

**Don't Miss It-Part 1**  
**Being Extra Careful to Always Take Hold of the Truth**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Imagine yourself a 20-something young single man. I'm not done yet. Got that part of it, at least? You've just been convicted, though, of fraud. You've been sentenced to prison and taken there in handcuffs for embezzlement and racketeering. You have spent the early part of your adult life stealing money, in essence, from people. You've ripped people off, hundreds of people off, for thousands and hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars. And worse yet, before you were caught by the law enforcement, you had squandered just about everything that you had stolen.

The judge, when you went before him after being convicted, wanted to make an example of you. And because you had no money to make any restitution, he decided to sentence you to consecutive terms for each person that you defrauded, and it ended up that your sentence added up to 60 years in prison. You've spent a few months there in prison thinking about your life, and you're devastated. You have hit bottom. You sense as though you're truly repentant. You feel like you've flushed your life. You imagine yourself, if you live that long, getting out as an 85-year-old man. What kind of life will that be? And worse yet, you imagine yourself dying in prison and having your body carted off to some unmarked grave in some county cemetery. You've really made a mess of your life, and you know it. Times couldn't be worse for you. You feel like your life is over.

Then, one day, the most beautiful girl in all of Orange County reads about your situation in the newspaper. For some bizarre reason, she takes an interest in you and has a great deal of compassion and pity for what you've gone through. She reads about you, sees your picture in the paper, and feels terribly distraught about your hopeless life. So she makes contact. She sends word to you that she has fallen in love with you. She comes to visit you, starts visiting you every day. The guard calls you out of your cell, and you go down to that little visiting area there. You've got a little booth. There's a big thick pane of glass between you. You've got that little speaker right there in the center, and you're speaking every day to this most attractive girl you've ever seen. She's telling you she loves you. She's placing her hand on that pane of glass, and she one day just hits you with this incredible statement that she has decided to sell everything she has.

She had a lucrative business. She'd been blessed. She sold her house that she had purchased and made a tremendous amount of money. She sold her family business. She sold all the shares of stock she had. She sold her car. She sold her jewelry. She sold everything. And she had a great deal of money, and she goes to the district attorney, and she tells you with her hand placed against the glass that she's struck a deal. And the DA has decided to mitigate your sentence. And your sentence that was 60 years, and you thought about it every day, has been reduced to six months. Because she's paying back every single person on the list that was read in that courtroom on that docket, and she's paying them back one by one. Six months.

She says to you, she sits across from you, that she wants to marry you. She says, I want nothing more than to be your wife. And you're blown away by this. Every day you ponder, what in the world? I don't understand. You feel so unworthy to be the target of this young gal's love. She says, I know you've got six months left, but I'm going to be here every day. And every day there's three visiting hours. There's a morning, there's a noon, and there's a night visiting hour. And she's going to come every hour that it's available to her. And she's going to come and she tells you, I'll be there. I won't miss a single visitation. And she says, nothing more I want than to be with you and to be your wife.

Sure enough, she doesn't miss a visitation. I mean, morning, noon, and night she's there. And the guard comes and says, you've got your visitor. Your beautiful fiancée is down and wants to speak with you. But after a few weeks you start to realize what a hassle it is. You can't talk to her in your cell. I mean, it interrupts your sleeping in some mornings, and you think about the long walk down the corridor to go to the visiting area. You start realizing that, you know, you don't know what you're going to say today. I don't know, whatever I said yesterday is probably good enough. And I've shared about all I can share, and we really can't be close to one another. We've got this big pane of glass between us. So she sits there morning, noon, and night, waiting for you. The guard says, here, just want to spend a little time with you.

You saw about three minutes ago where I was going with this, right? What a travesty it would be for someone that's given everything to set you free, who says they deeply love you and says, I will be there to speak with you morning, noon, and night, and you think it's too much trouble to walk down the hallway, spend a little time talking to your fiancée. I think people would think you're a bigger heel for doing that than for committing the crimes in the first place. Am I right? To take that kind of love, that kind of receptive love, and to say, you know, what I said yesterday will probably do for today. People would think you're a scum of the earth. Because that kind of love, man, it deserves attention. At the very least, it deserves conversation.

I suppose we could pray right now and be done with this sermon. Because when I wrote that out and read it back a few times, I thought, that's convicting enough for me. Because, of course, Christ said, I gave everything for a relationship with you. And there's nothing more I want than to spend time with you. And I want to talk to you, and I'm there, and I'm available morning, noon, and night. And we start getting so busy in our lives that we think, well, I don't know. I don't have a lot of time. It's kind of hard for me. You know, I need my sleep. I'm kind of tired at night. I don't know. I don't know what to say. I kind of laid my request before Christ yesterday. I'm sure that'll do for today. Christ knows everything. Surely I'm not going to give him any newsflash here.

Any time you preach on prayer, get to a place where you study a text like Romans chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, there's just built-in conviction. I can't study it without being convicted, and I'm sure you can't read it without being convicted. Because here's a guy who sets a model for us that should be the cry of our heart. Here's a guy who knows the value of the love of Christ. He knows the privilege of speaking with Christ. He knows what a big deal it is to spend time communicating with the God of the universe, and he confesses, not just by his own word but by the testimony of God, that he's doing it all the time. And he's not missing a visiting hour. If there's a chance to pray, the Apostle Paul spends time praying. It's conviction. It's huge.

Look at how he says it. Romans chapter 1, verse number 9. He says, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, he's my witness, how I constantly remember you in my prayers at all times. I mean, I might think that's some verbose, grandiose statement and maybe a little hyperbolic about his personal spiritual disciplines. But start studying the words of the Apostle Paul, and book after book, letter after letter, he starts saying, you know what, I just, I'm praying for you all the time. And then to say, God is my witness. I'm praying for you all the time. In my prayers, I'm remembering you. I'm praying for you. I'm praying, he says in the bottom of verse 9, that now at last by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you.

That's the specifics of his prayer, and he unpacks it a little bit more. But tonight, suffice it for us to look at the fact that he's always praying, and he's praying that he can get together with these

people. And the first thing he says is remarkable. God's my witness. I don't know if you've ever said that. You ever been in a conversation where someone's just saying, yeah, you didn't do that, or you really didn't mean that, or I know your motives, and they start impugning you? I mean, there comes a place when if you're sure, I mean really sure, you feel like pulling that phrase out of the drawer. God is my witness. I've done it. I've done it recently. God's my witness. I know what I did. I know what I said. I know what my heart is. I'm telling you, God is my witness.

There's a few things in life I would say, hey, I'd pull that big phrase out, I'd say, God is my witness. But there's one thing I wouldn't want to stand up and boast about and then pull that phrase out. It'd probably be my prayer life. How about you? I don't think I'd want to stand and say I pray for you all the time. Oh, God is my witness. He can tell you. Because I'm afraid most of us would feel a bit spiritually embarrassed at that point.

Number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, here's a poignant question for you based on the pattern of the Apostle Paul. I just wonder, as I've asked myself this question this week, how about you? Jot it down. What would God say about my prayer life? If I were to call him to be the witness on my prayer life, I wonder what he would say. Say, hey, God is my witness. I've got a really mediocre prayer life. God's my witness. He can tell you I'm not really praying a whole lot. God's my witness. I told you last Sunday I'd pray for you and I really forgot. But when I saw you walking up, I threw a quick one up so I can say, hey, I've been praying for you.

God is a God, and I've loved this truth lately, God is a God who sees and a God who knows. And he knows my life. And he knows my spiritual disciplines. And he knows how many minutes, how many hours I spend in Bible study. He knows how many minutes, how many hours I spend in prayer. He knows all that. He's familiar with it. And I'm saying, if I really want to look at my life before God, he's going to have to make an honest assessment of my prayer life. I might be a little concerned about what he says. How about you?

I've yet to ask anybody, do you think your prayer life is all it should be, and have many Christians say, oh, yeah. Do you pray enough? Oh, sure. Because the standard in Scripture is high. There's a lot of superlatives attached to our prayer life, like we ought to pray without ceasing. And I'm thinking there are not many things I do without ceasing. Eating, maybe. Breathing, you know. Prayer, I don't know. Depends on how broad you define without ceasing. Good for us to look at our lives and to say, man, are we praying like we ought to pray?

I want to encourage you to pray, obviously. I want you to remember the great, and these might be good things to jot down, I was going to put these on the outline. I did, and this was more kind of sidebar stuff. But please remember the incredible privilege that we have in prayer. Jot this reference down. Matter of fact, this is a Bible study, right? So why don't you write it down and then we'll turn to it. The book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 4. It's just one of the best verses in all the Bible about prayer. What would God say about my prayer life? What would he say about me taking advantage of the privilege of prayer? This is not a letter A or anything. This is sidebar stuff on your notes.

Deuteronomy chapter 4, verse number 7. What a tremendous declarative and observation about the people of God. And if it's true before the coming of Christ, wow, is it ever true for us who have the mediator standing between God and our sinful past making intercession for us. Deuteronomy 4:7 says, what other nation, from our perspective, what other group of people is so great as to have their gods near them the way Yahweh our God is near us whenever we pray to him? We bow our heads

to pray, he's there. It may be, as Paul said, the feeling of he's a God I still need a lot of faith for. There's a glass there that I look through dimly. There's a hand pressed against that thick pane. But he's there and he's listening. He wants to draw near to us as we draw near to him. We'll see him face to face, the God-man, that is, reigning on the throne, and yet right now he's beckoning us. The marriage supper of the Lamb is yet to come, but as a betrothed bride, he's calling us to the privilege of prayer. And if you'd come down to the visitation room and just talk to me, man, I'll press my hand right up against that glass and I'll be near to you. What a privilege we have to pray. If God assesses my life, I wonder if he would see me taking advantage of the privilege of prayer the way I ought.

I love this, Psalm 86, verse 5. Look at the second half of that verse. It's worth jotting down. The second thing I'd like to remind you of as we get started here tonight, we ought to remember the receptivity we have. We have a tremendous privilege. We have tremendous receptivity even as sinful broken people, because we have a tremendous God who responds to us in grace when we pray. Psalm 86, verse number 5. Look at the second half of that verse. Are you there? You're a forgiving God and a good God, O Lord. You're forgiving and good, abounding in love to, underline these words, who? All who call on you. Man, when people pray, God just pulls up with great receptivity.

It is a privilege to talk to the God of the universe. But just know it's with openness. I love the way James 1 says this, without reproach. I read a book on body language once. You ever studied any of that? Don't do it, because then all of a sudden you're analyzing everybody you're talking to. Not that it's all, you know, an exact science. But there's something to it. And when you see the obvious postures, you go, wow, that's clear. I mean, he's not listening to me. And trust me, from my perspective, I get plenty of that from up here. That guy is not listening to me. They're there. Their ears are on the side of their head. They're looking this way. But they're not receptive.

And God is a God, when you pause and turn the world off and you say, I'm going to talk to God right now, God draws up. And you know the postures of people that are just receptive. They're almost like invading your space, right? And he says, okay. And there they are, open, ready, receptive. God's a forgiving, loving God. Man, he abounds in love to all who call on him.

How about this New Testament verse, Matthew chapter 7? You know this one. Matthew chapter 7, verses 7 through 11. Should be able to remember that reference, right? Just think Slurpee. Matthew loves Slurpees. Matthew 7, 7 through 11. If you knew half the stuff that ran through my head, you'd think I'm far more bizarre than you already think I am.

Matthew 7, 7 through 11. Ask and it will be given to you. Third word here I thought of is the word benefit. We've got a tremendous privilege. We've got tremendous receptivity from our God. And God is ready to shower tremendous benefits on us. Ask and it's going to be given to you. Seek and you're going to find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks, man, the door is opened.

Which of you, now here's where it really gets personal and it really connects and resonates with us parents, which of you, if his son asks for bread, is going to give him a stone? I mean, just think of that. You want some bread? You want a Pop-Tart this morning, John? Do you? Okay, here's a sponge, right? Chew on that. I don't care if we've had a bad night the night before. I love my son. I may not give him the frosted Pop-Tart, but if he asks for bread, I'm not going to give him a dirt clod or a rock or a sponge. If he asks for a fish, you're not going to hand him a snake.

If you then, though you are evil, and our hearts aren't always abounding in love, we're not always forgiving and good, but if we as parents who have evil in our hearts still know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will your perfect heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him? Tremendous benefits. And yet God's looking at your life and mine, and if I were to call him up to testify about your prayer life, I think most of us would slump in our chair and go, wow, I don't want God to comment on my prayer life. And we're neglecting privilege. We're neglecting God's receptivity. We're neglecting his benefits. How can we not talk to God? Paul says, God's my witness. He sees how much I pray for you. It's amazing.

I'll give you some quick practicals here from Colossians 4. If I think, how in the world can I have God next week say about my prayer life something better than he says about my prayer life this week? How do I get there? We glean a lot of practicals from Colossians 4. It's so helpful. He doesn't just say pray more. He says here's how you do it. You want to pray more? What's it going to take? Here you go. Here's the four subpoints.

If I want God to say, now that Mike guy, he does, he prays quite a bit. I hear from him a lot. Rarely am I left in the waiting room, the visiting room, sitting there without Mike showing up. If that's going to be the testimony of God, I'm going to have to follow the directions of this text. Colossians 4, verse number 2. Devote yourselves to prayer. There's the key verb. Circle it. Devote yourselves to prayer.

Letter A. You've got to resolve to pray. Just jot that down. Resolve to pray. It's not always going to be the most convenient thing to do. As a matter of fact, you will find it's a spiritual battle. So you've got to resolve to do it. You have to decide to do it. You have to make this your purpose to do it. And I know that my life, probably a lot like yours, has a lot of things that if I don't resolve to do it, it doesn't get done, right? It's got to get on a list. It's got to be a priority. It has to be directed by things that I put in my life to drive me to it.

And the super-spirituals among us go, no, that doesn't seem right. Talking to God ought to be natural. See, the problem is my heart is encased in humanity, and my humanity rebels against God, rebels against the law of God. So I struggle with prayer, and I'll bet you do too. One day, as Romans 8 says, I'm going to walk out of this prison, as Paul says, who's going to deliver me from this body of death? One day, creation's going to cheer me on and you on as we are fully redeemed. Oh, we're redeemed now judicially, but the bodies in which we live are going to be redeemed. And no longer will I have this internal struggle. As Peter put it, the desires that wage war against my soul, which are not just active desires. They're passive desires to sit with a Cheez-It box on a couch. See, in other words, there's the sin of omission as well as the sin of commission. Committing sin, there's lots of desires that draw me into sin, and there's a lot of desires that draw me to sit tight, because that's an oxymoron, but they call me, they pacify me to sit tight and not step up and do what I'm supposed to do, like read my Bible or spend time in prayer. So I've got to resolve to pray. It's a decision.

Because I know I can preach about prayer and everybody here is going to go, that's a good idea. I should do that. I should do that more. It's like the guy who dates the girl for eight years, right? Thinks about marriage. It's a good idea. I ought to get around to that sometime. You've got to do it. You have to resolve to do it. You have to get it on the calendar and make it happen. Resolve to pray.

If you're going to resolve to pray, sometimes we need to pray about prayer. I love the way Spurgeon put it. Pray to pray. Pray for prayer. Pray for the spirit of supplication. Do not be content to say, I would pray if I could. Spurgeon says no. But if you can't pray, you'd better pray until you can. We've got to resolve to pray.

Secondly, Colossians 4:2, he says if I'm devoted to prayer, that's great. Now I've got to be watchful. Watchful. Does that sound like a familiar biblical word? The Bible talks a lot about watching and praying. Watchful, a defensive posture. The soldier would be put on the wall to watch. The concept was one of protecting. To watch is to stand guard and to see if there's a problem, kind of like the security guards. They've got real ones here who would carry guns. They're all packing around Temple Beth-El. But the strip mall, they're not, right? Their job isn't to apprehend or to, you know, they don't have the muscle. They're just to watch. They see something go down, they call somebody with a gun, right? The watcher, the one who stands guard. Not a lot they can do, but they can stand, they can watch, they can notify.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful. This phrase clearly chosen in this text, I'm quite sure, because of Jesus and the story that was told of Jesus telling his disciples in the garden to watch and pray so that you won't fall into temptation. I'm reading here from Mark chapter 14, at least jot it down, verse 38. And he says this, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. You won't want to pray, at least your flesh won't. Your spirit wants to pray. And when I say you ought to pray more, your spirit goes, if you're a Christian, that is. If you're not a Christian, you go, so what? If you're a Christian here tonight, you say, yeah, you're right, I need to. And then your body says, where's the Cheez-It box? Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak.

And the Scripture is really clear. The way to fix that is to be watchful. And that means you stand and you start to look and you say, when you're going that direction, you go, no, you're not going to do that. God, help me. I call the one with the gun. Say, shoot that desire to be a sluggard, to be lazy. No, God, I'm going to hit that snooze button one more time. God, no, I'm seeing myself. God, help me, empower me to get this body off the ground and standing up. And help me to walk over to that desk and to start to pray.

I put it this way. Number two, protect your prayer time. You've got to protect it. Protect your prayer time by watching, organizing, strategizing. You have to approach it as though it's going to be a spiritual battle. I'm not super big on military strategy, but I'm assuming that in warfare, you want to go after the guy. I remember when I was a kid, you got those little plastic soldier guys, and they had the guys with the gun. They had the guys laying down, shooting the guns. You had the guy with the over-the-shoulder launcher. They still have these, right? My kids have a big pile of these green things. One of the guys, at least when I was a kid, had a pack on his back with a big antenna and a little phone. Do you remember that one? And I thought to myself when I was a kid, well, that's a dumb army person. What good is he? He doesn't look intimidating. He doesn't look, I don't understand. He's a guy on the phone.

And I remember asking my brother or my dad when I was young, what's the deal with the guy on the phone? And the answer is, of course, he's the communication link. You send those soldiers out there, there's got to be some communication with headquarters. So then all of a sudden I started to realize that's an important guy. As a matter of fact, you want to defeat the army, you take out the communications. And if you don't think, 2 Peter 5, that our roaring lion enemy who seeks someone to devour, if you don't think he's aiming at your communication system, you're naive. Matter of fact, he'll even let you come to church. He'll let you hum worship songs. He'll even let you study

the Bible. But I'm sure he's real concerned about you talking to God, because that's where it all happens. And God starts to put the truth to work. He starts putting the worship in sync with the real God. This is the critical element.

John Chrysostom of the fourth century, I've told you this before, but Chrysostom just means golden mouth. He was the great preacher of the fourth century. John the great preacher said this, the devil knows how great a good prayer is. Hence, he presses heavily upon us when we pray. You've got to know the battle's going on. Non-Christians don't have the same experience that you have when they want to get involved in their little hobbies or whatever they do. But you want to practice your religion. You want to get in tune and communicate with your God. They don't have the same experience. When they want to go collect stamps or trade Star Trek cards or whatever they do, there isn't the same battle going on. Protect your prayer time.

I'm going to give you two real practicals if we're going to protect it. Here's a way to do it. Here's how Jesus did it. Mark chapter 1. We ought to turn to this one. Verse 35. Mark chapter 1, verse 35. Don't look at your watches, by the way. You're saying, Mike's talking really slow tonight. What's going on? It's 8 o'clock. We're on the first point, second subpoint. We're never going to get out of here.

Mark chapter 1, verse 35. Two things here we learn about Christ guarding his prayer time. And you'll see in verse 36, it worked. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, that means early, Jesus got up. He left the house and he went off to a solitary place where he prayed. Some key stuff there. You can see it, right? You want to guard, watch, protect your prayer time. You better pick a good time and a good place. That's helpful.

And by the way, stop with all the justification about, oh, I don't do that. I just pray throughout the day. I'm talking to my best friend, you know. Jesus. If you try to survive on casual talk with Christ between listening to your talk show in the car and walking into your office, you don't know anything about prayer. This is prayer. Now, I'm not saying you've got to get up early in the morning. But Jesus got up early in the morning while it was still dark. You know why? Because nobody else did. He knew it was going to be quiet. He knew it would be solitary.

Now, it's for a different reason, but when Jesus is talking about the Pharisees praying, he says, stop praying out on the street corners. Don't do what they do. But then he makes this interesting statement, go into the inner room. The inner room in the house, in the old ancient first-century house, was like the closet. It had no windows. It had no distractions. It was private. Then he said, the God who hears in secret will reward you. It's a secret place. Do you have a secret place to pray? You should find one. Moms of children, you need one. Find one. Preferably with a lock on it.

I don't care where your time is or where your place is, but find a good time and a good place and protect your prayer time. If God's going to testify that you had a good prayer week, I can pretty sure guarantee you're going to need to devote yourself to it, resolve to pray, and you're going to need to protect it.

Colossians chapter 4, please. Colossians chapter 4 says, not only be watchful, but what's the next thing he tells us we ought to do? Be thankful. Prayer should be with a thankful attitude. Thankful attitude is a good attitude. I mean, it's hard to be thankful and not have a good attitude. Thankfulness is good. Thanksgiving is good.

Number three, or letter C, jot this down. We need to keep a good attitude. You want to pray more often? You want God to look at your life and say, man, that guy's praying quite a bit. He's coming down to the visiting center, putting his hand on the glass, and having conversation with the one who loves him a lot. You're going to have to make sure that your conversations are not just, God, give me this, give me that, I need this, I need that. You need to make sure that your prayer life is punctuated, colored with, woven in your prayer time is thankfulness. That makes this a good experience. And your attitude becomes different.

I don't know how many times there's been testimony in my own life and those of others I've counseled or listened to who've just had a raunchy, terrible prayer life, and one of the reasons is the attitude of their prayer life was bad. And all it took was saying, can we just list a few things and be thankful in your prayer time? Let's spend the first five minutes of prayer doing nothing but counting our blessings. And all of a sudden now, everything changes about the prayer life. You'd better resolve to do it, you'd better protect it, you'd better keep a good attitude.

And then, we don't have time to unravel all this, although at one point I think we did when we taught through Colossians. But in Colossians chapter 4, keep reading, he then gets real specific. Pray for us. Pray specifically that opportunities, a door, will open for our message. Oh, and by the way, pray that we can proclaim clearly the mystery of Christ, for which I'm in chains, by the way. Be good for you to pray for that too. Verse 4, pray that I can proclaim it clearly or boldly, as I ought to. He gets specific. What to pray for, the nature with which the message is proclaimed, the opportunity for the message being proclaimed. It's very specific.

Letter D. If you want to pray regularly, you better get specific. Because you will say to yourself, I kind of told him to bless all the missionaries yesterday. I'm sure that'll hold for today. You're going to have to start talking about a lot of things in your life specifically. And you know, the ambiguity and generalities of prayer, I find some people are just, it's all over the place because we use the word prayer like it's intransitive. It doesn't take an object. In other words, we say sometimes in our prayer, God, I pray for the pastor. God, I pray for this meal. God, I pray for the church. God, I pray for all the missionaries I know. God, I pray for a good night's sleep. I pray, God, I just pray for everybody. Amen. Prayer.

As a matter of fact, here's a good little practice, and I ask people to do this, take them through partners or whatever. I say this, listen, don't use the word prayer when you pray. Just don't say it. And what that will force you to do is to pick a synonym for prayer. And when you say, I pray for the pastor, pick a synonym for the word prayer. What does the word prayer mean? The Greek word, the English word, Latin word, it all means, give me some synonyms. It's not a trick. Request. I ask. I beseech. There's some old English. I'm petitioning you. It takes an object. You can't say, I pray for the pastor, because God's going to go, and, for.

If you use the word ask instead, here's what it sounds like. Lord, I ask for the pastor. How you finish that sentence is very important. But finish it. Are you following me? Finish the sentence. Lord, I ask for the missionaries. You can get away with saying, I pray for the missionaries. Lord, I pray for the pastor. But you can't get away with, I ask for the missionaries. You're going to have to get specific. Prayer means to ask, to petition, to request. Let your requests be made known to God. Philippians chapter 4, verse 6, by the way.

Paul says, you know what? You can ask God about my prayer life. God is my witness. He knows how I'm praying. He knows my attitude. He knows how often I'm praying. Man, and he could

testify to you, man, I'm really praying for you. That's bold. And I pray that at the end of next week, when we get back together next Thursday, I pray that we can all say, you know what? I'd like God to give a little testimony about my prayer life, because it sure improved this week.

Prayer. Another problem we have that doesn't reflect the Apostle Paul, that may be summed up in this question, and number two on your outline, seen clearly in verses, the end of verse 9, the beginning of verse number 10, which, by the way, we got a verse break at a very unfortunate spot. And though there's some grammatical ambiguity, this is probably the best translation, and most people recognize this now, not when they put the verse numbers in. But he says, God is my witness of what? How constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

Okay, now, Paul prayed about a lot of stuff, but what he's confessing to here is I'm praying about you, and I'm praying about you a lot. And he says that in almost all of his letters. I'm praying about you, and I'm praying about you a lot. If you study the prayers of the Apostle Paul, you'll find he's praying for other people a ton. And as a matter of fact, you'll be hard-pressed to find examples of him praying for himself. You'll find examples of him asking people to pray for him. That you'll find. But what Paul is always doing in his prayers or confessing to or testifying to is that he's praying for other people. Oh, and by the way, pray for me too. That would be good.

But the assumption that we draw from this, not only the command elsewhere in Scripture, is you ought to be praying for other people. Is it okay to pray for yourself? Sure. Jesus taught us, give us this day our daily bread. Fine, pray for your daily bread. But you'd better make sure that you follow the pattern of Scripture, and that is that our prayers are focused on other people. Which, by the way, will transform your prayer life, because the default mode for our prayer is, when we say, fill in this, Lord, I ask, it usually has an object that's related to me, because we want to ask for stuff for us.

Number two on your outline. It's a good poignant question based on Paul's example of prayer. Are my prayers focused on others? Are my prayers focused on, if God were to testify about my praying, first of all, what would he say about the nature of the state of my prayer life? Secondly, would he say, man, that Mike, he sure is praying for other people a lot more than he's praying for himself.

If you have an NIV, this will work. Take your, keep your finger here and go to John 17. And I know this is, you know, a bit of a stretch, but it's an example nevertheless of the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. And I want you to look at it. The NIV breaks it down into three categories and gives it headings. And I didn't check the NAS. I'm not sure how it breaks it down or what the headings are. But most of us are reading from the NIV. Take a look at the headings. John chapter 17. In John chapter 17, let me get there, what's the first heading? Jesus prays for himself. How many verses do you have there? Five. You got another category. Verses 6 through 19. What's the heading there? How many verses, math majors? How many? Okay. Look at the next section. Verses 20 through 26. Jesus prays for? How many verses do we have there? Seven.

Okay. I just want to show you, in the longest recorded prayer of Christ, you've got Jesus praying for himself in five verses. And yeah, I'm praying for other people. How many of that make it? Twenty-one? Twenty-one verses. So 5/21 of prayer, yeah, he's praying about God doing stuff in his life and glorifying him and all of that. Yes, terrific. But notice the natural default mode for godly people in praying. Pray for themselves, but you know what? Their prayers are focused on other people.

And I'm just saying, how are your prayers? Are they focused on other people? God's called us to be focused on others. Great passage. Colossians is full of great insights on prayer. Look at Colossians

chapter 4. There's an example here, and I guess it just doesn't sound right, but he's a good guy in the Bible. You might want to name your next child Epaphras. I don't know. Epaphras. Epaphras would be his, like path, all right? It doesn't work. But he's a good guy in Scripture who is known in this text, look at it, verse number 12, Colossians 4:12. Epaphras, who is one of you, he's come from Colossae apparently, and a servant of Christ Jesus, he sends his greetings. He is always, look at this word, wrestling in prayer for you, so that you may stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. How's he doing that? His hard work is the agonizomai of prayer. It's the agony of prayer. It's the wrestling in prayer. It's the work of prayer.

And all I'm saying is God is calling us to take, speaking of the Twilight Zone, I've watched a lot of those the last couple weeks. Remember that big eyeball in the Twilight Zone? One of the entries, I know it changed several times, but as the MC square goes by and that little doll thing goes by, and then there's that big eyeball. The eyeball default mode for everyone is here. It's on ourselves. And God is calling us as Christians to be concerned about others. Philippians 2, to put others' interests before our own. And that ought to be reflected in our prayer life.

You want to know how selfish you are? Just do a little analyzation of your prayer list. That's all you've got to do. And forget the prayer list, because that's just a list. Your actual praying. Do a little analyzation of that, and it'll tell you how, the direction of the Twilight Zone eyeball. It'll tell you where it's at. Ooh, it's mostly here. Occasionally it glances over there, but it's mostly here. What you want to do is spend five verses here and 21 verses there. Can you see it now? Make sure your prayers are focused on others.

We don't have time for this. Well, no, I can't. Oh, all right. Colossians chapter 1. We were going to skip this section, but I pulled this out. I was in Colossians this week because it's so focused on prayer. But Colossians is a parallel passage here to verses 9 and 10 in Romans where he says the same things to the Colossian Christians about, "I'm praying for you guys all the time." But what he does here is he gives us more specifics about what he's praying for.

He says in verse 9, "For this reason, since the day I heard about you, we haven't stopped praying for you. We're asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." That's a general statement. It says, "And we pray this in order," here's purpose, "that you may live a life that's worthy of the Lord and please him in every way," colon.

Now he starts to unpack it.

"Bearing fruit in every good work"—one.

"Growing in the knowledge of God"—two.

"Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have endurance and patience"—three.

"And joyfully giving thanks to the Father who's qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."

Now, I don't know. I think we preached this sermon five years ago. Some of you remember it. We tried to give it an acronym, and I'm not big on acronyms, but this one worked. There's four things here. Look at them again. I want to pray specifically for others like the Apostle Paul, just by way of example, to bear fruit in every good work. Okay? Letter A. I put it this way: to do more deeds for God. If I pray for you, one of the things I want is for you to do more good works. I want your life to do good deeds.

Letter D. This is what I call **duet**. If I'm going to pray for my brother, if I'm going to pray for my sister in Christ—I know, it's corny—the duet. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pray for more good deeds in your life. Letter D.

Secondly, what does he say? I want you to grow in the knowledge of God. That just makes sense. I want you to do more good deeds, and I want to pray that you have more understanding of God. I want you to grow in your knowledge of God. I want you to understand God better. Not so you can answer Bible trivia questions better, but so you can understand the mind of God. I want you to understand God—this God that loves you and sent his Son to die for you.

U: I want them to understand God better when I'm praying for other people.

Three, or letter E, is to be strengthened. It says, “with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have endurance and great patience.” I put it this way: to get more empowerment from God. This world is a hostile place to people's faith. I want to pray that they would be empowered. They can endure. They can persevere. They can have their gas tank full of energy from God and be strengthened with all power.

More good deeds, more understanding of God, more empowerment from God.

And then T—you know what that is? “Joyfully giving thanks.” T: I put it this way, to give more thanksgiving to God. I want them to give thanks to God more.

D–U–E–T. **Duet**. It's not very good. Certainly when you spell it “duet,” it's not good at all. Oh, all right.

Paul's praying for them. He gets more specific in the parallel passage in Colossians about a different church. But he's praying for them. What's he praying for them? Well, he gets at the bottom of verse number 10. He begins to talk about his specific prayer for them, which will set up the rest of his discussion in the opening statements here in the book of Romans.

So let's go back to Romans chapter 1, verse 10. And this, I think, is the most insightful part of this text. He's praying for them. And I don't know—we can assume he's praying the same kind of things for the Romans. I want them to do good deeds. I want them to understand God more. I want them to be empowered by God. I want them to give thanks to God. All of those are themes the Apostle Paul prays for the people.

But in this case what he says is—he turns quickly to this because this is his immediate plan—but he says, “I'm also praying. I pray,” which, by the way, is a different word for prayer, *deomai*, which is the word to really beseech, I beg God. It's a more intense word. “I'm begging God that now at last by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you.”

And as he unpacks in the next verse: “I long to see you that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, to make you strong.” We'll try and understand that next time. But here he says, “I want to come to you.” Okay, now he's praying for their good. He's others-oriented. But now he's saying, “I want to come to you.” Here's a way to put it.

Do My Prayers Aim Me at Being the Answer?

Number three, we need to ask this question. Do my prayers—bit of a tricky sentence here—do they aim me at being an answer? Do my prayers do, like they did for the Apostle Paul, aim and prompt me to be the answer to my prayers? Do you see what I'm saying?

Am I praying now, "God, I really, really want this to work. I want people to come to church at Compass Bible Church on Sunday afternoons of all times. I want them to come." My prayer life cannot be dichotomized to where I say, "I want that good for the people in South County. That's what I want." And now I'm—"you know, what's on TV today?" I have to say, "Now how can I be part of the answer to that prayer?" And that's what Paul's always doing. "God, I pray they would be encouraged. Now, God, how can I encourage them?"

Prayer has got to be connected from our knees to our feet, in that we pray and we say, "God, I want you to do this, this, and this in those people's lives." And then we get up on our feet and we say, "Now I'd like to see, God, if you would empower me by your will to go and do it. I'd like to answer that prayer." And I want to go and I want to encourage these people, and I want to do good in their lives.

I thought of that classic prayer—actually it was a request of God and the answer—in Isaiah 6. Remember that? Verse number 8. Here's this voice resounding after the purification and all that symbolism of him being cleansed of his sins. God's majestic court—the one on the throne—cries out, "Who are we going to send? Who's going to go for us?" Remember that? And Isaiah says, "Here I am. Send me."

And I'm thinking to myself: we often pray for the good in other people's lives. We pray for the good in our church. We pray that the church will meet their financial needs, that they would have people in the pew, that the word would be taught well. And the question then is, what are we doing about it? There's got to be a connection—not a disconnection—there.

Now, I understand the power of this is in prayer. But part of prayer is shaping me. I read an article that was entitled, "Does Prayer Change Things or People?" And it was a good little poignant thought about how much prayer—what prayer does for the pray-er. Are you with me on that? "God, please, please fill the place up on Sunday so people can be a part of Compass Church at 3:30 at the bizarre time." Now praying that prayer for half an hour all of a sudden gets me excited about picking up the telephone and talking to my neighbor and calling somebody that works in Aliso Viejo.

"God, I want them to—" And now all of a sudden I'm prompted to action. My prayers need to include: "God, how can I do this? I want to be a part of the solution." Which is exactly what the Apostle Paul is about to discuss in verses 11 and following.  
Let's pray.

God, we need to probably confess our sin right now. Sin—Bible word, *hamartia*—to miss the mark, to not hit the bullseye. And God, in our prayer life I'm sure, as we think about calling the God of the universe who sees and knows as a witness to our prayer life, we would probably all quickly admit we've missed the mark in our prayer life. We certainly haven't prayed enough. We haven't prayed for the good of others enough. We probably haven't prayed that we would be a part of the solution enough.



And God, we need to say we've missed the mark. What we're saying there, God, is we confess our sins. Forgive us for not being the kinds of prayer people that we need to be. God, please, because of this sermon—because of the ministry of your word, because of the work of your Spirit—prompt us not just to catch a few snatches of prayer on the way home from church, but to spend some time, our best time of the day, in a protected place: turning out the light, or locking the door, or standing in a closet, or in a solitary place like Jesus used to do in the book of Matthew, going up to the mountainside and spending good time pouring out our heart to the one who paid the ultimate price to redeem us from our prison.

And we're waiting—waiting for the marriage supper of the Lamb—when we'll be united with the one that you've betrothed us to, Christ the head. God, make us better at praying. As the psalmist wrote, help us to pour our hearts out before God. God, help us to ask. What a privilege. What a benefit. God, what a wonderful opportunity that we have to have our God near us when we call, when we pray. God, I pray that this week we would turn off something, say no to something, shut something down early so that we can spend time—even if it's in a car in the corner of a parking lot—just talking to you. I need to talk to you more. What a travesty it would be for you to pay the ultimate price to redeem us and want to marry us, and we neglect to talk to you. God, we want to talk to you.

We want to pray for others. God, we want to be a part of the answer to our own praying as you prompt us to get involved. God, thank you for the book of Romans. It's full of great, deep doctrinal truth, which we'll get to. But thanks for the practical things that we learn from the pattern of good prayers like the Apostle Paul.

In Jesus' name, amen.