



Message Transcript

Modeling Prayer

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Amen. With that, let's go before the Lord and prepare our hearts to hear His living an active word this morning. Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are and we pray this morning specifically that you would talk directly to us because Lord, we believe that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, that you speak. So our prayer this morning is, Lord, speak, for we are ready to hear what you have to say. And so now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus Christ speak directly to you, who will believe what He says and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

Amen. Today is day eight of our 21 days of prayer and fasting. Last week we talked about maximized fasting and how fasting was not just starving ourselves. It was something we do in addition to our prayer life, that to maximize our prayer life, we set aside food so that we can hunger more for God. And I want to let you know if you've been participating with us in these last eight days of these 21 days, I hope your heart has been served more for the Lord. But I want to let you know something. No matter how deeply you love Jesus, there's more. There's more that you can have. And the reason I know that is the Bible makes so many promises when it comes to prayer. The

Bible says, "Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and unsearchable things that you do not know." The Bible says, "If you abide in me and my word abides in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." Look at that.

The Bible also says, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened." The Bible says, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can ask this mountain to uproot itself, go throw itself into the sea and it'll be done." And we read those and we ask Christians, "Do you believe the Bible?" "Yeah, I believe it." "Do you believe that?" "Yeah, it's in the Bible." "Do you practice that and see that in your life?" "No, not really." And the reason is, is that wherever our prayer life is, it's not nearly at the level it can be. And God's given us everything we need for life and godliness. God's laid open a table, but we have to go and grab it. The Bible says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Prayer needs to be primary in all that we're doing. So as we continue this 21 days of prayer and fasting, I want to talk to you today about how Jesus Christ modeled prayer.

I want to talk about modeling prayer because I believe prayer is more caught than taught. Nobody better to look at than the person of Jesus. And I want to look at a familiar story. It's one that's not often preached about and it's one that when we see Jesus in this story, we think, well, that's not really the Jesus I conjure up. Because for most of us, we think of Jesus as meek and mild. We think of Jesus as just compassionate helper, humble servant, and He is and He was all those things. But Jesus is also ruling and reigning king. And what we see in Jesus Christ embodied is the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. And right towards the end of His ministry, He went

back into Jerusalem and on one of those first days that He was back there, that's when this story takes place.

I'm going to be reading from Mark chapter 11. We're going to look at verses 15 and following, and I just want to give you a picture of what was happening in the story. This same story happened in John's gospel at the beginning of His ministry. So right when Jesus started His ministry, He had an encounter just like this, and then at the end of His ministry, three years later, He has this encounter too. Notice what happens when He and His disciples arrive in Jerusalem.

"Then they came to Jerusalem," this is Mark 11:15, "and He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, 'is it not written? My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations, but you have made it a den of robbers.' Then the chief priest and scribes heard this and began seeking how to destroy Him for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching."

Now, I've seen a lot of precious moment figurines and I've told our guys at men's conferences, if anybody can find one of these precious moment figurines, I'd love to have it. Something where Jesus is enraged, overturning the money changers. Or in John chapter two, he gets a cord of three whips and He's whipping people around. He's saying, "Get out of my father's house. My house is to be called a house of prayer for all the nations. But you made it a robbers' den." And He wouldn't let anybody carry

merchandise through because what was going on is instead of the temple being the place for the presence of God, people had turned it into a marketplace to profit for themselves.

So instead of having people bring their offering to the Lord, they'll say, we'll, just make it easier for you. We'll sell your pigeons, we'll sell your offerings. You can just come buy it from us. Sure, there'll be a little upcharge for you, but that's not a big deal. At least you don't have to think about bringing God a genuine offering. And that's what was going on. And people were using the temple as a thoroughfare to just cross through the streets. It wasn't being used to honor the Lord anymore. And Jesus at the beginning of His ministry and at the end of His ministry has the same guttural, passionate response. Keep in mind Jesus Christ is fully God. He never sinned. This is not sinning for Jesus. There's nothing He did that sinned. But when He says, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you made it a robber's den," it's something we should take serious note of because of the passion and the zeal from which He taught.

Even His disciples early in His ministry when they saw this, they were reminded of the scripture in Psalm 69:9 that said, "Zeal for your house will consume me." When they saw Jesus get like this, they were thinking, we've never seen him like this before. But then they thought, yeah, the Messiah is going to have zeal for the house of God like that. So today I want to talk to you about five ways that Jesus Christ modeled prayer because His whole life modeled prayer, didn't it? I mean, very early in the morning when it was still dark, Jesus got up to solitary places and there He prayed. It

was His model. Mark 1:35 tells us that, that from very early in the morning He would get up and He would go pray.

After He did miracles, He would go pray. Before He did miracles, He would go pray. At all times, He was praying. On the night that He was going to be betrayed, when He knew He was going to be crucified, He takes His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. What's He doing there? He's praying. On the cross, what's He doing? He's praying. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit." He had such an ongoing relationship with His father that He said these words, "If you've seen me, you've seen my father, for I only do what I see the father doing." He had such a connection in prayer as the God man that He lived a life of prayer. As a matter of fact, the only thing we see recorded in scriptures that the disciples wanted to be taught was what? Lord teach us to pray.

And yet so many of us as Christians leave that discipline on the table and I want to show you how Jesus Christ modeled prayer. And the first is this, first out of five. Jesus modeled how prayer demonstrates a priority for God. Prayer. Make no mistake about it, prayer demonstrates a priority for God. He began to teach them and say, "Is it not written," and he quotes Isaiah 56:7, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." Isn't this what the scriptures teach? My house shall be called a house of prayer.

Now the temple was the dwelling place of God. It's where He dwelled in the Old Testament. First was in the tabernacle, then in the temple. Where does He dwell today? He dwells in the hearts of all those who have repented and placed their faith

and trust in Jesus. Those who have, you are a temple of God. You are the dwelling place of God. He dwells in you. And when that group of people gather together, that's called the church.

So what should be primary in the church? I mean the scriptures teaches all sorts of things it should be. 2 Timothy 4:2 says, preach the word. Preaching should be an element of what takes place in churches, but Jesus did not say, my house should be called a house of preaching.

Scripture should be evident in the church. Give yourself to the public reading of scripture, the Bible teaches. But Jesus did not say, my house should be called a house of scripture. Praise. Praise should take place in the house of the Lord. The Bible says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and enter His courts with praise." The type of worshipers the Lord seeks or those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. Sing to the Lord a new song. Praise and worship should be taking place in a church, but Jesus did not say my house shall be called a house of praise.

Discipleship's important, wouldn't you say? Jesus told us to go in all the world and make disciples. I mean disciple making should be a part of what we are doing and what we are being sent to do. But Jesus did not say my house should be called a house of discipleship.

We're called to take care of the poor. It's the very thing that Paul said he was eager to do, but Jesus did not say that my house shall be called a house of benevolence.

Service. We're called to serve one another. Clearly we are. We're told to engage in the body of Christ. But Jesus did not say, my house shall be called a house of service.

But what about love? I mean love's primary. "By this all men will know you're my disciples, if you love one another, even as I have loved you." Love should be primary, but He did not say, my house shall be called a house of love.

What did he say? He said, my house shall be called a house of say it with me.
Prayer. Say it again.

Congregation:

Prayer.

Pastor Jeff:

My house shall be called a house of.

Congregation:

Prayer.

Pastor Jeff:

For who? For all the nations. Jesus said if there's anything that's priority, it's prayer. If there's anything that should be taking place in the church, it's prayer. If there's any ministry that should be going on in the church, it's prayer, it's primary, it's everything in the church. And if that's not a foundation, it's not the church of God. That's what Jesus said. Those aren't my words. Those are His. If you have a problem

with it, take it up with Him. He said, this is what my house is. It's a house of prayer.

For who? For all the nations, that all people everywhere can connect with my dad.

That's why I came. I wanted people to have direct communication.

Prayer is what a church should be known for. We read in Acts chapter two how the Holy Spirit fell on the early disciples and began to empower them to do all sorts of incredible things. But what we don't read is what was going on before. What was going on before was a prayer meeting that allowed the Holy Spirit to come and then they were to devote themselves to the apostle teaching, that's the word of God and the fellowship, which is our relationship with God and how it translates into each other, and the breaking of bread, which is the gospel that Jesus Christ's body and blood are central to everything and what? And the prayers. Prayer was central to everything. Why do you think we prioritize prayer at Brave? It's been essential from the very beginning when there was only a handful of people back in central Illinois that would get together on the carpet and pray that God would bring us a bass player or a drummer or provide a building or provide res...

I mean, it's always been about prayer. Even when we started First Tuesday, it was me and a handful of people, usually about 20, 15 to 20, then it got to be 30, then it got to be 35. I would sometimes play the guitar. Think about that. Because prayer meetings aren't about who's there. It's about the fact that Jesus is present. So think about how we prioritize prayer At our church. We have First Tuesdays 12 times a year. We do 21 days of prayer and fasting to begin the year. We do 21 days of prayer in the fall. We do what we call Taft, Thursday After First Tuesday. So our staff gathers 12

times a year to seek the face of the Lord from nine to noon. We have three weeks every year as a staff. The week going into Easter, one of our busiest weeks, the week going into fall kickoff and either the week going into Christmas or the week of New Year's where we spend time as a staff for the entire week from nine to noon, praying and seeking the face of the Lord.

We have prayer available to you at every single service before the service and after. We have people that pray in our church during services, we have people that are learning how to grow in their ability to pray, to see more prophecy, healing, freedom, et cetera. But I started counting it up. I'm like, how many days a year at Brave do we really dedicate specifically that our staff and our church can pray? It's 130 days a year, and we're just getting started, y'all. You can count on more coming next year, I promise you, because that's what God wants. Why? Because when we're seeking God, God can tell us what He wants. And it's not about us. If we did nothing as a church but pray, I promise you we'd have far more impact than 95% of churches in our culture. Let me say it again because you don't believe me. I believe if all we ever did was pray, we'd have more impact than 95% of the churches in our culture because it's hard to be in the presence of God and not do what God wants.

I heard this earlier this year. I love this quote. I was down at Church of the Highlands and they said the quote and it just stuck with me. "Prayer should be our first response, not our last resort." Friends, I'm telling you this and I'm passionate about this because I've been on church staffs that don't pray. Now, sure, all people pray. Atheists pray if they're about ready to get in a car accident. They're like, "Help." I mean they

do. Everybody prays to an extent, but I'm talking about praying, church. I'm saying give time and dedication. I've had people, friends of mine that are pastors that serve on staffs that they gotten in trouble because they've spent time in their office praying. We're not paying you to do that. I'm paying our pastors to do that. It's the number one responsibility that they have. If you can't pray, you can't serve. If you can't pray, you're of no use to anybody.

And yet what have we relegated church to in our culture? We've made a mockery of what God desires. Churches that are devoted to prayer are a dime a dozen. I mean, that are not devoted to prayer. They're a dime a dozen. I mean they're everywhere. There are churches that never pray. They never pray, but they've become entertainment centers. They got some good speakers, they got some good music, they got some good coffee in the lobby. I really feel good when I go there. I'd kind of like to go back. Friends that ain't a church. It's not a church. Go somewhere else. Go see the Broncos next year. I mean go see the abs and the nuggets. Or we've turned it into social networks. It's a community.

I used to have a friend that before he would say, he told me the story, he was a funeral director and he said, "We used to split up. I went to the Methodist church. My brother went to the Lutheran church. My other brother went to Catholic Church and when people died, we got all their business." There's a social networking. I want to go to a place where I network with the right people so it can benefit me. I don't really want community the way God's designed community. I want community that benefits me. I want to see what's about me. I'm a consumer for the church. I'm looking for what

suits me. And you can find churches like that. They'll meet all your needs. They just may not give you Jesus.

Or what about churches that have become counseling centers or therapy sessions? Now, before I say what I'm about ready to say, I'm all for counseling if it's done correctly and biblically and encouraging, but it should not be a lifetime anchor for you. There can be seasons for it. And some churches have turned everything into a therapy session like, "I know you're all hurting today and I know you've all had a hard week. Let me tell you how you can make it through another week." That's not what the church of Jesus Christ is all about.

Some have turned it into leadership seminars. We have really educated, skillful people that can give you tools for how you can accelerate in your life. Friends, the church is not a self-help mechanism to help you become a better person. It's not. The Bible says about you and me, "There is no one good. No, not one." So if you want to double that in self-help, you're doubly bad at the end of your self-help time. It doesn't work. If you're only coming here to help yourself, you've come for the wrong reason. The church of Jesus Christ is about Jesus Christ. He's the God of the universe. He's the Lord of all our salvation. We're putting Him on display.

That's why prayer must be a priority in the church. These aren't my words. These are Jesus's words and you can tell where His spirit dwells by how serious the people are about praying and seeking His face.

Now, why is that so important? I've had people come to me over the last 13

years and they'll say things to me like this. "Hey, pastor Jeff, I hope you stay humble." And I know what they mean because I'll look at them, "I hope you stay humble too." But I know what they mean. I mean, I have friends and I've seen people in ministry that have had ministry that starts going and then because of one person, they blow out the whole thing and hurt a bunch of people and ruin a bunch of things that God was doing. So I understand what you're saying when you say that, but do you know I do not have the ability to stay humble. Do you know my heart is deceitful above all things and who can understand it? I mean, what kind of responsibility? Like, okay, I'm going to work on being humble today. I mean, if I came back to you and told you, "I think I'm doing pretty good," I'd be proud.

So what can I do? Here's a better question. "Hey, Jeff, how's your prayer life? Hey, pastor Jeff, are you seeking the face of the Lord," because you should like I know when I spend time in the presence of the Lord, you cannot be anything but humble." Right? The people I know that have blown up ministries and done some of those things, they lost their prayer life and their first love long before they lost their church, long before they made bad decisions. May it never be here. May it never be for me. May it never be for you.

I mean, entertainment centers, social networks, counseling centers, therapy sessions, leadership seminars, none of these things will turn a sinner to Christ. All they do is they have a form of godliness and they deny His power. They may not even talk about Jesus other than at the end of a sermon to say, "Hey, if you'd like to trust Christ, just believe this prayer." But they want nothing to do with God. They want nothing to do

with God. Not here, not now, not ever at Brave. May Jesus Christ always be paramount to us. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

Prayer demonstrates our priority to God.

I imagine sometimes if you had the privilege of talking to loved ones after they die, you could still communicate with them, you'd take that option. By the way, it doesn't work. Those of you that think you can, you can't. The Bible makes it clear when you die, you either go to heaven and hell and there's a chasm and you can't cross it and come back. So if you're being talked to, it's not by your relative that deceased, I promise you that. But I mean if you could, I mean your great uncle, your uncle, your friend, your aunt, your mom, your dad, your son, your daughter, your niece, your nephew. I mean somebody that you know personally that you lost. If you had access today to talk to them and they could talk back, would you take the option?

Jesus Christ who died on the cross and rose from the dead said, there's one mediator between God and man. That's the man, Jesus Christ. It's me. You can talk to God all day long, the one that rules and reigns in the universe. And how serious do we take that assignment? How seriously do we take that gift? It's the greatest gift the church has ever been given. And if anything, we use prayer as an afterthought or a last resort rather than our first response. May it never be. Prayer is a priority. It was in

Jesus' life and if it was for Him, how much more should it be for us?

I remember my wife and I, we were in New York City in 2005. We were relatively newly married and we were ministers at the Billy Graham Crusade, his last crusade. We were altar ministers. We got to lead people to Christ and it was great. Well, one of the things that we did with the evangelists that we were with is we got to go to a church for a prayer meeting. And the name of the church was called Brooklyn Tabernacle. We'd never been there before. And I remember thinking, we're going to a prayer meeting. There are about 20 of us, and I was picturing in my head, we're going to walk into a room. There's going to be about 50, 60 people all with yellow tablets and their Bible. And we're going to ask the question, "Does anybody have any prayer requests?" And then we're going to write them down. And at the end, somebody with two to five minutes left is going to say, "oh, we should probably pray about those. Would somebody like to pray?" And then somebody will pray and we'll leave. So I wasn't looking forward to it.

And I remember the prayer service started at seven. I didn't know it was a service. I thought it was just a prayer meeting. Started at seven. We got there at 6:30. There were 3000 people there that were worshiping, singing out, crying out to the Lord so loudly I couldn't talk to my wife who was next to me 'cause I couldn't hear her. And I thought to myself, what in the world did we just walk into?

And for two hours they read scripture, they prayed, they asked the Lord for healing and deliverance and freedom. They prayed for missionaries, they prayed for the world, they prayed for everything. When we got done praying in that two hours,

they had cards like this. They waved them all over. We were praying for people we didn't know. It was so exciting. We got done. We were young, married, we were ready to go out to a dinner with a bunch of friends and we looked at each other and I'm like, "I'm whooped." We went home with the bed. I mean we fell asleep. We were so worn out from prayer and we said, what was that that we just experienced? And it began to move me.

And then I read a book called Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire. If you've never read a book on prayer, that should be your first book, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire by Pastor Jim Cymbala and he talks about how prayer has changed his church and it's been part of my DNA from the beginning. If I ever pastor church, that's what I want to do and that's why we started First Tuesdays and that's why we give attention to prayer and that's why we want to grow in prayer because we want to be a place where people can commune with God.

Yes, you can come to me as your pastor. I'll pray for you and other pastors and elders will pray for you. But did you know that you have full access to the throne of God all by yourself and you can get to know Jesus? It's for you. That's what I want you to have. I want you to have that privilege that Jesus Christ gave to you.

And see, here's the problem. If we make church something that Jesus didn't make it, then we never see the results that we read about it in the New Testament. We read the New Testament, we see salvations, healings, deliverance. We say, well, we never see that. Why? Because we don't pray. "Well, I thought it was because in 70 AD

the apostles said..." Give me a break. There's nowhere in my Bible that says any of this garbage. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Everything He's always done is everything He still does. If you don't see what God's doing, it's because we're prayerless, not because God's changed. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

See, here's what the church is in my understanding. The church is an army of spirit-filled soldiers, men and women who have denied themselves in order to fight for the fulfillment of the great commission in our generation. That's why I'm here. I want to see the last person get saved and Jesus come back. I want that in my generation. If not in my generation, I want it in my next gen... I want to live as though it can happen in mine, and it can't happen apart from our prayers. Jesus Christ modeled and taught us that prayer demonstrates a priority for God. Rhetorical question, how's your prayer life? "God's first place in my life?" How's your prayer life? That's all I ask. Your prayer life is how prioritized Jesus Christ is in your life. Period. End of story. That's it.

Number two, Jesus Christ modeled how prayer develops a passion for God, a passion for God. Notice what He did. When He came into Jerusalem, He's overturning money changers, seats of those who are selling doves, which was the sacrifice. He would not permit anyone to carry anything through. Why is He so passionate? 'Cause He spent time with His dad and His dad said, this is intolerable and this is an

abomination to me and don't you ever let this go on in my house. This is my house. You know how we talk? Like you see athletes or coaches giving a pre-game speech and what do they talk like? "This is our house. Nobody comes into our house." And I mean you know how to... Here's what God would say about His church. This is His house. Prayer needs to be primary. And if it is, I promise you, if you seek the Lord, you will develop a passion for the things of God. You will begin to love what God loves and you will begin to hate what God hates and you won't even realize what's going on in your life.

If you could rewind my life, if I could rewind my life about 40 years and I would say, what are you going to be like? Maybe not even 40 years, maybe when I was 20 or something like that. If you said, this is what you're going to look like. I would've been scared of myself. I didn't like people like me.

But it's interesting that when you spend time with the Lord, you get passionate about what the Lord gets passionate about and you have a hatred for the things he has a hatred for. I mean, why is it? Why is it that in our culture we don't think about God? We can put them on the bench. We can put them on the side. Have you ever considered what God wants, desires, expects and needs in every situation in your life? Are you bothered when people don't have the same zeal for Jesus that you do? I mean people that are lukewarm when they get around a zealous person, they don't like them. It's exactly why the Pharisees wanted to arrest and kill Jesus after this because He was bringing judgment on the way they were doing their abominable religious practices and they hated Him for it. And religious people still hate people for it that are spirit-

filled.

I mean, don't you want to see God elevated in our nation? It's prayer. Why is it that we don't start every assembly at every public school and every assembly and every governing body and every assembly at every sporting event praying in the name of Jesus? Why is that a legal issue? Jesus Christ is Lord and you NASCAR fans, I know you may do it, but I'm not talking about a sport that you just take 2000 left turns right? I mean, why is it in our culture this has to be a debate that you can't pray in Jesus' name or you're offending people? Here's why. Because our culture hates Jesus. They hate Him. Lost people hate Jesus. That's why we preach the gospel. God loves all people. He created all people. He loves you. But if you haven't repented and believed, there is His wrath getting ready to be poured out on you because he hates those who sin.

He's angry with the wicked every single day 'cause holy. That's why as a preacher, I preach the holiness of God. I preach righteousness and judgment because hell is real and heaven is real. And people go there every single day. And once you're home, there ain't no coming back. Why do I get so fired up? I spent time with Jesus this week. And when you pray, you'll get passionate about the things that God gets passionate about too. You'll have an intolerance for things God can't stand. I mean we can make a list. I talk about them all the time. Drunkenness, immorality, abortion, gender confusion, not believing the word of God is completely an errand in every single way. And that's just the culture. Let alone what goes on in the church, which is an abominable self-help group, make you feel better about yourselves while you're going

to hell. That's ridiculous.

So if you get fired up... "He's mad." I'm not mad. I love you. I'm actually a pretty nice person, but I get passionate 'cause God's so passionate about you and He loves you and He loves your soul and He wants to spend time with you. And if you seek Him, you will realize that the made up God you have in your mind is not the God of the Bible. And He wants you. Amen. And that's what prayer does. You can't fake that. You can't fake passion. I've watched people on worship teams try to do it over the years, I've watched pastors try to do it over the, you can't fake it. It's not about raising your voice, it's not about lowering your voice. It's not about that. But see, we've taken away the passion of Jesus and we've taken away the priority of Jesus and we're like, yeah, we don't really need that anymore.

You know what we have? We can dim the lights. That'll do it. We have musical instruments and LED screens that'll get them. We got all these things. We can turn the temperature up or down. We can get people to feel the way we want them to. That doesn't do anything, doesn't do anything. Only the God of the Bible can do what He says that He can do. Amen.

Let me give you a third thing that Jesus modeled for us. And what prayer teaches us is Jesus modeled that prayer cultivates the presence of God. Prayer cultivates the presence of God. I already told you that Mark 1:35 said very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus went up to solitary places and there He prayed. He stayed up all night the night that He had all these disciples and He had to select from them 12.

And He prayed. He's God, why did He have to pray? Shouldn't He have just known all... I mean, if Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, dedicated Himself and depended Himself upon the Father for every move He made, why should we not do the same? And prayer is not praying once like, I prayed before I got married, this would be my wife. I prayed before I got married. This would be my husband and I know it's him and I know it's her. And now we're going to live in bliss. I mean that'll last for about a week.

You have to continue to pray. Just because you're taking steps with Brave Academy or Brave Church or what we're wanting to do with me, it doesn't mean that we move this way and now we're done. It means we're moving this way and we still seek Him and we're still going after Him 'cause we want to cultivate His presence. And yes, let me be clear, God's presence is everywhere. He's ubiquitous. I mean there's nowhere you can go where God is not. Psalm 1:39 tells us no matter where you go, there He is. But there's a move and a manifestation of His presence that only comes through prayer. And here's what I'd say about it. One touch of Jesus is more important than a lifetime of seminary. I mean, you get touched by Jesus. He heals your heart in a certain area. He heals your life in a certain area. He redeems you in a certain way. That's more important than all the books that you could study for the rest of your life.

What you're looking for is a touch from God and prayer cultivates the presence of God. Even Jesus at the end of His life was praying, "Father into your hands, I commit my spirit. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." And it was interesting because even the religious people in Jesus Christ's day were like asking,

how come your disciples aren't doing it the right way? In Mark chapter two, the religious leaders, the Pharisees came to Jesus in Mark 2:18, and they said this, "John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting and they came to Him and said, 'why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?'"

Here's what they were asking. How come we're so much more spiritual than you? How come we do all the right religious activities, like we fast? You're not fasting, your disciples aren't fasting. You must not be as spiritual as us. They're saying that to the God of the universe. You know how arrogant that is? And you know what Jesus' response is? It's beautiful. Jesus said, "And Jesus said to them, while the bridegroom is with them, the attendance of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they?" Who's the bridegroom? Jesus. He's like, while I'm here and the purpose of fasting is for my presence and I'm already here, why would they fast for my presence when I'm in their presence?

The purpose of fasting and prayer is to be with Jesus. The purpose of fasting is not fasting. It's presence. The purpose of prayer is presence. That's what it's about. And so Jesus is saying, okay, let me tell you something. Why would they fast for my presence when my presence is with them? Then He says, "But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away," which Jesus has now, "and then they will fast in that day." The day's going to come when they're going to want my presence, then they'll fast. Here's what prayer fasting is for. Do you want the presence of God in your life or do you just want to go through religious routine or do you just want to live off the

coattails of other people? Do you just want to say, I like going to Brave because I sense God there? I like going to Brave because I feel God there and that's enough for me.

Or do you really want Him in your life to the full because there's more that you can have. He wants to give His full measure of everything to you. He's not holding anything back from you. And through prayer you can receive it. Lord, I need this. I need to know how to live godly. I need your life in this area. Lord, teach me how to forgive. Lord, teach me how to love. Lord, teach me how to do this. Lord, I don't have wisdom for that. Bring people into my life that can help. All of it is available to you. You don't lack one thing for God's calling on your life and prayer is the mechanism by which God brings it.

Jesus says this in John 7:38, if you're rightly related to Him, that literally streams or rivers of living water will flow through you. It's experiencing the touch of God. When you spend time in Jesus, you start welcoming His purity. You want His presence, you want His purity. You want to be holy because Jesus is holy. You want the bridegroom here. The reason people have experiences in church that don't really help them is many times the Bible's not even opened. Many times Jesus Christ is not even being worshiped and sometimes people are not even seeking His face.

I felt so convicted by this when our church was a lot younger. We had about 800 to a thousand people, and I said, if we're really serious about prayer, we're going to start praying in our services out loud. And I remember when we would turn and have

people pray, about 60% of the people would get in groups and pray. And about 40% of the people stood there like, "This is weird." And I started getting notes from people that I loved and people that I cared about. We can no longer come to church because we're uncomfortable that you would ask us to pray out loud in church. Jesus said, my house will be a house of prayer. If you can't pray out loud in church, where else are you going to pray? And if you don't know how to pray, nothing else that we're pouring into your life will be of any help to you.

I want to teach you how to pray. You say, "I don't know how to pray." Just start talking to God as he's your father. Start reading the word, start praying the word back to God as your Father. Right? Lord, you say you're going to give me everything I need for life and godliness. Lord, I don't even know how to pray, but Lord, I'm asking you to give me everything I need for life and godliness. Lord, you told me that I'm your witness. Lord, I'm just going to pray that you'll help me be your witness. Lord, you told me that I'm loved. I don't feel loved, but Lord, I'm going to say that I am loved and I want to experience and feel your love.

I just start praying the word back to Him. I don't have to be... There's no perfect prayer out there. I remember we used to go to restaurants when I was a young kid and we'd watch people bow their heads and pray, and I remember thinking, that's weird. There's no way we'd be at a restaurant where you wouldn't see us pray unless it was just a one-off accident or something like that. We always pray and not so that other people see us, but because we love God. Sometimes we'll ask the wait staff, Hey, anything we can be praying for you. Sometimes people, "no, we're fine. I'm fine

on the prayer thing." Other time people will start weeping and tell you what's going on in their life.

Pray. Pray. It's the presence of God. It's the presence of God. If God showed up in all of His fullness and His presence, I mean, it'd be amazing. Now, I've never seen God with my own two eyes. I don't expect that I will until I see Him face to face. I just don't. I've not had that encounter. And most people that have, they don't speak about it because the people that saw Him in the Bible had a hard time speaking about it and they were falling dead in His presence when they did. But what I'm saying is I've experienced His manifest presence. I've seen God do miraculous things in our church. I've seen Him save people. I've heard stories of Him saving people through our radio ministry.

I've seen Him heal people. I've seen Him heal marriages. I've seen Him heal hearts. I've seen people delivered from demonic influence in their life and set free who knew Christ, but there was something just hanging on from a moment of unforgiveness in their past where God has freedom from that. Now, they love Jesus even more than they did. I've seen His presence and I want more of it, not less. And when I pray, I get to personally experience His presence. That's what I want. You want more people in the church. I don't want more people in the church. I want more people seeking the presence of God in His church. I want more people set on mission because they love Jesus more through His church. I want to see generation changers in His church. I can't make that happen. You can't make that happen.

Well, we better pray. Prayer should be first and primary for everything we want

to see, and then let God unfold it as we go. Prayer cultivates the presence of God. It also does this. It unleashes the power of God. It unleashes the power of God. "My house shall be called a house of prayer."

Now, there's a pattern in the New Testament. If you read through the book of Acts, as I talked about. In Acts chapter two, you see the Holy Spirit show up in power. Now, the truth is every time a sinner repents and believes the gospel, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of you. But here's what you see in the book of Acts. Here's all they had in the Book of Acts. They did not have buildings. They did not have budgets. They did not have seminaries. They did not have trained pastors. All they had was men who had spent time with Jesus, women who had spent time with Jesus. That's all they had. So certainly they didn't have any impact, did they? I mean, Peter had never gone to a homiletics class. How's he going to stand up and preach?

But here's what you see. You see this pattern. You see a group of people seeking the face of God and praying for God to do whatever He wants to do, and then you see them filled with the Holy Spirit where they can't contain it, and then they speak the word of God with boldness and then guess what happens? Miracles. Miraculous things take place. And I know what people in our culture say. They say things like this. "Well, that was then. It doesn't really happen like that anymore." I'm like, you're right. It really doesn't happen that often, but here's why it doesn't happen, because God's people don't pray. And when you don't pray, you're determining, I don't care about what God wants.

Now, if you want to do something nice, we saw somebody healed and we saw somebody delivered, that would be great. But I don't want to put in the time and seek you because Jesus, I don't care about you. I only care what you can do for me. That's why we don't see those things here. "Well, I was on the mission field, and yet..." Yeah. Go back a little further and see what's going on. I've been on the mission field too, and sometimes when I prayed in India, two and a half, three and a half, five hours before the service people are on their face by the hundreds out in front of the church praying that the pastor will have a word. Do you know how intimidating it is to preach in an environment like that when people have been praying for five hours saying, "this better be good? I came to hear God."

You want my preaching to get better? Pray for me. You want our church to be more fervent? Pray for our church. You want to see God change our city, pray for our city. You want to see God change our nation, pray for our nation. I've heard this said, and I believe it, that history is in the hands of the intercessors. We have more power available to us than any other people on the planet. Pray and don't give up. Pray. 1 Corinthians 4:20 says that the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. Power. I've seen God do amazing things.

I think the greatest miracle that we can see is a salvation of a soul. Somebody who's dead, lost and rebellious that comes to Christ. There's no greater miracle than that. They have no hope. They have no help. They can't get themselves to God. And God reaches down and saves them, and they're a new creation. There's no greater miracle that can happen. And we've seen that in scores at Brave and watched people

get baptized as a result of that.

We've also seen people get healed. We've seen people get healed from physical ailments. We've seen people delivered from demonic influence here. Why? Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. I mean, I've loved having these prayer cards during these 21 days of prayer and fasting. If you haven't filled one out, I encourage you, we prayed over these hundreds of times this week. I also would encourage you to come be part of our mornings and seek His face in prayer. If he can't come every day, hey, tune in online. Be a part of it online. Any way that you can pray. I just want to get you closer to God. I don't want you to develop religious habits that you're just doing for the sake of doing it. I just want you to get to know Jesus better. I want you to fall in love with Him more.

I've had a blast reading these cards. I've taken pictures of hundreds of them that I've been praying over over the week, but I've been moved by specific ones. There's a gal that's coming to our church, I had permission to share this. She had shared a prayer request. Her name's Linda. She had a brother. I believe he was in the Mayo Clinic. I'm not sure where he was exactly, but he had a bone marrow and blood disease that's incurable. Doctors said there's nothing we can do. Her prayer was that God would heal her brother, not only heal her brother, but that they would have no explanation for how we got completely healed. And she sat down here earlier this week and said, guess what? God completely healed my brother. And when he went into the doctors, they said, we have no idea what happened. We can't explain this.

There's no way.

I prayed the cards for your marriages, for your prodigals, all that. I've prayed specifically for those of you that have been writing down, "Hey, pray for my friends. They're lost. Pray for my family. They're lost." Bob, Tim, I've been praying for your four lost friends all week. Casey, I've been praying for your family to come to Christ and the other people that you put on your card. I've been praying that. Jen Lewis, I've been praying for the people that you wrote down, Brian Swift, Vanessa. I've been writing all these down because what I've been praying is that you get a blessing for having the heart of God to see people that are lost come to Christ. That not just would you see those that you wrote down come to Christ, but that you'd be more passionate about Jesus as a result of that.

Love praying for you. I've loved walking around here, God just kind of putting on my heart different ones of you, just laying my hand on you at different times and just praying over you. Just a short breath prayer here and there just for what God's doing in your life.

But I read the Bible like you read the Bible and I see all sorts of miraculous things that God does, and it would beg the question to a new believer, why don't we see that anymore? Why don't we see the miraculous anymore? And many Bible scholars will say, well, that was Jesus and His apostles and they had special power. And Jesus was the son of God and He could do things we can't do. And I do believe that Jesus could do things that I can't do. And I do believe the apostles had a special on demand anointing on their life to do things that I can't do. I believe all that.

But I also believe the scripture that said, when Jesus said in John 14, "You'll do greater things than these because I'm going to the Father." And that it's not me that's going to do them. It's Christ in me, the hope of glory that can, if I'm seeking His face. When the disciples ask, why couldn't we drive it out? Well, this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting. You got to be with me. You got to be close to me for me to be able to pour that out. I mean, we could tell story after story after story.

I mean, I love the story of Elijah, so I'll just tell you that one. Remember that he had the standoff of the prophets of Baal, these prophets that were calling out to their God that was going to do something for them. So they had a barbecue off to see who could light the sacrifice. And all morning the prophets of Baal called out to the Lord. And while they're doing it, as Elijah's getting tired, he's looking at them, he's taunting them. He's like, well, maybe your god's sleeping. Maybe he's gone on vacation. I don't know. You should probably try harder. Maybe he's in the bathroom. We hadn't thought about that one yet. What's wrong with your God? He's not available to you. And then when it came to be Elijah's time, he didn't scream. He didn't shout. He didn't do anything fantastic. All he did was pray.

In one Kings 18:36, "At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel today, let it be known that you are the God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things that your word. Lord, let them all know that you're God, and I've just been doing what you told me to do. Answer me, O Lord, answer me that this people may

know that you, O Lord are God and that you have turned their heart back again."

That's it. I mean, there's nothing fancy about that prayer. But notice what happened. Something miraculous about our God. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench.

It wasn't like He sent fire and said, let it burn for a while. I like mine medium, medium-well. It wasn't that. It was everything's consumed the stones, the... Why? Because Elijah was a man of prayer. He prayed that it would not rain for three and a half years. It didn't rain for three and a half years. He prayed again it would rain. And it did. And he was a man just like us.

I could tell you about King Hezekiah and his prayer and how he prayed fervently that Israel would remain a solid nation against the Assyrians that destroyed all of the neighboring countries, that were taunting him and saying, "Y'all aren't going to follow Hezekiah, are you? I mean, we've destroyed all the other gods. I mean, y'all are going down if you don't surrender to us." And Hezekiah prayed. And that night the Lord went out and an angel of the Lord slew 185 Assyrians in a single night, and they were all laying dead.

We could talk about King Jehosaphat, 2 Chronicles 20 when three armies were surrounding them, and God took down all three armies where they fought all each other and everybody was dead. And it took them three days to gather the spoils because of what? Because of prayer.

We can read about David slaying Goliath and we see the story and man, he's a man of God. But what was he doing? I mean, as we read through the Psalms, he was a man of God that was crying out to God as a kid and growing in God as a man. That's why he was able to do what he did.

Or Peter, in Acts 12 when he's in prison and the angel comes and sets him free because there's a prayer meeting in the city, and when he gets released, he goes to the prayer meeting and a little girl, Rhoda, comes to the door and says, Peter's like, it's me. And Rhoda goes back into the prayer meeting like, Peter's at the door. We've been praying for him to get released. That's not him. It must be like his ghost or something. I mean, even the prayer meeting didn't believe he had gotten there. It's not, "Man, I got to be his perfect prayerer and I got to believe everything and I got to..." It's just start taking steps with your father and believe that He can because prayer is the most powerful weapon that we have. It develops a passion for God, the priority for God that cultivates the presence of God, unleashes the power of God.

Why do you think praying's so hard? Why do you think it doesn't come natural? Why is it every time you sit down to pray you're distracted by a million different things? Why is it's hard? Did I pray it right? Did I say the right words? Did I know how to do this? I don't think I'm very good at it. Why do you think that is? I don't want to speak out loud and pray because then people will think blah, blah, blah. Because prayer is the greatest weapon given at your disposal.

And here's what Jesus also modeled. He also modeled that prayer exposes a

poverty with God. Prayer exposes a poverty with God. When you pray and you're around people that pray, if you're not praying, it will expose that you have a poverty with God. It will expose your soul like, man, I'm not like that. I don't have these things in my life. Notice He said my house should be called a house of prayer. You made it at a robber's den. That's from Jeremiah seven 11 saying, I'm going to destroy this temple. The reason they wanted to kill Him after he said it is they understood Jesus' words as words of judgment to destroy the temple. And in John chapter two, He said, "Destroy this temple. I'll rebuild it in three days." He was talking about Himself, 'cause I don't need stones and I don't need wood, and I don't need your building. I'm God. And I don't like your prayerless religious practices 'cause they do nothing. And if you're not going to pray, you may as well shut down the house because prayer is that primary.

See, yeah, they were extorting people. They were profiting off. The things that they were selling, the doves that they were selling, they were making a profit. They were making it a marketplace and a thoroughfare. But that wasn't just the main sin. The bigger sin was that their unrighteousness and lack of zeal for God. They wrongly believed they could just waltz into the temple and therefore experiencing God in their own way. When they were prayerless, they thought, I can just waltz into church. I can just be whoever I want, and then God's got to accept me 'cause I did what He wanted. And some pastors stand up and say things like, "Well, if you're here today, God's pleased with you."

No, He's not. No, He's not not. If you haven't repented and believed or you're not walking with Him, He's not pleased. He loves you unconditionally, yeah, but He's not

pleased with sin. He hates sin. How do you know, Jeff? He hated it so much, He killed His son. He allowed His son to be murdered on a cross for your sin. That's how serious He takes sin. And if you think that wasn't serious enough, for all those who refuse to repent and believe, that's your future too, in a place called Hell all by yourself with eternal, emotional, physical, and spiritual anguish for the rest of eternity. Why? Because you offended a holy God. And prayerlessness exposes your poverty with God. If you're not a prayerer, you're not a strong Christian. And if you're not a strong Christian, this is not to badger you or belittle you. It's to say you can be. Just start small. Just say, Lord, I don't even know that I know how to pray. Lord, teach me to pray like he taught your disciples.

Read through Matthew six, read through Luke 11. Pray like Jesus prayed. Our Father who is in heaven, holy be your name. May I live my life in a way that your name is represented as holy. Lord, let your kingdom come. Let me live for your kingdom until you get here. Let your will be done, Lord. Same way on earth as it is in heaven. Lord, give me today my daily bread. Give me what I need and Lord forgive my sins, but do it in the same way you see me, forgive other people. And Lord, I'm having a hard time forgiving this person.

So Lord, would you teach me how to forgive them, because show me how much you forgave in me so it'll be easy for me to forgive them. And Lord, don't lead me into the way of temptation because Lord, I'm so tempted right now, even as I'm listening to the sermon, I'm thinking about the sins I'm going to sin later today. Don't lead me that way. Lead me not into temptation. Deliver me from the evil one, for yours is the

kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. I want to serve you. I don't even know how to do this, Lord. Help me. You can start small. As I said earlier, prayer is our first response and not our last resort.

Here's my question, when's the last time you prayed about your problems? When's the last time you prayed about your marriage? When's the last time you prayed about your singleness? When's the last time you prayed about your job? When's the last time you prayed about your health, not as your last resort, but as your first response? Because I can tell you as a pastor, usually what happens when people say, "Hey, would you pray for our marriage?" It's at a level nine where they're ready to get a divorce at level 10. Or pray for my health. It's at a level nine when it should be... We're almost dead. So pray for us now. Why don't we pray now? Why don't we ask God to help now?

And I'll say this again. Listen to me. Some of you that have the opportunity to pray, choose not to pray. Not because you don't want to pray, but because you're so prideful you care more about what other people think about you than actually getting the help that you need. Now, I'm for counseling. Don't get me wrong, it can be a helpful tool to support what God's doing in His church. No problem with that. But how many of you put prayer first? Those of you that have a challenge in your marriage, why not come to the front of the altar and start repenting. If your marriage is challenged, husbands, why don't you lead your wife forward and kneel down and say, "Lord, forgive me. I have not loved this woman the way you loved your church. I have not washed her with your word or my words. I haven't treated her the way that you want. I

haven't honored her the way you want. The problem in the marriage, although there may be other things in her, is predominantly me, change me."

And then have women. "Lord, I repent too because I don't serve him the way I serve Christ. And by dishonoring him, I'm dishonoring you. And Lord, I repent and yeah, he's got his things, but change me." You start there first and you get two people in the front repenting, then counseling can be a help. But if you're not willing to do that, you will go to counseling ad nauseam for the next three, six or nine years, paying hundreds and thousands of dollars and you'll never change. The problem in your marriage is you.

Singles, listen to me. You've been praying for the right one to come along. I know you have. God's Heard all your prayers. What is God wanting to change in you to bring you the person that you need? What would need to change in your life if he was to bring you, Mr. Wright or Mrs. Wright? "Well, when I get married, when I start dating, then I'll change it." Change it now and repent to the Lord that you haven't been living the way God wants you to live and ask the Lord to show you. I don't even know if there's anything there. Lord, is there anything in me that's keeping me from experiencing your best? Because the Bible says no good thing will God withhold from those who walk up rightly.

And for those of you have financial need, maybe instead of saying, I need more money, who doesn't, but instead of saying that, why don't you come repent because you've spent more than you've earned. Why don't you come repent because you

haven't been seeking a job? Why don't you come repent because you haven't honored God with the first fruits of your giving, that you don't tithe. You rob God every single week, and yet you're going to ask him for a bonus check? Why don't you come repent about that and get your stewarding right and then ask God that will meet all of your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ?

Or for those of you that are needing healing. I'm all for doctors. I am. But why don't you first come and ask God to touch your life? Why don't you first come and say, God, is there anything in me that's preventing you from healing me? And Lord, first and foremost, I'm going to you. And if you choose to use a medical doctor or somebody else, I'm going to use that route. I'm good with that. See, so often when it comes to prayer at an end of service, we don't want to come forward because we care more about what other people think. I was even getting ready to fill out a card this week. I'm like, should I fill that out 'cause then they'll see that it was me. I'm like, pride. I'm like, of course I'm filling that out. I want the healing. Most of us don't want the healing. We just want people to feel sorry for us.

And that's why we go to counseling because we can pay people to feel sorry for us. When we have no desire to change and it's everybody else's problem. Now, if you go to counseling and I'm the problem, your counseling sessions will last about two or three weeks, six at the most, and then you'll be done with counseling 'cause you're like, "I'm the problem. Fix me. I'm the problem." They'll run out of things to tell you. Most people that go to counseling are like, "They're the problem. Fix them." And counselor's like, "Well, we can't do that quite yet, but over the next nine years, we'll be able to get

that stuff fixed." Right? I'm not down on counseling, I'm not. It's okay if you go. That's not your primary need. You need Jesus. And I just want to tell you, as your pastor, I care about you and I love you, and I will pray for you.

But today, as we open up our altars on all three campuses, and even if you don't have an altar at home, make the altar right in front of your video monitor that you're at. I'm just going to invite those of you here that know God's been talking to you about an area of your life that you've been begging for Him to change, that maybe there's something He wants to change in you before he does the work He's going to do in you to be able to come forward and pray. I did this in the first service, so I want to be crystal clear on this. If you do not have any problems and you never have any problems and everything's perfect in your life, could you just raise your hand so we could draw attention to you? Okay. We had one in the first service.

We all have it. I'm not going forward with my wife because then they'll think we have marital problems. Every marriage has marital problems. I'm not forward and praying about my kids because then you'll know my kids... Every kid has problems. Every job has problems. Everybody is aging and everybody has problems. And remember, the purpose is not to get God to do something for you. The purpose is that you'd fall more in love with Jesus. Because even if you leave and you're still sick, or even if you leave, you're still hurting. Even if you leave, you don't have the provision, but you got Jesus, and I got news for you. You got everything you need. You got everything you need.

We will have pastors and elders that are upfront, that're willing to pray with you.

We'd love to pray with you, but it may also be a time that you just want to spread out here and just kneel with your spouse or kneel as a single or kneel as an adult. Maybe you're going to pray for your grandkids. Maybe you're going to pray for life, but just say, Lord, I want to experience your manifest presence. I want to experience your touch of my life. I need it today. I don't just want to go home and say, oh, that's a good message, or Man's a good worship. Or, man, I love dedicating those kids. I want to go home today and say, Lord, I met you here and you touched me. And so I just invite you forward because at Brave, and if you're in the balcony, take your time. Just come down the stairs, love to pray over you. Get a touch from Jesus before you go. Amen. Would you stand with me?

Father in heaven, we give you all the praise, glory and honor for who you are. Lord, we believe that your house is a house of prayer. That church is to be a house of prayer. Lord, we gather here. This is a group of individuals that say, Lord, we're declaring our declaration of dependence upon you. Lord, we're needy and you're worthy. Lord, come touch every single person. Make a special manifestation of your presence here at the altar today for your glory, for married couples, for singles, for sick, for those who need to be delivered, for those who need to be healed, for those who need to take a step to forgive somebody. Lord, do a work. Lord, don't hold people back. Men, if you're hearing my prayer and you know, we probably need to go and pray, grab your wife by the hand and start coming now. And Lord, we just give you praise, glory and honor that you would touch all of us. You'd be so gracious. It's in Jesus' name we pray that you're worthy. Amen and amen.

