



The Royal Task-Part 4

Praying for Progress

Pastor Mike Fabarez

You may not know that my daughter is a hawk. A hawk. So were her brothers. Not literally, of course. That would be really strange but... It is what they designate her because of our local high school chose that as a mascot when they started the school back in 1978. I guess that makes sense because living here, having lived in a few places in my adult life, I've seen more hawks, literal hawks, in this area than anywhere else. I'll be driving down the road and I'll look up at the streetlight and perched there majestically on the street light is this really big hawk. I see that, I don't know, once a month probably. More impressive than that, and I probably see it more often than that, I will see them unfurl their big wings and just start circling around and cruising around and swooping into the canyons. I've even seen them dive after snakes and pick them up. They say that they will dive, these hawks, up to 150 miles per hour. I mean, that's fast. They go right down, I mean, two or three inches from the ground, snag their prey and off they fly. Man, that's impressive.

When I saw hawk the other day I thought to myself, you know, people have been watching birds fly since Adam and Eve. And I'm sure every generation, they've all said what you've said and I've said, that is cool. I would like to do that. That would be neat. And when you think about history you've had smart brains in every generation trying to figure out how to do that. And they have, they've tried hard. And it wasn't until 1903 when the Wright Brothers launched their first plane that we actually got human flight off the ground, pardon the pun. And by 1970 we were rolling out Boeing 747s. Think about it. From Kitty Hawk in Ohio to Boeings being produced and people being, you know, catapulted across the sky, across the country at 35,000 feet at 6-700 miles an hour. That is an amazing, amazing thing and it all comes down to the wing. We figured out the wing. After all these years we finally figured this out. Flat bottom, curved top. Right? Get this thing moving, thrust, of course, you get this wind sweeping over the top, you'll create lift and all of this defies gravity and the seemingly impossible happens just by figuring out the design of the wing. I mean that changed everything. It was revolutionary. So simple but so revolutionary.

I'm going to preach this morning on a topic that is really simple. As a matter of fact, you might have already seen it in the bulletin and you think, "Man, this is like Sunday school stuff. You're going to talk to us about something I've learned from the time I went to school. I don't even remember the first time I learned about this topic. It is so simple." If you're tempted to yawn your way through this sermon I just want to tell you don't. It may be simple but it changes everything. The seemingly impossible becomes possible with this. Though I think you've heard it all before, and you may say I know all of this, don't underestimate the power of what we're going to talk about this morning. Jesus talked about it in Mark 11 and he said, you know, it's the thing that can take a mountain with these cubic tons of dirt and rock and granite and pick it up and throw it into the sea. And in verse 14, here are the three words: "asking in prayer." Of course, God isn't in the business of trying to move dirt around by you praying. That's not the point. The point is what is impossible is made possible when God's people pray. Praying about the right things to the right person and God says I'll do the impossible.



Well, the impossible isn't doing magic tricks for us and it's not even putting band-aids on temporal problems. And though we've had these band-aids on temporal problems that have suspended natural law, we've had plenty of miracles that take place. I say plenty, it really is not that many. Less than 100 designated miracles in the Bible that were actually the suspension of natural law. But those times that we've had them just realize they're a sign pointing to something much bigger and something much more important. Because to make blind eyes see, if you're talking about literal eyes seeing, they're just going to stop seeing anyway because in this fallen world they're all destined to die. But God's worried about what happens after you die. The Bible says there's a whole new life awaiting everyone and you're going to spend it in one of two places. Where you deserve to spend it is incurring the penalty, the just penalty for your sins.

But the Bible says I can do the impossible. God says, "I can take guilty people whose sins are guilty, I mean their sins are staining their lives like crimson, like blood, like wine on a white linen and I can make it white as snow. I can do that. I can do the impossible." And you and I know as we look at Acts Chapter 1 that we are commissioned, like the early Church, to take this message of the gospel to our Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. That's our job. And our job is impossible. We're trying to get people who are by nature children of God's just wrath and to have their lives completely changed. To have them, instead of being alienated from God, being children of God. Instead of being worthy and qualified for his judgment, to be worthy and qualified for his blessing and eternal life. Well, that's big. That's important. A lot of Christianity is trying to shift the emphasis on the here and now. Trust me, the here and now is going away. What you see is temporal, what you don't see is eternal and that's what matters the most. And God wants you and I to get people ready for that. And what it takes is the gospel.

In Acts Chapter 1 we've been studying, in our new study, our verse-by-verse study through Acts, we've been learning what it's like to see ourselves in the sandals of that first generation of Christians in the Church and say we've got to get serious about what that passage tells us to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. The Bible says if you get serious about prayer, which is what we see by a pattern in Scripture and a command in Scripture, God can start to do the impossible. God is about to turn the world upside down with 120 people in Acts Chapter 1. Things are going to seismically shift. A revolution is going to take place. And it all comes down to men and women praying. I know you know about prayer. I know you've heard about prayer. I know you probably have a prayer life. I'm here today to get that prayer life a little bit more focused on what's eternally important and a lot more habitual in your daily life. A lot more consistent in your daily life. I'd like you to do what they're doing in this passage. I'd like you to be devoted to your prayer life. Particularly the kind of prayers that make a difference for eternity because you've got your sights set on people being saved.

I challenged you two weeks ago and I guess by way of introduction we've got to go back and deal with that in our minds because I've tried to be very specific about you getting four people in view that you think need the gospel. You can tell they don't have a real genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. And so we took those four words in Acts Chapter 1, the Jerusalem, the Judea, the Samaria and the ends of the earth, and I said please try to identify someone. I just made some simple correspondence. Right? Jerusalem was the place where they were going to be walking through



the marketplace, at least for the next ten days and thereafter, and people they rub shoulders with every day. And a lot of them were non-Christians, most of them obviously were not right with God, and they needed the gospel. I wanted you to identify someone that you rub shoulders with every single day. I mean you see him almost every day at least and you say they need the gospel and I wanted you to put a name down on a card. Remember that two weeks ago?

Then I said how about your Judea? There's got to be someone here, you may not see every day, but there's a kinship with. Because in Judea that was the region around Jerusalem and they all kind of felt they were on the same basic page as it related at least of their ethnicity. I'm saying you've got a connection with some people in your life, maybe related by biology, and you say they're not saved. They need to be saved. And I wanted to think of one person. It could be a connection through maybe, I don't know, your kid's soccer team or little league or some thing that you're involved in your neighborhood. But you say here is a group of people I have a kinship with and it may be outside of work but I want to care about their salvation.

Your Jerusalem, your Judea, and then I really challenged you with the third one, didn't I? Samaria. I mean Samaria, they wrote them off as theologically aberrant. I mean, these people did not have it right. These are people who, if you wanted to talk about the Jewish Messiah, they had all the wrong ideas. And I said there's someone in your life that you think, "Just, no way." They may be a militant atheist, they may be an agnostic, they may be someone who you think, I don't know, they're just completely opposed to biblical Christianity. And I dared you to write down a Saul of Tarsus, someone you thought probably would never get saved, but someone you know, someone you could connect with. And I said think about that person and write that name down, your Samaria.

And then I said "ends of the earth." You got a fourth slot there. Just pick anyone. I said it's like the free space on a bingo card. Just pick a name and put it down. Some non-Christian you know, and I challenged you to put four names down. Well, as they were just thinking through the progress of the gospel that was going to go out from Jerusalem, I want you to be thinking throughout this whole series about those four people in particular. Could you think of 40? Sure you could. But I want you to think of just at least four and identify them. If you're late to the party here and you weren't here two weeks ago, or maybe you were and you didn't write them down, it would be great for you, even now, just to jot down those four names, and then to think through this passage in light of those four people.

I want to show you how these people were devoted to prayer and I don't have a record of what they were praying about but I can guess. I can guess because the rest of the book unfolds their interest in the progress of the gospel. So let's read these three verses, simple passage, turn there and get your eyeballs on this text. I would love for you to follow along as I read verses 12, 13 and 14 of Acts Chapter 1. I'll read it from the English Standard Version starting in verse 12. You can glance at the context and remind yourself that the Ascension had taken place. Jesus left, we talked about that last week and he was going to send his Spirit of course who was going to change everything about their empowerment to do the work of progressing in terms of the gospel in this area from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth.



Christ had left. In verse 12 it says, "Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up to the Upper Room, where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James," that's not Judas Iscariot, that's the other Judas. "All of these with one accord were," here's the key, I just want to focus on this all morning. The key was they were "devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women," it wasn't just the twelve, "and Mary," was there. I mean a noteworthy person was there, "mother of Jesus, and his brothers," Jesus' half-brothers, his biological half-brothers.

And by the way, you can just dip into verse 15, we'll deal with this next time, but, "In those days Peter stood up among the brothers," and so you want to know who was there? This parenthetical statement tells us - "the company of persons was in all about 120 persons." So we've got 120 people and we're about to see the world turned upside down. What are they found doing in verse 14? "Devoting themselves to prayer." There is not a casual acquaintance with prayer. This is not just you saying, "Well, I guess I'll pray for these four people this week." It's not about you just kind of praying for a couple of weeks and then if nothing happens, well then I give up. I've known people who have been praying for lost people in their lives for decades. And I've had some great stories. I remember baptizing a man in this church who had been prayed for, and I'd been praying with this wife, for probably 22 - 23 years. And she had been praying for 50 years and he finally came to Christ. And it was a wonderful story. I've known people who have prayed for their family members and their neighbors and their friends for decades. And this is a persistent kind of praying. And I'm just saying I want to pray for the progress that we need to have in seeing the gospel expanded.

So, let's start on verse 14. We'll kind of work our way backwards here and just remember what I'm asking for and what I need to see happen among us is a devotion to prayer for the progress of the gospel. I put it this way, number one if you're taking notes, you need to "Pray for Evangelistic Progress." Let's pray that God will see people saved, that's what we need. Let's pray that those people, and again I don't want to be too formulaic, but when it comes down to it can you name four people who you say I'm going to focus on these four people that need Christ. I know them, they know me, they've got my phone number, I've got theirs, I run into them all the time, I want to pray for these four people to be saved at least. You got 40? Great, but let's start with four and let's just then say what I need is to pray for progress and see these people saved.

And why? Because it's impossible. It is like moving a mountain into the sea. The Bible says, "You're dead in our transgressions and sins." I mean, Jesus showed us that you take biological eyes that didn't work and allow them to see, not so that we get excited about him healing blind people, because seeing eyeballs aren't going to last for very long. I said what God is trying to show us is that he can take spiritually blind eyes, Second Corinthians 4, and he can have them opened. "Though the god of this world is blinding the minds of the unbelieving," he can open their eyes to see the light of the glory of the gospel in Christ. That's what we're praying for. Because right now you've got people on your list, they don't see it, they don't get it, they don't understand it. The Bible says there's a spiritual war going on.



When Paul was dragged in before King Agrippa, Herod's great-grandson, still in the Herodian family, when he described his calling to be a witness, same word, to be a witness of Christ, he said I was called to "turn them" from blindness to sight "from darkness to light. To see them experience the forgiveness of sins." That's something you and I can't do. We have to beg God to have that happen. And so you and I need to pray. And that's the whole point, to remind ourselves and to ask God to do what only he can do because you and I can't do it, any more than you going to the cemetery and trying to see the whole cemetery raised from the dead, you can't do it. You can't walk through neighborhoods thinking of lost people and say, "If I just give them the right words they're going to be saved." Now God wants you to give them the right words. He wants you to give them the right answers. But what it's going to need here is God getting involved in changing things.

So I'd like to come up with a few things that you can pray for and I want to be specific. Now I know and I already said, verse 14 doesn't tell us what they were praying for. I have to give an educated guess here as a student of the Bible that they had to be praying about the thing that God said was going to happen, the coming of the Spirit and the task at hand. So I want to look in the Scripture at the things that I think are important for us to pray for when it comes to that combination of things. So take your Bibles and go to the 4th chapter of Acts, Acts Chapter 4, and let's break this down to a few things that you can itemize that we need to be praying for.

Here's the first thing. Drop down to the bottom of Acts Chapter 4. Acts Chapter 4, let's look at verse 31, one simple verse. Let's get our first point. What should I be praying for? Let's pray for this. It says, "When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit." So they're praying, here comes the Holy Spirit. It had already happened in Acts Chapter 2 but here's another example of this happening, the combination of praying, God's Spirit involved and what was the result? "They continued to speak the Word of God with," which has been the whole theme of that chapter, by the way, with what? "Boldness."

Number one, let's pray for this: for the Holy Spirit to give you boldness. Because if you don't have courage to talk about Christ you're not going to see anybody saved, let alone the four people on your list. You need courage. Jesus said there's going to be a price to pay. I was talking to someone just this morning about the fact that when they started talking to their co-workers about Christ they were immediately excluded from things. And I'm telling you that's just what Jesus said, you're going to be reviled, you're going to be mocked and you're going to be excluded. "If they hated me they're going to hate you." So I realized this: there's a price to pay. And a lot of us, naturally, we don't want to pay that price. I don't want to sit here and bring up Christ with the other soccer moms at this game. They're going to end up thinking I'm weird. They're going to exclude me from their conversation. They're going to ridicule me. We're afraid of that. I don't want to be outed at work as the religious Jesus freak. Well, I know there's a price to pay, so what you need is to realize that the goal is for you to be faithful to your calling as an ambassador or a witness of Christ, and that means I need to have the courage to say, "I got to do it, no matter what the price. I've got to let the chips fall. I need to be a person who is courageous enough to speak up," and the Bible associates that with the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit wants to embolden you. He



wants to give you courage. You're never going to share the gospel unless you are emboldened and have the courage to do it.

I'm sure you've all been to a lake where there's a place where you can jump off an elevated place, a rock or whatever, into the water. The higher that rock the scarier it is and I understand that. Maybe it's Lake Powell, Lake Mead, I don't know, Canyon Lake. You're somewhere and there's water and you climb up there hopefully in your younger days because, you know, the older you get the dumber that whole thing seems. But you get up there on the cliff and you're looking over the cliff and you're thinking, "OK, I got to jump." The longer you think about it the harder it is. Right? You just need to jump. You need the courage to jump because once you're jumping, you don't need courage anymore. Am I right? It's just on its own at that point.

And you know what you need? The courage to jump into the conversation. Because once you're in the conversation, you're in the conversation. And you're going to feel like that when it comes to answers. Like I'm up to the edge, I need to say something, I need to say something, I need to bring this up, I need to talk about it. Well once you do you've jumped. And, you know what? Everything that we've talked about in the past, everything begins to start to work. Right? God brings your training, your understanding of Scripture, your experience and your knowledge of the gospel, your testimony, your answers that you have learned, even if you're not some expert apologists. All of that starts working. But you need the courage to start. So let's pray for boldness. They prayed, Spirit got involved, they spoke with boldness. You and I need courage and that's going to set us and purpose us to the task. And even in those four people, let's think specifically, I need courage with all four of those people. All four I need courage. God give me courage. Let the Spirit grant me courage.

Letter "B." Let's go to Colossians Chapter 4. I want to go here because I couldn't help in studying our passage to see this word that's not all that common, in verse 14, that precedes the word prayer. It's a strong word, I said it's not a casual association with prayer, it's a kind of a devotion. It's a hard connection. Matter of fact, the word has to do with like grasping it and sticking with it. That same Greek word that's used in Acts Chapter 1 verse 14 is the same word that's translated differently here in the passage but it's the same Greek word. It's the same context and the same subject but it's a different passage. Look at verse 2. See the words "continue steadfastly" if you've got an English Standard Version, that's how it's translated. Same word we find in verse 14 of our passage. "Continue steadfastly," be devoted to, stick to it, it's like getting crazy glue on your hands and then putting a screwdriver in your hand. It's just like you're stuck to it, you're going to have that, you're going to continue to hang on to it. Well, prayer needs to be that way. "Continue steadfastly in prayer."

Now be alert, be watchful, be thankful and then he says, "Listen, I want you to start praying that way for me, at the same time pray also for us." He says, "That God," here's the first request we have here, "that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I'm in prison." "That God may open to us a door for the word that I can declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I'm in prison," which is an interesting juxtaposition of phrases here. What a paradox. Prisons - they like to shut the door. Right? That's the whole point. Keep him in. He's praying for open doors while he's in prison. Open doors to get out? No, open



doors so I can talk about the gospel. Which he reports, by the way, in Philippians Chapter 1, it's meant great success for him. He was enclosed in prison and yet he got a chance to speak to the entire Praetorian guard, the Imperial Guard in Rome and the gospel was going out to some very important, influential people. He saw that his imprisonment was the advancement of the gospel.

We're praying for the advancement of the gospel in our world. I've kind of given you a directive to get a target, to get at least four people here. I'm praying, first of all, that you be bold about that with those people. And secondly, I'm praying that you can have an open door to discuss these things. So, I put it this way: the Holy Spirit needs to give you boldness, number one. Number two, or Letter "B" the Holy Spirit needs to give you an opportunity. You need an open door. That's the way Paul likes to talk about the opportunities. An encounter, a divinely orchestrated situation where it's just going to be the perfect entryway into the conversation. An open door into the topic. We need to pray for those.

If you pray specifically and steadfastly, continuing in prayer and you pray for you to have an open door, guess what's going to happen? You're going to start to see it. God's going to provide it. The book of Acts, by the way, is full of examples of God orchestrating people's circumstances so that this thing called the gospel starts to get talked about. We're going to look at this one in Acts Chapter 6 down the road when we get there, but Philip is a great example of a guy who gets tossed right into a situation where he's going alongside a chariot where this Ethiopian eunuch is. He's in the big retinue of Candace this queen and he comes upon him while he's reading the Bible of all things, Isaiah, and he says, "Hey. Hey you. What does this mean?" Can you imagine that? I mean, just coming onto a situation where there's, talk about teeing up a conversation with the gospel. "Is the prophet talking about himself in this passage, is he talking about someone else? Can you tell me about what this means?" I mean, the circumstances of Philip being right there in Acts Chapter 8, a divine opportunity, a divine appointment, a divinely orchestrated encounter of an open door for the gospel. Pray for those. Pray that God would open the door for those. Letter "A" pray for the Holy Spirit to give you boldness. Number two, pray for the Holy Spirit to give you an opportunity.

Number three, let's look at the next verse in Colossians, verse 4, that I may make it clear. Number three or Letter "C." Pray for clarity. Pray that you can be clear. You don't want to confuse people with your message of the gospel. You want to be crystal clear about it. He breaks it down in three ways if you want to kind of expand this, sub-points to the sub-points, he talks about walking in wisdom toward outsiders. He says I want to make it clear as well. That's how I ought to speak, I ought to be clear and I want to do the wise thing. I want to walk in wisdom toward outsiders making the best use of the time, that's the word in Greek that's translated "time," it's not a bad way to translate it, but it's not about the clicks on the clock, it's about the opportunities, making the most of the open doors.

So if God gives me an open door, I'm want to do the right thing, I want to have clarity about what to do, and then, obviously, verse 6, what to say. I want to have gracious speech. I want to have gentle, respectful speech but I want it to be good speech, speech that leaves them wanting more, seasoned with salt. And the third thing, that you may know how you ought to answer each person. So I need wisdom and clarity about what to do, what to say, and how to answer. And



that's the prayer that you ought to be having, that God's Spirit would allow you to do that. And a lot of it's going to be prep. Right? Like the answer part, we ought to be ready to make a defense, give a defense, to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that's in us. We've been doing that on Thursday nights and that's helpful and there's prep involved in that. But when you're called to do it, you've jumped off the cliff of the conversation and you're in it, we certainly want God to grant us that clarity about what to say. Clarity about what to do. Should I take him up on that offer, should I go to that situation, should I invite them over to my house? I need clarity and wisdom about what to do, what to say and how to answer. Pray for the Spirit to give you boldness. Pray for the Spirit to give you an opportunity. Pray for the Spirit to give you clarity.

Number four. You don't need to turn there because I know you've got this one memorized, John Chapter 16 verses 7 through 11. And you're saying, "I don't think I have that memorized" Well, I think you remember the passage at least. John 16:7 through 11 is the passage when Jesus promises to send the Spirit of God. When he sends the Spirit of God he gives us the job description of the Spirit of God as it relates to non-Christians. Here's the word: "That the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment." There's the word, the verb, "convict." I want to pray for that. I want the Holy Spirit to convict them. What does that mean? That they feel that everything I'm saying applies to them. Three things: sin, righteousness and judgment, and those are the hardest things for people to agree with. "You want to talk about God is love, God wants you to have a great life. I can agree with all that. You know what I can't agree with? That I'm a sinner." That's the first thing the Holy Spirit wants people to be convicted of. I mean, you're going to say "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." He's going to give you the L-shaped amen. "I know someone like that." Right? "You're right. Sinners, I know sinners."

But when you ask them are you going to heaven, they're going to say what? "Well, yeah. I'll probably go to heaven." Why? Because I'm a sinner? No. "Because I'm a good person." The Spirit of God has to do that work to convict them of sin, and the only way we're going to see sin is if you know the standard is so much higher than you, of righteousness. Jesus said the reason the Spirit is going to come and do that all over the world is because I'm leaving. When Jesus was there, trust me, you'd feel uncomfortable because he does everything righteous and everything holy and everything right. The Spirit's going to take that over now. When you share the gospel what you're praying for is the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin, that's who they are, righteousness, that's who God is, holy, holy, holy. He's perfect. Right? And then what's the difference between those two? Well, my feeling that I should be punished, I should be judged. Sin, righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit is going to be sent into the world to do that. Guess when he does that? The Bible says he does it when we, his messengers, share a clear message of the gospel. I need boldness to do that. I need an opportunity to do that. I need clarity when I talk to do that. And then I need the Holy Spirit to convict them. Pray for the Holy Spirit's conviction in those conversations.

And then lastly, you don't need to you turn to this one because you know this one as well. John Chapter 3 verses 3 through 8. You say, well I know John 3:16. Well, if you know John 3:16, you remember that that's Jesus talking to Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, a teacher of the law, and Jesus' his whole thing with him before he gets to saying "that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," and the whole point is he gave his Son because they are sinners. But he said, if



you get all that what you need is a thing called New Birth. You need to be born again. And in verse 3 of that passage he says, "unless you're born again, you're never going to see the Kingdom of God." You need, and the fancy word in theology for that, which is just a restatement of the word "born again," is the word "regeneration." You need to be made new.

Number five or Letter, what is that? "A" "B" "C" "D" "E" is you want the Holy Spirit to change their hearts. You want the Holy Spirit to regenerate them. Pray for the Holy Spirit's boldness. Pray for the Holy Spirit's opportunities. Pray for the Holy Spirit's clarity. Pray for the Holy Spirit's conviction. Pray for the Holy Spirit's regeneration. That's what we want. What he needs is what we all need, a change from the inside out. I'm not going to drag someone to church and say lived like Christians, although that would make the world a little bit better, but it that's I want your heart to be made right. I need you to be born again. I need you to have a whole new start. I need God to take who you are and make you new. And Jesus starts quoting the symbolism of the Old Testament in Ezekiel about water and the Spirit, which is not water baptism, it's the picture of being cleansed and washed and made pure, your sins forgiven, and the Spirit now directing you from this point forward, taking your heart of stone that's dead to God and making it a heart of flesh. It beats in sync with the will of God. I need you to be born again. I need you to be a new person.

Now, I want you to think of the four people that you've targeted and I hope that you have. If you need to catch up, you wrote those names down, you want to think of those people, now I want you to think about these five things. I want you to be devoted to these. The passage doesn't say they're praying for those five things, but the rest of the New Testament would definitely encourage you to look at these kinds of things and pray for them, all related to the Spirit of God's work in this world. Pray for boldness, opportunity, clarity, conviction and regeneration.

They were devoted to prayer. If you noticed back in verse 14, it's printed on your worksheet, this was not just everyone going to their own corner of Jerusalem and praying by themselves. They were "all with one accord devoting themselves to prayer together, together with the women and Mary and Jesus' brothers." Before that in verse 13 to work backwards, we have the key eleven of the twelve who were the apostles, the sent ones, the evangelists, the ones who were supposed to go out and preach the word and represent Christ in the world. They had entered, they went to the Upper Room, and they were staying there together Peter, John, James, Philip, Andrew, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon, Judas, the other Judas, the son of James. Those were all there who'd all been called to be fishers of men and then you had a bunch of other people up to a 120, verse 15 says, and they were all praying together.

I know there's a lot in the Bible about praying by yourself. And there is, Jesus talked about that, you pray by yourself. Jesus patterned his life, you know, oftentimes going out early before dawn and praying by himself to the Father. But it's interesting that we have also throughout the Scripture a pattern, including Jesus enlisting people to pray with him. When it came to the battle of evangelism, I mean a very common thing that God is calling people together to be praying and certainly that's the pattern we see in this passage. We see people who have an evangelistic mindset praying together. And I can ask you to pray with people. But I'm asking you to pray with a certain kind of people. I could ask you to pray with Christians and that's good. But I'd like you to



pray with a certain kind of Christian. I'd like you to enlist people in your life to pray with you for the people you are trying to see saved who have an evangelistic heart.

I put it this way. Number two, would you "Pray With Evangelistic Christians" who care about seeing the lost reached? Who would look at your list and say, "I'll pray for those people to get saved. I want you to be the instrument of God's conversion in their lives." That would be great. Matter of fact, that's a certain kind of prayer team that you're pulling together who will make all the difference. It really will. Because praying with other people changes everything about what you say you want to do. And by that I mean if you start sharing, let's just say you start with the four people in that card. If you've got four people who you're praying for and you personally, quietly, privately just pray for those people by yourself. Well, that's great. And it's a good thing. But as soon as you share that with someone, if you were to say I'm going to get a prayer team together and I'm going to have people praying for my relationship with those four people. You've just moved from a kind of a hope and a wish and a dream, I mean, that's what a private goal is. Right? It's just a dream. You've made it concrete now. You've kind of outed yourself that these are the people I want to see saved.

Now I'm challenging you, the Bible doesn't say this but Pastor Mike is saying this, I'm saying would you please identify four people who you want to see saved, four non-Christians. And now I'm asking you could you enlist some evangelistic Christians who care about the lost and say, "Would you pray with me for these people?" Now, it would be great if you had 120 people to pray for the lost people on your list. It would be great if you had 12 people, or in this case, 11 people, who really have an evangelistic heart to pray for them. But let me just make it easier for you. Let me give you a goal and here's the goal. Could you enlist three people? Three people.

And the reason I say this is so often you see Jesus enlisting three people, and who were they? Well look at the list in verse 13. They're always listed first. Peter, John and James. Sometimes it's Peter, James and John or sometimes it's Peter, John, and James. But it's always those three guys. Those three guys are Jesus' tightest prayer partners. Here's a passage you can jot down, Luke Chapter 9 verse 28. "Now about eight days after these things, Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and they went up to the mountain to pray." Did Jesus pray by himself? Plenty of times he prayed by himself. But a lot of times he took Peter, James and John. And he said, you guys pray with me. When he went into the Garden, it talks about the Garden encounter in John 16. He's about to be betrayed in the Garden but he goes in there and he takes these guys to pray. And if you really read carefully the passage, he takes all 12 guys in there. But then he says, "Hey, Peter, James and John, you come with me and you pray." And he takes them and he says, "Stay awake. Don't get tired. Resist temptation. Pray with me, watch and pray with me."

It would be good if you had a Peter, James and John who prays with you. And I'm just being specific in this series to have them pray with you about people in your life who you want to see saved. Three people, to pray for four non-Christians, and I've already given you a prayer list now, to pray five things. You just think about the potential. This very simple, and I hate that it's for formulaic but, man, if it's helpful let it be helpful. If you had three evangelistic Christians, praying for four non-Christians, praying five things that the Holy Spirit would do in your encounters with them, we could see radical changes in South Orange County California. Because if you just took



half the people in this church, and I don't want to be a pessimist, but if you took half the people who are hearing my sermon this weekend live on our campus, you took a thousand adults, let's say, and you had those thousand adults who got serious about listing four names, that's 4,000 people. And all 4,000 of those names were being prayed for, not only by the person who wrote them down, but by three other people. So you've got four people praying for those four non-Christians and they are spending time articulating five specific prayer requests. Right?

That's more than just, you know, a 10-second prayer. They're really devoting themselves to prayer. You're going to watch God start to move mountains. You're going to start to hear a lot of testimonies of people being won to Christ. Because the Bible says, listen, you can move mountains by asking in prayer. God's not in the business of just doing magic shows for generations. That's not the point. The magic show was that you can believe that God can change hearts and prepare people and get them ready for the coming kingdom. Three evangelistic Christians praying with you about four non-Christians five things. It's going to move this from a theory to a practice. The second thing it's going to do as soon as you out yourself as saying I'm praying for these four people, it keeps you immediately accountable. Think about that. Anytime you share some prayer requests like that, "I want to see these four people saved," immediately there's accountability. I can think of several examples of people saying, "Would you pray?" And I remember one specifically, "Would you pray for this non-Christian in my life?" Well, I wrote it down and I started praying and guess what one of the conversations is almost all the time I see that person, I ask, "How is it going with you sharing the gospel with that person?" You know what that does? Lights a fire.

And they recognize there's accountability just in sharing my list. Hey, if everyone on this campus who hears this sermon would share four names with three other Christians, I guarantee you it's going to light a fire. People are going to say, "I need to share the gospel." You want to talk about revival, want to talk about people being saved? "Adding to their number day by day those who were being saved," that great line we're going to read in Chapter 2 of Acts, it could start happening right here. It could change our city, could change our county. It could expand from our Jerusalem, the real Jerusalem, if you will, the real city, not just the person, but I mean, you could see the reverberating effects of people getting saved in a wave because one church got serious about devoting themselves to prayer in prayer teams of evangelistic Christians. I just challenge you to do this. It's very simple.

Sharing those requests are going to move these private goals from dreams to reality. It's also going to be built-in accountability. There may be one more thing it'll do. Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 11. Second Corinthians 1:11. If you start praying and you say, "Would you pray with me?" The Bible says there's real help in that. What happens when God answers is more people get excited and they worship God, they praise God, multiplied thanksgiving, if you want to put it in two words, multiplied thanksgiving. Here's how the verse reads. Paul says, "You must help us by your prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted," that's the answer to prayer, "through the prayers of many." "You must help us by your prayer so that many will give thanks," and he assumes that's a good thing, that's a great thing, "on behalf of the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."



You start praying for those four people and you see two of them saved in the next year, are you going to rejoice and give thanks? Oh, you will. But, you know what? You're going to multiply that thanksgiving if you've shared that with at least three prayer partners who are praying with you. I know they'll be rejoicing in heaven, the Bible says. But God is honored by a lot of rejoicing on earth when God answers the prayers of his people. Please share your requests. And your requests, in this case, are you seeing non-Christians in your life saved. We need to be praying in a devoted kind of prayer for evangelistic progress. We need to be praying with other evangelistic Christians.

The context in verse number 12 was, you remember, their coming across the Kidron Valley back to the city of Jerusalem. Look at this in verse 12. "When they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away." They enter the Upper Room and then off they go. It's all about them devoting themselves to prayer.

Well, it's an interesting little historical fact that they're not too far away. It says here, look at that phrase, a Sabbath day's journey. Now there's nowhere in the Old Testament when it speaks of the Sabbath, which was supposed to be a day of rest, that it tells you how far you can journey on the Sabbath. It doesn't say. The only passage that rabbis used to point to was the passage when the manna came in the wilderness and all people went out on the 7th day and they went out and they search for manna on the day Christ said you don't have to search for manna because there'll be none out there, collect twice as much on the day before. Well, that passage says stay where you're at. Right? You don't have to go out. Now that's the immediate context. But sometimes the rabbis looked at that and say, "Well, God wants his people to stay where they're at."

So they started saying, "Well, let's be very careful about how far we travel, because travel in the old days was a lot more laborious than it is today. I mean, if you really had to walk, think about it, even you had to walk three miles and you had to take everything with you for what you're doing. If you're going to walk to the marketplace, well, that would be a pretty big thing. It would take you some work. You would probably sweat. Well, we're not supposed to do that, it's the Sabbath. So the rabbis started to come up with how far that might be. And they took some interesting passages about things that went on in the cities of refuge and the Levite cities and they saw a designation in Scripture of 2,000 cubits. 2,000 cubits, depending on how long your forearm is, is about a half a mile, a little over half a mile, almost .6 of a mile.

And so that became kind of the standard among the rabbis. It's not a biblical restriction but it was what they said, and that is you may want to go a mile on the Sabbath but you shouldn't go a mile, you should only go about a half a mile. That's how far you should go. So again, this is a man-made rule that became, you know, somewhat out of control, as so many of the Sabbath rules did. But it was in the spirit of you should be resting on this day and not doing whatever you want. As a matter of fact, in the Old Testament God put it that way. There are a lot of things you may want to do on the Sabbath but you do what I want you to do, and you curtail the things you want to do. And you may want to take a journey and go see someone, some friend of yours in another town, but don't. Right? Relax, rest, even rest your animals, rest the field, just rest.



Now the pattern of work and rest is still legitimate. Matter of fact, I preached on that a couple of days ago at the men's retreat. I think it's important for us to rest and you should rest. But the command for us to observe the Sabbath is much like the circumcision law, which was the covenant sign of God's people, Israel, with their God. The Bible says that all of those covenant connections through a ceremonial law, they were all fulfilled in Christ. Matter of fact, everything about the temple, the sacrifices, the altar, the showbread, the candles, the priesthood, the breastplate on the priesthood, the Sabbath day, the new moon festivals, all of that were summed up in Christ and they were the "shadow of the things that were to come," the substance is in Christ, to quote Hebrews Chapter 10 verse 1.

And the point is that everything was pointing toward Christ in the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. So in reality, the command of the ceremony to rest on the Sabbath, well, that's not the command now. But the pattern of work and rest certainly preceded the Mosaic Law and that's a good thing to do. So we observe the principle of work and rest. It's a great ratio, six-to-one. Go do that. When it comes to the law the Sabbath, that's not the point. Well the point here is just telling us how far it is. It's not even a half a mile to go from the backside of the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. And that's all he's trying to say. But it is funny that it reminds us of the conditioning of the Israelites that when it came to the Sabbath, you don't do what you want to do, you do what you're told to do. Which by the way, is what's happening in the beginning of verse 12. They return to Jerusalem. Well, we're reminded in verse 11 they're men of Galilee. I mean, if you're supposed to be an evangelist, I got a lot of friends, neighbors and relatives in Galilee. I want to go back up to Galilee, 70 miles away from the Mount of Olives, that's where I want to be. But no, you go and remain in the city. Both Luke 24 says that. We learned it earlier in our passage. You're supposed to stay in the city and wait.

And so they went. They were obedient. "Hey, I don't care where you want to go. You may want to go to Jericho. You may want to go to the beach in Caesarea, you may want to go back to Galilee but I'm telling you what to do. I'm going to curtail your freedom and say, 'Do this instead of that.' And that may be what you want to do, I want you to do this thing because it's the right thing and the right thing now is to stay in Jerusalem," which by the way you've been conditioned in the Old Testament that some things you want to do, you don't do because God said don't do them. A lot of times you do things that God says you're supposed to do even when you don't feel like doing it. I mean that's just the pattern of obedience. I know I'm overemphasizing this but I'm just trying to say, here is the context of them going to Jerusalem and praying. It was a reminder that you don't always do whatever you feel like doing. You recognize your submission to what Christ tells us to do. And so much of what the Bible says to do, both Old and New Testament, is you ought to be devoted to prayer, you ought to be praying. In the context of our passage, I'm saying you ought to be praying about lost people even when you don't feel like it.

Number three, let's put it this way. Verse 12. You need to "Pray When You Don't Feel Like It." You need to pray in context of what we're talking about for evangelistic salvation of the lost, even when you don't feel like it. Even when you think, "I don't think this is going well and I don't think he's going to be saved and I'm not sure we're making any progress." Keep on praying. I mean, I mentioned it and you probably know a lot of people as well who've been praying consistently for lost people in their lives and it didn't take two weeks, it took two years, or it took 22 years. And



some it's taken 50 years. But I'm just asking you, as Jesus said in Luke 18 verse 1, to always pray and never give up. Keep on praying.

And that's the problem in our microwave society. We want to pray and we want the answer and if it doesn't come out immediately, well then, I guess it didn't work. Be devoted. Continue steadfastly in prayer. Fix it to you like super glue. And you've got it stuck in your pattern of everyday work that you are praying. If you don't feel like praying, pray anyway. You feel like the person is beyond hope, pray anyway. Keep praying. Even the number three person, that Samaria parallel, the Saul of Tarsus in your life, keep on praying. Just because you had a bad encounter are you done? Listen, keep on praying. Pray when you don't feel like it. The Bible calls us to pray. We need that. We need to not give up. It's one of the reasons our prayer groups can help us. You got your prayer partners. I was asked to preach at the singles group last Sunday night and I preached a ten-point sermon of all things. It only took me 10 hours (laughter). It didn't, it took me 10 minutes. Well it didn't. It was a little more than 10 minutes. But I started the sermon by saying I have a twelve-point outline and it's only going to take me 10 minutes. I over-promised, but it wasn't much longer than that.

And I went to a book that I was thinking was a great choice because it was a book by a very optimistic apostle in that case who looked at a church that was doing so many great things he had so much hope and optimism for that group. And he laid down these things as he crescendos in the end of the book. It was a great chapter. Anytime I go into drop into a passage, of course, I'm studying the context, and I was getting ready to talk to the Alliance group, the singles group, last Sunday night. I just wanted to preach the whole passage, which of course, Pastor Doug didn't give me enough time to preach the whole passage. But I saw the first part and I just wanted to preach that, it was a great section of Scripture. And I came back to it this week after I was done preaching there and I said, this is a passage so helpful for us as evangelistic Christians. It reminds us that the nighttime is the time that everyone likes to sleep, but you don't sleep, you're of the day, you stay alert and awake and sober. You go about the work and it talks about us putting on the helmet of salvation and going out there into warfare, the armor of God. And you continue to work this and you encourage one other, and you spur one another on. Well, there's a lot of times that you are going to want to give up, and your team can help you in this.

I was preaching at the men's retreat on Friday night and I revealed one of my jobs in college was a night watchman at a desk in a dorm on campus in Chicago. I used to try and get as many hours as I could and I could only work so many days, but I would double up my shift on some of the nights where I would do from, like, 11 o'clock at night until 7:00 in the morning. Because in my mind, theoretically, I thought how great it would be to be able to study all night. Right? Because I got all the studying to do so I can study all night long. That sounds great at 11 o'clock at night but not at 3:00 in the morning when you're by yourself, locked in this little place, behind this desk, behind this glass and it was painful.

But I thought to myself, it's funny how, by 2:00 in the morning, I'm running out of gas, just trying to stay awake with toothpicks in my eyelids. When other nights when I had papers due and I wasn't working, I knew what I did, what everyone did. I lived on the 16th floor of this dorm. We had a lounge in the middle of it, this little lounge with a refrigerator and coffee pot and all of that,



and everyone would come, if you had a paper to write or some deadline and some books to read, you would come and study together. And it was amazing how the synergy of that group encouraging us, "Don't give up. Don't stop. Don't fall asleep." We had that kind of synergistic accountability. Because our natural tendency was I want to crawl in bed and go to sleep, or I want to crawl under the desk, which I was tempted to do many times when I was working all by myself, and go to sleep.

We need other evangelistic Christians helping us pray because we're going to want to stop praying. That's why it's good to share that list because they're going to say, "How's it going with that person?" Please don't give up. You need help. We don't live the Christian life alone in our very independent, autonomous culture. We try to just take whatever we hear in a sermon, whatever we read in the Bible, and just do it ourselves. We need to never give up on praying. We need to always pray, even when we don't feel like it because we've got a team of people who are keeping my prayers rock solid on the goal of seeing people reached for Christ.

When I was reading that passage I couldn't help but think of the other passage where Paul elaborates on the armor of God, because he talks about the armor of God in First Thessalonians 5. But when I say armor of God, if you're a Sunday school graduate, you probably think of Ephesians Chapter 6 where he goes through that whole long list. And by the way, that whole passage is much more about evangelism than most people give credit for. They just jump into the context and they don't think about Paul's heart.

Well, at the end of the passage his heart becomes very clear. It's about sharing the Gospel. And he knows this: that God said he's going to build his Church and as that Church expands the evangelistic progress of the Church, it's going to bat back the gates of hell and that's how it starts. Right? I need you to continue to put the armor of God on. Why? Because we're not wrestling against flesh and blood. We have a cosmic battle going on here. As he said elsewhere to the Corinthians, "We have weapons of warfare that are not of the flesh, they're divinely powerful though for the destruction of these arguments, these lofty things that are raised up against the knowledge of God." We fight a battle. So put your armor on and get out there and represent Christ. It's a spiritual battle.

As Paul said before King Agrippa, we are there trying to turn people, not only from darkness to light, but he says from the power of Satan to God. This is a huge battle. And so he goes through the list. I remember as a kid going to church learning about the armor of God and every piece of armor had its peril and, if you know it, it talks about of the breastplate, talks about the shoes and the belt, and talks about the helmet and the sword and the shield and all that. That's great. But there is one piece that's not in the list. It's the main emphasis at the end, as it ramps into Paul's concern for evangelism.

But it always reminds me of a Broadway play and I'm not much of a Broadway play kind of guy, if you hadn't noticed. I love Compass Bible Church kids musicals. But don't take me to Hamilton or anything like that. I'm just not interested in all that. But I must admit, if you don't tell anyone, there was a play I kind of liked because I saw it on the small screen when my daughter was young. I actually watched Annie. And I don't like to admit that I liked it but there were parts of it I

kind of thought was just so quaint and so cute and I liked it. The old Annie. The little redhead, you know, curly head girl. There's one scene where they go to the radio station because they're talking about trying to find Annie's parents. And they keep flashing back and forth from the radio station where they're singing this song to where the kids are all singing listening on the radio and they're all, you know, singing and dancing. It's just a cute song. The song if, you know that play, in that scene in the movie and in the play, it's called "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile." Remember that song?

Now don't tell anybody I like that song. But I just thought it was so clever and it was so interesting and it's so well done. So, I thought well that's interesting and now I can't help it, but every time I read Ephesians Chapter 6 I think of that song. Because here are all these things we're told to dress in and at the very end, it's like, but you're not fully dressed without this. Put on all that stuff. Think about your salvation, think about readiness, think about the Word of God, think of all these things, faith and shield and all that. And then at the end it doesn't give it a parallel to the armor of the soldier, but let me read how it ends. After all of that, the last thing he discusses, the sword of the Spirit, we got the Word, we're bringing the word, he says this: "And praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayers and all supplication." You couldn't have said that stronger. And he says, "And pray for me." I mean, you want to do all this? I got the armor on and I need prayer and I'm praying, pray for me that I can "boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel," and I can declare it boldly as I ought to speak. Sounds exactly like Colossians 4, it's the same idea. But it's preceded with put on the armor of God and then you're never fully dressed without you praying. And not just sometimes. Praying at all times in the Spirit, the Spirit accomplishing what we know we can't accomplish. Boldness, opportunities, clarity, conviction, regeneration.

A lot of folks in our church, they love the Word, they love theology, they're pro-gospel, they're pro-evangelism, they're ready, they study apologetics. But we're not going anywhere without prayer. It is revolutionary. It's the thing that changes hearts. "Asking in prayer." Mark 11:24. That is the goal. I want to commission you to pray. Pray with three people, about four non-Christians, praying five things. Three, four, five. Can you remember that today? What did you learn in church? If the waiter asks you at lunch: three, four, five. I got three evangelistic Christians praying with me about four non-Christians. Five things that the Holy Spirit needs to do. You do that. You put the sermon to good work. This is exactly what our troops need to be devoted to prayer.

Let's pray. God, as we think about prayer and our prayer life, we want to pray for our prayers. We want to pray that we would pray, even when we don't feel like it, even when we're struggling with faith to believe that you're going to work in someone's life. Just like everyone shied away from Saul of Tarsus thinking he could never be saved, God, I pray that we would have the kind of faith that is bolstered by not just praying in our closet by ourselves but sharing our prayer requests just like Jesus did saying, "Hey you, Peter, James and John, pray with me. Come and pray with me."

God, I know our time may preclude praying every day with three other people about non-Christians but God we can share, thanks for technology, we can shoot a text or an email. We can connect with other people and say, please be praying for these four people. And then, God, may that built-in accountability start happening and then, God, oh, we can't wait to hear that some of



the people from the thousands of people who have been written down because of this church and the royal task getting serious about evangelism, God, we can't wait to hear of thanksgiving that is multiplied because some of those people are coming to faith in Christ. God, give us those stories of conversion that we know is just the beginning of a path of sanctification in the Christian life. Calling more people to us that we might be in this community, salt and light and a beacon of the gospel. And God, let us get so crowded here we got to continue to accelerate church planting. We want to see more people reached, start a movement here in our church as people get serious about sharing the gospel. Thanks for this team, God, for the folks in this room who have been faithful just to respond to the counsel of their pastor regarding non-Christians, regarding what to pray for, about who to pray with, and about identifying those that need salvation. God, honor them for that kind of responsiveness to the preaching this morning. And let us hear good things because of it.

In Jesus name. Amen