

The Prayer Of Faith

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] Now I want you to consider for a moment the enormous amount of instruction that the Bible has on prayer. Just think about it for a moment. It is impossible to read the scriptures and conclude that regular communion with God is anything less than a paramount discipline in the life of a believer. You just can't do it. You can turn anywhere in the Bible you want to. It doesn't matter. You can go to any book you want and you're going to read through that book and you cannot conclude after reading through that book that prayer doesn't really matter because it's everywhere.

It's everywhere either by a descriptive example of the way that God is blessing people and the way that God's people are responding to him and they are faithful to commune with him in prayer or you're seeing explicit commands for it. You'd be hard-pressed to find a section in the Bible that does not include in some way a note of prayerfulness. And of course Jesus is the most remarkable example of this, especially when it comes to developing a faithful and fruitful prayer life.

Time and time again as we read through the Gospels, we find Jesus committing himself to seasons of prayer. He was consistently instructing his disciples to do the same thing. Even in Mark's Gospel, we see it time and time again from the very first chapter. After Jesus's baptism, what does he do?

For 40 days, he's driven of the Spirit into the desert. What does he do there in the wilderness? He prays. He communes with the Father. Just a little bit after that, he has a busy few days.

What does Jesus do? He gets up way before the rest of the disciples get up. It's the middle of the night and he goes to a place where they can't easily find him. And what does he do? He spends hours in prayer over and over and over again. We see this as the pattern of Jesus's life. He is faithfully communing with the Father in prayer all the way up to his crucifixion when we see this magnificent prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. As sweat drops of blood pour down his face and he cries out to the Lord or to the Father, let this cup pass from me, not my will, but your will be done.

[2 : 21] This is amazing. His life on earth was consumed with communing with the Father, which brings a very simple question. If prayer was such a vital part of Jesus's life, the perfect Son of God, the Messiah and Savior, why do we so regularly neglect it? If Jesus so faithfully dedicated time in his relentless schedule, and we can easily say, well, things just get so busy and it's just easy to forget about prayer, just not to have a lot of time for prayer. We can't read the gospels and not figure out that Jesus was busy. I mean, the man couldn't go anywhere. He couldn't go anywhere without being crowded by hordes of people that were trying to push up against him. Even his disciples wouldn't leave him alone long enough for him to have a dedicated time of prayer. What did he do? He made time. He was dedicated to it. He was fervent in it. In his relentless schedule, he made time to commune with the

Father. Why then are we so quick to make excuses as to why we can't? He's our example. We follow him, and it's what he did. And I think a misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of prayer is part of what contributes to our neglect of it. There's some people that may be the more cynical of us would say, well, I mean, what really is the purpose of prayer if God is sovereign and he has it all worked out anyway? Well, I think what these people fail to acknowledge is that prayer or the lack of prayer is a means by which God accomplishes his sovereign work.

God doesn't work in a vacuum. He uses real means, right? He uses real people to do his work.

He uses real circumstances to accomplish his will and to accomplish his purposes. Why would we think that prayer isn't a part of that? Prayer is a means that God has said he provides blessings to us. A lack of prayer is a means by which he withholds those blessings from us. So we can't blame his sovereignty for our neglect. That doesn't work. Others fail to develop a genuine prayer life, I think, because they've really reduced prayer to nothing more than a means of asking for and receiving things from God. And of course, that's a part of what prayer is.

But some of us reckon that the only purpose for prayer is to communicate our personal desires. It's a means of letting God know what we want and hoping in the process of that, that he will oblige himself to grant our requests.

[5 : 34] Listen, prayer is so much more than that. It is so much more than asking and receiving. It's a means of communing with your creator.

It's a means of fellowshiping with your redeemer so that we might experience the joy of knowing God and growing closer to him in personal fellowship.

That's what prayer really is. It's a form of worship. In prayer, we express our adoration for God's greatness. That's the point of Psalm 145.

That's why we read a psalm almost every Sunday before we begin our worship. We go to the psalms. Why? Because it focuses our attention on his greatness. And then we immediately pray. Why? Because prayer is a means by which we worship.

Lord, you are great when we consider the work of your hands. What is man that you are mindful of him? You are an amazing God. Prayer is a part of our worship. We offer adoration to the Lord. We offer gratitude to the Lord.

[6 : 37] Didn't David talk about that in Psalm 145? You open your hand and you feed us when we're hungry. And you protect us when we're weary. And you lift us up when we're bowed down.

Lord, you've been so good to me. You've been so good. King Hughes wrote that someone once asked George MacDonald why, if God loves us so much and knows everything we need before we ask, must we pray?

And here's how George MacDonald answered. What if he knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in God's idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need, the need of himself?

What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help drive us to God? Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other needs.

And prayer is the beginning of that communion. That's a wonderful picture of what prayer is. And sometimes we get in this rut and we think, well, prayer, I don't really have a particular need right now.

[8 : 00] What's really the need in me having a lot of time in prayer? Well, prayer is not just about asking for stuff. That's just a part of what we do in prayer. Prayer is about communing with God. Prayer is about us learning that we need him more than we need all the stuff that we're asking him to do.

And it draws us close to him. That's why we see it over and over and over and over again from Genesis to Revelation. The presence and the importance of prayer is unmistakable.

But in addition to those who misunderstand the nature and purpose of prayer, there are some people who have come to this particular passage in Mark chapter 11, and they have utterly perverted its meaning.

The Word of Faith movement in particular has developed its entire theology of prayer on this one text. And it continues to proclaim this heresy that we call name it and claim it theology.

This idea that what Jesus was teaching in this passage is that if there's something that you really want, you only need to have enough faith to get it. And what you really need to do is say, God, I really want this thing, and I'm claiming it for myself.

[9 : 14] And if you just do that with a faithful heart, God has no other choice but to give it to you. His one motivation in life is to give you whatever you want. That's the problem. That's not what Jesus is teaching here.

That's not what prayer is. They ignore the collective teaching of Scripture, and they use this text to proclaim that God will just grant your every desire.

as long as you believe strong enough, and you pray hard enough, and you give to their ministries generously enough. Name it and claim it theology is fundamentally narcissistic.

It treats God like a slave to his creation, and it's a twisted perversion of the Bible. Now, the meaning of this passage is not complicated, but as one of my teachers said when I was growing up, it might require us to put our thinking caps on here for just a few minutes.

And I think it will be helpful for us to come to this amazing lesson on prayer. And it is an amazing promise that Jesus gives here, but we need to understand it rightly for what Jesus meant for it to teach us.

[10 : 30] And I think probably the best way for us to do that is to pray and to ask for his help as we jump in, okay? Lord, you are good, and we are grateful for this passage and this truth. And we ask that you would help anything that might cloud our minds from understanding it the right way, that you would remove those things, and that you would open our hearts, and that as we engage with this text today, we will be encouraged and astonished once again at your amazing love and graciousness in our lives, and that you will open our hearts to understand what you meant, and that we will then be encouraged and strengthened by it.

In Jesus' name, amen. The first thing I want you to see here in this text is the object of faithful prayer. The object of faithful prayer.

Look with me at verse 22. And Jesus answered them simply, one sentence, Have faith in God. Have faith in God.

Now the sequence in Jesus' lesson is crucial to understanding its meaning. Notice that he did not lead with an explanation, but an imperative.

He doesn't provide an explanation of the prayer yet. He leads with a command for these disciples to obey. The command? Have faith in God.

[12 : 01] Trust God. And everything in this lesson that he gives moving forward has to be filtered and processed through this opening command. How did you do that, Jesus?

Men, trust God. And faith is only as good as its object. And the only person worthy of our trust is our sovereign God.

And the false teachings of groups like the word of faith movement takes the focus off of God. It actually removes the faith from being focused on God and on God's will.

And it places the focus on faith in faith itself. It turns the focus to where it's not that they're trusting God to provide something.

They're trusting on their ability to lay claim on something that they believe God wants to give them. That's not faith in God. That's faith in faith.

[13 : 06] But faith is only as strong as its object. And the real prayer of faith, according to Jesus, is the one that wholeheartedly trusts in God.

But it trusts not only in God's power to accomplish magnificent things, it trusts in God's will to always answer in the way that is right and answer in the way that is best.

The prayer of faith is trusting God's power to do what is impossible and trusting His will to do what is right, even when that means His answer is no or not now.

And some people, they've never been told that a possible answer to their prayer is no. And they need to hear that. God says no a lot, a lot.

And having faith in God in the context of prayer is not just believing that God can, it's trusting that He will do what is right, even when we don't understand why He won't do what we are asking.

[14 : 16] Rather than imposing on the will of God, the prayer of faith submits to it. And this is the filter through which everything we understand in Jesus' lesson here, and as we begin to wrap our minds around the biblical teaching about prayer, it all has to be filtered through this one imperative.

Have faith in God. Trust Him, His plan, His power, His will. And you say, well, I'm not exactly sure how to put that into practice. What does that mean that I need to do?

Well, we start with trusting the promises of His Word. You struggle to practically practice faithful prayer.

Start by opening your Bible and trusting what God has spoken. Let me give you just a few easy examples here. Okay? How about 1 John 1, 9?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[15 : 19] There's a promise in that, isn't there? That if we come to God in faith, if we come to Him and confess and repent of our sins, God promises then that He will forgive our sin, that He will cleanse us from the unrighteousness that has plagued us.

This is a wonderful promise. The prayer of faith goes to 1 John 1, 9, and reads that and believes it and trusts God despite the fact that you may not really feel forgiven.

Because some of us really struggle with that, don't we? Many people struggle with believing that they are actually forgiven. They are crippled by fear and burdened by their past sins.

And they just think, How? I just feel so much guilt and I just feel so much weight and I'm just so ashamed and embarrassed by what I've done. And what you need to do is come to the Word of God and open it.

And when you read 1 John 1, 9, trust God with it. Believe Him. That when we confess our sin, He forgives us of our sin. That's the prayer of faith.

[16 : 25] The prayer of faith isn't, Lord, I really want one of those new Broncos with a soft top and the black fenders over the wheels and the really big tires.

And if you would just give it to me, it would just be amazing. That's not the prayer of faith. The prayer of faith is, Lord, you said that if I confess and forsake my sin, you'll forgive me. And I just want you to know I don't feel forgiven, but I trust you.

And I believe you because you're good and gracious and this is your promise. Let me give you another one. How about Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 31.

You know this one. They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They shall walk and not faint. You know that verse. It's beautifully poetic. Sometimes that makes it hard for simple minds like mine to understand.

[17 : 21] But it basically means this. Those who wait on the Lord are those who trust God. And those who trust God, he says, you're going to go through some difficult times.

And you're going to be in some positions where you might faint. And where you might fall. And it may even get severe in your life. But if you trust me, I will always give you the strength to get through whatever it is I've allowed in your life.

That's an amazing promise. You know what the prayer of faith is? The prayer of faith says, Lord, I'm struggling. And I don't see an end to this. And I don't know how this is. I don't think I can handle this any longer.

And then it comes to Isaiah chapter 40 and verse 31. And it's reminded again of God's promise that if we would just trust him, that those who wait for the Lord, he will strengthen them to persevere.

To persevere in the task that he has brought you in. That's the prayer of faith. Have faith in God. Let me give you another one. We could do this all day.

[18 : 24] How about Acts 16.31? Acts 16.31. Remember the Philippian jailer? He says, Paul, what do I have to do to be saved? What does Paul say? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Believe on the Lord. You know what the prayer of faith is? The prayer of faith is conversion. The prayer of faith says, okay, I'm a sinner.

And I recognize Jesus. How could he not be God? And he was perfect. And his death was a substitution for me. And it was enough to cover my sin and to take the wrath of God in my place.

And he doesn't ask for anything in return. He just says, if I come to him and believe him and follow him, that he will forgive me and I'll be saved for all of eternity. The prayer of faith says, Lord, I believe. I believe.

One more. 1 Peter 5, 7. Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

[19 : 30] He cares for you. I don't know if we live in the most anxious age in history or if people are just more willing to talk about it openly right now.

The truth is, Christians struggle with all kinds of anxiety. Maybe some of you are struggling with some severe anxiety today. If you're not, I'm certain that you know somebody that is.

I don't deny that there's physiological deficiencies that can contribute to anxiety and depression, all those things. I'm not denying that at all.

I know that's not the case. But I wonder how many believers just aren't trusting God when he says, he cares for you. He cares for you.

And he says, if you will cast your care on me, you will find rest and you will find peace because I care for you. Sometimes our fears are exacerbated by the fact that we don't honestly believe God is concerned about our personal battles.

[20 : 41] The prayer of faith, it doesn't issue from a life that is free from worry. It just submits its worry to the loving care of its heavenly father.

Faith doesn't mean you're never concerned. Faith doesn't mean that you don't have some sleepless nights. Faith doesn't mean that you're never afraid.

Faith is when we submit those fears to the Lord and we trust him and we follow him in spite of our fear. Have faith in God.

You say, how do I have faith in God in prayer? Well, you start with his word. You have to start there. And from there, it branches out into all these other things.

Get in the word. Believe the promises that are there. Pray like you've never prayed. Number two, the power in faithful prayer. See, the object in faithful prayer.

[21 : 45] Let's see now the power. Verse 23. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

That's amazing, isn't it? That's amazing. You've got to understand it the right way. This is an amazing promise. What's Jesus getting on about here?

He wasn't saying that you can magically wave your hand and witness a huge mountain in North Carolina be thrown into the Atlantic Ocean. That's not what Jesus is saying.

This is metaphoric hyperbole here, which basically means God can do the impossible. God can do the impossible.

The things that seem impossible to you are not so with God. Think about the context here. These disciples are amazed that Jesus cursed a tree and it withered.

[22 : 55] That's the extent of their astonishment right now. And Jesus essentially responds this way. Guys, you ain't seen nothing yet.

You think this is a big deal? You think the tree is a big deal? For one who believes in his following God and is trusting him, God will move mountains to accomplish his purposes in your life.

This tree really is nothing. He wasn't signing a blank check for us here. He wasn't guaranteeing an affirmative answer for any possible request that we imagine.

Remember, we have to filter this through the promise and through the command of trusting God's will. But what Jesus was doing here was assuring us that God has never made a promise that he cannot keep.

He's never overpromised. It's not possible. And when he says all those things in his word, even if he has to move a mountain in front of your eyes to accomplish it, he can move a mountain in front of your eyes to accomplish it.

[24 : 03] He was proclaiming that when we pray in faith, we tap into the unlimited resources and power of the Holy God and creator of the universe.

That's the source. We're going to move on, but do you remember the man that brought his demon-possessed boy to Jesus' disciples while he was up on the Mount of Transfiguration?

Was that chapter 9? And he brings him and the disciples can't do anything about it. Jesus catches up to them a little bit later in the day and sorts through what's going on and the man says, Lord, if you can, if you can, will you please help my son?

Do you remember how Jesus responded to the man? He said, if you can? If you can? He says, no, no, the question is not if I can.

Of course I can. The question is, will you believe because anything is possible for the one who believes? And when Jesus said that, he didn't mean that whatever you ask for is just going to automatically be given.

[25 : 08] No, that's not what he means. He means that God can do the impossible, the thing that you can't do, the thing that no one else can do, God can do. So have faith in God and pray in that faith.

Number three, the practice of faithful prayer. The practice of faithful prayer. Look at verse 24. Therefore, therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.

So let's summarize the sequence again. First, Jesus says, trust in God. That's the filter. And we begin by trusting God's power and his plan.

Okay? Have faith in God. And then in this teaching, the sequence moves on to step number two, which Jesus assures us that God can do the impossible. He's not limited by anyone.

He's not limited by anything. So he's telling the disciples, trust God. He can do what you cannot do. And then there's this magical word at the beginning of verse 24. You see it? Therefore.

[26 : 12] What is it? What is that all about? Well, I had a professor one time that said, whenever you come to a therefore, you look to see what it's there for. And what it's there for is a practical response to these first two points.

Jesus says, trust God. He can do the impossible. And now, now boys, it's time to put it into practice. And he says, it's actually time to pray. And it's actually time to ask.

And it's actually time to believe these things that God has promised. Because we trust God and recognize his power, we can pray without reservation.

And we don't presume upon his will, but we don't limit it either. We can genuinely bring our request to him, seeking his perfect plan, believing that he will answer.

And there's just two practical dynamics to this that I want you to see. First thing is this. the prayer of faith, ask. It asks.

[27 : 18] You have to ask. You have to actually pray. Remember, God doesn't work in a vacuum. You have to actually ask him.

And he told us that plainly. Do you realize this morning that God wants you? This is his desire. He wants you to bring your request to him.

He wants you to do that. No matter what they are, he wants you to bring it to him. This is not like when on Sundays, Sunday nights in particular, after our Sunday evening service when I was growing up, especially when I was a teenager and I could drive or at least one of my friends could drive.

I knew that my dad would always stand at the back door of the church and there would be a line of people walking out to greet him, shake his hand, complain, whatever was happening. And that's what those lines were for.

And I knew that if I caught dad and mom at just the right place because they're in a hurry because they don't want to talk to me, they want to talk to these other people. And if I were to just say, dad, can I have 10 bucks to go out with my buddies to Hardee's or McDonald's, wherever we were eating.

[28 : 27] And it was almost always accompanied with an eye roll but because he's in a hurry, he reaches in his pocket and he gives me five bucks or whatever it is or he just says, no, leave me alone, whatever it was.

But I could come to my dad, I could ask him and I might have this eye roll and he hated when I did it that way but I would continue to do it and sometimes it worked and sometimes just to get me out of the way, he'd give me five bucks, right?

That's not how God sees us when we pray. We never get on our knees before God and experience the divine eye roll. Oh, here's Marty again.

What's Faye done to him now? Whatever it is, you know. God doesn't look at us like that. He wants you to ask him.

He invites you to speak to him and he desires that you ask him to meet your needs and supply your wants.

[29 : 25] He's not annoyed by your prayer. He longs for that communion with you. One of the most prominent titles in the Bible for God is Father.

He is our loving heavenly Father and he wants us to rely on him and seek his blessing in our lives. Jesus taught this wonderfully in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter seven. Jesus says, ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you.

But the door doesn't open when you don't knock. Nobody just walks down the street of your house and you just magically open the door. If they knock on the door, you open the door.

He goes on. For everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, Jesus says, if his son ask him for bread, we'll give him a stone.

[30 : 31] Don't answer that. Some of you might would do that. Or if he asks for a fish, we'll give him a serpent. If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

That's amazing. Not only has he created you, but he says, I am your father. And if you will come and ask, I want to provide.

I want to pour out blessings on your life. I want to do my work and accomplish my purposes in you. And I think many people refuse to pray because they believe God is naturally unwilling.

They don't view him as a loving father. They view him as a stingy ruler. But that's not at all what the Bible tells us is true of him. He won't always say yes to you because let's face it, if we always got a yes, we'd be in rough shape.

God doesn't always say yes to us, but you will miss out on an abundance of divine blessings if you don't have faith enough to ask.

[31 : 45] The prayer of faith, ask. The prayer of faith, surrenders. Surrenders. So God indeed wants us to bring our request to him and it's true that he desires to bless us, but we have to remember that our request must be surrendered to his sovereign will.

Again, the prayer of faith, it doesn't only trust God's power, it trusts his plan. And this is where the word of faith moving at others like it, they go wrong because they ignore the rest of what the Bible teaches about this.

So we're going to look at it together. How about this one from 1 John 5? This is the confidence that we have toward him that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request that we have asked of him. John's clear there.

Yes, God will grant your request according to his will. And the prayer of faith doesn't impose our will unto him. It surrenders to his will even when we don't get what we hoped.

[32 : 59] How about this one? John 14. This is from Jesus himself. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. Now we've taken that in kind of a ritualistic way where we kind of tack on at the end of a prayer, we tack on in Jesus' name.

There's nothing wrong with that. I do it. Every prayer, I do it. But it's not because Jesus said we have to say the words in Jesus' name every time we pray. You don't. You don't have to do that.

To pray in Jesus' name is praying according to his character and surrendering to his will. It's the idea of lordship. It's that when I bring my prayer to the Lord, I'm acknowledging that he is actually the Lord, not me in this equation.

And I'm gonna surrender to whatever it is he wants. And the things that I bring to him, when I'm bringing them in Jesus' name, I'm bringing them in accordance with his character and with his word, which means I'm never gonna ask God to provide something that he's already told me in his word, he's not gonna provide.

[34 : 14] I've heard people say that they've divorced their spouse and they've married another and their excuse for it, they say, I love God and I love Jesus. This is God's will for my life. He just wants me to be in love with this other person.

And their marriage falls apart. And listen, the Bible says that's a lie. So there's no point in going to God and asking him if he can just give you this other man. That's not asking, even if you say the words in Jesus' name, it doesn't matter.

That's not what praying in Jesus' name is. It's praying according to his will, praying according to his character. How about this one? Matthew 6. Pray then like this. Jesus, this is the Lord's prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. What's the next phrase? Your will be done. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

That's before he gets to the, give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we've forgiven the sins of others. Your will be done. Isn't that what Jesus himself prayed?

[35 : 15] Has he knelt in the garden? Not my will, Lord. Your will be done. The prayer of faith surrenders. So prayer is not about convincing God to align his will to ours.

It's about surrendering our will to his. I'll give you this quote from East Stanley Jones. This is fantastic. He said, prayer is surrender. Surrender to the will of God in cooperation with that will.

If I throw out a boat hook from the boat to catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me or do I pull myself to the shore?

Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God. Prayer of faith surrenders. Number four and we're done.

The hindrance to faithful prayer. The hindrance to faithful prayer. Look at verse 25. Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

[36 : 21] This is kind of tough, isn't it? The final element of this lesson is that God will keep from blessing us if there are certain things that are true in our life.

Regardless of our faith, there is a hindrance to prayer. In this context, Jesus says that it's an unforgiving spirit and that when we have an unforgiving bitterness in our hearts, we forfeit the forgiveness of God.

Jesus isn't talking about eternal salvation here. He's not talking about God withholding salvation or taking our salvation away from us. That's not the context.

The context is prayer. Bringing our request to the Lord assumes that we seek his daily forgiveness and gracious provision, right?

If we weren't seeking God's gracious and merciful provision in our life, we wouldn't pray. Okay, it assumes that we're coming to God. And in this context, we're coming to God to receive from him something that we refuse to provide to someone else.

[37 : 32] And Jesus says, don't expect, don't expect to get the blessings from God that you desire when you are living in unrepentant sin, when you have bitterness in your heart.

It's similar to the parable of the unforgiving servant. Do you remember that one? It's in Matthew 18. I think Luke shares it too, but there was this servant, Jesus said, who despite being forgiven of a tremendous debt himself, refused to forgive a much lesser debt to someone else.

And that servant ended up being judged for his unfaithfulness and he lost the blessing that he would have otherwise enjoyed and would have been joyfully provided to him by his master.

And the point is this, when we seek forgiveness or when others seek forgiveness from us, God desires that we show his mercy to them. And when we're doing that, we open the doorway for God's blessings when we come to him in prayer.

And I believe that Jesus is using this as an illustration, really, but as an example of a much greater, broader truth. The hindrance to the prayer of faith is unrepentant, unconfessed sin.

[38 : 52] And in your life, whether that's an unforgiving spirit or a bitterness, or whether it's something else that's disobedient to the Lord, we cannot expect God's blessings when we do not pursue holiness.

It just doesn't work. James 4, chapter 4, verse 3. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your own passion.

You're just consumed with self. That's sin. God doesn't hear that prayer. He doesn't grant that request. Psalm 66, 18. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

All right. Let's finish this way. Prayer is, of course, one of the most important spiritual disciplines. It's also many times one of the most neglected.

I want to give you a handful of practical tips that will help all of us, I think, okay? Just a few things to keep in mind. How to have a faithful prayer life.

[39 : 57] Number one, designate a time. Designate a time. Find whatever time works for you, but remember that nobody prays by accident.

You always pray on purpose. And to obey this command and to enjoy the sweet fellowship of communion with God, we have to be intentional.

Now, how you work it into your day is up to you, and only you know the best way to do that. I would encourage you, if it's possible, give your mornings to God. Go to bed at night knowing that the first thing I'm doing when I get up is I'm communing with God.

I'm spending time with Him. Schedule it. Write it down in your planner. What gets scheduled gets done. Designate a time and go to that time in prayer. Number two, keep a prayer list.

Keep a prayer list. And I know how this works sometimes because it's happened to me so many times before where I get frustrated because I want to pray and I start and I get four or five minutes into the prayer and I just kind of run out of things to say.

[41 : 06] You know what I mean? You've been there. You run out of things to say and you're not really sure and then you feel like, I don't know about this prayer thing. I can't really do it like other people can do it. And I'm telling you, the simple solution is a pencil and a piece of paper.

Get a journal and keep it on your nightstand and have one page that's designated for daily needs. You're going to pray over these things every day. Start listing out all the things that matter to you that much for daily prayer.

On mine, I have a one day that it's got a bunch of personal things. It's got my wife and it's got a bunch of things for her and it's got each of my girls and it's got a bunch of things for each of them and it's got things for our church.

It's things that I'm praying over every day and then I've got a different page for each day of the week where I start with the main page and then I'm moving to the daily page and every one of you that's in this room is on one of those pages.

There's a day every week where I'm spending time and I've got a list of things that I pray for you about that you may not even know that I'm praying for you about but I'm praying for you about and I'm praying through it and before you know it, you're praying for 30 or 45 minutes and you don't even realize it.

[42 : 03] Why? Because you just wrote it down. Sometimes it's as simple as that. Write it down and pray. Number three, pray the scriptures. Pray the word.

Sometimes I just get started with prayer and I don't really know what to say and I'm kind of struggling and my list seems stale. I'm telling you, open your Bible and start to pray those words. Go to the Lord's Prayer.

This one is so helpful for me on days like that. Go to the Lord's Prayer and start praying the way Jesus said to pray. Heavenly Father, holy is your name and just let your mind think on that and start telling him how holy he is and how wonderful he is.

Your kingdom come. Lord, I can't wait. I'm longing for the day when your kingdom is finally and forever established and we can enjoy it and perfect freedom from sin and peace and joy and start praying through that prayer.

Go to those Psalms. You got sin to confess? Go to Psalm 51. Pray David's Prayer. Have mercy on me, Lord. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

[43 : 11] God's not, God's not, he's not bothered when you pray his words back. He likes that. Pray the word. Number four, pray all day long. All day long.

Paul famously wrote, pray without ceasing. Pray all the time. Pray when you're driving. Whenever you're having a conversation with a coworker and they confide in you about something seriously going on in their life, pray about it.

Then, when you're walking around the neighborhood or on the greenway, pray. Pray all the time. Something comes up. A blessing comes up.

Stop. Pray. Number five, pray with other people. Pray with other people. Pray with your spouse. Come early to church or stay a little bit late after the service just to find somebody and talk to them, pray with them a little bit.

Go to coffee with one another and talk about whatever you want to talk about, but whenever you get ready to leave, stop and say, why don't we just thank God for the time he's given us for our friendship today? Pray with other people. Let prayer be an important part of your relationship with other people.

[44 : 19] Finally, it's a big one. Just stop making excuses. Just stop making excuses because it's so easy to do, isn't it? It's just so busy.

There's a lot going on. I forget. You know, I'm not a morning person and it's hard for me to get up. I'm telling you, that extra half hour of sleep, it's not worth forfeiting the benefits of growing close to Jesus.

But whatever it is that's in your life, what is it that's there that you find more worthy of your time and effort than some time communing with your God?

Whatever that thing is, you need to get rid of that thing. It needs to diminish. Stop making excuses and pray. Look at all the blessings that await you.

Look at this promise that Jesus has given in this passage. It's amazing. Now ask, pray, and trust.