

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PRAYER

Pastor Warren's sermon transcript

40 Days of Prayer – Week 2

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Good morning, Saddleback. If you'll take out your message notes, welcome to 40 Days of Prayer week two. If you missed the first week, you want to go back and watch it online.

I have to admit to you, confess to you, prayer is such a giant subject. I was actually a little baffled on how to start this series, because it has so many different facets. I typed the word "prayer" into Amazon.com. It brought up 136,000 books on prayer, so we have a few weeks to talk about this. Then I typed "prayer" into Google. It brought up 136 million webpages about prayer, including four million videos on prayer, four million books on prayer, and six million news articles on prayer.

I have been a pastor for about 40 years, and I've learned a lot about prayer. One of the things that I've observed is this.

Number one, **I've learned we are wired to pray.**

We're wired for prayer. Your Creator designed you in a way that prayer seems natural. Everybody in the world prays. Everybody does. Buddhists pray, Hindus pray, Muslims pray, Jews pray, Christians pray, secular people pray. Even an atheist prays, if you hurt him. You hit him in the stomach, he goes, "Oh, God!" He didn't say, "Oh, me!" When an atheist is hurt, he always calls out to God or Jesus.

Everybody prays. It's in every culture. Now, who they pray to, what they pray to, differs, but what I'm saying is that there is an internal desire in every human being to pray. In fact, it's what makes you human. It's what makes you different from animals. Animals don't pray. Cows don't pray, birds don't pray, dogs don't pray, worms don't pray, because they're not made in the image of God. We're all made in God's image, and that means we have the ability, God wired in you, in your DNA, you are genetically encoded to be able to talk to God and to desire to talk to God sometimes.

The Bible says this, up here on the screen. Ecclesiastes 3:11, it says, "*God has planted eternity in the human heart.*" That means you have an eternal soul. You're gonna last longer than just here and now. And it also means that you have a natural desire and drive in you that thinks there's gotta be more to life than just this. Just here and now, right now, today, tadam, tadam, tadam. No, there must be more. There's gotta be an eternity. There's gotta be a God. God wired us to look for him, and God wired us to talk with him. Human beings are naturally wired to pray. It is a universal trait. Everybody prays at some point in their life.

The second thing I've learned is that **we're not very good at prayer** and we know it.

We're not very good at prayer. In fact, everybody I've talked to feels inadequate about it. "I don't really know what to pray. I don't know how to pray. I don't know how to say it. I don't feel real

confident." In fact, many of you feel very un-confident about praying publicly. If I were to ask you to come up here on the stage right now and lead us in prayer, you'd faint. I couldn't do that. I wouldn't know what to say. And you'd feel so insecure and inadequate about your prayer life, you won't even pray in front of other people at a meal.

God doesn't want you to feel that way, inadequate, like your prayers are second class and they're not as good as someone else's prayers. Everybody feels inadequate. A couple weeks ago, before we started this series, I took a survey, and I asked you to write down the word that best describes how you feel about prayer. And in that survey, what came back were some things like... frustrated. I feel inept, awkward. I feel unsatisfied, I feel confused, I don't understand prayer. I don't understand how it works. It's a mystery. I want it to be better, and I need help.

The fact is, of all the people I've met in my life, I've never met anybody who thought that they were outstanding at prayer. I've never had anybody say, "I'm a PHD in prayer. I'm a world-class prayer. I'm a professional prayer. I'm a pro at prayer." Everybody, no matter how long you've known the Lord, everybody knows they could be better. This is pretty common. The greatest Christian who ever lived next to Jesus himself was St. Paul, and here's what St. Paul said. Look up here on the screen. Romans 8:26, he said, *"We don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray."* That's in the Bible, friends. That's the guy who wrote half the New Testament, and he's saying we don't even know what we should pray for and we don't even know how to pray. So we're all in the school of prayer. We all need to learn. If Paul said that, it's okay for you to admit, I need to get better at this. I need to know how to talk to God. I need to learn the language of prayer.

Even the disciples, the 12 guys that Jesus hand-picked to follow him for his entire ministry, they didn't know how to pray. In fact, they said this. Look up here on the screen. Luke 11:1. *"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'"* That's an amazing thing. They watched Jesus pray, and they said, "Teach us to pray." Now, here's the amazing thing about this. These 12 guys got to watch Jesus do everything he did while he was here on earth. Saw him do all kinds of miracles. Heal people, raise the dead, turn water into wine, walk on water, do miracles, cast out demons. All kinds of bizarre and amazing supernatural things. Never once did the disciples say, "Lord, teach us to do miracles." Not one time.

And then they heard Jesus teach. The greatest teacher in history, the greatest preacher on the planet. The great masterpiece, messages and stories that Jesus told, that have been studied for 2,000 years. Never once did the disciples say, "Lord, teach us how to teach. Teach us how to preach." Instead, they said, "Teach us how to pray." Why? Because watching the Master, they knew that all the power behind his miracles and his teaching and his preaching was through prayer. Jesus prayed constantly. He talked to God the Father in the mornings, the afternoons, the evenings, in secret, in front of other people, in all different ways. In fact, later in this 40-day campaign, we're gonna look at some of the prayer life of Jesus as our model. He's our pattern and he's our model.

But as they looked at him, they realized that all of the power and all of the blessings that came in his life came through his connection to God the Father. That's where it came. And so they said, "Teach us to pray."

So if Paul says, "We don't know what to pray and don't know how to pray," and the disciples go, "Teach us to pray," it's okay for us to feel a little inadequate about our prayers. That's why I titled this introduction *A Beginner's Guide to Prayer*. God doesn't want you feeling lousy about your prayer life, feeling guilty about your prayer life. God doesn't want talking to him to be so difficult. And it's not as difficult as you might think it is.

A third thing that I've learned as a pastor, as I've watched people pray and talk about prayer, is this. You might write this one down.

Our frustrations with prayer are caused by our misconceptions about prayer.

Our frustrations about prayer, "I just don't feel satisfied with it," are caused by our misconceptions about prayer, and there are a lot of misconceptions out there. There's a lot of phony baloney ideas. There are a lot of lies, myths, misunderstandings, legends, misconceptions. There's a lot of false information that's simply not true, and it probably leaves you feeling guilty. God doesn't want you to be driven by guilt; he wants you to be drawn by grace. Prayer is not something you're supposed to feel guilty about. It's just a conversation.

And so we're going to, in the 40 Days of Prayer, explode some of these myths and misconceptions that you've been building your prayer life on that are simply flat-out wrong. Maybe you were taught them as a kid or you watched them on TV or whatever. Let me just give you four of them. We're gonna cover more in the days ahead, but here are four really common myths about prayer, misconceptions.

Number one. I wrote them there on your outline.

- **Prayer is not a magic wand!**

It's not like that little stick Harry Potter has that he waves and all of a sudden all the circumstances change. Prayer is not a wand where you go, POOM! and all of a sudden everything changes in your life. It's not a magic wand. It's not a genie in a bottle where you have this little magical bottle called prayer and you rub it and all of a sudden God comes out and he says, "Your wish is my command." God is not your genie. God is not your servant. You are God's servant. You got that role reversal. It's all wrong.

So God is not your genie. Prayer is not some secret words, some secret incantation or chant or spell, that if you know the right words and you say those special words, then you get your own way all the time. You look at your husband and you say in prayer, "Abracadabra! You're a great husband." That doesn't work. Or "Hocus pocus! I got the promotion." By the way, do you know where that term "hocus pocus" came from? It's actually a perversion of the Latin in the Catholic mass when the priest holds up the bread and he says, "Hoc est corpus meum". Hocus pocus meum." He's saying, "This is the body of Christ" in Latin. That's where hocus pocus comes from.

Some joker in the back row couldn't hear correctly and he says, "What's he saying up there?" "Hocus pocus! I'm turning this bread into Jesus, so I'm gonna go out and say, dog, you're now a cat. Hocus pocus." That's where it came from. Prayer is not some ritual words that you just say and all of a sudden things change mysteriously or magically.

Another myth is that prayer is not a fire extinguisher.

- **Prayer is not a fire extinguisher!**

This is like hanging on the wall, and there's a sign that says, "Break glass only in case of emergency." Yet a lot of people treat prayer like that. They don't pray on the good days. The only time they pray is when they're in pain, when there's an emergency. Break in case of emergency. Pull it out. You get a crisis in your life and you pull out the fire hose of prayer and you start spraying prayer all over it. Hurricane's coming, let's pray. Got cancer, let's pray. My husband's about to walk out on me, let's pray. And you only use it in emergencies. In fact, the terminology is often, "All we can do now is pray." And the people are going like, "Has it come to that? Is it that bad?" All we can do now is pray, like prayer is the last resort? When you've tried everything else?

No, no. Prayer is not meant to be a last resort in your life. It's meant to be your first choice. Before you buy that car, pray. Before you go looking for a job, pray. Before you accept that date, pray. Before you eat that food, pray. You should make it the first choice, not the last resort in every area of your life. Prayer is not a fire extinguisher.

Number three, another misconception, is

- **Prayer is not a tug of war**

Prayer is not a tug of war with God. A lot of people think that God doesn't really want to answer your prayers. He doesn't even want to listen, and that you kind of have to wear God down until he finally gives in. You keep badgering him and pestering him and praying, "God, God, please." And finally, he goes, "Okay, all right already. I give in. You can have it." It's like a tug of war with God.

No, no. That's not at all the way the Bible teaches. God wants to answer your prayers. But in the tug of war idea, you beg or you bribe or you bargain. You beg, "Oh please, God, please please please, pretty please, please, pretty please with sugar on it. Oh, please please please." Like, if I say it 92 times, then maybe he'll say yes. That's the tug of war mentality.

Or to bargain with God. "God, if you'll do this for me, I'll do this for you, and you will be a lucky God. I'm gonna do this for you, God, and I know you really need me to do this." God's going, "Huh?" You don't bargain with God. You don't bribe him with some kind of sales pitch where you keep pestering until finally God gives in.

Jesus told a story, and the stories of Jesus are called parables. Jesus told a story that teaches the exact opposite of this idea about prayer. In some of the stories, some of the parables Jesus says,

"Here's the story," and then he says, "God's like that." In some stories, he tells a story and then he says, "God's not like that." And in one story, he tells about a judge who, a widow needs justice and she keeps coming and badgering the judge for justice and he won't give it to her until finally he just goes, "Okay. If you just stop yapping, I'll give it to you," and he gives in. The point of the story is God is not like that. He's not like that. We'll actually study that story in your small groups during 40 Days of Prayer.

Fourth idea that's wrong is

- **Prayer is not a ritual to relieve guilt**

Prayer is not a ritual to relieve guilt. Some of you grew up with this, where you were taught if you sin and if it's a really big sin, you have to go to say a certain number of prayers. That's not in the Bible, friends. I'm sorry, it's not. It might be traditional, but it's not in the Bible. In fact, Jesus taught the exact opposite. Prayer is not punishment for your sin. Prayer is not penance for your sin. Prayer is a privilege, not a duty. It is a joy, not some responsibility you've got to pay back because you did something wrong. That puts prayer in a whole wrong light. It is not a ritual to relieve guilt.

In fact, Jesus repeatedly said, "Don't pray prayers that you say the same thing over and over and over and over." He says it multiple times. Let me just show you an example. Here on the screen, the Bible says in Matthew 6:7, this is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is talking and he says this: *"When you pray, do not use meaningless repetition..."* where you say the same thing over and over and over and over. I'm not saying this. Jesus is saying it. *"When you pray,"* this is the Sermon on the Mount, *"do not use meaningless repetitions..."* You should not pray the prayer where you say the same thing over and over and over and over. *"Do not use meaningless repetitions thinking that you will be heard for your many words."*

Now, if you don't believe Jesus, who are you gonna believe? He says when you pray, you're not supposed to say something over and over. Don't use meaningless repetitions, repeating clichés over and over.

Now, during the 40 Days of Prayer, we're going to explode a bunch of other misconceptions that have put you under enormous guilt and made you feel like prayer was boring and prayer was a duty. We're gonna cover all of those with the truth of God. What I want to do today is cover what I call the basics. The foundations. The pillar principles of prayer on which everything else is covered. And there are four of them.

There's a legend about Vince Lombardi, the great football coach, that at the beginning of every season he'd bring all the team players in and he'd start on the first session by holding up a football and saying, "Gentlemen, this is a football." In other words, you can't start any more basic than that.

Okay, let's talk about what I call the four pillars of prayer. These are the fundamental truths on which everything else you believe about prayer rests. If you don't get these, you're gonna see

prayer as a duty, not as a delight. You're gonna see it as a burden, not as a blessing. So here they are.

Number one. The first thing the Bible teaches is that

1. God loves for me to talk to him.

God loves for me to talk to him, and I would quickly add, about anything. God loves for me to talk to him about anything. It doesn't have to be something spiritual. It doesn't have to be something religious. It just has to be whatever I'm interested in. If you're interested in something, God is interested in it too. You say, "How is that possible?" Well, I know that whatever you're interested in, God is interested in too. He wants you to talk to him about it for three reasons.

Number one, he loves you. God loves you. You wouldn't exist if God hadn't wanted to love you and create you to love you. It's the reason you're alive. When you love somebody, you're interested in what they're interested in. There are a lot of things I've become interested in because my wife is interested in them, and I love my wife. So what she's interested in, I'm interested in knowing about too. So God loves you.

Second thing, where do you think you got those interests? You got them from God. You know all the things that you consider to be your hobbies or your favorite sports or the things you like to do? Where in the world did you get those desires? You got them from your Creator. He wired you with them. He put them in you. And he gave every one of us different desires because we all like to do different things. That way, everything in the world gets done. But your desires didn't just come out of thin air. The reason you like to do what you like to do is God made you to like to do those things, and if God put that interest in you, he actually knows what you're interested in more than you do. He knows what you like better than you do. In fact, he knows the things that you wouldn't like that you haven't even experienced because he knows everything about you. He loves you, and he gave you your interests.

The third reason he's interested in whatever you're interested in is he enjoys talking with his children. He is your Father. The Bible calls him our Father who is in heaven. Parents are interested in what their kids are interested in. So when you come to God in prayer, if you're bored in prayer, it's because you're talking about stuff to God that you think you ought to talk about, not what you're interested in. And God is interested in what you are interested in.

Let me show you some verses. Psalm 103:13. *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who reverence him."* That means they spend time with him. God is the Father who is tender, compassionate. He's intimately interested in everything you are interested in. Those of you who are parents, when you started having babies, did you wait until your kids could talk in order to start loving them? Of course not. Of course not. When we had our three kids, I loved them from the moment they were born, even when all they could do is jerk and poop and spit. They couldn't even smile when they were first born. They had no emotion. They had no means of communication. But I loved them deeply. Why? I'm their daddy. I'm their father. And whether they could talk or not, I had a deep, deep love for them. And let me just say this about you: whether you ever talk to God or not, whether you ever pray or not, God deeply,

deeply loves you. Whether you won't talk to him, you don't talk to him, or you can't talk to him, he still loves you deeply, just like a parent loves a child who can't communicate.

But as my kids began to grow, one of the deepest desires of my life was for the day that I could have a conversation with them. I longed for that conversation with my own kids. I wanted them to be able to communicate to me, and I wanted them to understand how I was communicating to them. Today my kids are grown up. I have incredible conversations with my kids, and they're very meaningful. I love conversations with my kids. I love listening to whatever they're interested in. Why? I love them, and I'm interested in whatever they're interested in because they're my kids.

That's the way God is with you. He loves you whether you communicate with him or not, whether you pray to him or not. But God longs for the day that you talk to him. Talk to him about the stuff that's important to you, not the stuff that's important to him, but the stuff that's important to you. Parents long for that day they can have a conversation, and God wants you to grow up so that you learn how to talk to him. That's called prayer.

Learning how to pray is really like learning a language. It's just another language. Whether you learn English or French or Spanish or Arabic or Farsi or Korean or any language, whatever language you use, you have to do certain things to learn it. Prayer is a language. It's a spiritual language of God, and you have to learn it.

So how do you learn to pray? Well, how do you learn a language? First you listen to other people praying. You listen to other people. That's how babies learn languages, they listen to others. They start by imitating, but then they learn on their own, and they start practicing, and they start practicing, and they get better, and all of a sudden a word comes out, and then a few words, and then words become sentences.

Now, let me ask you. Did your first sentence make sense? I doubt it. I doubt you came out of the womb saying, "Fourscore and seven years ago, our forefathers married our foremothers and had four babies." No. When you said your first words, you could barely say them correctly, but your parents were smart enough to interpret what you were saying. God's smart enough to interpret what you're saying to him even when you can't say it correctly, even when you can't say it well. Why? He loves you. And your first sentences in prayer might not make a whole lot of sense. That doesn't matter. God loves you, he cares about you. He's not waiting for you to become mature before he starts loving you. He loves you at every stage of your life.

It's like when my kids would bring me pictures at one year old, three years old, and ten years old, and I'd say, "That's perfect." Was I saying that's the best picture in the world? No, I'm saying it's perfect for your stage in life. God doesn't wait for you to get to a certain level to start loving you. And when he wants you to learn to pray, he wants you to learn to talk to him, because God loves for you to talk to him. He loves it. He's not bored by it, he's not busied by it, he's not going, "Oh, no, you're here again?" No, he is waiting to talk to you, and he wants to talk to you and he wants you to talk to him literally about anything.

The fact is, when you talk to God, there's nothing off-limits. Some people think they should only pray about spiritual things, like world peace and stuff like that. No, if you've got an upset stomach, you can talk to God about that. If your heart's been broken by some girlfriend or boyfriend who just dumped you, you can talk to God about that. You can talk about mosquitoes. You can talk to God about anything. He's interested in anything you're interested in. He loves it. He loves it when you talk to him, because he's your Father, and just like a parent loves it when their child talks to them.

First John 5:14-15, says this. *"We can be confident approaching God, knowing that he listens to us whenever we ask him for anything according to his will. And since we know that he hears us when we make our requests, then we can be sure that he will answer us."* I want you to notice a couple things. You might circle this in these verses. Twice in that verse, it says, "We know that he listens to us and we know that he hears us." That's a for sure. God always hears you no matter how you say it, when you say it, how loud you say it, or if you think it in your mind. God listens to you and he hears you. Because of that, it says we can be confident in approaching God. We can be sure that he will answer.

We have confidence. That means that when you pray, God says you can pray with no shame. You can pray with no fear. You can pray with no hesitation. You can pray with no embarrassment. There's nothing you can say that will make God stop loving you. There's nothing that will embarrass you. There's nothing that will cause shame or fear, because God loves it when you talk to him.

I want you to write down a couple. I gave you some misconceptions about prayer. Let me give you a couple of truths about prayer. Write these down: Prayer is a conversation, not a ceremony.

Prayer is a conversation, not a ceremony.

What's a ceremony? It's something with a bunch of rules and restrictions and regulations, you have to do it a certain way or it doesn't work. Years ago, when I was a young man, I lived in Japan. I taught English. I helped plant a church in Nagasaki, Japan, and one day they took me to a tea ceremony. This is a five-hour thing that is full of ritual about how you sit, how you turn, what you do, how they pour the tea, how they strain the tea. It's incredibly elaborate, and you can spend years learning how to do a tea ceremony properly. That's a ceremony. You have to do it just right or it doesn't count. There is no just right way to pray. Prayer is not a ceremony. Prayer is a conversation.

In a conversation, it means you talk, but you also listen. One of the reasons you're bored with prayer is because you do all the talking and you never listen. If you're just doing monologue to the sky in the dark and you don't get any answer and you don't hear any impressions, of course it's gonna be boring. But you've got to take the time to be quiet and to just listen, and to say things like, "God, is there anything you want to say to me?" I do this every day in my quiet time. "God, is there anything you want to say to me right now?" I read the Word. Sometimes there's an impression from the Word, sometimes he puts an impression in my mind, sometimes nothing. Everything's fine. Copasetic. A-Okay. Let's get started with the day.

You're open to whatever God wants to say to you. Prayer is a conversation, and during 40 Days of Prayer, I'm gonna teach you not only how to talk to God. I'm gonna teach you how to listen to God, because that's a conversation. It's not a monologue. It's not a speech. It's not a poem. It's not an essay. Those things are boring. Talking and listening to God is a conversation.

Number two. Write this down. Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual.

Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual.

It's all about getting close to God. It's all about talking to God and becoming acquainted with God and getting to know God and letting you learn more about him. If prayer is boring for you, it's because you don't understand the point of it. Let me say it again. If you're bored of prayer, it's because you don't understand the point, and you're talking about all the wrong things. You're talking about things you think you ought to talk about, and it becomes a duty. It becomes a drudgery, and then it becomes "I should pray. I have to pray. I ought to pray." And friends, once you get in that trap, you're not gonna want to pray, because guilt motivation only lasts about as long as guilt does.

God doesn't want you feeling guilty about prayer. He loves to talk to you. He loves to listen to you talk to him. Guilt has nothing to do with it. It's not a duty. It's a privilege. I get to talk to the Creator of the universe, and he wants to listen. What an amazing truth that is. And not only is it amazing that he wants to listen, but he is interested in everything that I'm interested in. I can talk to him about anything. God, I had a bad day today at work. God, I really like this team. I really want them to win. They're probably not gonna win, but I can talk to you about it anyway. You can talk to God about anything. Nothing is off-limits, because God loves it when you talk to him about anything. That's the first law of prayer, the first principle, pillar of prayer.

Number two. Here's the second foundational truth:

2. God listens to prayers that are sincere and simple.

God listens to the prayers that are sincere and simple. You don't have to use flowery language. You don't have to use fancy phrases. You don't have to sound spiritual. You don't have to use religious clichés. You just talk to God. The only condition is that it is sincere, that means it comes from the heart, and it's simple. It's authentic, it's real, it's gutsy, it's honest. You pray about what you feel like praying about, not what you think you ought to pray about. And it's just simple and it is sincere.

You don't get up and start addressing God, "Oh thou great Potentate of the universe, thou whoest dost wonderfully bestow on us all manners of beseeched blessings." And God's going, "Huh? First, why are you talking to me in 200-year-old English? I'm not from England." God is not from England. You don't have to sound like Shakespeare. God understands every language. He understands lingo, slang, he knows it all. He invented it all.

So you just come to God and say, "Hey, God, it's me." Sometimes the simplest prayer is the most powerful prayer. When you're hungry, we get all these clichés and we get all these rituals we learn from other people, and we just use them like that's what we're supposed to say. You sit

down to eat your dinner, and you say, "Bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies, and our bodies to thy service. Bless the gift and the Giver." Where'd you get that? You learned it from somebody else. It'd be a whole lot better to go, "God, I'm hungry right now, and this taco smells really good, and my salivary glands are ... so this is gonna be short, Lord, but thank you for fast food. Amen." God likes that prayer a whole lot better than "Bless the gift and the Giver and bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies and our bodies to your service." The simple is ... God, thank you, thank you, thank you for In-N-Out. Amen. Okay. All right.

It doesn't have to be super spiritual sounding. God hears, listens, to the prayers that are sincere and simple. They're real, they're gutsy, they're honest. And when you don't feel good, "God, I don't feel like talking to you right now." That's a prayer. "God, I'm mad at you." That's a prayer. "God, I don't get it. I prayed for this, and it hasn't happened." That's a prayer. God just wants you to be honest.

If you don't understand this, go read the Psalms. One third of the Psalms, 50 of the Psalms of 150 Psalms, are called psalms of lament. They're complaints. They're complaints to God. "God, I've been asking you for this job, and it hasn't showed up. I'm still out of work. I need some help here." When you say it like that, it's honest. It's authentic. It's real. God loves prayers that are sincere and simple, not the phony baloney stuff and all the religious jargon.

Have you ever heard - of course you have - of people who pray a prayer and they've got one request, but then they say it about nine different ways because they think that longer is stronger? You're going, "Man, land the plane, buddy. You're just saying the same thing over and over and over and over in a fresh way. Not even a fresh way, in a boring way." If somebody out on the patio says, "I'm going into surgery tomorrow," the prayer can simply be, "Lord, my friend's going into surgery tomorrow. Would you help them? Help the doctors not make any mistakes. Give them a quick recovery. Have a minimal pain. I'm asking you this in Jesus' name." Boom. You don't have to go into 20-minute lecture on the value of a hospital and find a bunch of other verses.

Just say what you want to say. Would you write this down? **Longer is not stronger in prayer.** Simple, sincere, humble, authentic, those kinds of prayers. God's much more interested in those kinds of prayers than the long, winded, stem-winding sermon in a sentence and sermon in a prayer where you go on and on and on and on. No, no. You don't need to do that. Longer is not stronger. Just get to the point. Jesus had a lot to say about praying sincerely, honestly from your gut, and simply, without trying to sound super spiritual. Let me just show you one passage. We'll come back to this.

Matthew 6:5-8, is out of the famous Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is talking about prayer. Here's what Jesus says. *"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men."* In other words, for them, prayer is a performance. It's performance art. Watch me pray, everybody. I'm really gonna impress you with this one. Get ready. Buckle up. I'm gonna pray a good prayer. Here we go. They're not praying to God; they're just showing off. He says, *"When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, who pray just to be seen by men. I tell you the truth: they have received their reward in full."* In other words, they're not gonna get any more reward than that, just the praise they got

from somebody who thought they were impressed by it. *"I tell you the truth..."* he says, *"Instead, when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* In other words, openly. *"And when you pray,"* he says, *"do not keep babbling on and on [and on and on and on] like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."* Longer is not stronger. *"Do not be like them..."* This is Jesus talking. *"For your Father knows what you need even before you ask."* It's not like you've got to convince God. He already knows what you need. Just come to him as simply and as honestly and as humbly as you can say, and talk about what you need.

That passage right there is literally loaded. We could spend about two hours unpacking it, but let me just summarize you. He says three or four things. He says first, don't use prayer to show off. We've all seen people do that. They're going, "I got a good one. Watch this. It'll blow everybody away. Here it comes." You knocked that one out of the park, man. Don't use prayer to show off to impress other people. You don't get any credit for that kind of prayer, and God doesn't even listen to that kind of prayer.

He says instead be sincere. Don't spout off clichés. Sometimes, because we're afraid our prayers being too short, we just start adding in filler things. You don't need to add in filler. By the way, you know what one of the favorite fillers of Christians today is the word "just." We use it like "uh." "Lord, we just want to thank you today, and we just are here today to praise you because just, you're great. You're just wonderful and just, thank you, just God. And so just now, we praise the Lord. I just want to pray." Just, just, just. It's like going, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh. You can take out all the "justs" out of your prayer. You don't need to say "just." It's an empty filler.

Say, "God, nice day. Thanks for making this one. Talk to you in another three seconds." You don't have to have a run-on conversation. You can just pick it up where you are in another minute, keep talking to God later on. Be sincere, don't spout clichés, keep it simple. Adding words to your prayer doesn't make it any stronger. Stay humble or you'll stumble. As I always tell pastors, remember the lesson of the whale. When you get to the top and you're ready to blow, that's when they harpoon you.

We're gonna come back to this during 40 Days of Prayer, but the bottom line is this next verse, Hebrews 10:22. *"Let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith."*

There are the two qualifications. Sincerity, simplicity. Sincere heart and sure faith. Sincere heart means, "God, I'm not gonna talk to you about what I'm not interested in. I'm gonna talk about the way I really feel. You already know the way I feel, I just need to spout it out to you. I just need to confess it to you. I just need to talk about what I'm feeling right now. I'm upset. I'm nervous. I'm worried. I'm afraid. I'm confused." Just talk to God about whatever you're feeling.

Sincere heart, and then a sure faith. We come to God with confidence. We're not afraid to talk to him. We're not embarrassed to talk to him. We're not hesitant to talk to him. We're not ashamed to talk to him. He's a loving Father who loves to listen to us talk to him. He loves to listen to you more than anybody else in the entire world. So we come to him with a sure faith. We come to him with confidence.

So those are the first two pillars. Here's pillar number three. First, God loves for me to talk to him, really, about anything, whatever I'm interested in, and God listens to prayers that are simple and sincere. Sincere and simple.

Number three, third pillar.

3. God likes to show his grace by answering prayer.

God is a good God. He is a good, good Father. He's a gracious Father. He's a compassionate and loving Father. And God loves to answer prayer because he gets to show what he's really like. Everything in the universe comes from the generosity of God. No one is more generous than God. And when you pray and you ask for something in prayer, you make a request or a petition, one of the words it's called, it gives God the opportunity to show what he's really like. So God loves it when you ask requests.

Over 20 times in the New Testament, we are commanded to ask. Ask, and it shall be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened. You have not because you ask not. If you ask anything in my name ... Over 20 times, if you are a child of God, you're commanded to ask God for things. Why? God gets to show how good he is. He gets to show how gracious he is, how loving he is, how generous he is. With every answer that God gives through your prayer, it shows that he is a good, good God, listen, regardless of the answer. You don't get an answer yes to every prayer you pray. You know that from experience. But even when the answer is no, even when the answer is not yet, God is a good, good Father.

Question: Do you know any parent in the entire world that gives a child everything that child asks for? Of course not. They would ruin that child. There are dozens and dozens of reasons why parents do not give their children everything they ask for. There are dozens and dozens of good reasons why God doesn't say yes to everything you ask for. You may not understand why, but you're not God. There are dozens of reasons. Sometimes God says no for our protection. Sometimes God says no for our direction. Sometimes God says no for our correction, to correct us on course. Sometimes God says no for our perfection, to help us grow in our character. Sometimes God says no for our inspection, he looks inside of us and helps us see what we couldn't see before. A child that got everything they asked for would be spoiled rotten. God's much more interested in your character than he is your comfort. He loves you too much to say yes to everything. God is not a vending machine where you just put in the prayer and you pull it and you get whatever ... a vending machine will give you stuff that's bad for you.

God says, "I didn't say I'd answer it every way you want it, but I will answer." People say, "God, you didn't answer me!" And God says, "Yes I did. I just said no." That was an answer. No.

When you pray, there are always four possible answers to your prayer. Always four possible answers to your prayer. God always answers every prayer, and the four answers he gives are either yes, no, not yet, and you gotta be kidding me. And you have prayed some of those requests and God's going, "You gotta be kidding me. You're asking for that? Come on."

A child, a baby, doesn't know the difference between no and not yet. Maturity is when you realize that God's delays are not always God's denials. And a lot of times God says, "I have every intention of giving this to you, just not yet. You're not ready for it, and before I can give you the solution, you've gotta have the growth in character, because I'm gonna give something far bigger than you're asking for." There's a difference between no and not yet, and maturity knows the difference. God always answers, and he shows his grace. He shows his goodness whether the answer is yes or no or not yet.

Jeremiah 33:3 says this. God says, *"Call to me, and I will answer you. I will show you marvelous and wondrous things that you could never figure out on your own."* I love that in the Message translation. Sometimes God's answer is a bigger perspective. Sometimes you ask for something and God goes, "You have no idea what you're asking for. That's not really what you want. I know what you want more than you know what you want. You want to be happy. That will not make you happy. You think it's gonna make you happy, but it won't. So I'm gonna give you a bigger perspective. Call to me, and I'll answer you, and my answer will not be the yes. My answer will be I will show you things you could never figure out on your own, and you get a bigger perspective."

You're looking back and you go, "Oh, now I am so glad." As Garth Brooks' saying, "Thank God for unanswered prayers." Some of the prayers, if you'd gotten an answer, it would have been a disaster in your life. God will only give you what is good. A vending machine will give you something bad. God will only give you what is good in your life.

Matthew 7:11, Jesus says, *"If you, being imperfect and sinful parents, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him?"*

That's kind of obvious. God's a perfect Father. He's only gonna give you good things, but he wants to give you stuff you haven't even imagined. As the next verse says, James 4:2, *"You do not have, because you do not ask."* That's gonna be a theme verse that we're gonna look at for all 40 days in this campaign.

When you don't pray, there are a lot of things you miss out on life. When you get to heaven, there'll be a list of all the things that you missed out on because you never asked for them. You have not because you ask not. God's not just gonna give it to you. He wants you to learn to talk to him. He wants you to learn the language of prayer, and he wants you to learn to grow up.

The foundational pillars about prayer. God loves for me to talk to him about anything that's on my mind. It doesn't have to be spiritual. Conversation. It's not a ceremony, it's a conversation. I listen and I speak. It's a relationship, not a ritual. God listens to prayers that are sincere and simple, and he loves to show his goodness by answering his prayer.

Now, here's the fourth truth, and this is the biggest one of all. This is huge. If you get this, you really understand it, it's gonna radically change your life. And I don't mean just intellectually get it, but you actually feel it, because when you feel it, it's gonna change the way you look at

everything: money, sex, time, job, past, present, future. Number four, the fourth truth on which all prayer is built, is this.

4. God longs to be close to me.

God longs to be close to me. He desires it. He wants it deeply. He wants to be close to you. He wants you to be close to him.

If you're away from somebody that you love for a long, long time, you can't wait to talk to them. God can't wait for you to talk to him. He loves you so, so very much. He longs to be close to you. He's waiting to talk to you. He's waiting for you to talk to him. And he's not busy. You know, like, "Can you hold the phone? All circuits are busy. Can you call back later? I'll get back in touch." No, no. He's longing to be close to you. It is a privilege to be close to God. He's got a 24-hour drop-in system. He's never offline. You can talk to him any moment of the day, any second of the day.

Isaiah 30:18 is the verse you ought to write down on a little white card, put it in your visor, and memorize it. It says this, *"The Lord waits for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion."*

Did you know that? Did you know that every day you go without prayer, without reading God's Word, without spending time with God, God is waiting for you? You were made for this. You were made to know God. You were made for a relationship, for a fellowship, and he's waiting. The Lord waits for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. It's the whole reason you exist.

Some of you are parents, and you know the unique pain of a child that can't talk to you. That's a heartache. You love that child deeply, but for whatever reason, a physical reason, a brain reason, an emotional reason, they can't talk to you, and it breaks your heart. Because you love that child so, so very much, but they haven't learned the language. They can't talk to you. You can't have a conversation with them. And it hurts, as a parent, when you love them and they can't talk to you.

And others of you, you've been a parent of a child who, they can talk to you, but they won't. And they don't. And they've shut you out of their lives at this point. And the ache in your heart is great because you long to talk to them, and you long to just listen to them, and you long for the phone call. And it hurts you because they can talk, but they won't, and they don't.

That's the way God feels about you when you don't talk to him. When you go a day or days or weeks, and you haven't spent any time alone with God, God, just you and me, a few minutes here, just checking in. Here's what's on my heart. Here's what I'm feeling. Here's what I need. I love you. I don't understand this. Whatever's on your heart. My doubts, my fears, my gripes, my highs, my lows, it's like a parent going, "Why won't you talk to me? I created you. I love you. I want a relationship with you." And your kid turns around and walks away.

Don't do that to God. Don't do that to your Father in heaven, the God who created you. You see, God designed you for a relationship. The only reason you're alive is God made you to love you.

If God didn't want to love you, you wouldn't exist. You weren't put on this planet to mark things off your to-do list. You were put on this planet to be loved by God and to learn to love him back. He made you to love you. You were chosen to be his child. You were formed for his family. You were created for companionship. He made you to love you.

The Bible is full of examples of people who had a "close relationship to God." The Bible says Enoch had a close relationship. The Bible says Noah had a close relationship to God. The Bible says Job had a close relationship to God. The Bible says a guy named Hezekiah, who was a king, was closer to God than any king that ever lived. God wants you to be close. He longs to be close to you. He longs for you to be close to him.

Listen to the passion in this next verse. This is God talking to you. *"I don't want your sacrifices – I want your love! I don't want your offerings, I want you to know me!"* (Hosea 6:6) Can you feel that passion? The longing that God has for you? "I just want you to know me. I know everything about you," God says, "good, bad, and ugly. Nothing is gonna make me stop loving you. I want you to know me. I love you." No one will ever love you. No man, no woman, will ever love you like God does. No one will ever love you like God does. God wants you to learn to love him back. He wants you to be able to receive his love. He wants to just listen to you talk about what's interesting to you. He wants to have a friendship and a companionship and a relationship with you.

One of the most amazing verses in the Bible is one that I honestly cannot fathom. I cannot fully understand it. It's John 15:15. In John 15:15, Jesus says this. Look up here. Jesus says, *"I don't call you servants... I call you my friends."*

Are you kidding me? God wants to be your friend? God wants you to be his friend? Jesus said, "I call you my friends." The Creator of the universe, the God who died on the cross, says, "I want you to be my friend. I made you to be my friend." Are you kidding me? That's not about ritual. It's not about regulation. It's not about rules. It's not about religion. It's about relationship. It's about friendship. God says, "I call you my friends." Wow.

You were formed for a friendship with God, and if you miss that, you miss the purpose of your existence. Sorry, you just blew your life, because you were not put on this planet to make money, retire, and die. You were put on this planet to have a relationship with God that lasts for eternity. Do not miss the purpose of your existence.

Why are we doing 40 Days of Prayer? Because there is nothing more important than your life, and your life getting in harmony with God's life, and you having the relationship that you were created for, that you were designed for, a close fellowship with God. Job said, "In the prime of my life, God was my best friend." Is God your best friend?

You gotta learn the language. You gotta learn how to pray. He's waiting, he's longing, he wants to be close. God says, "I love you so much it hurts." You're gonna just nonchalantly walk away? Oh, that's nice. Sorry, I gotta go see a movie tonight. I'm hungry. I'm gonna go out to dinner. That's nice that God loves me that much, but forget you, God. Really?

Friends, what we're talking about, there's nothing more important in your life than for you having a fellowship and a friendship and actually having a relationship. A lot of people know about God, but getting to know God... Jesus Christ is my best friend. I've walked with him for 50 years. I know him better than I know any of you. And I want you to know, he wants you to know him like I know him. He wants you to feel his love like I feel it. He wants you to be able to hear his voice like I hear God's voice. God wants you to know him. That's why we're doing 40 Days. You don't miss anything in this. You get in a group. You don't miss a weekend. You read the devotionals. You do all the stuff we've been preparing a year to help teach you about this. Don't just walk away casually and say, "That's nice to know."

How do I get closer to God? Well, there's two ways, two ways you get closer. You desire it. You might write this down. **How do you get closer to God? Desire it and make time for it.** That's the only way you're gonna get closer to God. If you feel far from God, guess who moved? God didn't move. The only way you get closer to God is desire it and to make time for it, and that's the next two verses.

Psalm 25:14, *"Friendship with God,"* what a phrase. Would you like friendship with God? *"Friendship with God is reserved,"* in other words, not everybody gets to be a friend of God. *"Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him."* They make time for him. *"With them, he shares the secrets of his covenant."* God shares secrets with you when you make time for him that he doesn't share with everybody else. That's friendship with God.

And James 4:8, you gotta desire it. *"Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you."* That's a promise.

Now, in the days ahead, the next 40 days, we're gonna learn how to do that. How do you draw close to God, and God will draw close to you? And you're gonna learn all the benefits. I'm gonna go into all the benefits, but let me just leave you with one. Just write this down, one benefit. There's dozens of benefits to getting closer to God, but I'll just give you one.

The closer I am to God, the less stressed and more blessed I'll be.

The closer I am to God, the less stressed and the more blessed I'll be.

So we need to sing and pray, Jesus, draw me close. Closer, Lord, to you. Let the world around me fade away. Jesus, draw me close. Closer, Lord, to you. For I desire to worship and obey.

The entire purpose of the next 40 days is to deepen your friendship with God. You need to know him better. You need to know him closer. He is waiting. He is longing for you to get to know him. He is waiting for you to talk to him about anything you're interested in. Nothing's off-limits.

Let me pray for you.

Father, I pray a simple prayer, and a sincere prayer. I want the people that are here to know you better. I want them to fall in love with you the way you love them. I want them to know you the way I know you. And I ask you to take these words to touch their hearts, in Jesus' name, amen.