



12 TRAITS OF A BIBLICAL CHURCH – Part 5

Biblical Prayer

If you have a Bible—and I hope you or somebody around you does—let me invite you to open with me to Acts 1. It's good to be together around God's Word. Years ago I wrote a book about taking back your faith from the American Dream. Ever since that time, I've had people ask, "What's so wrong with the American Dream? Don't you like freedom and the opportunities it affords? Don't you like the opportunities it's afforded you—like to write a book?" Without question, I am thankful for freedom and opportunity—so much so that we have the privilege of experiencing these freedoms at great cost to many people, including many in this church who have fought and fight or work now to defend. But there's danger involved.

James Truslow Adams is actually credited with coining the phrase, "The American Dream," about a century ago. He defined it as "a dream in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable and be recognized by others for what they are." In other words, you and I can do anything we set our minds to accomplish. With ingenuity, imagination, innovation, skill, hard work and opportunity, we can earn any degree, start any business, climb any ladder, achieve any goals. What's so wrong with that? Certainly high aspirations and hard work aren't bad things. The freedom to pursue our goals is something we should celebrate. The Bible actually commends all of these things.

1. The Dangerous Assumption

Yet, underlying this understanding of the American Dream is a dangerous assumption that, if we're not cautious, we will unknowingly accept a deadly goal that, if we're not careful, we will ultimately achieve in our lives. So here's the dangerous assumption: Our greatest asset is our own ability. We are prone—we have wired ourselves—to prize what we can accomplish when we believe and trust in ourselves.

But the gospel of Jesus Christ is totally different. The gospel actually beckons us to die to ourselves, to crucify ourselves, to believe in God. We are called to trust, not in our own power, but in His power. In the gospel, God confronts us with our utter inability to accomplish anything of value apart from

Him. This is what Jesus meant when He said in John 15:5, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”*

This then leads to the deadly goal which is so subtle.

2. The Deadly Goal

Did you hear the deadly goal in Truslow Adams’ words? “Each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable and be recognized by others for what they are.” Did you hear that? As long as we achieve our desires in our own power, then we will attribute our achievements to our own glory. We will be recognized by others for what we are—and this is the deadly goal in the American Dream. We can make much of ourselves. Everything shouts at us: “Make much of yourself!”

But the goal of the gospel is totally different. The goal of the American Dream, in this definition at least, is to make much of man, while the goal of the gospel is to make much of God. God actually delights in putting men and women in situations where our inability is put on full display, for then He demonstrates His ability to do things that we could never have done on our own—which makes much of Him. This is so important for the way we think about our lives and our families; this is so important for the way we think about the church. If we as the church are not careful, we can actually embrace this same assumption—that our greatest asset is our own ability. We can achieve this same goal. We can make much of ourselves.

Just think about how we can so easily define success in the church today. We aim to put together great performance every week with a great speaker and a great band and a great place that’s comfortable and attractive, surrounded with top-notch programs run by ministry professionals for every age and stage. I get flyers on my desk and emails in my in-box advertising entire conferences built around creative communication, first-rate facilities, innovative programs, entrepreneurial leadership in the church. It’s like we’ve convinced ourselves that if we can just position our resources and organize our strategies, then just like everything else in life, we in the church can accomplish anything on which we set our minds.

What’s totally missing in that picture of performances, personalities, places, programs and professionals is desperation for the power of God. If we’re not careful, we can create—and we have created—a whole church culture where God’s power is at best an add-on to the church. If we’re really honest, we’d have to admit that we have created a whole system for doing church today that needs little if any help at all from the power of God. We can carry on most if not all our activities every Sunday smoothly, efficiently, successfully—at least in our eyes—never realizing that we are virtually ignoring the power of God. That’s not the way it’s supposed to be.

This is why we're in Acts 1 today, because here we see a totally different picture. Here's a fledgling group of believers, scared to death, in a small upper room. They're rural, uneducated, lower class, common Galileans. And what are they doing? They're not plotting strategies or discussing models or making plans. No, look at verse 14: *"All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer."* Underline that verse in your Bible. They were praying. And in response to their prayers, God sent His power.

Listen to what happened in Acts 2. I'm guessing some of you, maybe many of you, have read this story of Pentecost before, but picture this like it's the first time you've ever heard it. Just imagine this scene, starting in Acts 2:1. They're praying. *"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting."* So imagine right now that we're praying and all of a sudden there's the sound of wind, but it's not the wind, because our hair is not being blown around. Picture what a hurricane sounds like, what a tornado sounds like. Here's that sound in this room right now.

Then with that sound all around, verse three says, *"Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them."* Okay, picture that—tongues of fire. What comes to your mind when you picture a fire tongue? This is odd. Look at the person next to you and picture a fire tongue on top of them. What are you doing? How do you respond when the dude next to you has a fire tongue resting on him? Then he says, "You've got one too." This is a crazy scene! Hurricane-like sound. Fire tongues on everybody. *"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [other languages] as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:14).

Actually, that scene is not too hard to imagine in our church. We've got all kinds of different languages. But imagine that we didn't when we came in here today, then all of a sudden, with fire tongues and hurricane sounds, we're all speaking in different languages. This is an awesome scene. Verse five: *"Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language."* Of course this was drawing a crowd.

⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."

What in the world? Uneducated commoners are speaking the gospel in all kinds of different languages. The crowds think they're drunk. The first line ever preached in the very first Christian church might have been, "Hey, it's only 9:00 in the morning. These guys are not wasted." That's not what you would normally plan.

So Peter stands up to preach that sermon—he preaches the gospel. Ladies and gentlemen, this is not innate ability. This is the same guy who just weeks before denied Jesus, who was afraid to even say he knew Jesus, over and over and over again. Now he's standing under the power of God in front of thousands of people, proclaiming Jesus. Acts 2:41 says over 3,000 people put their faith in Christ. Talk about church growth! Acts 1 started with 120 believers. Acts 2, in a brief moment, adds more than 3,000. You do the math. That's 2,500% growth? Just like that.

Then what does it say right after that? Acts 2:42: *"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."* They devoted themselves to prayer. Underline it again in your Bibles. It's the second time that phrase has been used, "They devoted themselves to prayer."

Then the story keeps going. In Acts 3, Peter and John speak the name of Jesus, and a 40-year-old man, crippled from birth, stands up to walk for the first time. Not just walk. Look at verse eight: *"And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God."* He's jumping up and down, everywhere. This guy has been unable to walk for 40 years. Now he's not just walking—he's jumping everywhere, praising God.

The people are amazed. Listen to their conclusion in Acts 4:13: *"When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."* Did you hear that? The crowds aren't thinking of Peter and John's innate ability. They're thinking, "This is supernatural power at work." Who's getting the credit here? Not Peter and John. Jesus is getting the credit!

Then they start to experience persecution. What do they do? Look at Acts 4:23: *"When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God."* They start praying. Jump down to verse 29, to the end of their prayer: *"Now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

They finish praying, and then listen to what happens. Verse 31: *"When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."* Can you imagine, if we started to pray, and all of a sudden this building would start to shake? That will bring a crowd back next week—or maybe actually

drive a crowd away. “It’s not safe to go to that church. The building’s foundations are not stable when they start talking to God.”

It keeps going. Look at Acts 5:12. The apostles are performing many signs and wonders among the people. The sick are being healed of their diseases. Evil spirits are being cast out. In chapter six, they start being distracted by various things, but look at verse four. They say, “*We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*” Underline that—this is the third time we’ve seen this phrase, “We must devote ourselves to prayer.” Listen to what happens right after that, in verse seven: “*The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.*” Yes! That’s what we’re talking about all the time—how do we multiply disciples? It’s happening here as they devote themselves to prayer.

Then right after that, see this picture of Stephen in Acts 6:8: “*Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.*” Go to verse ten where he speaks to these rulers. Listen to how the Bible says they respond: “*They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.*” Stephen speaks boldly throughout Acts 7, then he’s stoned for it.

But what happens next? In Acts 8:1 we read, “*Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*” Jump down to verse four. What were they doing when they were scattered? “*Those who were scattered went about preaching the word.*” In other words, the gospel keeps spreading. Even stoning can’t stop it. The gospel spreads throughout Judea and Samaria.

Then in chapter eight, Philip gets zapped by the Holy Spirit from one place to another to lead an Ethiopian to Christ. In Acts 9, Saul, the most ardent persecutor of Christians—picture terrorists killing Christians—becomes a follower of Christ. In Acts 10, as Peter and Cornelius are both praying in different places, racial and ethnic barriers to the spread of the gospel come crashing down. In Acts 11, the church in Antioch is founded as the base of missions to the world.

Then you get to Acts 12. James is beheaded. Peter’s in prison, but listen to verse five: “*So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.*” They are praying earnestly and what happens? We need to read this story to see what happens when the church prays. Verse six: “*Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison.*” Don’t you love this? Peter is about to lose his life, for all he knows, the next day—and what is he doing? He’s sleeping. He’s not devising a jail break. He’s not working with Chuck Norris on a plan to break out. See the peace of God in the middle of prison. It gets interesting here.

Verse seven: “*And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his hands.*”

Picture this. An angel shows up, a bright light is shining in the cell, and what does Peter do? The dude's still asleep; still snoring. So the angel strikes him on the side. "Get up!" Verse eight: the angel says, *"Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.'*" We don't want Peter going naked into the streets.

⁹ And he went out and followed him. ¹¹ He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him.

Then verse 11 says, *"When Peter came to himself..."* I love that. This is what we love about Peter—he is so slow, like we are. He's been woken up by an angel! First the light, then a knock in the side; he's told to put on his clothes; the gates have opened up for him and he's let outside past numerous guards. Now he's walking on the street in freedom, then Peter came to himself. He said, *"Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."* Wait. It gets better.

He goes to the church, verse 12: *"When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying."* Remember, they were praying earnestly for him. *"And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate."* You've got to love Rhoda.

Put yourself in Peter's shoes. You now realize that you're an escaped prisoner, so you run to this house before anybody sees you. You're looking everywhere over your shoulder to make sure nobody sees you. You finally get to the house, start knocking frantically, and Rhoda comes to the door, asking, "Who is it?" "It's Peter," he says. "Let me in quick." But she's so excited, she leaves him standing at the door. She goes inside and tells everybody, "Peter's out of prison!"

Listen to what they say in verse 15: *"They said to her, 'You are out of your mind.'"* Imagine that conversation. "Be quiet, Rhoda. We're praying for Peter." She starts to speak again, but they say, "You're interrupting our prayers. We want him out of prison." She says, "I'm trying to tell you." "Be quiet!" *"But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, 'It is his angel!'"*

Meanwhile, the escaped prisoner is still standing outside. Verse 16: *"But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed."* Ha! Maybe Rhoda was right. *"But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, 'Tell these things to James and to the brothers.' Then he departed and went to another place."* What a great story. Jail break as evidence of the power of God in what? In prayer.

That leads us to Acts 13 where, guess what the church is doing. They're praying.

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

We just read about a worship/prayer/fasting meeting that ignited a missions movement that in the days to come would make Christianity the dominant religion of the entire Roman Empire within two-and-a-half short centuries. Then 2,000 years after that prayer meeting, over a billion Christians today bear witness to Christ, in almost every country in the world. Mark it down. Powerful things happen when the church prays! Are you seeing this?

We could go on and on for 15 more chapters, as Paul and others are preaching the gospel and people are being saved and healed of diseases. Demons are being cast out of them. People are even rising from the dead. Don’t you just want to be part of a story like this? Don’t you sometimes look at this picture of the church in the Bible, then look around the church today and think, “Something’s not adding up here. We’ve got the performance and the personalities and the places and the programs. We’ve got what we, in our innate abilities, can manufacture. Yet in the end, something is missing, isn’t it?”

Don’t you want to see the power of God at work like this in your life, in your family, in this church, in this city, around the world? If we truly long for more than status quo, run-of-the-mill, mundane Christianity, then I want to submit today that we must throw aside all dependence on our innate ability. We must throw aside any desire to make much of ourselves—in our lives, in our families, and as a church.

Biblical Prayer

I want to exhort us today, McLean Bible Church, based on this picture of the church in the Bible in two ways—both under the umbrella of this fourth trait of a biblical church, biblical prayer. In a sense, these are two challenges for our lives, our families and our church.

Let’s pray for that which can only be accomplished by the power of God. Isn’t that what we see here in the book of Acts? These early Christians were not trusting in their own abilities. They were scared to death in that upper room in Acts 1. That was the key. They knew they couldn’t follow Christ, they couldn’t glorify Christ, they couldn’t make disciples of Christ as a church, on their own. We’ve got to know the same thing. Think about our missions, what we talked about the first of this year, what we’ve seen in God’s Word. We want to glorify God by making disciples and multiplying the church among all nations, beginning right here in Greater Washington. But we can’t do any of that apart from the power of God. We would be fooling ourselves to think otherwise.

Some people could look at this church and say, “McLean is such a big church, with so many people, so many talented, gifted and even influential people from so many nations, in one of the wealthiest places in the world, with so many resources in this city. McLean Bible Church can make such a difference in the world for the glory of God.” That is a foolish way to think.

You say, “What do you mean?” Here’s what I mean. It doesn’t matter how big this church is—how talented, gifted or influential the members of this church might be. It doesn’t matter how many people are from any number of nations or any city. It doesn’t matter how much money this church has. It doesn’t matter how many resources we possess. Apart from the power of the Holy Spirit of God, McLean Bible Church will do nothing in the world for the glory of God.

In fact, the exact opposite is true. This church could be extremely small, with the least talented, least gifted, least influential people, with the least amount of money and resources, yet under the power of the Holy Spirit can shake the nations for the glory of God. Do we believe this? Really, do we believe that we can accomplish more in the next month in the power of the Holy Spirit than we could in the next hundred years apart from His power? Or do you believe you can do more in the next week in dependence on God’s Spirit than you can in your entire lifetime in dependence on yourself? This is a totally different way to think.

We have no clue about the depth of our inability and the wonder of God’s ability. We have been fooled into thinking that our greatest asset is our strengths. No, our greatest asset is our weaknesses, because that’s when we are most dependent on the strength of God. That is a totally different way to think, isn’t it? It goes totally against the grain of everything around us. And this kind of thinking is the crux of prayer, because prayer is the intersection between our inability and God’s ability. Think about it. Why do we pray? We pray because we need help. We pray because we can’t do something on our own. We need God to do it. We’re desperate for God to help us. That’s why we pray. I think about the “Hail Mary” pass in football. Why do we call it that? Why in the world do we bring Mary in for the last play of the game? Why do we name a football play after a prayer—an unbiblical one, by the way, which I’ll dive into at Secret Church a few weeks. But that’s another story. Why do we name a football play after a prayer?

Here’s why. Because the situation is desperate. We think the only way this 60-yard pass is going to work so we can score a touchdown is with divine intervention. We need help. It’s like for the rest of the game we can rely on our own resources, our own game plan, but at this moment of desperation we’ve run out of time and our game plan has failed. We don’t have any other options left—it’s time to throw up a prayer.

The question I want to ask is what if we lived like that all the time? In our lives, in our families, as a church—what if we lived in such a way that we were constantly and desperately in need of divine

intervention, constantly saying, “God, I can’t carry out my life. I can’t carry out my marriage. I can’t carry out my parenting, my job, my career. I can’t love and serve. I can’t walk through day-to-day life without divine intervention.”

That is the Christian life; that is the Christian church. We can’t do anything apart from the power of God. You say, “It sounds like you’re very weak. That’s such a weak thing to say.” The world would say, “That’s just weakness,” and we would say, “Yes!” The only reason we would say otherwise is if we had a very deluded view of ourselves, compared to the power of God. Why would we want to do anything in our lives apart from the power of God and the help of God?

Here’s the problem. All too often prayer in our lives, in our families and in the church is not fundamental to what we do. It’s more supplemental to what we do. In our lives, in our families, we pray here and there, before meals, maybe before bed. We spend hours throughout the day doing so many different things—hours in front of our phones, watching TV, running from here to there in all kinds of activity—yet we spend very little time alone with God in prayer. We spend so many hours doing so many things with our spouse, with our kids—yet minutes, if not seconds, with them in prayer. What are we thinking?

Then it transfers over into the church, where we often pray almost as a matter of routine—at the beginning or end of a meeting, here or there during the service, kind of on the side, even as a transition, “God help us.” We’re prone in a setting like this for somebody on stage to say, “Let’s pray.” So we all bow our heads, and then in a matter of seconds, our minds are going in all different directions. We’re not even thinking about Who we’re talking to, about Who’s listening to us, about the all-powerful King of the universe, the God Whose glory and beauty and radiance and holiness outshine our wildest imagination. How do we so easily miss it?

How do we get so casual with prayer, to the point where it plays such a small part—a supplemental part—in our lives, our families and the church? Why are we so often a prayerless people? I’m convinced the answer is simple. Because we are a prideful people. Think about it with me. Prayerlessness is pride. Simply, bluntly, prayerlessness is pride.

Why do we pray? We pray because we know we need help. We pray because we know we need the God of the universe to do what we can’t do. So if we’re not praying, what are we saying? We’re saying we don’t need help. We’re saying with our lives, “We can do this without You.” That’s a bold thing to say to God, in any one of our lives, our families and especially in the church.

We often say, “Look at what’s happening around us. How do you share the gospel in this culture?” I wonder if the greatest hindrance to the spread of the gospel is not the self-indulgent immorality of our culture, but it’s the self-sufficient mentality of the church. We’ve fooled ourselves into

thinking of all we can do on our own. In the middle of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards said, “Only God is able to do the work of God.”

One of my favorite proclaimers of the gospel in history is a guy named D.L. Moody. He has a great biography called A Passion for Souls. He started preaching in inner-city Chicago and many, many people started coming to Christ. Then he started traveling and many more people were coming to Christ. During one of his first trips to England, he was preaching in one particular church on a Sunday morning. He said later that it was one of those times when it seemed like nobody was listening. [This is pretty miserable for the guy preaching and the people listening.] People were just sitting there, looking around, bored, and he thought, “You’re not enjoying this. I’m not enjoying this. What’s going on here?”

He got to the end, gave an invitation, but nobody responded. He was scheduled to come back that night to preach again, but he wasn’t really excited about doing that after that morning service. But when he got there that night, it was a totally different atmosphere in the room. He started preaching and people were sitting on the edge of their seats, totally tuned in. Everybody was looking, listening, nodding. He got to the end and invited people to trust in Christ. He said, “If you want to trust in Christ, please stand,” and people all across the room stood up. Moody was totally confused. The same group that was bored in the morning was now completely changed. He thought, “Maybe they didn’t understand me.” So he told them, “Sit back down!” Then he went through the invitation again. “I want to make sure you understand what I said,” and he walked through the gospel one more time. “Now, if you want to trust in Christ, I invite you to stand where you are.” Well, more people stood the second time than the first time. This is a true story.

Moody was still not convinced so he told them to sit back down. “I want to walk through this one more time. If you really want to trust in Christ, I want to meet you in a side room afterwards, along with the pastor, and we’ll talk there.” So he talked a little more, dismissed them, then went to the side room. Within minutes, that side room was totally full of people, with standing room only. Moody, still not convinced, walked through the gospel one more time and said, “I want you to really think about this. You’re going to go home tonight.” No evangelist does this. He sent them home, saying, “If you really want to trust in Christ, I invite you to come back tomorrow night and the pastor will meet you here.” Moody was headed to another town the next morning.

Moody dismissed them that night and left town the next morning. He received a telegram from that pastor a few days later that read: “Moody, you’ve got to get back here. More people showed up on Monday night than were here Sunday night. God’s doing something in this town!” This is one of those stories we read about in church history, where a massive percentage of that town ended up trusting in Christ—an awakening broke out.

Here’s what I love about the story. Moody is an inquisitive guy, so he wanted to figure out what in the world happened between Sunday morning and Sunday night. It was totally different. He started

doing some research and found that there was a bed-ridden woman in that town who had not been at church that morning because of her illness. Her sister was there, brought lunch to her, and the bed-ridden woman asked, “How was church this morning?” The sister said, “Ah, it wasn’t that exciting. A guy named D.L. Moody preached, but not much happened.”

The bed-ridden woman’s eyes lit up. She said, “I’ve heard about that man, how God has blessed his preaching of the gospel in America. I’ve been praying that he’d come here. Put aside my food. I’m going to fast today and pray that many people would come to know Christ in our city through this man’s preaching.” Get the picture. Same preacher. Same place. Same people. Totally different power, as a result of prayer.

What if God is waiting to show His power in indescribable, inconceivable, unimaginable ways to a people who will take Him seriously through prayer—in their lives, in their families and as a church?

One of my favorite quotes from Samuel Chadwick is, “The devil fears nothing from prayerless studies and prayerless religion. He laughs at our wisdom, he mocks at our toil, but he trembles when we pray.” So church, let’s pray! Let’s humble ourselves and pray for that which can only be accomplished by the power of God—in our lives, in our families, in our church.

So first, let’s pray for that which can only be accomplished by the power of God. Then flowing from that, let’s experience that which can only be attributed to the glory of God. I want to show you something really interesting here in the book of Acts. Turn back to Acts 2:41 when the church started growing like wildfire. I want you to notice the language, because is it subtly significant. I want to show you something you probably missed. This is right after Peter preached the first Christian sermon. “*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*”

Did you notice that passive language there? “*There were added...*” That begs the question who added them? Go down to verse 47, where Luke makes it clear, to be sure we get the right answer: “*The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*” Turn over to 5:14: “*More than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.*” God was adding them to Himself. It continues. This is the picture of the church at Antioch, as the gospel is spreading—not just to Jewish people, but to Greeks as well. Acts 11:24, talking about Barnabas, who “*was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.*”

The trend continues in the book of Acts and it’s purposeful. Who’s growing the church? It’s not Peter or John or Paul or Barnabas. No, God is. God is doing what can only be attributed to His hand at work. Isn’t that what you want to be part of? Don’t you want to see the power of God at work in your life and in your family in a way that can only be attributed to the glory of God? In this church, don’t we want to be part of something that is way beyond you and me? Don’t we want to see God do that which can’t be

attributed to us? God takes our collective wisdom, gifts, talents, influence, experience and money, then He just blows all that out of the water in ways that resound to His glory alone.

This is what I love about George Mueller, another great biography—George Mueller of Bristol. In the 19th century, Mueller pastored a church in Bristol, England, for about 60 years. But he was best known for the orphan ministry he began. In his lifetime he cared for over 10,000 orphans. What was unique about Mueller's ministry is that he never publicized the physical needs that the orphans had, nor would he let anybody on the orphanage staff do that either. If they needed food for the orphans tomorrow, instead of saying, "Who do we call?" they would just go to prayer. They would only pray, then somebody would show up with food the next day. This is how all those decades of ministry to orphans was built.

In his journal, Mueller described why he started the orphanage. Listen closely to this. It totally took me by surprise.

If I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith obtained, without asking any individual, the means for establishing and carrying on an orphan house, there would be something which—with the Lord's blessing—might be instrumental in strengthening the faith of the children of God, besides being a testimony to the consciences of the unconverted of the reality of the things of God. This then, was the primary reason for establishing the orphan house. The first and primary object of the work was, and still is, that God might be magnified by the fact that the orphans under my care are provided with all they need only by prayer and faith, without anyone being asked—by me or my fellow laborers—whereby it may be seen that God is faithful still and hears prayer still.

Did you catch that? Mueller just said, "The reason I started the orphan house was not primarily to care for orphans." Of course, he loved orphans, but that's not why he started the orphan house. He started it because he wanted to set up a ministry that was totally built on prayer. When God provided, it would be clear to the church and to the consciences of the unconverted—those who were without Christ—that when you pray to God, He is faithful to answer your prayers. He wanted God to be magnified in that way.

May that be the commentary on McLean Bible Church. May we see disciples made and churches multiplied and needs met and orphans cared for and the hungry fed and the unreached peoples reached. Then when people ask, "How did all that happen?" we have only one response: God did it all. We just pleaded before God and He did it all. That only happens, though, when we are desperate for Him in prayer. I'm not just talking about a prayer room, or a prayer time here or there, but in all that we do—every time we gather together, in small groups, in large groups, all the time as we scatter, on our own, in our lives, in our families, in our marriages. I'm talking, not about it being supplemental, but being fundamental to our lives individually and as a church.

It would make no sense for us to just talk about prayer today, but not to pray, so I want us to pray here. I don't know what's going to happen in light of Acts 2 and Acts 4 and Acts 12. We don't have any

special effects engineered—we're just going to see. I'm going to turn this over to the campus pastors in the different locations, while I lead here, and we're just going to have a time of prayer. I want this time to culminate in one particular prayer, so here's the deal. Our mission as a church is to glorify God by making disciples and multiplying churches among all nations, beginning right here in Greater Washington, DC. That mission can only be accomplished in the power of God through prayer. So here's a prayer I want to introduce to us as a church, that we might pray over and over and over again in the days to come, in our lives, in our families and as a church—earnestly pleading to God.

Here's the prayer: "God, give us Washington and the world, and do it in such a way that only You get the glory." This should be the cry of our hearts. You say, "That sounds like maybe too big of a prayer." Well, we have a very big God. So let's ask Him, "God, give us Washington and the world, and do it in such a way that only You get the glory." We want to see the name of God glorified and magnified. We want to see the glory of God enjoyed. And we don't want to stop here. We want to see His glory known among the nations, all over the world.

We have the greatest news in the world. I know that even as we have this prayer, there are some here who are not followers of Christ right now. You might be thinking, "Oh, this is going to be a little awkward." We don't want this to be awkward. We want you to observe a people who are not just playing religious games, but who actually believe that when we pray, God is listening. This is a privilege we are overwhelmed by. We don't deserve this. We're sinners talking to a holy God. How is that possible?

I'm glad you asked. It's possible because this holy God loves you so much that He has sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross for your sins, for our sins. Jesus has paid the price for all the wickedness in our hearts, so we can be forgiven and can have, not just forgiveness of sins, but access into the very presence of God. Jesus values prayer so much that He gave His life to make it possible. We have this privilege because of the blood of Jesus shed for our sins. So as we pray, if you're not a follower of Christ, we invite you to trust in Jesus. Let this be the first time you pray to God. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins, and know that because of what He did on the cross, prayer is possible.

Then, brothers and sisters in Christ, may prayer be continual for us. This is such a privilege that we have. I just want to encourage us to not let our minds wander and forget the magnitude of what we're doing right now. We're praying to the same God Who brought fire tongues in Acts 2 and shook a building in Acts 4 and delivered a prisoner in Acts 12. He's the same God Who was bringing people back from the dead. He is the One we're about to speak to right now. So let's pray to this God, "God, give us Washington and the world, and do it in such a way that only You get the glory."

I'm going to lead us to pray in four ways. I want us to pray for our lives—in desperation for each of our lives, humbling ourselves before God. Then pray for our families. Then for the church. Then I want us to pray for our community specifically, as we think about Easter. We'll pray in those four ways.

I want you—to the extent to which you feel comfortable—to pray out loud during this time. Call out to God. This is the beauty of prayer—even corporate prayer like this. He hears us all at the same time. You can do that alone or you can do that with somebody near you. I want to give you freedom to stay where you're seated, or if you'd like to stand, or if you'd like to go out into the aisles or come down here in front—or even get on your knees by your seat. That is a more than appropriate posture for prayer.

For the next few minutes, we're going to fix our attention on the God of the universe. By the blood of Christ, we're going to go before Him, praying for our lives, our families, our church and our community.

Let's pray for our lives. Pray, "God, we need You," and then call out all the specific ways that you need God right now in your life. Let's throw pride aside and cry out for God's grace, mercy, help and strength. It could be spiritual, physical, emotional, relational—everything. Work, home, you know what's going on in your life. Let's cry out for God's help in our lives. I invite you to start praying now. Again, stay seated, get on your knees, stand up—whatever you want. Just let's begin to cry out aloud to God for His help in our lives.

Let me invite you to broaden your prayer now for your marriage, family, kids, grandkids, mom, dad. And not just your family, but others' families, for marriages, for families and kids around us. Plead for God's grace and mercy on our marriages and our families in specific ways.

Let me invite you to broaden your prayer for our family of faith in Christ, for brothers and sisters, for our church. Pray for McLean Bible Church, that we would see God do that which can only be attributed to His glory in our midst. Think of all the things going on in and through the church, from our gatherings to our scattering, for God to be glorified in an Acts-like way in McLean Bible Church. Those of you who are visiting from other churches, we invite you to pray for this church, but also pray for your church in this way. Plead for His power in the church today. We wouldn't be content to do anything apart from His power.

Now, let's expand our praying one more time, to our communities. I want to invite us to pray especially in light of this upcoming Sunday—Easter Sunday—where the gospel will, Lord willing, be faithfully proclaimed here. I want to invite us to pray that many people will come to know Christ next Sunday, and to pray specifically, by name, right now, for people in your sphere of influence who you can invite to be here. Let's pray for those people specifically—people we work with, live around, those in our families—that God would save them, that God would save many people, which only He can do. Pray that

God would do something similar to what He did in and through D.L. Moody that night, in this church, next week.

I invite you to stand with me, continuing in a spirit of prayer, and pray as the Lord Jesus taught us to pray: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Cause Your name to be known as holy and glorious—in our lives, in our families, as a church, in this community and around the world. Show Yourself as the Savior of souls, as Healer, as Restorer, as Life-giver. Show Your glory, we pray. God, give us Washington, and the world, for Your glory, and do it in such a way that Your name alone is praised through our lives, our families, this church. May it be so, we pray and plead, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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