

Before we get started today, there is a question I would like you to respond to by a show of hands. How many of you who have been believers for a period of time, whether that be one year or 20 years, would say that, although you know that prayer is to be a part of our lives and that we are to be men and women of prayer, would have to honestly say that deep, intimate prayer life with the God of the universe on any consistent basis has been very difficult for you? So let the record show that it's a bulk of us. If you're listening to the podcast, through three services, anywhere between 85-90% of the room raised their hands. Now there's an old saying about assuming, "Don't assume because it will make a fool of you." One of the things we hear over and over again is that there are so many of you in the last four or five years who have come to know Jesus Christ who actually grew up in church. So you grew up somewhat bitter at your upbringing because what you heard was, "Do this and don't do this." So now you're in your mid to late 20's and you're hearing and responding to the gospel, and that's created some animosity towards your upbringing that you now view as legalistic or cold. So we've learned that this is epidemic here in the Bible Belt. Now what happened was not that an evil group of men said, "We're going to get them. We're going to preach and teach very legalistically and we're going to try to drown out their hearts." That's not what happened. What happened was men unfortunately assumed the gospel. They assumed that you knew it, and they preached sanctification or the process of growing in holiness as though it were justification, what you needed in order to be a Christian. And when that happened, you began to hear over and over again, "Don't do this and don't do this," because they assumed that it was the invisible foundation that you already possessed. So they didn't think they had to constantly sing about the blood of Jesus Christ or the cross of Jesus Christ. So they didn't continually point you to the cross, they didn't continually come back to, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and even the faith to believe is not yours. It was given to you so that no man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8). They don't come back to that over and over again because they think you either know it or they don't think they should have to say it all the time, despite the fact that Paul preaches the gospel to believers just as much as he preaches it to nonbelievers in the Scriptures.

So one of the reasons we wanted to do the series that we're in right now on progressive sanctification is we felt like there were some areas we were assuming. So we ferociously preach the gospel here. In fact, you're never going to come here where you don't sing about and hear about the shed blood and broken body and how it is what gets us right standing before God by no act of our own. You're going to hear that every weekend, week in and week out. There's never going to be a weekend where we don't get back to that. It is our fervent belief that no text of the Bible can be fully preached without Jesus being taught in the text. So you're just going to constantly hear that. I think what we have assumed is that, in the classic spiritual disciplines, you understand what those are and you walk in those things. So we started this ten week series on progressive sanctification to kind of teach you some things that we assumed you already knew. So we started out with the Bible and just very clearly said that you can't pick and choose the parts of the Bible that you like and don't like. If you do that, you do not have a relationship with God; you have what Tim Keller in Manhattan calls "a Stepford god." You have a god that you created and you made up, and you do not have a relationship with him because he cannot confront you, he cannot engage you and he cannot correct you. So we talked about the importance of the Bible, we talked about the importance of confession and repentance as a continuing ethic, not a one time thing but the longer we're Christians, the more we'll confess and repent and then we talked last week about the role of remembrance in the life of a believer. And so this week, I want to tackle prayer, but I don't want to do it by talking pragmatically about it. I don't want to go, "A – adoration, C – confession. . ." And every Baptist in this room right now just perked up. Because it's not that we don't know that we should pray and I don't believe that it's that we don't know how to pray, but it's a heart

issue and a misunderstanding of the nature and character of God that leads us to be people who know we should pray but don't really do it all that much.

The first problem with prayer is that there's quite a bit of tension over the matter in the Scriptures. Let me show you what I mean. Turn to Ephesians 1, we'll pick it up in verse 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him." Before the foundation of the earth was laid, He chose you to be holy and blameless before Him because of Jesus Christ. So if you were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight because of the cross of Jesus Christ, what role do you have in being holy and blameless before God? It's pretty simple. None. It was decided before you were. Let's keep going. "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, . . ." So this great mystery that, before time began, God predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters, to present us as holy and blameless in His sight by no merit of our own but by His free gift of grace, that mystery, did we figure it out or was it made known to us? It was made known to us. We were the passive element. He made it known to us. On more than one occasion, I have had the great opportunity and honor to sit at the table with multiple people who are not believers and to share what our faith is, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and have seen one person at that table have their heart, mind and affections stirred up and want to know more about it, one guy get offended and one guy be indifferent. So what happened since it was the same presentation? The Holy Spirit is quickening one of them.

Let's keep going. Verse 9, ". . .making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, . . ." So God is sovereign over all things and is working all things in accordance with His will. So it's very clear in this text that salvation belongs to our God and that He, before the foundation of the earth was laid, has predestined adopted sons and daughters.

Last night, we got home my boy and I went upstairs, opened up the Bible, read the Bible and said our little prayers. Then I went and tucked Audrey in her bed. And once she was in there, I got on my knees beside her bed and I asked God to save her, I asked God to open up her heart and her mind to the beauty of the gospel and I asked God to protect her from my sin. And then I got up, walked into my son's room, tucked him in, made sure he was snug in there and then I asked God to save him, I asked God to open up his heart and open up his mind to the beauty and reality of the Scriptures, the beauty and reality of God as Creator and to, by His grace, lavish His mercy on my son. And then I prayed that God would protect him from my sins. And then I walked downstairs, and did the same thing over little Norah. Why?

In fact, it gets much more complex than this. Do you know that proverbs 16:33 says that the outcome of the roll of the dice is set by the Lord? So that means that in great weekend you had in Vegas or that bad weekend you had in Vegas, the roll of the dice are called by the Lord. In fact, it goes much deeper than that. I wrote down tons of these. Here's Proverbs 16:9, "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." Psalms 115, "Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." Do you know that, according to Jesus in Matthew 6:26, that a bird flies or falls out of the sky by the word of God's mouth and that a flower in the field blooms or does not bloom at the command of the sovereign God?

Let me give you some others. Jeremiah 10:23 says, "I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps." Psalm 135 says, "Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps." In fact, it is the biblical understanding that God does all things that even has those men and women saying, "God brought about the rain" despite the fact scientifically they understand how rain works. So if you read Ecclesiastes 1, you would see that he says life is like the water cycle; it constantly rains and pours into the ocean but it never gets filled. "Nothing ever changes" is what he was saying. So in the book of Ecclesiastes, they clearly understand how the water cycle works, and yet it does not stop them from saying, "Yet if it rains, God lets it rain." It is their understanding and it is the biblical understanding that God is sovereign over everything, that He reigns and rules over everything. And if this is true (and it is biblically true), why pray? If God has already decided, why pray? If God's decided whether or not He's going to save Reid or save Audrey, why does it matter if I pray or not? If the Lord directs the path, why does it matter if I pray or not? If the outcome that God desires is going to happen, why pray?

Now there's this other thing that happens in the Scriptures that creates a great bit of tension. In the Scriptures, God is portrayed as clearly sovereign, but then God's people constantly ask Him for things. They ask Him for things personally, they ask Him for things for others, they ask Him to change their circumstances, they ask Him to do this, to do that, to not do this and here's the thing – God listens. Let me show you one of these. Go to Exodus 32, we're going to pick it up in verse 9. "And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you." Let me translate this to you. God, upon seeing the disobedience of Israel after He brought them out of Egypt, comes to Moses and says, "Get behind a rock. I'm killing every one of these fools, and then I'll be back and I'll start over with you." And He even tells him, "Keep quiet about it. Don't talk to Me about this." So God thunders away at Moses, "I don't want to talk about this anymore. I'm killing every one of them, and I'll be back and we'll start over with you." This is a command of the Lord that has just gone out. Now watch what Moses does. "But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" And the LORD relented from the disaster." So God sovereignly goes, "You, hide and don't talk to me. I'm killing everyone." Moses implores Him, "Don't do this." He implores, he begs, he prays and what does God do? He listens and He relents. The sovereign God over all, who knows all, sees all, the future, past and present isn't just something He knows but it's a place that He is, God who is outside of time says, "I'm going to destroy them all" when He knows good and well that He's not going to destroy them? Okay.

Let me give you some more examples. "You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask." Is not an implication of this text that if you did ask, you would have? "You do not have because you do not ask. I would give you, but you're not asking." Luke 11:9-10, "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." This is every bit of the inerrant word of God as the text on His sovereignty is. This is just as much a part of the Bible. Because I know my five pointers right now are like, "Chandler!" Okay, breathe. This is just as much the Bible as your Romans 9 passage is. Let's keep reading. 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." "If my people pray, I will heal their land." Well hasn't He already sovereignly decided what He was going to do with the land to begin with? So why the "If my people would pray, I will hear and I will heal?" Do you see the tension? Let me give you one more. This is from a text we were in a couple of week ago. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we will pray and confess our sins, He will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So is God sovereign over all things or can we move Him by our prayers? Yes. Now the problem is we have a hard time believing both of these to be true and we want to pick one and play it against the other. You'll see what I call textual tennis occur among seminary guys all the time. They will get what proves their point, they will grab Romans 9 and hit that at the opposition. Then the other guy will go, "nuh uh," and send Luke 11 over the net. And they will play textual tennis for the rest of their lives. Now there are some issues which C.S. Lewis would call second tier issues, which we call the open hand of theology, that you'll play tennis with for the rest of your life until Jesus shows up and goes, "Both of you are stupid," or "just you were." And we have unity around secondary issues. Now we teach you what our official stances are in those secondary issues, but there's freedom, which means we can partner a great deal and disagree on secondary issues. There are some issues that are never going to be resolved, and then there are some that can be. This one that we're talking about today can be resolved.

Let me explain it this way. This would be the easiest way because we've already been in Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1 is very clear that salvation belongs to God and no man can be converted without Christ opening his heart, was it not? I don't know that it gets any clearer than Ephesians 1. The only way you believe and have the ability to believe is if God opens your heart and your mind to understand the gospel and gets you out of darkness into light. That's the only way you believe. If that's true, then why preach? If preaching does not open the hearts and minds of people but only the Holy Spirit does, then why share your faith with your neighbor? Why share your faith with your friends? Why share your faith with your family members? Why do I spend a crazy amount of hours every week studying and preparing the Scriptures to teach in such a way that you can grasp and have an opportunity to believe? Because God's appointed means to achieving His appointed purpose is the proclamation of the Word. Which means God said, "The means by which I'm going to accomplish this is the preaching, teaching and proclamation of the Word. So I'm going to save men through the preaching and teaching of the Bible and through interpersonal relationships where the gospel is taught and lived out." So we preach because the means by which God is going to draw men to Himself is through the proclamation and preaching of the Word. The same is true about prayer. So prayer becomes the means by which the purposes of God are accomplished. So in this way, prayer changes things.

One of the problems in this theological quandary of sovereignty and what prayer does is when you pick one of those, you end up making one of two errors. The reformed guys, of which I'm solidly in, since God is sovereign over everything, they kind of relegate it to this dusty corner of their lives, and the intellect rules and prayer is just a small part of their lives. Over here, the error is that God becomes a genie in a lamp that you just rub and He does what you tell Him. Both of those are erroneous.

This isn't the only problem though. Another problem goes back to the first week of this series, and that's that we don't know the Scriptures so we don't know what God has promised us in the Scriptures concerning prayer. Let me show you just a couple of these. Luke 11:13 says this, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" I love the setup of this verse, and I should have read the whole thing. He says, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?" "Dad, I'm hungry?" "Here, have a snake." ". . .or if he asks for an egg, [which one of you fathers] will give him a scorpion?" It's a rhetorical question. There's not a guy in the crowd who raised his hand. Everyone would have gone, "No one would do that. So He's going, "If you are like that and you're evil, then how am I going to respond to those whom I love? Ask for the Holy Spirit; It will be yours."

That's not the only one. Turn to Matthew 21:22. "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Now there starts to be this little caveat in here that would stop you from being able to pretend to be Aladdin. He said that if you pray and ask for anything, you'll receive it if you have faith. That's not the faith that that prayer would come about, but that's rather faith in the cross of Jesus Christ. Which means that for prayer to be effective, we must have a heart that belongs to the Lord. Which means you're going to pray less and less and less selfishly and more and more and more in regards to the kingdom. Let's keep going. John 15:7, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." So now we've got another caveat, don't we? "If My word is in you and you are in Me, then ask whatever you want, and then it will be done."

Now go to James 1, starting in verse 5, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Listen to what the Bible just said for those of you who are believers. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask, and he will receive. Okay, I know that I am to love my wife like Christ loved the church and that He loved her and gave Himself up for her. But what does that exactly look like? And then what does that look like if she were to ever be wrong. . . hypothetically of course? How do you lead and love your wife like Christ loved the church? So the Evangelical Christian response to this right now is for me to recommend a book that can do that for you, that can tell you how to do that practically . The Bible says that our response should be, "Give me wisdom." I am worried about my kids, and here's how I worry about them. Do you remember that scene in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* where Cameron begins to kick his dad's Ferrari? He says, "I hate this car. I hate this car. You love this car," and he kicks it until it goes off into the ravine. Because of what's happened here and because most of the preachers' kids that I meet are really kind of jacked up, I have this fear the pressure of being my children puts on them. How do I get off of them the pressure that even some of you unbeknownst to you have put on them? How do I tell them, "Don't you worry about embarrassing me. When you stumble in sin, we'll deal with that, and we'll never deal with it because you are Matt and Lauren Chandler's child. We'll deal with it because it's sinful and needs to be dealt with?" How do I free them from that? I don't know the answer to that question. I specifically don't know it as they get older. So I'm asking. How much of our money do we give away? How much do we keep? Where's the line on that? I know I'm going to have to die, stand in front of God and give an account. How do I do that? I pray. You pray and ask for wisdom. And listen, the Bible just said that He'll give it. And we already read that He's not a wicked Father. "God, what should I do?" "I don't know. Figure it out, and I'll judge you on it later." That's not the God we serve. "I don't know, but you had better get it right. Hell is over here." That's not the God of the Bible. "Help me, lead me, guide me," and He answers." It's a profound truth in the Scriptures.

But that's not the only reason we don't pray. I think a lack of confession as a continuing ethic will kill your prayer life. If you're not constantly aware of your shortcomings and confessing them to the Lord and others, you will go into hiding, including hiding from the Lord. Nothing will sap your prayer life like walking in secret sin. You'll run from Him and not to Him. It is a certainty.

And then the last reason we don't pray is because we're proud people, and not in a good way. I don't know if you knew this but "God helps them who help themselves" is not in the Bible. That is not in Proverbs. It's a silly, rugged American, individualized statement that is anti everything the Bible teaches. So you don't pray because you think you don't need him. You don't pray because you think you've got this. You don't pray because you'll make it happen and you'll get it done because you don't think you need Him. Now, here's the interesting thing. The reason I believe this is true is because the Bible teaches it. Psalm 138:6, "He regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar." It's also because I've witnessed about a billion times when your illusion of control is stripped from you, you become great prayers. Like when you lose your job and nine months later still don't have one and now you don't know how you're paying the rent,

all of a sudden you're like Elijah. When you find out that you or someone you know is sick and recovery is going to be extremely painful or maybe not possible, all of a sudden you become a prayer. When the illusion of control that so many of you are operating under disappears and how the universe is actually ordered becomes clear to you, you pray.

Now, there's seven reasons why you should pray. Prayer shows and exemplifies our dependence on God. Prayer is a simple act of humility. "I cannot; You can. I do not know; You know. . ." Prayer is just as simple, daily act of humility on our part. Prayer gets us into fellowship with God. God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit and through His Word; we speak to God through prayer. This is called interaction. This is called relationship. In prayer, God allows us to be involved in activities that are eternally important. According to God's Word, when we pray, we're involved in something, much, much bigger than ourselves. One of the things that my wife and I are constantly praying about are the Africans that we work with down in Dallas and the countries they represent, and in so doing, we're a part of something eternally and globally larger than we are. Prayer changes things in the way that we outlined already.

So in the circumstances of your life, what needs to be changed? Is marriage difficult? Is money gone? Do you have a wayward child? Pray. I'm praying for so many things that I cannot control or that I need God to do. When I got to this church seven years ago, I was 28 years old and had never pastored before. Very quickly I hired a bunch of other 20 year olds. And so everybody was like, "That wasn't smart." Yeah, we had like an \$8,000 budget. What did you want me to do? Here's the great thing about 20 year olds. I can go find a super sharp, brilliant 20 year old who is picking ups some megapastor's laundry and I can put him on staff at an executive level and pay him \$8 grand a year and they'd be happy to take it. And that's what we did. So that means that we've had to grow our pastors, walk with them, encourage them and give them a lot of time, resources and energy to developing them. And it also means we make some monumental mistakes early on that we're still trying to correct. I'm praying. I'm praying for your heart because so many of you here are simple consumers and are not a part of the body of Christ. You are church attenders. You go to church, but you belong to nowhere. I'm praying that God would change your heart. Some of you have been taught down here that church is about you. I'm begging God to change your mind and heart about that.

Prayer is a means of confession. It's in prayer that we confess our shortcomings to sin. Prayer is a means to fighting sin. You see, prayer is a spirit-driven activity, which means when we're praying, we're disconnecting from the sinful fallenness of this world and we're connecting to what is holy, right and good. And finally, we're commanded to pray. God has ordained that He would accomplish His purposes through prayer. And so He has commanded to the individual life of a believer to pray and therefore fulfill His purposes.

Now on to the pragmatic side. I think that when you start to try to give pragmatics to prayer, you really rob it of its power. Because I think it's a little bit more unique to the individual than we make it. Here is what I know about it pragmatically. There will be a private expression. In fact, Jesus warns against those who would only pray in public. There will be a private expression, and there will be a public expression. So at some level, we have private times of prayer. Now I don't know what that looks like for you. For some of us (myself included), that means early mornings. I pray best early in the morning. But I'm not telling you that the best time to pray is early in the morning. Some of you get up in the morning at 5:30, start to pray and you're back asleep by 5:45. That's what happens to me at night. If I lay in bed at night, it's like, "God, I just thank you for zzzzzzz. . ." And then I don't even know how far I got, and I don't know who I prayed for. So I'm a morning person. That's when I pray. You've got to figure out when you do that. Is it at lunch? Do you take a walk around the park? Is it early in the morning?

Is it at night? Part of that will be where you are in life. Another thing that I know helps me is I have to write. If I take my little moleskin journal, open it up and write out what I'm praying for, then I can just commune with the Lord forever. And it doesn't even have to be complete sentences. It can be something like, "Lauren: grace, mercy, further intimacy for us.

Audrey: salvation, godly little girlfriends. Reid: a clear understanding of what it means to be a man." If I put that down and I get on my knees beside the couch and go, "Father, I just want to pray for the Village. . .oh, I think we're putting the carpet down today in the sanctuary and then they'll bolt those chairs down. Do you know what? I need to call and give them a tour first. . .No no no! Okay, Father, I just pray for Atlanta Catalyst this week. . .Catalyst? I wonder if I have a chance to hook up with Brad and then get a cup of coffee because I want to talk about. . .No!" But if I've got that piece of paper, I'm there. Now some of you would be the exact opposite. You'd be like, "I want to pray for my sister," and then you'd end up drawing a picture of her. So for some of you, a journal would be a miserable idea. But I know that there's a private aspect of it, and I know you've got to figure it out. And I know part of the joy of this is figuring those kind of things out. How do you pray?

And then there's the public aspect to it. My family prays together. I don't just have individual time with my children in prayer. Although we do have those times, they're not wrought into how we do life. We pray as a family. We do our family reading together and then we pray. The kids get to say what they're grateful for, and then I lead us in prayer. We do that publicly. We also know that God does profound, beautiful things when His people gather corporately to pray. This is another area I'm praying we get stronger at. We're not strong at this. I'll give you an example. This weekend, at the Highland Village campus, there will be between three to four thousand adults. This Wednesday night, we'll corporately pray as a church, and no more than a hundred of you will show up. Now listen to me. I get life, trust me. I mean, I board a plane for Atlanta this week, I was out last week, I travel quite a bit myself. I get that. But more than a hundred of us can show up for sure. I often say there's nothing more powerful that we do than to gather together corporately and humble ourselves before the Lord. I'm not pulling that out of the air; I'm pulling it out of what we see in the Scriptures. When His people draw near to Him to say, "You are great and good, and we need You," God does powerful things.

Now I'll end with this. Some of you don't pray because you're stuck in religion and aren't believers yet. Here's what I mean by that. You still think that your shortcomings, your historic failures and your past somehow disqualify you from approaching the throne of grace with confidence. You misunderstand your own faith. We come before the throne of God not with confidence in our moral uprightness, but in the confidence that came with the impartation, the imputation of grace onto us so that the righteousness of Christ was given to us and our sins were nailed to the cross with Him. It's the great exchange. We come with that confidence, not our own. You misunderstand our message. Our message is not, "Christ so loved us that we cleaned ourselves up." That's an anti-message to the gospel. The gospel is, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) You're praying because you're going, "I'm unworthy." You are unworthy, and yet He has made a way. You misunderstand our faith. So may God make us a place of prayer. Might we pray long and might we pray well. Might we pray in private, and might we pray in public. And may we, with our 40 years, see God do tremendous things as we pray according to His purposes.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for our time together. I ask that, in Your mercy, You would stir up our hearts and minds and that we would be men and women of prayer, whether that be in our homes, our families, our home groups, our own individual times. I pray that we would learn to commune deeply and intimately with You. Help us as we seek out the pragmatics of this. May You give us wisdom. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."