



Israel's Greatest Hits Volume II-Part 4
Faith-Filled Prayers
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When I was a little kid, probably 8-years-old, I remember signing up for a football team at a local park district. Of course, with little kids and everyone on the team that went to try out wanted to be the quarterback, myself included. But we were kids so the coach decided to choose the quarterback based on who could run the fastest and who could throw the ball the farthest. I don't mean to come here and brag on a Sunday morning, but I could run faster than every kid on the team. Except for Todd Gates. And I could throw the ball farther than everybody else on the team. Except for Todd Gates. So guess who became the quarterback of our little eight-years-old team? Todd Gates. Yes, he did.

They put Mr. Runner Up in charge of the defense and I became the little scrawny kid, the middle linebacker. I didn't like it. Man, I wanted to be in charge of that offensive team. I wanted to be the quarterback. So after a couple seasons I dropped out. Well, Todd did not drop out, he continued on for the next 10 years and led every successive team throughout our childhood right into high school and set a ton of records in our high school, a very large high school. I know that because I watched him do it as I sat in the stands in my band uniform with my trombone on my knee.

When I look back at high school the nerd I became and the football glory that I let slip through my fingers, I realize it was all because, as a kid, I couldn't see the value of both the offense and the defense. Any winning venture has got to have both, you got to have a concentration on both and the Christian life is no different. To be a Christian and you're going to live the way that God would have us live, as a productive, fruitful Christian, making a difference in this world for Christ, you've got to focus both on offense and on defense. Our number one tool, the number one resource we have in the arsenal for living the Christian life the way we ought to is prayer, it's a high value in Scripture, it's one of the distinctive values of our church that we seek to underscore all the time. If you're not praying with a good offense and a good defense then we're in big, big trouble.

As a matter of fact, it says in the Lord's Prayer, as Jesus lays out a model for us to pray, he begins, if you think of the petition section of that prayer, with telling us that we ought to pray that "Your will done on earth as it is in heaven." It starts with that idea of advancing the ball down the field, if you will. There's really strong offense and offensive prayer request and it ends with a very important defensive prayer request, "Deliver us from evil." You've got to have a good well-ordained, well-rounded prayer life and I want to help you with that today. We can't afford not to have this kind of prayer life. I want to turn to Psalm 20, if you haven't already, and I want us to get a good, solid, well-rounded prayer list that we can start to apply in our daily prayer life. I don't know where you're at in terms of your prayer life. Most of us know we need help. We need strength. We need a bolstered prayer life. Well, this will help you this morning as you look at this nine-verse prayer from Psalm 20. Let me read it for you and then let's try and piece together how we should pray and what we should be praying for.

Psalm 20, starting with the superscription, I'll read from the English Standard Version, it says, "To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David." And as you'll see in this psalm this is more about David than it is a psalm or a prayer of David. It begins this way, verse 1. "May the Lord,"

capital O-R-D, Yahweh, "May Yahweh answer you in the day of trouble!" God's proper name, may he answer you in the day of trouble. "May the name of God, the God of Jacob, protect you! May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion! May he remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt offerings! May he grant your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans. May we shout for joy over your salvation, in the name of our God set up our banners! And may the Lord, Yahweh, fulfill all your petitions! Now we know that Yahweh saves his anointed; and he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand. Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of Yahweh our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. O Yahweh, save the king! May he answer us when we call."

Look again at verse 1, "May the Lord answer you." Now, again in English we don't differentiate between a singular "you" second person pronoun and a plural "you" a second person pronoun, unless you're in the south you say "y'all" perhaps. But here we have a singular "you." "May the Lord answer you." So we have people praying, because certainly the first-person pronouns are "we." You can see that in verse 5, and we have a singular pronoun that this is directed to, a "you." We see in verse 6 that this is the "anointed one." Now you anointed in the Old Testament both prophets and priests, but probably with the most pomp and circumstance, it would be the king and that's who this is directed to in verse 9, "O Yahweh, save the king!" So this is a psalm of prayer about the king by people who are praying for him and it's all about battle, it's about going into warfare. This is probably the prayer of the people of Israel or perhaps even, as some commentators suggest and they imagine, this could be the prayer that was recited by the warriors, by the soldiers themselves, as they march into war under the banner of Israel with David as their king.

Now, we recognize that this may be a prayer that is directed to an earthly king 3,000 years ago. What a great set of prayers. They're sovereignty chosen by God, these component parts, these prayer requests, put in the Scripture for us to remind us the kind of things we ought to be praying for, for each other and certainly it will allow us this morning to think through this in terms of how we pray in our own lives for ourselves.

So let's take the first five verses and come up with five things here that we see prayed for and pattern, if we would, at least this week and perhaps into our Christian life, the ways that we ought to be praying. Or more specifically, the things we ought to be praying for. OK? So let's just put a title on this if you're taking notes and I wish that you would, number one, we need to "Pray for the Right Things." I think prayer in general, as the disciples asked Jesus to teach us how to pray, he started to tell them the kinds of things to pray for. So let's get five things from the first five verses that we ought to be praying for. As general as they may seem as I state them, we at least get some directional categories for which to pray in our prayer life.

So number one, verse 1, under the first category of praying for the right things, let us look at verse 1 and recognize what we're dealing with. "May the Lord, Yahweh, answer you in the day of trouble!" So I've got problems. "May the name of the God of Jacob, may he protect you." So, this is clearly a defensive prayer. Let's talk about it in those terms. We need to pray defensively. We'll start at the bottom of the Lord's Prayer in this regard. "Deliver us from evil." We need deliverance at times. We have trouble, we have problems, we have opposition, we have persecution, we have sickness, we have financial problems and we should pray

defensively. And certainly into warfare, you get a lot of arrows coming your direction and we ought to pray defensively.

But instead of just saying, "Hey, let's pray for a good defense," let's really talk about what it is in Scripture to pray for the right kind of defense and I'll add this word to it as you jot it down, verse 1, we need to "Pray for a Perfect Defense." Jot that down if you would. Verse 1, the first thing we need to start praying for is a perfect defense. Now, I want to spend most of our time... If you're going to take a look at all these subpoints, the eight subpoints, this sermon is going to last three hours. I'll try to keep it at least under two. But the first point certainly I'm going to spend here the most time on because this is the most misunderstood.

I am as a Christian praying to God. I'm often facing a lot of difficulties and I say, "God help me. God protect me. God defend me. God help me get out of this situation that I'm in that is painful or difficult or trying." And when we pray those kinds of things and we don't get the answers that we want, we sometimes think, "Well, God hasn't heard my prayers." It sounds like a lot of double talk and tap dancing from the pulpit when people talk about this, but you need to understand what the Bible has to say about defensive praying.

I understand that in the immediate context when David marches out into war and the soldiers of the citizens start praying for him to be protected and to have an answer for the king's prayer regarding the trouble that he's facing, they're expecting a temporal kind of salvation. "Don't lose the battle. We want you to win the battle. We don't want arrows to come and pierce your chest and kill you." So there's that sense in which there is the intuitive kind of defensive praying. I'm all for that and if you're taking notes jot down James Chapter 5 because it should be in our minds, James Chapter 5 verses 13 and 14, "If you're suffering you ought to pray." And intuitively in that text we should understand that that's a kind of prayer that says, "I'm suffering. I'd like to stop suffering so I'm praying for protection. I'm praying for deliverance." That's a defensive kind of prayer and it's completely allowed.

The next verse says, if you're sick, you ought to pray and you ought to even call people in to pray for you. So, that's good. And what's the prayer? I'm sick. I'd like to be healthy. If I said I got some financial problems and I said pray for me, the clear intuitive prayer would be pray for my finances so that they'll get better. If I've got a relational problem, pray for my relationships so that they will improve. I've got a health problem, pray for my health so I'll get healthy. Those are intuitive prayers and you should pray that way. There's nothing wrong with that.

But there's so much in the Scripture that moves beyond a kind of temporal defense that speaks of something that is far more important, a perfect kind of defense. When Paul is in prison he writes a few letters to the churches, one of them was to Philippi. They're called prison epistles because he's in prison and he's facing potential death and execution. And he says in Philippians Chapter 1, "Listen, I've got a real problem on my hands in that I'm incarcerated and perhaps going to be executed, but I want you to know that my incarceration has led to all kinds of good things, good things that I know are part of God's will for my life. I want the Gospel to go out and I don't want anything to inhibit that. I want God to protect that kind of endeavor that my life is all about. So God has put me in prison that looks like I've lost the battle but I'm winning the war. How am I winning the war? Because the whole Praetorian Guard now in the Roman Imperial Army is hearing the Gospel because of my incarceration. I

may die but if I die I'm going to die as a martyr." And then he says this: "So that it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not at all be ashamed," in other words, this battle will not be lost, "so that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body whether by life," if I get out of prison, "or by death," if I die.

There's a kind of thinking in the Bible regarding our defensive praying that moves beyond if I have hurt, I just want it to be fixed. There's a certain kind of praying in the Scripture that says there's great protection of God's objectives in my life. Sometimes if my temporal intuitive praying isn't answered the way I want, God is answering in a much higher level. Think of, for instance, jot this reference down, Second Corinthians Chapter 12. You know that passage and it's often discussed in the way it's poetically put by the Apostle Paul, that "I have a thorn in my flesh, I have some kind of chronic illness, and it hurts and it's painful. I prayed to the Lord that it would be removed. I prayed three times and that was enough for me to recognize God is not going to take this away. So I realized that God's grace is sufficient for me and that there's a purpose in this." And he explains what that purpose is. The purpose is that the ultimate battle of his life isn't a skirmish, isn't really a battle, it's the war-making sure that the Gospel goes out through his life and he says, "I know this: that this chronic illness in my life is protecting that objective in my life and the Gospel is going to go out, and one of the things this illness is going to do is keep me humble and dependent on the Lord. And that is going to cause victory. God is protecting my objectives in winning the war in my life even though this battle for my health has been lost. Even though this battle for my freedom has been lost."

One passage, and again we have no time for cross-references except for this one I assume, Second Timothy Chapter 4. I'd like you to go there and look at this with your own eyeballs. So call this up on your devices, look at it in your printed Bibles, follow along as I read a few things from Second Timothy Chapter 4. And let me remind you what's going on here. In Second Timothy Chapter 4, you could call it another prison epistle. We call it a pastoral epistle because he's writing Pastor Timothy who's pastoring in Ephesus. But it is a prison epistle because he's back in prison again. This time he doesn't have the hope. It starts to shine through in Philippi, in a letter to the Philippians, because he says, "I think I'm going to get out. It's going to mean fruitful labor for me and I think God's got more on the table for me to accomplish. So I think I'm going to be released." He's very hopeful of that in the book of Philippians.

In Second Timothy he knows it's done. He's back in prison, he's back in Rome, and as history tells us, he ends up being executed in Rome. So this is the last extant letter we have from the Apostle Paul. We can probably safely assume it is the last letter that he wrote. So are you there? Second Timothy Chapter 4, look at verse 6, look at the tense of these verbs. "I'm already being poured out as a drink offering." Now, there are a lot of offerings that you feel like there's some substantial payback for, in other words, you bring an offering, the priests eat it, the kids of the priest eat it, sometimes it's a fellowship offering and you get to eat it. Well, a drink offering, no one gets to drink that. It goes right out on the dirt and it's gone, it's over. "I'm being poured out like a drink offering. In other words, I'm not coming back. This is it. My life is over."

"The time of my departure," look at this tense, "has come," it's here, I'm going to die. And here's the poetic way of discussing it. "I fought the good fight. I finished the race and I've kept the faith." Now verses 8 through 13, he starts to talk through some various things including

people in his life, but he goes on in verse 14 and he says, "Alexander the coppersmith," dropped down to that, "did me great harm." Now, I know if I'm going to a situation and I'm going to pray defensively, I'm going to pray no harm would come to me. Go on a mission trip, God, we want no harm to come to us. That's a good intuitive defensive prayer, but it really doesn't encompass the perfect kind of defensive prayer that there may be something larger that God wants to do. Well, he does want to do larger things and even that persecution works to serve the purpose of the Gospel for Paul. But then he looks at the situation and says, well, you know what? I want him to be repaid. I do pray that the Lord would bring justice upon him. "May the Lord repay him according to his deeds." And not only that I can warn you of guys like him, and him himself. Right? "Beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message." I suppose I'm going on a mission trip, I'm praying that my message would not be opposed. I'm praying that I'm not going to suffer great harm. "At my first defense," verse 16, "no one came to stand by me, they all deserted me." I know if I go on a mission trip I'm going to make sure that I pray that my team does not desert me. Yet, they all did. And yet in gracious terms for his colleagues he says, "May it not be charged against them." Much like Stephen and Jesus from the cross, this very gracious response of saying, "May the Lord be gracious to them," they've got a lot to learn and perhaps they did, like John Mark when he wasn't willing to go with the Apostle Paul. He ends up coming around being even stronger than he ever would be before.

"But the Lord stood by me." Here's something I learned, he says in the midst of being all alone suffering great harm and being strongly opposed, "He strengthened me, so that through me the message might be," here success right here, "fully proclaimed." He's praying for a defense for what purpose? That we could accomplish all that God would have us accomplish. And in that sense, as a minister of the Gospel he says I just want the message to be fully proclaimed. And it was. In every persecution, in every opposition, in every lane change, in every left turn, in every seeming U-turn, God is getting his job done proclaiming the Gospel fully and that "all the Gentiles might hear." Even as I illustrated from Philippi being imprisoned in Rome helped that happen. The reason he could write to places like the book of Romans, to Rome, and have so many people he greets in Chapter 16 of that book.

"So I was rescued from the lion's mouth," which may be a poetic way of talking about Rome trying to bite off the head of the Apostle Paul and saying, in reality, "they may have incarcerated me, there may have been people along the way who harmed me and opposed me and deserted me, but you know what? I was rescued." There was the perfect defense of God. "The Lord will rescue me." Now keep in mind what we just read in verse 6. "I'm poured out." Verse 7, "I have fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith." It's over for him and yet he says, "The Lord's going to rescue me from every evil deed." Oh wait a minute, it's evil isn't it to behead the Apostle Paul in Rome by Roman persecutors? Well of course it is. But here it is, here's something much bigger in terms of defensive praying, a kind of perfect defensive praying, "and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

If you can catch what's going on between verses 6 and 7 and verse 18 you'll start to realize that sometimes our prayers must seem from heaven's perspective very juvenile because all we want is to be healthy, wealthy and we want everything to be comfortable. And God says you know what? That's the kind of defensive praying that I'm not opposed to. You're sick? Pray. You're suffering? Pray. Problems? Pray. But, you know what? You ought to be mature enough to look like the Apostle Paul does when those things are not answered immediately the way we want them and in repeated praying, maybe three times or 30 times you prayed it,



but maybe you say I recognize God's doing something greater here and the defense that I want is a kind of perfect, holistic, bigger defense than the one I have been praying. Pray a little bit more maturely if you would, and I'll do the same when it comes to our defense and what God would do to protect us. Because even the Apostle Paul dies as a martyr, it seems like he wasn't protected. But of course, as he said in Philippians Chapter 1 verse 20, he was going to honor the Lord in his life and in his death.

Verse 2, Psalm 20. "May he send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion!" We don't just want to be protected from the slings and arrows of our enemies. We'd sure like to have help from the sanctuary and support from Zion. We'd like to have a good offense. Let's talk about an offense in the Christian life which was such a broad topic for an audience like this because all of us have different callings, different places in our lives to which we're called. So I can only speak in terms of God's will in a somewhat general sense. But let me give you principles to help you discover what God's will is in a more specific sense by speaking in terms of the best adjective that could ever describe the kind of offense that we need. And that is if we're to discover the will of God we ought to make sure that we're looking to advance the ball down the field in the direction of the goal, and the goal has got to be within the white lines and the strips, if you will, of what God would have said and what God has laid out in his Word.

So number two, let's put it down this way, you need to be "Praying for a Biblical Offense." God, I'd like my life protected, and though the text is going first to the defense and then an offense, I guess it really is foundational for me to understand what the objective of my life is as a Christian. And you can say general things about that. Right? To glorify God. But there's much more than saying I'd like my life to count for God, I want it to make God look good, there's got to be some specifics in that regard.

And here's the thing about the will of God for your life. It is found, ultimately, within the pages of Scripture. Jot these two references down from Psalm 119. Psalm 119, two great verses, one of them I know that you know, Psalm 119:105, it says "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." My feet are walking on a sidewalk or on a path. Right? I need a lamp, I need a light, I need to see which way to go. Here's another one that I think is even more graphic, verse 35. Psalm 119:35. It says, "Lead me in the path of your commandments." That's great. That's an even more firm and even tactile way for me to see it. Instead of just shining photons so I can see where to walk and maybe even to avoid, you know, stubbing my toe on a rock, I'm looking at the lines and the stripes on the road. Here's the pathway.

It says, "Lead me in the path of your commandments, incline my heart to" your commandments or "your testimonies and not to selfish gain." See, so many people look at prayer as a tool to get the selfish desires of their hearts satisfied, when God is saying I've defined things that I think would make a successful Christian life and they're right here. Here are the things that would define a successful family life, a successful career. Look within the commandments of God's Word. Is there wiggle room within that? Sure there is. But the idea starts with is this a biblical endeavor in my life? Is this something that the Bible can affirm? If you want to discover God's will for your life, let's start with this: it needs to be allowed by Scripture. It needs to be something that you say is not just good but it's really described as something a good and best investment of my life as it relates to the things that the Bible would promote.



It's affirmed and allowed by Scripture and it's CONFIRMED, here's another thing I can add, though we're not really here preaching about the will of God. We're just talking about praying for a good offense. It is affirmed and confirmed by godly counsel. That would be a good thing to put down and explore a little further in Scripture. We often quote this, certainly in the 10th chapter, I believe, of the Partners Manual. We talk a little bit about this in our discipleship program here at the church, to make sure that you're seeking godly counsel. We quote passages like Proverbs 15:22. There should be no Christian in the room who isn't consulting with other godly Christians to determine if this is the best job to take, if this is the right move in my life, if I should be involved in this ministry. You ought to be discussing those things with godly people who fear the Lord to discover what it is for you, what position you play on the team and what the specific routes are that you're supposed to run when it comes to God's will.

We've been reading in the Daily Bible Reading about Joshua. And the great thing about Joshua, we concluded that last week, this last week, we see God making such strong statements about him being right where God wants him to be, and the Lord here being his fuel and being, as it's put, and I'll just quote for you Joshua 23 which jumped off the page for me this week when it says, "One man puts a thousand to flight, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you." I love that, I want God to fight for me. Whatever it is that God has called me to do, I'd like to have God on my side. But the idea here is that that kind of attitude, that kind of success is because God has made very clear, "Here is what I want you to do."

Here's the next phrase in the verse, it says, "It is the Lord God who fights for you, just as he promised you." And it wasn't just do whatever you want and I'll be with you, which so many Christians think that's what prayer is all about and even the Christian life is all about. "I got some things I want, I can get God on board, he can help me get there, he's like a life coach, a therapist," and that's not at all what Scripture says. Scripture says that God has a plan, he has a purpose, he wants to accomplish it in this world, and he's calling people out of the world. That's what the word "church" means, "ekklesia," called out of the world, calling people out of the world to enlist them as people who are going to do his will in the world.

So, so often people get this completely backwards. "I want God to get in line with what I want," when prayer is really trying to get my mind in line with what he wants, so that I can say there's a pass pattern that needs to be run, there's some kind of blocking that needs to happen, there's someone who has got to throw the ball. I need to be directed. What is it that you'd have me do? Knowing the will of God starts by being willing to do whatever the will of God is. Before you start praying for a biblical offense, you got to figure out that that biblical offense has to be defined clearly by Scripture. So much more could be said on that. I would direct you to several sermons that we've preached in that regard and even our Partners Program, which is a great way to team up with another godly Christian to figure out more of the specifics of God's will for your life.

Verse 3. And I should quote the rest of Joshua 23 after it says the Lord will fight for you and has fought for you just as he promised, the next verse says, so "Be very careful to love the Lord your God." And that is certainly a great, great reminder in combination that we see also here in Psalm 20. If you want God to send help from the sanctuary to do what you should be doing to fight the battles God would have you fight, give you support from Zion that the Lord would fight for you the way he fought for Joshua, that would be great. Then it says "May you



remember all your offerings and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices!" So, I want to make sure that your religious and spiritual life is where it needs to be, which is not about just religion or spirituality, it's about making sure that me and God are on the same page, that me and God are tight.

You think about offerings that aren't regarded with favor, we go back to the early parts of the Bible and we see Cain bringing an offering and God did not regard his offering with favor. You have to kind of look at the rest of Scripture to figure out what was going on here. It had nothing do with what he brought. Right? Just because he brought the fruit of the fields didn't mean it wasn't acceptable. Right? There was no Levitical law saying you could or couldn't do that and even if you looked in Levitical law later you'd find out there was nothing wrong with bringing the fruit of the field for your offering. This had something to do with his heart. And clearly even in the confrontation that God has with Cain there's something wrong with your heart.

You start looking at that throughout the Scripture and you realize people coming to worship, they can sing the songs, they can give an offering, or in the Old Testament they can come in the throng, sing the songs, bring their animal offerings, and it doesn't mean they're right with God. As matter of fact, in Malachi 1 it says I wish there was someone who had just closed the gates to this Temple Mount so that no one would come and uselessly "kindle fire on my altar" because your heart's not right. I mean how often is the Bible clear about the reality of, if you're not close with me, if you're not contrite before me, if you don't have a sense of dependence on me, all your box-checking in terms of religion doesn't do anything.

So we need to make sure, and I put it this way, very simply when it comes to praying I want to pray and make sure that my heart is what it needs to be with God. I put it this way. Number three, you need to "Pray for Closeness with God." And that's a good prayer. And again, I'm not putting in the order that I might put these things if I were listing these, but I'm just following the text. It reminds me that I want to make sure that the people I pray for, and if I'm praying for myself, what I really want, is my life, my spiritual life, to be in sync with God.

And by the way, just a little sidebar here for just a moment. I remember a passage about unanswered prayer in the book of James. It says you asked for things, you don't get them. The reason you don't get them is you're asking for a bunch of wrong and selfish things. You ask so that you can get things and spend it on your pleasures.

Well, that diagnosis about a prayer life that's not working out well on a set of prayer requests that aren't very mature or godly or biblical, is followed up by this: maybe you're not close with God at all. And it ends with his great appeal from the God-breathed Word, and that is this: if you draw near to God, he'll draw near to you. You need to be close to the Lord. He talks about you purifying your hearts. There are things that stand between you and God for sure if your prayer life's not what it ought to be. And your prayer life should be even foundationally motivated by the fact that "God I want to pray because I'd like to be close to you. I need my relationship with you to be what it ought to be."

Poetically in Psalm 51 David is talking about sacrifices and offering. He said if was just about checking a box I would check the box and bring those. But I know the preliminary sacrifice and offering that you want, he says is a contrite heart, a broken spirit. Those are the sacrifices



the Lord will never despise. All of us sit here on a Sunday morning looking back at our week. You can't even look back on yesterday without, as fallen beings, recognizing, if you were honest with yourself, that we've all sinned before God. But I would say with the sin that we've committed before our great God how many of us have really spent that time confessing our sins and saying, God we're sinners, we know that, we need your grace and your mercy. And to the extent that that kind of praying is absent, I can guarantee you there's distance between you and God.

And so it is that the Scripture would call us to always have that hopeful endeavor that God would favor my expressions of piety, offerings, sacrifices, prayers, giving. But I know that's predicated on something that underlies that statement and that is that my heart is where it needs to be with God. Only takes a second for you and I to get right with God. Whatever God brings to your mind that's not what it needs to be, it's time this morning to say, "God, I confess it. I admit it. I need to get right with you. Whatever it is it stands between me and you, I want to say, I've blown it, there are no excuses, there's no rationalization, there's no explaining it away, I just want to admit it."

God loves those sacrifices and he draws those people near to himself. That you draw near to God, he'll draw near to you this morning. That's a prayer we ought to be praying. It's why the great model prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ made it very clear: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."

Verse 4. "May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill your plans." Now, if you just jumped into verse 4, you didn't think anything about context and it wasn't laid in the middle of a set of requests, you might say, well that's the kind of promise I want. Right? I just want whatever I want and I want God to do whatever I want. Well, think about this: the psalm of David, this is about David, do you think that people should be praying at every moment of David's life that he has whatever his heart's desire or whatever his plans are fulfilled. Matter of fact, I would hope people were praying against some of those heart's desires and plans. Certainly when he went and had an adulterous affair with Bathsheba, when he killed her husband, those were plans that he laid out that we certainly didn't want God to fulfill. But God allowed that fulfillment of those desires, not because it was an answer to a godly prayer, but because it was an expression even, of the imperfect nature of some of the leaders in Old Testament Israel, to remind us of his grace, just like Paul said, the greatest of sinners, a murderer, a persecutor of the church, being a reminder of God's perfect patience. But the point here is that we're speaking of a certain kind of desire and a certain kind of plan that we would say that those are the good ones, those are the ones we want.

We should be praying for, number four, verse 4, "Praying for Godly Desires." And I say that because so many of the things in our hearts we need to begin to sort out. It's good that it comes on the heels of verse 3 when I think about my closeness with God. The closer I draw to the Lord the more free I am to express my heart's desire with a confidence that they'll be within the will of God. Think about that. The more I see my heart growing close to God the more freed up I am to release the desires of my heart in prayer and to know that these are right in the center of the will of God.

Psalm 37:4, we often quote it, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Delight

yourself in the Lord. That's the key. That's verse 3, and he will give you the desires of your heart, that's verse 4. But you can read that two ways and rightfully you should because both ways work. He will give you the desires of your heart and he will grant you the desires of your heart. Same sentence, same words, same idea. But certainly a different direction. What I want God to do is to infuse my heart with the right kinds of desires. We ought to be praying that often because we know our hearts are fallen, we know our sinful desires, our flesh, often wage war against our soul. And so it is that we need to be praying that God would help us clarify the things that he would have us do, the things he wants us to accomplish. Pray for godly desires.

Which, by the way, you might want to jot this down, the reminder from Ephesians Chapter 6 verse 18 as to what this phrase means and what it doesn't. In other words this has confused a lot of people and has been open to a lot of bad interpretations throughout the last 80 to 100 years when it says we ought to be praying at all times in the Spirit. To pray in the Spirit. I don't know how you've defined that in your childhood or your upbringing, what it means. You might picture something esoteric, something bizarre, something phenomenal. It has nothing to do with that. Matter of fact, has to do with the verse that precedes it, which is this: That we ought to "take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit," there's the idea, "which is the Word of God, and then pray at all times in the Spirit.

The Spirit wrote a book, the Word of God. The Spirit, we ought to pray in the Spirit, which Romans 8 says he knows exactly how he ought to be praying for us and we ought to be praying the prayers that he's praying. How are we going to know what he's praying? How would we know what he would want to intercede for our lives to accomplish? Well, it's written in his book, at least the commandments are a pathway to run in. And so I want to say that book needs to be the thing I go to. There's nothing sitting on a rock or feeling some weird feeling. To pray in the Spirit is to say, "What did he say in his book? How can I get my prayer life aligned with those things?" And the more I see that in step, as it says in Galatians Chapter 5, the more I can walk in step with the Spirit, then unleash your desires in your prayer life. And you can say and hear a prayer like this: "God grant me all the desires of my heart and fulfill all my plans." That's a great thing certainly if we're walking in step with the Spirit.

I think I've admitted this to you before publicly, not to be overly transparent, but my prayer list certainly has included the categories of Galatians 5:22 and it speaks of what the Spirit wants for my life. And here's what I know the Spirit wants from my life: more love, more joy, more peace, more patience, more kindness, more goodness, more faithfulness, more gentleness, more self-control. I pray those things every day for my life. Not a bad place to start when it comes to saying, God align my desires with those things. That's the fruit of your Spirit. That's what your book is trying to get me to be in this world, as I think about the good offense and the things I want to be protected from. Walking in step with the Spirit, reflecting the book that he wrote. We live by the Spirit, we're granted life by the Spirit, verse 25 says let's keep in step with the Spirit. To do that is to see my heart increasingly reflecting the desires of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 5, Psalm 20. We go from "God do this for him" to "Hey, may we all shout for joy," verse 5, "over your salvation." Again this is temporal salvation. That's the idea. We're marching into battle, we want to win the battle, we'd like to win the war and so it is that we'd like to shout for joy when it's all completed, "in the name of our God." Here it is, the God factor, the connection of God in all this, may we "set up our banners!" Kind of waving the festival banners



of victory after war. "May Yahweh fulfill all your petitions!" We want all of these things answered so that we can go back and be thankful for them all, be joyful for them all, set up our banners and celebrate them all. A part of our prayer lives that is often overlooked.

It's how the model prayer started in the disciple's prayer in Matthew 6. Right? He talks about the Father, "Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name." Holy. We want you to be recognized as the great holy sovereign one. Father, you're in charge, you're the giver like a child gets all good things from his parents. That's the idea and the picture of our prayer lives and we should recognize the connection between what God does, certainly in answer to our prayers, and how we ought to come in response to that to him with joy and thanksgiving and the festive banners of victory.

I put it this way: we ought to be "Praying for that Thankful Heart." We ought to be practicing thankfulness in our prayer life. It ought to be filled with that. Matter of fact, that is what thanksgiving is. It is worship. It is thanksgiving for the things that he has done. Great is the Lord. He does great things for his people. This is the picture throughout the Scripture. And the difference between, as I've often said, non-Christians and Christians is the recognition of that and the acknowledgment of that.

We talk about offerings. I love Psalm 50. It says you ought to "Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving," to the Lord. That's the command. The ultimate kind of worship and sacrifice is saying, "God, thank you." And then it says in verse 23, "The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me," God says. There's nothing I think in Scripture that more fundamentally puts us on our place and God in his place than for us to be perpetually and chronically thankful. And you start praying and God starts supplying, you start to recognize what a great, great thing it is to fuel our prayer lives. Convicted of that recently in my own prayer life and I think you and I ought to work harder at itemizing those things, recording those things, as I've mentioned in this series already, in celebrating those things with joyful thanksgiving.

This is a "we" statement, not a "him" statement. It doesn't say may "he" shout for joy. Right? May "he" set up these banners in the name of God. No. It's about we doing it because you answered his petitions. Jot this reference down, we won't take time to look at it. I think I send you there in our discussion questions for our small group this week on the back of your worksheet. Jot down Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verses 8 through 11, certainly if it's not printed there, if it is circle it. But I want you to recognize how important it is in the Bible for us to be praying for one another. I put it this way: widening the prayer circle, as it is appropriate, and sometimes it's a question as to whether it's appropriate or not, but broadening that prayer circle for this very reason: so it can be not "I shouted for joy" when he delivered me and "I set up the banners" when there was victory, but "we did it" and "we set up the banners" and "we shouted for joy."

In other words, when we take our prayer hurts and concerns, when we have our day of trouble, when we need protection, when we need help from the holy hill from Zion, when we need God to answer us, and we share that request with more people, God says he is greatly multiplied in his honor because more people are giving thanks to him. Follow this now. And that's a hard thing to do. Do we decide to share this prayer request? Now again, there are a lot of people you can picture abusing the sharing of prayer requests. It is nothing more than



putting a megaphone on people's troubles and, you know, discussing other people's, you know, whatever, gossip, you know, being a gossip. I'm not talking about that obviously.

And I'm not even talking about you being known, you know, for suffering in your small group and every time you get together it's always you sharing what a horrible life you have. I hope that's not the case. But when you have a real hurt in your life and something comes into your life that is painful and you're making a decision and on the fence should I share this with some folks in my life or should I not, please remember Second Corinthians Chapter 1, when the Apostle Paul embarrassingly shared, and it is an embarrassment to say that the great Apostle Paul, who stood in front of all the philosophers in Athens, said, "We were so despairing, we had such a crushing burden that we despaired even of life itself." So you felt suicidal, our great leader and preacher? It's exactly what he says.

And he said, "We didn't want you to be uninformed of that so that you would know that we set our hope ultimately on God and we shared it with you so that we might be helped by your prayers so that, because he had confidence that God would deliver him from all of that, he said, "So that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessings granted to us through the prayers of many." He says so my little band here had such a terrible time of persecution and I, within that, felt the sentence of death and I wanted to despair even of life itself. And yet "now many people are giving thanks because of that."

If you're struggling with something in your life, I hope every one of you is in a small group. I don't think it should be hardly anything in your life you're not sharing with your small group, if it's a day of trouble and a problem and something you're facing, and not sharing that. Not being known as the person who's "woe is me" every small group. But you've got to be sharing these requests. And then when you do and God answers, set up the banner, rejoice together in God's fulfillment. I don't know. Bake a cake. Buy a pile of Abba Zabas, do something to celebrate. Which I got several. Thank you for my Abba Zabas this week. Which I've been told are hard to find but I don't need to shop for them anymore, I have plenty. Just great. Pray for a thankful heart. And we need that, don't we? I mean, we need to be as thankful and joyful in the answers to prayer as we were hurt and frustrated in our need for prayer.

All right quickly now, that's the things I think from our passage included in the first five verses we can be praying for. Let's spend the remainder of our time just quickly here looking at three ways that we should pray.

Even the subtitle of this sermon, you can see, is about faith-filled prayers. Faith: it's not a cross-your-fingers kind of well I hope this is the case. It's a real confident praying. So let's put it down that way. Number two, we need to confidently trust, not just that God's going to answer our prayers, but in the goodness of God himself. Number two, "Confidently Trust in a Good God." I'm praying to a God who I trust is a good God. And I believe that that good God hears my prayers. Of course he wants me to align my desires and my endeavors and my objectives in his path and what he wants for me. But I'm ultimately am praying with a kind of confidence that he's a good God. He's not an ogre. He's not out looking to make my life difficult, even though he may allow crazy, difficult things into your life. But I want to confidently trust in a good God.

Which by the way, without getting too complex or theological here, when you see the word, "I know that the Lord saves his anointed," that word "anointed" in verse 6, I mean that can't help but take you, I hope, in your mind to Jesus Christ, because "anointed" that's what Christ means. Right? Christos in Greek is the word anointed, anointed. Putting the flask of oil over the head. He is not only the king and he certainly is the ultimate King, he is the priest and the prophet, and you think about this passage and you read it christologically through the lens of, "Hey, did the Lord do this for Christ? Did the Father answer these prayers for Christ?" Well, of course he did. He did. And just like the Apostle Paul, if you think about Christ's day of trouble, even in the Garden of Gethsemane, even on the cross the day he was crucified, we recognize that though it didn't end the way that we would intuitively and temporally pray for a defense, God got accomplished everything he wanted to accomplish in Christ's life.

And we can think christologically about this passage and say, "In Christ I have victory," as Paul said, everything is "yes" and all the promises are "yes" because of Christ. In other words, my association with the king, as I think about Christ being all that God wanted him to be, provides me an opportunity to pray with a kind of confidence I never would have. That's what it means to pray in Jesus' name. It means that I'm coming in the authority of the one who's accomplished everything and is fully favored before God. An important way to look at this. But when I think about what it means here to be praying that "he'll answer from his holy heaven, he'll save with the might of his hand," I can think about the fact that we are looking to our king, the great King Christ, we may have some bumps and bruises along the way as part of his army. But we realize that God is a God who won the war and he's a God who answers from heaven.

Nevertheless, it is prayer and in prayer I've got to remember that every prayer is involving another person's will. Think about that. "God, here's what I want. My will is this. Here's what you want. Your will is that. I'm coming to you saying would you accomplish this and I'm hoping that my will is your will. But if my will is not your will, I would like to say like Christ, this king that you did answer and deliver, I'd like to say like him in the Garden, "not my will but yours be done." And that's a hard thing to say but that's what prayer is. Prayer is not, "I'm just going to do this myself," prayer is, "God, I need you to do this." I want to make sure that I'm recognizing that I'm talking to another person with a will, and so I need to be a bit flexible and moldable and deferential.

I ought to be like Christ who says, "I want to get out of this wrathful cup, but not my will but yours be done." There's a confidence in this and yet there's a deference in that. That may sound like an oxymoron but let's write it down anyway. Verse 6, we need to "Pray with a Confident Deference." I am confident that God is going to win the war. But there's a lot of deference about every battle. I don't know whether this cancer is going to go away. I don't know if I get my house back. I don't know if I'm gonna get this job that I want. I don't know if this relationship is going to work out. But I'm confident, because the goodness of God says that, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose," and I am going to hold on to every item on my prayer list very, very loosely except for one. What? Except for one.

There's one that the Bible allows you to be tenaciously, absolutely, firm on. Jot it down if you would. James Chapter 1 verses 5 through 10. James Chapter 1. It talks about this: "If you lack wisdom," which really is the key to all good praying, I want to know what it is that God would

have me pray for, I want to know what a good defense should be, what the right offense should be, I want the right closeness to God. I need wisdom to know all those things. He says if you ask for wisdom you should never doubt, let no one doubt. If you doubt, you're not even going to get it. Here's one thing I know for sure God wants to grant you in your prayer life and that is wisdom. So I come with a great confidence that in my prayer life God can help hone my mind and my heart into his set of desires and objectives for my life. That may take time, may take weeks, may take months, may take years. But I'm going to have a deference in the process because this is the act of praying. All prayer is asking another, it's all contingent on the will of another. Jesus modeled this even as the perfect man and so we should do the same.

More I could say on that but let's rush on to verses 7 and 8, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, we trust in the name of Yahweh our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright." Well, the army says this, or the citizens say this, they recognize we've got a good army, we're praying for our king, but ultimately we're trusting in God, not our earthly leaders, not our chariots, and not our horses, and not our swords, and not our spears, and not our arrows.

Number two, our verses 7 and 8, Let's "Pray with no Earthly Confidence." I want to put no confidence in anything that I can see. I'm going to put no confidence in the things or the mechanisms that God may in fact use to fix the problem. It may be that this chemotherapy is going to attack this cancer, but here's the thing, I'm not putting my hope in that drip bag. I'm not putting my hope in the doctor or the oncologist. I'm not putting my hope in my attorney to protect me. I'm not putting my hope in my physicians, I'm not putting hope in my counselors. I ultimately have to put my hope in God. Here's a great cross reference for that. You can look up later Psalm 33 verses 16 through 22. Psalm 33 versus 16 through 22. What a great expansion of that simple statement that we do not trust in the mechanisms of our warfare.

I was repulsed again listening to the Sound of Music not long ago, not because I hate the Sound of Music or the sound of music. But I hate that song by Maria as she leaves the abbey to go gear up to deal with the von Trapp family. Right? She's going to go be the nanny, if you will, in the family. She sings a song about having confidence in me. Remember that song? The worst song in the entire play. The confidence in you. Well, that's a bad bet. No matter what you're putting confidence in, if it's not exclusively and singularly in God, we've got a problem. We cannot afford to put confidence in anything else and the longer you live in the Christian life the more God demands for you with exclusivity to trust in him.

And I say that because I look at two lives, one of them is David himself, who stood in the shadow of Goliath and said the battle is the Lord's and God delivered him. But late in his life, he thought the battle was in his army and that's why he sent his generals out there to count his troops, because he started to trust in his army. Asa was the same way. He lived many years reforming the land in Israel, the great, great grandson of David and as he did he had so many victories but when he came to the end of his life and he got struck with a disease, the Bible said he did not seek the Lord but he sought the physicians. Now, there was nothing wrong with seeking physicians and there's nothing wrong with David having an army. It's just when you count it, at least in that context, you're showing you're trusting in it and not in me. And Asa when you picked up the phone, so to speak, and you called your physicians and you didn't fall on your knees and start to pray and trust in me and I may direct you to call your physicians and get this thing fixed, you show that your trust is not where it needs to be. I can't

emphasize it enough. You don't trust in your parents, you don't trust in your education, you don't trust in your bank account, you don't trust in your doctors, you don't trust in your lawyers, you don't trust in your medicine. You've got to trust in the Lord, which doesn't mean we dispense with any of those things. They're all useful and God uses them. But while others trust in them we should trust in the powerful authority and the gracious mercy of our God.

Lastly, verse 9. "O Yahweh, save the king! May he answer us when we call." That word "may," may or may not be advised. As a matter of fact, if you look back up, how many "mays" do we have? "May the Lord answer you," "may the name of the Lord protect you," "may he send help," "may he remember you," "may he grant you your heart's desire," "may we shout for joy," "may the Lord fulfill your petitions," "may he answer us." All these "mays" in this passage, without getting into Hebrew grammar because it could bore us and protract this entire discussion, but if we were to learn a little about imperfect verbs and jussive forms, you would recognize that there are two ways you could translate this entire psalm. You can translate it with an interpretive translation that the English Standard Version has chosen to use, and most translations have, that this is a, at least the parallel in Greek, would be an optative tense, of wishing and wanting and praying and expressing my desire that God would do something.

Or you could take it as a straight imperfect, which you can rightly, grammatically do in this text, which is God will do this, God will do this, God will do this. The Lord will answer you, the Lord will help you, the Lord will protect you, the Lord will answer us when we call. The reality is, I'm just saying, it's somewhat stronger in the original language throughout this text. Not that we're not realizing a dependence because that's what prayer is. It's not an overweening pride that God is going to do whatever we ask. So I think most translators are probably justified in putting this in terms of "may God do this" but these are strong verbs. And all I'm saying is that there is an overarching confident expectation in these prayers that we just can't even see in our English text.

So let's end with that, verse 9, we need to "Pray with a Confident Expectance." I expect God, because he's a good God, because I trust in the goodness of God, to accomplish his will through these prayers. And I'm even going to trust that sometimes when I latch onto something, and occasionally I'm going to be wrong and I'm going to say, God take this thorn away and he's not going to do it and I've got to change my praying. But I need to be much more confident in coming to God. He is pleased when we trust him, if our trust is truly in him and no earthly thing. God loves to hear a kind of confidence in our praying.

We don't pray big enough. We don't pray firmly enough. We think faith is believing in something we know that's not true. Faith is a confidence. We think hope is just crossing our fingers. Hope is an assurance. So we talk about words like faith and hope they mean something completely different, you know, on the Twitter feed than they do in the Bible. It's a confident assurance in a good God who's going to respond well to his people. I love this psalm. It's one of my favorites. It's a good prayer list. Something we should pray for ourselves, it's something we should pray for others as well.

I think back to the high school glory that I fumbled. I didn't take the work on the gridiron seriously and sat there as a band geek in the stands. I realize it really doesn't matter all that much from my perspective now. I have no idea what Todd's doing. I try to look him up this



week. I can't find him. Who knows where he's at, but I'll bet my knees are in better shape than his are so. There are a few things going on that make me realize, does it matter that I wasn't there walking through campus on Friday with my letterman's jacket on? It doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter.

I can assure you this: 100 years from now what I've talked about this morning will matter. Between now and the time that you meet Christ face-to-face if you pray with a dependent kind of prayer that we celebrate here at this church, that we are reliant on prayer, and you pray these kinds of prayers, defense and offense, a closeness with God, godly desires, thankful heart. God do these things in my life. I want to do it with a kind of deference and a kind of confidence in you and no confidence in myself or any of the emissaries or tools that you might use to get this done. I assure you, you will say it was worth it. You've got to make sure that you value the things that God does. Praying for the right things and praying in the right way.

Let me encourage you with one final quotation from Second Timothy Chapter 4. After Paul said as he was about to be executed, "I fought the good fight, I finished the race, I kept the faith." Here's the verse I didn't read that followed it, verse 8. "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that Day." I'm going to get that letterman's jacket, so to speak, and it'll be great. "And not only to me," I love the way he includes not just Timothy but all of us in this. "Not only to me but to all those who have loved his appearing."

I can't wait for the Lord to come back. I'm ready to be done with this world. In the meantime though, I better pray and I better pray well with well-rounded, full-orb prayers, for good offense, good defense, a close relationship with God, a thankful heart. The kind of praying that shows my trust is squarely in him and not myself or anything else. It will make a difference and make all the difference in the world. It'll be worth it.

Let's pray. God, help us to be men and women of prayer. It's certainly been on my heart lately as I've shared from various platforms on this campus that we need to pray and we need to pray more. I need to pray, I need to pray more. And even not just praying more I need to pray better, more strategically. So God, give me more of that clarity in my own heart regarding what this means and how to do it. I pray you'd be honored as we seek to pray in a way that brings you glory by seeking to walk in the center of your will. Thanks that your Spirit has saved us. Let us now keep in step with that Spirit as we pray in the Spirit wielding the sword of the Spirit. Knowing what it means to value this book that you've given us that lays out for us the will of God in so many ways, so many specific ways, it can direct and change our lives as we yield ourselves to you in our prayer lives. So God, make us better at praying.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen.