

How to Develop a Stronger Prayer Life

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

I bought a few books on prayer and thought, “OK, I’m going to start reading about prayer. I don’t know anything about it.” I scheduled some time and started praying every day. My leaders told me to schedule time, and they told me to make a prayer list.

I thought, “OK...” And I did it. My prayer was so boring at first. I thought I was going to be a hopeless failure and that I would never, ever enjoy God in prayer. I was so surprised when, over a short amount of time, a few years’ time—not that it will take you a couple of years, and I’m not saying that to you—my ideas shifted. Initially, I had so many wrong ideas about God as I approached prayer. At first, I thought God was mad at me all the time. I thought I was failing all the time. When you approach prayer with that idea, it’s going to be pretty rough. It’s going to be pretty boring, actually, because you won’t feel the presence of the Lord in that.

THE PRIVILEGE, STRUGGLE, AND MIRACLE OF PRAYER

OK, let’s look at this. These are some really simple concepts. What is prayer? Obviously, it’s talking to God. It’s talking to God and God communing back with us. Prayer is a great privilege. It’s a fierce struggle. It’s not just a privilege, it’s a struggle. But it’s also a miracle: the fact that God lives inside of us, and that He’s helping us talk to Him. That’s a miracle. The fact that my dark and broken heart could actually become alive is a miracle. So it’s a privilege, it’s a struggle, and it’s a miracle.

DIFFERENT PRAYER EXPRESSIONS

Paragraph B. When I think of my prayer life, I think of the different expressions of my prayer life. Number one, there’s devotional prayer. That’s the prayer I make when I say, “I love You, God, and God, You love me. I want to give my life to You, God. You gave Yourself for me.” Devotional prayer is the love connection.

The second type of prayer is intercessory prayer. That’s when you’re praying for other people, for revival, for justice to break through, for God to break in, and in revival to come and touch your campus. That’s different from devotional prayer. Then there’s prayer covering, where you’re praying for a friend in ministry or on a ministry trip. You’re praying that God would protect them and direct them and provide for them. You’re praying specifically for an individual who’s on a divine assignment. You’re praying for a prayer covering over their life so that, when the enemy attacks them, there’s a shield or a covering around them. That’s a little different than praying for revival and praying for justice.

Then, there’s praying for the sick: when you pray for a person who’s sick in their body. That’s actually part of your prayer life. I’ve heard people say, “I never pray,” but they pray for the sick all the time.

I say, “You pray a lot. You pray a lot. You don’t do devotional prayer, and maybe not much intercessory prayer, but you do pray. You pray for the sick.”

Not that this is a comprehensive list of prayer, but I wanted to give you an idea that there are several different expressions of prayer available that are described in the Bible.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CONSISTENT PRAYER LIFE

Paragraph C. This is obvious, but I want to say it anyway: a consistent prayer life is essential. When they used to tell me that back when I was eighteen, nineteen, and twenty, it pained my heart like a knife. They said, “Prayer is essential.” And it is, if you want to enter into the fullness of everything God has for you. Now of course, at twenty years old—and here at fifty years old, too—I wanted everything God had for me. They said, “You’ll never get it without prayer.”

I said, “I love God! I want everything, but I want it without praying. Is there any way to have the full blessing while skipping the prayer part?”

I thought about it and I tried to figure it out. I want to say this to you: there is no possible way you’ll enter into the fullness of what God has promised you without developing a prayer life. Now, at first that’s bad news. We think, “I have to endure boring God. Well, I guess I will, because it’s worth it to get the blessing.”

Now no one quite says it like that; that’s a little crass. But that’s what I thought, pretty clearly. It was dreadful to think that I had to do this and that there was no other way. But, I’ve got good news for you: prayer will become enjoyable. Granted, there will always be a dimension of struggle that happens here or there; but I want to assure you that, even for you, it can be enjoyable and successful. So, I want to give you a few tools in this session that will help you on your way.

PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL FOR RELEASING CHANGE IN THE SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

Paragraph D. Prayer is essential to release the full blessing, but it’s also essential to release change in the Church, in society at large, and in the nation. Did you know that when you pray, it changes the spiritual atmosphere of the city or the nation for which you’re praying?

“What does that mean? ‘Changes the spiritual atmosphere?’”

Did you know that, above this city and above every other city on the earth, there’s not just a natural atmosphere of the weather, but a spiritual atmosphere? Behind the natural, there’s a spiritual atmosphere over every city and every nation. There’s a network of demonic powers; they’re invisible, but they’re real, and they’re over every city of the earth. There’s also angelic activity: angels are coming and going from heaven to the earth, and they’re going through that demonic resistance and that demonic warfare. So, when we pray, angels are actually leaving the presence of God and coming through the atmosphere. We don’t see it with our natural eyes. Demons are resisting them, fighting them, and when we pray more, the angels press through more.

ANGELS ARE ENABLED BY THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

Now you could study more about that in Daniel 10:13. That’s the great chapter on spiritual warfare where Daniel the prophet fasted and prayed for twenty-one days. The angel shows up after twenty-one days and says the most remarkable thing. He says, “Daniel, did you know that I heard your words on the day you started twenty-one days ago?” (Dan. 10:12, paraphrased)

Daniel is thinking, “Well, it sure took you a long time to get here.” He’s a little concerned: “Why did it take you twenty-one days?”

The angel says, “Demons stood against me.” He was speaking of the “Prince of Persia,” which was a demonic prince in the spiritual realm. “The prince of this nation in the demonic realm fought me. And you kept praying, so more angels came to help me” (Dan. 10:13, paraphrased).

TWO OR THREE BELIEVERS CAN ALTER THEIR CAMPUS

Isn't that amazing that weak people on the earth, in the name of Jesus, can pray, and the spiritual atmosphere of a campus, even of an entire city, can change? You can change the spiritual atmosphere of your campus; you really can. You don't need thousands of believers. You can get two or three, or ten or fifteen of you, praying regularly, and you can change the spiritual atmosphere on your campus. This means that the same sermon that would have reached ten people will now reach one hundred. The same weak words that would have moved ten will now move one hundred—because there's an anointing, there's power, there's a supernatural dimension in the invisible realm that has been released. The song that moved one hundred people will now move one thousand people—the same song! It's not that the song is different, but the invisible, spiritual atmosphere is charged with the presence of God and angelic activity, and the demons are held back.

DEMONS HAVE BEEN HELD BACK THROUGH PRAYER

You know, in some ways we prayed for this conference throughout the whole year; but we really focus on the last thirty days. There are angels all over this room. Demons that could have been here have been held back by the prayers of the saints over the last thirty days, and even over the last year. Many of you are being touched; ideas are coming to your mind for the first time with clarity because the demons have been driven back. That's because weak little intercessors, little guys and gals, those of us praying here in Kansas City, and all of you who are praying with us out there, saying, “Lord Jesus, please help and break through!”—it doesn't have to be some great prayer—simple prayers like that change the spiritual atmosphere. Many of you are being touched in a way that you wouldn't have experienced if you hadn't prayed or joined with us to pray for this conference.

So, I know many of you will be back next year, and I want to ask you to do this: we start really ramping up around December 1. We go on a seven-day fast the first week of December—the whole staff; all two thousand of us. Plus, we've got a few thousand extra who are part of our spiritual family there that aren't full-time. All of us engage in this for seven days, praying that God would visit you with dreams and visions when you come, that demons would be held back, that angels would be released, and that if you plan to be a part of this next year, then join us for the whole month of December. We fast for one week, the first week, and then we press in to God the rest of the month. Join us, and even more will happen here next year.

PRAYER WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE DUTY OR RESULTS-ORIENTED

E. Prayer was never meant to be just “duty-based.” What I mean by that is, we say, “Oh, it's my duty to pray. I have to pray. OK.” It was never meant to be results-oriented. What I just described is results-oriented. We pray more and angels move more. Results are good, but prayer is more than just results-oriented. Prayer was also meant to be a place of encounter where the human heart in our weakness encounters the power of God. This is because when we pray, we position ourselves for the love of God to touch our spirit.

Now there's a debate I've heard for many years. It's really a wasted debate; it's not even worth arguing. But, for twenty years, I've had this little argument going with many people. They say, “I don't want to pray so much. I want to love people instead of spending so much time in prayer”—as though, if you end up praying, you love people less.

And some people say, “Well, I’m into love.”

And other people say, “Well, I’m into the prayer room.”

Let me tell you, you won’t love people any better than laboring in prayer for the demons to be driven out of their lives and for angels and the power of God to touch them. Prayer is an act of love; so I tell people, “You’ll love far better if you take time to develop a prayer life.”

Then they say, “Well, if I take time to develop my prayer life, I have less time to love other people.”

I say, “No. You can still love the people x-amount of hours in the week and also pray x-amount of hours in the week.” Steal that time from your recreation and entertainment; don’t steal it from loving people. There’s plenty of time for most people to pray and to love. We don’t have to choose between the two.

DEVOTIONAL PRAYER PROTECTS US

Paragraph G. Prayer—devotional prayer, the prayer that leads to intimacy; the prayer that says, “I love You. You love me. I want to obey You. Help me to love You. Help me to obey You.”—that’s the devotional type of prayer I am talking about. When we get that kind of prayer into our lifestyle, it actually provides a protection in our spirits from burnout. I’ve known people who have done ministry for many years, and after about five or ten years they get so bruised and burned out from ministry that they quit altogether. Why? Because they’re serving people and they’re ministering to people and they’re getting burned out in their spirits. They’re getting burned out in their spirits because they don’t have any intimacy with God. God gives us intimacy to protect our spirit while in the midst of all the labor in the kingdom.

TELLING GOD WHAT HE TELLS US TO TELL HIM

Paragraph H. Why does God want us to pray? I remember years ago when I was eighteen years old, I said, “God, why do You want me to pray? Really, all I’m doing is telling You what You tell me to tell You.”

Then it dawned on me one day. I was in the prayer room and I said, “God, I have a lot more I could offer You. Here I am, stuck in this room by myself telling You what You tell me to tell You. You already know it. I already know it. Let’s make a handshake and agree that we both know it, and You just let me go and do it.”

The answer was “No, I want you to sit here in the room and tell Me what I tell you to tell Me.”

I thought, “What an ineffective a way to use such a gifted young man like me.”

WHEN WE PICTURE THE THRONE OF GOD, OUR SPIRIT OPENS

What I didn’t know is that every time we talk to God, whether we feel like it or not, when we stop and focus our mind on the throne of God, we’re talking to the Father on the throne. I always picture Revelation 4, and you can do that on your own. It describes the throne of God. There’s the Father, there’s the emerald rainbow—the sign of mercy around His throne. There are the seven lamps of fire. There are the twenty-four elders circled around the throne. There are the four living creatures, which are high-ranking angels. There’s a river of fire coming out of it. Anyway, you can study Revelation 4. And again, on our website I have quite a few teachings on that, as do Stephen Venable and Matt Candler and some of the others. But I posture my mind, and I focus on the throne of

God. I'm not just speaking into the air. I'm actually talking to a Person on a throne. I picture it because the Bible gave us that information.

But did you know that when you pause and set your mind on that person on that throne, your spirit actually opens and you receive more? I didn't know that in the early days. I thought prayer was mostly about information and communication, and I was telling God information He already knew. But what's really happening is that I'm sitting there and it's opening my spirit. Whatever you focus your mind on, you open your spirit to that thing, and that's what I didn't understand in the early days. When you do that, you're exposing your spirit to the direct presence of God working in you, even though you can't measure it, and you can't always feel it. It's working in your spirit all the time, and it's developing a heart connection with God. That is what He wants. The Lord is saying, "I don't need the information; I want the heart connection because I want to use you, but I don't want to burn you out. I want to use you because I like you. I'm not looking for a work force. I'm looking for sons and daughters who are close to Me."

Jesus would say, "I'm not looking for a slave work force; I'm looking for partnership with a Bride." If God wants only a work force, He has angels. They're servants; they're the work force. The Son of God wants a heart connection with human beings, with the Bride of Christ; and then we're sons and daughters before the Father.

"YOU DO NOT HAVE BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK"

It's interesting that God requires that we ask Him for everything. Look at this prayer: "In everything by prayer . . . let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6, paraphrased). In everything, we make requests. Now, that used to throw me off. I said, "Why do You want me to say it?" He wants us to say it. You don't have to say it loudly; you can whisper it. But He wants you to actually make the request.

Look at the next verse: "You do not have because you do not ask" (Js. 4:3). Now here is what we do very often: we think of our need. We think of our need with frustration because the need isn't being met, but we don't actually take time to ask Him. So, we're sitting there and we're thinking, "I need this; I need that."

And the Lord is saying, "Go ahead and ask Me."

We say, "No, I'm just too busy."

He responds, "Go ahead; just ask Me."

One day goes by, one week, one month. Many believers never ask. The Lord says, "I'm waiting. I really would give it to you, but not until you ask Me. Because when you ask Me, it causes you to focus your mind on Me; it opens your spirit to Me and I touch your spirit. I won't make you do that. I'll only do that if you volunteer because you want it. I won't force you. But, when you actually ask, when you focus your mind and ask, your spirit opens and I touch your heart. I actually change you and connect you to Me in the very process of blessing you."

A CAUSE AND EFFECT THAT EXCITES

When you actually ask—not just think about it—but ask it, then God answers it. There's a clear connection in your mind that there was a process of cause and effect: you really asked and He really answered you. Because I asked, He answered. Because I gave the money, He gave money back. Because I prayed for the sick, they got

healed. There's a cause/effect relationship that excites your heart because you realize that the invisible God actually listens to you!

HE WILL WAIT UNTIL YOU ASK

But here's what a lot of people do: they have a need. They want to see revival on their campus. They want to see healing happen. They want to see their hearts changed. They want to see finances provided. They want spiritual direction. There are many different requests, but they never ask.

They tell their friends, "Oh, I need direction."

The Lord says, "Just talk to Me. Don't talk about Me; talk to Me."

So they tell their friends, "I don't have any direction. I don't have any money. I don't have any anointing. My heart is in bondage. I'm in pain."

And the Lord says, "Talk to Me. Don't just tell them; tell it to Me."

Many believers go for months and years without doing it. He says, "When you focus your mind, your spirit opens and we connect. When you say it and I answer you, you say, 'Wow! Wow! He heard me!' There's a connection and I'm stunning your heart. I'm exciting your heart."

And you know what? The Lord would say, "I'm so committed to you connecting the dots that I'm listening to you, and I'm so committed to touching your spirit without forcing you to talk to Me, that I will starve you out. I will wait until you ask Me."

And a lot of people will go for years and years and won't ask. And God says, "Well, I'll starve you out. I won't answer you until the need becomes so burdensome to you that you break down and start talking to Me. Then I will start changing you and showing My love to you."

Look at paragraph I. There are many blessings that God has chosen to withhold until we ask Him, because He's so jealous for relationship. He's saying, "I really will give it to you, but only when you look My way and make the connection."

So, for a lot of folks, the need becomes so painful that they finally decide to ask. But they only ask when they're in crisis. God will answer them, but He would have answered them long before the crisis if they had simply talked to Him.

"THE LORD WILL WAIT..."

Look at this verse here in Isaiah 30. It's one of my favorite prayer verses. I encourage you to really learn this one. It says, "Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you... He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you" (Is. 30:18-19, paraphrased).

So, the Lord is waiting to be gracious to you. He says, "I want to be gracious; I want to be very gracious," which means, "I want to reveal My power. When I hear the sound of your cry, then I'll do it. If I don't hear the sound of your cry, I'll wait, and I'll wait—and I'll wait. When the pain of not getting the answer grows too

great; when you finally stand up and say, ‘God!’ and set your mind upon Me, and open your spirit to Me, and you make the requests, so that when I answer you, you say, ‘Wow, it really worked!’ and I fascinate your heart in the process; then,” He says, “Then, I will give you many, many answers.”

RELATIONSHIP BEGINS WITH RIGHT IDEAS

God is after relationship. He’s not trying to see if you’ll endure prayer. He wants you to know that it’s an exciting relationship. But, in the beginning, our mind has so many wrong ideas. Typically, we have so much defilement in our lives that we don’t feel His presence until our ideas get cleared up. When we acquire the right views of God, after a short amount of time we will begin to feel His presence. Then the excitement of the relationship begins to happen. And again, I’m not telling every one of you that it’s going to take you two or three years to get a breakthrough. It took me a few years, but I didn’t have right ideas in my mind when I was approaching prayer. My perception of God was that He was always mad at me. Things were bad, He was boring, and He was angry. It’s hard to approach prayer with those wrong ideas, because, as you’re going to see in a moment, one of the first things we have to do is get right ideas of God if we want to approach prayer in the right way.

PRACTICAL ISSUES FOR A PRAYER LIFE

Page 63. Here are some practical issues when developing a consistent prayer life. I’m going to give you three things that are essential to strengthening your prayer life.

Number one: Make a schedule for regular prayer time. In other words, put a time on your calendar daily that you’ll commit to praying. Maybe one day is fifteen minutes, maybe one day is thirty, maybe another day is an hour. Some days are longer than others, but you put it on your calendar. I know that this sounds strange to some people, but I’ll get back to it. It’s essential to make a schedule.

Number two: Make a prayer list. I have several prayer lists, and I have them on the website. It’s not that you want my prayer list, but you might start with my prayer list. Then, because you can get it electronically, you can download it and change it around any way you want: add verses, subtract verses, add new ideas, throw away ideas. Use mine, if you don’t have one, to jump start your own prayer list.

THE NEED FOR A LIST, A TIME, AND RIGHT IDEAS

The third thing is to have a right view of God. Unless all three of these things are in place, I believe the chances of you having a good prayer life are very minimal. I’m not saying it’s impossible; I’m saying there’s probably a ninety-nine percent chance that you won’t have a good prayer life in ten years if you don’t do these three things. In other words, when you look back ten years from today, say, in 2020; if you don’t do these three simple things, there’s a ninety-nine percent chance that when you look back over those last ten years, 2010-2020, you won’t have a prayer life.

I know some of you are thinking, “Huh. That’s a pretty bold statement. What about the Spirit leading me?” Well, we’ll get to that in a second. A schedule establishes when you pray. You can also pray outside of your schedule. I have scheduled prayer. I’ve had scheduled prayer for thirty-five years. I was eighteen when I started and I’m fifty-five now. Whatever the math is, I’ve been doing it for that long. Your schedule tells you when you’re going to pray. I pray many times outside of my schedule, but my goal is to pray at least eighty percent of the time when I schedule it. The prayer list tells you what to pray. And, having the right view of God makes you want to pray; it enables you to desire prayer.

MIKE’S MISERABLE EARLY EXPERIENCES

Paragraph B. When I was in college at the age of eighteen, a leader told me, “If you’ll schedule prayer and get a prayer list, you’ll pray a lot more.”

Now, I hated prayer, so I didn’t have some wrong idea of thinking I knew anything about prayer. So, I said, “Hey, whatever you tell me, I’ll do it. I’m so desperate!” I was reading books on prayer, but they only made me feel miserable. I would read the books on prayer that said, “If you don’t pray, forget it.” That was the message of the books. I would read those books on prayer and I would suffer: I would say, “I’m miserable. I’ll be terrible forever because I hate prayer and these books tell me to pray.”

So, I scheduled my prayer time because my leader told me to do it. I didn’t know if it was right or wrong. I just remember being eighteen years old in college, in the evenings, at 9:00pm. That’s when I scheduled it: the fateful hour, 9:00pm. I lived in an apartment in the University of Missouri with four Christian men. They kind of laughed at me because I put prayer on my schedule, since they didn’t have a prayer life either, but I was going to try and get one. At 9:00pm, I would go into the room—that fateful moment—when I would march into the room, into the hour of death. It really was! I would lock the door. It would be 8:45pm... fifteen minutes until 9:00pm, the fateful hour. I would start sweating at the thought of how horrible it was going to be, and beginning in fifteen minutes. They would be laughing at me. I would say, “Fifteen more minutes until it begins...”

Some of you say, “Man! That’s awful melodramatic.”

I hated it. I would go in there and lock the door: “God, Thank You for arms and legs, and for all the children that don’t have food, and that You give me food. Help me score touchdowns on the football team.” (I played on the college football team.) “Help me get the girl and do well in my classes.”

Then I looked at my clock. I had fifty-eight minutes to go. It was a one-hour commitment. I said, “Oh goodness... fifty-eight dreaded minutes.”

So I would do it again. “Thank You for arms and legs. Thank You for the food, because all the kids don’t have food in the world. Help me score touchdowns. Give me a girlfriend.”

Well, I never scored touchdowns; I didn’t do very well in school, but I got the girl! I got the girl.

MIKE’S FIRST PRAYER REQUESTS

Anyway, in this prayer time I started complaining. I started saying, “God, this is miserable.” I didn’t really realize I was praying, because I was actually praying when I got off the “arms and legs” thing. Then, I really got into praying, asking Him, “Why do You even run Your kingdom this way? I mean, if I were You, I would throw this whole thing out the window. And just... You know... help me. This doesn’t make any sense. Help me pray.”

Then it struck me. My leader had said, “Make a prayer list.”

And I said, “What do I put on it?”

He said, “Well, whatever you want.”

I didn’t even know what he was talking about. So, I wrote down, “Help me pray.” That was my first prayer request: “Help me pray.” Cool! Then I said, “I don’t understand You. Oh, Help me understand You!” I had two things on my prayer list now.

WHEN YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY

And so, the next day, I would go in there and I would start off with, “Help me pray. I don’t understand You. Help me understand You.” Then I found some Bible verses that went with those painful experiences. After awhile, I had a whole page. Then I had two pages. I would get these ideas while praying. Whatever extreme I felt, whether it was painful or good, I would say, “I felt the Lord’s presence, I think.” I would write it down, and eventually, I had ten pages. It took me an hour to go through it, and I didn’t even have to say the whole “arms and legs and touchdown” thing. It was remarkable. When I finally got a prayer list, I had something to say. It’s amazing how much easier prayer is when you have something to say.

THE USEFULNESS OF THE PRAYER LIST

Now, it’s more than thirty-five years later. I still have a prayer list. I’ve had a prayer list all these years—thirty-five years and more. I have scheduled prayer. I don’t keep my scheduled prayer one hundred percent of the time. I’ve never done the math, but I’m guessing I’ve kept it eighty-percent of the time all these years. I can tell you with probably eighty percent accuracy, barring some great emergency, when I’ll be praying in February and June and next September. It’s already on my schedule. Now, if my life shifts, then I’ll re-make my schedule. I’ll shift my schedule whenever I need to remake it, maybe once or twice a year or every few years. But I’ll always schedule my prayer. I schedule my family time; I schedule our leadership time; I schedule ministry time. And then I find out where my free time is after I get my priorities on the schedule.

Even today, many years later, I’ll go into the prayer room because everyone at IHOP–KC has twenty-four hours per week we’ve committed to the prayer room. That’s part of our commitment to being on staff: We do twelve two-hour prayer meetings; everyone at IHOP–KC does. I’m committed to twenty-four hours. That’s not the length and the limitation of my prayer life, but that’s what I’m committed to doing.

I’ll sit in the prayer room or in my office up on the stage. It’s cheating a little. I’ve got this little, private office with a one-way mirror. You can’t see me, but I can see you. That way I can see all the worship teams. I can have my coffee. You don’t get to have coffee in the prayer room, but I have coffee in my office. It’s cheating. I get to wave at all the worship leaders. I get to wave at you, but you don’t get to wave at me. Anyway, I’m in the prayer room, either down on the floor or up in my “prayer station,” as I call it. I’ll be up there and I’ll say, “OK. Two hours.” And I’m tired; I’m brain dead. I mean, I’ve been praying for forty years now, and I can’t think of one thing to pray. “OK God. I’m supposed to be the leader of the house of prayer. I’m supposed to understand prayer. You know what? I can’t think of anything. I love You, God. Thank You for arms and legs. Help me get... No, no; let’s not go there.”

And you know what I do? I mean—sometimes it’s really true—I’m blank. I’m tired. I’m blank. I feel bored. I pull out my prayer list and I just go down it. And some of the prayers I spend more time on. On others, I go faster. Sometimes I take five minutes on one prayer; some I skip it on my prayer list. I feel free to skip anything I want on my prayer list. But, after going down my prayer list, all of a sudden, five or ten minutes later, I hit a

moment where it's alive. And I think, "Just a few minutes ago I was aimless: My brain was tired; I was unfocused. And now, all of a sudden, I'm focused. I'm feeling God."

I don't know the real number, but that's happened to me thousands of times in thirty-five years—where I went into my prayer time only because it was on my schedule. I didn't feel like praying; I felt spiritually dead. I felt bored. I felt tired, but it was on my list. I sat down. I was in that chair. "Here I am, God. I don't know what to think." I pull out my list. And then, I tell you, ten or fifteen minutes later, all of a sudden, I'm feeling the presence of God. I'm thinking, "Thank You for the prayer list! Thank You for the schedule or it never would have happened!"

YOU'LL PRAY TEN TIMES MORE WITH A PRAYER LIST

Paragraph C. I'm going to make a strong statement, but it's true, absolutely true: you'll pray ten times as much in the next years if you'll get a schedule and a prayer list. You'll pray ten times as much. I've said this for years. I know godly people. They love Jesus, but they say, "No, that's legalism."

I say, "I don't think so." Again, I've been saying this for thirty-five years: "You'll pray ten times as much."

They say, "That's legalism."

I say, "OK. Let's wait ten years." Ten years come and go. I've known lots of people for the last thirty years who still don't have a prayer life. They're still in pain about not having a prayer life. It's ten, twenty, thirty years later. But the problem is, they won't ever schedule a time.

I say, "What's wrong with this picture? Get it. You're getting old; you had better figure it out. Simply put it on your schedule."

"Well, I'll pray when the Spirit leads me."

"Well, He never leads you."

"Well, I'll pray when I finally feel rested and connected."

"Well, you're never rested and you never feel connected."

IF WE WAIT, WE'LL NEVER PRAY

If I wait until the day when I'm most excited and energized and my brain is clear, I'm never going to pray. I mean, to get all three in one moment—a clear brain, excitement in my heart, and physical energy all in the same hour—that's an amazing hour. But it doesn't happen very often. I'm almost always lacking one or two of those. "OK, I'm excited, but I'm tired. Oh, I'm not tired, but I'm bummed out. Oh, I'm excited, I'm not tired, but my head is all fuzzy." I mean, I don't wait until the optimum moment. That day never comes. Regardless of what I feel like, I sit down with my schedule and I go through my prayer list. I've found that I enjoy prayer and God breaks in. Now, I don't mean it's awesome, but I feel His presence and I say to myself, "This is the most remarkable, simple tool." People who buy into this, one and two years later, will come back and tell me, "It worked."

I say, “I know it did.”

I’ve known many men who have been in the kingdom for twenty, thirty years. They resisted it. Now, at last, they’ve been doing it for a year or two, and they say, “It really changed my life. It works!” They say, “When should I schedule prayer?”

I say, “Everyone is different. One man schedules it this way; another man that way.” You’ll work it out, but get it on a schedule. I charge you to do this. I charge you to do this.

A REAL APPOINTMENT WITH A REAL PERSON

Paragraph D. Now, once you put it on your schedule, it’s sacred time. When I put prayer on my schedule, barring an emergency, I consider it a real appointment with a real person. How many of you believe Jesus is a real person? This is true. Someone says, “Well, can I meet with you tomorrow?”

I say, “No, I have an appointment.”

I used to say, “No that’s my prayer time.”

But they would say, “Oh, come on; you can pray any time.”

With that kind of attitude, you’ll never pray. If you leave your prayer time because you can pray any time—because Jesus is so available—I assure you, years will go by and you’ll never have a prayer life. Until you think He’s a real person who really has an appointment with you, then you’ll never develop a prayer life.

I quit telling people, “No, I’m praying at that time.” I say, “No, I have an appointment.”

Now they say, “Oh, OK. Cool. Well, when is your appointment over?”

I say, “Well, at this time and that time.”

They say, “Well, I can’t meet then.”

I say, “Well, then I can’t meet tomorrow.” I don’t treat that time I set aside for the Lord as casual. It’s sacred time. It’s as important as an appointment with one of the leaders on our staff and, obviously, more important—although Jesus is nicer. If you blow that one, He’s so nice about it.

THREE DIFFERENT PRAYER FOCUSES

Roman numeral III. Now, when I’m developing a prayer list, I have three different focuses—three different things I think of. And I have several different lists.

Number one. I have my intimacy with God, my devotional prayer list: the things where I want to connect with God’s heart, where I want to give myself to Him, and where I want to feel His presence and His power. That’s one type of prayer list I have, which I sometimes use. I have these prayer lists, by the way, on the website.

Then, I have another prayer list of petitions. Here I'm praying for individuals, a prayer covering for people or for friends or for people who are sick. I have a list, because if I just go according to when I feel inspired, I don't ever feel inspired. I tell someone I'll pray for them, and I try to put it on a list. I don't always do it, but I try to do it as often as I can. I stay with that list. That doesn't mean I pray for everyone on the list every time; but I'll pray for many of the people who are on the list when I go down it. Without that list, I can't keep hold of it.

Then I have intercessory prayer: a list of what I want to see, for example: a breakthrough of revival in our city, various things that I want to see happen, and I go down and pray that list. One day I want to do intimacy or devotional prayer, the next day maybe I want to do more petitioning. Maybe, on the next day, I want to do more intercession with devotional prayer, and maybe one day I'll do all three. Maybe one day I do two out of the three; it doesn't matter. I have my appointed time and I have my three lists, and I go through these lists.

Someone says, "Does the Lord lead you?"

I say, "I don't know, to be honest. I just do what I feel like doing. So, maybe He leads me; maybe He doesn't. I don't know. I just pick the list I want."

Sometimes, I'm totally brain dead and I feel bored and tired. I pick the list that's on the top of the page. I say, "OK, there you go; I'll just do the first one right here." My point is, I'm trying to be practical. It's just that simple, but it really changes me. It changed me over the years, and it continues to change me.

THREE BASIC THEMES OF PRAYER

Paragraph B. Now, on all three of those lists—my devotional intimacy list, my petition list, meaning my prayer list for other people, and my revival/intercession list—there are three basic themes I think of when I pray. Almost every prayer you ever pray for yourself, whether for intimacy, or petitioning for someone else, or for revival; almost every prayer you pray will be one of these three things: either the gifts, the fruit, or the wisdom of the Spirit.

The reason I'm citing these three things is that if you identify this when you're thinking of a prayer list—whether you're thinking of praying for a loved one, for your campus, even for your own life—every prayer you pray, that I know of, will fit into one of those three categories. You're either going to pray for the gifts of the Spirit—for the power and favor of God to be released; for the fruit of the Spirit—for the character of God to be released; or for the wisdom of the Spirit—for God's plan to be released. When my wife and I pray for our sons, we pray for gifts, fruit, and wisdom. We pray for our grandchildren that they'll have the power and favor of God, and that God would touch their hearts with the love of God. That's fruit. We pray that they would have divine wisdom. For whomever I pray, I pray for gifts, fruit, and wisdom. When I pray for myself, I pray for gifts, fruit, and wisdom. I want power; I want character; I want wisdom. So, whatever list you're praying for, whether for yourself in intimacy, for your friends in petition, or for your campus for revival, you'll find that every prayer you pray will fit into one of those three categories. I start with that.

I tell Lou Engle, "Lou, I will pray for you."

He says, "Hey, thanks Mike!"

I put Lou Engle on my list. He's one of the men I pray for. I say, "OK. What do I want God to do with Lou?" I say, "Gifts, fruit and wisdom." I pray for gifts, for power and for favor on Lou. I pray for fruit: I pray that God would reveal the love of God even more greatly in him, and cause his heart to abound in holiness. There are many ways to say it. I pray for wisdom: that he would have divine wisdom in his family, that he would have divine wisdom in his ministry, and that he would have divine wisdom in the management of his own life. I pray for gifts, fruit, and wisdom.

THE POWER OF CONSISTENCY

When I pray for this conference, I pray for gifts, fruit, and wisdom. I pray that power would hit you, that the love of God would form your character, that the wisdom of God would come, and that you would have a spirit of revelation. I use those three things—gifts, fruit and wisdom—for every prayer list I have, and it works for everything. The reason I'm giving it to you is to simplify your process of starting a prayer list. I pray this for my children, my grandchildren, for Allen Hood. I pray it for Lou Engle. There are a number of staff members whom I have specifically on my prayer list. I pray these things for them specifically—one, two, three. I don't spend an hour on each one, but I take a few moments on every one of them. Sometimes I'll feel His presence and I'll take three or four more minutes instead of one or two, and it's powerful.

Paragraph C. The power of it is the consistency. When I start off, my mind is spacey, my emotions are a little down, and I'm physically tired. By the end of it I feel energy, I feel focused, and I say, "Lord, this is a miracle!" That's why I say prayer is a miracle. It really is. I say, "I was so scattered and now I feel so connected. How did this happen?"

His answer would be, "I'm helping you, but you did take the time to begin the conversation." God won't make you begin this conversation, but if you make it, you'll experience the miracle and He will actually touch you in it.

IF YOU DON'T MAKE A SCHEDULE, THE DEVIL WILL

Paragraph C. I have several prayer lists. I just want to note that to you. Put a star by it. Go to our website and download it. You can change it if you don't like the list. Change it and make it your own list. Page 65. It's critical to have the right view of God. You can have a schedule: you know you're going to pray at 9:00am on this day and noon the next day.

Someone may say, "Is it better to pray at the same time every day?"

I say, "Not necessarily. Whatever is best is what works in your schedule." Work your schedule out. Put your prayer time first. Put your relationship and family time in there. Put your work time in. Put your workout time in. You know that cardiovascular thing that we all need to do; put that thing in there. Well, you don't need it so much in your twenties, but you do when you're older. Put those things on your list, maybe move them around a little, and make sure you have time for the right relationships. You do have to put in rest. I have "rest" in my schedule. It's godly to rest. What happens is that a lot of people don't have a schedule, so they just meander around. If you don't have a schedule for your life, I guarantee you that the Devil will have one for you. If you don't have a schedule for your time, I guarantee you that your friends and your emergencies will have that schedule for you. You need to take charge of your schedule, instead of letting emergencies or people or the Devil make your schedule for you. Be proactive. I don't keep my schedule one hundred percent of the time, but

I guess I do about eighty percent of the time, because it's too hard to keep it all the time. But without a schedule, you're aimless. You're just aimless.

I say, "Hey, what are you doing?"

They say, "Hanging out."

I say, "Throw that hang-out thing away."

I love what Corey Russell said: "You hang out so much you get hung over"—or something like that. It was really clever how he said it. I can't remember exactly, but beloved, I believe in having some time that's rest and some time that's down. However, we need to seize our schedules, press into God, press into relationships, press into ministry, and accomplish something in our lives.

A RIGHT VIEW OF GOD GIVES CONFIDENCE

Top of page 65: a right view of God. I won't go into detail on this. I just want to say that when we have a view of God as our tender Father and a view of Jesus as our Bridegroom with desire; when we realize that God isn't mostly mad or mostly sad when He relates to us, but is actually glad when He talks to us, when we see that He's kind and gentle with our failures—not angry with us—we feel the assurance that we're enjoyed by God even in our weakness. If you have a wrong view of God, if you think He's an angry taskmaster instead of a tender Father and a Bridegroom with desire, you'll never have confidence in the presence of God. Without confidence that God is smiling at you, even in your weakness, you'll run from Him instead of to Him.

WE PRAY DIFFERENTLY WHEN WE FEEL CONFIDENT

Now you can have your schedule, you can have your prayer list, you can know when you pray, and you can know what you're committed to praying for, but if you don't like prayer because you think God is mad at you or He's scowling and disappointed and grieved at you, then you're in there pleading, "Oh God, help me to love You; don't hit me, please!" Then, it's really hard. It's really hard to pray if your view of God isn't biblical. There are so many books and series out there in the Body of Christ worldwide. Most of the books I've written are about God as our Father. Probably, half or more are on this subject. All my books are on our website and they're free. You can get them and download them; you don't have to pay for them. Most of them speak about God's heart in a way that would give you confidence to connect with Him. There are plenty of books in the whole Body of Christ. Whatever you do, get your view of God right so that you have confidence that He enjoys you, so that then you can open your spirit to Him when you come into His presence. You will pray very differently when you feel confident before Him. Your spirit will be in a very different position in a positive sense.

PRAY-READING THE SCRIPTURES

Roman numeral V. We're coming down to our last four or five minutes here. This is critical. Conversation with God is what I call pray-reading the Word. That means that when I read the Bible, instead of just reading it, I turn it into a conversation with Jesus. When I'm reading it, I stop every few phrases and talk to a person. I use the Bible as conversational material so I can talk to Him.

And so in my prayer time, I have those prayer lists—my intimate, devotional prayer lists. I have my petitions—my prayer covering for my friends. Then, I have my intercessory list. I want to see revival. I want to see

300,000 people saved in Kansas City. I want to see thousands touched at the onething conference. That's my revival/intercessory list. My whole prayer life isn't those three lists, though. My favorite part of my prayer life is when I open my Bible and all the material is already written out. I read the Bible and I turn it into a conversation with Him. That's by far the most enjoyable. Oh, I love that! I love that much more than my prayer list. I try to do the prayer list along with this; but I pray through the Bible more than I pray through the prayer lists. The most substantial way to bolster or strengthen your prayer life is to read the Bible and feed on the Bible by saying it back to God.

FROM DISTANT TO PERSONAL

Paragraph B. John 5. This verse is the foundation verse. This verse rocked my world back when I was a young man in my college days. It rocked my world. I was reading the Bible because my friends told me, "You have to read the Bible," but the Bible was so boring. I was even reading it a few hours per day. It was so confusing. I couldn't figure out the difference between a gospel, a disciple, an epistle, and an apostle. They were all confusing to me. I said, "Which is who and what is what?" And so, I was reading it—very bored—and I was backsliding. In other words, my heart wasn't becoming tender. I don't mean I was doing this or that or the other thing. I did some of those things, but that's not what I mean right now. I mean my spirit was hard; I couldn't feel God at all, and I was reading the Bible a lot. It was so boring, and then this verse, John 5:39, changed my life. In it, Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life" (Jn. 5:39a). He's talking about reading the Bible. I thought, "Yes, of course. I think if you read the Bible you're supposed to have life." Put the word *anointing* there. You think you're going to feel the presence of God, is what I meant by *anointing*. I studied the Bible because I thought I would feel His presence. When I read that, I said, "Yes, that's me."

"COME TO ME THAT YOU MAY HAVE LIFE"

Jesus went on to say, "And these are they which testify of Me" (Jn. 5:39b). In other words, "No. These Scriptures only point to Me. They testify. They're like a neon sign pointing to Me" (v. 39, paraphrased). It goes on, "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (Jn. 5:40). "You're not willing to talk to Me when you read the Bible. Come to Me" (v. 40, paraphrased). Instead of the phrase, "Come to Me," write, "Talk to Me. You read the Bible, but you're not actually willing to talk to Me. Then you'll have the power and the presence of God, the anointing of God on your life. Just talk to Me in the Bible" (v. 40, paraphrased). It was like the light went on. I said, "This is my story. I search the Scriptures, but my heart is hard. I don't feel any presence because I don't ever come and talk to Him." I didn't realize the Bible was a neon sign pointing to Jesus, and Jesus was saying, "Take the Bible and turn it into a conversation with Me. Talk to Me in it."

PRAYER-READING: TO BELIEVE AND TO OBEY

Page 67. I'll do this quite briefly. I have several long teachings about this on the website. I'm only going to take two minutes because I want to bring this session to a close.

If this triggers your interest and you say, "Hey, I want to know more. What? What's that? How does that work, talking to God in the Bible?"

I have several long teachings about this on the Internet. And again, it's all free. I don't just want you to hear it; I want you to steal the material, put your name on it, teach it, and get other young people doing it.

Paragraph C. When I read the Bible, I think of two broad categories. There are more than two, but these are the two I think of when I pray-read the Bible. Some verses say, in essence, believe God. Believe God. These verses say, for example, “God loves you. God forgives you. He gave you the gift of righteousness.” Those are subjects you’re supposed to believe.

There are other subjects you’re supposed to obey: “Bridle your tongue” (Js. 3:2, paraphrased). In other words, control your speech. “Don’t give in to lust” (2 Tim. 2:22, paraphrased). “Use your money rightly” (Lk. 16:9, paraphrased). “Use your time rightly” (Eph. 5:16, paraphrased). Those are Bible verses telling you to obey something. So, one category tells you to believe things and one category tells you to obey things. I have those two categories in my mind.

THANKING HIM AND ASKING HIM

Paragraph D. We’re just going to do D and E. When I’m reading, I’ll run into a verse that exhorts me to believe. For example, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). I’ll stop and read it. I’m supposed to believe that. So instead of just reading it and saying, “Cool!” I stop and do two things. Number one, I thank Him.

I stop and say, “Jesus, thank You that You love me.” Instead of underlining it and moving on, I stop and have a thirty-second conversation: “Thank You. Thank You that You love me. Really, thank You.” Then I say, “Help me to see it more. Reveal it to me.” It’s a very simple, little formula. “Thank You. Help me to see it more.

The Bible says, “I have forgiven you.” I stop and say, “Thank You that You forgave me.” I talk to a person. “Give me more revelation, and more understanding that You forgave me. Help me to see that more.”

It’s a very simple, little thing to do. But if you’ll say, “Thank You,” and then ask Him to show you more, you’ll have a heart connection in reading the Bible, because you’re talking to a person, and not just preparing a Bible study.

EXHORTATIVE VERSES

Paragraph E. Now, there’s another type of verse. This one isn’t telling me to believe something. God forgave me. God loves me. God promises to do good for me. No, this verse, rather, is an exhortation to obey. “Mike, I want you to bridle your tongue. Bridle your eyes. Don’t let your eyes look on wrong things. Spend your time rightly; spend your money rightly; use your passions rightly.”

I say, “OK.” So I read a verse, a verse like, “Bridle your speech.” In other words, “Don’t have any wrong speech.” I’ll read that verse, and there are many verses I could put here as an example. I pause for one second, and I commit myself. I say, “Jesus, I commit myself to this. I won’t complain. I won’t gossip. I won’t. I commit myself to it. I set my heart to obey this verse: not to slander my brother, not to complain, to speak with gratitude, to speak wholesome speech. I commit to this.” I take thirty seconds for this. That’s all it takes, but now you’re in a dialogue with a person. Then I ask the next thing: “Help me. Help me to obey this.” I pause and say, “Holy Spirit, help me to obey this.”

Then I journal my thoughts and I read the Bible. One verse tells me to believe something, and the next verse tells me to obey something. The third verse does neither, so I read it and say, “Cool.” The fourth verse tells me to obey something again. I simply do this. The fifth verse doesn’t do it either, so I read it and say, “Cool.” The

next verse says to obey, and exhorts me to believe something: “I am with you” (Mt. 28:20). I stop and say, “Thank You. Help me to see that more.” Beloved, if you’ll do that simple, simple thing right there, your Bible time will be exciting.

F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P

Roman numeral VI. This is the end. Ten prayers. I want to give you this. Go onto the website if you want it. I have a little acronym called, F-E-L-L-O-W-S-H-I-P. It’s ten prayers, and these are prayers I pray for myself. I go right down the list. I skip some of them on some days. Some days I don’t do the list, some days I’ll hit three of the ten, some days I’ll hit all of them. Some days I hit one of them for a really long time, and then I switch off my list and I go back to pray-reading my Bible. In other words, I’m not really stringent or rigid. This list of ten things covers every single area in your personal life with God. I don’t want to develop that. Again, I’ve spent an hour or two on teaching it at other times. You can get it all if you want. Whatever you do, get a list and work through it.

Amen. Let’s stand.