five periods that should be given to prayer: (1) after rising in the morning; (2) before beginning work for the day; (3) before eating; (4) after eating; (5) before going to sleep.<sup>46</sup> This was not a side issue either for Calvin. He believed that having this regular pattern of prayer life was so important in the Christian's life that he also prepared five prayers that served as models of prayer at different times in the day. These model prayers were attached as a second part of the *1542/45 Catechisme*.<sup>47</sup>

It is evident from a survey of Calvin's own prayers, that he was fond of using model prayers to structure his petitions and thanksgivings to God. It has been observed that Calvin's formal prayers given after preaching were composed of three divisions or parts. The first part was an introductory address that acknowledged God's greatness and a confession of sin. The second part was a paragraph length reflection of the sermon just preached. The concluding part of the prayer was directed according to one of a few fixed forms that Calvin used according to the occasion of prayer.<sup>48</sup>

### *Confession & Thanksgiving*

As mentioned in Calvin's rules, Christians are to approach God humbly recognizing their own needs, but also with confident hope in God who saves. Prayer is then to be structured by confession and thanksgiving. The Lord's prayer teaches believers that they will continue to struggle with sin and therefore it is necessary that they

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<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.50.

<sup>47</sup> John Calvin, *John Calvin : Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 210.; Calvin, *Treatises on the Sacraments, Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Forms of Prayer, and Confessions of Faith*, 95–99.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *John Calvin*, 220.

confess their sins throughout their lives.<sup>49</sup> Calvin's pastoral approach to the topic of prayer is also recognized in emphasizing the practical implications of salvation in Christ. The forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ should result in a response of praise and thanksgiving. Commenting on Psalm 50:23, Calvin highlight the hardness of the human heart, which so often belittles the duty of praise, but also emphasizes that the sacrifice of praise is the true form of proper worship of God.<sup>50</sup> Calvin writes elsewhere "No praise will ever please God that does not flow from this feeling of love."<sup>51</sup> Thanksgiving in prayer serves is mutli-purpose. In praising God for His goodness, the Christian is fulfilling the whole purpose for which God created people. At the same time, prayer stirs up the believer to find their confidence and delight in this God in order to face oncoming struggles.<sup>52</sup>

#### *Perseverance in Prayer*

Calvin's pastoral approach is finally seen in the concern he has that Christians would persevere in prayer. Calvin clearly understood the temptations and challenges of falling into despair and Calvin seeks to come alongside them with motivation to persevere. Calvin writes, "We must not allow any feeling that God has rejected us hinder us from having recourse to prayer."<sup>53</sup> God's word informs and directs the Christian's feelings and interpretation of life's experiences and not the other way around. Christians can trust the laws of divine providence and in God's wisdom.<sup>54</sup> Since God does not vary in His purpose, for prayers to prevail with God they must be in accordance to His will

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.45; 600.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries.*, Psalm 50:23; 280.

<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.28; 587.

<sup>52</sup> Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 280.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.51; 604.

and so as Christians pray, they subject their will to God's will.<sup>55</sup> One must trust in God's word and trust in God's governance of events.

Christians will often feel as though their prayers fall on deaf ears and Calvin shows that the lack of response does not mean that God is indifferent or displeased with them. This also frees the believer from any sense of guilt due to unanswered prayer. On the contrary, it is God's very character that gives the confidence for Christians to press on and continue trusting in God because He gives what is expedient to them, He has given them their greatest need and will bring to an end all their present misfortunes.<sup>56</sup> Christians can pray knowing that their good God compassionately hears their prayers and is wisely and sovereignly bringing all things together for good while at the same time increasing the believer's confidence as they are proved through many trials.

#### *Providence & Prayer*

“Right prayer springs from faith, and that faith comes by the hearing of the word of God.”<sup>57</sup> God's word speaks of God's providence and governing of all things and this truth finds practical relevance in the exercise of prayer. Instead of having the doctrine of providence serve as a stumbling block to prayer, Calvin believed that prayer was propelled by this reality. The most bitter and difficult situations of this life can be sweet to Christians when they see God's providential hand governing all things for the good of His people and His glory.<sup>58</sup> The Psalms express all of life's experiences and respond with a strong confidence in God's providence. Calvin comments on the practical examples set

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<sup>55</sup> Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 291.; Engelsma, *The Reformed faith of John Calvin*, 264.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 264–265.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.20.27.

<sup>58</sup> W Godfrey, *John Calvin : Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), 146.

forth from the Psalms by writing, “We renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose our life according to his will, so that the afflictions which are bitterest and most severe to our nature, become sweet to us, because they proceed from him.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Calvin’s writings on prayer shows a concern that was centered on the practice of prayer in Christian’s life. This was not only a concern for Christians during the Reformation, but continues to be a vital component of the Christian’s life today. Calvin’s belief that God is to be honored and revered in prayer serves as a reminder to the church today about how to approach God in prayer. Calvin’s four rules also provide a helpful framework for approaching God in prayer. Calvin’s establishment of regular times for prayer gives regular opportunity for confession and thanksgiving for God’s provision. Finally, Calvin’s provides sufficient reason to motivate Christians in the exercise of prayer. Based on the will and work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Christians can come before God and pour out their concerns and thanksgivings. God’s word teaches that the Spirit of God is ministering unto the believer in prayer. It also teaches that their Heavenly Father is pleased to hear their prayers. Calvin’s treatment of prayer can revitalize the sluggish prayer life of the church today to focus on the Sovereign God who has shown grace to unworthy sinners.

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<sup>59</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*. vol. IV The Book of Psalms. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), xxxix.

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