



PRAY
Genesis 6-13; Matthew 6-12

If you have a Bible and I hope you do, to open it up with me to Matthew 6. I mentioned reading the Bible. If you were not here last week or in December, or maybe you're just visiting with us tonight, we have begun a process as a faith family of reading through the Bible together. Over the next two years, we'll cover the Old Testament once and the New Testament and Psalms twice, Lord willing. If you look at the top of the notes, you'll see Genesis 6-13 and Matthew 6-12. Those are the chapters that we read this last week, approximately two chapters a week. If you've not been reading along with us, let me encourage you, if you're a member of this faith family, to jump in. It's obviously not too late. It's never too late to jump in reading the Word. Every week we're going to look back to a specific text or broader picture that we've read through that last week that, and hopefully, even if you've not read, you'll be able to catch on ... but it will certainly help if you've read.

As I was reading through these chapters this last week asking the question, "What is the Lord saying to us?", it seemed like so many of these texts we were reading dealt with prayer. There's the foundational text on prayer in Matthew 6, when Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer, that many of you know rote, by heart. Then right after that, in Matthew 7, he says, *"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"* (Matthew 7:7-8). But even back in the Old Testament, there are pictures of Noah walking with God and Abraham walking with God, communing with God. And in the middle of all this, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are graphic, glorious pictures of the character of the God to whom we are praying. As I'm reading this, I just believe the Lord is—I know the Lord is—calling us to be a praying people, and I want to shepherd us to be a praying people. Our faith family, The Church at Brook Hills—a praying people. Not so we can say that we're a praying people, but so we know and love God. And so, I started thinking, "I need to put all these texts together—all these truths that we see in these texts—into a sermon on prayer." So that's the direction I was headed in. But the more I prayed and the more I considered this time today, the more I thought, "I don't know if our greatest need is new information on prayer, as much as our greater need is to pray and to help one another think through prayer in each one of our lives on a daily basis."

So think about it. What did prayer look like in your life this past week? Think about that. What did prayer look like in your life this past week? Would you say it was a healthy picture? My hope is that, as a result of our meeting with God tonight and the work of His Spirit here, your prayer life this next week will look different than it did last week in a lot of really good ways.

In your notes, there is a simple acrostic, PRAY. It's an acrostic that we mentioned in the "Simple Guide to Personal Worship" that I gave you last week. You can download the Bible reading plan and the "Simple Guide to Personal Worship"—just a guide to time alone with God—online at BrookHills.org. But part of that guide uses the acrostic, PRAY. And I mentioned that I wanted to unpack different parts of that guide. So what I want to do tonight is introduce a simple tool that I hope may help serve you when it comes to your

time with God in prayer on a daily basis, and I want to show you how daily reading the Bible informs and compels and transforms that kind of time in prayer. All to the end that, hopefully, you're led to pray. So I want us to see some truths in God's Word, and then along the way, I want to share some personal things that I do in my own prayer time that I hope might encourage you in your time with the Lord (not that you need to do exactly what I do, but hopefully it's just to help you practically think through some ways to pray in your life on a daily basis).

In Matthew 6, which we read this last week, Jesus said, in verse 6, *"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."* As I mentioned last week, that one practice will utterly revolutionize your life. It will. I promise. You set aside a time. You set aside a place to meet alone with God. It will change your life. You will experience Jesus' promise. You will experience great reward, and I am zealous for every single person in this room to experience that reward. I'm putting the cards on the table from the start. I am zealous for you to experience the reward that God has for you in a room alone with Him on a daily basis. I'm zealous for you to experience that.

You know what's interesting? Read those two verses right after that. Starting in verse 7, Jesus says, *"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"* (Matthew 6:7-8). Now you read that, and you might be tempted to think, "Okay ... then what's the point of prayer? I mean, if God already knows what we need, then why do I need to go in a room and tell Him?" This is where we realize that Jesus is showing us here that maybe there's a deeper purpose to prayer than just giving God a list of things—than informing God. Maybe God is not up in heaven with a Steno Pad and a pen, writing down your list and saying, "Oh, that's a good one. Oh ... haven't even thought about that—yes!" Maybe there's something deeper here for us in prayer.

That's what I'm zealous for you to experience—deeper than giving information to God. What if prayer is designed to experience intimacy with God? So obviously we're not... It's tough to talk about what happens when you're in a room alone with the Lord when you're in a room with 1,000 other people. But my hope is that if we walk through this acrostic and do some different things along the way, that you'll be able to apply—to transfer—what we dive into tonight, to your time alone. Now, you'll get a glimpse all together tonight of the reward that God has designed for you alone with Him tomorrow morning.

Praise

So let's start with the first letter. Again all this is really simple. But the P stands for praise. Worship God for who He is. So it's good, in prayer, to start by fixing your attention and your affection on the God whom you're praying to. If we're not careful, we can just kind of jump in and say, "Dear God. Okay, what do I need to pray for?" And you're not even thinking about who you're talking to. So pause and think about who you're talking to. And the Word helps us in this. George Müller, a giant, in a sense, in prayer and Christian history, once said, "When I used to rise from bed, I would begin to pray as soon as possible. But I often spent a quarter of an hour to an hour on my knees, struggling to pray while my mind wandered." Does that ever happen to you—your mind just wandering? Müller said, "Now I rarely have this problem and here's why not. As my heart is nourished by the truth of the Word, I'm brought into true fellowship with God. I speak to my Father and to my Friend

although I'm unworthy about the things that He has brought before me in His precious word."

So this is why my time with the Lord starts with an open Bible. I'll pray and ask God to help me to know Him more, for His spirit to lead my time with Him, and then I'll just begin to read. And so as I was reading the Word this last week, just a couple of chapters a day, every day I was overwhelmed by the greatness of God revealed in these texts that we were reading. We read in Genesis about God, in His holy and just wrath, bringing a flood over the entire earth. All the earth, He floods. I'm reading that, and all of a sudden it hits me. The God who flooded the earth in just and holy wrath ... this God is with me in the office. It can take your breath away when you really stop to think about it. Doesn't it? We've got to let the Word remind us who God is.

So here's what I want to do—a little audience participation tonight. Again, I hope, in a way, to help you realize that you can do this. We've got eight chapters in Genesis that we read this last week and seven chapters in Matthew that we read this last week, all of them filled with truth about who God is. So over the next few minutes, I want you to take these passages—anywhere between Genesis 6 and 13, and Matthew 6 and 12, and browse through them. Now this will be easier if you've read the Word this last week, but even if you've not, you'll be able to pick it up. Read through these passages, and write down attributes of God that you see in these passages along with the places where you see them. So you might write simply: God is (fill in the blank), and then write where the verse is found. So, for example, "God is holy, Genesis (fill in the blank)." Or it might even be in the New Testament. For example, "Jesus is holy; Matthew (fill in the blank)." Just write it down. You've got space in there. You can do this alone or get a couple of people around you. But write down characteristics or attributes of God, verses where they're found, and do that for the next few minutes, and then we're going to take audience participation up one more notch. All right. Go.

Alright, so here's what I want us to do. I want us just to, in a sense, pause and think. In these chapters, what do we learn about who God is, who Christ is, who Jesus is? This is where the audience participation is going to go to a whole new level. There are microphones spread out across the room, and I want to invite people from all around the room to go to these microphones and—one after another, after another—just say God is ... Jesus is ... fill in the blank. Quickly. And then say where the verse is found. You don't have to read through the verse. Just say "God is holy, Genesis (fill in the blank)." Then we'll go to the next one. Maybe in that space, you've written down some; write down some of these others, and let's just think about who God has revealed Himself to be in these verses. We're not just reading the Bible, so I will reserve the right, if you say something God is not, to say, "No; He's not that." So I'm just going to put that out there, but I don't want that to discourage you. Don't let the thought of being rebuked by a pastor in front of a thousand people be discouraging to you. I just want to make sure we keep this true. We haven't had any problems so far, so hopefully we won't have any problems tonight. Just be sure God is what you're saying He is. That's all I'm after. Start going to the microphones now ... Go for it.

[NOTE: People in the congregation speak different attributes of God based on the Scripture they read over the last week. They described God as Father, provider, disciple-caller, creator, loving (the nations), hero, sovereign, rescuer, ruler, judge, healer, griever, merciful, patient, trusting, able, caring, holy, specific, the covenant-maker, and the faithful covenant-keeper.]

These are just a few chapters that we've read this week, and we've seen all these things about who God is. When you think about it, this is who you're meeting with. You're in a

room alone with the creator of all things—all the nations—who's in control of all things ... the one who is able to heal, He's compassionate, merciful, able, sufficient, covenant-maker, holy, provider—provider for the birds. He's all these things, and you're meeting alone with Him. And there are these moments where you're reading, and you stop and think about what is said about God and you realize: When you're reading about the flood, this is who you're meeting with. It's in one of those moments where I'll just find myself in awe of God. I'm meeting with Him, praying to Him, and reading His word. It just brings you to your knees. It's good. It's good to physically get on your knees, to move to your knees in that room alone. Not that you have to, but it certainly seems appropriate sometimes doesn't it?

I find myself just writing these things out and then drawn to my knees in silence and praise. Sometimes I just want to sing. I don't sing well, so I pull up iTunes—a song that exalts God—and turn it up and belt it out. This Word of God incites and ignites the worship of God. So here's what I want to do. Again, it's tough because we're not in a room alone, but hey, we don't have to go to iTunes. I want to invite you to stand and our worship team to come out. I want you to think about the picture of God that we have seen this week in the Word, even if you've only read tonight. So with your attention and your affection ... you can stand if you want to, you get on your knees ... let's worship Him. Let's praise Him for who He is! As a microcosm of what we do in our time alone with the Lord, let's do this together in this room before this God. The beauty of when we're reading His Word is, this is what God's faithfulness is all about: what He has been, He forever will be. These are the things that He is—the God that we're meeting with tonight. He is. So let's give Him praise and glory and honor.

I just feel like singing more and more and more. And this is why we need unhurried time with the Lord. Don't think that 5 minutes is all you need. I mean, you've got to go to work at some point. I realize we've got to go to work, but set aside time to be with God in which He can direct you and lead you and guide you in ways that you didn't expect when you started. So we start with praise.

[NOTE: The congregation sings a song together in worship to God.]

Repent

Now praise automatically will, always in a sense, lead to repentance. So that's what the R stands for: repent. Confess your sin to God and acknowledge your need for Jesus. When you see who God is, then you've got a much clearer picture of who you are and why you need Christ. Think of what we've read the last week. When you read the story of the flood as God's judgment against sin in the world, immediately, you start to think about sins in your life. Think about gossip. It's so commonplace to you, yet it warrants the holy wrath of God. How serious it is! Think of anger and lust and materialism and these things about which we say, "Oh, it's not that bad. It could be worse." It's bad! You see sin before God.

I see, in reading about the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, my concern for my name. It's like a mirror. How concerned I am about what others think about my name. And you read, in Genesis 12, about Abraham immediately obeying God, and you realize, "I don't trust God like that. I don't obey God like that. He says to do something, and I put it off." Or in the New Testament, when you're reading about Jesus and what He's saying about prayer, and you think, "I'm prayer-less." Or you read what He says about fasting—this expectation that we fast—and you think, "I've never fasted. I don't fast regularly." Or you read what He says about giving, and you think, "I've stored up so many treasures on earth and so little

treasures in heaven.” At the end of Matthew 6, Jesus says (paraphrased), “Don’t worry about anything,” and you realize, “I worry about so many things.”

So you realize the point is not to get to the end of the chapter and check off a box, right? The point is to see God, to see ourselves, and to repent. So this is where—we mention this in The Simple Guide to Personal Worship—you should have something to write with ... something to write on or use your computer. I use my computer. And I’m writing out prayers—“God I praise you for this or that that I see.” Or I’ll start to write these prayers of repentance to God. This is just a running document that I’ve got on my computer, and I just put the date and write. Don’t think it’s a “dear diary” kind of thing. No; this is your communion with God, and as He speaks and you respond, you’re putting that down.

And so, I want to encourage us to do a little audience participation again. But I want you to realize why, because in just a second, I want to encourage you to write out a prayer of repentance—specific things in your life that you need to repent from and turn from. Things in yourself, sin that you need to turn from. This is not going to be a group exercise. This is going to be just between you and the Lord. Don’t look at the person next to you. If you do, you’ll have to write extra on yours that you need to repent of, so don’t do that ... just create more work for you (jokingly). And we’re not going to do open mic time either, so don’t worry about that. There is a place in the church for confession of our sin to one another, but the place is not necessarily an open mic in front of a thousand people. So we’re going to write.

Here’s why we do this. Some people would think it’s depressing to dwell on your sin, to write out specific ways you sinned against God. But oh, this is not depressing for reasons we’ve seen and what we’ve read, especially in the New Testament. Jesus told us that prayer involves confession of sin—asking for forgiveness of our sins. And when you look over in Matthew 9 ... do you remember what we read there? First story in that chapter:

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men. (Matthew 9:1-8)

The whole point of this miracle is plain. Jesus wants us to know that He has authority to forgive our sins. As we’ve already read in Matthew 1:21, this is the purpose for which He came: “...and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” So this is why it’s not depressing to confess sin and repent before God. You’re confessing sin to the God who, number one, knows all things and sees all things. You’re a fool to try and hide anything from God in the first place. A fool. But even deeper than that, why would you want to hide sins from the God Who has sent His Son to forgive you of your sins, to cover your sins, to wipe them away?

This is glorious! It’s not depressing ... it’s glorious! So, non-Christian friend who is here tonight, thinking, “What have I done? They’re doing Bible exercises and participating in front of everyone and I just want to leave.” My hope is that your being here tonight ... I’m

trusting that your being here tonight is not an accident. My hope is that you'll see that the God who created the universe—who is holy and just—loves you. He loves you even though you—just like I and everybody else in this room—have rebelled against Him. Even though you have rebelled against Him, though you have defied and denied Him, He loves you. Your very breath right now comes from the God that you maybe deny or hate. He loves you, He loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus to pay the price for your sins, for your rebellion against Him. Jesus has died on the cross in your place, for you, so that when you repent, when you turn from your sin and yourself—when you, in humility, say, "I need Your grace, and I need You to forgive me of my sin"—and you trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life, He will wipe away all your sins forever.

It is a glorious invitation in Matthew 11:28. "*Come to me,*" Jesus says. "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:28-30). Mark it down: Repentance leads to rest. This is why repentance is good. Turning from your sin and turning from yourself leads to rest. That happens at the point at which you first repent—turn from your sin and yourself, and trust in Christ.

And then, Christian, this is the process of life on a daily basis right? We're prone to wander, prone to go back to that which we've been saved from. And so we spend time in repentance, in confession, knowing that God is gracious and merciful to us, and repentance leads to rest.

So I want to invite you, Christian, in the next few moments, in the silence of this room, to write out a specific prayer of repentance. And you may be worried that somebody around you would see this or that, thinking, "I don't know if I want to put this word or that word down on paper." Well just put like an X or a Y or some kind of sign or something. You'll know what it is. God will know what it is. That's what matters. So let me encourage you to write out a specific prayer of repentance in your life, in light of things we've read in the Word, in light of things we've seen tonight. Just contemplate. Where do you need to confess sin to God? Acknowledge your need for Jesus.

And if you're not a Christian, I would invite you, we would invite you, and more important than that, God invites you tonight to trust in Him. And so I invite you, in that space on your page, maybe for the first time in your life, to turn from your sin and yourself and confess your need for God's grace in Christ and your trust in Him to save you from your sin. Write that out in your own words and to know that this is what it means to enter into a relationship with God—to be reconciled to God. All across this room, just spend the next couple minutes in silence, writing out a specific prayer of repentance, and this will lead us into a time to feast on the forgiveness that we have in Christ as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. So go ahead and write that out now.

[NOTE: The congregation spends time writing out their sins, repenting of them, and trusting in Jesus to forgive them and cleanse them. They then take communion together. This is followed by a testimony to God's saving grace as a man is baptized.]

We are reminded of what he just testified to in baptism: You've died with Christ; you live with Christ. And so that immediately leads to the next part.

Ask

A stands for Ask: Intercede for particular needs in your life and in other's lives. It just makes sense. You've seen who God is. You've been reminded of how much you need Him, and so you call out to Him. You know He's sufficient. You know He's the provider. He's the creator. He's the Father. He's in control of all things, and He has the power to provide—in your life and in others' lives. And the Lord's Prayer is so helpful for us, here in Matthew 6, because they're all requests ... teaching us to pray. "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*" (verse 9). That's a request. That's calling out. That's not saying, "God, You are holy." It's (paraphrased) "God, cause Your name to be known as holy." That's a good way to pray for your life and for other's lives: "Cause Your name to be known as holy in my life. Cause Your name to be known as loving in my life. Cause Your name to be known as this or that in my life—in other's lives."

And then He gets down to the details. "*Give us this day our daily bread...*" (verse 11). In other words, you can pray, "Give this person this; they need this. Give this person that." And then we've got these promises that Jesus gives us in Matthew 7. "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*" (verse 7). And you might say, "Well I've asked for things and God didn't give it." It's a good thing. God is wiser than you and me. That's the beauty of what He says right after that, right? "*Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?*" (verses 9-10). We have a good Father who is perfect. He gives good gifts to His children. So even in our asking, we can trust that if we're not asking for what's best for us, we don't have a Father who's going to give us what we ask for. He's going to give us what we need most. And so we intercede on behalf of our life and others' lives.

Now I want to put two words before you. You may want to write them down or just keep them in your mind. I want to encourage you, when it comes to asking for things in your life and things in others' lives, to think "spontaneous" and "planned." I want to encourage you to be spontaneous and planned when it comes to your intercession for others and even prayer for things in your own life. By spontaneous I mean, in your time with the Lord, think about what's going in your life, what's going on in others' lives, what's going on in current events, and what's going on in the world around you, and just spontaneously pray. Let the Spirit of God lead you to pray for different things.

At the same time, I know it's helpful for me to also be planned in my praying, meaning I'm more intentional in what I'm praying for on a daily basis. I've got, basically, a list of things that I pray for on a daily basis, and I've got them spread out over the week—Monday through Friday specifically. There are a lot of things that I want to pray for my life. But instead of trying to go through the whole list every single day, I kind of divide it up, and I pray these things for my life on this day, these things on this day, these things on this day. And the same thing for others in my life. For my wife, Heather, there are things I pray for her on Monday, and different things—specific things—that I pray for her on Tuesday. Different things on Wednesday. Same thing for my kids. I'll pray for this part of their character on Monday, this part of their life on another day, their manhood and womanhood on this day, for their future spouses and children. So I want to be intentional about praying for things in my life and my family's life. I pray for different friends on different days. I've got it spread out so that I make sure to pray for our elders by name every week and our staff by name every week. For the church, I pray for different things on Monday in our faith family than I do on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday. Then I pray on one day for other churches in Birmingham, on another day for other churches in North America, and on

another day for church planting teams we've sent out here, around the world. I've got it split up.

I'm not saying you need to do exactly that, but look at your life. What do you need to be praying for on a continual basis? Be intentional about praying for those things? So that's my encouragement when I say "planned." This is intended to be a hugely helpful tool. When you get your worship guide, just look at the other side there. You've got your notes here, on the other side there's the daily bible reading schedule at the top, but then there's a section there to intentionally help you "Pray For Our Lives" this week. There's a few sentences to help you, and you can split that up over the week or just pray that every day. Then you've got a column that says, "Pray for our City." This week we're praying for the Breakfast Club at Mitchell Middle School in Eastlake. A part of ministry in Eastlake. And there's six days with prayer requests for each. So pray for these things because we don't just want to do ministry with the church in Eastlake in our flesh, in our own power. We want to do it praying. And then "Pray for our World." This week, we're praying for Brook Hills church planters, J.D. and J.J., serving in North Africa. So instead of just praying, "Lord, do something in the world today," pray specifically for these things that J.D. and J.J. have asked us to pray for.

A couple weeks ago, a midterm missionary who came back from serving midterm came up to me and told me of specific ... ways that his ministry had been affected the very week we were praying for him as a church ... It was a totally different week, and it was so encouraging to hear. Do we really believe when we pray for these specific things that God's hearing us? Do we really believe God's hearing us and answering us? I don't think we do. Let's be honest. If we did, I think we'd be praying more. So let's pray more with confidence.

Here's how all this comes together. Planned and spontaneous, praying with confidence. I've set aside every Friday to pray for specifically is the church planting teams that we've sent out that are working among Muslim people groups. Friday is the day where Muslims gather in mosques for worship, and so I'm praying specifically on that day for these church planting teams. So I'm praying for Ryan and Bethany, in Central Asia working among an unreached people group, on a continual basis—every Friday. Well, one Sunday morning—this is a couple months ago—I woke up, and the Lord just immediately brought Ryan and Bethany to my mind. I just woke up thinking about them. I was driven to pray for them—to pray specifically for them. I didn't know specific things going on, but just prayed according to the Word, as best as I could. And I meant and should have emailed Ryan immediately to say, "Hey, I want you to know I'm praying for you specifically this morning." But I got busy doing other things, and so I didn't. And I meant to the next day, and I got busy. So two weeks later, I still hadn't emailed Ryan.

Well, all of a sudden I get an email from Ryan. And this is what his email said: "David, I want to make a minute to write you and recount for you the love that Christ showed me just two weeks ago. It was early and I was driving along roads from one place to another to pick up a few things and I had reached in, many ways, the end of my rope, both emotionally and spiritually." Then he went on to explain specifics there, which we won't go into. Then he said, "I needed the Lord Jesus to remind me of who I was and what I was doing. He did that and more. I turned on some worship music and began to listen. Listening turned to mouthing the words. Mouthing the words turned to singing. Singing turned into tears and snot and repentance. And as I drove with my knees so that I could raise my hands to the King of all creation, I had an experience. You know me, David. I'm no Pentecostal but I suddenly had the strange, overwhelming feeling that I was being prayed for, and felt like I could hear your voice specifically. I didn't hear any specific words, but my heart lit up with joy as the Lord reminded me not only who I am but why I'm here—that I was sent by His

church and lifted up by His Spirit in prayer. So I want to let the church know—and now I’m crying again—that when you lift your hands and voices in earnest prayer, it matters.”

I read this email—this was the fear of God in an email—and it just reminded me that this matters. We’ve got brothers and sisters serving among the Arundo in North Africa who need us praying each day this week for them. And God’s going to hear us, and God’s going to answer in His ways and His timing. We’re praying for the Arundo, an unreached people group with very few Christians. They’re really hard to reach. We’re praying that they would become reached. We’re asking ... and the whole language there in Matthew 7 is “ask” and keep on asking, “knock” and keep on knocking, “seek” and keep on seeking. We’re going to ask and keep on asking until the Arundo are reached. We’re going to ask with confidence that, by the grace of God, for the glory of God, they’re going to be reached.

And so let’s press in this week and pray for them. Let’s press in this week and pray for church of South East Lake, for the ministry there. And for things in your life and others’ lives. And again, we can even connect the Word with this. This week, we read Matthew 10, about Jesus sending out His disciples on mission. He says (paraphrased), “You’re going like sheep in the middle of wolves in difficult, dangerous places. You’re going to be betrayed and you’ll be persecuted. You’ll be killed.” And it’s kind of tough for us to understand this, because it’s kind of hard to identify with. Especially in this context. By God’s grace, those threats aren’t real to us on a daily basis for faith in Christ ... but we know they are around the world.

I was reading Matthew 10, and then later that day I came across an article that said, “Christian martyr deaths doubled in 2013.” I don’t know if it came out that day or the day before, but it was the day that I read Matthew 10 that I read this article from Open Doors, which works for the persecuted church. We’ve worked with them in Secret Church and other things. Every year, they release a “World Watch List,” (is what they call it) that has a list of countries—and it would be helpful and informative for you to go look this up—where Christians are most persecuted. So I’ve got a day each week set aside to I pray specifically for the persecuted church. I want to encourage you: we need to be praying for our persecuted brothers and sisters, especially in these countries that are most persecuted. This article talked about how, in 2013, the number of martyrs—Christians who died for their faith in Christ and proclamation of Christ—doubled from the previous year. There were more martyrs in Syria in 2013 than there were martyrs all around the world in 2012. And then it went on to talk about Nigeria (next after Syria), then Pakistan then Egypt. And it talked about a strong drive to purge Christianity from Somalia. It talked about how there were no reported killings from North Korea, mainly because we don’t have information from there, but it’s believed that somewhere between 50 and 70 thousand Christians live in political prison camps.

So when you read Matthew 10—that time in the Word—and you see something in the world, and it just drives you to prayer, to intercession. God knows what He’s doing. You meet with Him in a room alone with Him in the morning. What’s coming during the day? Just look for intersections that drive you into intercession.

We’d miss the whole point if we didn’t pause right now; so let’s pray.

God, we know that you’re hearing us right now. We know that you’re the God in control of the nations, and you’re hearing us pray. And so we pray right now for the Arundo people. We pray that you would bring them to yourself. God, we pray that these people who have little to no knowledge of you, right now, by your grace—that these people of whom so many are committed to fighting against anyone who brings the gospel to them, God—we pray that

you would break down doors and barriers, and with Your mercy, open their eyes to the beauty of Christ. Lord Jesus, you deserve their glory. You love them; you love them. You've purchased people from the Arundo, so claim that which you've purchased, which belongs to you—the souls of men, women, and children.

God, we pray that you would bless J.D. and J.J. and this team. We pray for these people they're sharing with. We pray for them all week long—these individuals they've had the opportunity to share the gospel with that are in danger even because the gospel is being shared with them. God, we pray that you would open up their eyes and hearts to believe—that you would raise them. You told us to pray for laborers for the harvest. We pray for laborers to come from among the Arundo, for laborers who will scatter throughout the Arundo, preaching the gospel.

God, at the same time, we pray for our brothers and sisters in prison camps in North Korea. God, strengthen their faith. Today we pray that you would strengthen their faith—even now, that you would sustain them. Sustain their family members who've been separated from husbands and wives. We pray for spouses who haven't seen each other because they're in prison. God, we pray that you would strengthen their faith. For kids who've seen Mom or Dad taken off to prison, Lord, we pray that you would not let the adversary use their parents' sacrifices for the gospel to pull their children's hearts away from Christ. God, we pray that you would protect those children's hearts. We pray for the spread of the gospel in North Korea. So many of us can't get in, and if we could get in, we couldn't speak the gospel. But you're Lord over North Korea and you have a people there. Strengthen them, we pray. Give them grace to proclaim the gospel in wise ways. Help them to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Give them grace to speak your Word with boldness when they have opportunity to do so. God, we pray for their persecutors, that you would draw persecutors to Christ in North Korea. We pray for these things there.

We pray for here, for the church of South East Lake, for Ben and the other elders there, and for their middle school ministry. God, we pray for kids and families to come to Christ, for teachers and school administrators to see the light of the gospel. We pray that the light of the gospel would have a transforming effect in South East Lake. For the glory of your name, we pray, oh God.

Thank you. Thank You for this privilege of being a part right now of what you're doing in East Lake, what you're doing in North Korean prison camps, what you're doing in the middle of the Arundo. We will keep on asking all week long and beyond this week. For your name's sake, we pray these things. Amen.

Do you see it? It's not time you just set aside to check off and say, "Okay, I did that." You're meeting with God, and you're part of what God's doing around the world in other people's lives, and in your life, so pray for both. Pray for the things here that go on in your life and pray for the big picture in the world.

Yield

All of this leads us to the Y, to Yield. Surrender your life to following Jesus, whenever and however He leads you. You praised and repented and asked for things in your life, and things in others' lives. So now it just makes sense. Your life is going to be different after this kind of time alone with God. People talk about prayer and if it really changes God. Wow. Not the point. We don't want to change God. God is good. We're in need of change, we're in

need of transformation ... and prayer is transforming. Pray what Jesus taught us to pray, *"Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:6), and realize, "Well, I'm on earth. Your will be done in my life as it is in heaven."

This is where we put a blank check on the table every day before the Lord. "Here's my life." I will, in my time with the Lord at some point in the morning, just walk through my schedule for the day, and pray for specific things that I know are on the schedule. For example, I might pray, "I know that I'm having a meeting, so I pray for grace and wisdom in this." Or, "I'm meeting with a person and pray for grace to be sensitive to your Spirit and what you're doing there." Or, "I know that when I get home, I'll be doing something with the kids, like coaching a sport, so I pray for grace with those parents, and I pray for an extra measure of grace with those kids." You've just got to pray through the day.

And then, I pray for grace to be willing to sacrifice my agenda if I need to at different points. For example, I'll pray, "I'm going to be walking in tune with your Spirit today, and I pray specifically for opportunities to share the gospel and for boldness." I need courage to share the gospel in those opportunities. I shirk back as much as the next person. So I pray for courage to share the gospel in those opportunities. Your will be done in my life today as it is in heaven. So you're surrendering. Yielding. This is where you come back to these pictures in Genesis. So you've got this concentrated time of prayer at the beginning of the day that just fuels continual communion with God all day long. You're realizing what Genesis 6 means when it says Noah walked with God (verse 9). What a great painting! As we read in Genesis 5 last week, the same was true with Enoch. There's only one paragraph about him ... really just a verse. Enoch walked with God and then he was no more because the Lord took him (Genesis 5:22-24). I think it was D.L. Moody who said that he imagined Enoch walking with God one day when God said at the end of the day, "We're closer to my house than we are yours. Why don't you just come home with me?" Don't you want this to be the commentary of your life? "He walked with God." "She walked with God." So we walk with Him, yielding to Him.

I hope that this has helped you in some way when you think about time in prayer in your life on a daily basis this week. Let's not just talk about prayer. Let's pray. Let's experience the reward that God has for us.

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