

MEET WITH ME: Prayer
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES - Part 2
Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life family. It is so good to see you here this morning. Turn in your Bibles to Matthew Chapter 6. We are in the series called, 'Meet With Me.' I am not sure how many of you have had this experience, but maybe you are just going along in your day when your phone rings, or you get a text or email, and someone says, '*Hey, are you still coming?*' Has that ever happened to you? That happens to me way too often, and I always tell people if you want to meet with me please go see Bennett who is our office manager because he does a great job of managing my calendar. And if you try to schedule something with me and I don't show up that is why, because I forget details a lot.

There is a sinking feeling you can have when you have missed out on an appointment, someone is expecting you, and you don't show up. It is like you cannot believe you just did that. And when I think about what we are doing this morning in talking about the spiritual discipline of prayer, I think a lot of times when it comes to our meeting with God in this way we feel this sense of guilt, this sense of, '*I should have prayed with Him, I should have done this, or I should have done that.*' So what I want us to do is to just put all of those feelings and emotions aside.

I am going to address a bunch of feelings that we may have felt and then say, '*Listen, God wants us to meet with Him.*' Last week Pastor Dan talked about meeting Him through His Word, and God also wants to meet with us through prayer. I don't want you to come in here and when we start talking about prayer all of a sudden you think, '*Oh, I should be praying more.*' Listen, this is a process and we are all going to be learning something this morning when it comes to prayer.

Our vision and our mission is to 'pursue at all costs a passionate God-centered life.' That we as people are centering our lives around the person of God. I believe that this series on meeting with God is vital and if we truly want to have a God-centered life that can happen when we pray. And I don't think it can happen if we don't pray, so we are confronted with this issue of prayer.

Now when it comes to prayer what are the feelings, thoughts and emotions you have right now? Can you name them? We have already talked about guilt. I think maybe another feeling or emotion we might have is what I would call disappointment. Maybe you have prayed for something and maybe you have prayed for it for years, or you have asked God to do something and you have prayed and tested God in a way, and God does not answer the prayer, or He doesn't answer it in the way that you expected.

So when we say we are going to be talking about prayer this morning, some of you in this room are feeling a little hurt because you have tried prayer and it didn't work. Or maybe you are sitting here and the emotion you feel is frustration because you want to

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pray, you want to meet with God, and you have tried it a million times. You get up in the morning and you think, *'It is 6:00a so here I go, 'Dear Lord,'* and then you fall asleep. Have you ever fallen asleep while praying in the morning? I have done it. I decide I am going to get up and I am going to pray and then I fall back asleep.

So maybe there is this frustration you feel. You feel like everyone has this great prayer life but you. Can I tell you something? No one in this room, not one of us pray like we should. And I don't say that in a guilty way; it is just the reality. If we are living perfect lives in communion with God it takes a lot of focus, a lot of time, and a lot of maturity.

All of these spiritual disciplines require starting small and building that spiritual muscle. Next week we are going to be talking about fasting, so get your mind ready for that. As I was preparing for that sermon I realized that I was a baby in fasting. And now some of you are wondering if you really want to come next week to hear about fasting. Especially at the eleven o'clock service when we are already getting hungry.

Maybe there is another word that would describe your experience with prayer. Now I am going to say something and I don't think lightening is going to strike me from heaven, but maybe you feel bored with prayer. I remember when I went to this conference to hear Donald Whitney who was a professor who taught prayer at a seminary in Kentucky. So he was teaching this church right down the road from me and I was a pastor in Denver so I wanted to go hear him because my prayer life felt boring. And this professor said that the number one reason why people don't pray, or that they stop praying is because they say the same thing about the same things every day.

And when you say the same thing about the same things every day, do you know what prayer is going to be? It is going to be boring to you. So here is what we need to do. We have to confront the things that are in our experience with prayer. We need to put our emotions over here, and we need to ask ourselves, *'if we could start fresh with prayer what would it look like.'* What would it look like to start fresh with our prayers?

Prayer is one of those things that if you ask most Americans, like when they do these surveys of religion practices, prayer by far is the most common spiritual practice that Americans do. Forty-four percent of Americans say that they pray every single day. Now I don't know if that is true or not, but forty-four percent of Americans say they pray every day, whether it is to the God of the Bible, or to their deity of any kind. That is almost half of all Americans say they pray on a daily basis. So prayer is extremely popular but I would also say that prayer is extremely misunderstood.

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There are a lot of ways we could talk about prayer. We could talk about the theology of prayer. We could talk about the philosophy of prayer. We could talk about the different styles of prayers. We could spend an entire series on prayer, and maybe we will do that somewhere down the road. But what God is leading me to do this morning is I want to make this a very practical sermon on prayer, something very practical, and something that you can go home and try this week. I don't want you to be frustrated, I don't want you to feel guilty, and I don't want you to be bored.

Here is what I know from my own experience, I believe prayer is an adventure. If you are taking notes my main point this morning is that prayer is an adventure. There are ups and downs, there are twists and turns, there are peaks and valleys, and there are the disappointments that we have with God when we pray. And then there is also elation when we see Him answer prayer. There are all these emotions, and all these experiences, and I think if all of us could be honest with each other, we would agree that prayer is an adventure. It is a journey that God takes us through to teach us how to commune with Him.

So we are going to look at Matthew Chapter 6, because what we need to do is to see the right way to pray and the wrong way to pray. And Jesus deals with this in this passage. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is in Chapter 5, and then in the very first verse of Chapter 6 we get the context of what He is talking about. He says: ***"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."***

So right there is the context. Jesus is saying there is a major problem that people have when they do religious things so that people will look at them and say, *'I think you are a really spiritual guy.'* And then Jesus begins to talk about prayer and then about fasting. And next week we will be talking about fasting. So prayer is something that can be done wrong. Listen to what Jesus says beginning in verse 5.

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others." Listen, Jesus is actually giving an illustration of this in the book of Luke where the Pharisees are standing on the street corner praying, *'Lord, thank you for not making me like this tax collector.'* And then the tax collector beats his chest and says, *'Oh Lord have mercy on me for I am a sinner.'* The Pharisee got prayer wrong and the tax collector got prayer right.

Jesus is addressing this kind of attitude in prayer. Listen to what he says next: ***"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father***

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who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this.”

Now this passage is probably something you are familiar with. Maybe you have recited it in church growing up or it may just be from the familiarity of reading it, but this is the Lord’s Prayer. He says: ***Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”***

So what we have here is Jesus teaching His disciples, His people how not to pray and then how to pray. The first way not to pray is the idea of praying a man centered prayer. We can make prayer man centered. Man centered prayer looks like we are trying to impress others. When we try to impress others we are saying, ‘*I want you to look at me and I want you to think that I am somebody that I may or may not be.*’ What you are really looking for is their approval, for their validation. And God is saying if we look for approval and validation from anyone else but Him we are missing it.

So Jesus is addressing this idea of us wanting to stand in public wanting man’s approval. Now He is not addressing that we should never pray in public; that is not what He is saying. What He is saying is we should not do something that makes people look at us and think we are so spiritual. Have you ever been around someone who prays in the King James English? Has that ever happened to you?

And again there is nothing wrong with that, but because I grew up in church and my dad was a pastor sometimes when a bunch of pastors got together they would start praying like, ‘*Thou Lord, bless us today in thy favor and in thy glory.*’ And you are like, ‘*Whoa, I don’t talk like that.*’ The only time they talk like that is when they talk to God, and I think we need to be consistent in how we talk to God. God is not impressed by thee and thou and by adding ‘est’ to verbs. What God cares about is that we do things sincerely and that we are not doing things for an audience.

When Jesus says, “***go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father,***” what He is saying is we need to get out of the limelight and go to a place where you know you won’t be bothered. And I think that is really key. Whenever you try to pray go someplace where you know you can be alone. When we pray we need to avoid distractions so we can really approach God in heaven. That is what Jesus is saying. Stop trying to impress others and seek Him.

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One of the things that is interesting about this passage in verse 5 is Jesus says this about people who pray in public, “*They have received their reward.*” And in verse 6 He says, ‘*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*’ Underline those two words ‘reward’ in verses 5 and 6. There is juxtaposition between these two rewards and we see it in giving, in prayer and in fasting. There is a different Greek word when Jesus says, “*they have received their reward.*” The reward that comes from man is a different Greek word than the Greek word reward that we get from, “*And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*”

Now what He is saying is the way that God blesses and the reward that He gives is completely different than the way man gives rewards. You can have one or the other but you cannot have both. So when it comes to these spiritual practices we always have to check our hearts to ask what we are looking for. Am I looking for validation from other people? Am I looking for approval from other people? Or am I doing it for the sake of the goodness and the glory of God? That is number one.

Number two – don’t try to manipulate God. So don’t try to impress others and then don’t try to manipulate God. Look what He says in verse 7. “*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*” The idea is that when we pray sometimes we think there is a certain thing we have to say. Like in those days there was a recitation and they believed if you recited this prayer then God had to do something.

And maybe you have heard that later on Jesus said something like, “*If anyone asks anything in my name I will give it to them.*” And you are like, ‘*Oh, that is why we say ‘in Jesus’ name’ in our prayers.*’ But that doesn’t mean that we can ask for whatever we want in Jesus’ name, and God has to say, ‘*Oh no, he said ‘in Jesus’ name’ and now I have to do it.*’ That is not what that means, okay? To pray ‘in Jesus’ name’ means that we are asking for things that Jesus Himself would ask for. So there is this idea that there is a certain phrase we can say, or if we can say it enough, or if we can just say the right words. Have you ever felt like that? Like I prayed but I don’t know if I really got it right. Listen, it is not about what kind of words that you use, it is about the sincerity of heart that you have.

I remember my dad’s testimony when he got saved. He was fifteen years old when he went to a Christian camp where he heard the gospel for the very first time. He was weeping when he went forward to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He sat down with the counselor who asked my dad if he understood and my dad is just really crying hard. The counselor then asked my dad if he wanted to pray, and my dad said this: ‘*God,*

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I don't want to hurt you anymore.' That was his prayer. The counselor told my dad he wasn't sure that prayer was okay, but that was my dad's heart in repentance. And there are no magic words to say. You don't have to say all the right things, because God knows your heart. God knew my dad's heart and He saved him in that moment.

We have to understand that it is not about trying to impress others, or trying to manipulate God with our words, or by the things that we do. But there is a right way to pray. And the right way to pray Jesus outlines for us in verses 9 through 13. And there is another portion later on in another gospel account where the disciples come to Jesus and they ask Him to teach them how to pray.

So this is a model for prayer and we could spend weeks on this. But I want to teach you a model for prayer that someone taught me and that I use on a regular basis. Maybe you have been walking with Jesus for decades and you are a prayer warrior that prays multiple hours a day, or maybe you are just dabbling your toes into this idea of praying, or maybe you aren't even sure if you are a follower of Jesus, but you believe that prayer is important and you are going to try to pray for the first time. No matter where you are in your spiritual journey you can do this.

The idea of the model that Jesus gives can be summarized in four words – up, down, in, out. I want you to say that with me. Ready – up, down, in, out. If you can pray up, down, in, out then you know how to pray. This is a model for how we pray and approach God. So let's look at these four directions of our prayer, and the reason why I think it is so important to have the full scope of it because many times when it comes to prayer we are just very comfortable in our prayer, and that is just what normally we know to do. *'Dear Lord, thank you for this day. Help me to do this, help me to do that. In Jesus' name. Amen.'*

There is nothing wrong with quick prayers, there is nothing wrong with silent prayers, but the reality is that many times our prayers are limited in scope because we have just gotten too comfortable in something that is not necessarily biblical. So this is going to stretch us, and this is going to challenge us.

So the first direction is 'up.' We begin with relationship and worship. What did Jesus say to start with? ***"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name."*** That word 'hallowed' is the idea of being holy, being sanctified. So that when we approach God we approach Him as Father and as holy. Remember the sermon series we just finished was the names of God. And what was so fascinating about that is that we talked about the names of God reflecting the nature of Him - His transcendence, His bigness, His power, His glory, His greatness. There are certain names of God that when we looked at them we said, *'Yes, God is that.'*

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And we also looked at names of God that reflected His closeness, His intimacy, His mercy and His kindness. And what Jesus is saying is that both things are our Father. There is a relationship there, a closeness there with a Father. He is saying a lot of people pray to God, or they pray to a deity, but what sets the Christian faith apart is that we can call God Father because of Jesus Christ, because of what He has won for us on the cross. Through Jesus' blood we have now entered into a relationship with God as Father. And a Father who is close, a Father who cares, and a Father who loves.

We also pray to a God whose name is holy and there needs to be reverence and worship. So we need to understand that is our starting point when we begin our time with God. There may be times when we are in a desperate need and we just cry out to God for help and there is nothing wrong with that. But on a regular day by day basis what we need is communion centered prayer. Our prayers need to be both communion centered and kingdom centered. If we just pray one thing, like kingdom centered, it is all about what we need God to do. And prayer is action, but if we neglect the communion I think we will end up missing out on the fullness that God is expecting from us and what He wants us to experience.

One of the things that I have had to do because there have been many times in the morning when I would get on my knees and then I would fall asleep, so I love to get up and do a prayer walk. I get up early, I get dressed, and I follow this couple of mile route and I prayer walk. That is my time with Jesus, before anyone else is up. That is a good rhythm for me. One of the things that I do when I am walking and praying with God is I remember that I am just talking to Him about who He is. Many times the Holy Spirit will ask me what my joy is in this moment. What am I thankful for right now? And He turns my heart to Him, to see and know Him.

There are needs, there are requests, there are desires and there are big things I need to bring to God, but what God wants me to do first and foremost is to just be with Him in relationship. It seems like in every human relationship that we have on this earth when we first meet with someone that we want to be close with we don't sit down with them and immediately say, '*Okay, here's the plan.*' If you do that you need some relationship coaching. The idea is when you first sit down with someone what do you do? We ask things like, '*How are you doing?*' '*What is going on in your life?*' If there is a relational connection that you want to have with them there might be things that you want to get to, or business that needs to get done, but what you first want to do is connect relationally with them.

And that is what God is inviting to us. He is saying, '*Listen, I want you to walk with me.*' I think that the Psalms is a wonderful guide book to teach us how to pray. It

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gives us words, words to know what to say, because many times we don't know what to say. And one of my favorite things to pray every single morning is from Psalms 16. It is one of those Psalms that is just about the intimacy that we can have with God. And there is a last passage there in Psalms 16 that says, ***“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”***

I love talking to God about that. I love just walking with Him. There will be times when I am prayer walking, and many times the speed of my walk is in relation to what I am asking God to do. If I am intense I am speed walking. And other times I will realize I need to slow down and take the next few moments to just think about Him. The reality is that God is always drawing us. And if I truly believe that the fullness of joy in life is not found in my family, not found in my income, not found in my job, not found in my possessions, or in all the things that I think I need, if my heart trusts that the fullness of joy is found in the presence of Him, then I will pray that way. I have to start that way because it puts everything else into focus. So we have to start with ‘up,’ and begin with relationship, begin with worship.

Next it leads us to ‘down.’ Ask for God-sized God desired actions. Notice I used God-sized God desired actions for a reason, because Jesus said to pray this way: ***“Your kingdom come.”*** So after you spend time relating to God in communion, this is the kingdom centered prayer now. ***“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*** There is a part of prayer that is worship, there is a part of prayer that is adoration and thanksgiving, but there is also a part of prayer where we express things that we want to happen on this earth, where we want to see this happen.

And what Jesus is teaching us is that many times our wants and our desires are simply that. They are our wants and our desires. Jesus is saying that there is something so big; there is something so great that He wants us to have a sense of expectation and hope. ***“Your kingdom come,”*** what does that mean? It means that we want to see the rule and the reign of Jesus on this earth. It means that we want to see people's lives transformed.

Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah Chapter 61. If you want a description of the kingdom of God, and you don't know how to pray for the kingdom, this passage is how you can do that. This is what Jesus declared before He began His ministry. And when we look at Jesus we see that he is the one who modeled the kingdom. He modeled the kingdom for us and He uses this passage to describe what He was about to do, so to me this is one of the greatest descriptions of the kingdom of God.

Isaiah Chapter 61 says: ***“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion***

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– to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

That is how I want to pray. That is the stuff that I want to be asking God for. Listen, there is nothing wrong with having lists, there is nothing wrong with having things that we want God to answer. We love crossing things off of our lists, don't we, when we see God answer them? But what I have to first do is make sure that my list is filled with these kinds of things. *'God, I want to see the gospel advance. I want to see lives transformed. God, I want to see people that are broken made whole again. I want to see people who are mourning become glad. I want to see people who are depressed to be made whole.'*

That is how we should want to pray. And what we have to be confronted with is this idea of when we pray to God what are we asking Him for? What are the desires of our heart? I think many times when we don't see God answer prayer it is not because He doesn't want to answer our prayers; it is because our prayers are too small. Our prayers are man sized and they are man desires. And He wants us to start with what He wants. Prayer does not align God with our heart; what prayer is supposed to do is align our hearts with Him. God is not the one who is going to move. This is hard because many times we think we are praying for something that is really good. And many times we do pray for something that is truly good, but we also need to pray for kingdom sized things.

We also need to keep in mind that it says: ***“Your will be done.”*** See I can pray God-sized things and I can pray for God's action, but ultimately God is the one who knows how to answer that prayer. I know I use this illustration a lot, but when I was younger and my kids were younger we would go on a family trip. And you know that someone has to be in charge on that trip. And you are either going to let the kids be in charge and pull over whenever they want to, and stop and do things whenever they want to, or you are going to be in charge. And so we have to say, *'You know what, we are going from Point A to Point B and this is the plan.'* And that is because I know in the long run we don't want to be in the car for thirteen hours. We want to be in the hours for seven hours only. And if we do everything that the kids want to do, we will definitely be in the car for thirteen hours.

So many times we just need to understand that God knows more than we do. I don't know about you but there have been so many times in my forty-five years of life when I have looked back and remembered things that I asked God to do, and today I thank God that He did not answer those prayers. I think there is a country song about that. *(Laughter.)* I am not into country music so I don't know who sings it. Is it Garth Brooks? Yes, okay I got one song right. But this idea that many times we think that we are praying for things for God, but maybe we also need to understand that His will be done.

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When we don't know what to pray we can always pray Scripture. We can pray the Psalms. Just start going through the Word of God and when that sounds good pray that. When we pray Scripture our heart is aligned with God. Listen, I look across our community, across our church and here is where my heart is so burdened because I believe if we were a church that began praying for God-sized kingdom things we would see God more. There are two hundred fifty thousand people that live across Lake Norman but are we praying the types of prayers where we could see good news taken to the poor and to the oppressed. Are we asking God to do things in us and through us?

I am challenged by this every single day when I come here and when I do prayer walking across the parking lot. I pray for our church and I am praying for our community because it has been a really hard eighteen months of Covid and people are still struggling. There is still a lot of disruption to our lives, and the thing that we need to remember is that all of the stuff that has been going on in our world today, all the chaos, all the sicknesses and death can turn us inward if we let it. It requires a crying out to the Lord, asking Him to shape our minds and our hearts before His kingdom. The last thing I want to do is be a pastor where our vision does not extend beyond our parking lot. That is not what it is about.

If God does great things here but they never leave this facility that is not the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is seeing the entire community transformed. And we need to pray, *"God your kingdom come, your will be done in my family as it is in heaven. God your kingdom come your will be done in my school as it is in heaven. God your kingdom come your will be done in my office, God your kingdom come your will be done in Lake Norman and in my neighborhood. God, I want to see your presence, I want to see your power. I want to see you work here, to do something here."* Imagine if all of us in this room started praying those kinds of prayers how different our church could look. How different would our community look if we prayed like that?

So we have talked about praying 'up,' and then praying 'down,' so next we need to pray 'in.' The next two verses are for the 'in' prayers. ***"Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*** 'In' means this; to be honest about your needs both physical and spiritual. Now once we have spent time in worship and praise, and once we are asking God to do His will in His way, then we can turn to our own needs. And we all have needs. Every single one of us in this room has needs. We have needs bigger than the prayer circle requests that we give. Have you ever been in a prayer group with a list, and I am not belittling that, but many times we sit around in a circle and we ask what we should pray for. And if there was a scale of one to ten of things that I could share with the group I most likely am not going to give anything above a six because my pride keeps me from sharing what some of my needs are, or the struggles I really have.

And I think it takes incredible humility not just before God but before others to say I have needs, I have weaknesses, I have issues, I need God to work in my heart

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spiritually so I can understand my relationship with God. This is where the gospel comes in and many times we have to preach the gospel to ourselves every day to understand how forgiven we are. Many times we go before the Lord and we just spend all this time thinking that we have to talk to God and say enough things until He is finally okay with us.

Listen, if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you believe what He did for you on the cross, that He rose from the dead, and that He has covered your sins with His blood, you do not have to work your way into a right relationship with Him. Remember the verse says: ***“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”*** What God wants us to do is to be honest and to say, *‘God, here are my needs. Here are my spiritual needs. Here are my physical needs.’* What God is teaching us in this kind of prayer is dependence that we learn how to depend on Him in ways that we would not if we hadn’t prayed.

One of the questions that I heard at a prayer conference one time was asked by the guy who was leading the conference, and I have never forgotten it. I bring it up constantly in my mind to ask myself that question – what in my life would stop if I stopped praying? That we could have such a dependence on God, that we believe that He is our help, that we can tell Him that we need Him today. Do you know how many times that I pray that? It is every day. *‘God, I need you in this way today. I need you in this way today to help me be a better parent. I need you today to help me be this employee. God, I need you today to help me with this situation at work. God, I need you today to help me to know what to do with this money problem. God, I need you because I have these needs so I am asking you to come into this situation and to give me wisdom to help me, to solve this problem that is too big for me. God, I need you.’* We need to invite God into those moments.

So we have to pray ‘up’ with relationship and worship, we have to pray ‘down’ when we ask God for God-sized desires, we have to pray ‘in’ and ask Him for help with our physical and spiritual needs, and then we need to pray ‘out.’ Verse 13 says this: ***“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”*** We have talked about prayer being this idea of intimacy, prayer as conversation, prayer as work, but prayer is also war. It is war, and what Jesus is saying is we live in a world that is filled with sin and darkness. We are not just humans alone living on this planet as we talked about in a series last year about spiritual warfare. We know that when we wake up every morning that we enter into a spiritual world and we have an enemy that we wrestle against. We don’t wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and the forces of darkness of this world.

This is a real battle that you and I face every single day. And prayer is one of our offensive weapons that we take to the kingdom of darkness and say, *‘I don’t like where the kingdom of darkness has a stronghold and I am praying against this issue in my life*

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and around me. There are problems that are so big, there are issues that are so great, the only way we can see them change or we can overcome them is through prayer. It is on our knees, it is not with our words, it is not with having a conversation with another person, because there are some problems that are so big that the only way we can see God move is when we do it on our knees with prayer.

So God is inviting us to ask Him to help us attack sin and darkness whether it is in us or around us because we live in a world where there is goodness, truth and beauty but where there is also dark, broken and sinful. We as children of God, as salt and light, we more keenly than anyone else can see where the kingdom of darkness is advancing today. And many times all we do is go on Facebook and say we hate when this happens when we need to get on our knees and pray for God to move, pray for God to change hearts, and pray against things.

Have you ever prayed against something? God wants us to do that. Listen, we know that prayer is war because the moment you start praying what happens? We think, *'Oh I forgot to send that email.'* Then we are like maybe I need to put down a time for prayer on my phone. Have you ever watched the movie *'War Room?'* After watching that we are ready, we are so going to do that. We get in our little closet and we get down on our knees and start to pray and then we remember that we forgot to pay a bill, or we forgot to call so and so back, or your child wakes up early when you pray. See prayer is war. And we need to understand that there are going to be forces of darkness that will keep us from being on our knees, that will keep us from praying.

I am so excited that in about a month on November 11th we are going to be having a missionary by the name of Carole Ward here. I hope you mark your calendars and will be here for this because this woman, Carole Ward, has had an amazing ministry in the continent of Africa doing things that I think most people could never imagine. She is someone who about twenty years ago felt the call of God into her life and she went into war torn Africa in northern Uganda and southern Sudan. She basically told the State Department where she was going and they were like, *"if you go there we are going to consider you dead because no one in their right mind should go there."*

But Carole Ward walked into this war ravaged area that was in a humanitarian crisis only armed with the gospel of Jesus Christ and prayer. There is a book that was written about Carole, and we will have some copies here that day, that is called *'Send Me Where No One Wants to Go.'* And Carole's story is a very powerful story of someone who dedicates their life to prayer and believes that prayer can change things because there are things that are so big they are beyond government and beyond armies.

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Carole's testimony in the book tells about a prayer movement that began in northern Uganda. On the human level there was a government rebel by the name of Joseph Coney that was just ravaging northern Uganda doing some horrible wicked things across that community. And the prayer movement started and had grown until finally God told Carole to gather people into a stadium to pray. So she arranged for a night for pastors and church people to gather for a night of prayer.

Years later Carole had a conversation with one of the men who had formerly been a general in the rebel force of Joseph Coney who had done such horrific things. This rebel had now become a believer, and Carole was telling him about this night of prayer they had had. And the former rebel asked her what was the date and time of that prayer meeting. And when Carole told him the date and time the rebel said that was the exact time that the rebel force realized that they had lost power. They felt the power leave them and they knew they no longer had the power.

When I hear that kind of story I want to share it. That is the kind of experience I hope that we desire as a church. That we look across the landscape of our world and realize the solution is not going to be yearly electing the right people that we feel have our values. That if we are going to see our community change, if we are going to see the next generation reached, if we are going to see lives transformed, people that are broken made whole, if we are going to pray against the darkness, we better start praying now.

So I have given you the prayer steps of 'up,' 'down,' 'in,' and 'out,' which is what this seminary professor taught me. And the professor told us to never teach on prayer without praying. So we are going to pray right now. We are going to take the next few minutes and I am going to lead us into this way of prayer. So please bow your heads and close your eyes and let's just go before the Lord and let's start with praying upward. Talk to God as your Father, talk to God as your Savior, and spend some time in worshipping in relationship with Him. *(Pause.)*

Next I want us to pray 'down.' Let's pray and ask God for His kingdom to come, His will to be done here. What do you want to see God do? What is the kingdom desire that He wants you to pray for in you and around you? Let's spend some time praying for those. *(Pause.)*

Next let's pray 'inward.' Be honest about our needs. What are our needs? What is the help that you need God with in this moment? *(Pause.)*

Lastly let's pray 'outward.' Let's pray against the sin and the darkness and the strongholds of evil that we see around us. *(Pause.)*

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Father, I pray that you would teach us to pray, teach us to pray through your Spirit and through your Word. In the name of Jesus.’ Amen.

Just a few application questions I want to give to you before we are done. I believe that if enough of us practice prayer the way that God wants us to we will be a different church. The first question is this – will you commit to praying every single day this week? Maybe you are new to prayer, maybe your prayer has been a roller coaster and you just haven’t really prayed much in your life, maybe your prayers have always been something difficult for you. I want to just challenge you to pray: *‘God, for the next seven days I am going to find a time and find a place to dedicate some time to pray.’*

Now don’t worry about a time limit, just make a commitment that every day this week you are going to pray ‘up,’ ‘down,’ ‘in,’ and ‘out. You have a model and you have something that you can do for seven days this week. And next Sunday you will come in here as someone who has spent time with Jesus every single day. Maybe that is the commitment you need to make this morning.

The second question is this – will you commit to praying for God’s kingdom through us for the next thirty days? Maybe you do have a dynamic prayer walk, maybe you do have a regular time with God where you are praying for things, but maybe your prayers are not necessarily kingdom focused. So I want to challenge you to pray this: *‘God, change the way I pray and for the next thirty days I am going to go to Isaiah Chapter 61 and I am going to pray those things that I know that you want to see happen through your church.’* I challenge you to make that commitment now. If we have enough people doing that in our church for the next thirty days we will be a different church.

Lastly, will you commit to start a prayer group? Listen, maybe you are thinking, *‘Ben, I do pray. I have a great relationship with God and I spend time with Him every single day.’* But maybe God wants you to expand the circle. Maybe you can start a prayer group at your job, maybe you can start a prayer group in your school, or maybe you can start a prayer group for people in your neighborhood. You could meet at Starbucks, you could meet at the church, but commit to inviting two, three, or four people into a group and start praying together for the kingdom of God and against the kingdom of darkness.

Those are the three applications I want to leave you with today, because I believe if we commit to this kind of prayer, if we meet with God in a very supernatural way we will be different. You will be different, I will be different and this church will be different. We will see the power in the work of God like we have never seen it before. And that is what I believe God wants us to do.

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The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.