

# Session 2: Lessons from Bernard of Clairvaux's Prayer Life

Six Men and Their Prayer Lives – Monday Night Bible Study 2025

Michael Garreau

---

## I. Synopsis of Bernard's Life



## II. Bernard's Teaching on Prayer

**A. Our highest \_\_\_\_\_ in prayer should be to \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Christ and experience his love in return.**

**1. In preaching the text, "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His Mouth," Bernard says this:**

a) *"Who is it speaks these words? It is the Bride. Who is the Bride? It is the soul thirsting for God. ...If a man is a slave, he fears the face of his lord; if he is a hireling, he looks for wages from his lord's hand; if a disciple, he gives attention to his teacher; if a son, he renders honour to his father; but she who asks this is held by the bond of love to him from whom she asks it. Of all the sentiments of nature, this of love is the most excellent, especially when it is rendered back to Him who is the principle and fountain of it — that is, God. Nor are there found any expressions equally sweet to signify the mutual affection between the Word of God and the soul as those of Bridegroom and of Bride..." (Sermon Song of S. 7.2).*

**2. We love God because he first loved us. And yet, loving God has its' reward! In his well-known book, *On Loving God*, Bernard explains how this experience of mutual love works.**

a) *"for whilst we must love God, independently of all reward, we shall none the less be rewarded for having loved Him... true love seeks no reward, but it merits one... I have said that the motive of our love to God is God Himself, and it is well said, for He is both the efficient cause and the final end of our love. He is such that it is impossible to know and not to love Him; ...Our love is prepared and recompensed by His" (On Loving God VII).*

**3. For Bernard, intimacy with Christ is experienced when the mind and heart are one, when you \_\_\_\_\_ what you \_\_\_\_\_:**

## Session 2: Lessons from Bernard of Clairvaux's Prayer Life

Six Men and Their Prayer Lives – Monday Night Bible Study 2025

Michael Garreau

---

- a) *“For there are two kinds of ecstasy in holy contemplation : one of the understanding, the other of the heart ; one in the light of the understanding, the other in the fervor of the affections ; the one a blaze of discernment, the other a rapture of devotion ; and the glow of piety, the heart aflame with holy love, ...and everyone, whosoever he may be, who rises from prayer endowed with the fullness of these priceless gifts, may say with truth, The King hath brought me into His banqueting house” (Sermon Song of S. 49).*

### **B. Intimacy with Christ in prayer requires an \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ heart.**

1. **Bernard believed what it says in Jeremiah 29:13 “You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with \_\_\_\_ your heart”**

a) *“But there are heavens which are holy, living, reasonable, which declare the glory of God; and these bend themselves, with a willing and gracious acquiescence, to our prayers: these allow themselves to be reached by our devout affections; these receive us into their bosom as often as we knock at the door of them with a pure and worthy intention. For to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Sermon 62.2).*

2. **We don't seek Christ earnestly in order to \_\_\_\_\_ his fellowship but because we are conscious of his saving \_\_\_\_\_.**

a) *“Now, the soul that loves the Lord is carried away by the fervour of its prayers, is led on by its eager longing, forgets altogether the smallness of its merits, ...regards only His saving grace, and acts confidently in that. Finally, without fear and without shame, it recalls the Word, and confidently asks for its former delights, calling Him with its habitual freedom, not Lord, but Beloved” (Sermon 74).*

### **C. Intimacy with Christ in prayer is best expressed in \_\_\_\_\_.**

1. **To a new convert, Bernard exhorts the following:**

a) *“Wherefore avoid as much as possible, my son, conversations with guests, because these leave the mind empty and the ears full. Learn to pray to God; to lift up to Him your heart as well as your hands. Learn in all your needs to lift suppliant eyes towards heaven, and to bring upon you the pitying look of the Father of mercies. It would be an impiety to believe that God will shut up His bowels of compassion from you, and remain deaf to your groans and cries” (Letter 322.2).*

## Session 2: Lessons from Bernard of Clairvaux's Prayer Life

Six Men and Their Prayer Lives – Monday Night Bible Study 2025

Michael Garreau

---

### 2. According to Bernard, the best time for prayer in solitude was when everyone else was asleep:

a) *“He who wishes to pray in peace will take into account, not only the \_\_\_\_\_, but the \_\_\_\_\_. The moment of rest is the most favorable and when nocturnal sleep establishes a profound silence everywhere, prayer becomes more free and more pure. ...With that certainty can prayer arise during the night, when God alone is witness...It is calm and peaceful when no sound, no cry comes to interrupt. It is pure and sincere when the dust of earthly cares cannot soil it.”* (Sermon Song of S. 86).

### D. Intimacy with Christ in prayer is hindered by \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and worldly cares.

1. *“For he who ...suffers still from violent temptations, being drawn away and enticed by his own lusts— such a soul as this needs not a Bridegroom, but a Physician ; and on this account receives, not, indeed, approval and tenderness, but only remedies, oil and salves, for the cure of its wounds. Is not this the condition in which we often find ourselves in our prayers, we who are every day either tried by the passions which are in us now, or touched with remorse for those which were in us formerly?”* (Sermon Song of S. 32.3).

### 2. Bernard understood that “God \_\_\_\_\_ the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

a) *“Pride has been found in me, and the Lord has turned away in wrath from His servant. Hence is that barrenness of my soul and that defect in devotion which I experience. How is it that my heart is thus dried up? ...Its hardness has become so great that I am not able to shed tears. In the chanting of the Psalms I feel no interest, I do not care to read, I have no delight in prayer, I do not resort to my habitual meditations... follow me in not sparing yourselves, but on the contrary, accusing your own selves as often as you detect that grace is lessening in you, that zeal is growing cold, and virtue languishing, as you see that I likewise accuse myself. To do this is to act as a man who watches exactly over himself, who examines with care his ways and his desires, and who in everything holds in suspicion the vice of arrogance, for fear that it should creep secretly into his heart”* (Sermon Song of S. 54.8-9).

### 3. Fellowship with God is not only hindered by sin, but also by the \_\_\_\_\_ of life, even ministry.

a) *“Who doubts that a man, when he is in prayer, is speaking with God? and yet how often are we withdrawn, and, so to speak, torn away,*

## Session 2: Lessons from Bernard of Clairvaux's Prayer Life

Six Men and Their Prayer Lives – Monday Night Bible Study 2025

Michael Garreau

---

*from prayer, and that at the very dictate of charity, because of those who are in need of our assistance or our advice! How often does holy quiet give place, and that from a pious motive, to the tumult of business affairs” (Sermon 50).*

### **E. Devotion to prayer leads to an \_\_\_\_\_ in life and ministry.**

1. **Prayer is not just the best way to love God, it is the best way to love your \_\_\_\_\_. When writing to a fellow Abbot, Bernard encouraged the following:**

a) *“Remember also to give to your voice the utterance of power. What is that, do you say? That your works harmonize with your words; nay, rather your words with your works... Yet if you are wise you will add a third, that is, devotion to prayer... And now abideth these three — word, example, prayer; but the greatest of these is prayer. For although, as I said, work is the life of the word spoken, yet prayer gives, both to work and word, grace and efficacy” (Letter 201.3).*

2. **After admonishing a young man in a letter, Bernard writes,**

a) *“In the meantime I have by these admonitions knocked sufficiently at the heart of a young man modest and docile; and nothing remains for me now than to knock by my prayers also, for him, at the door of the Divine Mercy, that the Lord may finish my work if my remonstrances have found his heart ever so little softened, so that I may speedily rejoice over him with great joy” (Letter 45).*

### **F. Right praying is praying that relates \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ to Jesus Christ.**

1. *“You pray badly if, when praying, you seek something other than the Word. For everything is in him: the remedies for your wounds, the help which you need, the correction of your faults, the source of your progress. In a word, all that a man can and should wish for. There is no reason to ask the Word for anything other than himself, since he is all things” (Sermon 86).*