



## **A GOSPEL FRAMEWORK FOR APPROACHING EVERYDAY LIFE**

### **Living Every Day to Love God with All Your Heart and Soul**

So, all right. Open up the Study Guide. The foundation I hope is now laid for a gospel framework for approaching everyday life. Now I hope we're now ready to hear the commands of Christ for what they are. The commands of Christ are an expression of His love to us, and a promise from Him that He'll give us everything we need to obey them. So He lives in us, and so the rest of tonight we're going to talk about what His life looks like in action on a daily basis.

So as we talk about different commands, starting with these two greatest commandments in Mark 12. As you hear every one of these commands the rest of tonight, hear them as invitations for you to enjoy God's grace in relationship with Him as you exalt God's glory to the ends of the earth, a relationship that is only possible by the cross of Christ.

So Jesus says in Mark 12, the end of this passage, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,*" and "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*" When I was thinking through, praying through—okay, everyday life, what needs to be guiding us, framework?—these two commands come to the forefront. So what does this look like practically? What does it look like to live every day, to love God, enjoy God, exalt God with all your heart and soul?

#### **A Call to Daily Prayer**

This is where Scripture calls us to daily prayer. "*O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.*" And Jesus teaches His followers to pray. You get down to Matthew 6:5:

*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:*

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

## Questions about Daily Prayer

Now, this passage and others like it—Luke 11—lead to questions about daily prayer. So why do we pray every day? I want to give you three reasons. One, we pray daily to express the depth of our daily need for God. “*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*” So our conviction every day in prayer is we can do nothing without Christ. Jesus told us this in John 15. “*Apart from me you can do nothing.*”

So don’t miss this. Prayer is the intersection between our complete inadequacy to live out the Christian life on our own and God’s complete adequacy to give us all we need as His children so we might live in and through Him like we talked about. And in this sense there is no activity in the life of a Christian that doesn’t require a prayerful attitude, a prayerful dependence on God to do that which we can’t do ourselves.

This is just like we talked about in the daily struggle between the flesh and the spirit, because sin still remains in us. We’re prone not to love God with all our heart and soul, mind and strength. We’re prone not to love our neighbor as ourselves. We need God’s grace, God’s power, God’s provision for everything we do, every single day. So this in a sense not just a call to daily prayer, it’s a call to continual moment-by-moment prayerful dependence on God.

Which means—this is huge—we even need His grace to pray. So our confession every day in prayer is, “Lord, teach me to pray.” Which is exactly what the disciples do in Luke 11:1. “We want to learn to pray.” So, we pray to express the depth of our daily need for God.

Second, we pray to explore the mystery of daily intimacy with God. Did you hear what Jesus said in Matthew 6? “When you pray, don’t heap up empty words. For your Father in heaven knows what you need before you ask Him. He knows what you need.” So God is not up in heaven with a notepad writing down your requests, saying, “Man, I never even thought about that. It’s a good one.” No, He already knows what you need.

Now that causes some people to wonder, “Well, what’s the point then?” And as soon as you ask that question, you are now on the verge of an incredible break-through in prayer, because the heart of prayer is what happens when you’re in a room alone with the Father in heaven, and you realize there’s intimacy to be found with Him. Intimacy.

That’s why I put Exodus 33 in your notes, because listen to this:

*Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, [listen to this] all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*

Can you imagine that? Like, you’re sitting in your tent, hanging out, playing cards or whatever you do in tents in that day, and all of a sudden, Moses starts walking. And word gets around, “He’s going to the tent of meeting.” So you come out in front of your tent and you stand there. And everybody in Israel is standing at the front of their tent, and they’re

watching in silent awe as they see a man go into a tent, a cloud come down and cover it, and everybody is in silent worshipful awe because there is a man who's meeting with God.

Now you've realized—based on what we've talked about, so the foundation we've laid—that we don't have to sit around and wait for some dude to walk to a tent. You and I have this privilege on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis. We don't have to go to a tent. Like, you are the tent. You're the temple of the Holy Spirit. You have this opportunity every single moment. What a joy to have intimate communion with God any time, all the time—draw near to God, experience intimacy with God.

This is what I want to remind you: The most important thing in your life is not your job, it's not your finances, it's not your family, it's not your husband, it's not your wife, it's not your potential husband or wife, it's not your kids, and it's not your football team for sure. The most important thing in the world is your personal relationship with God. So set aside a time, go to a place, find a room, close the door, and pray.

This one practice will totally revolutionize your life. Not just revolutionize your prayer life; it will revolutionize your life. Set aside a time, go to a place, and you receive your reward. Jesus is saying, "The Father has so much for you. If you want to experience all He has for you, then this is how you should pray." We pray to explore the mystery of intimacy with God.

And we pray to experience the power of daily being used by God. So the Bible is just replete with promises from God in prayer, because God has ordained prayer as a means by which we participate with Him in His purposes in the world. As we pray, God acts. Now, it's not that we're changing God's mind or changing God's plans. I don't want to change God's mind or God's plans. How ridiculous would it be for me or you, with our finite knowledge and finite wisdom, to say to an infinite God with unfathomable wisdom, "Here's what I think is best. Why don't you conform your will to mine?"

No, we trust God. And as we do, we pour out our hearts to Him. Psalm 50:15, "*Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.*" John 14:13, "*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*" So here's the design of prayer. We ask for help in our lives to live according to the purpose for which He's created us. And when we ask, we get the help and God gets the glory.

Now, I put in the notes here that the power of prayer is useless. And here's what I mean by that, so don't throw me out as a heretic just yet. Because in and of itself, prayer as an exercise is useless. There's all kinds of people in the world who pray. Muslims pray. Hindus pray. Buddhists pray. Animists of all kinds pray. They pray. Even Congress prays. Big deal. First Kings 18 is an example of people praying to Baal and the lesson's clear: When you pray to a god who's not there, don't expect an answer.

So our goal is not just to be a people of prayer. What matters most is the object of our prayer, right? So the power of prayer in that sense is in and of itself useless. But the power of people who connect with Almighty God is unstoppable. This is evident in 1 Kings 18 and reiterated in James, who said that the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it's working. "*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*"

So my aim in calling us to prayer is not just to call us to set aside a few minutes or an hour or more to pray. My aim is to see that as children of God we have the privilege of

connecting with the Creator of the universe, that we can do nothing without Him, that we've been invited to experience intimacy with Him and to join with what He's doing in the world.

Which leads us to the next question: Who do we pray to every day? So, Who is the object of our prayers? "*Pray then like this,*" Matthew 6:9, "*Our Father in heaven.*" Now, Luke 11—which gives the account of the Lord's Prayer there—tells a story to give a picture of Who the Father is we're praying to. Listen to this story:

*[Jesus] said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs. And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

Okay, that's a great story. Just get the picture here. First-century Palestine, food not quite as readily available as it is today, no late-night Taco Bells. So, there's a battle for bread every day. You bake enough to meet that day's needs. So, a guy shows up at his buddy's house at midnight, and he's hungry.

Now, in first-century Palestine, hospitality was huge. So the buddy has a dilemma. One option: He can be a poor host and not get this guy any food. His second option is to go try to find bread from somebody else. So it's either be a poor host or poor neighbor. He takes what's behind door number two. His neighbor, already fast asleep, enjoying his dreams—not only asleep, but everybody else in the house asleep. And houses in that day were one-room affairs, which meant that everybody in the family slept in one room.

The family is sleeping, using the same bed with the same mat. You get kid one down, kid two down, kid three down for bed, and you and the wife lay down, bolt the door closed, and you're going to sleep. There isn't anybody getting up and going to the bathroom without causing a major commotion in that house. Everything is quiet. So while this nice guy is asleep on the mat with his wife and kids, all of a sudden a knock comes at the door.

And the guy on the outside says, "Friend..." That's a good way to start when you're waking up somebody at midnight for a piece of bread, because friendship is walking a tight line at this point. Because when that dad wakes up he starts looking around. Any dad can picture it. Little eyes on the mat next to him starting to pop open. It's one thing to wake up dad. It's a whole other ballgame when you wake up the kids in the middle of the night. This friend thing is seriously in question at this point.

So the guy inside is not too happy right now, and he says in the most polite way possible, "Don't bother me. I'm not giving it up. I'm not giving you a thing." And then Jesus says, "Even though the guy won't get up because he's a friend," because that's in question, "he will get up because the guy is impudent." That means bold. Literally, it means shameless. He keeps asking the guy until he finally gets up out of bed and gives him some bread.

Now, here's the thing about parables. We hear them and we think, "Okay. Somebody in the parable is me and somebody in the parable is God," right? So the disciples are thinking,

"Okay, I think we're like the guy knocking on the door. Okay. So who's God? The grumpy old guy inside, yelling, 'Don't bother me'? Like this is kind of weird, hard to understand."

Well, think about it. What is Luke 11 teaching us about prayer? Okay, well if you want something from God you just keep banging on the door and eventually He'll get up and do something for you—not because He loves you, but because you just bothered Him to death. So, let's pray. No—that's not the takeaway. Not the point of the story.

The point of the story all comes back to this boldness, this shamelessness. Some translations say "annoyingly relentless." And we'll only understand the parable rightly when we look at it through the lens of the man in need. So follow this. Jesus tells the story from this guy's perspective. So you've got to keep this perspective about the whole thing. Resist the temptation to try to compare God with the friend inside. Just put yourself in this guy's shoes.

Jesus phrases the whole thing as a question. He says, "Imagine that if you were bold enough, shameless enough, to go to your friend at midnight just to ask him for a piece of bread." In other words, imagine somebody with enough nerve to knock on his friend's door at midnight just to get a piece of bread.

I think the picture Jesus is painting here is the guy who is, well, in one sense just rude. This guy just doesn't know which social lines to cross and which ones not to. You know that kind of person? Or are you that kind of person? The guy who doesn't seem to get the hint, i.e., you don't wake up your buddy and his entire family at midnight unless you've got a really good reason.

But this guy doesn't know that. He's shameless. He's so socially out of it that he actually thinks it's no big deal to wake his friend up in the middle of the night. "He won't mind. I need some bread. I know he's got it. He won't mind me bothering him in the middle of the night. And I know that he'll get up and get some for me. No problem."

That's how we should approach God. Think about it. In prayer, we approach God our Father who has all authority. So the whole earth belongs to Him, Psalm 24. He has the supply. He has the supply. I love this in Psalm 50, midway through that passage. *"Every beat of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds on the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."* God has the supply. He has the sovereignty. In other words, He has the authority to do with everything whatever He wants.

So we pray to God our Father who has all authority, and to God our Father who is always approachable. So this guy knew his friend was able to meet his need, and he was shameless enough to think that his friend wouldn't mind him coming at such an inopportune time. And it's in this picture of the shameless guy that we realize that the God—follow this—that the God of the universe, who has all the supply and all the sovereignty, has actually invited you and me to come to Him any time, at any day.

It says in Psalm 27, *"You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, Lord, do I seek.'"* This story is a perfect illustration. It's a perfect illustration of us going to God and saying, "I know it may feel a little inappropriate to interrupt you, because you're running a universe and you've got all these things going on, but I just need you to sit down and listen to me and look at me and don't be distracted because I've got some things I need to share."

Does that seem a bit over the top? But it isn't. The picture here is shameless nerve, a boldness, and it seems almost ludicrous for us to be going into the presence of the God of the universe. But Jesus is saying, "Be as invasive as you want. Be shameless." Here's the point. I think Jesus is saying that God delights in revealing Himself to those who are bold enough to bother Him. And I hesitate to use that word "bother" because of the negative connotations, but it's not always negative.

Think about it this way. When I'm really busy—either with things around here or maybe I'm travelling, and my wife Heather has something heavy on her heart -- and she calls me on the phone, if I'm out of town, or she comes to me and she says, "I don't want to bother you with this", what am I going to say? I'm going to say to my wife, "Heather, this is the kind of stuff I want you to bother me with? I delight in being the one that you want to bother with the problems and struggles and heartaches in your life. It would bother me if you didn't come to me." Right?

God has given you, as His child, full access to His presence, and He says, "I want to be bothered by the things that are heavy on your heart. The struggles you're walking through—I delight in being the one that you want to bother with these things." Ladies and gentlemen, the God of the universe is approachable, and He has invited you to unburden your heart shamelessly before Him.

Jesus is not saying, "Don't bother the Father with the trifling things in your life." He's saying the exact opposite. He's saying, "You have freedom to ask and seek and knock." God invites us to bother Him any time. It is never too early; it is never too late. God invites us to bother Him in everything. We sometimes think we're praying for what may not be important enough to warrant mentioning in time with God.

But look at the story. It's not an emergency. Now, this guy's not saying, "My wife's having a baby," or "My wife is dying. My kid broke his leg. We've got a robber in the house." He's in the middle of the night; he's in the middle of the night. He said, "I just want some biscuits." I mean, that's presumptuous to say the least. The guy's not going to die if he just waits until breakfast. Tell him to go to bed. He'll forget he's hungry when he falls asleep.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing too small to bring before God. Our simplest prayers are not insignificant to God. There are no minor matters. It's why Nehemiah prays, "Lord, just strengthen my hands. My hands are hurting." Nothing too small. There's nothing too great. We can pray about mustard seeds and mountains. We can pray about colds as well as cancers. It's not about the size of our prayers, but the maintenance of a relationship. The Bible never cautions us about the magnitude of our prayers.

Let me ask you, what are the great things you're praying for? I mean, the things that, if somebody else knew you were praying for this, they'd think you'd lost your mind. I have a couple of those kind of things I'm praying for. I can't tell you what they are. But there's nothing too great. Nothing will be impossible with God.

I didn't put it here, but Philippians 4, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" In the Greek original language of the New Testament, that word "everything" means everything. Everything. We pray to God our Father. He's always approachable.

And we pray to God our Father who is ever active. So this guy thought, "My friend is able. I know he'll have some bread. He's approachable. He won't mind me knocking on the door. And he's active. He'll get up and give me some." Now, here's the picture we need to see.

Contrary to the friend inside the house, God is not asleep. When we pray, we're not trying to arouse a sleeping giant. We don't have to wake God up.

And we know this, but we don't always really know this. Have you ever thought that God might be asleep in your life? "Why is this happening? Why is that happening?" And so when we pray, it's almost like we're praying for God to get up and do something. Let Luke 11 be a reminder to you: God is active. He's not gone to sleep on you. Even when it makes no sense, He's active in your life. Isaiah 40:28, *"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength."*

Now, that leads us to the privilege we need to embrace. This story is primarily about asking someone for a need to help another person. It's not just the picture of a personal petition, but asking something on behalf of somebody else. In prayer, that's what the Bible calls intercession. Intercession is the means by which we participate in the daily activity of God in other people's lives.

So God's not asleep—He's active. He's working in the lives of people all around us. And He has chosen to involve in His work through our prayers on their behalf. To go back to the earlier question, "If God is sovereign and He's all-knowing and He's purposed everything from beginning to the end, then what's the point of praying?" And this is when we realize that our praying is also a part of that purpose; that plan. And we have the joy of participating in the plan and purposes of God in our life, in our communities, around the world, by falling on our knees and interceding on behalf of those who are hurting.

It's exactly what we read about in Exodus 2, Psalm 106. This is when we were praying just a minute ago for Turkey—we know Christ has died to purchase people from among the Turks, the Kurds, every other people group on the planet. He's going to save them. He's working right now in Turkey. God is working in Turkey right now. We're not trying to arouse a sleeping Giant. He's working in Turkey, and He's given you and I the privilege of being a part of that work for the last however many minutes—from our knees, crying out to Him.

And He uses the prayers of His people to accomplish His purposes in the world. We get to be a part of what He's doing in Turkey from wherever you are. And I think there's a church here from Chunky, Mississippi. And in Chunky, Mississippi, you can be a part of what God's doing in Turkey.

So, the promise we need to remember is that prayer to God is never, ever in vain. Prayer to God is never, ever in vain. *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."* Now, you read that and you think, "Well, I've asked for things and I've not gotten them. So what does that mean?"

Well, that leads to the next question: What do we pray for every day? And here's the daily secret to prayer. It's twofold. One, make your wants God's wants. Psalm 37, desire what God desires. This is the mystery of intimacy that we were talking about. So in prayer, you go in your room, you close the door, get alone with God. You begin to want what He wants. You begin to long for what He longs for. And this is key in prayer. Because if we skip this step, we'll miss the whole point of prayer altogether. We can't go on to step two here.

So make your wants what God wants, and then, step two, ask for whatever you want, and it will be done for you, Jesus says. So what do we ask for? Well, what do we ask for? What does God want? Based on how Jesus taught us to pray, one, we ask God for His glory. *"Our*

*Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*" That's not a description of praise to God as much as it's a petition for God to be praised. "God, cause your name to be hallowed, to be known as holy, in all the earth. Cause your name to be known as holy in my life, in my family, in my church, in the world."

That's the great God who is the sovereign Father in heaven, the Holy One above all. "God, show," 2 Samuel 7, *"that there's none like you, and there is no God beside you."* You're praying for Turkey—you show there's only one God. His name is Jesus. You pray in that, you know you're praying according to what God wants. It's going to make it happen. He's the coming King.

So our consistent cry is, "Cause people to hallow your name. Bring people to submit to your kingdom. Enable people to obey your will. Enable me, my family—O God, may your will be done in my life. May your will be done in my family. May your will be done in my church as it is in heaven." This is a prayer that God promises to answer. And then ask God for His gifts. "Give us this day our daily bread." God satisfies our hunger on a daily basis.

The whole picture here goes back to Exodus 16, when God's people were wandering in the wilderness. God provided them with food—bread from heaven, manna—on a daily basis. They wake up in the morning. God would literally give them their daily bread. It would last for a day. They would depend on Him for the supply for the next day. And He did this, Deuteronomy 8:3 tells us, to sustain their faith on a daily basis.

So, God satisfies our hunger on a daily basis, and He sustains our faith on a daily basis. We need to pray like this. We live—most of us gathered tonight—live in a culture where praying like this makes almost no sense to us. Because we're so well off that it doesn't make sense for us to pray to ask God for daily bread.

But this is exactly where the problem lies. We're people who have so much that we've grown so accustomed to depending on our own things to satisfy us instead of our God. We don't need to ask for daily bread. Most of us didn't ask for it today, "God, provide food today," in the way that many brothers and sisters around the world are, because we think, well, we can take care of that on our own. God help us to realize we can't.

I'm convinced, the more I look at my own life as well as the state of Christianity in the Western culture around me, that one of the greatest reasons we're so casual and flippant with prayer is because we actually believe we can sustain ourselves. And we can't. God alone can satisfy our hungers, and God alone can sustain our faith. And prayer—prayer is the guard in our life that keeps us from thinking that this world can give us what we want when only God can do that. So we ask God for His gifts.

And we ask God for His grace. "Forgive us our debts." Four simple words that open the door to the vast storehouse of heaven's mercy. And here's the beauty. The more we grow in prayer, the more we grow in intimacy with God, the more we will realize our constant need for His grace. Constant. And when we pray, we experience His forgiveness.

You say, "Well, why do I have to ask for forgiveness when," like we talked about earlier in our foundation, "I've already been forgiven in Christ?" This is where we need to picture, not a courtroom where judgment is being pronounced here. God has already in Christ declared you not guilty before Him. Instead, picture a family, where a child is confessing something he's done wrong—not so he can remain part of the family. That's not up for question. But so that nothing will hinder that child's intimacy with his mom or dad.



And in this way, when we pray like Psalm 51 teaches us to pray, we experience our Father's forgiveness continually, on a daily basis, specifically. This is not just confessing sin generally, but specifically examining our hearts. As we experience His forgiveness, we then extend it to others. We must extend it to others; our intimacy with God, Jesus says, is dependent on it.

Finally, we ask God for His guidance. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Now, this obviously doesn't mean that God might entice or tempt us to sin. Instead, it's an acknowledgement of our tendency to wander away from Him. We're weak, and we're compelled to pray that He'll give us protection against temptation we face, just like 1 Corinthians 10 promises. And He gives perseverance amidst trials we encounter, James chapter one.

Now with all this you may be thinking, "Now, where do I start practically?" It's where I want to give you a way to think about daily prayer. So, go in a room, close the door, and pray. So use that acrostic—P.R.A.Y. Just four steps to maybe help you remember, "All right. What do I do when I close the room alone with the Father in heaven?"

Start with Praise. Just worship God for Who He is. I put Psalm 63 earlier in your notes:

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.*

It's just pouring out your heart to God to express Who He is. And maybe that's writing down just the attributes of God, or prayers to praise. Maybe just crying out. Maybe you're doing this sitting down or standing up. Maybe you're on your knees. Maybe you're on your face before God. Maybe you turn on some music somewhere in there. You praise. You worship God for Who He is. And sometimes you just keep going and going, because you're enjoying exalting God. This is not just duty, where we come in here and check off a list and get out. No, this is relationship. We're worshipping God for Who He is.

And then R—Repent. Confess your sin to God. Acknowledge your need for Jesus. Confess your sin. I mean, examine your heart. Where am I sinning? What am I doing or not doing? And oftentimes I write this out. And you might be tempted to think, "Well, that's just depressing, I mean, dwelling on your sin and writing out the specific ways you've sinned against God."

But this is not depressing, for God your Father delights in forgiving you, and in restoring you. Repentance always leads to restoration of relationship. Even better, we're reminded—as we're repenting, we're confessing sin—that our sins have been paid for by Christ. And then repentance just leads to deeper and deeper rest in Christ.

Praise, Repent, and then Ask. So intercede for particular needs in your life and others' lives. Ask God for His glory. Ask God for His grace. Ask God for His gifts. Ask God for His guidance. "God, your name be hallowed in my life, in this person's life, in this country, in this current event. Your kingdom come. Your will be done in my life, in this person's life, in your church. Give us this day our daily bread. I need you for this today. Other people around me—this person needs this. This Christian needs that."

There are so many ways you can approach this kind of asking, intercession. I would encourage you in two particular ways: Spontaneous and planned. This isn't in your notes.

This is just “no extra charge.” Spontaneous: So, just what comes in your mind? When you’re in the room alone with the Father, what comes in your mind? Things to pray for in your life, in others’ lives. This is just spontaneous.

But I would encourage you also to be planned. I have a prayer list. I pray for specific and different things in my life on a daily basis. In my life, for my wife Heather, for our kids. I pray one day specifically for this, and their lives, and something different on other days. I just want to be intentional in my praying for them. I pray for different friends on different days, for the church in different ways on different days. For the elders and staff of our church by name on different days in the course of the week. I’m praying for other churches in Birmingham, and churches in North America, and church-planting teams that we’ve sent out.

Just Monday through Friday, I want to be intentional about prayers. I would encourage you—not to be so planned that it just becomes rote and you’re just kind of reading off a list. That’s not the point. But I think it’s healthy to be intentional about asking God for things that you want to see Him do in the world according to His Word, in people’s lives right around you. First Samuel 12:23, “*Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you.*” We’ve got to be intentional about that. But also leave room for spontaneity.

All that leads us to Yield in prayer, surrender your life to following Jesus wherever and however He leads you. So you should Praise and Repent and Ask for these things in your life and others’ lives, and so it just makes sense: Your life’s going to be different. You prayed, “Your will be done in my life as it is in heaven,” so now it just makes sense to pray, “Lead me. Guide me. Deliver me from evil. Lead me not into temptation. I want to walk with you.”

And when I spend that time in prayer in the morning with the Lord, I just kind of walk through every single thing that I know is coming that day—meetings or this or that—and just pray through every single detail that I know, and just pray for sensitivity to things I don’t know, people that I don’t know I’m going to meet or interact with, opportunities that are going to be there. So you’re dwelling with God, Psalm 84, in a concentrated way in the morning, for example. Or obviously, you can do this any time of day, but I think it’s good to start the morning that way. And then it just fuels continual prayer all day long.

## **Living Every Day to Love God with All Your Mind and Strength**

### **Fill your mind daily with truth from God’s Word.**

I believe prayer is the key to living every day and loving God with all your heart and soul. Then, living every day with all your mind and strength. So fill your mind daily with truth from God’s Word. So it’s prayer and the Word—these are the backbones of daily life in Christ. Now, people come up with all kinds of reasons why we don’t read, study, memorize the Bible. “I don’t see how the Bible really applies to my life. I’ve tried, but I just don’t know how to study the Bible. I’m not professional. Isn’t that the pastor’s job? Isn’t that your job? I just don’t have time. I’m not sure if the Bible’s even true. To be honest, it just seems boring to me.”

And part of my prayer tonight is that you will see, just even in the next couple minutes, the treasure that’s waiting to be found in God’s Word, so you will desire it and believe it, make time for it, and devour it. People ask me, “How do I grow in my hunger, my desire for God’s Word?” And the answer is, by reading God’s Word.

So the illustration I've always shared here at The Church at Brook Hills is when I first met my now-wife, Heather. And the first time I went over to her house to have dinner when we were just getting to know each other—as soon as I got there, her family loves seafood, and so they had cooked this seafood spread. And they were like, "Do you like seafood, David?" Well, I grew up in a family that never ate seafood. My dad hated seafood so I hated seafood.

And so I'm there, I'm at the meal, and all there is is seafood. And they said, "Do you like seafood?" And I said, "Uh, yeah. I like it. No, this looks great." Like, I don't even know what many of these things are. So I start eating it. And the problem is they believed this act I was putting, because the next time I come over they were like, "Hey, David's coming over and he loves seafood. Let's have some more seafood." Ah, that's great.

I went on vacation with her family down at the beach, and they're like, "Hey, David, what's your favorite seafood restaurant down here?" I'm like, "They're all so awesome, I don't even know." And inside I'm thinking, "I know which ones have chicken fingers." That's where I go. So anyway, the point of the story is, after a while, I started to love seafood! Because I had to eat seafood to get a wife.

So this is how it works. Now, I'm not saying, "Hey, this Word, you might not like it but just eat it and it'll taste good one day." But I am saying, "The more you taste it, the more you'll see it's good. It's good. It's better. It's better." The more you eat a Ruth's Chris steak, then a McDonald's hamburger just doesn't cut it anymore. Like, you realize what a real deal is.

So, why we must then daily read, study and memorize the Bible—because it's essential for growth and maturity, and we need it. We need to have this Book to sustain our lives spiritually. 1 Peter 2 says we're like a baby grabbing for milk. I've got a one-year-old. A bottle of milk comes out at night, and it's like the kid hasn't eaten anything in his entire life. It's like, "Give it to me." He doesn't say that, but he does with his screaming. And so he wants it. So crave this.

As we read it, we read it because it's essential for spiritual growth and maturity, and because it's vital for life and ministry. 2 Timothy says, "*All Scripture...*" All Scripture, 2 Timothy 3. That includes Leviticus. All of it "*is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*"

And we read the Bible because it's key to joy and satisfaction. It's key to joy and satisfaction.

*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

Then you look at all these verses in Psalm 119 that echo that reality.

Let me ask you a question. What would make you happier this year? A hundred thousand dollar raise at your job, or reading through the Bible over the course of the year? Don't be super-spiritual. Just what's the first thing that came to your mind? "Well, I know I'm supposed to say reading the Bible, but I'd love a raise." Look down at Psalm 119:72, "*The*

*law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*" Oh, for that kind of view of the Bible in our lives. It's better; it's better.

Now, just because we start reading doesn't mean we'll understand. So we've got to be on guard against dangerous approaches to daily Bible reading, like the emotional approach—what feels right to me?—where we twist the Bible to fit our tastes. Or the spiritual approach—what deep hidden meaning is there for me?—as if we're going to find something new that Christians for two thousand years have totally missed and now thankfully you came on the scene.

Or the pragmatic approach—what works best for me?—making Scripture accommodate our lives. Or the all too common superficial approach—what does this mean to me? This approach happens all the time in small group Bible studies. A lot of people sitting around in a room, they'll read a verse or a chapter. Take like Genesis 22. Abraham offering his son Isaac. God providing a ram for a sacrifice. And somebody will say, "Okay. What does this mean to you?" And all of a sudden people start saying all kinds of different things that the passage means to them.

Bob over here says, "Well, I think this chapter means I need to go hiking with my son more, just like Abraham went hiking in the mountains with Isaac." Okay, Bob, that's good. Anybody else? And Joe over here chimes in, says, "Well, I think it's clear from this passage that it's okay to sacrifice animals, which means no one should be a vegetarian." To which Joe's wife Mary, a vegetarian, would reply, "Well, that's not what this passage means to me. Maybe this passage means I need to sacrifice you, Joe."

So when we start a Bible study with the question, "What does this passage mean to me?" the conversation will quickly congeal into a pool of ignorance where a group of people find themselves sitting around sharing what they don't know about the Bible. That's not what we're after. The same thing can happen in our personal Bible study. So I just want to remind us that the first question we ask is not, "What does this passage mean to me?" The first question we ask is, "What does the Holy Spirit mean in this passage?"

Quite frankly, I don't care what this passage means to you or what it means to me. I care what this passage means, period. Someone might say, "Well, David, don't you know that different verses mean different things to different people?" No. That's application. We'll get to that in a minute. There's no question different verses apply to our lives in different ways, but our goal in Bible study is not to determine a personal meaning for every verse in the Bible. Our goal is to discover what the Holy Spirit meant when He gave us this verse, this chapter, this book.

So here's what I hope, I believe, is a dependable approach to Bible reading, based around an acrostic R.E.A.P.—Read, Examine, Apply, Pray. So start by reading. Read the Word. Read the Word. Read the Bible prayerfully, knowing that we never study the Bible alone. So Christian, you have a built-in Guide for studying the Bible, the very Spirit of God. And in the process of reading the Bible the Holy Spirit is with you, in you, helping you to understand it and to apply it. Bible study is a supernatural activity. It's a divine encounter with the Word of God through the Spirit of God. It's an awesome thought.

So read the Bible prayerfully. Read the Bible humbly. We want to know God. We don't come to the Bible looking for options to consider for our life. We come to the Bible looking for commands to obey. Read the Bible carefully. We want to understand it rightly. Read the Bible joyfully. We want to experience it fully. Read the Bible confidently, like I just mentioned, knowing that the Holy Spirit's in you. Read the Bible diligently, knowing that

knowing God deeply doesn't happen overnight. The Bible does not yield its most choice fruit to the lazy. Read it diligently.

Read the Bible consistently, meaning not just every day, but every part of it. Don't skip over certain parts of the Bible as if they're not important. All Scripture God-breathed. Read the Bible expectantly, with a way to record your thoughts. I would encourage you to read the Bible with a pen in your hand or a journal. I have a journal just on my computer. So I've got my Bible and I've got a running journal that I'm writing things down. So if you're expecting God to speak, I would recommend writing down how He speaks into your life based on His Word.

And read the Bible personally. So many Christians never learn to study the Bible on their own, and as a result, their entire spiritual life is lived by proxy, through somebody else. These are Christians who come every single Sunday to hear the Word preached by somebody else—which is obviously not a bad thing in and of itself—but here's the deal: You never fall in love with somebody by proxy. You don't fall in love with your spouse through someone else. You don't love your spouse through someone else, by proxy. You fall in love with someone directly, personally, intimacy with that person.

I'm zealous for you not just to know God through sermons on a Sunday. I pray that you might read this Book every day. I'm convinced that when you do, you will fall in love with the Author of this Book. And you'll find true life under the authority of this Book.

And as you read, memorize. So take time. When a verse or a couple of verses stick out to you, commit them to memory. Do this with key verses, key passages, key chapters. Spend concentrated time learning. Be intentional. Memorization just doesn't happen. It's intentional. I mean, what is that movie that just came out from Disney? "Frozen" is what it is called.. I mean, I just hear people singing it all the time. You know? Because we're filling our minds with it. So I hear people sometimes say to me, "I just don't know how to memorize." Oh yeah you do. You know every word of those songs.

So the question is, what are we spending our time memorizing? What are we filling our minds with? People say, "My, I just can't memorize." Well, go back to the illustration earlier. You say, "Ah, I just can't memorize." Well, what if I told you that I would give you between now and the end of the weekend a thousand dollars for every verse you can memorize? I think you'd learn to memorize. I mean, "*Jesus wept*," John 11:35. And that would be a thousand dollars. And just move on.

So the question is do we value it enough to do that? So spend concentrated time learning, and then spend concentrated time, continual time, reviewing. So write it on a note card, make a note in your smart phone—do whatever works for you. But camp out on that verse, hide it in your heart, and then just go back over it, over and over and over again. When you're driving down the road, you know, or when you're just doing menial kind of things, go over it. Just constantly, when you're laying down in bed at night, just go back through the Word.

So R, Read. Then E, Examine. So as you read, ask questions in the text. What is happening in this passage? What words, phrases or ideas seem particularly important? So you're looking for details. You're thinking about every word, phrase, idea. And again, this takes time. You're not just going through this like you're going through a fast food restaurant. You have to be patient with the Word. You have to ponder over it.

I remember when my wife Heather and I, when we were just getting to know each other, she would write me letters. And I'd just like devour that letter. I'd open it up and just read it and I'd just over-analyze every word. What does she mean by this? She said she liked me a lot. Does that mean she liked me as friend, or like me as more than just a friend? She said she's praying for me. Well, is that like she prays for me like she prays for anybody, or like she's praying for her future husband kind of praying for me? She put a smiley face at the end. Does she always do that, or am I like special because I get a smiley face?

This is what we're doing in Bible study, looking at every little detail. We are saying, "Okay, what does this mean? What does this mean? What does this mean?" We're asking questions. And then we ask, "What does this text teach you about the gospel?" This is where we start to step back a bit and consider how the truth in a passage is not just talking about something that happened 2,000 years ago. It's communicating to people of all times.

So we ask, "What does this text teach us about God? What does this text teach us about man? About Who Christ is and why we need Him?" So you go through these questions. Luke 24 makes clear that all Scripture ultimately points us to Christ. What does this Scripture teach us about trusting and following Christ? What does this passage teach us about the hope of heaven, the horror of hell? So we ask those questions. We write down answers.

So Read, Examine, then Apply. How does what I've just read apply to my life? And we ask simple questions. What sins do I need to repent of or avoid based on this? What truths do I need to believe? What commands do I need to obey? What do I need to give up, stop doing, start doing or continue doing? What principles need to change the way I think, speak or act, and how do I implement that change? What relationships do I need to establish, strengthen, or change? In all of this, what we're asking is, by the power of God's Spirit, Christ in me, what can I do today to apply God's Word to my life?

And then that naturally leads us to do what? To Pray. And in this way we see that Bible reading and praying go hand in hand. This is communion with God. Praying to Him, hearing from Him, in a back-and-forth interplay of intimacy with the God of the universe. And this Word, the Bible, is crucial, critical, necessary, non-negotiable in loving God with all your mind. "*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.*"

### **Sharpen your mind daily with truth in God's world.**

Now, at the same time I wanted to put in here that there are other ways we love God with our minds. So first and foremost and over and above everything else we fill our mind daily with truth from God's Word. But then, underneath that, sharpen your mind daily with truth in God's world. So expanding on how we're thinking about loving God with our minds for a second, we love God with our minds when we read and study widely and wisely.

So yes, the Bible is the only book we must, we should, read, but it's also good to read other books. So many of you in this gathering tonight, in different places, may be in school. You're reading and studying all kinds of books. And this is good. If you're going to be a doctor, I hope you'll know what Leviticus says, but I hope you also know how to do surgery on me because you've read a couple books about it at some point. So I'm praying you're reading on the things that are going to be helpful there.

And you're loving God with your mind when you're using your mental faculties He's given you to grow in wisdom and in usefulness to God in the world. That's what I mean by studying widely and wisely. We've all been given minds, almost all of us who are listening to this gathering tonight are able to read, which is a gift in this world. So we must take advantage of it. Read different things.

There's so much in the world that passes as wisdom but is total foolishness. We don't love God with our minds by blindly believing everything we read or hear in the world. So heed Colossians 2:8. *"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy or empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."* So we want to filter all that we read in the world through the lens of God's Word, ultimately revealed in Christ.

Similarly, listen and learn humbly and continually. So even if you're not in school, don't stop learning. Don't stop reading and learning as God gives you opportunities. Proverbs 18:15, *"An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge."* And do all of this as you read, study, listen and learn. Avoid the pattern of this world. Romans 12:2, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."*

So there's a pattern in this world that's described here in Romans 1 that begins with disordered worship: people turn their hearts away from God. That leads to disordered thinking: People believe lies that are not from God, that inform the way they view the world. That leads to disordered desire: the desire for things that are not of God. Which leads to disordered behavior that does not bring glory to God, summed up in Romans 1:28. *"Since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."*

So this is why we must fill our minds with the truth of God's Word, and then read, study, listen, learn, discern what is true in God's world. This means, to use language in 1 Peter 2, we think as pilgrims in this world. We're sojourners and exiles, pilgrims in this world. So how do we do this? How do we read and study widely, listen, learn, and continue in this world and still avoid the power of the world that displeases God? These are a few exhortations from 2 Corinthians 3 and 4.

First, continually savor the person of Christ in all things. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10, *"We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God..."* And listen to this phrase, *"and take every thought captive to obey Christ."* So more than anything, keep your attention, keep your affection on Him, fill your mind with His Word, lift your heart to His praise, and as you do, you're continually savoring Christ.

And then, humbly depend on the Spirit of Christ in all things. So trust in the Spirit Who dwells in you, Who knows all truth. Remember, when you're studying calculus or you're diving into electromagnetic theory, you're not exploring subjects that the Spirit of God knows nothing about. He's omnipotent. He knows more about electromagnetics than you do, and more than your professor does, and more than everybody who's written on it together combined knows about electromagnetic whatever. So you're reading, studying, learning in any area of life; and you're humbly depending on the Spirit of Christ in you to discern what's right and wrong, wise and foolish.

And in all of this, constantly focus on the mission of Christ in all things. So the author of Hebrews is urging early Jewish Christians not to be carried away by a prevailing Jewish culture that denied the glory of Christ. So he says, in the second passage here, in verse eight of Hebrews 13, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace."* And he calls them to follow Christ into dangerous, difficult places for the glory of Christ.

Here's the deal. I know I mentioned school a couple times. God has put many of you in difficult settings on university campuses, in public schools for that matter, maybe in some

private schools who claim to be Christian but are far from the truth of Christ—or in jobs, workplaces, where this is much knowledge that is set up against the knowledge of God in Christ. You're in a mission field.

So love God with all your mind, continually savoring the person of Christ, humbly depending on the Spirit of Christ, constantly focusing on the mission of Christ and the proclamation of His truth in that place for His glory. We love God with all our minds as we daily sharpen our minds with the truth that He's given us in His Word and then in the world.

### **Take care of your body daily as a temple of God's Spirit.**

Love God with all your mind, and then love God with all your strength. Take care of your body daily as a temple of God's Spirit. Your body. So now we're talking about strength: Your body. One of my favorite books to read to my one-year-old is a book about the different body parts. What's his nose, ears, eyes, all that stuff? Do you ever wonder why we have all these ears, eyes, nose—whatever we've got? Why do we have these things?

The prevailing philosophy of our day is that all these things are just products of our DNA. These are the bodies we have. Each of us has a body that belongs to us. We're free to do with it whatever we want to do with it. So many of the hot-button issues in our culture today revolve around this kind of philosophy. Like what is marriage, homosexuality, abortion, prostitution, drugs, alcohol, free speech, pornography—the prevailing philosophy is that everybody has the right to figure out what's best for their body, and to use it however they want, however they deem most desirable.

So the question I want to ask is, "What if that's just not true? What if our bodies are not simply products of our DNA, and deeper, what if our bodies are not ours to do with whatever we want? What if they don't even belong to us?" This is exactly what the Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 6: *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."*

Now this is one of those areas where we're tempted to fragment our faith. We think, "Well, Christianity is about my spiritual life, but it doesn't have anything to do with my physical life." And in that sense we are just dead wrong. Your life in Christ has everything to do with your body—what you eat, what you wear, how you exercise—everything you do with your body matters to God. It's informed by Christ's presence in your life. He died on a cross to make your body a temple of the Holy Spirit of God.

So follow this line of thought in 1 Corinthians 6. One, your body's been created by God. It's created by God, which we've already talked about. But get into 1 Corinthians 6:13-14, you realize, your body's invaluable to God. *"The body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord,"* but listen to this, *"and the Lord for the body."* So your body's for God, and God is for your body.

God is very interested in your physical life. Your body is precious to Him. God puts a premium on how you use your body. It's invaluable to Him, so much so that He's made an eternal investment in it. Verse 14 says that He'll raise it up with Christ one day, a reality that's also reiterated in 1 Corinthians 15. Just as God raised Jesus from the dead, He's going to raise your body from the dead. So heaven's not going to be a place where spirits are just floating around on the clouds. We're bodies, walking around in a new heaven and a new earth. Your body has been created by God.



Second, your body's been purchased by Christ. We've already talked about this. Christ has united you with Himself. Jesus took on a new body like us, the body of a baby boy, and in so doing He showed us that the body's a good thing designed by God for God. Then on the cross He gave His body for us, to purchase us, to unite us with Himself. And in so doing, He set us free to enjoy God's great purpose for our body and exalt God's great glory in our bodies. *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

And God enabled us to glorify Him with our bodies by filling our bodies with His Spirit. Your body has been filled by the Spirit. Your body and my body are temples of the Holy Spirit. You think about it. The temple in the Old Testament was the place where God's presence dwelled among His people, the place where God's holiness drew the nations to Himself. So then we possess the presence of God in our bodies. Just like the temple in Jerusalem housed the presence of the living God, your body houses the presence of the living God.

The Spirit of God dwells in your body, and so we display His holiness through our bodies. See this, Christian. God has created your body with His hands, purchased your body through His Son, filled your body with His Spirit—all for the display of His glory in the world.

So then, practically, think about it. Honor God then with what you wear on your body. First Timothy 2, *"I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works."* Adorn yourself with modest dress. That's a biblical command. It's an invitation to enjoy God's grace and exalt God's glory. Do not draw attention to physical beauty. Don't dress in a way that draws attention to you.

The word there for "modesty" in 1 Timothy 2 has sexual overtones. That's why I put Romans 14, where Scripture warns us against putting stumbling blocks in the way of others, particularly a brother here. Sisters in Christ, let me urge you—particularly as we approach spring and summer—that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. So don't wear in the world what you should only wear in your bedroom. Skin-tight clothes, low necklines, short dresses, short skirts, short shorts don't glorify God. They glorify the flesh, your flesh, and they appeal to brothers who are pulled away from God by your immodesty.

Don't dress to draw attention to yourself. When you decide what you're going to wear, what is the question you're asking? You're asking, "What's going to make me look the best?" or "What's going to make me look most attractive?" But you ask, "What can I wear that can best demonstrate a humble heart that is devoted to the glory of my God?" And that changes what you wear. God says, "Don't draw attention to yourself."

Along those lines, do not draw attention to worldly wealth. Part of the point of the exhortation against gold and pearls and jewelry there in 1 Timothy 2 is because some of these ornate things were highlighting the distinction between the poor and the rich in the early church, and women were using their dress to assert their status. So that's what the world says. Don't adorn yourself with dress that draws attention to you.

Remember the one you're competing with attention for—God. You want your life in every way to draw attention to God. That's the whole point: adore God through a Christ-like demeanor. Paul is not saying, "Don't adorn yourself with anything." Paul is saying, "Adorn yourself with godliness. When you look in the mirror, look for good works. That's what matters—the fruit of faith in Christ. Adorn yourself with that. Adore God with that." *"Charm*

*is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*" (Proverbs 31:30)

*"So let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16) *"Do not let your adorning be external,"* this is the Word of God, 1 Peter 3, *"—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious."* Sisters in Christ and brothers in Christ, wear on your body that which brings glory to your God.

And honor God with what you eat. So God created our bodies to eat, right? He didn't have to. But He did. And God cares about what we eat. The very first sin in the world revolves around disobedience regarding food. This is important. It's reflected all throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament. All these Scriptures that I've put in there.

And in all of it, God over and over again condemns excessive eating. This is sin that we do not talk about much in the church today, but we must. *"Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags."* (Proverbs 23:20-21) *"If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it."* (Proverbs 25:16) *"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom,"* who brought down the wrath of God. *"She and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it."* (Ezekiel 16:49-50)

Philippians 3, *"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."* Those are strong words. Our lack of discipline in eating, in the church, in our culture, is a sign of a much greater lack of discipline in our lives as Christians. And we must filter our breakfast, lunch and dinner and snack decisions through the lens of the gospel in what brings most glory to God.

So control why you eat. So we eat not primarily to satisfy ourselves, but to glorify God—1 Corinthians 10:31. Control how and what you eat. With a body that's a temple of the Holy Spirit, that changes the way you view what you put inside of you. Now, honestly, people have different ideas of what is good and right and healthy to eat, and what's not, and it's not where I'm going to go off on why everybody should eat Paleo or everybody should eat this or everybody should eat that. That's not the point.

The point is we've got to go before God and say, "Am I honoring you with the way I'm eating, with what I'm eating and how I'm eating? Is this bringing glory to your name?" How do we eat on a continual daily basis that brings the most glory to God? We cannot disconnect this from our spiritual lives—"That just has nothing to do with it." It has everything to do with our spiritual lives. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible even warns us to control who we eat around. Proverbs 23, *"When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you are given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food."* Don't be lured away by the indulgences of another's table. We even have this warning in 1 Corinthians 5 where an unrepentant sinner is removed from the church, not to eat with him.

So don't remove God from your daily meal decisions. Be careful what you eat, how you eat, why you eat, who you eat around, and in all of this, crave the day when we will see the King. So there's a reason why we have a meal that we celebrate called the Lord's Supper, to remind us in the church of the fellowship we'll have around His table one day. Crave that day, and crave the feast we will enjoy in His Kingdom, which the Bible clearly describes in terms of food. This is just a good gift from God, for the glory of God.

Honor God with what you eat on a daily basis, and honor God in how you exercise on a daily basis. John prayed, *"I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."* All who are in Christ must be careful not to ignore the care of your body. Let me confess to you that I have been the chief of sinners on this. It was not until a couple years ago, when I through my precious wife became very convicted about this, because my eating, sleeping, exercise patterns were either unhealthy or non-existent when it came to exercise. No sleep, no exercise, eating horribly.

And that was sin in my life. I was ignoring the care of my body, and I needed to repent. However, there's another side of the spectrum here, where you must also be careful not to idolize the care of our body. Most scholars believe that the Ephesians spent a lot of time on training athletes for festivals; it was a craze, so to speak. So Paul says about midway through that passage in 1 Timothy 4, *"Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."*

Did you follow that? Physical training is definitely not bad. At the same time, it's not the best. This is so key. Physical training is valuable. We need to care for our bodies. We need to eat well, exercise well. But let that pale in comparison with training for godliness and prayer and fasting and the Word and the Spirit. Train there. Train much more there. The healthiest body in this room is not guaranteed to make it through the end of this night. What's going to matter ten billion years from now? So, don't ignore the care of your body, but let's not idolize the care of our body either.

So these issues with our bodies are issues of obedience, of sin, of are we enjoying God's grace, exalting God's glory. If we're not honoring God with what and how and why we eat and how and when we exercise, then we're dishonoring the temple the Holy Spirit has given us, and we need to repent.

### **Keep control of your body daily in accordance with God's will.**

And along those lines, we're still thinking about loving God daily with all our strength, so keep control of your body daily in accordance with God's will. And we'll hit this, and then we'll take a break. We must control our bodies instead of our bodies controlling us. And so two areas in particular. One, a biblical expression of physical denial—fast regularly. So, in Matthew 6, Jesus expects His followers to fast. *"When you fast..."* He doesn't say if you fast, but when you fast.

But I would dare to say that many followers of Christ, even in this gathering tonight, regular fasting in your life is nowhere close to your life, or maybe has never even been a part of your life. We don't talk about fasting a lot. In Matthew 6, fasting is as elementary and basic praying is and giving is. And so we need to have emphasis here: putting aside food and water for a certain period of time. Maybe that's a meal; maybe it's a day; maybe it's more than a day. This is not necessarily food or water—whatever you decide to fast from—but to say, "Okay, I'm going to control my body by saying more than I want this physical sustenance, there's something I want more."

This is what fasting is. I remember the first time I ever fasted. A group of us got together in high school and said, "We need to fast." And from metro Atlanta, we went out to Stone Mountain and we kind of spread out and we went, got our Bibles, and we just spread out. And we got there about nine in the morning and had our water bottles, because we were just fasting from food. And this is awesome. We prayed, and we got back together about noon. And we went, "We need to pray some more."

Then it got to be about 2:00, and we were all getting kind of tired, so we got in the car. Our plan was to fast for the whole day, but we just said, "Well, you know, I mean, this has been good, and there's a Burger King on the way home, so, I mean...." I waited until 2:00 that day, and then I'm diving into this Whopper, and thinking, "I think I missed the point. I think I missed the point."

So you start at some level, and then you kind of work into it. But the whole picture of fasting—why do we do this? Because we're hungry for God's Word in our lives. Because we don't live by bread alone, Jesus says, "*but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*" We fast because we're hungry for God's power in the church. We need strength for our bodies, so we eat. We need strength for our souls, so we put aside food periodically, and we seek after God. We just say, "Okay, instead of eating lunch, I'm going to spend time in prayer and the Word. I want God's power in my life, in my family, in the church."

Because we're hungry for God's glory in all nations. We fast because, Isaiah 62, we want His glory to be made known in all the earth. So we fast and we pray for the spread of the gospel in Turkey. When we fast regularly, we express our delight in God's glory. More than we enjoy food, we enjoy God. We want God. We put aside a meal and we say, "More than I've got a hunger for that food, I've got a hunger for you."

We confess our need for God's grace. Oftentimes in the Old Testament, places like Joel 1 and Joel 2, you see fasting associated with times of confession and repentance of sin. More than we need a meal, we need the mercy of God. When we fast regularly, we seek and submit to God's will. More than we want our hunger to cease, we want His Kingdom to come and His will to be done in our lives.

And then when we fast regularly, we anticipate the return of God's Son. One of the great passages on fasting is Matthew 9. The disciples come to Jesus and say, "*Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?*" And Jesus said to them, "*Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.*"

Jesus said, "You don't fast when the bride and the bridegroom are together. You fast when the bridegroom leaves and you long for his return." You fast because there's an ache, a longing, a hunger inside of you because Christ is not here as fully and finally as He will be one day, and you want Him to be. So fasting is a physical expression that, more than our stomachs long to be full, our souls long to see Christ. And in this way a lack of fasting demonstrates a lack of desire for Christ to come back.

So let me encourage you—if you have not fasted and don't have a picture of some kind of regular fasting in your life, to consider as one takeaway from our time together tonight to think through what that might look like in your life. And start small, and have a Whopper after a few hours if you need to, but just start to put this into practice. See what God does.

Then, in loving God with all your strength and controlling your body, consider a biblical expression of physical discipline—and I think this is necessary to put in here—flee sexual immorality. My friend Kevin DeYoung writes,

If we could transport Christians from almost any other century to any of today's 'Christian' countries in the West, I believe what would surprise them most (besides our phenomenal affluence) is how at home Christians are with sexual impurity. It doesn't shock us. It doesn't upset us. It doesn't offend our consciences. In fact, unless it's really bad, sexual impurity seems normal, just a way of life, and downright entertaining.

This is huge for us. We've already seen command in 1 Corinthians 6, "*Flee from sexual immorality.*" First Thessalonians 4, "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.*" You say, "What does that mean? What is sexual immorality?"

The biblical word that used there, "*porneia*," is a reference literally to all sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman. So this is any sexual looking, thinking, touching, acting, speaking, desiring, wanting outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. Again, Kevin DeYoung helps us think practically about everyday application of this command. He says:

The simplest way to understand *porneia* is to think about the things that would make you furious and heartbroken if you found out someone was doing them with your husband or your wife. If someone shook your wife's hand you would not be upset. If someone gave a casual side hug to your husband it probably wouldn't bother you. A kiss on the cheek or even a peck on the lips in some cultures might be appropriate. But if you found out another person had sex with your wife or saw her naked or touched certain parts of her body you would be furious. If you found another person made out with your husband or talked about sexual activities or made certain gestures you would be heartbroken. Why? Because these are all activities that are appropriate for a married couple but are inappropriate when practiced outside of the lawful relationship of a man and a woman in marriage. Any sexual activity between those who are not married, or between two men, or between two women, or among more than two persons, or between family members, or between those married to other people—any sexual activity in these contexts is sin and can be included in the prohibitions against *porneia*.

Now, needless to say, the Bible is going completely against the grain at this point in our culture and our country and even in the church in so many ways in our day. But we must hear it and we must heed this. This is everyday application with an eternal exhortation. Hear the words of Christ, Matthew 5:

*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

Here are the words of Scripture. First Corinthians 6, *"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."* Unrepentant sexual sin leads to hell. It's not saying if you've ever committed any sexual immorality of any sort then you're going to hell. That's why I say "unrepentant" sexual sin. It's what the Bible is saying here. Those whose lives are characterized by sexual immorality, who refuse to repent of sexual immorality, will experience eternal condemnation from God.

This is extremely serious. I am confident that this is the Word from God that many people in gatherings tonight to hear most. All across this room, and in every remote site—we've got 60,000 people—God in His mercy has brought some of you to this gathering right now for this moment, for you to hear these words from the Word. Don't rationalize your sexual immorality. Don't reason with sexual immorality. Run from sexual immorality. Flee sexual immorality. This is the Word of God. Love God with your body—with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength.

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