

Alright. Hey, everybody. Welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today, and we are in season three of A Different Way: Do What Jesus Did. We're in season three of a year-long series where we're taking all year to ask this question: Who am I becoming? And who do I want to become? And what does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? And how do I arrange and rearrange my life around Jesus and the way that He lived His life? And so, what we're saying all series is that if we want to do the things that Jesus did, we have to first do the things that Jesus did. If we want to do the things that Jesus did – like be a man of peace and have joy and freedom and victory over temptation and deep connection with the Father and free from the love of money, free from the love of this world – then I first have to do the things that Jesus did: His practices, like prayer and fasting and Scripture and meditation and celebration and generosity. Like, if I want to do what Jesus did on the spot, I have to first do what Jesus did – I'll keep saying it until we all get it – behind the scenes. If I want Jesus's life, I have to first take on His lifestyle. If I want to do the work of Jesus, I have to first walk in the ways of Jesus. And if I want the health of Jesus, I have to first take on the habits of Jesus. And so, our theme verse is just simply, "Train yourself to be godly." Don't just try to be godly. Don't wait around and hope one day you'll become godly. Don't just assume that somehow God's going to send a lightning bolt to make you godly. Don't allow the world to train you to be worldly. Train yourself to be godly. Take on the practices, the spiritual disciplines, if you will, the lifestyle of Jesus that will shape and mold and form you more into the image and likeness of Jesus. And so, what we're doing is talking about these practices – the way Jesus lived His life – so we can open ourselves up to receive His grace so it will change us from the inside out. I'm not doing something for God; I'm opening myself up to God's grace so He can change me from the inside out. These practices have been practiced by the people of God for thousands of years because they're the way to be human, so we're learning to arrange our lives around that.

You see, one day at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when word got out about who He was and what He was doing, so many people started coming and going. I mean, they heard about Jesus, so the sick, the lost, the lame, the broken, the oppressed, the demon-possessed – people who were in great need – were constantly coming to Jesus with these major needs in their life. And I love that it says, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went out to a solitary place where He prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for Him, and when they found Him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'" And in this moment, at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, we discover that Jesus's life was arranged around prayer, not around people. That Jesus arranged his life around relationship with the Father, not the demands of the people. It's like it almost didn't matter what people wanted from Him. What mattered was arranging His life in prayer, communion, relationship with the Father – and everything else flowed from that reality. And you see it all throughout the Gospels over and over again. "The news about Him spread all the more, so that the crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." It's like the more people wanted stuff from Him, the more He removed Himself to go be with the Father. And I'm sure that super confused the disciples

because they're like, "Jesus, this is why you're here. Everyone is here. You cannot leave right now and go on the mountain. This is the whole point." And Jesus is like, "No, this isn't the whole point. The whole point is me being connected with the Father, and everything else flows out of that."

And not only was it early in the morning or late at night – it was all throughout the day in the middle of environments, events, experiences, activities. Jesus would just start praying. I mean, when He's raising Lazarus from the dead and there's all kinds of people weeping, mourning, wailing, waiting, wondering what He's going to do, it's just: "They took away the stone. And then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. And I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people.'" In other words, everyone's there. You would think He would just be talking to the people. No, He's just talking to God. And what you get when you read the Gospels is this sense that Jesus was always aware of the Father. He was always conscious of the presence of God with Him. And everything in His life flowed from that reality. It was like He was constantly connected with the Father, so He was able to be connected with everyone around Him. And you just see it over and over again. Another time, you watch Jesus is talking about going to the cross, and He just shouts out, like, "Father, glorify Your name." Like, imagine in the middle of the message, I just start talking to God. And you're like, "Are you talking to God? You're talking to us? We're not really sure." I think that's how it was with Jesus all the time. The disciples are like, "Who?" Because He was that aware of the presence of God with Him. You see him pray all the time. He prays at His baptism. He prays all night before He picks His disciples. He prays when the disciples come back with joy that the demons submitted to their name. He prays when there's great sorrow when Lazarus is dead. He prays on His way to the cross. He prays while He's on the cross. Over and over again what you get from Jesus is the sense of the awareness of the presence of God in His life. He acted like God was alive, like God was real, like God was available, like God cared, like God was deeply involved in the intimate realities of His life. You never see Jesus using religious words to talk to God or complicating it or pleading and begging God to just show up and do something. No, He just lived like God was real, God was available, and God cared about what was happening in His life. Early in the morning, late at night, all throughout the day.

In fact, His prayer life was so powerful that one day Jesus was praying. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." Like, these are men who knew how to pray; they're Jews. They had the prayer tradition, the prayer religion, the prayer dynamics. They were men who prayed, but there was something about the way Jesus prayed that was so personal and powerful that it moved them to ask Him to say, "We see how your life is arranged. Help us arrange our life like that." See, Jesus didn't see prayer as a last resort; He saw it as a lifestyle. And if we're honest, we see a prayer as a last resort, not as a lifestyle. But if prayer was how Jesus arranged His life and we want to do the things that Jesus did, then we have to arrange our life around prayer. And so, let's talk about the practice of prayer together. Because see, if we're honest, I think if I asked you, just about all of us in this room, we would all

say, "We wish we had a better prayer life. Oh, we want more. We want to go deeper. We want to connect with God. We want our prayer life to look more like Jesus' did." We have this heart within us, and yet, for somehow, it gets all confused and complicated. Like, prayer is so simple, and yet, for us, it feels so complicated. And it's so basic, and yet it often feels so mysterious. And most of us where we pray and when we pray is one of two things. One is when we're led to pray in a group of people or, two, when life has fallen apart and we have nothing left. I don't think we pray a whole lot more than that, if we're honest. And our perspective of prayer has been shaped by the way we've been raised and what we've experienced, what's been modeled to us and by the disappointments of perceived unanswered prayers. We think "I've prayed, and it didn't happen." So I make a theology from that and then live my life based on that false reality. And if I asked you and I said, "Hey, what do you think prayer is?" Like, if I had to get you to define: prayer is... How would you answer that question? Like, if you were going to define what prayer is, prayer is what? I think if we're honest, across the majority of Christianity, prayer would be defined as asking God for things. I think for the average person, we would have reduced it down to prayer is asking God for things. And you might not use those words, but some way, shape, or form, that's what a lot of us really believe it is. But prayer is so much more than asking God for things. See, here's what prayer is. Prayer is two things. It's intimacy and authority. Prayer is intimacy with God and it's authority with God. Different words for you: prayer is relationship and rulership. It's relationship with God and it's ruling and reigning with God. Prayer is communion and it's commissioning. It's communing deep with God and it's the commissioning authority that we have to rule and reign with Him in our assignment on this earth.

See, prayer is about intimacy with God first and foremost. Relationship, connection, friendship, talking and listening, authenticity, vulnerability, face-to-face and heart-to-heart where we laugh and joke. Do you ever laugh and joke with God? Where we weep and have sorrow, where we share our secrets and share hearts, when we look Him deep in the face and He looks deep into our soul. It's this sense of intimacy and relationship and depth and beauty. And it's also authority, where we bind and loose and remove and replace and declare and prophesy. The problem is we jump to authority without intimacy. We jump to what God can do through us or for us as opposed to just who God is and wanting Him for Him. In fact, this is why Jesus says, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you." Can you see it? Intimacy and authority. And the problem is we jump to authority without intimacy. I mean, think about Moses. Moses had such great intimacy with God that he had the authority to confront Pharaoh. David had such great intimacy with God that he had the authority to take out Goliath. Peter had such intimacy with Jesus that he had the authority to preach the first gospel message. Our problem is that we jump to authority without intimacy. And if you pursue authority, you will miss intimacy. But if you pursue intimacy, you will always find authority. And when we reduce prayer down to just asking God for things, we miss the whole thing and it unravels on itself.

So, we get disappointed with all these unanswered prayers. But maybe it's not that they were unanswered. Maybe it's just: I bypassed intimacy to get to authority instead of choosing intimacy and then allowing authority to flow from that. In fact, here's a great question to ask yourself: Why all throughout the Bible does God say, "Ask whatever you wish, and I will give it to you?" Why does God say that so much throughout Scripture? It's constantly over and over again. "Ask me. Ask me. Ask me. Ask me. Ask me." Why? Why does He say that? Is it so I can have what I want? Is it so my life can be easy? Is it so that things can go my way? No. He tells us to ask for whatever we want because He is empowering us to rule and reign with Him. He has commissioned us as His delegated authority on this earth, and so He has empowered us to ask for things that accomplish His will on this earth. "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. Extend my kingdom. The kingdom is within you. Whatever you ask for, bind and loose." All of those things are so that we might demonstrate and declare His kingdom on this earth, an authority that flows from intimacy. And this is why James says, "You have not because you ask not. And when you ask, you do not receive because you ask with the wrong motives that you may spend it on yourself." I think a whole broken thought process of our prayer life is asking God for things that are good for me. And He says, "No, I've empowered you to ask me for things that are good for the world – that bring forth my kingdom and my goodness and my glory because you're my representative on this earth." You have a very important assignment, and you could not do it without this commissioning or empowerment, and you cannot do it without this intimacy. So maybe we need to think about it differently. I mean, okay guys, just think about it like this with me for a second: Imagine if all your wife ever asked you to do was her to-do list, her honey-do list for you. The only time she ever talked to you was, "Hey, I want you to paint the garage, and I want you to clean up the landscaping. And I want you to hang this up. And I want you to fix this. And I want you to take the kids here. And I want you to call my mom at the end of the day." Imagine if – you're like, "I'll do all that. Don't make me..." – imagine if all she ever did was ask you to do things. Paradoxically, you actually want to do those things for her, but you also want her to see you and pursue you and have intimacy with you and ask you questions and actually listen to what you have to say and share the secrets of her heart with you. Moms, imagine if all your kids ever did was ask you for stuff, because that would never happen, but imagine if it did. And all your kids ever said was, "Mom, I need lunch. Mom, I need you to order this on Amazon. Mom, I need you to take me here. Mom, can you fill out this form? Mom, can you get me this?" Paradoxically, you want to do all those things for them, but you also want them to talk to you about their day and what's going on in their life and what they're struggling with and what they're afraid of and what they're celebrating and how their friends are doing. Students, imagine if your parents, if all they ever told you to do was to go and do stuff, right? "Do your homework. Clean this up. Stop doing that. Get a haircut. Don't wear this outfit." Whatever the things are. You don't mind if your parents ask you to do all that stuff. But in your heart, you're like, "But I want you to see me and notice me and value what I have to say. Ask me what I think about that." Are you catching me? There's so much more than just asking God for stuff.

In fact, here's what I would define it for you is: prayer is talking with God about the life we're living together. That's prayer. It's talking with God about the life we're living together because I am not living this life independent from Him, whether I realize it or not, and He has chosen to not live without me. So, prayer is talking with God about this life we're living together. That was Jesus early in the morning, late at night, in the middle of it all, talking with God about this life that we're living together. And that is that big word that I have a love-hate relationship with, and it's the word connection. I have a love-hate relationship with the word connection. Like, connection is so beautiful. If you've ever been deeply connected with someone, it's an amazing thing. Two unique, distinct individuals. They're so different, and yet they come together. And when they come together, there is this profound unity and alignment and agreement. There is this mutual submission, mutual respect, mutual love to the point where the two become one, where life just flows back and forth between two people. One can put a thousand to flight. Two, though, can put 10,000 to flight. So, it's incredibly beautiful, and yet it's incredibly frustrating because the word connection is often very subjective. What makes one person feel connected is not the same as another person's feeling of connected. One person's experience or preference or sense of whether or not we're connected, it can be very different, so it can be very frustrating. Okay, but put this in context with God. The moment you put your faith in Jesus, you are forever, for all eternity, connected with God. You are as connected with God in this moment if you're in Christ than you will ever be in your entire life. Why? Because the moment I put my faith in Him, He just grafted me into the vine. The moment I put my faith in Him, He just placed me into His body. The moment I put my faith into Him, the spirit of the living God dwells inside of me. I am in Him. He is in me. We are one. The Father and Him have moved into my life. I have died. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live. It's Christ who lives within me. You are as connected with God in this moment as you will ever be. Prayer then is simply how you experience the connection that already exists. Prayer does not connect you with God. If it was prayer that connected you with God, then it would be on you to connect yourself with God, not on the finished work of Jesus. You are not greater than Jesus. You do not have the ability to connect yourself with God. Only Jesus can do that. And once I realized I've been deeply connected with God, prayer is how I actually experience and feel and open myself up to the connection that He says already exists. It's like a marriage. When a husband and wife get married, in that moment when they get married, the two become one. They are as connected in that moment as they will ever be in their marriage. The two have just become one. But if they want to experience that connection and feel that connection and enjoy that connection, then they have to have communion and conversation and face-to-face living. That's how they access that which is already real. And if we are the bride of Christ, then the two have become one. And for us to practically enjoy the realities of that connection, we have to get face-to-face with Jesus and talk and listen and become aware of His presence in our daily life.

Are you with me on this? See, prayer is not something God demands from you. It's something He longs for with you. It's such a different way of thinking about it. It's so much more than asking God for stuff. I mean, have you ever just stopped to think about what the invitation

actually is? That the Ancient of Days, that the Rock of Ages, that the Great I Am, that the Holy One, that the Eternal One wants to talk to you? That the Good Shepherd, that the Spring of Living Water, the Bread of Life, the Prince of Peace wants to listen to you? That the Lion of Judah and the Lamb who was slain, the one who has fire in His eyes and lightning in His hands, the one whom the mountains melt before and yet who does not snuff out a smoldering wick, the one whose voice is as loud as many waters and quiet as a whisper, the one whose foundation is righteousness and justice and yet is gentle and humble in heart wants to experience connection with you? Have you ever thought about it like that? Maybe prayer isn't a religious duty or asking God for things. Maybe it's the greatest invitation of your life. And maybe – just maybe – that's why Jesus wasn't super worried about who wanted what from Him. He was super interested in experience that connection that already existed with the Father. I mean, do you ever just stop and ask yourself the question, when God made you, why did he make you with a mouth, with ears, and with a heart? Surely, He can't have made you with a mouth so that you can gossip and slander and grumble and criticize and complain and curse. Surely, He didn't give you ears so that you could listen to accusations and condemnations and lies and deception. Surely, He didn't give you a heart so you could spend your life loving the things of this world. No, He gave you a mouth so you could speak to Him. He gave you ears so you could listen to Him, and He gave you a heart so you could give and receive love with the one who is life itself. Prayer is talking with God about this life we're living together. When was the last time you talked with God about the life you and Him are living together? Because He's got just as much, if not more, than you do vested into that life. And when we get that, things change. In fact, as Jesus was praying, the appearance of His face changed, and His clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. If when Jesus prayed, He changed, how much more then when we pray, will we change? His face changed. Why? Because when you're face-to-face with the God of glory, you can't help but reflect that glory. When you're face-to-face with the beauty and the holiness and the radiance and the majesty of Jesus, you can't help but become bright and literally reflect and radiate the very beauty and reality of heaven.

Have you ever seen people that really pray? I mean, I'm not talking like the formal King James heavy religious language. I'm talking like they get face-to-face with God. Their face is different, isn't it? You can see it. Why? Because it's the glory of the Lord radiating from God onto them now into the world around us. Because they've chosen to arrange their life around prayer, communion with God, as opposed to people, busyness, activities, work, hobby, school, so on and so forth. You with me on this?

Hopefully, this is creating a sense of repentance, changing thinking in your mind. And let me just try to do this for you; let me build your faith. Okay. Let me build your faith that everything that is required for you to have a powerful prayer life has already been taken care of. Just catch these verses with me. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." We can come boldly to God when we're in need because of what Jesus has done. "In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." Freely and confidently, I can approach God at any time at

any place with whatever is going on in my life. "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer," there it is again, "believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." God wants us to ask. He wants to empower us. He wants to give us authority, to have a faith that what we ask for will bring His kingdom into the world around us. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; He who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." If we ask, seek, and knock, we will receive, find, and the door will be opened in Jesus' name. "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge." He cares. He sees. He's interested in the pain, the brokenness, the disappointment, the sorrow, the heaviness, the confusion, the questions poured out. He cares. "But He listened! He heard my prayer! And He paid attention to it!" You can hear this guy as he's writing like, "Oh, my gosh! He actually listened! He actually heard my prayer! Not that super-spiritual person's prayer, my prayer. And He paid attention to it!" Yeah. He listened to you. He heard your prayer, and He paid attention to what was on your heart. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, yes? Okay, then your prayer is powerful and effective. It might not change what you want out there immediately, but it certainly will change you in here. One more. "We do not know what we ought to pray for," sometimes we just have no idea, "but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." Even when I don't know what to pray or how to pray, the spirit is praying in me and through me. So, why can't you pray again? So, what is the barrier of talking to God about the life you're living together? The only barrier is right here.

See, here's the interesting thing about prayer: your prayer life probably reveals your theology more than anything else in your life. If you want to know what you really believe, look at how you pray. Why? Because it reveals what I really believe about who God is, who I am, and how life works. My prayer life reveals whether or not I believe God is available, accessible, close, interested, whether or not He's good and kind or harsh and angry. My prayer life reveals what I believe about myself. Am I worthy? Am I valued? Am I seen? Am I wanted? Does God care about me? And it reveals what I believe about how life works. Because when I don't pray, I'm either saying, "I'm doing my own thing, so I don't care," or I think it doesn't really change anything anyway, so I got to make it happen. But if I do pray, it communicates that God is deeply interested in the details of my life. What does the way you've arranged your life around prayer or the lack thereof show you about your own theology? Because it's so easy to sit in church and say we believe this and we believe that and cheer for this and cheer for that, but then, actually, practically look at it. It reveals what you really believe. And there are two main reasons that I think a lot of us never progress in prayer. Like, wherever we are and we've been at that juncture for 20 years, and we don't progress and go forward. And the two reasons I think are one is I don't think we have a heart for prayer. And two is I don't think we have the patience to practice praying.

The first problem is I just don't think we have a heart for prayer. I just don't think we have a heart for it. We're not interested in it. It's really not all that important for us. Because what I

would say to you is the heart to pray is more important than the ability to pray. What a lot of us will say is, "I don't know how to pray. It's too hard. It's too complicated. I'm not sure how to do it. I'm not sure that..." No, that's not really it. The heart to pray is more important than the ability to pray. That's why the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." Lord, teach us. I have a heart to learn. I don't know how to do it, but I have a heart to do it. Will You teach me? And you will never have a heart to pray until you first have a heart for God. Because why would I have a heart to talk to someone that I don't have a heart for? The mouth speaks of the overflow of the heart, and ears are always tuned to that which they're interested in. So, what are your mouth, your words, and your ears telling you about what your life is really interested in? I mean, have you ever seen a grandparent with a young child? They don't care what words the kid uses. Babbling, goo-goo-ga-ga, making things up. The grandparent is face-to-face with the child, connecting, communing, relating. They don't say, "When you figure out how to say it right, then I'll take you for ice cream. Better go find a friend to figure that one out. Your older brother hasn't figured it out yet either, so don't ask him." But that's what we think about God. That's why Jesus says, "When you pray, you don't have to be like the pagans and babble and use a bunch of words." Father already knows what you need; He already cares. It's not about the right words, the religious words. Look at Jesus' prayer life. You won't find a single religious word He used. You won't see Jesus jumping through any hoops with this desperate pleading like, "Oh, God, please, come, hear us, care." He knew God was right there, so He just talked to God like He was right there, and yet still could say, "Not my will but Yours." And then, the second reason is I just don't think we have the patience to practice it. We want a 30-year relationship in 30 seconds. Well, 30 seconds of prayer, and I want it to equal 30 years of intimacy. It's like a marriage. It's like you don't get to 30 years without 30 years, but you have to have the patience to learn, to talk, to listen, to try. That worked. That didn't work. This experienced connection, this didn't. That I think moved the heart of God, this didn't. We don't have the patience for it. In fact, what I would tell you is if you want to learn how to pray, the best way to learn how to pray is to [pray]. Ah, my gosh. It's not to listen to a sermon series on prayer. It's not to read 17 books on prayer. It's not to podcast. "Oh, I'm going to podcast this great podcast on how-to..." It's just called pray. It's just like, try it. Like learn and grow and fail and make mistakes and get around people who do know how to pray. And you'll find yourself learning how to pray. And read the Gospels on how people talk to Jesus. He is the image of God, so when the disciples ask Him questions, that's an acceptable way to pray. When Nicodemus brings his doubts, that's an acceptable way to pray. When the woman with the flow of blood just interrupts Jesus, that's an acceptable way to pray. When the blind man, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me," it's an acceptable way to pray. You just got to practice.

Listen, like 2019, 2020, somewhere in there, we realized we weren't a praying church. I never shared this with you guys. We just realized like as leadership, we're like, "We're not really a praying church. We're a worshipping church. We're a presence-based church. We're a missional church" – a lot of great things, but we weren't really a praying church. So, we're like, we had it in our heart, "We want to be a praying church." And so, we started Tuesday Night Prayer as the only thing we knew what to do. And at first, they were like these sad little 50-person



gatherings. If you are one of those 50 people, we owe you so much for helping us. We didn't know how to do it. And they were weak and they were struggling, but we were trying. And then, for about two years, we would make our staff meetings – every staff meeting we had – everybody had to stand up in a circle, and we would take about two minutes, and everybody would pray out loud all at the same time. Because half of learning to pray is getting over yourself, is getting rid of the self-consciousness of what anyone else is going to think or what they hear. You're not talking to them anyways. Jesus didn't care what anybody— Listen, when Jesus was praying to the Father, they're like, "Oh, it thundered." That's what they thought. When the Father spoke back, "Oh, it was thunder." It wasn't thunder; it was God speaking. Jesus doesn't care. They're like, "Oh, no." Some people were like, "It was an angel." He's like, "That's not an angel. That's me and God. What? That's fine." We have to get out of our own self-consciousness. And then, serve teams started doing that and Circles started doing it. Then, on the weekends, we started introducing prayer elements. You didn't even know this, and like a frog in a boiling water, we've just been turning that thing up. And now, we can sit here and be like, "Hey, we're praying for back to school. You pray for your family." Not, "here's 19 verses on the slide and a perfect little template for you to pray." And all of a sudden, you've probably seen, if you've been a part of this church, your prayer life has progressed. Why? Because it was something that we had the patience to just practice. To try. To say, "Let's learn how to do it." And now, Tuesday Night Prayers have like seven to eight-hundred people, and they're one of the most important things we do. And now, we pray in service like God is here, like God is real, like God is available. You have to just— you have to practice though. You have to practice. We want to run a marathon before we put our sneakers on. "Lord, teach us to pray." And then, here's what He says.

"This, then, is how you should pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus says, "here's a great template to start if you don't know how to talk to God." It just starts with "our Father." The most important two words in the entire Lord's prayer, "our Father." Who is the "our"? The "our" is us and Jesus, meaning that I have the same access to the Father as Jesus does, that He hears my prayers to the same way He heard Jesus' prayers. That He will speak to me to the same depth that He spoke to Jesus. Our Father. He's with me, He's for me, and He loves me, and He's in heaven. The superior perspective, the superior reality, the higher thoughts, the higher ways. Hallowed be your name – worship, affection, attention. Tell Him who He is and how grateful you are for Him and all the good things that He is and that He does. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In other words, submission, surrender, and trust. God, I choose to submit and surrender my will to Yours, and I trust You that your ways are better and higher. Give us today our daily bread. It's okay to ask Him for things. He already knows your needs before you ask Him, and He withholds no good things from those who love Him. So, if He withholds it from you, it's because it's not good for you or what He's doing right now. It means He might be working all things together for the good behind the scenes. And notice that it's sandwiched

right there in the middle. It's not first and it's not last. It's intimacy that leads to authority. Forgive us our debts as we've forgiven our debtors. In other words, we come to God and we confess and we repent. You don't have to come to God to be forgiven forever; He's already forgiven you in Jesus' name. But I come and I confess and I repent. And I come into agreement and alignment with Him to change the course and the direction of my life. And when I'm receiving His forgiveness, I can't help but forgive others. Listen to me, it's impossible to live with an offended heart when you're a person who has arranged their life around prayer. That's why Jesus was not offended at the people who wanted to kill Him or the Pharisees or Peter or Judas. You would tell the story about Judas for the rest of the day, for all eternity. "Let me tell you about this guy." But He wasn't offended. Why? Because His life was arranged around prayer. And when you get face-to-face with grace and truth, you get face-to-face with love in its purest form. When you get face to face with goodness itself, you don't have the energy even or the interest or the desire to hold on to offenses. And lead us not us not temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Give us victory, God. All temptation, when you're tempted, it's because you believe God is withholding good from you. You wouldn't be tempted to do this if you didn't think there was something good for it in you, so we're praying in a sense, "God, help me believe that what You have is good for me because Satan, the evil one, he has bad will for me. You have good will for me. And so, give me the belief that what You're inviting me to do is for my good."

See, there's so many different ways to pray. Intercessory prayer, contemplative prayer, silent prayer, breath prayer, prophetic prayer, petition prayer. There's so many different ways. But here's what I want to try to pull this whole thing together for you in this: prayer is just simply being aware of God. That's it. In any form or fashion of prayer, it's simply being aware of God. And when I become aware of God, my life becomes full of the realities of God. That's prayer. Just being aware of God. And yes, there is a time to talk and listen. And there's a time to worship and a time to wait. And there's a time to ask and a time to receive. There's a time to give and to take, a time to sing a song, a time to be silent, a time to ask questions, a time to be quiet, a time to bless and a time to be blessed.

But at the end of the day, all prayer comes down to the simple fact of just being aware of God's presence in my life. When the disciples were about to sink in the storm, when they became aware of Jesus, that was prayer. And their life became full of the reality of God and peace took over the storm. When the man with the demon-possessed son who had tried everything to heal him became aware of Jesus in front of him – "Jesus, if You're able, take pity on us and help us." In that moment, his life was full of the reality of the healing of God. The woman with the alabaster jar, when she became aware of God, she poured it out on His feet as a prayer, as offering, as communion and connection with Him. And the whole room became full of the reality of the fragrance of heaven. It's simply being aware of God. This is what Jesus and David did. "I have set the Lord always before me." I'm always aware of Him. And here's the paradox: the more you try to be aware of Him, the more you realize how much of your life you live unaware of Him. But it doesn't defeat me; it inspires me that there are so many more hours

of my day where I can learn to be aware of God's presence in my life. Like Jesus, not just early in the morning or late at night – though those are important – in the middle of the day, in the middle of the business meeting, in the middle of the class, in the middle of the argument, in the marriage fight at home, in the middle of driving the road, in the middle of the confusion, in the middle of all the stuff. Prayer is not, "Oh, God, do something." Prayer is, "Oh, God, I choose to be aware that You're here. And I want to talk to You about this life that we're living together." That's prayer. In fact, this is why it says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you." God's will is for you to pray continually. If prayer was a religious service or early in the morning or late at night or in a quiet room by yourself – if that was the extent of it – then this verse would say, "24 hours a day, you need to sit in a little closet by yourself and petition God to do things on this earth." Is that what this verse is saying? No. It's saying, "God's will is that you would be aware of Him through all of your life, all day long because He is available, He is accessible, and He is good."

A while back, the Lord just challenged me on something in my own life. I'm a thinker, and I'm always trying to think and I'm always trying to make things better. And the Lord challenged me and He just said, "Stop thinking about it and start praying about it." That was really impactful to me because you might think, "Well, stop thinking about it; start praying about it. Does that mean I take all my thoughts and just be like, 'Oh, God, please desperately I need you?'" No, it was like, as I'm thinking, be aware of God and invite Him into those thoughts. Invite Him into those spaces; accept His invitations for what He wants to do. I think for a lot of us, we could take note from that. Stop thinking about it – the marriage, the sickness, the problem, the child, the situation, the finance, the circumstance – and start praying about it. Not petitioning and begging God to do things but talking to Him like He is real, like He cares, and He is deeply involved.

Last verse, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Do not be anxious. Anxiety is the present without God. That's all anxiety is. Anxiety is the present without God. I'm so in my head and I'm so full of thoughts and I'm so stressed and overwhelmed and afraid and heavy. There's so much going on inside of here. It's like I'm living in the present but without God. And therefore, this massive anxiety is induced in my life. When I think about things without God, it creates real feelings in my life – anxiety, stress, fear, a sense of being overwhelmed – and those feelings create physiological responses, like panic attacks and high blood pressure and a fast heart rate and shakiness and the inability to sleep. All those things are real, and they're all tracked back to, I have created a thought life, an arranged life, that lives in the present but without God. Prayer, in a sense, is the opposite of anxiety. It's living in the present aware of God. But prayer is not the antidote to anxiety. The Prince of Peace is. We read this verse and we think prayer is the antidote to anxiety. No, the Prince of Peace is the antidote to anxiety. Prayer just helps me become aware of that which already exists. When I pray, I become aware of the Prince of Peace, and the Prince of Peace guards my heart and my

mind. But when I am not aware of God, anxiety comes and raids my heart and my mind. So, maybe I need to stop thinking about it and start praying about it. Because when I start praying about it, the Prince of Peace comes and guards my heart and mind. This is how I arrange my life differently to go in a different way to become the kind of person that Jesus was. I can't live with peace without the way He arranged His life. And this prayer doesn't connect me to God; in Jesus, I'm already as connected as I will ever be. It helps me experience, feel, believe, understand, embody, have access to this reality that He's always right there. Right there. Jesus never prayed like He was out there. He always prayed like He was right here.

So, here's your practice plan for the week. If you're new and you say, "What's this?" At the end of every one of these practices, we're just doing a practice plan during the week because we don't want to just be people that come to church. We want to be people who are training to be godly. Here's your practice plan for this week. Start every morning and end every day simply by becoming aware of God. I bet you that's not what you thought I was going to put for the practice plan on prayer. You thought I was going to say, "Pray this and do this and ask. Make a prayer list." No. Start every morning by being aware of God. Before you touch your phone, before you yell at the kids to get up, before you look at the homework for that last minute of studying, start your day by just being aware of God. God, I choose to start today by just being aware of You. I acknowledge that You're here, that You're with me. You might want to pray the Lord's prayer, our Father in heaven. You might want to recite Psalm 23. Maybe you sit down and read a few Psalms. Maybe you read the daily chapter that we're going through. I don't know, but start the day by being aware of God before you're aware of anything else. And then, end every day by simply becoming aware of God. Like, before you get in bed and scroll on your phone, put it down, sit down. I'm not talking like an hour. I'm talking like three to five minutes. Sit there and just be like, "God, I just choose to be aware of You at the end of this day." And maybe there's things you want to thank Him for during the day. Maybe there's things you're disappointed in that you invite Him into the life you're living together and you want to talk about. Maybe you're afraid to go to sleep; talk to Him about that. Maybe again, you pray the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23 or you read a Psalm.

But before you lay down, even when you're become... "God, I'm aware of You that as I go to sleep, You're in my sleep. As I lay down, whatever dreams I have, I'm believing that You're in my dreams. And that when I wake up, You're going to be right here. Because wherever I go, there You are." That's how you fire up a prayer life. Not by trying to pray for an hour with other church people that you feel like we're not even in the same category of conversation here. And as you start becoming aware of God in the morning and the evening, watch as you probably start becoming aware of Him a little bit at the time throughout the day. Just this week, okay? This is all I'm asking you to do for this week. Can we do that? Sort of. Some of us, maybe. But remember, so here's... This is my really nice to you, ready? This is as nice as I can say it. If you're here with us, this spring, we put on our sneakers, we walked around the block, and we learned how to run three to five miles. I told you, you needed to keep your stamina up over the summer because we're going to keep moving to that marathon reality. So, we are now moving

to the five-to-ten-mile range. So, my encouragement for you is there's a number of practices week after week after week that we're going through. Here's where you're lucky. I do not have enough weeks left in the year to split any practice into two weeks. So, this is all you're getting on prayer. We could do a whole series on prayer, but for this, so my encouragement for you is, try this. What if we just did some things that Jesus did so we could do some things that Jesus did? Because I want to become the kind of person that lives and acts like God is real, accessible, and available in every moment of my life.

So, Jesus, thank You that You have given us this great invitation to be in deep communion with You. I pray for every person here. Every person that's in Christ. That they would know that they are deeply connected with You, regardless of how they feel about it. I pray for every person that's here that is not there yet on their journey, that they would call out to You. Because there is a God who wants to be deeply connected with You in Jesus' name. And I pray, Lord, that You would teach us as a people how to be a praying people. That we would experience and feel and access that connection that is so real and so supernatural and so powerful. God, I pray this week that every one of us, we would just have that little bit of faith to in the morning and in the evening arrange the first five minutes of our day and the last five minutes of our day around being aware of Your presence in our life, because You are here, and You are worthy of being arranged around. Teach us to pray. Show us a different way. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.