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Improving Our Praying



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses ways to improve one's prayer life by drawing on passages from the New Testament, specifically Luke 18.1 and James chapter 4. He emphasizes the importance of not losing heart and surrendering to God's will while focusing on the model prayer taught by Jesus. The key takeaway is that prayer is a powerful weapon in spiritual warfare and the priority should be to align ourselves with God's will while praying for the advancement of His kingdom.

Transcript

The topic I'd like to talk about today, I've entitled Improving Our Praying, and I would like to start by turning your attention to two passages in the New Testament, Luke 18.1 being the first and James chapter 4 being another. Luke 18.1 and James chapter 4. I do not present myself as a paragon of mighty prayer. I've known the Lord for many years and of course I've prayed many prayers in those years, but I have not ever considered myself to be exceptional in prayer.

It has kept me at times from preaching more about prayer than I have because I would like to think that I primarily teach on things of which I'm an eminent model, but that is not always the case. I don't want to give the impression that that is the case. And when it comes to prayer, I speak as one who needs to improve my praying, and I'm sharing with you the things that I have found in the Scripture as I've sought answers to feeble prayers, neglected prayer, and whatever else may be a deficiency in our prayer lives, my own included.

In Luke chapter 18.1, it says, Then he spoke a parable to them that men always ought to pray and not to lose heart. The King James says not to faint, which is another way of saying not to lose heart. Now, after this there follows a parable, and we will probably look at this parable later this morning, but I just wanted to point out that this is one of the rare cases, it may be the only case in the Bible, where the narrator precedes the record of a parable that Jesus told by telling us what the parable is there to teach.

Most of the time we just have the parable, and on a few happy occasions, Jesus actually

explains the parable to his disciples. Most of the time he does not. But very rarely, I can only think of maybe one other possible time in all the Gospels where the writer of the Gospels, now this parable is here to teach us this lesson.

And now I think that if we had read the parable without that introductory statement, we probably, probably as spiritual people would have discovered what the lesson was, but Luke wants to make sure we don't miss it. It is absolutely essential, just in case you're a little dull and don't get the message of the parable, it's important that you recognize he taught this parable in order to get across that men ought always to pray. And what's interesting, he says, and not to faint or not to lose heart, which maybe tells us one of the reasons that prayer isn't offered more than it is because we do lose heart.

It indicates that one of the greatest detriments and hindrances to prayer is the loss of courage, the loss of heart and fainting. I don't know why that would ever happen, but I actually I do, too. And I think the scriptures are very realistic in pointing out that Christians do become discouraged and that discouragement can lead to neglect of prayer.

The other passage I wanted to open with is in James, chapter four, the first three verses. Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure, that war in your members you lust and do not have you murder and covet and cannot obtain you fight in war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures. Interesting about this passage is he seems to be talking about war. He may be talking principally about small squabbles between individuals or or clans, you know, feuds and so forth.

But he does use the word for war here and fights. And he seems to indicate that the reason there are wars and fights is because people desire to have things that they don't have and and they lust for them. And that is certainly true.

I don't suppose any war has ever been fought, but through covetousness, covetousness or the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. And war is the is the paradigm in which all kinds of evils manifest themselves. It's been called the sin that includes all other sins because there's hardly a war where there isn't also rape and pillage and stealing and destruction and torture and other horrible things, lying.

But the thing that's interesting about this passage is that he talks about the cause of war and he talks about what he says would be the cure of war. The reason that you fight in war is because you desire what you don't have. Now, if you really if it's something you really need, you could have asked God and he would have given it to you.

And if you do ask God and he doesn't give it to you, it's because you have bad motives in

asking. So he says and he suggests that perhaps those objectives that people seek to obtain through war could be obtained through prayer rather. Now, of course, not all people who wage war, most people who wage war are not inclined to pray and don't have any relation with God in case they did.

But the interesting thing is it may give us some idea of what the Christians alternative to fighting in war would be in order to accomplish whatever it would be. We hope to accomplish through fighting in war. In any case, prayer is what is brought before us.

And that is a war of its own. That is a spiritual warfare. And it is a war.

You can tell whenever you try to become serious about it, whenever you become diligent about it, you'll find that there are attacks on your family, on your purity, on your concentration. The enemy fights. And when Paul talks about spiritual warfare, he says that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.

They're mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds and casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity of Jesus Christ. Now, he said this is accomplished through the weapons of our warfare. I would like very much to bring every thought and I'm not just talking about my own, every thought on the planet into obedience, into the subjection to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

And actually, prayer is able to accomplish far more than men think. But that is perhaps why men don't pray more or more faithfully or with greater expectation. I have three things I'd like to talk about today because prayer is a very large subject.

I can't, of course, give an exhaustive teaching on everything the Bible has to say, but there are three things I'd like to say. I'd like to take a look, first of all, at the model prayer of Jesus with which we're all familiar. And then I'd like to talk about these two points that James brings up.

You have not because you do not ask. Well, if it's that simple, why don't we ask more? I'd like to examine why we don't ask more, why we don't pray more, what hinders us. And then I want to talk about that other part.

You ask and do not receive. Why is it that sometimes, although we do ask, it still seems powerless? So I want to look at what Jesus taught about prayer first. And then I want to talk about hindrances to prayer that keep us from asking when we ought to be asking.

And then I want to talk about powerlessness in prayer, why our prayers often do not accomplish more. I think the Scripture gives answers to those things. Let's look at Matthew chapter 6. And we could have looked at this over in Luke 11, and that would have introduced it a little differently.

In Matthew 6, we have the model prayer of Christ given to the disciples, which we usually call the Lord's Prayer. And it's in the context here of the Sermon on the Mount. It's simply introduced as a part of a section where Jesus is talking about how to give your alms in a way that pleases God, how to pray in a way that pleases God, and how to fast in a way that pleases God.

And he inserts, when you pray, pray like this. And we have the model prayer here. Over in Luke 11, we have the same prayer given, and it's given in a different context where the disciples come to Jesus, and they say, Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples to pray.

And so Jesus says, well, do it like this, and he gives essentially the same prayer. It doesn't matter which passage we look at, the prayer is the same in both. And I've got to turn to Matthew 6, so that's where we'll be looking.

In Luke 6, 9 and following, Jesus said, In this manner, therefore, pray. Now, when Jesus said pray in this manner, he didn't necessarily say pray this prayer. Now, I've got no objection to praying this exact prayer.

I pray it frequently when I don't know what else to pray for. I always figure you can't lose by praying the very prayer that Jesus, you know, dictated for you to say, now repeat after me. But he didn't exactly say repeat after me.

And I would say this, that it is possible to say this exact prayer and get nowhere with it, because it is just that, it's just an exact prayer. Just like in many Catholics who are raised Catholic, you know, when they go to the confessional, the priest says, well, you know, you'll do fine if you light this many candles and say this many rosaries and say this many Hail Marys, and this many Our Fathers, Our Fathers being the Lord's Prayer. And I've known many people raised Catholic, I was not myself, but they said they just learned how to say those things so fast, never did take a thought for what was being said.

Now, Protestants, of course, don't fall into that kind of crass abuse, but I will say this, never having been a Catholic and never having said Our Fathers for the sake of, you know, getting my sins, I don't know, more thoroughly purged or something. I will say this, I have learned this prayer from childhood and prayed it thousands of times, and I will confess that I have to force myself to think of what I am saying when I use this prayer, because it is so familiar, it is very difficult for me, and I would assume I'm not alone in this, to pray this prayer without just kind of letting several of the lines go by and then realizing later, I didn't even think about those lines. I didn't even think what they were saying.

I just said them because it's like a memorized prayer. Well, I'd like for us to look at these lines a little bit. We can't go into them as much in depth as I would like to, but I would like to at least see what kind of prayer, and that's what this manner, praying this manner

means, pray this kind of prayer.

Pray in this way doesn't necessarily mean in these exact words. Again, I favor praying in these exact words so long as you're able to keep your attention on what it is you're saying and not just rattling off memorized syllables. But really what we have here is a model of the kind of prayer we should be praying.

And it is sort of, I take it sort of as a skeletal structure upon which to hang specific matters, specific points. And we know it very well, the prayer goes, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Some manuscripts read, from the evil one.

For yours, thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. And some manuscripts leave out that last line.

There's no need to leave it out, however. There's nothing heretical about it. It's a wonderful line.

And by the way, in 1 Chronicles, I guess it was, near the end there, David prayed a prayer of dedication for the materials that were donated for the temple. And he actually used this line, or essentially the same line. All the contents of this line, thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, are all in David's prayer.

And I don't know, you know, the manuscripts differ as to whether Jesus included it here, but if you have any doubt about it, at least it's in another prayer in the Bible. And it doesn't hurt to include it here. Now, what actually is this prayer about? I have many things that I've said on other occasions when I was going to simply teach an entire session on nothing but this prayer that I will have to omit today.

I will say this first of all, that the way that God is addressed in this prayer is in a manner of familiar reverence, which is kind of a strange oxymoron, but it is so. In speaking of him as father, of course, that is a term that everybody has a father and everyone knows what it's like to speak to a father. And while some fathers are not as accessible as they ought to be, or not as God-like in terms of modeling fatherhood to their children as they should be, most of us have the concept of what a father is.

He's the person who cares for us. He's the person who brought us into existence. He's the person who feels in measure responsible for us as we look to him.

And who has our concerns in his heart. In another place, in chapter 7 of Matthew, Jesus said, You fathers, you know how to give good gifts to your children. He said, Even you

earthly fathers who are wicked, if your child asks him for bread, you won't give him a stone.

If he asks for a fish, you won't give him a serpent. And you fathers are evil, how much more will your heavenly father give those good things to those who ask him? Jesus encourages us to pray as he prayed to God as the father, as one who has our concerns at heart, and one who listens because we are his children. This also suggests, of course, that the prayer is a prayer suited only for people who are children of God.

Because God is not everybody's father. And so Jesus was telling his disciples how they, as persons who have been brought into relationship with God, by their repentance and faith in him, how they now have the ability to approach him as a child approaches a father. And yet the term father is a term of reverence, at least in Jesus' culture.

It wasn't like today. They had not had their Simpsons on TV yet in those days, and other TV programs and movies that make fathers look like idiots. And so they still had a high regard for the office of a father.

True, Jesus referred to God in his prayer in Gethsemane as Abba. And we're told that that is an Aramaic form of the word father that is a very familiar form, such as a young child might use. In other words, it's often compared with our word Papa or Daddy.

And that Jesus could speak to the father that way. He also taught we can. We're told in Romans chapter 8 and in Galatians that we have been given the spirit of sonship so that we can cry out to God Abba, Father, as well.

So we have a welcome in God's presence, such as a child has in the presence of a loving and concerned father. And yet that child must show reverence and respect. And that is seen in the second line, or maybe it's the second part of the first line, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Now, I will tell you that there are many lines in this prayer that I find difficult to know exactly what to say about them. And this is one of them. Hallowed be thy name means essentially may your name be held in reverence, or may your person be held in reverence.

May you be highly revered and esteemed and extolled and honored is what it really means. What I don't understand fully about it is whether this is so much a petition as it might be, or whether it is more like simply an expression of reverence. When people in biblical times, and I suppose other times too, would approach their king or a monarch, they would often not just say, Hi King, they would say something more reverent than that to open the conversation.

They would say, Oh King, live forever, or something like that. Now, of course, in saying live forever, no one really expected it by saying, so that's really going to make the king

live forever, or even in more English culture to say long live the king. Again, the expression doesn't really bring about longevity of the king at all.

But it is a statement of honor, a statement that I don't feel that I can speak to the king as I can speak to others merely, but I need to come to him as one who's very high, very lofty, very important, and someone that although I can come to him as a father, I cannot come with him without reverence. And to say, Hallowed be thy name, maybe that might be a specific petition, that we should pray that God's name would be more revered than it is, and that would not be a bad petition to ask. But I think I've suspected for a long time it is more simply a statement of one's own desire to honor him, and to come with the proper state of reverence and deference and so forth to him.

Now, one very clear petition, and the very first petition that is very clear is, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. And it's clear that later on we pray for things for ourselves. Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us, deliver us, lead us not into temptation, things that are good for us.

But the first thing that we are to pray for is the first order of business in prayer, always. And when you pray, you should pray like this, even if you don't pray this exact prayer. Your prayer should be focused on the priority of God's will, not ours.

Prayer is not simply a magic wand that God has put into our hands to bring about the world we want, or the circumstances we want. It is not for our will to be accomplished, it is for his will. And that ties in with what I said, this is a prayer only for disciples.

This is a prayer only for people who are really Christians, because people who are not Christians want their own will. And Christians are people who at least in theory, if they are real Christians, have denied themselves and taken up their cross to follow Jesus Christ. And have therefore, in theory, renounced their own agendas, their own will.

And by the way, if you haven't done that, then you have not properly understood what it means to become a Christian. We know that it says in 1 Corinthians 6 that we have been bought with a price, we are not our own. We are owned by God, as slaves are owned by a master.

And we sold ourselves, I mean, he paid the purchase price, but it was up to us to decide whether we would apply it in our own case, or whether we would reject that and be slaves of sin instead. We are all slaves of something. To be a slave of God is much to be preferred.

He is a very good master and father. But the point here is that in the decision to become a Christian, it is a decision to accept the fact that he paid a price for us and we want to be bought. We want to be owned by him.

And if owned by him, that means we have laid aside all our agendas. You might recall

there were some men, three men in a row are recorded in Luke chapter 9, I believe it is, that Jesus called, in each case he either called them or they called themselves, but in Luke chapter 9, verses 57 through 62, we see very quickly this. Luke 9, 57, Now it happened as they journeyed on the road that someone said to him, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head. Then he said to another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father.

And Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow you, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. But Jesus said to him, No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Now this isn't a passage about prayer, but it is a passage about what it means to be a Christian. It is a passage about what we are agreeing to when we say, Yes, I will change my identity from whatever I was before to a follower of Christ. That's my new identity.

There's no more Jew or Gentile, bond or free, Scythian, Greek, male, female in Christ. We're all one. We've changed our identity.

My identity is not as being a white American male. I mean, I am those things, but that's not where I find my identity. I don't find more solidarity with white people than with other colored people, with males than other genders, with Americans than other nationalities.

My identity is I'm in Christ. In Christ, all these distinctions fade into equal littleness so that we now have one distinction of importance, and that is we're followers of Christ. When we're called into this life, it's like these three men.

Jesus said, Come and follow me. And yet none of these men apparently had really understood what it meant to follow him, as I suspect many Christians don't. Two of them both said, Lord, me first.

Did they not? Let me first go bury my father. Let me first go back. That's the problem with many Christians.

They think they're becoming followers of Christ. They say, Lord, I'll follow you. But still in their mind, it's always me first.

And in their prayers, it's me first as well. In the prayers that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, because they were disciples indeed, and with them it was not me first. It's, Lord, you're first.

In their prayers, it's, Lord, you first. First, Lord, your will be done. First, Lord, your kingdom come.

That's the first order of business always in prayer. Now, you might say, I don't even understand what that really means. What am I asking for when I say, thy kingdom come? Am I praying for the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the millennial kingdom? Or what am I asking for here? Am I asking for something to happen inside of me? Well, the kingdom of God is, Jesus said, like a little mustard seed that was planted in his day and grew and is growing still into a great tree to fill the whole earth.

Or as Daniel saw it, a stone that struck an image in the feet and grows into a great mountain to fill the whole earth. Or like leaven in a lump of dough that starts out small and it grows to leaven the whole lump. It is a growing proposition, the kingdom of God is.

It began with Jesus Christ. He began to gather followers. It's grown.

It's grown. The citizens of the kingdom are the kingdom. A kingdom is made up of the subjects of a king.

And those who have surrendered to Jesus as their king are his kingdom. But there are dynamics of the kingdom which are not to be revealed until Jesus returns. And then we see the consummation of the kingdom.

In the meantime, the kingdom is growing. It is expanding. It's spreading to all nations.

People are defecting from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, becoming part of this. And for us to pray that God's kingdom will come, I think, is to be informed by all of this reality. The fact that eventually God's kingdom will be universal and his will will be done thoroughly on earth as thoroughly as it is in heaven today.

In the meantime, we pray that his kingdom will keep coming. It came when he was here and it's coming and expanding and growing and co-opting more and more people as time goes by. We need to be praying for God's kingdom in all of its aspects to be advancing.

In praying for this, what are some of the things we would be praying for? Well, I think that Paul, in some of his other specific requests for prayer for things, is reflecting our concern that the kingdom come. And these are the kinds of things, if you're not sure what you're really supposed to be praying for about this, in 2 Thessalonians 3, 2 Thessalonians 3, 1, Paul says, Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified just as it is with you. Now, that's praying for his kingdom to come, that the word of the Lord through which the kingdom is spread, the gospel of the kingdom, that the gospel may run quickly through the world, that it may have no obstructions.

Pray for the advance of the gospel. I'm sure many of you routinely pray for missionaries that you know personally or that you've heard of, or maybe just in the outside you say, Lord, help all the missionaries out there. But, what do you want Him to do for them? Have you ever told Him? You know, I mean, OK, I heard you talk about the missionaries, so what do you want me to do? You never mentioned it.

Lord, just bless them. Well, one way that you need to ask that God will bless the missionary enterprise is that the word of God preached, whether it's by missionaries abroad or by domestic ministers, that the word of God may go forth with power and conviction in the Holy Spirit and that it may confront sinners powerfully and change their lives. That's what the word of God is capable of doing, but I don't think it does that automatically.

Apparently, Paul wanted prayers to be behind his preaching, lots of prayers, everybody's prayers. And we need to pray that those who are on the mission field may go without obstruction, that their families may not be a hindrance to them, that finances may not be a hindrance to them, that God will provide for them, that health hindrances may be kept from them, that when they preach the word it will be with anointing and with power, and that God will confirm the word with signs following. These are the kinds of things that we can pray for missionaries.

That's praying for the kingdom to come, because the kingdom is advanced in that way. Another way that we can pray, besides for the missionaries that are out there, is to pray for more. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 9, in verse 38, Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers in the harvest.

Do you pray that often? I mean, a lot of times people say, I just don't know what to pray, and I have to confess, there's times I get down to prayers, I want to spend an hour in prayer, I can't think of an hour's worth of things to pray for. Well, you've got a head start if Jesus actually said, pray for this specific thing. You can start with that at least.

And many of us say, I don't know what to pray for, but we haven't even prayed for the things we've been told to pray for. Jesus said, pray to the Lord of the harvest that he will send more laborers into the harvest. Pray for that, and pray for those that are there.

That's how we pray that his kingdom will advance, that his kingdom will come. Now, you might be careful when you pray that, because what we see in this chapter in Matthew 9, Jesus said, pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Then the next verse says, in chapter 10, verse 1, And when he had called his twelve disciples, he gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all kinds of sickness, and then he sent them out.

So he says, pray for more laborers to be sent, and then he sent them. So, I mean, you have to have sincerity in your prayer. If you're praying for something you don't really

want, I don't think you're going to fool God.

I don't think it's going to happen. But, if you really want more laborers to go out there, you need to be prepared to go too, or send your children there. Do you want your children on the mission field? Whose children are they? What did God give them to you for? There should be nothing more thrilling to a Christian parent than that their child answers a call to the mission field, or to the ministry, because then you know, wow, this is why God gave me this child.

So this person could go out and promote the word of God. I've always been kind of surprised. My parents are Christians, and I was very sick when I was two years old.

I was diagnosed as having cystic fibrosis. My parents prayed for me. They were not what we call Pentecostal charismatic types.

They were not into healing ministries or anything like that. But when the doctors say your kid's going to die, what do you do? And you're a Christian. You pray.

And my dad did pray that I'd be healed. Apparently his prayer was answered because I don't have cystic fibrosis today. But during that time, he says he dedicated me to the Lord for the ministry.

He says, Lord, if you'll heal my son, he'll be dedicated to you for the ministry. Now, he didn't do that with his other two children, and although they're Christians, they're not in the ministry. What I don't understand about that is that I begged God to take my children to the ministry before they were born.

I'm not sure why, in anyone's case, it should take a health crisis for a parent to say, Okay, God, take them into the ministry then. I think that that should be the greatest desire that a parent should have for their child. Lord, I'm praying you'll send more labors in the harvest, and if you can generate some out of my family, all the better.

Me included. Here am I. Send me. You've got to be prepared to pray the way you're willing to live.

If you pray one way and live another way, you're not fooling God. And so, to pray for His kingdom to come means I'm committed to His kingdom coming, and that should reflect in the commitments of my life. And I'm praying for the Word of God to go forth.

I'm praying for there to be more people carrying the Word of God. What else? Well, another thing we need to pray for that's related to praying for His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth is in 1 Timothy 2, and very timely for us today, this particular week. In 1 Timothy 2, verse 1, Paul says, Therefore, I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, and intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings, and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and

reverence.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. Now, we sometimes have heard people say, and I've said this myself, because I think there's some truth in it, that, you know, probably what we need around here for the church to wake up is a little bit of persecution. You know, if things would just get hard here, maybe Christians would stop being so petty about stuff and stop being so divided unnecessarily about little issues and maybe get serious about God.

You know, that's what happens in countries where freedom is taken away from Christians and there's persecution. And while I believe that that statement has truth in it, I believe for the church to be persecuted, God works all things together for good, the church can benefit from that, yet Paul indicates, and he was certainly no stranger to persecution, that for us to live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, and we should be praying for that. Now, the particular circumstances he's talking about there is kings and those in authority and the dictates of them that affect us.

We should be praying that God will raise up the rulers that please Him and control the rulers that are already there. The Bible tells us that both are the case, but things that God says He can do, He doesn't always do them automatically. He waits to be asked.

Remember, you have not because you ask not. In Daniel chapter 2, we're told that God raises up kings and He brings down kings. Now, we may think it's... I mean, history may tell us that that king rose because of a military coup or that king rose because of an election or that king rose because of this or that secondary circumstances.

The Bible tells us to look behind that and recognize God raises up the king that comes up and He brings down the king that goes down. Furthermore, we're told in Proverbs 21.1 that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water, He turneth it with us wherever He will. So, God is sovereign over the kings.

That's why He's called the King of Kings. King over the kings. And as such, He is the one who will determine the political circumstances.

However, it should not be thought that His sovereign choice about this will simply materialize without prayer. Now, I do believe that God's ultimate will will be done with or without prayer. I don't think it would be done without prayer.

I think there will always be someone praying, fortunately. But Wesley thought that God doesn't do anything except through prayer. I don't know that we could establish that because there's always people praying.

You never know what happened and who might have been praying for it. You can't really prove it doctrinally, biblically, that God doesn't do anything except through prayer. I

probably created the universe with no one praying.

But I would say this. The Bible does indicate that prayer does change things. That we would have things that we do not currently have if we had asked for them and had not asked amiss that we might consume them in our lives.

That God wants things for us that don't always happen because we did not put ourselves in a position to be receptive. It is my belief that God wants all people to be saved. Not all are.

Now, that's something that God wills that doesn't always happen. What's wrong there? I believe many of those people that God wants saved are not saved because they don't put themselves in the position to be receptive to His grace. Now, if we are in that position, we didn't put ourselves there alone.

I mean, God drew us there. But the point is, it is the lack of receptivity to God's grace, I believe, that prevents one person from being saved when another is saved. Likewise, once we are saved, there are many things God wants for us.

More grace, more holiness, more victory, more of whatever we need that we don't always get because we do not ask. We don't put ourselves in the position to receive. But the point here is, the governments, the decisions they make under God obviously affect the well-being of Christians.

And that's why we're told to pray that our well-being might be enhanced by what God does among the rulers of the earth. And that is part of what it means to pray for the kingdom to come and for His will to be done. Certainly, when we think of God's will on earth, you cannot omit from consideration who's ruling the most powerful nations of the world.

That would certainly have something to do with what God's will is on earth happening. And we need to pray that God will raise up those rulers and bring down those rulers that please Him to do so and to control the rulers that are there. We must not be afraid.

Many of us are in Idaho because we know there are dangers posed to us by the direction of our present government. But really, I mean, that's true, and we're supposed to be aware of dangers. And the Bible says when the wicked rise to power, men hide themselves.

The Bible says, I hid here in Idaho. And it seemed to work. They didn't find me, but not yet.

They may yet. But the fact is, whether you hide yourself or not, the best place for you to hide is in your closet with your door shut on your knees and pray to your Father, which is in heaven. And that's the place of safety.

The Bible says some trust in chariots and some in horses. But we will remember the name of the Lord our God. And so, the political outcome of elections or any other movements is really in the hands of God.

And the hand of God is, to a very large extent, in the hand of those who will pray and beseech God and prevail with Him. There are scriptures I will show you a little later on that. The point is, though, when we're praying, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, we're praying for specific things.

We're not just praying for some kind of vague religious eschatological event. We're praying for something that's really going on on earth. That's what He says, on earth as it is in heaven.

It's about here. And I believe that there are many things that God has accomplished in heaven that need to be accomplished on earth. I believe that Jesus, for example, bound the powers of darkness when He was here.

But we are those who are, through our prayers and through our evangelism, through our testimony and so forth, we enforce that which has already been accomplished in heaven. You read about it in heaven in Colossians 2.15. Through the cross, Jesus disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross. This is a picture that Paul uses of a victorious general, Jesus Christ, leading His enemies, the demons, in chains behind Him through an arch of triumph.

Well, that's what heaven sees, but we don't see that here. Why not? Because we have been told to pray that His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It's already done in heaven, but it's not done here yet.

Why not? What's hindering it? Perhaps we have not because we ask not. We're to pray that His kingdom will come and His will be done here on earth, and it may not happen until God's people are moved to do so. Well, we're also to pray for our daily bread.

I won't go into this in detail, but certainly the Bible indicates that God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory. There's nothing selfish about praying for your daily bread. In fact, it's a very unselfish prayer.

Daily bread means the allotment for one day. A lot of people are praying for RVs and new villas in France and things like that. And that's not exactly what Jesus told us to pray for.

It's hardly a need. But He said, we can pray, give us this day our daily bread. Today, give me the bread I need today.

I'm not even asking for filet mignon. Just bread will do. Now, God is really great in that He only authorizes us to pray modest prayers, but He will often provide abundantly

above and beyond what we ask or think.

But we have to recognize that when it comes to praying for us, Jesus only authorized that we pray for our needs. Now, God may generously give us way in excess of what our needs are, and in my experience, He always has. He's never given me less than I needed, and He's generally given me far more than I could ever claim to honestly need.

But we are to pray for our needs. And we pray for our physical needs, our daily bread. We also pray for our spiritual needs here.

Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. That's a very important need we have, to be forgiven. And notice, He only authorizes us to pray for that conditional upon our forgiving others.

He doesn't allow us to just say, God, forgive me. He says, no, say it like this, forgive me as I forgive others who've wronged me. Well, maybe it'd be easier for me to just say, forgive me, and feel better about it, because if I'm not a very forgiving person myself, I don't want God to be as unforgiving toward me as I am toward other people.

And yet, God says, that's the way it's going to be. You pray for forgiveness, you do it on the basis that you ask to be forgiven the same way you forgive others. No better, no worse, no different.

And there's actually three or four other times in the Gospels that Jesus gives the same teaching, not in the context of prayer. That you forgive others, God will forgive you. You don't, He won't.

And then, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. That's a very difficult petition to understand, too, because it's asking that God won't lead us into temptation. And yet, temptation is inevitable.

Even Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. And the Bible indicates that temptation is part of the battle that we're called into, and we've got to overcome temptation. And all people are tempted.

So, why do we pray that we won't be tempted? Well, there's a number of ways to understand that. I can think of two that make sense to me. One is that we've already conditioned the whole prayer with this statement, Thy will be done.

And in a sense, everything else we ask for, we're asking, if it be your will. If it accords with your will being done. When I ask for daily bread, God might want, this might be the day He wants me to die.

He doesn't have to provide me daily bread on my last day. Give me my daily bread, if it's your will. That is, if it's your will that I live and do this or that, then, of course, I'll need

this.

I'm asking for that. If it's your will. Don't lead me into temptation, unless it is your will to do so.

Now, it is sometimes God's will for us to be tempted, so that we can overcome temptation. He doesn't want us to sin. But as I said, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and He beat it.

He overcame. And that's what He wants us to do sometimes, too. I do think, though, we shouldn't go running in temptation.

I think it's wise to ask God not to let us be tempted more than, you know, unnecessarily, more than it is His actual will that we must be. The other way to understand it is not so much to see it as, don't let me be tempted unless it's your will, but this way. Don't lead me into temptation, but lead me out, all the way through.

Because the other part is, deliver us from. Don't just lead us in, but deliver us out of it. You know, yes, I have to be led along this path into places where temptation is inevitable, but don't just lead me in there.

Lead me through there. Deliver us out of it, from the evil one. And I think what He's asking us to pray for, of course, is personal holiness, personal sanctity and victory over temptation, which should be, again, one of our prime concerns.

Actually, everything we're asking for has to do with God's will and God's kingdom. For me to be holy is God's will for my life. For me to eat is His will for my life, just like it's my will for my children to eat.

For me to be forgiven is His will for my life. For me to meet the conditions of that by forgiving others and asking Him for forgiveness. Now, those are the kinds of things we're to pray for, and there's many other scriptures that talk about it.

When it comes to praying that we be led not into temptation, but delivered from evil, I wonder, some of you probably would complain that there are sins that you just never seem to really beat. I mean, there are a lot of sins you've overcome since you've become a Christian, but there's a few there that you can count on it. Almost every time you're tempted, you're going to be disappointed.

You're going to fall. Now, that's not inevitable, but it is almost a universal experience for Christians. Now, how could something that is not inevitable be a universal experience? Well, let's put it this way.

To have prevailing sins that you never overcome is average in Christianity, but it's not normative. It's average in that almost everyone would have to admit there are some sins

they still haven't beat, and they've been working on them for years in many cases, and they still don't beat them. But it's not normative.

The norm is that we live a holy life and that we overcome sin. The Bible says there's no temptation taken you, but such is as common to man. And God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you're able to endure, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape.

Okay, every time you're tempted, there's a way of escape. Then why do you fall? Because you didn't take the way of escape. Well, what's the way of escape? How about this one? Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.

Jesus said that to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation. That's Matthew 26, 41.

Olson wrote an article for our little magazine we were publishing about prayer, and he used this scripture. I thought, you know, he told me he prays this scripture for himself and his family. I had never done so, and I just thought, well, you know, Jesus did say to pray this way.

In Luke 21, in verse 36, Jesus said, Watch, therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass and to stand before the Son of Man. Now, that's like praying that he'll deliver me out of evil. Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil.

Okay? Elsewhere, he says, watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. And he says, pray, watch and pray that you will be able to escape these things and not succumb to them and be able to stand before the Son of Man. So, we are actually told to be praying about those things.

If somebody tells me they've got an ongoing problem with some kind of sin in their life, my first area of curiosity is, are you praying about it? It's amazing how many times people just figure, I've got to beat this. I've got to read another book about victory. I've got to maybe go to the people who have deliverance ministry, or maybe I need inner healing, or who knows, maybe I need to go to a psychiatrist.

You know, I try everything except the way of escape that God has provided from temptation, which is watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. So, these are the kinds of things we're to be praying for, and we all know the prayer, but those are the kinds of issues that are raised in the prayer. Let me real quickly, because I got started late here.

I'm going to run a little late. I apologize in advance. Let's talk a little bit about why we don't pray more.

Now, if you pray all the time, I know there's one or two people here that I'm aware of who do pray all the time, some tremendous prayer warriors, but that's not most of us. And I'm not sure why it isn't. It is possible that some people, God has set aside to a ministry of prayer more, I mean, some preach and some give and some do other things, and some maybe are set aside to a particular intercessory prayer ministry, maybe by giving them more of a burden, more anointing for that, more time on their hands for it than others have.

But the fact is, we can't cop out and say, well, I don't have that ministry of intercession, therefore I just don't pray much. I mean, prayer is the chief activity of the inhabitants of heaven. I mean, and they know what's good for them, you know, and they know what's valuable.

I mean, the 24 elders, the four living creatures, the multitudes no one can number, John's up there in heaven, what were they doing the whole time? Praying and praising? They're just talking to God all the time. You might say, well, I would too if I could see Him face to face, but that's just the thing. Jesus said, blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

We will see Him face to face. In the meantime, we're supposed to be relating to Him the way He told us to relate to Him. Well, then it will be a lot easier when we see Him.

In the meantime, it's the battle. In the meantime, it's the battle of faith. And that battle of faith has to confront several obstacles.

Many times we don't pray more than we do, I think. First of all, because we have a sense of self-adequacy. We just don't really feel like we need God as much as maybe some people do.

I mean, I'm not an alcoholic. I'm not a drug addict. You know, I can work.

I can supply for my family. I can do all kinds of things for myself. Why should I pray about those things? Why should I depend on God for those things? And then it gets worse.

I think, well, I can handle temptation myself. I can just screw up my willpower a little tighter and beat it next time around. I haven't beat it yet, but I'll beat it next time.

And just the sense that I ought to be able to pull this off. If anyone can, I can. Well, the fact is no one can, and you can't either.

You can't live the way God wants you to live. It's just impossible. Only one person can do that, and that's Jesus.

However, fortunately, he is a resource available to us that if we pray, we can have the victory. We can have the things we need. Paul knew that he was not sufficient.

In 2 Corinthians 3, verses 5 and 6, Paul said, Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves. He's talking about the mighty ministry of the new covenant and the glorious ministry he has there. He says, None of that's of ourselves.

We're not sufficient for that. He says, But our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit, etc. Now, our sufficiency is of God.

Now, how does Paul obtain this sufficiency from God? Well, by prayer. I mean, when you read Paul's letters, you find he doesn't open a letter without prayer. He hardly ever closes one without prayer.

And in between he says, And I'm always praying, and I'm praying this, and I'm praying that. He was a prayerful man, and he changed his world. He changed his world.

The ministry of Paul changed Europe. I mean, they were offering babies to idols in every country in Europe before Paul got there. And a lot of people still did after he left.

But there were at least Christian communities set up there that grew like leaven in the lump. And eventually, Europe became officially Christian. Officially, not necessarily really.

But the fact is that Paul's impact was tremendous. But he was a man of prayer, first and foremost. He knew that his sufficiency to preach and to win people was not.

He didn't count on his education. He had a lot of that. He didn't count on his eloquence.

Judging from his writing, he was capable of that. He didn't count on his standing in Jewish society. He had one time, but in Philippians, he says, I count all those things as rubbish.

I don't count those things as even helpful anymore. Anything that makes you feel you're sufficient of yourself is likely to be to your detriment. That's why Paul was given a thorn in the flesh.

He says, because God said to me, in your weakness, my strength is made perfect. If you are strong, you'll depend on your strength. If you are weak, you won't be tempted to depend on your strength because it's nonexistent and you'll have to count on my strength.

And that's when you pray. You pray when you know you're in trouble. Even atheists do that.

When they're really in trouble and they know they're over their head and they can't do anything more, when they come to the end of themselves, they'll pray. They may not follow through in their life and follow God, but they'll call out to God because prayer

happens when you know you're inadequate and when you're overwhelmed. What we need to do is be enlightened to know that we're always overwhelmed.

We're only aware of being overwhelmed when we can't pay the bills or when our children are so sick, there's nothing the doctors can do. Suddenly, we know there's nothing left to do but cry out to God. Alas, has it come to that, that we have to look to God now? Boy, are we in trouble.

Actually, we need to know that every day to live as Christ, we're inadequate. We need to pray. We need to ask Him to fill us and to enable us.

There's also another thing that hinders us from praying, I think, is that, I think we get a very profound sense when we're praying sometimes that we're really doing nothing and there's an awful lot that needs to be done. The house needs to be cleaned. You know, bills have to be paid.

There's another job waiting to go out and bid. The kids need some quality time. We've got all kinds of things on our plate to do and there just isn't time to pray.

And when we say, well, I'm a Christian, I should pray, we get down to pray and in a little while we feel like, there's so many other things I should be doing. I mean, it's so distracting to be trying to pray and feel like, I'm not really doing anything important. There's so much that needs to be done.

And we don't realize too often that when we're praying, we're doing the most important thing. Because everything we can do without prayer is wood, hay and stubble and it's just going to go up in smoke. But what is done through prayer, God does.

Through us or even beyond us, apart from us. But God does and His works are eternal. His works are everlasting.

And we need to realize that it is no waste of our time to spend an hour or two or three a day in prayer. The godliest men who impacted society in times of revival, I mean, Wesley and Luther and Calvin and Finney and all these different guys, they were men who spent a lot of time in prayer. Hours of prayer.

Two to four hours a day. And I'm not saying you have to pray that many hours. It just depends on how much you want to get done.

I think it was Luther who said, I have so many things to do every day, I can't afford to spend less than two hours in prayer. He had to spend at least two hours in prayer, there was so much to do. But nothing more important than prayer.

We get the impression that we're accomplishing nothing, doing nothing, partly because our prayers aren't always immediately answered. It's very encouraging when they are

and I hope all of you have had that experience. I certainly have seen remarkable instantaneous answers to prayer, but that's not always the case.

A lot of times we have to pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and persevere and we don't see anything and that's especially contributing to our sense that nothing is really happening. But something is. One thing is we're praying.

One thing that keeps us from praying is a sense of unworthiness. If we're sinful, and especially recently, and we know we did something that isn't any good, we sometimes feel like we can't come before God because we're unworthy. And of course we are unworthy, but in Romans 5, 8 and 9, it says God demonstrates his own love toward us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us, much more than having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Now, he goes on and says, for if when we were his enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his son, much more having been reconciled shall we be saved by his life. That is, when you were not even God's friend, when you were just an ordinary sinner, God, you were unworthy of anything from God, and yet he sent his son and died for you. Totally undeserving as you were.

Now, you're his child. Is he going to do less for a child than he did for an enemy? Is he going to say, well, I'm sorry, you were unworthy when I saved you, but now you're unworthy to pray to me, even though you want to pray to me, and even though you want to be my child, I'm just not going to let it happen. It says over in Romans 8, verses 31 through 34, What shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died and furthermore is also risen, who even is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Now, if we've done anything that makes us unworthy to approach God, there's a quick remedy for Christians, and that is called genuine repentance. If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Once we've done that, if there's any sense of unworthiness to pray that keeps us from praying, that is a sense of condemnation from the devil. It needs to be ignored, and we need to believe what God said. God heard my prayer when I asked him to come to me and save me initially, and I wasn't even his friend at the time.

I'm his friend now. I don't always act like it, but I am. And because of that, I have as much more access to him about anything I need or I'm concerned about, as I did before.

But sometimes the devil makes us feel we're unworthy, and that keeps us from praying. I

think a sense of self-adequacy is where we don't feel like we need God, a sense that we're accomplishing nothing when we pray, and a sense of unworthiness are things that keep us from praying more. But let me just real quickly tell you what things I think keep us from seeing more power in our prayers.

James said you ask and receive not. He gave one reason, because you ask amiss that you might consume it on your lust. There might be other things too.

There are times when we ask and don't receive. Why is there no power in our praying? Now, I'm sure many of you have power in your praying, but I have no doubt that I'm on safe ground suggesting that most of you feel like your prayers are relatively powerless, rather routine, something you do because you're supposed to or you don't do, even though you're supposed to, but really doesn't change much when you do it. That is not normative.

Prayer is capable of doing tremendous things, and in the Bible just about everything miraculous that occurred was done through prayer. But there are some prayers that were not powerful, even in the Bible times, and they correspond to things in our own lives that keep our prayers from being powerful. One is that our prayers can only be powerful if they are offered in purity and sincerity.

Now, when I say sincerity, I said earlier you need to be willing to live the way you pray, not make a lot of holy platitudes in your utterances to God and then live totally contrary to that. When you say, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, and earth as it is in heaven, you need to be prepared to say, and me too, my will not be done, your will be done. Our prayers are to be asking God for His will, not our own.

We need to be fully dedicated to Him, but too often prayer is used as a means of getting what I want or hoping to get what I want from God when I can't get it some other way. It says in Proverbs chapter 21 and verse 27, the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, how much more, or it says the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, how much more when he offers it with evil intent. Prayers offered with evil intent, or James says you ask amiss that you may consume it upon your lusts, motivated by selfishness rather than motivated by concern for God's will.

Certainly that's one of the things that makes prayers inadequate, but not only that we have to be praying for the right thing, we have to be the right people. We need to be cleansed. We need to make sure that there are not outstanding accounts that God has against us and there can be, there can be.

That's why the Bible says if we walk in the light, that's a process, as he is in the light, he is, then we are in fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ the Son is cleansing us from all sin. This cleansing we need all the time because we're imperfect. And we remember in the days of Joshua when they went out to fight against Ai, Joshua

didn't know that one of the warriors Achan at the previous battle at Jericho had stolen something that was devoted to God.

And the Jews army was defeated at Ai, a little town that they thought they could beat easily. And Joshua fell down on his face to pray and said, God what's going on? And God said, get off your face, stop praying. He says there's sin in the camp, no sense praying to me about it until you get this settled.

And then they got rid of the sin in the camp and then their prayers were answered. But God knows your heart. If there's sin that you're refusing to repent of, if there's something between you and God, you're not letting go of, he's not going to hear your prayers.

And you're not going to feel that he hears them either. It's going to be very discouraging and there won't be any power in the prayers you do utter under those circumstances. James 5.16 says the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

You need to be in right standing with God when you pray. And if you have sins that you have not confessed and that you are holding out on, now I'm not saying you have to somehow rack your brain or anything of every sin you've ever committed that you haven't confessed. But rather if you know, if your conscience is not clear before God, your prayers are not going to be powerful.

It says if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things. But if our heart condemns us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

It says that in 1 John chapter 4. So, or three, if our heart is clear, if we're not holding out on God, if there's no sin that we've refused to repent of, then there can be that kind of power in prayer, but not otherwise. David said in Psalm 66 verse 18, if I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. And that is often the case.

People pray, but they don't get right with God first. They don't get, you know, they don't live for God. And then when they call out on God, they expect him to answer, but there's no power in that.

Another thing that may hinder the power of prayer is problems in our relationships. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 verse 23, if you come to the altar with your gift to offer it to God, and you remember there that your brother has something against you, that you've done wrong to him. You leave your gift there and you go and make it right with your brother.

Then you can come back and offer your gift. This offering of the gift is talking about an animal at the altar in Jerusalem, but it corresponds to the spiritual sacrifices of prayer that we offer. And basically what Jesus is saying is don't come to God with your offerings

to him if you are not doing all you can to settle the problems you have with other people.

Remember Jesus said, if you don't forgive others, your father won't forgive you. Well, how can you get anything from God if he's not forgiving you? Husbands are told in 1 Peter 3, 7, concerning their life with their wives, as live with them according to knowledge, giving honor to the wife as unto a weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered. A husband who does not honor his wife and does not live according to knowledge, the best he has with her, the indication is that prayers will be hindered.

Now, I'm not sure why. I'm not sure if it's just that God's holding out on him because he's waiting for him to treat his wife right, or if it means that if his relationship was more right with his wife, he and his wife could be praying in concert. And by the way, many men don't pray with their wives because there is not unity in their relationship.

And if there is unity, where two or more agree as touching anything, Jesus said, it'll be done. So, I mean, prayers are hindered by having that disunity in relationships. Another... I'm going to skip over some.

Let me just give you another reason I think is more important than people have realized. I think sometimes our prayers are weak because we are not desperate, or we just don't know that we are. Desperation in prayer is prayer that is urgently offered.

When we are desperate, it means we've got no one but God to turn to. Sometimes I wish that we were in that condition more often. We have so many other things to turn to.

We pray that God will take care of it, but we have plan B. We've got this other thing backing us up here, and, you know, we can handle it if God doesn't, but we'd rather let him do it and keep our hands clean. We just, you know, save us the work. We pray for God to do something, but we don't really see him as the one who alone we must trust in that.

We're not desperate. I really think that that is the value of fasting sometimes in prayer. I've often wondered why fast? The Bible doesn't actually command it, but it often links it with prayer, from, you know, more powerful prayer.

Jesus said, this kind doesn't come out but by prayer and fasting. Well, why does fasting contribute to all that? It's not like a hunger strike where you're bending God's arms and saying, I'm not going to eat until you give it to me. You know, it's not earning anything.

I mean, you can't earn stuff from God by fasting. What is fasting for? I can't say for sure, but one of the things that's crossed my mind on the occasions that I have fasted is that when your stomach is empty, you have more of a sense of desperation in general and much less arrogance, much less self-satisfaction. The Bible indicates when a person's stomach is full, he's likely to be proud and self-sufficient.

When his stomach is empty, he's humbled. God says He led the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 8 through the wilderness to make them hungry and humble them. Now, when you've got plenty of food, you feel like you can take on the world.

When you don't know where your next meal is coming from, you really get humbled. You really feel vulnerable. And even though fasting is voluntary, and you know where the food is, and you know you can go there if you want to, or you know that tomorrow you'll be able to eat, or the next day, or whenever you're going to end your fast, still there's just that dynamic, I think, that when your stomach is empty and you know you can't eat, you feel much more human.

You feel more mortal. You feel more like a creature and not a creator. You just have a harder time seeing yourself in the role of God when you're weakened by hunger.

And I think that that might be one of the benefits of fasting. I think Christians, we're not desperate. We say, why do we see so many miracles of healings and so forth in the foreign field, but we don't see them here? And someone says, well, we just don't have enough faith.

That's not the case. There's plenty of people in America who've got plenty of faith, and we still don't see many miracles here. I think it's because we're not desperate.

I think God provides miracles where there's nothing else for it but that. And we've got everything else for it. You know, what do we need miracles for? We only rarely, exceedingly rarely, hit a situation where we need a miracle from God or else we're really in trouble.

People in the third world, they need miracles on a daily basis, and often they see them because God knows the desperation with which they cry. And we sometimes pray, but we don't have much heart in it because we don't really, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if he answers this one or not too much.

It's just not that important because we can handle it if he doesn't. That lack of desperation. I think not only fasting but watching.

We saw Jesus say, Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. Watch and pray that ye may be counted worthy to escape these things. Paul said, Pray with all perseverance and watching thereunto.

Watching doesn't mean focusing your eyes on something like you watch TV. Watching is a term in Scripture that means to lose sleep. Like to keep a watch, like a sentry keeps a watch.

He's watching. He's staying awake. And when Jesus said, Watch and pray.

And then they fell asleep. He said, Couldn't you watch for one hour? Couldn't you stay awake for one hour? Watching and fasting are coupled with prayer in Scripture as helps to desperation in prayer. Losing meals and losing sleep.

I'll tell you what, I wouldn't advise losing too much sleep in a row, but when's the last time you spent a whole night in prayer? When's the last time you got up two hours earlier than was comfortable in order to spend those two hours in prayer? I've done it before, but I haven't done it lately. I mean, I haven't watched an awful lot in prayer, nor fasted a lot, to tell you the truth. Over the years I've done quite a bit, but in recent times I haven't done either of those things a lot.

And guess what? My prayer life is weaker than it used to be. I think watching and fasting at least helps us to almost artificially create a sense of desperation where we feel the need for God because we're weakened, we're not self-sufficient, and we sense more our creatureliness, our dependency on God, and that's very much needed. Then, of course, the only last thing I would say about why prayer is sometimes not powerful enough is it's not persevered in long enough.

Let me close with a... I said we might read that parable in Luke 18. We won't. We don't have time today.

But that parable in Luke 18, 1 through 8, is about the widow who prevailed on the judge to get what she wanted. And that is a lesson about not always to pray and not to faint. You need to keep persevering.

God doesn't have to answer immediately, and sometimes He'll hold off in the answer in order to test our faith and to see if we'll quit, see if it's really important to us or not. You know? I prayed for Neil to be healed ten times. You know? Well, if I decide something else is more important to pray about for a while and don't pray for that, God says, oh, so that's how important it was to you.

I see. You know? Cheryl. You know, I prayed for Cheryl to be healed probably lots of times.

But if I stop now, I'm showing God exactly how serious I was about it and how important it was to me. I mean, to persevere is to... If God doesn't answer immediately, I believe it's in order to test how important it is to us and to test our faith, see if we'll still be calling on God and trusting God when we haven't seen anything yet materialize. In Isaiah 62, verse 1, the prophet said, For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest until her righteousness goes forth as brightness and her salvation as a lamp that burns.

And then a few verses later, in verses 6 and 7, God says, I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem. They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make

mention of the Lord, do not keep silent and give Him no rest, give God no rest, until He establishes, until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

What an exhortation. Give God no rest. Call out to God day and night until He has established and, you know, so Jerusalem, her righteousness goes forth as brightness and salvation as a lamp that burns.

Until that happens, I will give myself no rest, the prophet says, and he says, give God no rest either. I think we're all a little eager for a little rest and we'll let God rest too an awful lot of the time and we do so by not praying. You see, when you pray, you put God to work.

When you pray, you ask God to work. And it's work for you to pray. That's something you need to understand.

Prayer isn't just a spiritual blissful thing that just comes over you at certain times. It is work. It is a labor of faith to pray at times.

You have to overcome obstacles. Perseverance, or the lack of perseverance, I think, is often accountable for the lack of power in prayer. Daniel prayed and fasted for 21 days.

And on the 21st day, an angel appeared to him, or someone, and said, when you started praying 21 days ago, I was sent by God to bring the answer to you. But you know what happened between then and now? He says, I was intercepted. There was this demonic power up there, this prince of Persia, who withstood me.

And I was wrestling with him up there for 21 days and then Michael finally came to help me and I got through. And when I'm finished delivering the message, I've got to go back and help Michael out again. Now, I mean, Daniel, when he was praying and fasting, he didn't know what was going on up there.

He didn't know there were demons and angels fighting it out over there. But his praying persisted. And I believe it was because he continued to pray and fast that that prince of Persia lost that particular encounter and the prayer was answered.

I wonder what would have happened if Daniel had decided after 19 days, well, nothing's happening. Guess I'll give this up and go back to my meals. Well, prince of Persia could have sent the angels back to heaven, I guess, with their mission unfulfilled.

There is spiritual warfare going on. I mean, the problems in our country are not accidental. I mean, we think, how could people be so stupid as to pass laws like that? Who could ever think that's a good law? Who could ever think that's just? Who could ever think they'd get away with that? You fill in the specifics.

I mean, there are certainly things that are out there that we wonder, how could anyone

be so dumb? And the fact of the matter is, they're blind. There's spiritual warfare going on. And if we're praying for revival, if we're praying for righteousness to exalt our nation, if we're praying for our children to be saved, we're praying for anything, healing of people with cancer, there's a warfare going on.

And when we are praying, we are engaged in that warfare. And that, many times, I don't know about every time, but many times the day we first asked, God sent the answer but didn't get here yet. It's still in root.

And there's a conflict going on. And we are participants by our prayers in seeing that conflict resolved in favor of what we're praying for. So I hope that may give you some reasons and some encouragement to pray.

When I decided to speak about prayer, I kind of thought, well, it would have been, if I'd known in advance I was going to speak on this, I would have probably tried to organize some time and say, now we're all going to start getting together at prayer at such and such early in the morning every day and do whatever. I haven't done any such thing. But I would certainly encourage something like that being put together, people gathering for prayer, either early in the morning or in the evenings or at some other times, lunch times.

You know, one of the greatest revivals that ever hit the East Coast happened when a guy who worked for a church went around handing out banners, or not banners, flyers, inviting people to come to their Sunday school room at lunchtime in New York City to pray for lunchtime. This huge revival broke up, shook the whole eastern seaboard, and for years it went on. And it all started with this guy just inviting people to get together to pray with him at lunchtime in the Sunday school room of their church.

And they filled many, many halls eventually with people praying, and people were saved. I don't have any plan. I don't have any meetings to announce.

But let me urge you to pray, at least on your own. And if you get the opportunity to pray with others, to do so. We are living right now at a turning point, I think.

Again, I don't want to be overly dramatic, but I personally think we are at a very important turning point of our nation. Now, some of you are saying, it's not a turning point. The big guys up there have it all planned out.

You know, it's going to go bad no matter what we do. The big guy up there does have it all planned out. And what their plans are doesn't really make a hill of beans.

Do you believe in conspiracies? I do. But I don't believe they amount to a hill of beans. The nations and the kings of the earth, they gather themselves and conspire against the Lord in His knowing, but He sits in the heavens and laughs, and He gets His way.

But He does so when His people pray, and not otherwise. All right, well, let's pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word, and for the privilege that we have been reading about, thinking about a prayer.

Father, this is such a massive subject, such an awesome thing. I know that my words, I don't have the ability to really impart the vision. And certainly I don't have the eloquence or the wisdom to know how to instruct everyone in every situation that hinders their prayer life.

But I pray, Father, that You will give us at least a start here today, that we will be determined to find those hindrances and remove them, and to become mighty through God, and pulling down strongholds, and casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. And this not through guns or the ballot, or through intellectual wisdom or political penetration, but this through the mighty weapons of prayer and the Word of God that You've given us. I pray that we might become mighty men and women of God in the use of these weapons, so that we might see Your will be done on earth, and Your kingdom come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information visit www.fema.org