



Prayer (Part 1) – A Call to Prayer

Matt Chandler – January 3, 2016

Happy New Year. How are you? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Ephesians 3 for the first part of our time together. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you.

For the last six to eight years, we've used the month of January the same way. We've tackled three fairly large topics. Those topics are always the same. We haven't varied from those topics. We've looked at racial reconciliation. We tend to do that the weekend before Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Then we've tackled the idea of life and what life is and when life begins and how the Christian ought to consider life.

Lastly, we've looked at the unreached peoples or what the Bible would call the nations. All over the world, there are men and women who do not know about the mercy and grace afforded to them in Jesus Christ. Yet we see in the Scriptures that Christ did not die for those who *might* be saved but for those who *will* be saved. We pray. We send. We go. And we consider the unreached in the world.

We've done that every year. We always kind of frame it around the idea of prayer. These things are the size and scope of which, without the power of God moving in profound ways, it is going to be a dance of three steps forward and four steps back for our lifetime. We want to humble ourselves and be desperate and dependent upon God to work and move for the glory of his name and our good.

We've approached that in various ways for the last six to eight years. Here's what I want to do in my time together today to kick start this month. I want to give two sermonettes, each about eight to ten minutes. I'm going to give an eight to ten-minute sermonette on my hopes for The Village Church in 2016. Then we're just going to stop, and we're going to spend about eight to ten minutes just praying together.

Then I want to give an eight to ten-minute sermonette on really the lenses by which we will see and approach those three topics over the course of the rest of the month. Then we'll stop, and we'll pray again. I know that's risky. What I mean by risky is I know some of you are not believers in Christ, so you've come because a friend or a coworker or a family member has coaxed you into being here, and here I am giving 20 minutes of our service over to just prayer.

Maybe I can help you by framing it this way. What you'll witness when you watch us pray as the people of God is men and women who are well aware of their imperfections. We are well aware of our hypocrisies. We are well aware of our shortcomings, yet we earnestly and completely believe that God hears us and wants to hear from us, and that when we pray, it pleases the heart of God. When we consider the God of the Bible, he is unlike any earthly father ever.

In fact, Jesus, in the gospel, gives the story of the persistent widow. He is trying to convince the people of God that God wants to be pestered by his children. Right? I've oftentimes joked that if my dad ever said, "Ask me one more time here," that was a threat. It wasn't an invitation to actually ask him one more time. Yet, the God of the Bible says, "Pester me. Bother me. Follow me around the house without stopping talking. I want you to keep coming to me. I want you to keep bothering me. I want you to cry out to me," not because he finally gives in but because it changes our hearts to ask.

If you're not a Christian, what you see when we pray is our understanding that in our brokenness, in our weariness, in our undone-ness, our God still hears us. If you need further evidence to feel safer here at The Village, let me just do this. If you are a Christian... How many of you who are Christians would go, "I can look back on the last week. I can look back on the last two weeks, and I can see sinfulness and brokenness present in my life"?

That's 100 percent of the Christians who just raised their hands, or they didn't, and they're liars, and that also proves my point. Yet, what we believe as Christians and what the Word of God teaches is that these hypocrites you know and these inconsistent followers of Christ you know are heard by their God, loved by their God, and delighted in by their God, despite maybe their difficulty in prayer itself. That's what you'll witness.

I want to add this caveat too. This is also dangerous because many of us are what could be called cultural Christians. You don't really have a relationship with God, but you would self-identify as a Christian, maybe because your parents were Christians. Maybe because you're a conservative, or maybe your parents duped you with the whole, "Do you want to come to heaven with us or burn in

hell forever?" question, and you signed on to heaven and were baptized when you were 4 or something.

You would self-identify as a Christian, but you have no relationship with Christ. That's going to make things awkward because I'm about to sit you down with a stranger. Prayer will feel awkward because you have no real relationship with Christ, but you would self-identify as a Christian. Cultural Christians tend to want to be entertained. They tend to want me to dance for them.

I don't mean literally, because no one would want that. They want me to be funny and energetic and insightful and witty. Really, when all is said and done, I want you, if you find yourself bored or not interested, I want you, if you identify as a Christian, for you to enter into the wrestle of why that would be if you really are a believer in Christ.

Why would you not want to have a conversation with your Savior? Why would you not want to engage with the living God? With that said, let me start with my hopes for The Village Church in 2016. If you have your Bibles, we're in Ephesians 3. We're going to start in verse 14. Just to honor our God who speaks to us in his Word, will you stand as I read Ephesians 3:14-19 for us?

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

May God bless the reading of his Word. You can have a seat. I have been glued to this text. I have had my hooks in this text. I have read it and meditated upon it and wrestled with it since the first week of June. I have daily dove into this text for the good of my own soul. My experience in my relationship with Christ is, over the last 20-something years, God has actively been deconstructing me and reconstructing me. Amen?

God breaks me down and builds me back up. He breaks me apart and puts me back together. In my highs and in my lows, in the things he enables me to see, he deconstructs me, and then he reconstructs me again. This past summer, the month of June was a month of deconstruction. I went

up and saw a guy who is probably my spiritual mentor, just kind of helps me navigate the depths of my heart. There is much in me that is confusing to me.

I don't know if you can relate to that or not. Maybe you just know exactly who you are. I get jostled easily about things inside of me. I'm from a broken place. God has, for 22 years, been putting me back together. To do that, he has had to break some things in order to set them right. June was one of those months for me. I laid hold of this text, and I wrestled with God through this text.

In this text, I see the prayers I have prayed for myself. This really mysterious, cool thing has happened as I've been the pastor of this church for 13 years. The longest I've ever lived anywhere in my life now is in this place. What has happened is my prayers and hopes for myself have also become my prayers and hopes for us. The Lord has mysteriously and beautifully knit us together, so I can't hardly hope for myself without including you in that.

What I thought I would do is just point out a couple of things in this text that your pastor wants for his own soul, and then I want to lead us in across all campuses, Plano, Fort Worth, Dallas, across the rest of our campuses, into a time of prayer for us individually and then us corporately as The Village Church based on what we see in this text. Here's the first sentence in the text that I've prayed for for myself, and I want us to pray for us.

The apostle Paul writes to the Christians at the church in Ephesus that they may be strengthened with power through the Spirit of God in their inner being. Now, as westerners, as Americans, we don't tend to consider the inner being very often. We are very rationalistic, very intellectual. We'll talk about the intellect here in a minute. There is nothing wrong with the intellect. God would have you steward your intellect well. Yet, we're not primarily thinkers. We're primarily lovers.

There is something in us. There is an invisible code our lives run on. It is this operating system that is underneath everything. It drives how we think. It drives how we interact. This is the inner man, the inner being, the integration of mind, body, and soul. It's the Spirit, and the apostle Paul says we need strength by the Holy Spirit in the inner being as God deconstructs us and reconstructs us.

I've been praying that for myself. I have not yet learned to love the seasons of deconstruction. In fact, I still hate them, even though I know what they're accomplishing. I know that every time the Lord has deconstructed me, he has reconstructed something more beautiful, something that can hold more of his grace, something that understands more the full beauty of who he is.

Yet, every time the foundation and walls of my life begin to creak, I brace and cling to a verse like this in the hopes that I'll make it through. I need strength in my inner being as God deconstructs and reconstructs me. I'm not yet who I know I one day will be. I'm hungry for that strength in my inner being.

The next part of this text talks about being rooted and grounded in love. I want to be rooted and grounded in love. I want the default motivation of my heart to be love, not to be other pursuits or motivations. I need more rooted love. I feel like oftentimes, love, as a driver of my life, is much like a weed in shallow ground rather than an oak tree beside streams of water. Right?

I want deeper roots. I want love, as the grounding agent in my life, to be nearly impossible to uproot. I want the Spirit of God to do that. I can't simply decide to do that. I can decide to act loving. Right? In some sense, that's slavery. I want to actually be rooted and grounded in love, to be shaped and molded by the love of Christ.

Then this third prayer. I want to create a caveat, lest you think your pastor has lost his mind. He says in verse 19... I've just clung so tightly to this phrase. In verse 19, he says, "**...and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...**" The apostle Paul who wrote Romans, the Mount Everest of doctrinal books... Even the Bible says Paul's writings are hard to understand. Have you ever thought about that?

In 1 Peter, Peter is writing to some churches and says, "I hear you're reading Paul. He's difficult to read." The Bible says the Bible is hard. That's awesome. Yet, Paul would say to the church at Ephesus, "I pray that you would experience Christ in a way that supersedes your knowledge." Let me say it to you this way, just as means of a confession. Your pastor's mind is 200 miles ahead of his heart. The integration between heart and mind, that gap is too big.

I'm asking the Spirit of God to close that gap because Paul says, "I want you to experience the love of Christ in such a way that it surpasses your knowledge, that you wouldn't even know what was going on, that your sense and experience of the living Christ would be so profound that you wouldn't have a grid for it." I'm hungry for that for me. I'm hungry for that for you.

Lest you think I'm getting all mystical and weird, let me be really honest. The Village Church will be a place that loves and preaches ferociously and fearlessly the Word of God. We are rooted in the

Scriptures, unafraid of what the Scriptures teach, never want to vary from them in any way. In fact, after this series, we'll get into the gospel of John and walk through the seven "I am" statements Jesus makes in the gospel of John.

From there, we'll get into the Psalms this summer, specifically the Psalms of Ascent. Starting the fall, we'll dive into what might just be a year or two in the book of Exodus. We love the Word of God. We started The Village Church Institutes here where we're training doctrinally informed disciples of Jesus Christ. Yet, in the midst of all of that, you must know that intellectual ascent does not equal a transformed heart.

What I'm hungry for for me is the gap between my head and my heart to close. What I'm hungry for for you is that you might experience the love of Christ in such a way this year that it surpasses knowledge, that it's disorienting and discombobulating as the love of Christ sweeps you downstream.

Lastly, you have this prayer that we would be filled with all of the fullness of God. The thing about all of the fullness of God... That Greek word there, *all*, if you look it up, means all, all of it, which is why they translated it that way into English. We would be filled with *all* of the fullness of God. I'm hungry for that, and I'm aware that part of what is happening in my deconstruction and reconstruction is God creating space for more of his fullness, which is why we need to learn to love those seasons in which we're being deconstructed.

Here's what I want us to do. I want to set aside some time regardless of campus. We're going to do this together as a church for you to pray for you and for you to pray for us as a church. Here's the reality about these four things. At the end of 2016, we could pray these same things for 2017, that the Lord might answer these in profound ways this year, and still there would be all of this room to grow into.

What these kinds of prayers create is a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those are good things because Jesus said, "**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.**" These are the types of prayers that link us up to our brother David in the Psalms who says, "As the deer pants for water, so my soul longs for you. It yearns for you."

In Psalm 27, "One thing I ask and all that I seek is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple." There are prayers that sow

into our lives divine discontentment and insatiable thirst for more of God, and I'm hungry for that for me and you, so I just want to lead us in a time of prayer.

Again, if you're not a Christian or are a cultural Christian, you identify as a Christian, but there's no relationship, I understand this can be awkward. If you're not a believer, maybe just pray prayers of belief. Ask God that if he's real, he would show you that he's real, that he would convince your heart, that he would show your mind. If you're nominal, that you would really wrestle with the fact that this bothers you to stop and actually have a conversation with your Savior and Creator.

I'm going to put the prayer points on the stage, and we'll just begin to pray, you for you, and you for us as a church. Here's the first prayer point right from the Scriptures. I want us to pray that we might be strengthened with power through his Spirit in our inner being. If I could simplify that, let's ask for there to be a profound work of God in our hearts this year and in the life of The Village Church. I'm just going to give it to you now to pray for yourself. I'm going to be praying also.

If you don't know how to pray, don't know what to pray, just pray the words on the screen. I promise you the words on the screen are from the Bible. You can pray the Bible back to God. It's his words. It's lovingly saying, "You've promised this. I'm claiming this promise. I want this promise." You pray for you. Ask to be strengthened with power through his Spirit.

Ask for there to be a profound work of God in your life this year as well as the life of our church. Maybe you know some specific places where you want to see that profound work occur. Next, would you begin to pray for you that you would be rooted and grounded in love? Ask that your heart would be shaped and molded by the love of Christ. Then pray that same prayer for our church, that our church, the people of The Village Church would be rooted, grounded in love.

Would you begin to pray that you would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge? Would you ask to experience the love of Christ this year, that the gap between your head and heart would shrink, that the one-liner, bumper sticker theology that exists in your mind would be experienced in the depths of your soul? Would you ask for that for you? Would you ask for that for our church?

Lastly, to close out this first block of prayer, would you just stand with me? Plano, Dallas, Fort Worth, will you go ahead and just stand? We're going to stand together as a church across the metroplex. I know what I'll ask you to do next might be weird for some of you or freak out others of you, but it's just a simple act of faith as we pray this last part.

Will you just cup your hands in front of you? I know some of our Pentecostals are like, "About time," and some of our Baptists are like, "This is freaking me out." Just as an act of faith, would you just cup your hands? I'm going to pray for us that we might be filled with all of the fullness of God, and our open hands aren't magical or anything like that. They're just a sign of faith and longing to be filled with all of the fullness of God. Let me pray for us now.

Father, I thank you that you hear us, that our prayers are pleasing to you, that despite our undone-ness, despite our hypocrisy, despite our shortcomings, we can boldly approach your throne of grace with confidence. I thank you that there is more occurring in our humbly asking you to move than in all of our efforts. We ask you now to full us as your individual sons and daughters and fill us as a corporate body of faith, a covenant community, a family of faith in this given location, in this given time with the fullness of what we can handle.

I thank you for the deconstruction that has occurred and the reconstruction that has occurred. I'm hoping and believing that that reconstruction simply will house more of your fullness. Where '15 was a year of brokenness and hurt and loss, I pray that as you reconstruct us, we'll experience more of your fullness, more of your pleasure, more of the beauty that is belonging to you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Why don't you have a seat? The second sermonette I want to address begins to set us up for the next couple of weeks. If you have your Bibles, go over to Genesis 1. That's a real easy one. It should be the first page or two in your Bible. While you're turning there, I want to point out something really quickly.

In the Ancient Near East, the ruling nations of the day had specific creation narratives they embraced, stories where they got where the universe came from and where humankind came from. If we look back upon the Assyrians and the Babylonians and the Persians, as we look back on the Ancient Near East and those nations that ruled the known world at that time, they all shared similar creation narratives.

The creation story they ascribed to was that there were multiple gods, and somehow a war broke out in the heavenlies, and via violence, conflict, and power, the universe began to exist, and humankind began to exist. As the dust settled, those gods divvied up creation, and they were the

god of that aspect of that creation, or they were the god of that nation. They were the god of this people group.

The worldview was that the universe and humankind began to exist out of power, violence, and ultimate dominion. Now, what this did to the view of humankind was it put the value of mankind on a sliding scale. Depending on your color, your class, your culture, or your capacity, your worth was determined by those four C's.

If you were a specific color or class, were a specific culture or capacity, you might be of ultimate worth, equal to others, or you might be worth less than a goat or a cow. This is part of what made the Ancient Near East such a brutal and violent place, their understanding of where we all came from. Yet, in the middle of the Ancient Near East, this small group, this chosen nation, this group of God's elect called the Hebrews had a creation narrative of their own.

Because of what they believed about the origin of the universe and the origin of humankind, they were awkwardly freakish in the Ancient Near East, that the idea of a monotheistic reign and rule of one God, and the intrinsic value of every human person regardless of class, color, culture, and capacity would have seemed as foolish as a lot of things seem to nonbelievers today about us.

I want to read to you the creation narrative in Judeo-Christian thought and life, how God created the world and created mankind. Then I want to lay before you how that should change how you see yourself and how that should change how you see others, and let that be the framework for where we're going the next three weeks. In Genesis 1, starting in verse 26, the Word of God says this.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Let me stop there. Right away, you see what makes us awkward and freakish in regard to the Ancient Near East. The Ancient Near East said the origin of the universe is power, violence, and dominion. In the Christian worldview, the way God created the world is actually out of the overflow

of community, love, and joy, right? If you were here when we studied the Apostles' Creed, we talked at length about how our God is triune, three in one, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

When you're reading Genesis 1, and the Bible says God said, "Let us..." it's not saying that God had some angels there, like, "Hey guys, here's what we're going to do today." Rather, out of the overflow of loving community, God paints on the canvas of creation the beauty and worth of his own glory. The origin of the universe is not power and violence and dominion but community, joy, and harmony.

Then, what would have really thrown people off is that in this text, you see that God made man in his own image, that humankind becomes the crown jewel in all of God's creation, that we, although not the most powerful mammal, not the fastest mammal... There are all sorts of mammals that are faster than we are, can do things we cannot do, yet the Bible says, "No, no, no. It is mankind alone, humankind alone that has been made in the image of God."

Since humankind has been made in the image of God, then all humans everywhere, regardless of capacity, regardless of color, regardless of culture, and regardless of class are intrinsically valuable because they and they alone have been made in the image of God. When you get that, when you understand that, it changes how you see yourself.

Here's what I mean by that. When you understand that you have been made in the image of God, you will not treat yourself cheaply. What I'm talking about is I'm not talking up here in the ethereal, spiritual clouds. I'm saying you won't treat yourself cheaply. You'll grow your mind. You will increase your intellect when you know you've been made in the image of God.

Now, I'm not trying to put a weight on you that is not meant to be put on you. How many of you would just say, "I know people who are smarter than I am, and they're always going to be smarter than I am"? Right? Yeah. Okay. Everyone but maybe Doug Stanley, our director of operations, just raised their hands. "I'm going to need to see some data. I'm not sure I'm willing to sign off on that just yet." Biomedical engineering, *summa cum laude*, just a freak.

Most of us are around people who we're like, "Yeah, I could give all of days to studying and thinking, and that dude is just naturally smarter than I am." I'm not saying you are to be the intellect of another but rather that you should be serious about the life of your mind because it acknowledges

that we have been made in the image of God, and God has plans and purposes for our lives, so we want to be the most sanctified version of us possible.

We grow in our mind. We grow in our intellect, not to show off, not to solve the world's problems. If man's mind could solve the world's problems, we would have already done it. Even the Greeks had myths about why every time man fixes a problem, he creates other problems with the fix of that problem. Prometheus. You can look up and study the story of Prometheus, how he gave man fire. Zeus tied him to a rock and had a vulture come eat out his liver every day and then have the liver grow back so that... Right?

Do you know what the Greeks were trying to explain? The fact that humans can't fix themselves, and the more we try to fix things, we might fix this problem, but we create seven others. That's what happens in us, but we grow in our minds, not because we'll solve any problems, but rather because God has called us, has purposes for us, so we want to become the most sanctified version of us possible.

When we understand the *imago Dei*, we take good care of our bodies. Now, I categorically reject our culture's view of the sexy body we must all strive for. One, it's near impossible without devoting yourself to surgical enhancement and illegal drugs. The kind of spend all day in the gym... I'm just so categorically against that nonsense, but I do want to watch what I eat, and I want to take good care of my body because I don't know what the Lord is leading me into, and I want to be prepared for it, whatever it is.

I believe I have been called as a Christian, set apart as a Christian, and that God wants to use me, and I want to have adequate energy for that. I want to have adequate mind space for that. I want a physical body that will enable me, by the grace of God, to fulfill the calling God has for me in Christ. I eat well and go to the gym, not to bench press 315 because I just can't imagine what is going to happen to me during the week that is going to require that. "I'm ready for this one." I just don't know what is going to require me at any given moment to squat thrust 285 pounds.

Those aren't the kinds of goals I'm trying to set as I work out consistently. I want to be in good shape. I want to be ready for whatever the Lord would call me to. We take good care of our bodies. When we understand the *imago Dei*, we take good care, and we pay attention to our souls. We're paying attention to our minds. We're paying attention to our bodies, and we're paying attention to our souls.

Where there is lust and anger and anxiety and fear and rage flowing through us, we understand, feel, sense, understand that those are clogged arteries, and for robust health and vitality, those things must be dealt with. We seek counsel. We pray. We let others in to those clogged arteries so they might help and walk alongside of us. This is called integration, that we are full people.

We have a mind. We have a heart. We have a soul. We have a body. All of them coming together in health is what God has for us in Jesus Christ. The *imago Dei* means we don't treat ourselves cheaply. It doesn't just change how we see ourselves; it changes how we see others. I wrote this sentence. I wanted to make sure I read it. Life, especially human life, regardless of culture, class, color, or capacity, is to be considered with the utmost seriousness.

What I mean by that is I must take very special care not to believe that there are certain lives that are less valuable than other lives. All of us have been made in the image of God and therefore are due respect, honor, and seriousness. Understanding the *imago Dei* helps me see myself, and in knowing myself, helps me see others differently.

I stand up here today, a 41-year-old man, who didn't just spontaneously appear backstage right before I came out to preach this to you. What you see before you today is the result of 41 years of wins and losses, wounds and healings, frustrations and hopes... On and on I could go. I have been shaped by relationships and experiences, hurts and hang-ups and losses and education, and all of that has shaped me and put me up here.

I am a result of my yesterdays. You are a result of your yesterdays. You did not spontaneously blow up here today as you are. There have been things that have happened, things you have believed, things others have done, and things you have done to yourself that have brought you in here as you are. We behave the way we behave for very specific reasons.

Knowing that about me, knowing that about you, knowing that about others shapes how we see them. The guy who is consistently rude and crusty and a jerk... I'm not trying to excuse his behavior, but in understanding the *imago Dei* helps us understand that some things have happened to that poor soul to get him to that point.

Understanding the *imago Dei* creates empathy and creates the ability for me to respond to that type of nonsense with kindness because the Bible tells us that a kind word turns away wrath. As a man

who hates himself acts pompous and ridiculous and rude in order to make you hate him also, you responding with kindness to that begins to soothe deep places and confuse and maybe even incite initially.

Then lastly, not only does it affect how we see ourselves and affect how we see others. We also acknowledge, as we see others, the differences in other cultures, colors, capacities, and classes, but we are slow to make accusations and take a posture instead of humility, seeking to understand others as we know our own culture, color, capacity, and class are not ultimate but one of many of God's panorama of beautiful design.

Maybe I'll just make it real simple. That was too wordy. I'm white, all of me. I'm just a white guy. Both of my parents, white. Both of their parents, white. You can just keep going back. There is a lot of whiteness in my family. Basically, we're much. You take a little German, a little Anglo, all of the Anglos. You put them in, and you shake them up. You dump them out. That's the Chandler-Walker clan. That's my family. I'm white.

I am middle class. For a pastor, being middle class is pretty good. It means I've done well. I'm white. I'm middle class. I'm educated. I have moved the ball farther than my parents were able to in how the world judges success. I live in a larger house. I drive nicer cars. I have moved the ball forward in that kind of thinking. All of that is true.

Yet, for me to demand and believe that if others would just be more like me, the world would be a better place is wicked, arrogant, and perverse, and it's a misunderstanding of what it means to be made in the image of God and that all men and women are made in the image of God. What that means is I will never see myself as being ultimate but rather one culture, one color, one class, with certain capacities as a piece of what God is doing overall.

That immediately creates in me a gap of ignorance. It means that it's going to be hard for me to understand people who don't share those things with me, right? Isn't that a no-brainer? It just means I don't know what it's like to be a different culture. I don't. My little sister lives in Asia. I've been over there. It's confusing. I don't get it. They don't get me. How can I? I'm an Anglo-American, and they're Taiwanese Asians.

We're just different. We've grown up differently. We have different languages. We have different cultures. We're different colors. We have different backgrounds and different experiences. It creates

a humility. How can I judge them? I can't. I haven't been there, and I'm certainly not going to demand that they be like me.

"Do you know what? I was thinking about this country, as beautiful as it is, if you guys could just be more like me, this place would be far more awesome. Be white. Work as hard as I work. Take advantage of the same opportunities I took advantage of because all of mankind has those opportunities." That's a complete lie. "If you would just do these things, you would enjoy the success I enjoy, and the problems of the world would melt away." That is an arrogant, evil, wicked way of thinking.

It is ethnocentric, and it elevates your class, your culture, and your capacity, your color to uppermost. When all is said and done, you're what pleases God, your color, your class. I think everyone is guilty of this. This is not just an Anglo issue. I think everyone is guilty of this. Understanding the *imago Dei* creates in me an understanding that I'm never embarrassed about who I am. God made me who I am. He has blessed me with certain things, and he has created hurdles for my good for me.

It does mean, however, that I will often need to shut my mouth, take off my jacket, and put on another man's jacket to try to understand. Even when I put on his jacket, I might not be able to understand, but with a great deal of humility, I will acknowledge that in every color, in every culture, in every class, and in every capacity, there are beautiful, God-wrought gifts of common grace that, when all is said and done, will be embraced by the people of God and celebrated by the people of God.

It's to that end we labor and fight to understand one another, love one another, and be gracious to one another. This is what the *imago Dei* and an understanding should do in our hearts. In the weeks ahead, we're going to consider this. We're going to consider how the *imago Dei* shapes our views on race, on life, and on the unreached peoples of the world.

We're also going to look at how sin perverts our understanding of the *imago Dei* and really makes a mess of all of this. I would say that all of the truly deplorable acts of mankind throughout history can all be traced back to a fundamental flaw in understanding the *imago Dei*. It's a prescription to the Babylonian, Assyrian creation narrative that says all of this is about power and domain and violence, and therefore human value is on a sliding scale.

It's the God of the Bible who says, "No, no, no. All human life is valuable regardless. Done." In fact, so valuable is it that the most incapacitated special needs adult who will never be able to contribute anything and will need to be watched over all of the days of his life is more valuable than the most expensive race horse imaginable. This is what it means to grab hold of the *imago Dei*.

I thought, in light of this being a month of prayer, we would just spend a moment or two here at the end praying. Then I'll close us out here in a bit. We have two prayer points. Then as I close this out, the men and women who are going to serve Communion are going to grab the elements. Then we'll pass those out, at least here in Flower Mound. They might be doing it a little bit differently at other campuses.

Then we'll experience the love of Christ by holding physically a piece of bread and holding physically a cup, and we'll rejoice in the presence of Christ in our midst. For now, let me lead you in just two points of prayer. The first is I want to give you an opportunity to pray for a growing understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God. You pray for you, that you would pray for a growing understanding of what it means to be made in the image of God.

Maybe you treat yourself cheaply, and what you need the Holy Spirit of God to do is reveal that you shouldn't be treating yourself cheaply, that you have value and worth, that you alone are among those who have been made in the image of God. I want to invite you into the courage that will be required to pray that the Spirit of God would expose where you might think of certain people or peoples as less than.

Maybe that's a class of people you think are less than. Maybe that's a color of people. Maybe that's another culture. Maybe it's those who have different capacity, less capacity than you. Would you ask the Spirit of God to reveal those places in your heart where you believe others are less than? Most of us don't think these spaces are there. It takes an incident or a crisis to reveal those dark places in our hearts. Maybe in the quietness of this moment, the Spirit might reveal that to you.

Father, as we close out our time of prayer this morning, our time of considering you, Creator of all who has made us in your image, as we close out this time of looking at your Word and crying out to you for help, we ask once again that you would move for your glory and our joy, that you would give us eyes to see people as you see people.

We ask that even as we leave here, those who maybe will serve us at lunch or maybe those who are working around us, our peers, our coworkers, those we work for, those we work with, that we would learn to see others as you see them, and that, being rooted and grounded in love, our default operating mode being one of love, that we might be a part of dispensing your love to others.

I pray for my brothers and sisters here who are in a season of deconstruction, and they feel it. They are being undone and broken apart through various trials and difficulties. I thank you that when you reconstruct (and you always reconstruct), it will be a more beautiful us than exists now in this deconstruction.

It will house more of your fullness, more of your beauty, more of your glory. We thank you, and we ask that you would strengthen us in the middle of this process. We thank you that you have not abandoned us nor forgotten us. Give us eyes to see others as you see them. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.