

## I. The Conviction to Pray

Today, if you have your Bibles, turn to James chapter 5. I am going to be talking to you all about prayer today, and that is something the Lord has really been dealing with me on lately. When I first heard a little over a week and a half ago that I was going to be preaching this Sunday, the Lord really impressed two main prayers on my heart. One was to really start praying for Pastor Bob to get better again and come back soon. The other one was, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Danny yesterday was just talking about what he just went over with you guys, about Bob's schedule and how he is recovering and when we can expect him back. He said, "So yeah, man, I am not sure. I know you will definitely have to go tomorrow, but I am going to have to do one more week." He thought right after that, Bob would be done. I said, "I do not know if you will be going one more week. I am pretty sure after he hears me go tomorrow, he will be coming back the next week to recover everything that got undone."

As I bring this message to you all today, it is funny, I was talking about prayer and everything. This morning I started to use my iPad more to put down notes and thoughts. I think Angela even kidded me about that, saying, "What is this? Have you become technologically savvy?" I had a little jitters this morning. She said, "I am not used to you doing stuff like that." I said, "Yeah, I do not know. It is just like, I am always having thoughts. I want to record them and keep track of them." What I used to do was have about fifty different little notebooks that I had to carry around. But obviously, we are in this new era, so I started using that stuff. I did my whole sermon on my iPad, and I thought, "Well, I will just get to the church, we will just get to the printer and we will just print it off, right?"

I got up there, and the printer just decided to break. So Danny and I were back there in the office this morning, getting ready to have anOffice Spacemoment. We were up there trying to get this printer to print, and nothing was happening. I hate those cues that it does. You are super frustrated trying to get this thing out, and the printer, I do not know if Microsoft or HP, whoever upgrades and programs these things, puts these cute little sounds in there. It is like, "No, that is not how I am feeling right now. I am really upset." It just continued to do goofy stuff like that.

So we both walked out; we were done with it. I went upstairs to prayer group and told the guys, "Hey, pray for me because my iPad is an iPad mini, it is this size, and the print is like eight-font. So I am going to have to do a whole sermon off of something like this now. So just pray for me, guys." I came back downstairs a little depressed about that, and Jenny was in there and had everything already printed off and ready to go. So I guess that is all it took.

Today, what I want to talk to you guys about is prayer. The reason I chose this is because the Lord really hit me like a ton of bricks about how bad I am with this lately. This message actually came about due to the convictions that God gave me after hearing about the recent struggles and heartaches of a young person associated with our youth group. After hearing of this nightmare scenario that this kid was living through, I just could not help but question God and say, "God,

can't You do more about this? Isn't there something more that You can do to help this kid out in their life?"

It was funny because almost immediately when I started questioning Him about that, He dropped it on me like a ton of bricks. The answer was, "Yes, Zach, there is something more that can be done. And for the past four years, you have been neglecting to do it." What it was is that I have been neglecting to pray for my kids like I should be.

What follows, what I am going to read to you guys here, is a little bit more formal than I normally do things. I usually do not write things out all the way and read them. I usually like to have bullet points and just do like the old preachers used to say, "You take a verse and then you take an attitude and then you just preach on it." But just so that you guys can get the whole picture of exactly what God convicted me about, I did write it out, and I am going to read that off to you guys formally. So just bear with me as I go through this real quick.

I keep hearing about kids outside of the church, outside of good families, who are struggling and who do not have the support that we do. Eventually, after every troubling report I hear on them, I would usually conclude, "Well, what can I do about it?" The general thing that I would say is, "Well, that is too bad." And then oftentimes I would recline back to my fortress of safety and thank God my life was not as miserable as theirs. I would leave them with no support, almost thinking and hoping I could just forget about it and enjoy my own happy little thoughts, just clear my mind and think on the things that are enjoyable to me.

Then I started to look at the kids that God gave me and why they were there. I wondered what caused these kids who were plugged in and present to be there versus the ones who were not. Do you know what I discovered? I had my core kids only because their parents were core. The spiritual power, reach, and influence of my ministry did not extend past the ability of human effort. I only had the kids here whose parents were here, and I did not have one kid here by any unnatural or supernatural effort, with the exception of a few.

I thought, "Well, why has not God allowed every kid that was at camp to stick around during the year?" After all, we are honoring Him with the right Bible, the Authorized Version. We believe it, we teach it, we preach it, and we also love it. We have the right hymnal. We love those songs and understand their importance in our lives and in our relationship with Jesus Christ and our fellowship with God.

Not only that, look at our kids. When we meet as a youth group, it is not to play games, watch movies, eat snacks, or spread gossip. We try to give God the preeminence when we gather and take the attention off of ourselves. Our kids give devotions oftentimes based off of their own spiritual observations of triumphs and failures in their life. So I know it is more than just going through the motions for them.

Jesus Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Well, Lord, if we are lifting You up and we are waving the answer back to heaven, then why has not God drawn these kids and allowed them to remain? Does not He want the best for His children? Does not He look after the helpless, and does not He honor those that honor His Word?

I sat down and began to write the names of all the kids that have come to the youth group in the last four years that I have been here, that have come to camp, that have come to church, that have come to other events that we have hosted. Do you know what I found? If we would have kept all those souls that God allowed to travel down those stairs to our youth group conservatively, right now we would be around seventy kids.

The Bible said it is not enough for us to produce fruit, but He said our fruits should remain. I started thinking, "Zach, if the parents of these kids can make them come, isn't your God strong enough to get those kids who do not have parents involved here to be able to show up? Isn't God powerful enough to keep these kids around? Does not He have more influence and pull than me and than the parents of these core kids?"

Oftentimes when I would hear about these kids, I would sincerely feel bad for them and maybe even mumble something to God like, "Lord, bless them, help them out, God have mercy on them." But my overall attitude was like, "Well, the Bible says in the last days, perilous times will come," or "The Bible said many are called, but few are chosen," or I justify it by saying, "In the last days, there will be a falling away first." One of my favorites that I often quote would be, "Well, that is just a Laodicean church days, and there is really nothing we can do about it. After all, this church is not for everyone." "Well, that is what the Bible says, so that is the end of the story, right?"

No, that was me using the Bible as a wall to hide behind. I used it to justify my lack of care and compassion for others. I used those general truths in a general way to dodge my duty as a soldier. You say, "On the battlefield of standing for the Word of God?" No. On the battlefield of prayer. In our spiritual warfare, God only gave us two offensive weapons. One is the Bible. For the last four years, I had been fighting with only fifty percent of my arsenal. Sure, I knew about prayer, and casually I practiced it, and occasionally I even taught on it, but I never truly relied on it and watched for its influence on matters I truly cared about.

I would come to these careless conclusions about your kids, my little brothers and sisters in the ministry, kids who had just gotten saved or introduced to God. They were alone without support, left to fend for themselves. You say, "Against who? Against ISIS, nuclear weapons, or a deadly disease?" No, those are shadows of threats compared to what they were truly up against. I left baby, premature, newborn infants in the faith to fend for themselves against the world, the flesh, and the devil. That same devil that the Archangel Michael was not able to take on alone.

For the past four years, I have been over the youth group, going to camp. I got to meet your children, your nieces, and your nephews, and many more potential young Christians. We loved on them. We sang with them. We preached to them, watching as God practically worked the miracle in four days' time to bring them from darkness into light. By the last day of camp, everyone's hearts were knit together and charged to love God and to go to work for Him. No matter the circumstances, we vowed to support them. We congratulated them on getting saved, and we promised, "You made the best decision you will ever make. And now that you are saved, you are in the same family as us, and you will never be alone." The joy of this promise was so visible on those little faces that you could swear the whole world just got a little brighter.

Oftentimes on the last day of camp, as they would leave on cloud nine, I could tell and I would hear them say, they are wondering, "How could this have been in existence, and how could I have gone so long in life without this?" They are fired up, and they are ready to go do something for God. This newborn babe blindly walks off thinking that they will be supernaturally looked after while heading into the hottest battle of their life. I would send them out to the hottest and worst conditions with nothing more than my thoughts and hopes that we will see them again at camp next year, not caring for their soul and condition, just wanting to enjoy a crowd so that my own experience would be better. When hearing about them becoming a casualty less than a week or two later, I would just conclude with a spiritual analysis, "Well, Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Now here is a question: If you were God and you heard a prayer come up to you from a guy like me, and I was asking you to send the new kid my way, would you do it? Based off of my track record, a guy who left over seventy infants to perish without support in battle against the devil, if I was a hospital and asked you to send me your baby, would you do it? Maybe this is why a ministry that cycled through over seventy runs on an average of fifteen to twenty.

I am reminded of a quote by John R. Rice. He often got caught saying that every failure in a man's life is a prayer failure. This seemed to be the case in my own life. During my time in Old Paths, I have learned to put my faith in a book and refer to it for everything in faith and practice. I have learned to immerse myself in the ministry, giving it priority in my life and letting everything else fall in around it. Sadly, it has not been until now that God has placed prayer at the front of my convictions for growth in my relationship with Him. Not until now have I felt the challenge to truly rely on prayer for its power to influence and affect those seemingly impossible situations in my life. Yet by it, I now plan on never leaving a kid I come into contact with alone and abandoned through prayer. I will call into action Heaven's air support for every soul that God places under my care. Through prayer, I will take this work that God has given me and put it back into God's hands and leave it there.

That is what God convicted me about. He ended up showing me an example in the Bible that I could learn from. Today, that is what we are going to look at. So if you have your Bible, turn to James chapter 5.

## II. The Worthless Prayer

I want to share with you guys an example of a man in the Bible that God showed me. He said, "Zach, you really want to make a difference in these kids' lives. You want to do something to help them out. I am going to show you a man who had an effective prayer life. If you follow these four points that he had in his life, son, I will help you do that too." So I want to pass these things on to you, and thank God they have already been an influence in my life and already started to help me out.

James chapter 5, pick it up in verse 16. We are going to read through verse 18. It says this:

*James 5:16-18*

*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

*Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

*And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

Just in case you are wondering, this is not God's formula for controlling the weather. This is not that program. It is a guide that God gave us on how to use prayer God's way. We need this formula because the Bible says that one of our infirmities is that we do not know how to pray. Most of our prayers are worthless, and they are worthless because of three things.

The first thing is that oftentimes they lack the right motive. We are not praying for the right reasons. Our motive should be for what God did for us on Calvary, and we are going to do something for Him.

Not only that, our prayer oftentimes lacks the right purpose. It is a selfish purpose. It is like the Bible says over in James, the purpose to be consumed upon our own lusts. The Bible says our true purpose ought to be for God's purpose.

Lastly, it lacks detail. I am going to get into that later on, but oftentimes our prayers are general. They are vague, and there are no specifics in there. We just read right here. The Bible said about Elijah, he prayed for the rain to stop. He was specific. He told God exactly what he was looking for to happen, and God answered him accordingly.

When we get these three things lined up in our life, you are going to be off to a good start when it comes to prayer. Now let us jump into this great passage right here. Let us look at four things from verses 16 through 18 that caused Elijah to have an effective prayer life.

### III. 1.) You Must Pray

This first one right here is a tremendous spiritual thought, and you probably would have never came up with it. Just get ready to be blown away. The first thing that you have got to have in your prayer life in order to be effective prayer, you have to pray. I know you say, "Was that, you should not be so obvious. Are you serious?" Yeah, God has to remind us to pray. You cannot have an effective prayer life if you do not pray.

For years I walked around as if having a King James Bible and going to a good Bible-believing church automatically made me a seasoned Christian in all aspects of Christianity. I figured if I could quote a certain amount of verses, I could lay out the gap and lay out everything on that chart over there. I mean, that is pretty much just got dumped on me naturally, right? An effective prayer life is not an all-inclusive perk thrown in with salvation. The first key to being effective in prayer is that you must pray.

Think about that. Back in Elijah's day, he thought he was alone, but later on he found out there were over seven thousand prophets in Israel that were just like him, that had not bowed their knee to Baal. You have to ask yourself then, why did God use only Elijah if He had seven

thousand other prophets that were just as capable? He prayed. I believe God had already plans to cut off Israel's water for that three and a half years. This was not some spontaneous or selfish prayer Elijah came up with out of nowhere.

You guys remember back in Acts 15:18, the Bible says:

*Acts 15:18*

*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

The only thing that is not settled about God's works is who God would do those works through. I believe this is the purpose of prayer in our lives. Through prayer, we invite God to work His plan through our lives. But first, we have to pray.

About Jesus Christ, the Bible says:

*Matthew 14:23*

*And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

*Matthew 26:36*

*Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

*Luke 6:12*

*And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

Jesus Christ over in Luke 18:1 exhorted His disciples to quit being weak and stop fainting. He said, "Listen, men ought always to pray." The disciples finally caught on to this over in Luke 11:1. They said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

I think I have the wrong Bible today because I did not find the word I was looking for in there. Can anybody find that in Luke 11:1 and find the word "how" before "pray"? Anybody see that? Luke 11:1, "Lord, teach us how to pray." You see that? Raise your hand if you got that in your Bible. Do not embarrass yourselves. No, "teach us to pray." You cannot find that. You will not find it because like many of us, the disciples neglected prayer so much that the Holy Spirit did not convict them on how to pray, just the fact that they never prayed.

It is all right because the Bible tells us that we have to pray because prayer is not natural for our flesh. The Bible said about Elijah, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are." He had the same flesh and bones as you and I. Back in his day, I am sure he enjoyed the camel races, shopping for dreidels, and I am sure he loved triple cheeseburgers and a large side of hummus and unleavened bread. I bet he knew all the latest songs on the flute and the lute. But he still found that there was a significance in prayer. The Bible says Elijah was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed.

Prayer is not attractive to us naturally. As a matter of fact, prayer is kind of like torture for our flesh. Can I be honest with you today? I do not like prayer. I really do not. About three or four weeks ago, I told the youth group kids, "We are going to do something different." They came into the classroom, and we had taken out the rows. We had done a couple of things in there, not just the aesthetics of the walls and all that stuff. We got the tables out. We kind of set it up like a church service, that way I could spit on them easier because you could not hit everybody at the same angle. Anyway, we did that. But this particular day, I set a big circle of chairs up around the room. They were like, "What is this for? What is this for?" Their little bodies just blossomed with excitement and energy, wondering what was going on. I said, "All right, I will get to it, buddy. Just hold on."

Finally, we got going, and I said, "So why are the chairs set up like this? Well, kids, today we are going to have our first youth group prayer meeting." You actually heard on the recording some people say, "No, boo." I totally understood that, and I knew that that would probably happen. What I wanted to do, I wanted to be honest with those kids. What I did, I told them, "Listen, before we have this prayer meeting, I am going to be honest with you guys. I do not like prayer. I actually hate prayer."

I have always been kind of hyperactive. You guys can kind of see that, maybe my son Brady a little bit. He is probably where he got it from. But I have always been like, just go, go, go, go, go. I want to do something. I have got to be involved in something, moving around. When it comes down to it, I just want to share with you guys real quick. There are some reasons that I really hate prayer, and I really do hate it.

1. One of the reasons I hate it is because my flesh cannot participate in it. Folks, if your flesh cannot participate in prayer, you are not doing it right. The majority of my life is spent for my five senses. The problem with that is that prayer is all spiritual. You are a soul. If you are saved in here today, the Bible says that you were separated from your flesh by an operation of God without hands. So God sees you as your soul, not your flesh. So you are a soul that is a spiritual being praying to God, who the Bible says is a Spirit. The reason I hate prayer is because I live 99.9% of my life for my flesh. I am attracted to what I see. I enjoy what I smell. I am engaged through what I touch. I am fed by what I taste, and I love what I hear. I go from sitting in front of a 75-inch flat screen LED TV with surround sound, with strobe lights and controllers with rumble packs, and pizza rolls going down my mouth and washing down a Mountain Dew, to all of a sudden, "God, are You there?" This is why I do not like prayer, guys. Prayer does nothing for my natural body. It is engaging your sixth sense, and this thing has got to be developed, and I have to develop an appetite for prayer. My flesh cannot participate in it, and it is almost like I am putting it in time out. It squirms, it grumbles, it sweats. It is like a little kid that is constantly asking, "Is it over yet? Are we there yet? Can this be done now?"
2. The second reason I hate prayer is because it is an inconvenience to my daily routine. If I do prayer in the morning, I have got to lose sleep for it. If I do prayer at night, I have got to get out of bed for it. During the daytime, I feel like I am burning up valuable daylight that I could be doing something else much more educational, watching YouTube videos and

Netflix, just something else. I hate prayer because it ruins my daily routine, and there is a certain mood that I like to walk around with. Any man in here that has got red blood, you have a certain swagger to you, right? There is a certain ego that you carry with yourself until you walk in front of a mirror and all your hopes and dreams shatter. But that is prayer, man. It sucks because when you pray, it takes your general attitude that you have about yourself and it takes it off of you and puts it back on spiritual things, back on God, and that jacks up your ego, it jacks up your mojo, or what they like to call it. I hate this because I prefer to mind my own business. I prefer to take it easy. I prefer to enjoy what interests me. But prayer puts me under conviction of the daily norms that I oftentimes enjoy. When I am in a prayer mood, I cannot listen to secular music like I normally would, and not without getting convicted. I have to be careful about the humor that I have when I am in a prayerful mood. It sucks because I cannot sit down and just enjoy whatever comes into my mind and let the thoughts run wild. Prayer just jacks up my life, and I cannot stand it. It ruins my daily routine because prayer turns my attention to God. It is funny how vulgar jokes do not tickle me the same while looking at Calvary.

3. The third reason I hate prayer is because you cannot prove it works. You say, "Uh oh, this is sacrilegious. We are getting ready to go down a bad stream now." But think about it. Prayer is something you can believe works. You can even know without any doubt that it does, but you cannot prove it to someone. There is no physical standard to measure the effectiveness of prayer. I told the story when I was about three weeks ago, I was coming to youth group when we were having this prayer night, and I pulled onto the highway and I merged on. Actually, I was coming from work, and I work off Front Street, and it is horrible. Front Street is almost like Afghanistan's roads. It looks like IEDs have gone off all over the place. It is horrible. There is a certain way, if you know how to, once you have been down there enough, you are familiar enough with it, you know how to navigate through it because what happened, you have all these 18-wheelers down there also. If you do not know what you are doing, you will end up taking in this only about eight city blocks, but to get from my job to the highway to 435, if you do not know what you are doing, that can take thirty minutes. But if you are really resourceful, it can take five. I am not speeding. I am navigating through traffic in a very meaningful way. So I got through there, and I am driving along, and I am getting through it, and I finally get onto the highway. I am like, "Oh, thank God, man. I got through all those lights, passed all those big rigs up, and now I am getting onto the road." One thousand. Someone gets on the road after me, two thousand, then almost like a head-on collision with the car right after me spins across the whole highway, making a huge wreck. You say, "That is prayer." Of course, my mom tells me every time we drop off the kids and we are going and coming, "Son, I am always praying for you guys. I am always praying that you guys have been taken care of." So I could say, "See, that is prayer. That is the prayer of my mom." Yeah, but to someone else, it is just time and chance. You see that it happens to them all.

Drake was talking to me about just being a single guy living on his own and working at McKesson, where we work, that it is just a pretty temporal job, nothing special about it. But he was just talking about, "Zach, I am not sure, man. I might have to get something else, just a little bit more income. I am not living with anyone anymore. I am living on my own, and all the expenses that we have and all the running around the church, I might need a little bit more of a

cushion. I want to be able to put stuff in the savings," which is smart, good stuff. So he is like, "You know what, I am just, just pray for me, man. I might have to move on to something else." Not a month later, after we start praying for that, our whole company gets a significant raise all across the board. You see what I am saying? Someone says, "See, that is prayer works." But think about that. That same raise happened to 150 other people in my company that did not know the difference between Jesus and Jesus. You cannot prove that it works.

The only standard that we have to judge prayer by is God's promises in the Book. James 4:2 tells us:

*James 4:2*

*Ye have not, because ye ask not.*

So you have faith in that, and you start to ask.

1 John 5:14-15 says:

*1 John 5:14-15*

*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

*And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

So you have faith in that.

Matthew 21:22 says:

*Matthew 21:22*

*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

Those are the standards for measuring prayer by. You simply have to trust in what God said in order to measure prayer.

Now I tore prayer down. I said there are some reasons that I hate prayer, but I have got to be honest with you. There are also some reasons that I love prayer. These might sound familiar, but:

4. The first reason I love prayer is because my flesh has no part in it. My flesh cannot participate in it. You say, "Well, you just said that is why you hated it." Yeah, but I also love prayer because my flesh cannot participate in it because when I look back at my life and I look at all the trouble that I have had with sin and bad choices in my life, and I take a roll call to see who was consistent and who was a consistent suspect in those issues, do you know who I find? I find my flesh. Do you know who I could not find? My prayer life. The Bible says, "In my flesh, dwelleth no good thing," not one good thing, not even good cholesterol for that long. Therefore, my flesh cannot participate in prayer. That must mean that prayer is good for me.

5. The second reason that I do love prayer is because it interferes with my daily routine. The Bible says: Proverbs 14:12

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. A man once said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. My good intentions, my daily routine, have led me to many sorrows and many heartaches in life. Thank God that He gave me a way to escape that through prayer.

6. The third reason why I do love prayer is because I cannot prove that it works. If I could measure the results of prayer in an undisputable physical way, then my flesh would glory in that. I would look at Aaron Crust over there and I would say, "You know what, Aaron, I measured the prayers that have been happening in your life, and I saw what God has been doing. I saw He did eight things for you. Praise the Lord, brother. Last week He did ten for me. I am sorry. Good luck." Prayer would then be my spiritual measuring stick, and I would go around from being from within my communication with God to measure my spiritual status amongst men. That is one of the reasons I love that God did not allow us to be able to measure prayer and why I cannot stand that thing, but why I also love it.

So guys, the first thing I said to you is that in order to be an effective prayer person in your life, in order for prayer to be effective in your life, you have got to pray.

## IV. 2.) You Must Pray Earnestly

The second thing is that in order for prayer to be effective in your life, you have to do it earnestly. The Bible says over there in James 5:16:

*James 5:16*

*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

Look at verse 17:

*James 5:17*

*Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

He prayed how? Earnestly.

When you are praying, does your mind wander and drift? You are not praying earnestly. Lying in bed and praying while falling asleep did not work for me. I tried to do that. In my mind, I am thinking, "You know what, Lord, this has got to be the right way to do it. You want to save the best for last." So obviously if I am falling asleep, getting ready to go to bed, I say, "God, You mean the most to me. I am going to save this prayer for You right now." I ended up laying down in bed, "Oh, thank You, Lord, for such a good day." You just start to pray, "Lord, bless my father, bless my mother, bless my wife, bless my kids, Lord, bless this, bless that here, bless there, blessed everywhere, bless, bless." After a while, before you know it, I could fall asleep before I got into any type of content with God. You know what it ended up teaching me? It did not teach

me to save the best for last. It ended up teaching me that no matter what time of day I tried to pray, it actually conditioned me to fall asleep when I prayed. So it was kind of like the opposite effect on that. It did not really work out very good.

You have got to pray with intensity. I remember waking up, especially during the summertime when we were out of school. I remember waking up many weekend mornings and many of those summer mornings, I could hear my dad over in the guest room of our house, just crying out to God, "God help my boys, God pray for me with this, God do that." I always thought that, "Well, he is a little bit too serious with that stuff. There is no reason to be screaming at God. I mean, He can hear you if you are whispering or if you do not even open up your mouth." But it was, man. Maybe he did that just to keep his focus. I have noticed that when I try to pray silently, my mind starts to race in a hundred different areas, and I cannot even focus on one thing. It is good to pray out loud.

I thought about my dad's intensity. I also thought, "What am I intense about? Is it yelling at kids? Is it my sports team? Is it the safety of my family? Or do I get intense whenever I feel like my reputation is slandered by someone?" Do you with the same passion and intensity pray? Ian Bounds, who was a notable Christian when it comes to prayer, he said, "It is only when the whole heart is gripped with the passion of prayer that the life-giving fire descends, for none but the earnest man gets access to the ear of God." That is great, man.

This might sound stupid, but believe it or not, I actually learned how to pray earnestly at a very young age. Has anybody in here ever got a whooping before? I did not say, "whipping." I mean, whooping. I mean, there is some bass in that. That is what I am talking about. Bless God, as a kid, man, I learned how to pray earnestly. You say, "Well, that was not the right reason. That was a selfish prayer that you might consume it upon your own lust." I did not know what James said back then. I was just trying to survive, man. I remember oftentimes, if it was my mom, we would be over at my grandma's house, and there was about a fifteen-minute drive. I remember we would do something at grandma's house. She would tell us, "Boy, you just wait till we get home." And I would. I remember earnestly, palm sweating, belly aching, sometimes extra things coming out the back end, just begging God, "God, please help my mom to forget. God, please do not let her remember what happened." If it was going to be bad enough, I feel ashamed to say this, but I actually prayed several times, "God, please help us to get into a car wreck. Please, God." I really did. I was like, "If a car wreck happens, there is no way in the world we will get home. And she will remember what this was all about. She will be so distracted by that thing. So, God, please help us." God forbid if my dad was the one that was going to be extending that punishment, man, listen, at that point, you are going to say, "Well, this is sacrilegious. This is just unacceptable." I did. I prayed, "God, just kill me." Seriously.

Now you might be thinking, "Okay, that is stupid. It is just a whipping." No, it is a whooping. If my dad was giving a whooping, listen, it was better to die than to suffer. Think about that. Does anybody in here want to jump off a skyscraper and survive? No, you do not want to survive. It is funny. I was talking to Joe Christensen at volleyball yesterday, and he was just talking about, "If anything ever happens to me, like where I am almost brain dead and you guys have to spoon-feed me and wipe my butt," he said, "Just tell a nurse to come in with a hot needle and put me

out." I am the same way, man. If I were to fall for something like a skyscraper, I do not want to survive. If I am a vegetable, dude, put the pillow over me, turn off the music, and just let it go. But that is what it came down to. I really did. I learned how to pray earnestly because of that. You say that is goofy, but you know what it did? It showed me later on in life that, "You know what? You used to pray earnestly for things that were of lesser value, man. What are you doing now? Laying on your back, falling asleep, mumbling to God. What do you call this stuff?"

It is funny because nowadays we are more willing to organize than we are to agonize. Like Christ in Gethsemane, you remember what He said? You remember that song, one of AJ's favorites, "Lead me to Calvary, lest I forget Thine agony." You remember that? Where is our agony? Most of my prayers are like little flyers that I will leave on Heaven's doorstep without even ringing the doorbell. Have you ever prayed, doubting God would actually come through for you while you are praying? Yeah, I do that often. In my mind, I am thinking, "Well, at least I did my part, but due to the terrible condition of the church that I live in, it probably will not happen."

James 1:6-7 says:

*James 1:6-7*

*But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

*For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.*

My church age is not the one answering the prayer. God is, and with God, nothing is impossible.

1 John 5:14-15

*1 John 5:14-15*

*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:*

*And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

Once again, Matthew 21:22:

*Matthew 21:22*

*And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

Now, the only thing left to do is to do it earnestly and sincerely.

## V. 3.) You Must Get Clean

The third thing that I saw in Elijah's life is that when you pray in order to have an effective prayer life, you have got to get clean. I did not say you have to get cleaner. God answering my prayers and working through me is not an unconditional, all-inclusive thing that got thrown in at the time of salvation, and He will not work through you if you are not clean. The Bible says,

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." This is why we confess our sins daily for that cleansing. 1 John 1:9 cleanses from our sins and all righteousness. David back there said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," not a cleaner heart, O God.

You say, "Well, what is the difference between clean and cleaner?" Getting cleaner sometimes is taking care of the symptoms of your sin. It is not getting down to the root issue. It is like going to the dentist for a cleaning versus getting a root canal. That is what I mean by getting clean versus becoming cleaner. Aaron Crust shared an awesome song with me a couple of weeks ago, called "Nothing Between," which has become one of my favorites. That thing says:

- Nothing between my soul and the Saviour,  
Naught of this world's delusive dream;  
I have renounced all sinful pleasure;  
Jesus is mine, there's nothing between.

I love that song. That is what it is. When you get clean, it is you and God. You make sure that there is nothing between your relationship. I always say this about getting clean: when it comes to getting clean, the only person that can get you clean is you. When it comes to getting clean with God, this is not the time for intercessory prayer. This is between you and God. This is you confessing what is wrong with you and asking God to get clean. When it comes to getting clean, you also have to keep the way clear. Like that song says, you have to stay at it, go back and back to it constantly.

In the Bible, I found that when you come to that Book, there are eight hindrances to your prayer life with God. They have to do with you not being clean. There are eight things that will hinder the Holy Spirit of God working through you when it comes to prayer.

7. Over in James 4:2, the first one is prayerlessness itself. There is no way in the world that you are going to get a prayer through if you are not praying. "You have not because you ask not."
8. The second thing that will hinder your prayers when it comes to getting clean is having the wrong motive. We talked about that in James 4:3. You cannot ask and consume it upon your own lust.
9. Isaiah 59:2 says: Isaiah 59:2  
But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. Your sins. You have got to get clean.
10. Another hindrance to your prayers going forward for God is having a double mind. You ask, like I said, and you do not believe that God is going to actually do it. You cannot believe God while you are asking, and that will never help you out.
11. The fifth thing that the Bible says will hinder your prayers is if you will not forgive someone else. Matthew 6:14-15 talks about that. You ought to do unto others as you have God to do unto you. Did God forgive you for your sins? Did God forgive you for your transgressions? Brethren, we have got to do the same for others.
12. The next thing is bitterness. Colossians 3:19 and 1 Peter 3:7. It is funny because the Bible talks about husbands, "Don't be bitter against your wives." That is the thing right there. You

are supposed to love her like Christ loves the church. If you do not communicate with your wife, do not expect God to communicate with you.

13. A lack of obedience. John 15:7 and 1 John 3:22. You do not listen to God, He will not listen to you.

14. Lastly, in James 5:9, it talks about grudges.

When it comes to God working through us and accomplishing the things that He already has His mind made up on, that is what it is, guys. Prayer takes us from looking at things from our perspectives. It brings us to God's perspective. We get into the Word of God, we can see exactly what His plan is. If you cannot read, you have a chart over here on the wall. You can just look at that thing and see what His plan is. Do you have any unsaved family members, unsaved friends in your life? That is one of the things the kids and I have really been hitting on hardcore. I have taken prayer lists from each one of these kids. I want to hear about the people in their lives, the people at school that they think they have no influence on, but they want to see God do something in. We are going to pray for them. We are going to be persistent. We are going to be consistent with those things. But I told those kids, "Listen, God wants to save your friends." The Bible says He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. So then what is it? You are the pipe that the Holy Spirit of God flows through to do His work, and He is not flowing through a dirty pipe. You have got to keep yourself clean. Keep the way clear. There is nothing between.

## VI. 4.) You Must Be Persistent

Lastly here, the fourth thing is that you must be persistent. James 5:18 says:

*James 5:18*

*And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

When you go back to that story in 1 Kings, you might as well turn back there. Turn to 1 Kings chapter 18. When you look at that story, you find that when the water got shut off in Israel, Elijah only prayed one time, but in order to get that water back on again, he had to pray seven times. God is trying to teach Elijah that sometimes He will work quickly. Other times you just have got to keep at it, man. You have got to be persistent.

Look at 1 Kings 18:41-44:

*1 Kings 18:41-44*

*And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain.*

*So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees,*

*And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.*

*And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.*

I have had kids that I have been praying for for years who have not turned a leaf. While there are others that I barely even had a thought of them in prayer, and they turned it around. It is funny because once again, a couple of weeks ago, I was coming through some old journals that I had. I saw that when I first started the youth group or taking over, I had actually made a detailed list of the kids in the youth group and what I was looking forward to God doing in their lives. One kid, I will not disclose their identity, but I remember I wrote down for this person, I said, "Lord, I am not sure they realize the magnitude of what we are doing. But I pray that eventually they will help them to become aware of You and conscious of Your presence in their life. I pray You become real to them, and they begin to work for You."

Even in my neglect of prayer, it was funny because I prayed a couple of times, and it did not happen immediately, but I started praying for that person. It was funny because God just brought that back to my memory. He showed me this; I forgot about this journal. He showed it to me again. But three Sundays ago, this kid stopped me while I am heading up here to start leading song service. They started to share some of the observations that they are having on our own kids in the youth group right now. They told me about how they can relate to where they are at and that they are praying for them. Not only that, before they ended up graduating and moving on, they became one of my most dependable leaders in the youth group. It was funny, I had completely forgotten about that answered prayer that God gave me. I had completely forgotten about that being on my heart. The thing about that is that this did not happen after the first prayer, but eventually God did turn around, and they have not looked back since then. The lesson is that I have to trust that God will answer the prayer the seventh time just as sure as He did on the first time that I called. My faith in God coming through should remain the same no matter how long He has been holding out.

You guys remember that story about the unjust judge over there in Luke 18:1-9. Turn over there. Two last spots we are going to turn to.

*Luke 18:1-9*

*And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

*Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

*And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

*And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;*

*Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.*

*And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.*

*And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?*

*I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

Isn't that crazy? I have oftentimes quoted that verse, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" And I just meant in general, like Bible-believing Christians. But the context of that thing is prayer. Does anybody have faith in God to do what He said He would do when we call out to Him? That thing is all about sticking to it, your importunity, not giving up on it.

Luke 11:8, you see the same thing. Jesus Christ gives another great analogy over here. Pick it up in verse 5.

*Luke 11:5-8*

*And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;*

*For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?*

*And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.*

*I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

Importunity, sticking with it.

My question for you guys as we close today is, can God count on you to persist for someone? Can God count on you not to give up on someone? My son Brady, he has several annoying tendencies. One of them actually is that right there. Oftentimes I know he does not really want anything. When we get into the car and we start driving, the moment he says my name, I tell him, "Okay, Brady, no more talking, just be quiet for the rest of the drive." You say, "Well, that is cruel." I have got to be careful because Morgan said she is an official reporter for the state. She can turn me in. No, I am good. But I know where it is going to go. I have been in the car rides with him plenty of times. He does not really want anything. You cannot want anything at that young of an age. You do not even know that you need wants or whatever. So basically, this kid, I will be doing something, and I will just kind of ignore him several times. Next thing you know, he will just be over the room, "Daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy," literally just like this, "Daddy, daddy." By that time, I am standing right next to him, looking at him. He jumps. He does not realize I am there. He is like, "Uh," he cannot remember what he wants.

The thing about that though, it is a goofy illustration, but at the same time, God says, "Why do not My kids do Me like that?" Listen, even if you are a backsliding Christian that oftentimes would not even pay attention to, even if you are not clean, I guarantee you keep pestering Me, I am going to come over there. That is great to know, man, but who has time to continue to pester God? That is the thing. My question to you is, what have you given up on in prayer with God?

Nothing is impossible. I have a greater question than what have you given up on, but even greater, who have you given up on in prayer? Are you saved? That means someone did not give up on you. If they are alive, keep praying for them.

I have in-laws right now. They are on my heart and on my mind. I am not going to give up. I am just going to keep going. I do not care how long it takes. As long as they have breath, as long as I have breath, I am just going to keep praying and asking God to make me bold, give me those opportunities, open those doors. I am not going to stop. I was talking to Nicole Bracken earlier this week, and she was talking about some unsaved friends that they have had coming out to volleyball and to different events like that. It is funny how God just now put it upon those parents' hearts after five to six years to say, "You know what? I kind of want my kids to start hanging around George and come around these kids in the youth group." She said, "You know what? We were never really pursuing them in a specific way. I mean, we are just kind of like wondering, 'Lord, do You want us to keep this relationship going? Doesn't seem like nothing is happening.'" Then just like that. But who is willing to wait five to six years for anyone anymore in our instant society with all of our fast technology? Who have you given up on in prayer?

Folks, I just want to leave you with this: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Let us pray, guys. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for this, Lord. Thank You just for still being able to convict me of things, Lord, and making my heart tender. God, I have shut You out so often. You should have given up on me a long time ago, Lord. I just thank You for what You have done in my life here recently with prayer, God. I really hope that this is just only the beginning, Lord. I pray that I am just completely down on the foundation in a rocket, Lord, and getting ready to blast off into outer space and see all kinds of great things You are going to do through this, Lord. I almost feel like I have just now started to live my Christian life, Lord. I just really look forward to seeing what You are going to do with prayer. I pray that anybody's heart that God convicted about this, God, that You would give them a plan and help them to be consistent in prayer with You and to just make it a purpose in their life, Lord, so that they do not give up on those that You put on their hearts and that they look forward to You coming through for them, God. Today, we are getting ready to have our camp counselor prayer meeting, Lord. I pray that You would help us as we get ready to do that, God. I pray that we can start the first day of camp off today by praying for the kids that are going to be there and praying for You to accomplish what You want to this year. Lord, I just look forward to seeing what You have, Lord, and I cannot wait to rejoice about it. In Your Son, Jesus Christ, in the name of God, amen.