

Prayer and Fasting

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Preacher: Jesse Kincer

[0 : 00] All right, for those of you who were here last week, you would have probably heard that last week was the last sermon in Peter. We have Easter coming up, and so we're doing a little standalone thing today, and we're going to look at something that what Jesus called practicing righteousness, okay?

More commonly, today if you're a churchgoer, you may have heard this phrase, spiritual disciplines, which often have been an undervalued thing throughout the history of the church, practicing the spiritual disciplines.

But until recently, they've never been controversial. So often Christianity has these pendulum swings, right? Stuff that is good, what happens, it gets misused or abused, and so we just kind of stop using it altogether.

And if you're here and you're not a Christian, you're probably going to learn a lot about how Christianity hasn't done it well. And you're probably even thinking now, like, yeah, just looking from the outside looking in, that happens fairly a lot.

But, okay, fair enough. But we're hoping today as we look at this that instead of looking at how it's been misused and abused, how actually these things are so good for us. And so many of us experienced the Christianity that was all about behavior modification.

[1 : 21] It's about doing the right things. And while we were doing all the right things on the outside, reading the Bible and going to church and saying our prayers, on the inside, we were just really unhealthy.

Some of us in the room, we might even still be there. There's a lot of pretending from the outside that everything's okay and doing all the good Christian stuff, but on the inside in our hearts, we're not okay.

And then there's others of us that, man, we've discovered grace. We've discovered that it doesn't matter what we do. It's what God has done, and he loves us for who we are. He doesn't love us for those things of reading our Bible, going to church, and prayer or anything like that.

So the problem is, is oftentimes when we come out of that behavior modification stuff and we realize God's amazing grace, we swing the pendulum too far the other way. It's almost like, sweet, not only don't I have to do those things, I don't want to do those things, and I'm not going to do those things, right?

Those are, you can't make me do them. That's anti-grace. And that sentiment is kind of amplified by the rampant individualism and consumerism of our day that's really crept into Christianity.

[2 : 31] That idea that, man, I get to do things my way according to my needs. And so not only, as a result of that, not only are there fewer Christians reading their Bibles and praying and going to church, it's actually being celebrated as a freedom in Christ.

And the idea and the sentiment of that is, man, God loves me as I am, which is absolutely true. It's absolutely true.

He loves us just as we are. But the spiritual disciplines, what Jesus called practicing righteousness, aren't about God loving us more. It's, they're about us experiencing more of God's love.

It's experiencing more of his grace. I want you to think about this. God brings Israel out of Egypt. He saves them, right? Like, it's this picture of salvation. God brings us out of darkness.

And then they go through the wilderness. He brings them through the wilderness to the promised land. And that's this picture of us traveling through this life on our way to heaven to receive the inheritance we have in the promised land.

[3 : 37] And during that time, what were they doing? They needed God's provision and God provided them manna, this miraculous means of grace to go and eat and be nourished and fed.

Manna from heaven, water from the rock, right? But God didn't tell them, wake up in the morning and open your mouth and I'm going to place the manna in your mouth. What did he have them do? They had to go out and gather it, right?

And so God gives them a means of grace that they're meant to go out. And us today, that we're meant to go out and take hold of these means of grace, these avenues into which we experience God's good love and his grace in our lives.

And that's what it's about. And so if you like, if the phrase spiritual discipline leaves a bad taste in your mouth, think of it also as a means of grace. It's actually means of grace as a way more old school way to think about it.

That's what they called it centuries and centuries and centuries ago. So who wants to grow more in the knowledge and experience of the grace and love of the Father? Who here wants to do that? Awesome.

[4 : 38] If you're here and then you're like, yeah, that sounds cool. I'm not so sure. I'm just exploring Christianity. Man, I want you to lean in because, man, this can be really helpful in your benefit on your journey.

If you're sincerely wanting to know the truth and discover who Jesus is, this is really helpful. I've known people that have started praying to God and reading their Bible and they weren't Christians yet.

And through that, they were saved. They discovered that Jesus is real. God met them where they're at. So I encourage you to lean in and hear what we're talking about. So today, we're going to specifically talk about spiritual discipline and prayer and fasting.

And so when you hear about prayer and fasting, you don't have to pray and fast all the time. Prayer can be done on its own. But prayer and fasting, they're always done in tandem. You don't just fast to fast.

You fast and you pray at the same time. So we're going to look at those things together. But since prayer is such this clouded, confusing thing that seems shrouded in this mysticism of it's a little weird.

[5 : 41] How does it work? I really want to spend most of our time today looking into prayer. And then at the end, we're going to talk about how fasting enhances prayer. Okay? So what we're going to do is we're going to look at Jesus, what Jesus taught about prayer in Matthew 6.

So that's where we're going to be. We're going to start in verse 1. He says this, 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.

It's interesting that before Jesus gets to the how to pray, he speaks to our heart's motive and our heart's posture with regards to prayer.

And in his day, Jesus is pointing out the spiritual gurus like of the day, the guys that were like me, the pastors and those people that were seen as mature, what they like to do is they like to pray long and loud in front of everyone.

You ever know someone like that growing up in church? And what Jesus is saying here, he's saying that isn't prayer. He says it looks like prayer, but from God's perspective, it wasn't.

[7 : 08] So what we see from the very gecko Jesus tries to get at before the how is prayer is coming and speaking to the audience of one. It's coming and speaking to the audience of one, speaking to God our Father.

See, we live in a very competitive culture. Christianity, man, it's filled with that competitiveness as well. We always feel the need to one-up each other.

We always feel the need to be excellent and better than and just attain more and be more of who we should be. And so that is a message that is constantly attacking us in our day and age, and it easily seeps into how we do Christianity, right?

Like, man, we can get up and we could post our perfect morning prayer on social media so that everyone can see it and like it or whatever it is and applaud us. We look at how many likes I got and we feel so good about it, right?

But then our friend posts his and it's just a little bit better than ours and it gets more likes and all of a sudden we feel like, oh, man, I guess I'm not good enough. Instead of being blessed by another person's prayer, our ego can get bruised.

[8 : 19] And this just doesn't happen through social media. We could be praying in corporate prayers. We come together and be thinking about that same thing, you know, like, is my prayer

good enough or what are other people thinking about it?

Was it better than that person's prayer? This, like, weird competitiveness. But that isn't coming and praying to the audience of one, right? It's praying to the audience of everyone else.

The danger of this motivation to pray is that you seek the reward from others, not the reward that comes from God. It's for honest, man. It's probably why many of us don't like to come to prayer meetings or don't like praying out loud.

We're more aware of the people around us than we are of God's presence and focus on praying to him. And let me tell you, I'm not putting a guilt trip on you, man. I have been there.

Following Jesus and learning how to pray and going to prayer meetings, man, it was intimidating. And it was tough. And I still experience that insecurity from time to time.

[9 : 19] I don't know if you ever fully grow out of that. Let me just be honest with you. But here's the thing is you can't wait for that fear to go away.

You don't just stand back and don't pray and don't show up at prayer meetings just wait for that nervousness and that wonder if you're ever going to stop thinking about other people and wondering what other people are going to think. Because it's never going to happen.

The only way to get over that is actually to just pray in front of others and pray with others. Now, you might be thinking, wait, hold up, man. You just seem to be contradicting what Jesus said here.

But Jesus wasn't saying praying in front of people was wrong. He was saying praying to impress people was wrong. You can still have a heart that wants to impress people even though you don't pray in front of them.

So not praying and saying like, you know what, I'm just not going to pray, that's not really facing the facts. That's not facing the real truth of what's happening in your heart. You know, one of the best ways to get over-impressing people is to fail in front of them.

[10 : 22] Like literally. Like, man, if all you want is for people to be impressed with you and to project this false image of what you want them to think about you, then, man, you are not going to do a lot of things.

You're not going to do a lot of good things. And, of course, this happens because of our human perspective of what success and failure is, which is all jacked up.

We've constructed false ideas of what prayer should be. We've constructed false ideas of what good prayer looks like and sounds like. And that's probably why we don't pray out loud.

A recent survey found out, talked about how, I think it was like 80%, kind of being generous here, it might have been 84% of Christians that consider themselves praying at all.

It's 84% of them, like, pray by themselves, and they pray silently. They don't pray audibly. I'm not saying that's, like, necessarily a bad thing or anything, but they're called, the kind of, the tagline was silent and solo.

[11 : 25] Most Christians, that's how they pray, silent and solo. 2% ever attended a prayer meeting. But when you think about what we look at and what we've been told is success and failure with regards to prayer, man, I don't blame us for not wanting to come to a prayer meeting.

And even in your own private rooms, I totally get why you wouldn't want to pray out loud. You probably think you're not sounding good enough. You probably think you're not as eloquent as you should be in comparison to other people.

We think that our prayers have to sound like we've been on the mountaintop with God for 40 days.

We want our prayers to sound so impressive. And, like, let's remove people out of the situation.

We even want God to be impressed with our prayers, if we're perfectly honest. Matthew 6, 7, and 8, man, Jesus gets at this. It's when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they're going to be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. What Jesus is saying here is that prayer requires a sincere heart, not a sophisticated mind.

[12 : 39] Prayer requires a sincere heart, not a sophisticated mind. And, unfortunately, the church has done a poor job discipling people on how to pray. Hey, I'm guilty.

I know I'm guilty. I think back on public prayers here on Sundays, at prayer meetings, in the community groups I've led or have been a part of. And, too many times I have prayed with the motivation to impress you.

I'll just be honest. It happens. And so what happens is, is I want eloquent, really sophisticated-sounding prayers so that you guys would be like, Oh, wow, that was amazing.

But, unfortunately, man, that doesn't lead you into freedom. What Jesus is saying here, it actually leads you into bondage. Essentially, what I've done is disciplined you into a gospel of works and pretentiousness instead of a gospel of grace and authenticity.

And I want to say from the front, I apologize for that. God isn't demanding long, eloquent prayers. He isn't. He isn't demanding to respond until we've found out the perfect tone and verbiage in how we speak to him.

[14:02] That's not who he is. That's not what he's like. That's not what he wants. And so we need to shift our understanding of what a good prayer is to understanding, like, man, God just wants us to be with him and to talk with him.

We get to be more direct with God, right? So our prayers can look more like, Jesus, I'm afraid about the results from my doctor's appointment. Would you please give me peace?

Right? We don't need to pray that same prayer like, Lord, oh great, awesome, almighty, benevolent creator of all things, who has victory over everything, who's healed the sick and raised the dead and calmed the storms, who overcame death in the grave, yada, yada, yada.

Five minutes later, finally we get around to asking God what we really want, right? Man, I don't enjoy it when my kids come to me this way asking for stuff, right? It's kind of like, hmm, something's going on.

You're trying to flatter me and butter me up. What's going on? I'm just like, man, I love you. Just get to what you want to ask me. You know, oftentimes I already know and have guessed what they're going to ask me about, right?

[15:14] That's what the father says. He already knows. You don't got to butter them up. He already knows what you want before you ask. That's what Jesus is saying to us. God tells us in the Bible that his eyes are on the righteous.

His eyes are always on the righteous. His ears are open to our prayers. We don't have to try to do something to open God's ears to us or get him to pay attention to us.

He does that all the time. We don't need pretentious prayers. We can be bold knowing that God prefers simple, straightforward, sincere requests. And here's something that helps me in this, right? In my private prayer time. I don't put a timer on my private prayer times. I don't check the clock when I started and I don't check the clock when I ended, right? I'm sure you've heard plenty of Christians, like, brag on themselves about their prayer time.

I mean, I've been guilty of that, right? It kind of goes something like this. Hey, Brother Seamus, I was just laboring in prayer this morning. Woke up at 5 a.m. And I was just going for it. And before I knew it, my wife was telling me breakfast was ready at 8 a.m.

[16:24] And I just want you to know, I bring this up because God brought you to mind and I just wanted to let you know that. You know what I mean? It's like that kind of, like, ugh, gross religious stuff.

We do that junk all the time. But when we talk that way, when we brag on ourselves, when we're keeping, like, time, all it does is it produces hypocrites and hopelessness, you know? We start, like, discipling people into thinking, like, oh, the amount of time is what's most important.

And so, man, you know, those of us who are, like, all about legalism and keeping the rules, and we jump onto that and we're just like, sweet, man, I'm going to stretch this prayer time to one hour and odd so I can just let everybody know that I come across about this amazing hour that I'm giving to God or 30 minutes or whatever it is, you know?

Or it produces hopelessness. People are saying, like, shoot, man, you got to pray a whole hour? I'm not even going to try that. Like, I ain't got time for that. A good prayer time isn't how long you pray. It's not how long you and I pray or how well you pray, but how present and authentic you are with God. That's what a good prayer time is. And this should be encouraging and freeing for all of us.

[17:41] And I hope it encourages you to practice prayer, simple, sincere, authentic prayer each day. And for some of you, I hope you now realize you can stop wasting two hours of your life, right?

It's freeing to know that God cares about a sincere heart. But what if we're sincerely praying for the wrong things, right? What if our prayer time is like, the sincerity of our heart is like, man, Lord, I pray that you would strike my boss with blindness and the inability to speak, right?

Okay, that's sincere, right? But it's just sincerely wrong, okay? So I remember when I first wanted to start praying, my first question was like, well, what do I do?

What do I pray about? What are the things that I can pray into? And we should actually ask God to teach us how to pray. There's a guy named Paul Miller. He wrote a book called Praying Life, an amazing book.

Go out and read it. You'll be better for it. And he's been following Jesus longer than I've been alive. Pastor at a church, just amazing.

[18:51] Amazing guy. You know what he prays every single day? Lord, teach me to pray. Teach me to pray. He includes that in every single one of his times with God.

I mean, I love that humility. That is good. I'm reminded that we need that, man. We don't get to a point where we are experts in prayer. Man, we are always like people that are saying, man, Jesus, teach me.

Teach me to pray. I don't want to pretend or think that I have it all together. I need to grow in this. I need to learn this. You know what? Jesus loves to answer those prayers. And that's what Jesus' disciples came and did.

They came and they asked Jesus, man, teach us how to pray. Now, on the outset, we look at this and we think, man, that's not really a strange request, right?

If you're a disciple and you see someone do it, it's like, yeah, teaching us how to pray. We want to do that. It's kind of something new. It's like, yeah, it's like, yeah, it's like a prayer. It's like a prayer. It's like a prayer. See, the disciples grew up in a culture where they practiced prayer all the time.

[19:55] Prayer was a normal thing for them to do. In fact, they did it multiple times a day. It's not like Jesus had shown them and invented something new for them to behold.

So why did his disciples need to teach them how to pray? And I pray. I think it's because Jesus would pray in front of them and they saw him pray.

And his prayers must have been different both in authority and content, right? I mean, when we look at what people would say about Jesus' teachings when he would preach and teach the crowds, they said, man, this guy, he's saying stuff that's different.

And he's saying it with more power and authority than these other guys that are teaching. And so I think that's what's happening here is they're saying, man, we've grown up and we've been told how to and showed how to pray, but you're doing something a little bit different.

Teach us how to pray. And Jesus doesn't say like, no, no, no, guys, you're good. You figured it all out. You've been raised in the right stuff. You know everything there is to know.

[20:58] And he also didn't tell them, it's like, you know what, you should just go check out a Pharisee on the corner and they'll show you how to pray. No, he teaches them, right? And he gives them this template to follow, Matthew 6, 9 to 13.

We know this as the Lord's Prayer. And Jesus says to them, pray then like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be 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.

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, gives them a template, right? So let's start by focusing on that first part, right? He says, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer is the practice of putting God first. That's what Jesus is getting at right from the get-go.

Prayer is the practice of putting God first. So we know who we're meant to be praying to.

[22:01] We're meant to be praying to a loving Father in heaven, but we aren't really to treat him in this like this familiar lowly sense. He is our exalted Father.

He is our glorious Father, right? Jesus says this word, hallowed be your name. He uses this word hallow, right? Hallow. It's not a very common word. I haven't heard any of you use it ever before, right?

If you are able to slip that into your conference call tomorrow at work, like punk rock points to you, man. That's really, that would be really amazing. So what does it mean, this word hallow?

What does it mean to hallow God's name? To hallow something is to treat it as a sacred and supreme. It's to treat it as something transcendent and amazing.

It's to treat it as the most important thing in our lives. It's putting it first. And Jesus wants us to get to this in prayer right away.

[23:00] He's saying, you know what, guys? Your primary motive for praying isn't to seek God for what he can do for you. Jesus says, seek God because he's worthy to be sought.

That's why we do that. That's why. Why? Because God's glory and presence, his nature, who he is, man, it frames everything else in our lives.

It frames everything that we can think about and worry about and be concerned about. It puts all our problems in the right perspective and proportion. And most often, what we do is we come to God and we pray once we're under stress and duress.

Something isn't going well in our lives. Something isn't going right in our lives and we're like, man, I got to go pray to God. And that's good. You should go to God and pray for those things. I'm not saying you shouldn't do that. But often, that's all we do is we come to God with our grocery list of problems and impossible things that we're facing.

Right? And what this does, actually, it kind of makes sense that we do that. It does make sense that we do that. Our minds are preoccupied and filled with those problems and those pains.

[24 : 07] Because those things, they bring anxiety, they breed fear, they breed stress. And we can even think, man, God, how can I come to you and praise you and adore you under these heavy burdens?

So that's what we do. We often come to God for all these things and what he can do for us. And we neglect to pray to God simply just for who he is. But Jesus knows best.

He knows what is going to happen when we take our eyes off of our life and our problems and look to God. God's greatness, when we do that, when we move into him, when we lift our eyes and we behold the Almighty, when we behold the creator of the heavens and the earth, when we behold the one who casts the stars into the sky, he knows them all by name, when we go to the one who stains all the cosmos and creation and everything in between by the word of his power, when we go to him, what happens is, man, he begins to overshadow our issues.

He begins to overshadow our problems. And those burdens that we thought once so big and impossible, they fall into their proper proportion in light of him.

And this is what Jesus was saying when he says, man, come to me. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. When you come to me, it isn't so much that I'm going to remove your problems and get you out of it and give you exactly what you want.

[25 : 36] It's that, man, those things that you're coming to me with become light and momentary in comparison to the glory and the power and the grace and the love and the mercy and the goodness found in my presence.

See, we seek God first because he's worthy. We seek God first for who he is. We want our vision to be full of him.

We want the reality of his glory and his truth to invade us and transform us. We not only want more of God when that happens, we also want more of what he wants, right?

Prayer isn't about moving God to our heart. What happens is God moves us to his heart. And that's what prayer is about.

So the next natural step in prayer is your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. What is God's kingdom? Well, God's kingdom is the place where he dwells, where his presence is with his people, his people that are surrendered to his good and perfect will.

[26 : 49] His kingdom, he describes himself as righteousness, peace, and joy. Man, that's an awesome kingdom to be in. To experience the perfection of those things.

And this is a kingdom that is fully realized in heaven now. No one in heaven is living on their own agenda or fighting against God's supremacy or trying to take glory from themselves.

Everyone is happily enjoying God, happily worshiping him and submitted to him. And so how does that kingdom that we see up there, how does it break more into earth, right?

If we're meant to say, man, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. What does that look like for that kingdom to break in more where we're at in our present day and age?

Well, the best way to look at this is to look at revivals in church history. And what we see is there's periods of time where God, for some reason, of his own choice, man, he just blesses the church and blesses places with his presence.

[27 : 52] And it changes people's lives. And it changes places like whole cities sometimes radically. It's a time where God's presence is more real and active both inside the church and outside the church.

It's like this tide coming in and just enveloping and everything gets caught up in his presence and what he's doing. You hear about stories and there's this testimonies of people just walking past

church services, not going in.

But God's presence is so active inside the church services and surrounding the building that they're walking past and they get hit by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. They were just trying to get home and all of a sudden they're like repenting and crying out to God to save them.

You see this type of thing happen in Acts 2 at the day of Pentecost. They're praying and all of a sudden the Holy Spirit, boom, invades the room and crazy stuff is happening.

And then 3,000 unexpected bystanders get caught up in it. They get caught up in God's presence and activity and seeing what's going on. And then Peter gets up and preaches a five-minute sermon.

[29 : 00] In that five-minute sermon, 3,000 people get added, right? They're saved and they're baptized and they get added to the church. And their natural response is to run and practice these means of grace.

So when we pray, God, your kingdom come, your will be done, what we're doing is we're actively saying, God, we want your kingdom to be first and greatest.

We want to experience it. We want more of that in our lives, in our hearts, in our church, but also in our cities, in our neighborhood, in our, wherever you may be, workplace.

We are actively surrendering our will to his will. We think about our cities and neighbors. Man, they're in bondage to a false hope.

They're in bondage to hopelessness. And that gets worked out in so many different ways in depression and anxiety and stress and suicides and addiction and all these things.

[29 : 57] Man, we need, we want to see God's kingdom of power and truth break into hearts more and more and more and rescue people and heal them from what they're experiencing.

So why doesn't God just do that then? Why isn't he just doing this all the time? Why do we have to pray for those things to happen? I can't tell you, I know why, but I can tell you this, God has determined and he told us that he would work through the prayers of his people.

It's a mystery. We can only go so far in knowing the mind of God, but that's what he has ordained and determined. I mean, think about the last 2,000 years of the church.

How many millions of prayers like this, man, God, we want, we need more of you. We want to see more of your kingdom and your power and your presence breaking in and doing stuff to heal the brokenhearted, to save.

How many millions and millions and millions of prayers of the saints over that time went up? You know, some of those prayers got to behold those revivals with their own eyes.

[31 : 09] They got to be a part of that and experience that. And that is a huge blessing. But you know what? Others sowed those prayers and never got to reap that harvest. And they sowed and they sowed and they sowed.

And then another generation got to step in and see that. Our job isn't to predict when God's going to work that out. Our job is to pray and leave that up to God.

But we are about the business of praying. Praying for his glory, his will, and leave the details up to him. So practicing prayer Jesus' way, I hope we've seen, man, it significantly changes our priorities. Our priorities for living and what we want. Which ends up affecting what we end up asking God for in the end. We become less independent in our requests.

Less self-focused in our requests. And more God-dependent and more surrendered to his will. And then we come to God and we do. We can ask for things. God wants us to come and ask us for things.

[32 : 14] It's okay. In Matthew 6, 11-13, it says this, Give us this day our daily bread. Just a simple prayer. It's not, Lord, make me rich.

Lord, give me what I need. Forgive us our debts. And forgive us our sins. As we have forgiven our debtors. As we have forgiven those who are indebted to us.

So we're a people who are crying out to God for grace and mercy. But we're also a people that are givers of grace and mercy. And then lead us not into temptation.

Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from the evil one. So what is Jesus saying here? Prayer is the practice of depending on God. It's the practice of depending on God. The second half of Jesus' prayer template is all about asking God for help.

It reminds us that God is our provider. One pastor says this, Prayerlessness is the church's declaration of independence from God. When we don't pray, what we're saying is, God don't need

you, you've got this.

[33 : 25] And it's so easy. So easy not to pray. I mean, there are really good legitimate reasons. We can get so busy. Too busy for prayer, right? Too busy with life.

And we can get too busy with church activities. I heard one guy say this. This is what the church does too often. It's program work, people work, and then prayer work in that order.

And what we have to do is we have to change it. Prayer work, people work, and then program work.

We get too busy to pray.

Prayer isn't a priority. It's like this added extra option. If we can get to it, you know, that'll be good.

And busyness, man, it's a killer.

In a recent survey of pastors in America, it was found that on average, we spend between five to ten minutes in prayer a day on average. There's a story of a guy who talks about a church in Utah.

[34 : 25] He was helping them grow in prayer. And they were going through the process of hiring a new pastor. And they asked the congregation what attributes they desired for the next pastor to have that was coming in.

They did the survey. And, I mean, this is a big church. Just think hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people responding to the survey. And of the 85 qualities given, not one involved prayer. Administration, leadership, communication, pleasant personality, those were among the most desirable qualities of a pastor.

But prayer wasn't listed. A praying pastor wasn't listed among them. See, what happens in the church and with us as pastors and what can happen with us as people in the church, we overvalue the work that we get to see with our eyes.

So we say, oh, oh, you know, stuff that's quantifiable, that's the stuff we should give our time to because we can measure success that way, right? But the bummer is prayer doesn't offer us that. Prayer work is like, man, we're just sowing and sowing and we're just kind of trusting God to, like, do the, you know, create a harvest. So what we do is we end up giving time to those activities that we can quantify and look and measure.

[35 : 33] So we do the great commission and going and making disciples and we forget the great commandment. Loving God with all our heart and our soul and our strength. We overvalue slick programs, entertaining services and quality environments.

And I just want to say those aren't necessarily bad things. But if we make them ultimate things and neglect prayer because of that, that is slipping into a very, very unhealthy place.

The idea of a pastor tucked away in a study seeking God and interceding for the church doesn't register as good leadership to the average churchgoer. And I want to encourage you guys, man. Call us out. Desire that from us. Desire us to be pastors who are given in prayer and prioritize prayer. The pastor or the disciple too busy to pray.

We may see results. But I want to ask us this. What are we building? Ian Bowne says this. It's better to let the work go by default than to let the praying go by neglect.

[36 : 39] Whatever affects the intensity of our praying affects the value of our work. Too busy to pray is not only the keynote to backsliding, but it mars even the work done. Nothing is well done without prayer for the simple reason that it leaves God out of the account.

It is so easy to be seduced by the good to neglect the best. Satan has effectively disarmed us when he can keep us too busy doing things to stop and pray.

Friends, where do you and I need to make a correction today regarding this? Too busy to pray?

Man, can't be an excuse anymore. And I'm not saying you have to pray for an hour.

I'm not saying you have to pray for 30 minutes. I'm not saying you have to pray for 15 minutes or 10 minutes. Turn off the clock. Let's just start praying. Let's start depending on God.

Let's start seeking him first and putting him first. If we're too busy, we need to step back and see, okay, what part of our daily rhythms do we need to adjust here? Right?

[37 : 51] And so let's just start, man. Let's start small. Start easy. Just start. Man, if it's a minute or two, start there and just grow into more as it becomes enjoyable because it will.

So before we end, I want us to encourage us all to engage in a fun little exercise. Before we do that, I want to touch briefly on fasting and how it enhances our prayers.

So the idea of fasting is very simple. It's abstaining from food or something significant in our lives. And we abstain from it for a short period of time. So what is the benefit of fasting with prayer?

So the best way I can tell you this is think about it this way. When you close your eyes, right? You cut off that sense of sight. What happens is your hearing sense becomes more heightened. Okay? You can remember this as a teenager watching Saturday Night Live at night. My mom would be asleep like 20 yards down the hall with her door shut. And she would come out and say like, can you turn it down?

[38 : 46] I could hear it. And we're like, man, we're like leaning right next to the TV. We can't even hear it. Like, what the heck is going on? But when it's dark and you can't see and you're trying to sleep, man, your ears are like open to like more sounds.

You just hear a lot better. It's fascinating, and this is true, how eliminating one sense, cutting out one sense heightens others, right? They found that blind people, they're discovering this, have developed this sense called echo imaging.

Think bats like sonar. That blind people have this, they develop this thing that they can make out dimensional space around them somehow. It's crazy.

And without that blindness, their sense would have remained undeveloped. But that is what fasting does. It's cutting something out. It's weakening our flesh to make us spiritually stronger and heighten our sensitivity to God and what he's saying and to his presence.

That's what fasting does in tandem with prayer. And it's a strong tool for spiritual warfare. I want to tell you, I was 25. And the church I was at, we did a five-day corporate fast, five days.

[39 : 53] By the end, I was ready to eat something. I just started chewing gum so I could remind myself of what eating felt like. So every day there was fasting, and then we would pray.

We'd culminate with prayer every evening as a church body. And in that time, going into that fast, man, there was a lot of things that we were praying into. But me personally, I was praying, man, I struggled with lust.

I struggled with an addiction to pornography. And man, I wanted those things to end. I didn't want to carry that on in my life and into my marriage and any of those things. And so I was like, man, God, I was seeking God for those things and breakthrough in those areas.

And man, by the end of that fast, God had met me in such significant ways. And I can't tell you. And the result of that also was not only meeting God's presence in significant ways.

I walked out there with, man, just a sense of victory over lust and addiction. It had such severely diminished in my heart and in my life.

[40 : 58] It didn't have a stronghold in my life anymore in the light of God's glory and his grace and seeing him because of that. Now, you can fast privately as well.

It's a good thing to get into. We talk about fasting and prayer. There's private prayer. There's corporate prayer. There's the same with fasting. There's private fasting and prayer. There's corporate fasting and prayer. And I would really commend that to you as a regular part of your life. Young men and women, if you're struggling with lust, man, think about fasting. Think about fasting to fight against that as spiritual warfare. Those of us who aren't young men and women that are struggling with lust and pornography, it's a hard thing to face and deal with.

But, like, think about doing that. There's something very powerful about that. And I just want to commend you, too, that the private thing is so important.

Developing a private prayer life is so important. But, man, the corporate prayer, coming publicly together to pray, that is an amazing, powerful thing that doing it together.

[42 : 01] God just does something amazing in those moments when the church comes together unified, crying out to God with one voice. So, I was going to talk a little bit more about private and public prayer.

But let's just jump in getting to this little exercise. All right? So, you probably noticed a paper and pen on your seat. All right?

Thank you for not making an airplane and throwing it around the room. That was awesome. You guys are so mature. I don't know if I could have done that myself. So, you have on page one there this little statement that says, Father, I praise you because you are.

And what I want you to do is I want you to write down one word or one phrase to finish that. Okay? Take, like, 15 seconds to do that right now. Father, I praise you because you are.

Father, I praise you because you are. Cool. Everyone got something?

[43 : 09] They wrote down? All right. Let's not take too long here. 10 different people shout out the words that you wrote down. Okay. Sweet. Awesome.

Awesome. Awesome. Awesome. Yes. Little man's even in on it over there. I love it. I love it. Guys, you just prayed. You just prayed corporately. Okay? That's a little aspect. I just wanted to get you a taste of, like, how easy this should be and to kind of demystify this whole idea of what praying is.

Okay, next statement. Jesus, thank you for saving me. In you I am. Write down a word or a phrase. Amen. Cool.

All right. All right. Let's do it. 10. Let's go. Mm. It's good. Satisfied. What was another one? Complete. Forgiven.

[44 : 14] Free. Say it again over here. At your best. What's another one? Love. Grace. Love. Grace. Grace. Your child. Yes.

See how easy that was. See how easy and vastly different that was. You know what I mean? So, like, in our prayer times, we can pray this, and then when we come together, it's like where our words fall short.

God is showing himself to other people, and, man, people are loving him and enjoying him in different ways, but as they confess and profess what God is doing in their hearts and praising him, we get to join and enjoy that as well, you know?

It's really cool. All right. The next one. This is kind of the your kingdom come, we'll be done part, and I don't know if I wrote this really well, but we'll give it a shot anyways. Father, give me and your church more of your presence, grace, wisdom, faithfulness, love, understanding.

Good. Good, good. Guys, this is great. Okay, final statement. Holy Spirit, help me today, too. This is God dependence. What?

[45 : 20] Lead well. Love others. Love more. Trust you. Be more forgiving. That's good. Awesome.

See, guys, you go, like, if you're thinking, like, I don't know how I can pray, I don't know how I can pray, this follows the template Jesus gave us, and you can literally just wake up every day and do that short exercise, and I'll tell you what, it is going to be so meaningful.

It is going to be so nourishing to your soul, all right? And you're going to love it. And you're going to want to grow in that. And I guarantee you, you start doing that, you're going to want to start spending more time doing that, okay?

But don't try to run a marathon right away, all right? And don't start doing heavy lifting if you haven't been in the gym in a long time. That is okay. Just take your time.

Grow into it. Enjoy God, okay? This week, we're going to have our one-year celebration. Alan had talked about it. So we're going to come ready to eat, but we're going to come first to feast on God and to thank him for all that he's done in our first year at One Harbor, to thank him for who he is and for looking forward to what he is going to do.

[46 : 31] And, guys, it's not going to be anything more different than what we just did right now. That's it. So, guys, come out. Be encouraged. Yeah, we're going to be outside. You know what?

People are going to see us. We're going to be a little bit nervous. It's going to feel a little bit wonky and, like, you know, I wonder if people are going to think we're crazy or weird. But, hey, let's just step out and say, despite all those feelings, we're going to do it, and we're going to do it together. And let's enjoy him. Yeah. So this Friday is a good Friday service. We're not having a good Friday service here. There's one in our Moorhead City location.

If you want to go do a good Friday service, all of our sites are doing a fast on Good Friday. And there's not going to be a culmination in any kind of gathering for prayer.

But I just want to commend you. If you want to join in on that, it would be a good thing. Join in and fasting and praying. Think about what God is doing, can do, in Easter, on our Easter services.

[47 : 31] We're going to have a lot of people, possibly, that are here that haven't surrendered to Jesus. And, man, we want to show up with a heart just prayed up and ready to love them and serve them, but also having cried out to God that he would do something amazing in showing himself.

And, man, let's believe. Let's believe for salvations on that Easter morning, okay? I'm going to have the band come up. We're going to take communion. We're going to end with communion. Let's be reminded that prayer is coming to God.

Why do we pray? We pray because of who God is and what he has done. And prayer is a response to him. It's always a response to him. And we're reminded in communion that God invites us to come to him, right?

We don't have to earn our way to come to communion. We don't have to give God our resume. We don't have to, like, buy tickets to get to the communion table. And Jesus paid it all. And we see it in his body that was broken, in his blood that was shed as we eat the bread and drink the juice. He did it all. He's our provision. We feast on him for who he is and what he's done, his perfect provision in Jesus Christ. This is a moment that we as Christians, we come and we partake to remember God or remembers what he has done and to enjoy him.

[48 : 55] Man, if you're a Christian, if you aren't a Christian, let me say, consider right now. This is your response. Consider the sacrifice Jesus made so that we could know God as our Father.

And put your faith and your dependence on him as your Lord and your Savior. It is simply a matter of saying this. Jesus, save me. Have mercy on me, a sinner. If you do that, if you confess that, the promise is that you will be saved.

God will be your Father. Jesus will be your Savior and your Lord. And this is the first prayer that you pray. Let's pray together. Lord God, we thank you for the privilege of prayer.

We thank you that you call us into freedom. There's so much freedom in prayer. But Lord, we get to enjoy your grace. We get to experience you in prayer and who you are. And so I pray that for us, that you would work that out in our hearts.

I pray that we wouldn't go away feeling ashamed or feeling guilt that maybe we came in here and our prayer life has not been that great. That's okay. You don't care about that. But Lord, we get to go and we get to maybe go home today and just spend a couple of minutes just praising you, Lord, because you are faithful and good and righteous and true.

[50 : 07] Thank you, Lord, that in you we are saved and we are sons and we are daughters and we are forgiven. Lord, that we get to come to you and depend on you and you give us good things because you're a loving Father.

And our prayer doesn't have to be any more impressive than that. Lord, so Lord, thank you for that freedom. And I pray that we would go free to just enjoy you over the next week.

That there would be people waking up, waking up thankful, waking up thinking of you, waking up just simply, sincerely, straightforwardly going into your presence.

To speak with you. Amen.