

## A Call to Prayer

Pastor Carl Hargrove, September 30, 2017

Now, prayer, why talk about prayer? Incredibly important. And what's interesting about prayer, it's something that's on my heart, and not just right now, but it has been for some years. And I found myself, even recently, when being asked to speak somewhere, or engage in a classroom setting, that I've been talking about this more and more. And perhaps, the more I talk about it, the more I realize the need to talk about it, because God's people need to answer this call to pray. And before I say any more, let me pray. And just bow with me.

Father, we thank you for Your mercies, which are new every day. And I would ask that in the moments ahead, You would use me, that Your people here would be encouraged by Your Word. In Christ's name, amen. Amen.

Now, the call to prayer. Why is this important? Let me begin with four words that can help us think about it, and really important words, as we begin our time when we consider prayer. And those four words are "conscience," "communion," "consistent," and "consecrated."

That first word, "conscience" ... and this is really a response that we have to have from the prompting of the Spirit and God's truth. And you have to decide on that basis, and not on the basis of ... sometimes, people will pray, and say, they will pray so often, and say, they will pray so long, and it's really based on misguided guilt that they may have a sense of, but it should be my conscience. How is my conscience informing me? How much time should I spend with the Lord? Now, let me say this, our conscience needs to be trained. Our conscience needs to be matured. And there's a certain amount of time that I seek in my own life, to spend with the Lord. And as a matter of fact, at the seminary, I teach about prayer, and students are required to log a certain amount of time in prayer. But I even tell them, and I say to you as well, and I say to myself, "My conscience has to guide me in that area." But it has to be an informed conscience.

Our conscience guides us in all areas of life, and when it's an informed conscience, our conscience will guide us properly. We know there are people whose consciences are seared even, whose consciences are misinformed, and so their conscience will guide them in a certain way, because it's not Biblically informed. But once it's been Biblically informed, we can make good decisions, right decisions.

The other word is "communion," and this is so important. And this is really the desire of a genuine believer to spend time with the Creator. And this is something that we have to see as a privilege. We have a privilege to spend time with God. There's a joy that we can have in spending time with God, but there's also an obligation. Now, someone may say, "Well, those words, I don't know if they all work together. You just said privilege and joy, and then you said obligation. If it's an obligation, how could it be a joy?" Well, it is both. It's a joy that we have, because we can spend time with the living God, but it is an obligation, because God has called us to pray. It is a command that we pray. There are promptings to prayer, but there's also a command that we pray. And I would say, for the genuine believer, all of His commands are joy.

The basic thought of the Christian life can perhaps be distilled into this sense, that those who love God will keep His commandments. A love for God says, "I will respond to God."

And the next word is "consistent," and this is the pattern that we hope to achieve. And this is the pattern that we want to achieve in all of our Christian life, we want there to be consistency. And I would say this, that consistency is always better than at times. We may start off in a commitment to Christian life, or some discipline of the Christian life, and then, eventually, it tapers off. Consistency is the key. As a matter of fact, you're gonna hear that word again, even when I talk about parenting, the consistency that's needed in parenting. How as a parent there has to be a consistent approach, a consistency in keeping one's word, a consistency, even when there's consequences that you tell a child. Because a child will notice, "Oh, they're really not serious." Although they may never say it to you, in that little mind of theirs, that's what they're thinking. Consistency is so important and that is so true in our Christian life.

And that last word "consecrated," what does that mean? And it really is to be committed to that decision, to consecrate, to put it aside, to say that, "It's separated for." And as for me, when I'm generally at home, I have a time and a place in the morning that's consecrated. And I go to a certain place in my house. It's consecrated for prayer time. And I have a habit of early morning, and opening the blinds, and looking out. God has blessed us, we have a nice view, and I'm looking out back into the valley, and I see some of the lights, as traffic is starting, or some of the lights from other homes. That's my spot. That's consecrated for me. It's a special spot for me. And I'm hoping that, even later on today, between sessions, that I'm gonna go exploring in the hills here, and maybe find a spot that's there to have consecrated time with God.

Conscience leads us, communion, we want to be and spend time with the living God. "Consistent" is the pattern, and then "consecrated."

And as we move on, we come to this need that is evident today, and we can even learn from some men from the past, and what they said about prayer. Consider what Jonathan Edwards said, "There is no way that Christians, in a private capacity, can do so much to promote the work of God and advance the kingdom of Christ, as by prayer." What was Edwards saying? Do we want to promote Christianity? Do we want to promote the cause of Christ? Then be people who pray. Seek the living God, intervene for others, intervene for your own lives, petition the living God. There are maybe things that you can never do. Most of you, most likely, will not go overseas and do missions work, but what can you do? You can pray for missionaries, you can labour for them. And many of you will not be a preacher, but you can pray for your pastor. And there are ministries within this church even, that you may not be involved in, but you can pray for them, and you can labour for them. We should be people of prayer.

Consider the words of Bunyan. He says,

Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and His scourge for Satan. Prayer will make a man cease from sin or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer. In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart.

And think about what Bunyan is saying, that first thought that, "If we are people of prayer, it is, in fact, a sacrifice to God, it's a sweet aroma to Him." And I love how he says, as well, "It's a scourge for Satan," because Satan is fighting against our souls. But when we pray, we are engaged in a battle against him. It's not directed towards him, as some people have misguided views of prayer. We don't communicate against Satan, or talk to Satan, or abide in Satan, or rebuke Satan. We focus our attention on the living God. And in doing so, we fight against the schemes of the devil.

And as Bunyan said, as well, and it's so plain, "Prayer will make a man cease from sin", because it's consecrated in the consistent, "I'm in communion with God. Then how can I be in communion with God, and then continue in sin?" Or he says it's just the opposite. If a person is enticed away from sin, then you probably won't pray as much as you would, had you not been involved in it. And I love, as well, what he says that, "In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart." That is, you can speak words, but if you don't have a heart for God, the words are really almost meaningless.

But let's look to a passage. Go with me to Ephesians chapter 6, Ephesians 6. Let's look at Ephesians 6 to help us understand this call to prayer. And I said, in the context of warfare, even as Bunyan talked about, "a scourge for Satan," Satan is our enemy. We're engaged in a spiritual war with him and with his minions. And this warfare is not so much directly with Satan himself, but with the system that he controls. And prayer is very important in this warfare. Notice Ephesians chapter 6, beginning in verse 18, Paul says ... and he has just concluded about the armour of God, which began in verse 10, and then ending in verse 17 with, "The sword of the Spirit," which is the Word of God. ... Then Paul says, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me, in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel, for which I'm an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming it, I may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

Spiritual warfare is the context, it's obvious, but yet, notice the relationship of prayer to spiritual warfare. And we want to walk through this passage this way. In this call to prayer, we might say three things. First, we must respond to the call to prayer. We must respond to it. And then secondly, we must strive to persevere in prayer. And then thirdly, we must have the proper subject and object in prayer. We're gonna understand that as this unfolds. So we have to respond, we have to strive, and we have to make sure that our prayers are directed properly, properly.

Now, before we even unfold Ephesians 6, I want us to think, by way of Old Testament imagery, in words in the Old Testament, beautiful words for prayer in the Old Testament. And the more picturesque in the Old Testament, because the Old Testament larger, so much more narrative, so much more interaction that we see in the Old Testament, when it comes to prayer and God's intervention. And I want us to go there for a moment, and we're gonna see that throughout history, or throughout Old Testament history, there are many words for prayer, that we can see prayer through these different windows. And I want to give them to you, rapid fire, if you will.

Number one would be this: prayer is intense supplication. It means to be in earnest. There's an intensity about it. We see that in Job 33, the intensity of prayers. We see it in Exodus 9, in

Exodus 10. When we think about praying, we think about earnestness. There's intensity to it. And remember, if we're engaged in warfare, one doesn't engage in warfare with a lax attitude, with a sense of indifference, with passivity. There's intensity that's involved, absolutely.

And number two, we would say that prayer involves a sense of intercession. Or the King James, "To entreat," we see it 84 times in the Old Testament: to entreat, to intercede. We are people who are called to intercede, even for others.

Number three would be this: to inquire. And interesting, if you look at this, the use of this word in Daniel, it was used only of Daniel to seek from a king. As Daniel would go to the king, he was inquiring of the king. Now, there's some implications to that context, because do we not go to the ultimate King of kings and Lord of lords? As Daniel was going to the king, we are going to the ultimate King, to say, "We need Your help. I need Your help. You're the only one with the resources. You're the sovereign over all things."

And then number four would be this: it means to bend, to bow, to pray, to humbly submit. We see it in Ezra 16, it's used there, also in Daniel, as well. To bow down, to humbly submit to something - this is important.

And then number five, it means to describe deep and intense pondering.

Let's look at some of those though. Go with me to ... Let's look at Psalm 119. Psalm 119, and consider this example, or examples, that is. And beginning of verse 15, and what does the Psalmist say? It says, "I will meditate on all Your precepts and regard Your ways." Also in 23, "Even though princes sit and talk against me, your servant meditates on Your statutes." Verse 27, "Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders." Look at verse 48, it's communicated there, "I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Your statutes." And we see it in 78, 97, 148, this sense of meditation. This should be a part of our reflection upon God, in time with the living God.

Yet another word that comes out in the Old Testament, it's a specific request. We see it in 1 Samuel 12. The people are requesting for a king, so that they can be like the other nations. And what's interesting about that, there's specificity that's involved in it. When we go to God, we can be very specific in the things that we ask of Him.

Then, as well, in numbers seven, is the expression of a reverent heart, a reverent heart before we go, we go before this awesome God. In Exodus 33, it's Moses and he is before God in His awesomeness. And he asks of God, "Let me see your glory." When we go to prayer, we should be thinking about the awesomeness of God, that we can even engage with this God.

How about this? Consider it means to employ God's mercy. "God, I'm seeking Your mercy." We see it in Job 19:16, crying out to entreat the mercy of God. In Psalm 51 even David is crying out for God's mercy, to be upon his life as well.

Numbers nine would be this: It's a word that's close to "entreat," but it means to come apart from human strength. Why is that important, to come apart from human strength? And what's

interesting about it, that more than half the occurrences of this word, you find in the Psalms. You think for a moment and some of those examples in the Psalms, why is that important? Because in the Psalms, what do you often see happening? The Psalmist is crying out to the Lord, "God, I don't have the strength. God, my enemies are too much for me. God, the circumstances are too much for me. I need You to intervene." We have no strength. And in part, that's really prayer in a nutshell, if you will: "God, I don't have any strength. God, I don't have any resources. God, I don't have any answers. There's no way I can change their heart. There's no way I can cause my son, or my daughter, or my grandchild to come to you. You have to open their heart. God, I can't force them not to take that path that they're on; only You can turn them away from that. God, I need to forgive this person; create in me a new heart." And whatever your request may be, "God, here are my needs. I come to You and I'm not sure how this can be resolved." We come to the living God apart from human strength, nothing in ourselves, and we see that in a really pronounced way through the Psalms. And that's why God has, like I said, more than half the occurrences are in the Psalms of the word.

The tenth way to look at prayer is this: the outpouring of worshipful praise and communion with God. We see this here, praise to the living God, and the Psalms as well, we see it amplified there. What's an application for us? If we stop right now and the application would be this: prayer must be approached humbly. And prayer also allows for us to express a host of concerns and emotions, "Here are my concerns, a gamut of things that are on my heart. But yet, here are a number of emotions that I express to God as well." Now, prayer is, in fact, communion with God, conversation with God. There are gonna be any number of emotions that we may express to Him.

Now, last night, we talked a bit about marriage and we'll talk about it again. In your marriage relationship, do you not and have you not expressed varying emotions in your conversations? It's not just all sterile information that you shared with one another, there've been a host of emotions that you've shared. Perhaps, at times, even some frustrations that you may share with your spouse. You come to them and, "I'm a bit frustrated with you about this. Let's talk about it." Or, "Here's a concern that I have. Can we talk about this?" "Here's the request that I have. Can we talk about this and get some resolve on this issue?" "What approach should we take with our child? Let's make sure that we agree on that." "How should we use our resources? Let's make sure that we agree on that." "What does our future look like? Let's come together on that." "I need your help. Can you help me in this matter?" Varying emotions and concerns that happen, even in a marriage relationship.

The conversations aren't always the same, at least, in my marriage, they aren't. And maybe in all your marriages, everything is just always so stellar, and just always so lovely, and just always so engaging, and maybe it's that way, perhaps. Maybe that's the way things happen in British Columbia, I'm not sure. But in my household, varying emotions are expressed, things that we need to talk about, requests that we have, concerns that we have. And so with our God, we go to our God with these varying emotions, and concerns. And even with these words that are expressed in the Old Testament, it's obvious that we should have that relationship with Him when we pray. He is our Heavenly Father, so talk to Him like your Heavenly Father. Do not be sterile in your conversations with your Heavenly Father. I would hate it with my kids, my five kids, if they always came to me like this: "Hello, father. I'm your son. I have come to talk with

you about a matter." "Here is my request: I suppose I should say that I do love you and I respect you. May I have the keys to the car?" I'm like, "What?" "No, you may not, after that request. My goodness, I have raised a robot. What's going on here?" But if your son comes, "Hey, Dad. Some friends are going out, we're gonna have some fun. We're gonna be back at a decent time. May I have the keys to the car?" "No, you may not, but I love the request. No."

Oh, there have been times when they've come to me, "I'm sorry. I made a mistake. Will you forgive me? How can I avoid that again?" "Well, let's talk about it." Or, "Dad, I know you said, 'No,' to this." And there's a word that we have in our house, "I'd like to make an appeal." Sometimes I regret that we taught them that, 'cause we taught them how to make appeals in our house and they'll pull out that word. "Dad, I want to make an appeal." And I said, "Okay, let's sit down. Is it reasonable?" And they'll go through it pretty good. "Alright, I changed my mind. You won. Good deal." 'Cause it's a relationship. You speak with your God. You relate to your God. You talk with your God. You revere Him.

I'm absolutely opposed to some of the trends that I hear, where we want to speak with God simply like He's a buddy. Now, He is my friend and I can speak to Him on those terms, but I also speak to Him as the living God. And there are times when I don't speak to Him on those friendly terms, it is all, "You are God and I come to You in that way," and the other times I speak to God, "I'm confused. I just need Your help here. I've gotta figure this out, and I don't know what the answers are, and none of my education, and none of my experience is giving me the answers, only You have them." This is how we come to God in prayer.

Consider this, the words of William Cowper, and he said this, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees." And sometimes we think, "Well, if we're gonna move God in this way, and if we're gonna fight against Satan in this way, it takes that mature, saintly ... now, this grey-haired saint, those are the ones that can really engage God." Now, I do believe, in some measure, that's true, because people, if they have lived their life for the Lord for decades and decades, they can capture the heart of God, because they can pray to God in a way that you can't when you're younger in your faith. I can look at my life right now and how my prayer life has changed over time, but at the same time, the least Christian, the earliest Christian, when they bow, that child, when they bow in their knees, and pray to the living God, there's some sense in which spiritual warfare is being engaged.

Consider Matthew Henry and what he said, "You may as soon find a living man that does not breathe, as a Christian that does not pray." What was Matthew Henry saying? That, "If you aren't praying, then is this Christianity?" If you go on the streets and you see a man that's not breathing, you would say that man is dead. You go to a Christian and that Christian is not praying, you'd say, "Your spiritual life is dead right now, then." Those two cannot coexist.

And we go back to our text in Ephesians 6, turn back there with me, in Ephesians Six, and what does it say... in verse 18? "With our prayer and petition, pray at all times." Interesting. Notice that the stacking of words, he says, "Here is the call, the call is obvious, all prayer and petition pray," and really, he's saying, "Praying at all times, perseverance and petition." So prayer, petition, praying, petition. Paul is stacking his words, saying that, "There's an obvious call, that we should be involved in prayer," and this was true of Paul.

We see it in Ephesians chapter 1:1-15 and following, Paul is praying that the eyes of their heart would be open. He wants them to understand the fullness of their faith. We see that in Ephesians 1. Also in Ephesians 3, He wants them to understand the depth of their love for God, and God's love for them, really, is what he wants them to understand.

Let me pause for a moment and express this: One way that you can increase your prayer life, is to learn to pray through Scripture. And let me, right now, just recommend a book to you, a book by Donald Whitney called "Praying the Bible," "Praying The Bible." Little book, get a cup of tea or coffee, whatever you prefer, you could probably get through it. Great book. And what he's essentially saying is that, "One thing that we need to learn to do as a discipline, is simply to pray through Scripture, to pray through Scripture."

Now, since it's a Family Camp, and a different sort of a feel here, let's go to Ephesians 1, and let's just, even right now, try to apply it. If we go to Ephesians chapter 1, and how can we apply it? And Paul prays ... let me skip over here, there we go ... Paul says, "For this reason, I too, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." Then he says, "Well, what is it that I'm gonna pray? That the God of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a Spirit of wisdom, and revelation, and knowledge of Him." Stop right there, in verse 17. One way that you can pray the Scripture would be simply this: you go to verse 17 and you should pray it for yourself, "God, give me wisdom and insight." And when he says, "revelation," he means, "Illumine my mind. Help me understand greater things about You." So we would pray for our own soul, "I need wisdom for life, God. I need to understand and gain a greater knowledge of You, God." And how would you pray that for others? You would pray that for your spouse, pray that for your children. And you go to verse 17, "God, give them wisdom for life." And maybe you have a child that's in another stage in life, and they're about to make other decisions in life, "Give them wisdom. Help them understand You."

And then in verse 18, "I pray the eyes of your heart will be enlightened." And beautiful imagery here, so this sense of illumination, "bring light to them, God, the eyes of their heart, the heart that is gonna draw them closer to You, God."

And then notice what he says in verse 18, "And know what is the hope of His calling." Pause for a moment. Do you believe that one reason that people do not live the Christian life they should, is because they do not understand who they are? If we would understand who God is and who we are, we would live our Christian life differently. And so Paul here is praying that, "They would know the hope of His calling." He's saying for the Ephesians, "I want them to understand what is awaiting them. What is awaiting them? God, help them to understand the hope that they have." And we know that some people tragically make decisions, because they have no hope. "God, give them hope." And you can pray through that passage this way, taking the thoughts that are there, and pray as Paul prayed for your own soul, and also for the souls of other people.

Even notice verse 19, "And what is the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe." We all need to understand that, do we not? "God, help me to understand that there is a power that's available to me, and I'm not fully walking in that power. Help me to understand that. Help our church to walk in power." Hope for it to be a powerful witness in this community. We

can pray that way. There is a call for us to pray. There is a call to respond today, that we would be people of prayer.

Notice, if you will, the second thought: we must persevere in prayer. Go back to chapter 6, if you will. Go back to chapter 6, we must persevere. The call is obvious. Paul has stacked the words, even in that first verse, to call us to prayer. It's connected to this call to be engaged in spiritual warfare, in verses 10-17. And then we must strive to persevere in prayer. And we can say this, really, it is true, one of the greatest disciplines in life is perseverance. That means to sustain an effort. And we have to sustain it, when you're faced with challenges. Because one can say, "Well, I'll be consistent," but to be consistent when faced with a challenge is something very different. Prayer requires perseverance. And I don't want to have you raise your hands, but I'm sure that, just my experience would tell me that there have been times, perhaps, you've started a task, and you stopped. And maybe a spiritual task, maybe a spiritual discipline, and we can stop. Or something that we have been praying about, and we find ourselves, perhaps, discouraged, and we don't fight through, and continue to pray about that matter. But we cannot give up; we must continue to persevere. And what do we see in that? Notice what he says in verse 18, he says, "Be on the alert, with all perseverance." All perseverance. Will we persevere? This is important to complete a task. And what does it mean to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of, "We do this, despite difficulties in front of us"?

Notice, if you will, go with me to Romans 12. Romans 12, let's look there. In Romans 12, and then verse 12, what does it say? We'll start in verse 10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, giving preference to one another in honor, not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer." So, persevering in the midst of tribulation, we see that throughout Scripture, we see it throughout history. Perseverance is absolutely necessary. We see the thought in Colossians 4:2, Paul talks about being devoted to prayer. There are examples throughout history, where perseverance is necessary, whether it be in warfare, literally, that a battle would have been lost had those in command not inspired others to persevere. Countless stories throughout history of perseverance. And so prayer requires perseverance.

Notice what he says, as well, back in Ephesians 6. Notice what he says, not only must we persevere, but notice what else he says. He says, "for all the saints." So we are called to be praying for others, praying for the body of Christ. And we see this throughout Scripture. Just some verses, we won't go through them all, but all of them communicate this same thought: "For all the saints, pray for you all." "For all the saints, for all of you, I pray." Where should that start? Well, obviously, you should be praying for one another. When you go before the Lord, pray for the members, your saints here at GFC. Be praying for saints in other parts of the world. Be praying for saints in other churches. It's clear through Scripture, that we're to be praying for all the saints.

But he says something else that's interesting: "We're supposed to do this in the Spirit." If we go back to the first part of verse 18, it says, "in the Spirit." Now, there's some people who are confused about this and would say, "in the Spirit," means that we are praying in a, as Benny Hinn would say, "This third level of the Spirit." Or some would say, "It's praying in tongues," that's what it means to pray in the Spirit, but it's not that at all. What Paul is plainly

communicating is that, "My prayers must be controlled by, influenced by spiritual things, a spiritual mindset." "Am I praying in a way that's consistent with the Spirit?" That's what's being communicated there. And we could even learn from Romans chapter 8. Romans 8 tells us at times, we don't even know how to pray, but the Spirit helps us along.

And there's no way, in context, you can't say this, "To pray in the Spirit, means that our lives are consistent with the Spirit, if we're going to pray." That is, "How can I love my wife?" It has to be in the Spirit. "How can that child submit?" They can only submit, as they're in the Spirit. "How does that person respond in their job?" They can only do it properly, if they're in the Spirit. "How does a father not exasperate his children?" (which is said earlier) he can only do that, as he does it in the Spirit. "How do I forgive?" Which is said earlier in chapter 4, "I can only do it, if by the Spirit." The Spirit is prompting me. And so now, when it comes to prayer, what Paul is saying, in one sense, "The only way you can live out all these other things is in the Spirit. And the only way you can pray, is that you're a person that is motivated by the Spirit." Motivated by the Spirit.

I want to move to this next thought, go back to Ephesians 6, and what does he say there? "All the saints on my behalf." How do we direct our prayers? In this context, Paul says, "Pray that I would speak boldly, that I would have a boldness in my speech." Boldness is necessary. I was just talking with some of the brothers about some of the trials, if you will, that we're faced with in the States, and we know it's true everywhere, just where we are morally, as a nation, as a society. And more than ever before, we need people who can be bold in speech, who can share the Gospel. But what is going to happen more, is this: there's gonna be a tendency towards people to shrink away from sharing their faith, because now, there are gonna be consequences to it, and especially, looking into the future. Paul says, "I want to be bold in my speech, so I would have an utterance that represents God, that I would not shrink away, that I would not be ashamed," as Paul would say, "Even of the Gospel." But boldness, we should be ... Let's not confuse it. Boldness is not harshness, because in Colossians 4:6, it talks about having "seasoned words." The same thing is true in Peter, as well. One may say, "Well, you're bold in speech." But, no, you're really not bold, you're just a harsh individual. Boldness doesn't mean a harshness. Boldness means this sense of having courage and confidence in what we speak. Paul wants that for himself. That's the boldness that he prays for.

And isn't it interesting, as Paul finishes off, and he says, "That I was to speak boldly, as I ought to speak," in verse 20? And if anyone was bold for Christ, wasn't it Paul? But yet, Paul has this common sense, a wisdom, if you will, that says, "Yes, even I, as bold as I may be, I still need others to pray for me." One thing you can even do for your pastor, is to pray that he would always speak boldly, that he would be unashamed of the Gospel, that he would never compromise.

Let me ... I'm gonna move ahead to something. Here are some additional matters that we can pray about: To be a praying church, to be an evangelistic church, to be a hospitable church, to be an influential church, to be a Bible-teaching church. One may say, "Well, what should I pray about?" Here are any number of things that you can pray about here, and list these things, and pray about these things, and pray about these things on a regular basis: "God, help GFC be these things; that we would pray, that we will be evangelistic, that we will be hospitable, we will be influential, we would teach the Bible and never compromise on that." That's what we should pray

about. How about these things as well? "That our church would be gossip-free, we'd be financially responsible, we would praise God in our time with one another, we will be morally pure, we will be doctrinally sound, we will be a Christ-honouring church." These are all Biblical prayers and concerns. So, when we think about what should we pray about, there are any number of things to pray about. And perhaps, you take a list like this, and if you didn't catch all the notes, that's not ... Don't worry about it. I'll send it to Jeremy, or to Jordan, and you can distribute it as you see fit, so if you don't catch any of the notes, that's okay. It's yours, I'll send it to you. Pray about these things.

And you say, "Wait a minute ... " Let's pause for a moment. I'm gonna draw this to an end right now, with some tips for you. You say, "This makes sense. It makes perfect sense that we should be praying. It's clear from Scripture, that there is a call to pray. It's evident that, throughout Scripture, we should be praying people." Then the question is, "So, why don't we pray as much as we should? Why is it that, sometimes, our day begins, and all of a sudden, we realize, 'I haven't really stopped in a significant way and prayed to the living God.' Why isn't it consecrated? Why isn't it as consistent as it should be?"

And maybe all of you have dynamic prayer lives, that you would say, "I'm satisfied with it." I would say, "That's probably not the case. Probably not the case." And how do I know that? Because say, for instance, I've talked to any number of people, men who've been in the ministry 20, 30 years, and they would say, "Oh, I'm lacking in that area." Saints, that are dear saints, and they serve the Lord, and they serve in the church, and they give of their resources, and there are people that you look at, and say, "What a godly person," and you ask them about prayer, "Yes, I know," consistently. So, why don't we do it? Let me give you some thoughts on why we don't, perhaps, why we don't persevere in prayer.

Number one is this: we don't have an adequate view of God. See, I think, if we had an adequate view of God, a really high view God, we would say, "What a privilege." It's amazing to me. Say, for instance, at Grace Community Church, there with John MacArthur, that people come from all over the world to hear him preach. As a matter of fact, the receptionist there, she has a list of when he's preaching, 'cause people will commonly ask, "Is he preaching this Sunday?" And I don't know if that's good or bad, because sometimes people won't come if he's not preaching. Actually, I'll make a statement, "That's bad." You come to worship the living God, but nonetheless, it happens. And people come, and after service, they will line up, as a couple Sundays ago, we had a special service, and he must have been there for an hour talking with people. And people that were from ... New students that were coming from other countries, people that had visited from out of the state, people that had come from overseas to see him, and to shake his hand, and to have a moment, and to talk with him. And that's in part, because they say they respect him so much, and rightfully so. He has a great track record, 50 years there at Grace Community Church. "I want to speak to John MacArthur. Perhaps, he can give me some wisdom, some insight. Let me ask him something. I just want to go and have him pray with me for my daughter, for my child, or for this situation." And I'm not opposed to that whatsoever, but it's in part based on their view of him, is it not? I've never noticed a line for the interns. There's no intern line. And we have like 100, literally, we do. We probably have over 100 interns at Grace Community Church and their line is like their own family. It's like, "Dad, hey ... " Okay, that's their line. Because they don't quite see the intern the same way they do as John MacArthur.

And we might say, "Rightfully so, rightfully so." And 40 years from now, they'll have their line, if you will, but not right now. But it's in part based on, like I said, "The view of the person." What is your view of God?

Then you say to yourself ... And here's the great thing about it. I don't mean to be trivial in this statement, but it is a part of the reality. You don't have to wait in line. You don't have to wait in line. And there are people, that the line is going, and at towards the end, it's ... And there have been times, it's like, "Ugh," he has to hurry away. You don't have to worry about that with your God, there's no line. He's readily available, wanting you to talk with Him. And whenever you say, "Father, let me talk," you're first in line, on every occasion. An inadequate view of God.

Number two is because of an ignorance of prayer. We don't understand the dynamics of it, the call to it, the privilege of it, the joy in it, the obligation of it. It's also this, because of misusing prayer, and perhaps, I doubt if any of you misuse prayer, but it does happen with some people; their motives are not pure, what they're praying for is very self-centred, so it doesn't grow, because it's not as expansive as it should be, because of unchecked sins. The Scripture is clear, "How can I regard iniquity in my heart, and yet, pray to the living God?" It's not possible, even ... You just finished, I think, in 1 Peter, did you not? In 1 Peter 3, "Husbands, no, you can't pray. Your prayers are gonna be disregarded, because you're not being sensitive to your wife. You can't come to me and ask requests of Me, when you're being insensitive at home."

Then number five, because of misplaced passion. We have a passion that is in the wrong direction. We should have a passion for God and a passion to communicate with God.

It's also this, because of the battle to discipline the mind. We'll pause for a moment and you know this to be true. How many of you ... You're absolutely sincere about praying. You decide, "I'm gonna pray and I'm gonna pray about these things." And your mind tends to do what? It wanders, does it not? Totally sincere, and all of a sudden, the mind is somewhere else. You're thinking about the next thing that has to be done in the day. You hear the baby in the background. There's something that has to get done and the mind wanders. And sometimes, it's not even on things that are productive, for the mind can wander. Therefore, since the mind wanders, we become discouraged and we stop praying, but that's where perseverance comes in. You have to persevere through and continue to pray. Train the mind.

Number seven, because of losing heart, and that's connected to, even perhaps, number six, we lose heart. And Jesus even told a Parable about that, and that woman who kept doing what? She kept knocking. She kept knocking and He said, "Even that unlawful king or judge answered her, because of her what?" "Her perseverance." And He would say, "How much more will I, Your Heavenly Father, then give to you?" We have to keep knocking.

It's also this, because of a lack of love. Say, "Wait a minute, a lack of love? In what direction?" And I would say this, "A lack of love for other people." Say, "I don't hate anyone." But do you love them as fully as you should? Now, think about it for a moment, if you knew that you could intervene for someone, to the Person that has all resources and all wisdom, but you don't do it, then what is that? In some degree, it's a lack of concern. You love your wife, you love your

husband, you love your kids, you love your family, you love your church, you love your pastor, you love your friends, pray for them. Pray for them.

It's this, as well, because of underestimating spiritual warfare. We're engaged in spiritual warfare. The enemy does not want us to pray. He doesn't want you to have devotions. He doesn't want you to go deep into the things of God. He doesn't want you to study the way that you should. You're engaged in spiritual warfare. It's clear from that context; you're engaged in it. Think with me for a moment. In any war, the first offenses, the first strategy, always the case, if much as possible, is to cut off communications, cut off communications. That's why you'll see, you read any history of war, what you want to do is cut off communication. You think now, in modern warfare, you think cell towers, radio towers. You think bridges, highways, cut off communication. The enemy is a strategist and what does he want to have happen with you? Cut off communication. Pray.

But there are some countermeasures and I'm gonna give 'em to you quickly, as we get through it. When you see that number first, it says 11, but don't get frightened, I'm not gonna take much time. Here they are:

Number one, spend time meditating on the greatness of God. This is the countermeasure to an inadequate view of God. Meditate on God, think about God, study God.

Number two: increase your knowledge of prayer by reading and listening about it. Get good books on prayer. Read Donald Whitney's book "Praying the Bible," you can get through it easily. Get "Transforming Prayer" by Donald Henderson. If you have "The Method of Prayer" by Matthew Henry, get that as well. A great book, I don't know if it's in paperback now, you can get it on Kindle pretty cheap, "Taking Hold of God," it's a collection of Puritans, and reformers, and their thoughts about prayer. Read about prayer, think about it.

Number three is this: follow the Daniel Principle. Divide prayer into sections. And when I say the Daniel Principle, pray three times a day, so you may say to yourself, "Well, let me just ... How about a morning time of prayer, and then a midday time of prayer, and then an evening time of prayer, that I can engage God, and divide my day up into prayer sessions?" If you will. How about this? Develop a tender heart by praying through tragic news. One thing that I actually do in my prayer life, is I'd go to the news, and I see what is happening around the world, and I pray for people, and the tragedies that they're facing. And that tenderizes the heart, because you think less about yourself, and you think more about other people. You intervene for them, you intercede for them. And I believe that, if we had a prayer life that was more engaging for the lives of others, it might develop more.

How about this? Do this: avoid the frustration response. And I've said this to people, "Either you will pray for people or be silent, because one can be critical of a president, or a king, or a minister, or a mayor, or a council member, or of other preachers, or whatever it may be, but if you don't pray for them, I think a person should be silent." Recently, our president said something really horrible, in reference to these protests that you may have heard about with NFL players, and he said something that pretty much shocked me. I knew, at times, his tongue is not bridled, but what he said was pretty undignified, and I commented about it, and I said, "Here's

the thing about it, you need to pray for him, 'cause we're commanded to." 1 Timothy chapter 2:1-2, Paul says that... He says, "Entreaties, and prayers, and petitions, be that you pray for all kings and authorities." I'm called to pray for him, like I was called to pray for the previous president, and I prayed for him on a regular basis. And I pray for him often, because I thought, "In certain things in his life, his moral conscience was so damaged, or the things that he could be an advocate of, and he could even, at times, support." I thought, "This man is facing eternity, separated from the living God, let me pray for him." But I find that sometimes, even, and mainly among conservative Christians, can be quick to criticize, but then not pray. And I'll see it on social media, on Facebook, and on Twitter, and they're criticizing. And at times, I've asked people that plain question, "When was the last time you prayed for ... " And then there's a silence. Then I say, "Then stop tweeting, really. Stop Facebook. Just close your Facebook account, until you can pray for him, or for her, or for it." I get a bit worked up on that, 'cause it bothers me. It really does. I think it's unacceptable. It really is unacceptable. And think about it in context, when Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, and he's saying to them, "Pray for these kings, and rulers, and authorities, that they would live a dignified life, and they would live in godliness," Paul was writing about men that would've been ... Would they have been conservative Christians? No, absolutely not. They would've been unbelievers and some of them would've even been persecutors of the church, but he says, "Pray for them."

How about this? Find a place of solace, a place you can go, where ... Your own closet. And pray to the Lord, and spend time with Him there. There's some great places around here to be able to do that, and some of you probably have great spots right in your yard, or some view that you have, or just to get away somewhere, where you can pray to the Lord. And even if you don't have that, there's still a quiet place for you to spend with God. The very God of the universe, Jesus Christ Himself, He did what? He found a quiet place and He prayed.

How about this? Then we go to the next thought: Fight the wandering mind with lists, pictures, and notes. The mind can wander, we all know that, but sometimes, it wanders, because we haven't put something specific in front of us. Write out those things that you want to pray about, pictures of people, situations that you can pray about, notes that you've taken from someone else, and put that in front of you, and pray through that. That's what we should do.

Number seven, get a prayer partner, someone that you can pray with, that's gonna keep you accountable. Obviously, start with your spouse, pray with your kids, pray with your friends, pray with your pastor. Develop that habit of praying through Scripture. The Scriptures are there, not where you're getting into the Word of God, but you're also, it's helping you order your prayers as well.

Use technology to log your requests. I have a couple of apps that I use. I use something that's called Echo, and I put in my prayer requests there, and it gives me reminders, or I have the lists that are there, and I can say that I prayed for that, and I can check it off. Use technology to your advantage. This big iPad Pro that I have here ... I used to have a Moleskine, where I'd write my prayer requests in it, and I thought, "You know what? Let me just use technology." Because now, I do that, and when it goes to the Cloud, I can pick it up on my phone, on the iPad, on my computer, and those requests are with me everywhere, as opposed to when I go on a trip, I have to have that Moleskine with me, and if I ever lost it, guess what? There are all those prayer

requests gone. Use technology for the glory of God. Log those prayer requests, keep them, use reminders, put it in your calendar, "Pray for such and such."

Number 10, start with a reasonable amount of time, 'cause sometimes people will ... They say, "I should pray more." And you hear a thought of a Luther, and how he would give himself to two hours of prayer a day. I have students and require them to pray for a certain amount of time a day. And they say, "Well, I'm gonna do that." No, just a reasonable amount of time. Sometimes, I told people, "Just consistently, if you would pray 15 minutes a day." You may say, "That's a lot." But then, you know what? Follow the Daniel Principle: 5:00 in the morning, 5:00 in the afternoon, and 5:00 at night. And maybe see that your heart might grow, that you would even want more. Consistency.

I want us to turn somewhere though ... And I know I'm taking ... I'm almost at an hour here. Forgive me, but just something else I need to say to you. Turn with me to the Book of Matthew. Turn with me to Matthew, 'cause I want us to see something there, a final call, and ... Matthew makes a statement ... 26, and we're just gonna go right to it. Matthew 26, and I just want to close with this thought ... Notice what he says,

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane and He said to His disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And He took with Him, Peter, and two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved, and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and He fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "Father, if possible, let this cup pass from Me, yet not as I will, but as You will." And He came to the disciples, and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So you men could not watch with Me for an hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Again, He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. And He came to the disciples, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour's at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us go. Behold, the one who betrays me is at hand."

One of the most sober passages in Scripture, isn't it? It really is. And this bothers me every time I read this. It's amazing. I've read this so many times, and these thoughts again, and partly, because for this last hour, I've been talking about prayer in these Scriptures. And again, it's how many times have I read this passage? He prayed, and He prayed, and He prayed. And He said, "Keep watch with me. Keep watching." You're supposed to be watching. God has called you to stand in the gap, to pray for other people. "Prayer and petition, praying at all time for all of the saints."

The question for us is, will we watch with Him? There's not much more to be said, really. It's pretty straightforward. And now, you just have to allow this to inform your conscience, and have your conscience lead you. This is not to make you feel guilty, 'cause guilt-driven responses are not good, they'll tend to dissipate after a while anyway. But if you can get a picture of your God, and who He is, and what He has done for you, that can spur you on, that would be good. Then, if

you consider yourself in communion, "I can commune with this God and I want to do that." Then, if you can say to yourself, "I want to be consistent. I'm gonna look for consistency in my prayer life." And if you can say, "It's gonna be consecrated." Here was Jesus Christ, consecrated. He's gonna offer Himself, as a lamb without spot and without blemish, for you and for me. You're engaged in spiritual warfare and you need to pray to your Heavenly Father for various things, as you keep watch.

Father God, we thank you for Your grace and mercy, that is new, and even the freshness of a passage that I know I've read many, many, many times before, and I've even come to it before, and I have even taught this before, that there is a freshness to it. Help us all to have a freshness to prayer, to be committed to it. Give us grace in Christ's name, amen.