

Prayer as a Way of Walking in Love - a Personal Journey

by Francis Chan

Francis Chan shares his personal journey of prayer as a transformative way to experience God's love and care in everyday life.

Duration: 1:05:25

Scripture: Psalm 27:4, Isaiah 58:6, James 1:5

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Intimacy With God"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of dwelling in the presence of God, seeking His beauty, and abiding in Him as the ultimate source of strength and peace. It highlights the need to prioritize prayer and intimacy with God over performance, expectations, and pressures from others. The speaker shares personal experiences of answered prayers, moments of deep connection with God, and the power of walking in love through prayer.

Transcript

Okay, it's my job now to really make you be quiet and to gather your attention because in 60 seconds Francis Chan is going to be out here and it would be good for you to be ready to listen to him. Francis Chan was the founding pastor, is the founding pastor, is the founding founder of Cornerstone Church. For 16 years he was there and founded Eternity Bible College.

Stepped back from that ministry last April and is moving into partly an unknown and partly unknown dream of ministering and discipleship and mentoring in an urban center. Maybe he'll tell you more. Traveled with his family overseas to be exposed to God's work in the lives of people in other places.

He's now in San Francisco. And most of you perhaps know him in large measure because of the book Crazy Love which has been, of course, crazy successful and which probably has made him crazy frightened because success of that nature is a dangerous thing. He's married to Lisa and has four children and you can pray about an adoption that's in the offing.

I'm sure he would appreciate. And the reason he's here is because, at least from my side, it's because last fall at our Desiring God National Conference in his talk which may be one of the most listened to, watched talks Desiring God has ever put up, he alluded to and gave some expression of his own personal prayer,

walk, meaning walking daily in a helpless cry to God. And I just gave an experience or two and I wrote him and I said, do you just want to flesh that out for us? Want to finish that talk? And so whatever he wants to do with that will be okay with me as long as God is in it and I'm sure he will be.

So welcome, Francis Chan, to speak to us. Thank you, John. Have a good talk.

Thank you. Pastor John gave me the topic of prayer as a way of walking in love, a personal journey. And I love that topic, prayer as a way of walking in love.

I love it because prayer rivals, I want to be careful how I say this, in my life prayer has even rivaled the scriptures in stirring my affections toward God, the way God answers my prayers. You know, as a kid I sang that song, Jesus loves me, this I know, because the Bible tells me so, and still absolutely does that happen. Yeah, there are days I'll read something and I'll just go, God, I can't believe that.

You like me that much? You love me that much? Are you kidding me? And I'll get that. I know Jesus loves me because the Bible tells me so. But I've got to say, at this point in my life, I could also sing Jesus loves me because the way he answers my prayers, it shows me so.

I've seen it. There's so many times when I'll just break down and cry. I mean, just five minutes ago, I'm just back there, I'm getting ready to talk to you guys.

I'm going, God, is there any way I can communicate what we've had for these 40 years that I've been alive? I feel like ever since I was a kid, the way you listen to me, the way you hear me, it's unreal. I love you so much, and I just want these guys, I want anyone who doesn't experience that or know that, I want them to have that. But how can I share this personal journey? How can I share everything that God and I have been through together for all of these years? I mean, there are times I really question and I look, I go, God, do you love everyone this much? I mean, the way you answer my prayers, this is unbelievable.

I love you, I love you, I love you. I don't know what more you could do to show me your love. I see it in the Scriptures, but I've also seen it in the way you answer my prayers.

I mean, silly things, little things, the tiny things. You know, times when my wife and I will just look at each other and we'll just start crying because we're going, God, how can you care about even that? I understand the big things. I understand the spiritual things, but sometimes even little silly things.

I remember one time just driving and just talking to the Lord, just silently in my mind, I'm going, God, I'm struggling with something right now. I go, there's no answer to it. I'm just telling you my struggle.

I said, every time we have money in the bank, I want to just give it to someone who's in greater need than we are, and I go, I'm struggling because I kind of want to take my family on vacation. But every time I think about that, I think, I can't spend it on a vacation. You know, there are people who are in need.

I've got to give it to them. And I told God, God, I'm not complaining. I'm not even asking for anything.

You just tell me to tell you my desires. That's just what I'm feeling right now. A few days later, my wife calls me.

I'm in the office, and she just says, hey, honey, we've got this weird check in the mail. And I go, really? Why? She goes, it's a cashier's check. A cashier's check has been sent to us for \$2,000.

I'm like, really? That's a lot of money, \$2,000. You don't know who it came from? I go, there's no letter with it? There's no explanation? She goes, yeah, there's a sticky note. And it's taped to it, and it just says, Francis, spend this on your family.

And I go, honey, you know, I'm in my office, just beside myself. I go, honey, you don't even know what I prayed a few days ago. I go, honey, I just prayed.

I go, God, there's no answer to this one, because there was no physical answer. Like, no, no, if you give me money, I'm going to spend it on someone else. But no, God said, no, I'm going to give you a check, and you'll feel guilty if you don't spend it on your family, because that's what this note will say.

And I just go, honey, why does He even care about that? Just the little things, the silly things. I shared at the Desiring God conference about the time I was just bothered, because I was playing golf with my friends, and they were out driving me, because they all got new drivers, those big ones. And I hated that.

I had this little tiny thing, and even my friends that were terrible were out driving me. And I thought, I'm going to buy a driver. I've got to buy one.

I've got to save up money. I've got to ask for it for Christmas. I can't do that.

No, Lord, that's a waste. Not that if you did that, that was wrong of you. But, you know, I was just like, Lord, I don't feel good about that.

You know, oh, man. But, oh, well. The next morning, I'm speaking at a church, this little church plant, and they said, you know, we heard that a lot of times you won't take an honorarium, you know, if it's a little church.

I mean, I'll take one from this. But, you know, and... But, so... He said, so this is what the guy says. He goes, so we didn't get you an honorarium.

We bought you this driver. The very next morning, I mean, I'm driving home. I still remember that ride home, just laughing.

Just laughing. Like, God, this is silliness. This is ridiculous.

You don't get a driver for an honorarium the day after. The day after you just struggled with all of these thoughts. I mean, it's just everything in our lives just is crazy, supernatural.

I don't know. I mean, my life just does not make any sense. And even a few years ago, my wife looked at me, she goes, honey, you know, I love my life.

She goes, I love being married to you. I love the simplicity of our lives. She goes, I'm happy living off of whatever God gives us.

You know, I'm happy to live humbly. I'm happy to have nothing. She goes, the one thing I always wished, though, she goes, I always wished we were generous.

I always wished we could be generous. Ever since I was a kid, I thought, gosh, I would love to be the person that could just write checks. You know, like, oh, you're neat.

Here, let me write you something. I go, oh, that's awesome, honey, but that'll never be us. But that's a great desire.

But that's going to be for other people. I'm a pastor. And this is the way we're going to live.

It's just awesome that you think that way. And then even a couple years ago, I prayed, and I was praying for the wealthy. And I said, Lord, you know, I have a lot of wealthy people in the church.

I have wealthy friends. And God, I pray that somehow, like, I see them give, but I think, man, they got a lot. And, you know, they're 10%.

I don't know, just in my mind, I go, God, could you just raise up some new wealthy people? You know, people that really don't care about their stuff. You know, I mean, it's like it's one thing to have a little and say, I'll give it all to the Lord. But God, raise up people who have a lot and go, I really don't care, I just love Jesus.

And so the stuff here, just have it all. And God, I said, God, and if you're not going to do that, make me rich. Make me rich, seriously.

You know, make my friends rich that don't care about stuff. Having no clue what God was going to do. As Pastor John said, yeah, crazy love has been crazy successful.

And I had no idea, no desire to make money off of it. And so even said, you know what, I don't even want to touch the money. If it comes in, it goes straight into a charitable gift fund.

And I don't want that temptation in my life. And so if it comes in, then I can write checks to charities, but I can't touch it myself. And just last year, we made about \$2 million off the thing.

And I'm just looking at my wife going, are you kidding me? This is what you always wanted to do, wasn't it? Just to be able to write checks. Oh, you're in need here. This ministry is in need here.

I go, God, this is ridiculous. My life is ridiculous. The way you answer these prayers.

God, my life makes no sense. I'm coming on the stage. I'm just thinking through my childhood.

I'm thinking about everything in my life. And I go, none of this makes sense. Why am I walking on this stage? Why are people listening to me? Why don't you just shower me with all of this stuff and all of these opportunities and just your presence, the way you answer my prayers.

And so prayer is a way of walking in love. Man, I love God so much more because of these prayers. Answered prayers.

Some prayers He didn't answer. Like Joel said last night, how God will give us exactly what we pray for or exactly what we should have prayed for at the times when we pray the wrong thing. In fact, my wife, we recently moved to San Francisco and so we pack everything up and we're cleaning up these boxes and she finds this old journal of mine from when I was in high school and she's bursting in laughter in the other room.

It was a prayer journal. My youth pastor taught me just write down your prayers on one side and then write down when he answers them. And then you have something to look back on and go, no way, because

you'll forget.

You just forget. I'm just throwing out a few things I remember but you just do forget. But my wife was just laughing hysterically.

She even calls my oldest daughter, come in here, look at what Dad prayed when he was your age. I am kind of embarrassed to even share what some of that was. But we do.

We thank God, right? We thank God he didn't answer some of those prayers. Or a lot of us would have married Farrah Fawcett. We just... It's... It's that growing though as a child.

Like, oh, okay, that's not really what you asked for. You know, different things. But isn't... When you look at Scripture, isn't prayer the thing that differentiates us from the rest of the world, right? Our God listens to us, right? Wasn't that the story of Elijah where he could just mock the prophets of Baal? Go ahead, cut yourselves, scream out.

No one's listening. No one answers. Now watch what happens when I pray.

Let me show you what happens when I pray. It's always so... Look, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, he's the one that listens. He's the living God.

He's not a block of wood that you made up that's not going to answer you. My God answers me. He listens to me.

I was telling you about that prayer journal, but actually my very first prayer was for this... I told the Lord I was going to start going to church early. I was like 15 years old. I go, there's a park across the street.

I just want to tell these people about Jesus. And so let me share with some people as I go out there and play basketball and just hang out with them. And then I wrote down, I met this guy named Squeaky.

That's the name he went by. I'm praying for Squeaky. Save him, Lord.

Save him, Lord. Use me. And then I look in the answered prayer and on the answered prayer it talks about how, yeah, weird thing.

I was walking up to the youth group today and I heard a bunch of screaming and swearing downstairs. So I look over the edge and there's Squeaky and he's surrounded by these guys and they're about to get into this big old gang fight thing. And I go running down the stairs and I just, you know, just this kid going, Squeaky, what are you doing, man? This guy said this about my brother.

I'm going to tear him up. And all these people around me, I'm like, let's just leave all of this. Forget all this.

Come upstairs with me. We're having a Bible study. We're having a youth group.

Let's go. And he literally does. He walks up the steps with me, goes to this Bible study, youth pastor speaking, gives his life to the Lord, and I just write that down on my prayer list.

Just thinking through the prayers as I prayed for people in ministry. I remember one time just praying for this gal because I was leading a college ministry and we had this gathering on a Friday night and there was this one gal that wasn't there and I just thought, oh man, I think she's drifting away from you, God. And I just remember leaving the gathering and just walking around the block to pray for her.

I go, God, you know, I just lift her up to you. I lift up Jen to you right now. Would you just get her attention somehow right now? Right now, God.

Right now, get her attention because I want her to love you. I get a phone call the next morning. Jen's in the hospital.

She goes, Francis, you'll never guess what happened. She goes, I've been praying all night. She goes, I was driving.

I was driving last night, you know, and suddenly my gas pedal got stuck. I don't know why. It just, the accelerator got stuck and I ended up running into a house, into the living room of a house.

And I lived, but all night I kept thinking, God, man, I heard these messages and I just don't know if I had died. I don't know if I would have gone to heaven. I never really followed you as the Lord of my life.

She goes, I was so scared. I've just been praying all night, all night, all night. I don't even know what happened.

How could my gas pedal get stuck? I go, Jen, um, man, I prayed for you last night right then. She goes, well, it worked. She goes, all I've been doing is praying all night long here in the hospital bed.

I go, man, that's awesome. Then her mom called me and yelled at me. She got so mad.

How do you pray that? And I was just learning my theology. I go, I don't think he would do it unless it was right. I mean, you know, he's sovereign, he's in control.

But it was that same thing you were talking about last night. It's almost like, wow, this is a serious power we have here. A serious, serious power here.

I mean, I remember being in Colorado and I had to rent a car. I was at a friend's house. So I'm looking through the phone book and I don't know if it was Enterprise or someone, did they send a guy out? And I said, oh, great, could you send him over to my house? I put the phone down.

I said, Lord, I just got on my knees. I go, I don't know who this guy is coming to pick me up, to take me to the car lot. Would you just amaze him with your grace? Would you just show him your power? Would you just give me an opportunity to tell him how great you are? Comes, picks me up at this house.

No exaggeration. I would say within one minute this man was bawling his eyes out. Just weeping.

Just looked at him and said, how are you doing? He just started crying and telling him about his life falling apart. I go, let's sit down, let's forget about the car. Ended up going to coffee the next day.

Hanging out with him. Talking about a relationship with God. Took him to a church service the very next day.

Just some local church that I found out there. I said, God, see, this is the stuff that's got to happen. I remember cleaning out my garage one day and going, Lord, this is not eternal.

There's nothing eternal about cleaning my garage. I hate that. I'm going to be spending like two hours doing something that has no eternal value.

But I feel like I've got to do it otherwise I'm a bad testimony or something. I've just got to. But I want to do something eternal.

I don't want to just sweep and clean and move boxes. As I'm doing it, my neighbor across the street comes over with tears in his eyes. Just going, God, I've been wanting to talk to you for so long.

He just says, will you pray for me? I'm going, God, this is ridiculous. This is ridiculous. This is a ministry opportunity.

Everything I ask for. Can I be a part of something that you're doing? Maybe the craziest one. There's all so many.

But there's this one time. You ever dream about someone and you have a bad dream? Like you got in a fight with them and then you see them in the morning and you're angry with them and you're not even sure why. And then it occurs to you.

It happened to me at my church one time with one of my staff. I saw him one morning walk by the office and I just had these negative feelings toward him. And I was like, Lord, what was that? Why am I bothered? What happened yesterday? What did we do? Then I realized it was just a dream.

So I go over to him. I go, wow, weirdest thing just happened. When you walk by my office I was totally angry at you.

And I'm thinking, God, why? Why am I angry at him? And I realize I had a dream about you last night. I dreamt that you were a homosexual and that you were arguing for it and you were fighting against me and you were trying to persuade people to go that direction. I mean, is that the stupidest thing? And so when I saw your face I was just mad.

I was so weird. And he just walks away. He comes back the next week and he goes, remember that dream you had? That was from God.

I said, what do you mean? I said, no. He goes, Francis, you scared me so bad when you said those words to me. I knew at that moment.

Okay, God, you're trying to say something to me. He says, you had no clue. I had no clue whatsoever.

It would be like me coming up to any one of you. I mean, it was the farthest thing from truth. That's why I could joke about it and bring it before you.

And he goes, that is the struggle of my life and I feel like I'm going to head the other direction. And I was just about to enter into this. He goes, that was a prophecy.

And I remember just walking. Just stunned by what he said in the office and going home and just looking at my wife going, honey, you'll never believe what just happened. You know those moments where you just go, God, I thought, I know, I know you're a powerful God, but every time I experience that answer of prayer, it just makes me in awe of you again.

And I just go, God, what is, why do I do anything other than pray? You know? Just in awe going, God, what are you doing? These supernatural things. Then after a while I'm like, you know, because my wife is stunned, I'm stunned. And then I go, gosh, what is that verse? It says the old men will dream dreams, the

young men will have visions.

I go, wait, which one is it? Is it the old men that have visions? Was that a dream or a vision then? You know? We got all off track. But it's still, it's just this, see, when I share with someone, every time I share with someone, you know, a stranger on the plane or whatever, I say to God, I go, God, the only thing that's going to differentiate me from the Jehovah's Witness or the Mormon or the Unitarian or the Muslim or whoever it is, is this time right now. Man, I've got to pray, you've got to do something, otherwise I'm going to sound like some religious freak, some fanatic, some cult leader.

Like, you've got to make it known to them that my God is you, are the real God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Peter, Paul, Jesus, that Jesus is Lord. Somehow you've got to do that in their lives. And so I depend on this.

Every time I talk, I go, God, you've got to speak to them, or they're going to walk away and go, sounds like that guy or that guy or that guy. No, God, when I speak, there better be a power. It's not my job to convince them.

I can't change their heart. It's like going to a cemetery and say, come on, get up, get up, get up. It's just pointless.

No speech is going to do that. God, you have to do something. You've got to show them your power.

You know, as I present the gospel to them, there needs to be a power in that, where they hear that message and go, wow, that's like nothing I've ever heard. I mean, think about this. When unbelievers come to your service, picture someone, try to put yourself in the shoes of an unbeliever who's maybe seeking or something, and he comes to one of your services.

What's he looking for? What do you think he wants to see up there on the stage? Does he want to see a polished speech maybe? That's helpful. A brainiac that can just show them that you're more intelligent than him. A comedian to show them, look, I've got a great personality.

What does that person want to see? Don't they want to walk in and hear a guy and go, man, that person's connected to God. He has something I don't have. It's like God listens to him.

God doesn't listen to me like that. There's something about that guy. I can't explain it, but he had a connection with God, and I want that.

He knows this God that I don't know. I know there's something there, but man, when I heard that guy speak, I was convinced he knows this God, and I want that. Isn't that what they're after? When they hear you teaching up there, is that what they see? Is there this jealousy of, oh man, see, that guy, I want what he has.

I've been attending different services on Sunday mornings, or just throughout the week, just going to different churches, different services, and sometimes I sit there and just try to imagine myself as an unbeliever. I try to think, if I was searching for God, would I find him here? What would be my impression here? When I look up there and go, oh my gosh, that guy, that guy knows him. I've got to get with him.

These people here in this room, they know this God. They have something that I don't have. And I understand the gospel is powerful, and God could use an unbeliever to preach the gospel, because

there's power in the gospel itself.

I understand that, and I understand God is a sovereign God, and he is going to draw people to himself. But I also see in Scripture we have a responsibility, and it's not even necessarily just a responsibility. Isn't it a desire? I mean, don't you want to be that guy? Right? Don't you want to be that guy? Don't you want to be that guy that people go, wow, you've got a connection with him.

Your God listens to you. He doesn't listen to me like that. Do you still believe? That was the final point of Joel's message last night.

Are you still believing that God answers prayer? And I love the childlike faith that Paul was talking about. Is that still you? How many of you guys grew up in church, grew up going to Sunday school, church? Wow. Wow.

Okay, when you were a kid in Sunday school, what was your favorite story? Jonah. Okay? That's because it was every other week. But what else? What other... You've got to get to cut out the whale.

What else? What were some of the... Try to think back. David and Goliath, right? What else? Mount Carmel. Elijah.

I know, I love that one. What else? Daniel in the lion's den. Yeah, you can still see the pictures on the felt.

What else? What else? Jericho. Yeah, yeah, yeah, marching around, blowing the trumpets. What else? The exodus.

Fiery furnace. David's mighty man. Yeah, just killing everyone.

Okay, but think about this. Don't you remember, man, as kids, remember when you would walk out of Sunday school and it was like, my God, could do anything. And we were just so amazed by the power.

We see it in our kids now, right? When they walk out of church, they're going, yeah, my God can do anything. And you just love hearing that. And somehow it changes.

Somehow, I don't know, there's this weirdness that sometimes I felt awkward preaching some of those Old Testament passages and stories as though it was too childish. That's what we did when we were kids. And we used to walk around as kids amazed by these stories.

Amazed by the miracles of this almighty God. But then as we get older, we're no longer amazed by those stories. We're amazed when someone up front says, hapax legomena.

Whoa, did you hear that? Did you hear it? The way he parsed it. It changes. And we're amazed by intellect.

We're amazed by a communication style. We're amazed by these different things. And it's like, what happened to those days when we were just stunned by God Himself? Like, man, God.

Maybe we need to start preaching David and Goliath more often. Maybe we do have to preach Jonah every other week. Maybe we've got to get back to Sadrach, Mesach, and Abednego.

And just look at our people and go, man, our God is a mighty God. It's always been about this. It's always about Him answering our prayers and how that's real today.

And to give everyday illustrations. Go, man, that's still my God. That's still my God.

My God can do anything. That childlike faith to believe like children. Do you still believe? I mean, we know, right? James 1 says you doubt.

That's why you don't receive it. You're not going to receive anything. You're a double-minded man, unstable in all that you do.

If we lost the faith in our God that can do anything. You know, James 5 was mentioned last night, too. That's my favorite verse, is James 5.17. I never really even knew.

Never even understood it, but it was my favorite. You know, I didn't realize that. I never saw that, the praying, the way you mentioned it.

I can't even explain it now, but that idea, I just always loved that thought that Elijah was a man just like us. Elijah was a man with a nature just like us. See, as a kid, I lifted up David.

I lifted up Elijah. I lifted up Moses as these superheroes. And that's why I fell in love with that verse.

I go, wait, he's a man just like me. I love that. That means Elijah has nothing on me.

I'm going to pray like that. See, I believe if Elijah were in this room, some of you would just be in awe. You know, you're the prophet Elijah.

And for me to say, well, big deal. I'm Francis Chan. You know? He's just a man.

I'm just a man. We've got the exact same nature. But the way he prayed, he had this fervency about it.

And I could pray like that. I've got a nature just like his. You could pray like that.

Let's quit putting these guys up on a pedestal. That's why that verse is there. He prayed fervently.

That's why it didn't rain. I had a friend call me in tears one time because he prayed for rain in Southern California in the middle of August and it rained. And he's on the phone.

I didn't know what was wrong with him. He couldn't even talk. Amazed by the grace of God.

He goes, you never believe what I prayed last night. Because of this fire and everything that's going on. He goes, I've got to tell you the whole story later.

I just can't even believe it. The water that's hitting my windshield. It's not in the forecast.

This isn't supposed to happen. Why did he hear this? I'm just amazed. Wow, even now? He's just a man just like us.

Do you believe that? Honestly, you've got to really look in your soul and go, do I really believe that I could pray and if need be, if I were in that situation, I could just call down fire from heaven. Could I have that type of confidence, God? That if David was here, it's like no big deal. He's just a man with a nature just like mine.

In fact, I could maybe even argue that I have one up on him with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I mean, what would we say? We believe, you know, that whoever believes in him will have eternal life? But do we

also believe that when he says, you know, whoever believes in me will do the things that I do and even greater things than these? Because it comes back down to that belief. I mean, is it still there when you pray? I mean, there are times now when I'll pray for someone who's sick and I'm just blown away because I go, God, I don't get it.

Why didn't you heal them? Wait, how come you didn't hear that one? I think I confessed everything. I think he confessed everything. I think we're now, I'm just so, I'm getting more and more just used to him answering prayer than when something doesn't get answered.

I go, God, it's really weird. I'm going to really have to think about that one, Lord. Do you believe? Believe in the prayers.

I mean, it's true. The Bible says there are times when, you know, maybe it's doubt. Other times, you know, like James 4, you know, that was mentioned earlier today, how maybe I'm praying with the wrong motives and it's, there's a selfishness there.

I'm praying in the wrong way. You know, maybe it's a 1 Peter 3 thing that I'm not honoring my wife as a fellow heir of the grace of life so that my prayers may not be hindered. And I go, gosh, have I been treating Lisa okay? You know, I'll call her, hey, I love you.

You know, let me go pray again. Let me, let me, I want to, I want to think these things through, but I want to point something out to you. I know you're familiar with Isaiah 58, where God, you know, because the Bible says sometimes your prayer and fasting is a waste of time, right? He just said, I'm not listening to that.

Your motives are wrong, whatever else, you're not treating your wife the right way, you're doubting. Isaiah 58, it's like you're not caring for the poor. You know, you have there in Isaiah 58 verse 5, is such the fast that I chose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house when you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up speedily.

Your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. I love verse 9. This is what I want to point out.

Then you shall call and the Lord will answer. You shall cry and he will say, Here I am. There were people who were pleading with God for certain things, but because of their disregard for his commands, to have this concern for the poor, God says, I'm not even listening to that.

In fact, you're oppressing the poor. Of course I'm not going to listen to you. But then he says, you know, when you start doing these things, it's like he says, Here I am.

Here I am. It's like this quick response. And I look at this passage and I got to say, there are times when I marvel at the Lord because I say, God, I don't pray as hard as some people.

I know people that will spend hours in prayer and God, I almost feel bad, but it's like I'll just throw something up there or I'll just say something in passing or sometimes I don't even have to pray it. And you

just answer. You just do and I feel spoiled.

And then I look at this passage and I look back and I go, wow, it is the times when it's like when we just pour ourselves out and just obedience and go, gosh, I see this in your word. I'm going to go after this. And God says, gosh, when I see you doing that, you just say the word and I'll say, here I am.

What did you want? You just cry out to me. I'll take care of it. It's very similar to John 15 verse 5 when he says I am the vine, you are the branches.

If a man abides in me, he will bear much fruit. You just abide in me and you're going to bear a bunch of fruit. Verse 7 when he says if you abide in me, I abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.

Again, it's this idea that it's not necessarily because I'm the one that prayed the hardest, it's because when you're abiding in Jesus, when you're just pouring yourself out for the poor, there's just this sense in which what do you need? What do you want? Because you're abiding in me. My words abide in you. And as a pastor, I will have to say that this has probably been my biggest failure.

Times when I get so busy in ministry and those times when a million thoughts come into your mind at once and you have so many good ideas of what you can do for the Lord that immediately your prayer life goes to, okay, God, do this. God, do this. God, do this.

God, do this. Okay, bless this. Bless this.

Bless this. Bless this. Rather than that relationship that's just abiding in him.

Rather than me just pursuing God himself, I'm pursuing these things and these actions. And Jesus says, just abide in me. You want to bear a lot of fruit? Just abide in me.

It takes faith, though, huh? It takes faith to say, I'm just going to sit here. I'm just going to abide in God. And so many of my prayers, 90% at times, are just, God, do this.

Do this. Do this. Of course, for your glory.

But do this. Do this. Do this.

And I neglect the most important thing, which is prayer as a way of walking in love and just communing with my God and just being with him and abiding with him and just saying, God, you're so good. Look at everything you do for me. Look at my life.

Look at who you are. You're wonderful. You're wonderful.

You couldn't pay me enough to stop speaking to you. You know, as we learned last night. No amount of money.

I just, I love just being close to you. My guess is many of you guys struggle. So focused on the work of God that you neglect the person of God.

So much pressure. So much criticism. And there's periods we forget that, you know, in this pursuit of all of this fruit, we forget that if I would abide in him, it's a guarantee there.

I'm going to bear much fruit. But it takes faith. Because it does feel, like it was mentioned earlier, like I'm doing nothing when I just pray.

And yet, look at your ministry. Look at your life. The greatest things that have happened, did you really plan those out? Was that your strategic planning? And those hours and hours of planning that you put into it, or were they just something fell in your lap, right? And you just go, well, I couldn't have done that.

But then you'll write a book about it and pretend you came up with it. But the truth is, gosh, Lord, I didn't know what I was doing. I was just abiding in you, trying to be faithful.

Look what you did. Supernatural. Aren't the greatest things in your life unplanned by you? And the greatest things in your ministry were unplanned by you? Just abide in Him.

I've been camping out on this one verse the last couple of weeks. Psalm 27, verse 4. One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. Does someone have a Kleenex? I'm sorry.

I'm getting too emotional up here. Thank you. Turn my mic off for a second.

All right. Good. Psalm 27, verse 4. One thing have I asked of the Lord.

What's the one thing you keep asking of the Lord? If I could read a translation or a transcript of your prayers for the last few weeks, what would I see as the one thing that you just keep asking for? Would it be, God, just let me dwell in the house of your Lord all the days of my life. Let me just gaze upon your beauty and inquire in your temple. Let me just meditate in your temple.

Let me just gaze upon your beauty. God, it's you. Is that what your transcripts would say to me? I love the quote.

I forgot who you quoted last night, Joel, but when you said you want to humble a man, ask him about his prayer life. You know, let's look at these transcripts. What have you been praying the last few weeks? One thing.

One thing have I asked of the Lord that will I seek after. The last couple of weeks I've been saying, okay, let me just try this for a week. Can I do this? Can I just pray for this one thing? Can I just desire this being in your presence, this gazing upon your beauty? God, can you just let me see how beautiful you are today? Can you show me more of your beauty? I just want to stare at your beauty.

I just want to brag about your beauty. I just want to sit here and adore you for your beauty. That's all I really want.

That's the one thing I asked for that I will seek after. I'm just going to ask for it. I'm going to pursue this.

I'm going to go after this. Here's this one thing. It's just that I would dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

And when you look at this verse in context, it's in the context of danger. It's in the context of a man living a crazy life at that moment. And this is his one request.

See, the enemy wants us to get afraid. He wants us to start looking at all the things around us and all the things that might scare us and all the things we have to do to take away our peace. He wants us anxious about the future because I believe one reason is because in Philippians 1 verse 28 he says not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God. He says when we're not frightened in anything by our opponents, this is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation and that from God. See, when we can walk around striving side by side for the gospel unafraid, just not frightened by anything, he says then out there they're going to know wow, you really are saved and I really am going to be destroyed.

So if Satan can get us fearful, anxious, worried about the things around us, guess what? It's not much of a testimony to anyone. That's why I want you guys, we'll strive side by side together for this gospel and I don't want you to be afraid of anything. That's the context of Psalm 27.

That's the context is verse 1, the Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? He says he's my stronghold and I've got to ask you, is he the stronghold of your life? Is that where all your confidence is, is you can look back in your life and go God, you've always been there for me. You've taken me through so many ridiculous situations, there's nothing I have to be afraid of because I found that at other times maybe my staff becomes my stronghold.

Okay, we can pull this off because I've got a strong staff. We can pull this off, we had a good offering. We've got a good budget and other things become our stronghold or oh man, I'm feeling weak right now but I've got a day off coming up.

There's my stronghold. Or you know what, I'm going to have a vacation showing up in a couple of weeks, I'm going to go to Hawaii and everything and these things become our stronghold rather than God himself. Or maybe it's even this conference.

It's like okay, I'm getting worn down but Desiring God's coming up. Man, and I do have, and I want to be careful on how I say this but I get concerned that sometimes maybe maybe you come here not really desiring God but desiring Desiring God. It's a danger.

Or maybe you're Desiring Piper. I mean if I told you, wow, you know what, you could have lunch with him today. You'd be like, really? No way.

It would just be this I mean honest, I mean I used to be that way. Now I've had lunch with him, it's really not that great. It just it's fine but it just it's this but I've been in those situations where I'll get reliant and my stronghold will be in other things and my excitement will be in other things and they're good things, they're fine things.

I mean I enjoy the fellowship, I enjoy people praying for me. I get encouraged by these things. I get encouraged by the messages I've heard.

Because nothing compares to like when you're alone with God and you just bare your soul to him and you just enjoy being in his presence and you just say to him, I don't want to leave here. I just want to be here. And there's a fearlessness when you look back in life and go, God, you took me through that.

What am I going to be afraid of? You're my light, you're my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord's a stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? I love verse 2. He says, When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who will stumble and fall.

He goes, people who try to tear me up, they're the ones that are going to get torn up. It's a great thought. He just goes, you know what, it's kind of that go-ahead-make-my-day type of attitude.

You're going to come against me? Go ahead, come against me. But it's going to be ridiculous because my God's protecting me. He can't do anything to me.

He's my God. He's always taken care of me. And even when it gets worse, verse 3, though an army encamp around me, my heart shall not fear.

Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident. It's in that context that he says, One thing I've asked of the Lord. Why? Because of the one thing he's asking of the Lord.

Just that I could be in His presence. That I would just dwell in His house because there's safety there. As I'm just gazing upon Him, He's not going to let anything happen to me.

I'm in the house of the Lord. I'm in His presence. You're going to try to attack me while I'm communing with the Lord? Are you crazy? You know, get me apart from Him.

Yeah, then attack me. But really, you're going to try to attack me as I'm communing with the Lord right now. You're ridiculous.

You're going to come up against us. And that's why he says, Lord, just let me dwell with You. It's simplistic, isn't it? He just says, God, I just need to be with You and everything will be fine.

It's simplistic, but do you see the obviousness in it? Like, well, of course. If I believe that there is only one sovereign being, like right now, I believe in existence on this planet, there's one being who is in charge of everything, everything, the only ruler, the only sovereign, then isn't it obvious that as long as I am close with Him, abiding in Him, that's all I really need to do. The fruit will come.

The protection will come. Everything else will happen. It's obvious.

But it takes a faith, doesn't it? Okay, let me just get close to Him. Let me just get close to Him. See, we believe in His sovereignty.

I love that circle drawing you did. I mean, we would say we believe in the sovereignty of God. This is the Desiring God Pastors Conference, right? We believe in the sovereignty of God.

We believe in one being who's in control of everything. The question is, is how does that flesh out in your life? Does it give you a peace that surpasses all comprehension? Because you go, you know what? So come against me. My God is sovereign.

Does it flesh out? I mean, that's so sad to see that 90% doesn't flesh out to that point where you go, okay, I believe in the sovereignty of God. Okay, but what does that look like in your life? Does that mean that you have this peace that surpasses comprehension? And people go, man, I want to have what you have. You're so sure just because of God, that's it? Doesn't seem like you've got anything else going for you.

And you go, man, that's all I need. I mean, I've seen what my God's done in my life. And so, you know what? I'm just going to sit here.

I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. You ever have those moments when you just don't want to leave? You have that intimate time with God. Just a couple of days ago, I'm sitting, and it doesn't have to be at the beach or on a mountaintop or anywhere else.

The other day, I was alone at IHOP. Just having pancakes. Just there with my Bible.

Just studying, reading, and praying. And I just didn't... I was there for probably two hours. I'm just going, God, I don't want to go anywhere else.

I know they need this table. Can't eat any more pancakes. That's all you can eat, too.

But that's not why I stayed. I just had one helping. But you know those moments where you go, God, I don't want to leave this spot.

I'm having these impulses. I'm enjoying this time with you. I love your word.

I just want to stay here. So I look at this verse. I go, yeah, that's what he's talking about.

I just want to dwell in your house, Lord. I just want to sit here and gaze upon your beauty. That's what I meant by the time the word of God just stirs my affections.

You just go, wow, God, you're so beautiful. You're so wonderful. How could I love anything else? Why do I long for these other things? I have those moments.

Moments where I remember one time just a couple months ago where I'm praying in the middle of the night and I'm thinking about 1 Timothy 6 where it talks about how God is the only sovereign as we talked about and the only immortal and how every breath comes from him. I couldn't sleep so I just started breathing and going. I started breathing.

That always helps me sleep. I started counting my breaths with every breath. I go, God, thank you for that one.

Wow, there's a being in heaven that gave me that. God, you gave me that. That wouldn't have happened without you.

God, thank you. You're in total control. God, you gave me that one too.

I just started thinking and just realizing how in the grasp of someone's grasp my life is and just thanking him. I started thinking, and you love me and you're the one that answers my prayers. I started looking at life and I go, wow, we're in love with each other.

I'm in love with God. I'm in love with God. I felt those giddy feelings I used to feel when I first met my wife.

When you first feel in love and you can't even sleep because you're beside yourself. I can't believe this person loves me and I start feeling that toward God. I go, God, this is wonderful.

I want to be giddy the rest of my life. I want to just gaze upon you and just go, I'm in love with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is in love with me right now.

I mean, the God of the universe. Isn't it just the most amazing thing when he answers prayer and you just think, I just spoke to God. God just listened to me and he answered me.

Is there anything better than that on this earth? I mean, what's better than that? Like I, this little human, this little screw up, this one that doesn't even pray as hard as the other guys, this one that doesn't know as much theology as some of these guys. I'm trying everything else but I fail and I fail and I fail but then, God, you heard me, you listened to me, you love me. So the one thing I ask, you guys, there's so much pressure to perform.

As many of you know, as Pastor John mentioned, I really believed the Lord was wanting me to move on from my ministry in Simi Valley last May. I really believed he wanted me to go to another city and just start another work and let the elders who were there take the church. Godly, godly men.

I thought, you know what, this could even cause people to focus more on God than Francis. And so this could be good for the church, it could be good for whatever new work the Lord is leading me into. Three weeks ago I moved to San Francisco, believing that's where the Lord wanted me.

And everyone has been asking, so what are you doing there? What ministry are you doing there? What's next for Francis Chan? Not one person has asked about my prayer life. Not one. And I have a I have a guess of why I think people assume.

Of course you pray. It would be silly to ask that. Of course, I don't need to ask.

Of course, you're not going to start a ministry without walking the streets and praying and begging God to direct you and lead you. So I don't need to ask that. So then suddenly, because all the questions are like, what are you doing? Did you do this yet? Did you do that? You got a church? You got a building? You got this? You got that? And then suddenly you start feeling this pressure.

Oh man, three weeks, I better have a building. I better have a pretty serious ministry going on because everyone's expecting this. I guess I wish more people would just go, I hope you haven't started anything yet without seriously praying.

But I don't think that's a I think a lot of it is because they assume that I am. And people may feel silly asking the author of Crazy Love whether he prays and seeks God and is still seeking God. But I know better than to assume of people.

We've done that, right? Of congregation members that we just assumed they're doing fine. And then you're shocked, aren't you? You've assumed it of staff people. You've assumed it of elders.

And in hindsight, you go, why did I not probe? Why did I not get into his life deeper and really ask these questions? Why did I not share my own struggles and say, come on, let's do this. And so, this morning I assume nothing of you. I know.

This is the Desiring God Pastors Conference. I don't assume you're walking with the Lord. I don't assume that you know of this love that I'm talking about.

In fact, I'm just praying back there going, God, please, I want them to know how good it is to walk with you. That they don't find their strength in being a part of a conference, a denomination, having the right theology. That their boast would be in knowing you, understanding you.

Their boast that they would just be dwelling in your house, gazing upon your beauty, meditating in your temple. So are you about Him? And do people see that in you? That you're a man or a woman who just can't get enough of God? Or have all the expectations, the criticisms, all those pressures that I feel like we're a broken record, saying it over and over again. We've got all those things coming around us and they're there to distract us and get us afraid, get us discouraged.

And we think the answer is working harder and faster and hiring the right people and everything else. And it takes so much faith to just dwell in the house of the Lord. Just to abide in Him.

Just to walk in love and say, Jesus, I'm just going to abide in you and pour myself out for those who are in need and fruit, everything else. You're going to have to take care of that. And to trust that and to believe in that.

And I'm just praying that you get there because that's what people want to see when they come to your church. They don't care how slick your message is. They don't care how intelligent you are.

Maybe some of them a little bit here or there. Bottom line, people want to walk in and they want to see a man of God that's connected. Wouldn't you love to talk to Elijah? Wouldn't that be cool? Just to say, how are you so confident? You just knew.

You knew the whole time? Don't you always just want to talk to him? Don't you want to talk to Moses and go, man, okay, tell me, what was that like on that mountain? You've got to be kidding me! See, we want people to react that way to us. Help me understand something. You talk to God and He just does these things.

Yeah, let me help you. Let me help you with my journey. I want to be one of those men.

Elijah was a man just like you, just like me. Let me pray for us. God, again, right now I acknowledge that I am breathing and speaking only because of You.

You are sovereign God, almighty God, the only immortal one, the only true ruler. You dwell in unapproachable light that no one has ever seen or can see. Help us, Lord, to see the foolishness of our running and stirring apart from You.

Help us see the brilliance of abiding in You and just dwelling in Your temple and not wanting to leave, of gazing at Your beauty. God, it's our foolishness that causes us to look at these other things. We just gaze at You right now, Father, You're so beautiful.

You are so wonderful. You're all powerful, merciful, loving. The angels are adoring You.

You sent Your Son. He left all of that glory, came down here, emptied Himself, made Himself nothing for us. What kind of God is that? You are amazing.

And You're going to return one day in all of Your glory to all of Your angels to judge this world. And I'm speaking to You right now. God, You are beautiful, majestic, wonderful.

May You be the stronghold, our light, our salvation, that we would fear nothing. Help us to strive side by side, together, not afraid of anything. What do we have to be afraid of? We're talking to You right now.

So we rest in You. Help us to abide in You. May Your words abide in us.

Have this all sink in, Lord. Stir our affections for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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