



## **Back to the Basics-Part 2**

### **How to Pray and Making Sure We Do**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, we are on a little break from the book of Romans, and we are taking a bit of an excursus to go back to the basics, as the cover of your bulletin says. We want to get back to the fundamental issues and disciplines of the Christian life. Because if you take these two things out, one that we talked about last week, one that we'll talk about today, you really don't have biblical Christianity. You have more of a social club, a cultural tradition, a place for like-minded friendships and, you know, belonging and community. You'll have all that, see? But you won't have the church of Jesus Christ, which is really about, ultimately, although not devoid of our horizontal connections, it is ultimately about a vertical relationship with our Creator. It is about getting right with the living God, it is about us being children of God and connecting with God.

And if we don't have the topic that we dealt with last week as a valued, prioritized part of your life, or if we don't have the topic of this week as a prioritized, valued part of your schedule, then we don't have biblical Christianity. You're not then really relating to the God who made you. Instead, we're just kind of hanging out together. It can get to a place where we're spending more time exegeting one another's conversation on the patio than we are exegeting the words of God. We can spend more time talking to fellow churchgoers than we are talking to the living God. I mean, that's what I'm saying.

We cannot take this out of biblical Christianity. We have to be people, to put words to it, of the Scriptures, and we have to be people of prayer. We have to be men and women of the Bible, and we have to be people that regularly talk to God. These have to be there.

So, last week, you might remember, I tried to press this as not an end in itself, because I don't want to just burden you with, oh, you know what, spend more time, less *American Idol*, and less *Sports Illustrated*, more time Bible, more time praying. These aren't mechanical duties or assignments. I hope you recognize that.

And I tried to illustrate that by discussing the couple of years, at that time, soon-to-be wife and I were separated by 2,000 miles. She was at UCI. I was at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and we carried on this long-distance relationship, which was a strain, and it was hard. But I said, when I went to the mailbox to get the letters out, you remember this illustration, and I read them, it wasn't about the letter and being a great exegete of the letter. It was about the person that wrote the letter. See, that was critical.



And I know I kind of painted myself as someone who lived in the Stone Age. We didn't have email and text messaging and cell phones. But, you know, we did have telephones. Those were invented at the time. And, you know, I left that out because I wanted to save that for today. Because, yes, we need to read the letters that come from our beloved because we want to relate to our beloved in a long-distance setting. But we also can pick up the phone and we can communicate and pour out our heart to the one that we love. And I'll tell you, both of those are necessary because, though we may not like it, you super spirituals may not like it, we live in a long-distance relationship with God.

I mean, that's what we saw. We even referenced the passage last week in 1 Corinthians 13 that says, you know, we know in part, right? The prophets, they prophesy in part. We look through a glass dimly, right? We don't see Him for what He really is, as John says in 1 John 3. But then, as 1 Corinthians 13 says, we'll see Him face to face. And as John said, we'll see Him, and then we'll be like Him. As Paul said, we're going to be knowing Him as fully and as completely as He now knows us.

So the point is, we're separated. And though we have a relationship with God, it's a long-distance relationship. Then I won't be preaching to you. When we meet on the other side and we chat, I'm not going to have sermons for you about Bible study and prayer, okay? Because we'll be in a relationship that is personal, it's there, physical, in the presence of God on earth. It will be a whole different kind of relationship.

But until then, until the day you die, and if I'm going to be your pastor, I've got lots of messages for you. Every now and then, we'll take a break from whatever we're doing to get back to the basics. Are we in the Word of God? Are we cultivating our relationship with God in the Word? And are we people of prayer?

And to help us with that this morning, to take some instruction from God's Word, I want to turn you to Colossians chapter 4, and I want to look at three verses this morning as we think about what God would say about my relationship to prayer. Not as a mechanical duty. I'm now quoting John Bunyan, who said this in his *Pilgrim's Prayer Book*, if you know him. It is about cultivating a relationship with the most important person in our lives. That's what prayer is about. That's what Bible study is about. But we've got to continue to do it.

As Paul says, if you found it there, Colossians 4:2, he says, *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. And at the same time, verse 3 says, pray for us also that God may open a door to us for the word to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.*



Please pray for us. That comes on the heels of, you got to be continuing steadfastly in prayer. Now, that's a mouthful right there. Probably "steadfastly" is not something you've said this week. That's a bit of an archaic word, but the translators of the ESV have taken one Greek word and translated it, "continue steadfastly." And that not consistently in the 10 times that Greek word appears in the Greek New Testament. It's translated variously, but it's not a bad translation. It's a bit archaic and a bit wordy, but even if you looked up the word steadfastly in the Scripture, it does carry the weight of this Greek word, and that means you need to be faithful to it. You need to be loyal to it, and you need to continue to be loyal and faithful in this.

Elsewhere in the Greek New Testament, we find it, and it's translated in the English text, including the ESV, into words like "devoted" or "to be constant in" something. It has that flavor of being committed to it, of being resolved to do it, deciding to do it. You know, almost this kind of promise that we're going to do it. It is a resolute, volitional decision that we're going to be people of prayer and we're going to continue to pray and make it a part of our regular daily lives.

So number one on your outline, let's just jot that down and let's think through the topic. We need to recommit ourselves to prayer. Recommit yourself to prayer. And I'm assuming as a Christian at some point, whether you had to commit to it or not, you had a pattern of praying that was, you know, exciting to get involved and you got involved in it. And all I'm saying, the weight of this word gives us the feeling that we got to continue to do that. Continue to resolve, continue to commit, recommit yourself to say, I need to pray.

Now, I don't need to, you know, bang you over the head with that crowbar of guilt because most of us can sit here for our Christians and say, yeah, we need to pray more. But before you take the word or the subject of prayer and define it too narrowly, I would like you to think about what we're talking about when we use the word prayer.

If you picture yourself in one particular place, doing one particular thing, in one particular posture, you may be thinking too narrowly about what prayer is, and it may mess you up. So let me give you a definition, whether you trust me on my definition or not, based on all that I read in the Bible, all that I've studied about prayer. If I'm going to get down to the *synquino*, the essential components of this activity, what is it? Okay, here's the Mike Fabarez definition. You ready? Prayer is... Here's what prayer is: it is consciously and purposefully expressing my thoughts to God. Consciously and purposefully expressing my thoughts to God.

It's taking what's in my mind. It doesn't happen without me knowing it. It's conscious, right? It's not just God looking at my thoughts. And it's purposefully, it's at a moment in time, I decide to take what's in my mind and to express it to God. That is a definition of prayer. I haven't found it



anywhere else, but that's my definition of what I find is the basic element of what we mean by the word prayer in the Bible.

I say that because if you use just that picture of you verbalizing something by your bedside on your knees with your fingers interlaced and your head bowed and your eyes closed, that may be too narrow. Because you'll see throughout the Bible, there are people doing a thing that the Bible calls prayer that aren't in that kind of setting. Often they're not saying anything out loud because it's something that's happening in their mind. And it's not just the static of their brain. It's the purposeful, conscious expression of what they're thinking, often in the form of a request or a thanksgiving or a petition or interceding for someone else, but it's something going on here.

Now, when you define prayer that way, as a bare-bones definition, you can start to recognize that that can happen whether you say something out loud or whether you don't say anything out loud, and you start thinking about when you, in your mind, take thoughts and want to express them to someone else. You do that in a variety of expressions.

Today, don't we all utilize email? I don't say anything to you when I send you an email, but I take my fingers and I type out sentences, and in those sentences, my goal is to communicate. I hit send, and off it goes, and I'm trying to get what's in my mind in your mind, and to do that, I'm using sentences. I'm writing something.

Even in that, you can recognize that a written prayer is indeed a valid prayer. You can recognize, too, that in the Scriptures, you don't even have to... I mean, you look in the Scriptures in the 150 Psalms that we have, or you can look on the screen when we sing lyrics in church, some of those lyrics are written grammatically as, you know, directed statements to God. Now, just because you're singing them, if in your mind you're taking those words and those become your thoughts, and you're consciously and purposefully expressing those to God, even though we're hearing you sing, in reality what you're doing is you're praying. See? Because at the core of what we mean, it is a purposeful, conscious expression of my thoughts to God.

No matter what the content is, no matter what I'm talking about, I'm expressing myself to God. Sometimes it's out loud, sometimes it's in my head, sometimes it's in a song, sometimes it's in a written statement that I type out on my computer or something I write in a journal. But if I'm expressing those thoughts to God and the intention is to direct them to God, then that is prayer.

Now that may help enough just to say, okay, that broadens the kinds of expressions of prayer, and I'm participating in prayer, but this may help even more. There are two categories of prayers in the



Bible, and by that I mean two kinds of prayers, two types of praying, okay? And now that we've kind of defined it in the most basic way that we can, let us think through in the Bible the two basic ways. You can throw most prayers in the Bible into one of the two buckets that I'm about to describe.

The first one, let's find an example of it in Nehemiah chapter 2. So once you get ready to record this in your notes or whatever you're doing there, turn to Nehemiah chapter 2 with me. Because the first kind of praying, it may, I mean, I'm not going to surprise you, but it's going to be an example of what you've heard in a verse that most of you, if you grew up in church, you've heard from the time you were a little kid in Sunday school. It was one of those memory verses you couldn't wait to get to because it was just above the difficulty of "Jesus wept." Okay? And it's 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Matter of fact, I'd love for you to write that in the margin because I don't think your reference Bibles nor your study Bibles will probably connect these two passages. But Nehemiah chapter 2 verses 1 through 5 is an example of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which is simply three words: *Pray without*—you know it—*ceasing*. Don't stop. Keep going.

I remember reading that as a skeptical little church punk and thinking, well, no one can do that. I got to go to school. I mean, my parents, I got to go to work. We got to talk to people. I can't pray all the time. Well, that's a ridiculous verse. Pray without ceasing.

Well, obviously, we're not talking about monks here. People, you know, going up into monasteries and not dealing with people or having other work. There's some kind of punctuated conversation with God that takes place while you're doing other things. See?

So this is category number one. And let me give you this as a title, as a category. Category number one that we're about to see an example of is what I call conversational prayer. Conversational prayer. And some campus groups have used that phrase to describe a different kind of praying that I'm not talking about. What I'm talking about is the kind of discussion that I might have with someone where I'm focused on something else, but continuing to talk to them because they're in my presence.

I can drive down the road, and I'm very much concerned about when the traffic light changes and the flow of traffic and how fast I'm going. I'm focusing on something else, but if I've got someone in my passenger seat, I'm having punctuated conversation, right? I even have the radio on, and I'm listening to the news, and I'm watching the traffic, but I'm having conversation because this person's sitting right next to me, and I'm not going to ignore them. I'm going to converse with

them. I'm going to talk to them. I'm going to punctuate my mental activity from focusing on what I'm doing to talking with the person who's next to me.

That's what I call conversational prayer. Here's a good example. It's about a guy who's in the middle of his workday talking to his boss, okay? So picture that. Here he is. His name's Nehemiah. He's talking to the king. Look at verse number two. The king says to Nehemiah, *Why is your face so sad, seeing that you're not sick? I know you're not sick. What's wrong with you? This is—* Nehemiah 2:2—*This is nothing but sadness of heart.* Obviously, you're depressed about something. What's wrong with you, Nehemiah?

Then, Nehemiah says, autobiographically, *I was very much afraid.* I mean, here was a question. I was afraid to bring it up, and there was a lot of implications if he were to do what I was thinking and what was on my heart. So I started getting nervous, verse 3. *I said to the king, "Let the king live forever"*—which is always a good way to start a conversation with your boss if you've got something hard to say. May you be the CEO forever and ever. *Let the king live forever.* Sorry. *Why should not my face be sad,* Nehemiah says, *when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, that's Jerusalem, lies in ruins? I'm over here in Persia, and I'm looking across the desert there and hearing news of bad stuff in Jerusalem. Its gates have been destroyed by fire. Man, I'm bummed out about my hometown and about the place of worship and about the city of Jerusalem.*

*Then the king said to me, "Well, what are you requesting? Are you trying to ask me something here? I mean, you're thinking about that place? Okay, be clear, man. What do you want?"* Look at this last phrase in verse number four. Underline it and put in the margin, "1 Thess 5:17." *So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

Now, when your boss asks you a question in the middle of a work meeting, you don't say, "Excuse me, got to go to a prayer meeting now," right? Bad, bad idea. Because that's not what happens. He's not leaving to go to a prayer meeting. He's not leaving to go get down on his knees behind his desk and start praying. He says right here, between question and answer, which follows right after it in verse 5: *And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, send me to Judah and the city of my fathers' graves that I may rebuild."* I want to go back and be part of rebuilding Jerusalem.

Now, between question and answer, here's the line: *I prayed to the God of heaven.* So whatever's going on in Nehemiah's head, he's conscious of the presence of God in his life, the omnipotence of God, the omniscience of God, the omnipresence of God, and as he's about to answer a question, his mind now expresses consciously and purposefully his mind to God. And this, I'm assuming, in the form of a petition, right?

And I don't know what he says. He doesn't tell us what he prayed, but he probably prayed something like this. "Don't blow it, Nehemiah. God, help me not to make a big blunder here. Help me to say the right things. Help me to say it the right way." I don't know. But a real quick prayer went up before God, and he says, "God, help me. Now, here's my answer. The city's torn down. I want to go back. And that's big. It's scary. You're asking for a leave of absence from your job. You're going to ask him for supplies."

I mean, this is prayer. Do you see how that works? Conversational prayer. "Pray without ceasing" means that I am aware of God in every meeting that I'm in all day long, in every activity that I'm in, in every commute that I make, and every time I'm sitting around and talking to people, and that every now and then my thoughts express themselves to God. It can be thanksgiving. It can be a request. That's prayer. Category number one: conversational prayer.

There's another kind of praying we can get an example of in the book of Daniel. Not too far from here. Nehemiah—you're in Nehemiah—go to the book of Daniel. Turn toward the end of the book, and you'll see, as we start to approach the end of the Old Testament, here's the book of Daniel. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel.

This is a second kind of praying. It's a little different. If you look at chapter 6 of Daniel, you'll see the heading at the top of this paragraph. It is the reason Daniel gets thrown to the lions. He's getting thrown to the lions because of his prayer life. And it's not because he's sneaking in private, quiet, undetected requests to God between sentences with his boss. That's not the kind of praying he gets in trouble for. He gets in trouble for a different kind of praying. A kind of praying that once you find the passage, I'm going to call it concentrated praying.

There's a difference between conversational praying and concentrated praying. It's the difference I often try to sketch out in our fellowship. Maybe you've heard me preach on Acts chapter 2:42–47 there. I talk about fellowship where we fellowship and have relationship doing things where our chairs are side by side. You remember preaching on this? That's a certain kind of fellowship. Then there's a kind of fellowship where our chairs go face to face. Remember that?

Same thing here. There's a kind of praying where it's kind of like I'm going about my business, concentrating on something, but I'm aware of God, so I direct thoughts to God throughout the day. I punctuate my activities with expressing my thoughts to God. This is, though, when the chairs, so to speak, go face to face, where I say no to everything else that I'm focused on, and now I'm focused directly on communication with the living God.

That's what Daniel gets in trouble for. And look at verse number 10. We get an explanation of it. *Daniel, he knew that the document had been signed.* Context, by the way, his jealous, envious co-workers hated Daniel, wanted to take him down. They couldn't find anything that he did in terms of impropriety because he was a man of integrity. So what they said is, "I know the guy prays in a concentrated fashion. Let's make a law with the king. We'll have him sign it that he can't pray to any other person than the king of Medo-Persia. So we'll get him in trouble. We'll take, you know, pictures of him on our, you know, our flip video that'll get him praying and, sorry, we'll testify that he's praying in a concentrated way."

Let's see it now. *Daniel knew the document had been signed*, that you weren't supposed to pray to anybody else. He didn't care. *He went to his house where he had the windows in his upper chamber toward Jerusalem.* So he goes into his house, he goes upstairs to the very top floor, got a window there, happens to face toward Jerusalem. *He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.*

Now, Daniel is described, not only in Daniel, but throughout the Bible as a godly man. Godly men should be doing what Paul asks godly people in the New Testament to do, that's "pray without ceasing." This is not without ceasing. This is three times a day. So this is a different kind of praying. It's a kind of praying that affects his posture. He goes to a certain place in his house to do it, the upper chamber. He's got a window open because he's thinking of his homeland, just like Nehemiah of Jerusalem. Both of them are during this period of the exile. And that's a different kind of praying, three times a day, on his knees, talking specifically, concentrated to God.

Okay, since Paul doesn't tell us in Colossians chapter 4 what kind of prayer he has in mind, although I could probably figure out which one he's thinking of, I think if the Bible presents us with two kinds of praying, we need to step it up in both realms. You need to be continuing steadfastly in conversing with God throughout the day. And if you're thinking, "I'm pretty good at that," then we need to make sure also we're good at those concentrated times of prayer where you say no to everything else. You're not focused on your work. You're not focused on driving. You're not focused on showering. You're not focused on something else. You're focusing on just talking to God.

Both of those need to be a high priority for the Christian. Both of those are critical for our relationship with God. Both of those need our resolve, right? We've got to do it. Because a lot of people say that they're praying. As a matter of fact, here's some stats for you. Four out of five Americans say that they speak to some higher power. They say, "We pray." Four out of five, okay?



But when it comes to statistics and polls that really track the behavior, not just of the average Joe on the street, but people who are church-going, professing Christians—I mean, I’ve read so many of these surveys over the years, and they most consistently will tell you that professing Christians pray less than five minutes a day. Less than five minutes a day. So you may say, all Americans may wave the banner, “Oh yeah, I pray,” but they’re not devoted to prayer. They’re not resolved to praying. They don’t make it a priority.

We got to move it from, “Yeah, I occasionally do that,” to, “This is really a devoted, committed, resolved part of my life.” It’s like people who say they play golf. Everybody seems to say they play golf. Over 30 million people in America say they play golf. But if you look up the stats of people that go into the clubhouse when they’re done and post on the little USGA posting thing there, half of them don’t break 100, okay? So, I mean, you may be a card-carrying golfer, right? But trust me, if you can’t get under 100, you’re no devoted golfer. You need to pick up tennis or something else, right? Because that’s not a good score.

Do you see what I’m saying here? People can be the weekend hacker. We don’t want that in Christianity—people that occasionally pray like somebody, you know, speaking to a higher power at AA. We’re talking about Christians who know that this is an essential part of their relationship, vertical relationship, with the God of the universe to whom they have been reconciled. And it is a devoted part of our lives. We got to pray more, don’t we?

Start with a commitment. God, God, I will pray more. Just in your heart you express that. It’s a Nehemiah-style prayer. Don’t close your, you know, bow your head and start mumbling or get on your knees. Just in your mind you say, “God, he’s right. I need to be committed to praying. I will commit myself to pray more.” Great. That’s good, but it won’t be easy. It’s going to be hard. I know it’s going to be hard.

By the way, I always see prayer and the commands to pray associated with another command, and it’s found in the second part of Colossians 4:2. The middle of the verse, it says this. Oh yeah, be devoted to prayer. *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it.* Let’s tackle that now. Being watchful in it.

Now that sounds like a bit of an oxymoron, does it not? Now why is this oxymoronic? Think about it. Because when you were taught to pray, you were taught to pray how? With eyes closed. And now the command that goes with prayer is, “Hey, be watchful in it.” I don’t get your hands slapped as a kid in Sunday school. I mean, think about that. Be watchful in it.

Well, obviously we're not talking about your eyelids and your eyeballs. This is a command that is given to us with a kind of a mental picture of someone being a watchman, and that's always a defensive posture. I mean, someone who is a watchman stands up on the wall and looks out for problems, approaching problems on the horizon. So the watchman, that's defensive. Well, how did that get connected with prayer?

Glad you asked. Turn with me to the Gospel of Mark. Paul picks up the vocabulary from a classic historic scene in the life of Christ. Look at it with me in the Gospel of Mark. Mark chapter 14. Here's where the terminology "watchful" and "watch" comes from as it relates to prayer.

Garden of Gethsemane, you know the setting. Jesus is about to be betrayed, and then the next day he's going to be crucified. He's going to go through the kangaroo court all night. It's going to be a tough night. He's in the garden praying just outside the walls of Jerusalem. He takes Peter, James, and John with him. Go all the way down to verse 35. Now he starts to pray.

*Going a little farther, he, that is Christ, fell on the ground, and he prayed that if possible, the hour might pass.* Now, you can only imagine what it would be like to consider your own Roman crucifixion. That was horrible.

Verse 36, Mark 14:36: *And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet, not what I will, but what you will."* Then he came and found them, Peter, James, and John, who he brought with him. *And they were sleeping.* He found them sleeping. And he says to Peter, *"Simon, are you asleep? Could you not?"*—now circle this—"watch for one hour?"

Now, if you don't know what he's about to say, that sounds like, "I'm going to go pray. You look out to see if any Roman soldiers show up, and you alert me. You're the watchman. You protect. We're here at nighttime in the olive tree-strewn garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. And can you watch out? You see some shifting shadows. You let me know. You go watch. I'm going to pray." That's not what he's got in mind, verse 38. Now he makes it clear.

*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* Now we quote that all the time about peach pie and, you know, turkey at Thanksgiving. That's not what this is about. The context here is about praying. And it's about not falling to temptation, not being weak in praying. What kind of praying? A prayer that is lethargic, sleepy, my mind wanders, I go from "Oh Lord" to snoring, okay? No. Be alert, be defensive, be careful.



And I know that you know you need to do that. And some of you here have just in your heart said to God, "I'm resolved. I'm recommitted to do that." Now, here's what I'm going to say to you: it's going to be hard, because there are enemies that press against this. If you're visiting, this is all new to you. It sounds like, but here's the deal: we're in a spiritual battle. There is a God. There are these beings called demons. There is an enemy called Satan who dispatches them. And you know what they're very concerned with? Making sure that you don't spend time in prayer. That is what they're concerned about.

Why? Well, look at it this way. In 2 Corinthians, Paul equates Satan to a temptress, like a seductress. Now think this through. Now that makes sense, fitting the picture of Genesis. In Genesis 3, here's this relationship Adam and Eve have with God, and here comes the slithery little deceiver to try and get in between it all, cause Eve to doubt God, and then it all goes downhill.

Paul brings that back up, and he says, *I have betrothed you as a pure virgin to Christ*. Now he's picturing our relationship with Christ like you're His girlfriend, you're His betrothed bride-to-be. He says, "You be on guard, because Satan wants to distract you from that. He wants to pull you away from that."

Now back to the college scene, right? Got a long-distance relationship. You want to marry this gal. You're the betrothed, let's put it that way. Now there's two things I guarantee you that the seductress does not want you to do if the seductress does not want you with your betrothed—your beloved in a long-distance relationship, right?

Well, one would be when you reach to the mailbox to pull out a letter from your beloved. You think that your seductress wants you reading that? Not a chance. Certainly not twice. Not lingering on any sentence, that's for sure. Matter of fact, if your seductress can rip it out of your hand or put you to sleep, that's exactly what... that'd be a good thing. That's why our Bible study is so hard.

Or how about this: when you reach for the phone to talk to your girlfriend, do you think that the one that wants to break you up wants you to be talking on the phone to her? No way. The temptress doesn't want that. That is why Chrysostom said it well in the fourth century. Do you know John Chrysostom? John was his name. They called him "Chrysostom" later, because *chrysostom* means "golden mouth," because he was such a great preacher, and a lot was recorded from his sermons in the city which is now Istanbul in Turkey.

And he preached to these folks, and he had a great, you know, repertoire of pithy statements, and one of them was this. Ready? That was a long setup. I could have just said Chrysostom, and that



would have been enough. But maybe that'll get you excited about reading about John Chrysostom. John Chrysostom said this: he said, *Satan knows how great good praying is. That is why he presses so heavily upon us when we pray.*

That is why someone who wants you broken up, when you start walking toward the phone booth—thinking back in the archaic days again before cell phones when I was in college—she's going to want to intercept that. She doesn't want you going there talking to her. Do you get that? That's the picture.

You need to be prepared for a battle. So to be watchful in prayer is so appropriate in the Bible. Because if you are going to be committed to praying, or as it says, continue steadfastly in prayer, you're going to have to have a defensive posture about your prayer life. You're going to have to be watchful in prayer. And that has nothing to do with your eyeballs. It has to do with you being guarded in your prayer time.

Number two on your outline, let's just put it that way: you need to guard your prayer time. Guard it. Be watchful in it. Be defensive about it. You're going to need to work hard to make this happen. You're going to have to slap the hand, so to speak, of the one wanting you not to go to prayer. There's no way you're going to fight that.

Okay, guard your prayer time. I mean, I hope I've established logically and biblically it makes sense to guard your prayer time. How do you do it? That's a good question. Now I'm on to the pastoral part here. This is not in our passage, but let me give you some themes throughout the Scripture that may help you guard your prayer time. You want to know how to guard your prayer time so that you can stay focused and going in your prayer life, and it will continue on without all this distraction, the weakness of wandering minds and all that? Here's the first thing that I find is a pattern in Scripture.

We've already referred to it in Daniel's life. Daniel just didn't start praying on the way home through the marketplace of Babylon or Medo-Persia at that point. What did he do? He went into his house, up to the upper chamber, into a room, got on his knees. Here's the first thing: you need to guard your prayer time with a good place. Have a good place to pray. That is important because it is the pattern of Scripture that they're always talking about the places they pray.

Jesus says, go into your—does He say living room? No—your inner room, right? Translation, some translations call it your closet. It's a room with no windows. It's a room that is isolated, okay?



Or how about this? Here's some passages for you. Matthew 14:23, from Christ's life: *Jesus went up to a mountain to pray.* It wasn't for good views or fresh air, okay? That was so He could be in a place that was conducive to focus on His Father.

How about this? Luke 5:16. Luke describes Jesus as *withdrawing*—I love that—to *desolate places to pray*. That's how he describes it. And that might include the mountain, and that might include this place behind the olive garden in Gethsemane. He finds desolate places, places that are conducive to focused, guarded prayer. You need to have a place that is good. And you may, "Well, mountains, that would be good. Well, I'll drive to Big Bear and pray." We're talking about a place you can get to all the time, right, regularly, which for you is probably more likely to be your closet than a mountain. But it needs to be a protected place.

I jokingly said to one guy after the last service, you know, he said, "I've got a place. I'm going to get to my prayer place." And I said, "Great, don't tell anybody." Because even in the passage that I just read, they were always looking for Jesus, right? Always looking for Jesus, but He was in a desolate place praying.

D.L. Moody, in his biography, it says this of Moody—you know who Moody is. It says, *When no other place was available, Mr. Moody—this is in his biography—would pray in the coal shed, pouring out his heart to God.* I just love that. I don't have a coal shed, but if you have a place that's like a coal shed, where no one would think Mr. Moody would be, have a good place. That'll help guard your prayer time.

How about this? Have some appropriate times for prayer. Secondly, appropriate times. Jot this one down: Mark 1:35. Mark 1:35. Not only do we get in this verse a description of the kinds of places Jesus went, but we have a description of the kinds of times Jesus went there. Let me read it for you: *And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Mark wants to make clear, He, Christ, departed and went out to a desolate place where He prayed.*

Okay? So I know this about Christ. He was trying to find places and times that were conducive to focus, concentrated praying. And that's really what I'm talking about here in guarding our prayer times. Hopefully, what you need to do to make conversational prayer happen is just remember God is with you all day and talk to Him. But when it comes to the even more difficult, concentrated times of prayer, you're going to need to guard that time even more. And that's going to need some conducive places, some conducive times.



Unfortunately, for a lot of you, your prayer time is a lot like your church giving. How about that? Let's throw two crowbars of guilt at you at one time. A lot of people say, "Yeah, it's a good thing. I need to give because God says I need to give. Support the church. That's what it's all about. Gift to God." But we try to decide to give Him what is left over. And we know how that goes. There never is, right? Rarely is there anything left over.

Some of you treat your prayer life the same way. "When I get everything done I got to do, I'll get the kids in bed, I get the kids showered, get kids dealt with, dinner, when it's all done, then I'm going to pray, right at 11:30 near my bed, okay? In my bed. Lights off. No, lights off, head on pillow, on my side. 'Dear Lord, I just...'" That's a really great time to pray. No, not. You want to have some conversational prayers, you go off to bed, that's great. Concentrated time? Not a good time.

You got to find an appropriate time. Jesus found times that He thought would be most unlikely that people would come looking for Him. It was a time when He was starting His day. He was going off, a little exercise to get there, right? And then He gets to some place that is desolate, conducive, and during a time where He can pray undistracted.

You want to guard your prayer time? Do it with a good place. Do it with some appropriate times, and then this one will open just a plethora of things. But number three, or letter C, we need to do it with helpful methods. Helpful methods.

Let's start with some biblical methods, okay? Number one, or letter A, or sub-point I, or however you're doing it at this point. Ready for this one? Here's a method I find in the Bible, Acts 12:12. Here's one that's good: in groups. In groups. In groups.

Because some of these times it's hard to pray because my mind will wander and I get distracted. And even if I got a good time and a good place, sometimes that happens. But here's something that's more likely: I'm more likely to start a sentence in prayer and finish the sentence in a cogent, coherent way when you're there with me and we're praying together. Right? So there's a method that helps. And the early church would gather in people's homes and they would pray together. That's the Acts 12:12 passage that I just gave you. And it happened to be, interestingly enough, if you know your Bible, Colossians 4:10 talks about Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, who's called John Mark. And it happened in Mary's house. Mary was the mother of John Mark. Way too much information. But the bottom line is there is a connection to Colossians 4, and didn't need to start that paragraph. But the point is this: pray with some people.



I have several prayer meetings throughout the week where I pray with other people, and I tell you that it is something that helps me keep my mind on track because I know I'm going to pray with you. If you're in a home fellowship group, I trust your home fellowship group has a time of prayer. I hope you're not falling asleep during your group time of prayer at home fellowship group. You're less likely to do that than if you're doing it on your own at 11:30 at night. You're probably starting sentences and finishing them in prayer, and that's partly because you're in a group.

Okay, another one. Letter B, number two, I, I, however you've got it. You guys still with me on this? Okay, just making sure. How about this one: various postures. Postures. How your body is, okay?

Some of us, again, too narrowly think of prayer in one little package, and it's, you know, I don't know, however you do it, you think of it that way. You know that throughout the Bible, we have no set posture in praying. Matter of fact, we have a wide variety of postures in praying. I just got my Bible out this week and just for half an hour just started looking for various postures in prayer. Going through examples, I thought of the people praying. I thought, what was their posture? All over the map.

The most rare posture was the one I use the most. And I thought, well, maybe that tells me something. And that is, I can only find one example of somebody sitting while they prayed. And that was David. And it wasn't a good scene in his life. But David was sitting.

If you look through the Bible, here's some I came up with real quick. Hannah, 1 Samuel 1, she is standing as she prays. She's by herself there praying, standing. Solomon, we just read about this, he kneels down on his knees and prays. We just saw Daniel do the same thing. Hezekiah is described as praying with his head bowed, okay, which most of us do that. Stephen has his eyes open and his eyes are up in the sky when he prays, at least in the scene that I'm thinking of there in Acts. Joshua puts his face on the ground. The picture you might see in the Middle East of a Muslim praying. His forehead goes down to the ground and Joshua prays. Moses, remember him? On more than one occasion, he prays with his hands lifted up, as David talked about in the Psalms. When he started his concentrated time of praying, his hands were raised. Abraham, he was stretched out flat, the Bible says, completely laid out on the ground, praying to God.

All I'm saying is this: why not mix up the posture a little bit in your concentrated times of praying so that you can keep your mind engaged, because that's the whole point, to purposefully, consciously express my thoughts to God, and it would be helpful sometimes if your posture was mixed up.



Now, if you find an inner room and you're laying on your face and your kids find you, it may be a scary experience, but I'm just thinking through all the possible places we could find you this week in weird postures, in weird places, at weird times. But mix up the postures. Conducive time, conducive place, some methods like praying in groups, various postures. Those are biblical examples.

Let me give you some outside the Bible. These are personal. These are just examples. But there's one thing that I do, and the staff people I work with and the pastors that I work with will tell you this. I like to pace when I talk. I just do that in meetings. I do that in, you know, any time I get into a serious conversation, I'm a pacer. And so I recognize, look, if that's part of me articulating in a meeting, I should incorporate that into the varied ways that I pray. And I have a spot that is specifically that, I mean, it's just perfect for me pacing and praying. And I wish I could tell you I've worn a hole in the carpet. I haven't. But that is a pattern of me trying to keep my mind focused and pacing. And I do it with my eyes open so that I don't bang my head against the wall. But I pace and pray. That's been helpful for me.

Here's another thing. I've already described the fact that the essence of prayer is purposefully, consciously expressing my thoughts to God. And I said, by way of example, sometimes we write emails to people. Why wouldn't that be a form of prayer? Well, of course it is, right? If I can sit down with my computer, open a Word doc, call it "prayers," and start expressing as I would on an email to God and putting my thoughts in sentences with starting capital letters and ending in a period, and my mind starts to now express itself to God in written format, don't tell me that's not praying. That *is* praying. It is taking my mind, expressing my thoughts clearly and consciously and purposefully to God.

So maybe you need to do that. Maybe if you like to actually write, take a yellow tablet or a notebook and you get a pen and you write your journal, prayer journal.

Now, I don't suggest this last one, last example, for all of you, but it can work for some of you: singing your prayers. I'm not talking about, you know, scatting or rapping. I'm talking about you find songs that are already written, and they are written as prayers to God, and maybe you start to build a repertoire of these. You can find all kinds of websites that'll have these hymns and songs and current Christian songs, and you find the lyrics, and you recognize, "You know, that's the kind of thing I want to say to God right now." And if you find some of these websites, and a lot of times they'll have the little MIDI button there, the play button, you hit it, and this weird music comes on, and you can sing your prayers to God. That's legitimate praying, is it not? Yeah. Not the only way you should pray, but it may work unless you're a terrible singer. And then I guess it wouldn't matter too much as long as it keeps your mind engaged to help guard your prayer time.



*Continue steadfastly in prayer.* That's a commitment to do it. *Being watchful in it*, that's being protective of it. *With thanksgiving*, that's the third thing we see in the bottom of verse 2 of Colossians 4, is it not? To do it with thanksgiving.

Now here's my caveat on this. Right up front I know that thanksgiving is a broad topic and there's lots of aspects to it, and there's a lot you could say about the relationship of thanksgiving to prayer, okay? I am knowingly and purposefully, just right now, going to take one facet of that, extract that from the concept of being thankful in prayer, and then unfold that with what the rest of the Scripture has to say and say, "Well, this is an important part of praying as well." Okay? Did you follow any of that?

Here's what I'm trying to say, okay? When I'm asked in my praying to be thankful in my praying, it is a safeguard against the kind of praying that can't be done if I'm being thankful. I'm getting to the point. Are you ready? Here's my point: a lot of our praying is just like sitting on Santa's lap or something, right? "God, I just want a red tricycle and give me a wagon and I need a red ball and a BB gun," and blah, blah, blah. You know, our adult list, translated into an adult. We have that. "God, I need this. Aunt Myrtle's hip, my money this month, my wife I'm married to, my kids." That can be our praying.

Here it says, pray with thanksgiving. Now, if you're told to pray with thanksgiving, here's what happens to your long laundry list of things that you want from God. You have to pause all of that, and you have to start thinking about God and the character of God and how God has given you whatever He's given you. And now, all of a sudden, my mind goes from my wants and my desires to God, His character, His generosity, and who He is. It is a safeguard, just that one command. And I know a lot of other things can be said about thanksgiving and praying, but it is a safeguard against me being selfish or self-centered in my praying.

So I put it this way, number three, just for the sake of this morning's reminder about the basics: you and I need to keep it God-centered. Keep your praying God-centered. Make sure that as you're praying, your prayers are not just your adult laundry list of Christmas things that you want from God. That is not the intention of prayer.

"Oh, but aren't we supposed to pray for things we want?" Yes, that is a part of it. But it isn't just about your, you know, your wants and your desires. It is about your needs. But even in Jesus's model prayer, follow the logic of this for a second. He gives us five things we're supposed to do in the model prayer. You know what I'm talking about. It's called the Lord's Prayer. It's really the disciples' prayer. God's training the disciples how to pray. One of them is about their provisions: *Give us this day our daily bread*. That one is about the fact that you need bread today, so ask God to give it to you.

But all the rest of them take us outside of our little laundry list of things that we want. It gets us thinking beyond the horizon. Like, for instance, the character of God: *Hallowed be your name*. About the agenda of God: *Your kingdom come*. About the specific direction of God: *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. Now, *give us this day our daily bread*. Oh, and by the way, our relationships here: *forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*. Think through the model prayer.

Now, are you going to pray for Aunt Myrtle's hip and your sickness and the sniffles? Yeah, that's all fine to pray for. But let me challenge you. I know this is not mathematical. There's no biblical authority to this. But see if you can keep it down to one-fifth of your verbiage in prayer. I mean, let's cut it back. Let's recognize that's not the primary purpose of prayer.

As a matter of fact, here's the primary purpose of prayer. Turn with me, if you would, to John chapter 14. John chapter 14. And this will kill two birds with one stone because there's another part of praying we got to clear up this morning, and it is this little thing called praying in Jesus' name. Let's think through that one. Praying in Jesus' name.

Some people think praying in Jesus' name simply is a cue to tell people I'm done praying. Right? "In Jesus' name, amen." It's a translation: open your eyes now, right? Or go to sleep, or let's eat. I mean, that's what we think. "In Jesus' name" is just this little appendage to the end of our request so that we can now get people on with other stuff.

Obviously, that is not what it's for. Especially when you hear it start to roll off your lips and it starts to sound almost, you know, melodic. "In Jesus' name, amen," whatever. When you realize you're doing that kind of thing, as a matter of fact, here's my challenge to you: don't you go all week without saying the words. What we need to do is to envision in our minds and govern our prayers by what it *means*, okay?

John chapter 14. Drop down in that text to verses 13 and 14, and let's see the command: *Whatever*, verse 13, *you ask*—here's the three words—*in my name, this I will do*. Okay, now, some people think prayer is this: ask and God will give it to you. Now, I know there's some abbreviated summaries of prayer that sound like that, but over and over and over again, here's the qualifier: in His name. In my name. In Jesus' name. So if it's in Jesus' name, then what I need to know is what does that mean? Next phrase helps us: *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that*—here's the purpose clause—*the Father may be glorified in*—you? No—in the Son.



Here's the point: the Son has an agenda. The Son is someone who comes to earth to accomplish His agenda. He takes people and pulls them around Him, called His disciples. They become His emissaries on earth. Now He says, "I want you to ask. I want you to ask, though, in My name, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Yes, verse 14: *You ask me anything in my name, and I will do it.* That is not some magical phrase like, you know, rubbing the magic lamp, and if I just say "in Jesus' name" and mean it, whatever that means, then I'll get it. "Oh God, grow hair on my bald spot. God, clear up my acne. Make my abs flat. God, do all that in Jesus' name, amen." That's not even close to what "Jesus' name" means.

Maybe this one will help. John 15, right across the page or the next page. Same command to pray in His name, and we'll see how clear this gets. Verse 16. John chapter 15, verse number 16. Did you find it? You did not... Nobody said yes to that. I should wait. You found it? Okay. It's close. It's real close.

John 15:16: *You did not choose me, Jesus says this to His disciples, but I chose you and I appointed you, right? I have commissioned you. I've given you an assignment that you should go and bear fruit.* Now that's an analogy that speaks of you doing My work here on earth. *I want it to be good work. I want it to be fruit that abides or fruit that remains, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, right, He may give it to you.*

That's not separated or divorced from understanding my purpose in life. My purpose in life is to be an appointed, commissioned emissary of Christ. I am a branch now, so to speak, to bear fruit for the glory of the Son, right? That God can be glorified in the Son. So my life is to do stuff for God on earth, which has little to do with my bald head, my fat gut, or my acne, which thankfully is not a big problem right now. The balding and the flab is a problem. But what's the point? It's not that.

The point is this: God is concerned with His agenda through my life. That is what it means to pray in His name. It is within the purview, the parameters, the flavor, the feel, the direction of His agenda. See, even when I pray for my daily bread, I want to start to think of my requests as they relate to His agenda. "God, I'm your emissary. I'm your servant. I am your slave. I am your person. You feed me. I'm your problem. Meet my needs so I can do your will." That's the point.

Even if it is, "God, I got a hangnail, or I got a problem, or I got pain I want removed," we can go back to the garden and see what Christ did. "You know what? I want this cup to pass from Me."

That's a valid prayer. But I still need to take all of it and subordinate it to the will of the Father: *Yet not My will, but Yours be done.*

The old movies help us with this. When the old cop was chasing the bank robber, and he says, "Stop, in the name of the law." Remember that? "Stop in the name of the law." Now, as a kid, I saw that. I thought, well, that works. That's great. I can see the pizza guy driving through my neighborhood with that pizza sign on the top, and I can just imagine the pepperoni pizzas in the passenger seat. So I can yell out, "Stop in the name of the law. Give me a pizza." It won't work. Why?

Well, because in reality, you've got no right to ask for the pizza. The law has nothing to do with this. I'm under contract to the guy down the street to bring him his pepperoni pizza, which he paid for, and so I'm taking it to him. You can't stop me in the name of the law. But a cop can say, "Stop in the name of the law" to a bank robber because it is within the purview of the law for bank robbers to stop robbing. It's not within the purview of the law to give me a free pizza in my neighborhood because I see a pizza car driving by. Are you tracking with that?

Therefore, when I say, "I want to be this, I want to be that, I want to have this, I want to have that, I want to go here, I want to do that," if it's about me, I've missed the point of praying in His name. We need to keep our praying God-centered. That's the point.

We don't have time for James chapter 4, but it's a classic text, verses 1 through 4. Matter of fact, I wrote a little blurb for you. I guess you can read that in the bulletin at your leisure. But it's that selfish, greedy kind of praying that God is not interested in. And here's how it's put in James 4 verse 3: *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* This isn't about praying just to get what I want. It's praying in His name so that I can have the tools and resources to do God's will in this world. That's what it's about. Keep it God-centered. Being thankful is the open door for that. It gets my focus off my little list of wishes.

Lastly, verses 3 and 4. Colossians chapter 4: *Continue steadfastly*, verse 2 says, *in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.* There's three good things. Now, he says in verse number 3, "*Hey, at the same time, as long as you're praying here, pray for us.*" Then he lists a few things: "*Pray that God may open to us a door for the word. We need an opportunity for the missions work we're doing. Hey, and to declare the mystery of Christ, we want opportunities to share the gospel. Oh, which, by the way,*" this could be a sub-request here, "*remember, I'm in prison because I am a missionary,*" and he was writing this from prison, "*that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.*"



So he asks for several things. “As long as you’re praying, here’s some things.” You start looking for this pattern, you’ll find it everywhere in the Bible. And that is that God’s people are called to prayer. And then oftentimes in the call to prayer, there are all these things that start getting itemized. And they’re all good and godly things that the Bible’s asking people to pray for. And Paul is particularly saying, “Pray these things for me.” It’s a godly thing. It’s a good example. And so I want to just present it to you as something you ought to be doing as well, and me as well.

And that’s number four in your outline: we need to pray through lists. Pray through lists. The Bible makes a lot of lists for us. Some of them are personal. Paul’s dead now. His ministry work is done. But guess what? The short-term missions group at our church is not done. So when we hand out our bulletin, and inside the bulletin we give you, just because Christians are pretty good at it, we’re giving you lists. Here’s a list of things to pray for. This is a godly thing to do. Paul’s missions work is done. Our mission work is not.

Here’s an example of lists. Go to your home fellowship group. I hope you bring a tablet and a piece of paper or you got your iPad out or whatever you’re doing, but you’re taking down people’s requests. If you’re on our prayer team, you get it on the email every single day. Here’s lists. And I love the way our prayer team does this. And Barb and the rest do so well at giving us itemized prayer. Every time we get an update: “Here, pray for these four things. Pray for these five things. Pray for these three things.”

Make lists. And then it’s part of even guarding my prayer time. As I sequentially work through itemized lists, my mind starts to stay focused. I move from one to the next to the next. Pray through lists. Now the lists are great because you get to make them as long as they’re God-centered. Even if they relate to the servants of God, if they’re about advancing the agenda of God, make them. Ask your spouse, “What can I pray for?” Write them down. Ask your home fellowship group people. Ask people that you do Partners with. Ask people on the patio as they’re eating their donut, “What can I pray for?” And then write those things down and pray through those lists.

We got lists. Got one in the bulletin this week. But I was thinking about things we need to pray for, and at the last minute—and the team can tell you it was at the last minute—I kind of had the “duh” moment. And I said, “You know what? There’s a list I need to get to church that we as a staff have been praying for and we as pastors have been praying for, but God has continually shut the door. So I want you to help us pray for these things, and I want you to get this prayer list right now.”

The ushers are going to come down and give you one. We’ve made it as a bookmark, and on the front, they’re going to come down. Everybody take one of these, at least one. And on the front you’ll see our Ministry Value number five, because on the back of the bulletin every week or on our website, you’ll always see our eight distinctives. And one of our distinctives is “We rely on prayer.”



Now, that's easy to write on a website or on a bulletin, but what we need is sermons like this to get us back to the priority of praying. Well, here's a whole set of prayer requests, ten of them, that relate to a need that we've just got to get solved in this church. And let me try and present a little apologetic for this, if I can, real quick.

I'm bringing this to you because a lot of the things that go on here at the church we pray for and God answers them. And He has. In the short six-year history of the church, we've had a roadblock, we've prayed, and God has dealt with it. We've had a roadblock, we've prayed, God dealt with it. We have seen God knock down so many barriers to the health of this church, the growth of this church, the expansion of this church. We've been so thrilled with what God has done over the years.

Well, we've hit another roadblock and a need in our church, and that has to do with our facilities. And God has just skunked us on this one, right? I mean, we just have not been able to see God open a door here. And so we've been more concerted about our effort in prayer as pastors and as a staff. But I think it's dawned on us, certainly on me, that as it relates to this particular concern, it is such a big deal for the whole life of our church that I don't think God is actually going to do this until we all start praying, okay?

Let me just paint the picture real quick. We're in rented facilities. You know that. We kind of joke about being in a business park and all of that, and God's been real good to us in giving us this spot. We've got multiple services, multiple ministries. Almost every room every day is being used, and some rooms we don't have. I know that sounds impossible, but it's not. There are buildings, if you come to Awana on Thursday nights, for instance, that we utilize that are not our buildings. I mean, we didn't jimmy the lock, we got permission, but we're in these warehouses around us just so we can have enough room to do ministry.

We're out of space. Even things like our Awana circles, the city's going, "Oh man, time for you to move. We need that parking." I mean, we are out of space.

Now, that wouldn't be so bad, I suppose. We could get super creative if we owned what we're in, and we don't. And you businessmen can absolutely affirm this with an amen or your silent grunt. But here's the thing: when you get to a place where you've expanded your physical plant to an extent that you're renting and paying more in rent than you would ever pay to debt service the same kind of real estate, then you look at yourself in the mirror and go, "Boy, we are sure stupid," right? Mm-hmm. That's true. You don't want to rent facilities and dump money into a landlord's pocket when the amount of money that you're paying every month could easily debt service a loan to buy



the property you're in. You might as well pay the interest and pay yourself every month. Am I right? Mm-hmm. Thank you.

So basically, we're at that point. Now, we started small in one building. We borrowed rooms. We're in borrowed parking, as you know, right? You're parking in all kinds of lots that we don't own, but we do get permission for that. And then there's places you see the signs you can't go. The bottom line is we're really working in a facility that is so handicapped that at this particular point, any one of these rooms we use throughout the week could be leased to someone else. The opportunity could go away and our ministry be severely curtailed, okay?

So we have prayed, we have planned, we have thought, and we have thought with a full consensus: what we need is a facility that we can actually own. And if not own, at least rent to a place where we can actually expand in a more economical way. So we need another facility. We need something to happen. We can't get the owner of this property to sell it to us, and we've tried. So we're at a place now where we're saying, "Hmm, we got issues. We got issues with the city. We got issues with where we're at. We got issues. So we need God to answer."

Well, we've done what we've done for six years. See a problem for the good of the church, give yourself to prayer, get on your knees and pray, and God will answer. He hasn't. Like I said, we've been just skunked on this one. Everything we've looked at, it's been a no, no, no. So we're like, "Now what?"

We could, I suppose, like some pastors, wish that half of you would go away, and we could do small church and be happy with that. I shouldn't even joke about that. That's a legitimate pastoral strategy on the part of some staffs, but it's not the heart of our staff. And our pastors are interested in expanding the kingdom of God. And while, like somebody came up to me last service, "Why don't you just plant churches?" We're going to plant churches. We *are* planting churches. But we can't continue to do what we're doing under the circumstances that we're in.

So our commitment is, and our strategy is, make one facility move, whatever that means—whether it's purchase and build, whatever it is—so that you can have it, and from then we just throw out satellites, whether it's a block away, two miles away. Then we multiply whatever we can do. We're still planting churches, but what we want to do here is have that one move that shifts us to a more permanent facility.

Wouldn't make sense to build something the same size because we don't fit in what we got. So we've sketched up some basic ideas of what we think make a lot of sense. And here's our list. And



just, I guess, the first one is the end goal, and that is some kind of facility that can seat twice as many people as we can seat right now, okay?

Now, we need something in the interim. We've got to lock down these buildings that we use and don't have a lease for. So we've got to have that. We want to knock out a few walls here if we can possibly get the permits for it, and we're working hard on it, to just give us a little more space in this auditorium itself. And guess what? I found out you can't trade sermons for real estate. Really weird thing. I can't barter at all. I've tried. "I'll give you all the sermons in Romans if you just let us rent free for three months." It doesn't work. And I'm kind of jealous about that because all you guys get to barter your stuff away and I can't exchange a single sermon for a single thing.

Well, okay, yeah. Here's the thing, though. Enough of my tears about all this. The bottom line is this: it's going to take resources. We need the resources, and God's met every need along the way so far. But when we start looking at facilities, that's the kind of price tag that's going to take some major intervention from God motivating His people to do some great things. We don't want to encumber the progress of what we're doing now. I mean, God has been doing great things. We're moving ahead. Everything's going in the right direction. Building projects have a notorious tradition of souring people. We don't want that to happen. That's why number five is there: optimism, hope, faith. We want to trust God through this transition.

We want the favor of the city officials, and that hasn't been going all that well, even though we've done everything we ought to do. We've dotted every "i," crossed every "t." We've cooperated. We still need intercession for the city to look favorably at some simple things that we want to do.

When this is all done and we get in this place, it makes no sense to have a huge debt. We don't want that, so we want to minimize debt accumulation. We'd like you to stay happy in the process. We pray for that. I pray for that every day. Number nine—this is the one I pray for first on the list. It's circled on the one on my desk—but we need to pray that God would present us some encouraging and exciting options, and He hasn't done that yet. And I think He's waiting for all of us to get on board and to pray. Number ten, I think this is important: that whatever we leave behind, because we're growing old, are we not? Whatever we leave behind for our kids, our spiritual kids and spiritual grandkids, we want it always to be used for sound biblical exposition and evangelical exaltation of Christ until He comes. I don't want to see it—whatever we leave behind in terms of an investment in a building—I don't want it to be used for anything but the gospel. Now, at the rapture, you can do whatever you want to with it. But until then, I'd like it to be a post for the church to preach the Word and uphold the truth of the gospel.

Now, by the way, just so that you know, you may think I'm some insidious person here. This whole break was not planned to get that to you. This was a lot—I already said that, didn't I? This is a last-



minute thing. “Oh yeah, duh, we should pass out our prayer requests as it relates to the church.” This is just one list you should be praying through. I invite you to pray through. And if you’re not a consumer, I trust that you see this as a part of your corporate identity and you want to help us pray this one through. And I hope that as we start to pray, I hope that I can get up here during announcements some Sunday real soon and be able to say, “Wow, God has opened up a door for us.” So far, all the doors are closed. The Bible says we need to knock and the door will be opened. So we’ve been praying as a leadership team. It’s time for all of us to get on board and pray for that.

Would you pray for that with us, please, that we might see a facility? That’d be good. Until then, we’ll keep juggling what we’re juggling here.

All right. That was a really lousy way to wrap up a homily, but let’s pretend I had a great, fabulous conclusion to this sermon. Would you stand with me, and we will close in prayer? I guess this is appropriate.

Spurgeon used to say—well, let me quote a few greats here. Martin Luther used to say this: *It is the business of the tailor to make clothes. It is the business of the cobbler to make shoes. And it is the business of Christians to pray.* That’s a good one, isn’t it? I mean, this is not superfluous. This is not some fringe thing. This is the essence of what we are. We need to be in the Word and we need to be praying.

Spurgeon said this. He said, there are going to be times in your life where it feels like prayer is... there’s a cold season, he called it, of prayer in your life. He says, but when you feel that, he says, that’s when you need to pray even more. He says, if you ask, “What do you mean by that? How can I pray when I feel prayerless?” He says, here’s what I mean: pray to pray. He says, pray that you can pray. Pray that you will pray. Pray for a spirit of prayer. And when you say you can’t pray, you better pray until you can.

So let me close by asking God in prayer for us to be men and women of prayer. Let’s pray.

God, we need to pray. We need to pray more often. We need to pray more fervently. We need more of our workday punctuated with conversation with you. I need to speak to you more often. Even between questions and answers at work, I need to say, “God, help me. God, give me the answer. God, give me wisdom.” I need to say thank you for things that happened in my life.



God, help me and everyone in this room to be more frequent with our conscious, purposeful expressions of our thoughts to you throughout the day. And then, God, we need those guarded times of prayer where the chairs, so to speak, go from side to side to face to face, and we need to get serious about speaking with you. And God, if people here are doing it twice a day, I pray they'd make it three times a day. If they're doing it five times a day, make it seven times a day. If it's not at all, God, give us at least one good, undistracted time per day when we get before you, standing, face to the ground, kneeling, whatever it might be, pacing if we have to, to speak with you in an extended manner about the lists of concerns in our lives, things that relate to your kingdom, your agenda on earth, praying always in the name of Christ, in the purview of Christ's agenda.

I know it's partially a reference there to John 14:6, that we can't come to you without Christ. And He certainly is our mediator, but it's more than that. We want to bear fruit for Christ. So let us pray these kinds of lists that we carefully craft that are all about advancing your cause in this world. And certainly our short-term missions trip to Jordan does that. Our sister church in Cairo is all about that. Our efforts in China are all about that. Our outreach this summer in Aliso Viejo is all about that to our kids. God, and a building is about that. God, there's so much going on that we need to pray about.

So help us to make those times of prayer more frequent in our lives. Let us be watchful in our praying, guarding those times from distraction and lethargy and laziness. And God, as we pray, may it be, as Bunyan said, may it be the kind of praying that develops and cultivates a loving relationship with the most important person in our lives. So help us to pour out our hearts before you this week.

God, we love you very much for these reminders, and we pray that we would be men and women of prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen.