

Before Anything Else

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For a lot of families, a new school year has kicked off this week. And for those that didn't, that's going to happen this coming week. I think the kids have mixed reactions to that. Some of them are really, really excited to be back at school with their friends and getting into the routine again. And there were a whole lot more students in the first service today who were mourning the loss of their summer and counting down the days to the next one.

I think parents are a little bit divided on that too. You see a lot of parents, especially those with younger kids, thinking, "Man, we cannot wait for our kids to get back to school and out of the house. We need the house free a little bit during the day again."

I say that, but Chelsea and I are the opposite. Man, we love summer for the kids and the fun time together, but we love, love, love the relaxed schedule. Because once school starts at our house, it's game on. Life gets incredibly busy between school and work and practices and workouts and extracurricular stuff. It is tough to keep everything straight.

In fact, for me, it's going to be tough this year to keep the carpool schedule straight. I've got four people in my house who have to get off to school. Chelsea's a teacher, so she's off early in the morning to get to her school. Then, on the first day of school this year, at 6:30 in the morning, I'm driving my oldest off to high school. He's a freshman this year, so I've got to get him there. Then I come home, and at 7:30 I leave the house again and take our elementary school kid to school and get him dropped off. Then I come home, and I've got a middle schooler whom we get out the door around 8:15 or 8:30 to go to school. There are just hours every day of carpool.

Life's busy. I know it is for you too. So how do we prioritize it and keep it all together? At our house, we did something I thought we'd never do. We got a Skylight Calendar. Have you guys seen these?

Now, Chelsea was all hyped up about getting one of these, and I was thinking, "We do not need that." It was sort of an eye-roll thing. But we're in a phase of life where I sort of like this now. It's there in the kitchen. We know what's going on. And if it matters, we put it on the calendar.

There are a lot of things going on in our world. This is the month of May, as the school year was coming to a close, when the kids had different things going on. They've got a picture of just a snapshot of May. Now, it's not school, and it's not work. This is just the extracurriculars on top of everything else. We put it on there to keep it straight and to make sure that life happens on purpose. If we put it on the calendar, we're going to get where we need to be, and it's not going to be an accident.

I added something last night that Chelsea was surprised by in the first service because I want to make sure it happens. I let her know I've got a fishing trip scheduled soon. And if I put it on the calendar, that's her rule, right? If it goes on the calendar, it's actually going to happen.

Here's the deal: You're the same as me. When we set our priorities, we set our priorities because we want them to happen. My kids aren't going to end up at football practice by accident. Somebody's going to get them there. And I'm not going to end up at my dentist appointment by accident. I'm going to have some kind of reminder, and it's going to get me there. We need those.

But for many of us, when it comes to our spiritual lives, we expect somehow to accidentally end up in prayer. And I'm telling you this morning that is not going to happen.

If you've got a Bible, join me in Luke chapter 3. We're going to kick off a series. You saw it on the video. We're going to kick off a series called Pray Like Jesus. For the next several weeks, we're going to dive into the subject of prayer by looking at and learning from the prayer life of Jesus Himself.

If you take notes - and we always encourage you to do that - get a little notebook like this and take it with you. You can look back at stuff that we've talked about. You remember more if you write it down. If you're taking notes, our title this morning is "Before Anything Else."

We're going to see as we read that Jesus was intentional with His time, and that the public ministry of Jesus - the miracles, the teachings, all that He did - was an overflow of the private time and private prayer life He had with the Father. He made sure that prayer came first.

And to be clear, yes, I understand if somebody's thinking this way: The calendar illustration absolutely falls short. Prayer is not just one more thing on the schedule. Jesus didn't pencil prayer in when He had time. It wasn't like that at all. In fact, as we read, we're going to see that everything else got penciled in around the intentional time He spent in prayer.

If that was true for Jesus, what would it look like if that were true for us? What would it look like if we truly did pray before anything else? Let's answer that together.

Luke chapter 3, starting in verse 21, says this:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased."

— Luke 3:21-22

You've probably read this before, the baptism of Jesus, or you've heard somebody else read it before. It's in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But here in Luke, there's a detail that's not found in any other of the Gospels. You might have read it and never really paid attention to it before.

So I'm going to read it again. And as I read it, I want to ask you to pay attention to when the heavens were opened up:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened.

— Luke 3:21

When did the heavens open up? They opened up when Jesus was praying.

This is a massive moment in the Bible. This is a massive moment in the life and ministry of Jesus. And it happens while He is praying.

Back to our question: What would it look like if we were to pray before anything else? It's going to mean four things. I've got four points for you this morning.

Pray Before the Launch

The first is this: It means that we will pray before the launch. We're going to pray before we launch into something new.

The baptism of Jesus and the moments that follow are the beginning, the launching of the public ministry of Jesus. He's walking up to His baptism, and John the Baptist points at Him and says, "That right there is Jesus, and He's the One who's going to take away the sins of the world."

God calls down from heaven after the baptism and the prayer, and from that moment, man, it's on. Jesus goes around teaching. He's pointing people to the kingdom of heaven. We read miracle after miracle. The sick are made well. The dead are raised. We follow this all the way to the cross, to the resurrection, and then to the ascension as well.

We read here that the public ministry of Jesus, all that we know about it, is launched in prayer - in this conversation with God, the source from which Jesus' life and ministry actually flowed.

Look at the chain of events. Jesus prays. The heavens are opened. The Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove. God the Father tells everybody exactly who Jesus is, and all eyes are on Him in that moment. As Jesus is praying, that's when it happens. God steps out of heaven vocally to declare who Jesus is.

Again, there's no turning back. The ministry is launched, and it's on. Jesus knew what that meant. He knew with this public ministry and everything He was going to teach, say, and do that He was going to face opposition, that He was going to have enemies coming at Him from all sides. And Jesus was not about to step out into that without prayer.

So, like Jesus, pray before you launch.

We're always launching into new things. There are a lot of families that launched into a new school year this year. If you missed it this week, kick it off tonight. Pray before the launch of that school year. Huddle up with your kids, no matter how old they are, and ask them, "How can I be praying for you this school year?"

You're going to hear their hearts in this. Ask what's going on in their world, and let them give you those different prayer requests. I'm telling you, it's going to change your relationship with them, and it's going to drive

your prayer life to a whole new scenario. Ask them that often throughout the school year. Pray before it launches.

Maybe you're starting a new job soon. Pray before you launch that.

Maybe you're entering into a new season of life, and it's good things - all good things, all great transitions. Maybe you're an empty nester or a kid is starting over or doing something new. Pray before you launch into that.

Maybe you're starting out in a new season of life as a result of tragedy. Maybe you've had loss. Maybe there's been some heartbreak in your world. Pray before you launch out into that season of life.

Pray before a new idea, a new business, or a new venture. Pray before that new relationship really kicks off. Pray before those friendships take root. I'm just telling you, talk to the Father before you launch, just like Jesus.

Pray Before the Day Begins

Number two, if we're going to pray like Jesus before anything else, we're going to pray before the day begins.

Flip over with me now to Mark chapter 1. We're going to be in the Gospels, bouncing around a little bit - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If you're in Luke, go back a little bit to Mark 1. We're going to start in verse 32 and zero in on verse 35 as we read this:

That evening at sundown they brought to Him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him, and they found Him and said to Him, "Everyone is looking for You."

And He said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." And He went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.

— Mark 1:32-39

Look back at verse 35. If you write in your Bibles, underline this:

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He departed and went out to a desolate place, and there He prayed.

— Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, what did Jesus do? Jesus got alone, and He prayed.

I want to encourage you - plead with you - to pray before the day begins.

Charles Spurgeon, the great theologian, declared this about the example Jesus sets here: "The morning is the gate of the day and should be well guarded with prayer."

That's exactly what Jesus is doing right here. As Jesus prays, they come and find Him. What do they say to Him? They say, "Hey, Jesus, everybody's looking for You. Everybody wants to talk to You. Everybody wants to be with You. Everybody wants something from You."

Why would they say that? Because that's what was happening the night before. Everybody was gathered at His door. In verses 33 and 34, they were gathered at the door, waiting to be healed. They were waiting to see demons cast out. They were waiting to get something they needed from Jesus. And He was doing it. He was giving it to them.

Listen, it doesn't matter if we're talking about the first century or this century. If there's a guy who can stand on the front porch and heal you of whatever illness you've got, who can heal your family member or your friend from whatever illness they've got, you're going to get in that line. You're going to want to be with Him and to be near Him. That's going to be the most sought-after person on the planet. And that's exactly what's happening with Jesus here. Everybody wants Him.

Now, here's what I hope you're hearing: Jesus was busy. Jesus had a lot to do. He had important work to do. He was on a mission from God. He knew that as His day began, there were going to be people from all over His life fighting for His attention. There were going to be jobs fighting for His attention, tasks fighting for His attention, for His mind, and for His heart.

It's the same with us. Every single day, when we get our day going, there are people fighting for our attention. There's a task list that is building and vying for our time. But Jesus showed us how important it is to pray before any of that really gets going.

Spurgeon also said, on this early morning prayer note, "It is a good rule never to look into the face of a man until you have looked into the face of God."

Why? There are so many simple reasons. Here are two of them.

One, when we start our day in prayer, we're acknowledging before God, "God, we are fully dependent on You. God, we need Your wisdom to guide us through this day. God, we know that this day is in Your hands."

It reminds us. It resets our minds, our hearts, and our priorities first thing in the morning that our walk with Jesus is the most important thing going on in our lives. We're getting before God and acknowledging that at the very beginning of the day.

Another really practical reason why we need to spend the first moments of the day in prayer is this: This is true for me, and I'm sure it's true for you as well. If I don't carve out those moments for prayer at the beginning of the day, and I let the day get ahold of me and start walking through people and tasks and different things that are going on, there's a good chance I'm never making it back around to have that intentional moment before the Lord in prayer.

We need to pray before the day begins. If we don't, there's a good chance we never make it back to that moment.

Jesus gets alone with the Father before the day begins, and He prays. This is not while He is on vacation. This is not while things are slow in His life. I'm sure that His Skylight Calendar, if He had one, was fully booked up at this moment, and it stayed that way.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible helps us really get a visual on what Jesus did with His time while He was on earth. It's the last verse of the Gospel of John, John 21:25. It says this:

Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

— John 21:25

Think about what that means. Man, Jesus was active, wasn't He? Jesus did a lot for a lot of people. He spoke in a lot of places. He healed a lot of people. He cast out a lot of demons. He was raising the dead. I'm telling you, Jesus had so much to do. We cannot begin to imagine the demands that were made on His time.

Still, His pattern was to carve out intentional time before the day began in prayer. Let's follow that pattern before the day begins. We're not too busy.

In fact, Martin Luther, the great Reformer, once said this: "I've got so much to do today, I've got to wake up early and spend the first three hours in prayer."

If you're busy, if you've got a lot going on in your world, if you're interacting with a lot of people, if you have a lot of tasks, if you're at school all day - if you've got a lot going on - that means you should pray even more.

Prayer shapes the day. Jesus didn't wake up that morning and pray because He felt like it. He didn't wake up and pray that morning because He was facing some kind of crisis that pushed Him to a place of prayer. Not at all. He prayed before the day began because it was a fixed, non-negotiable part of His life. He got alone in the mountains, and He prayed.

Now, you might not be able to get to a mountain in Houston tomorrow morning. We don't have mountains. We have overpasses. That's the highest elevation we've got. So you're not going to a mountain, but you can get somewhere alone.

It's not going to happen by accident. Set your alarm. Get up earlier. Carve that time into the day to get alone before the Lord in prayer.

If that's not your pattern, here's a very practical first step. Everybody in the room can do this. I promise you, every single one of us can do this.

According to several studies, between 80 and 90 percent of Americans look at their phones within the first 10 minutes of their day. Within the first 10 minutes of waking up, many of them just roll over in bed and grab it. It's their alarm clock, and all of a sudden they're on their phone.

I've got two things to say about that. Number one: Stop that. Find a new morning routine.

But number two, if you're not going to stop that, if you're going to reach for your phone first thing in the

morning, I want to encourage you to do this today. You can do this while I'm talking right now, as long as you're just doing that. Pull your phone out and start a note that says "Prayer" at the top. Just put it in your phone.

When people ask you to pray about something, jot it in there. When you think of different things you'd like to pray about, jot them in there. If there are things going on for your spouse that you want to pray for them about, put them in there. If your kids have asked you to pray for certain things, put them in there. Put the different things you want to pray for your kids in there.

If you've got friends who are sick and you'd like to see God work in their lives in a powerful way, put them in that note and begin to pray for them as well. If there are areas in your life where you want God to move, put them in there. If you've got friends who are far from the Lord and you want God to do a miraculous work in their hearts and draw them to Himself, put their names in there. The things you want to pray about, put in that note.

Then, as you start your day in the morning, as your alarm goes off and you grab your phone and turn it off, before you get on social media, before you get caught up on the news and everything that's going on, open the note. Before your day begins, spend some time in prayer. I'm telling you, it absolutely matters.

John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, said, "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day."

Before your day begins, pray. Prayer sets the pace for everything else you're going to do.

Pray Before You Decide

Let's keep going. What would it look like if we prayed before anything else? We pray before we launch into new seasons of life. We pray before we launch into a new day in the morning. Third, we would pray before we decide.

When we have those moments in life where we're making a decision about what's going to be next for us, we will pray before we decide.

Flip back to Luke now, chapter 6. I want you to look at this prayer moment of Jesus here. Luke 6:12 says this:

In these days He went out to the mountain to pray, and all night He continued in prayer to God. And when day came, He called His disciples and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles.

— Luke 6:12-13

Then the names are listed right there.

Again, this is a massive moment in the life and ministry of Jesus: the calling of the 12 apostles. This is a big deal. Jesus is picking His team. There are a bunch of people around, a bunch of people who have been following Him, and He's going to look into the crowd and pick 12 of them to go deeper with Him. He's going to pick 12 of them, entrust them with the gospel, essentially, and ask them to carry it to the world when He is gone. He is picking His team.

With fall being back, a lot of great things are happening, but one of the best parts of the fall is football season, right? Is anybody else excited about football season this year? I know all of you are excited about the Aggies kicking off a new season of A&M football. It's going to be great. The Texans have high hopes for them again this year.

Listen, I'm excited about middle school football. I've got a kid who's in seventh grade now. He can finally play for his school. He is pumped about it. I can't wait to go watch some middle school football.

But there's one other aspect of football season that I think many of you are involved in, and that's fantasy football. Now, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands because some of you might not want to admit it. But a lot of people take fantasy football seriously.

You get on your computer, and you pick different guys, and your friends pick different guys, and you hope your guys do better than their guys on a given Sunday afternoon. My wife doesn't love it, and a lot of my friends' wives don't love it either because it consumes our afternoons and then Monday night. Anyway, it's a whole different thing.

But here's the deal: Some people take it really, really seriously. They buy magazines. They read articles. They do research on this. There are people who have paid subscriptions that last year-round, giving them research and the best information on picking fantasy football players. Man, they are all in. I think it's a little nerdy, but they are all in on this.

Then there are other people who show up to their fantasy football draft, more like me. I don't do any research at all. I just sort of walk in there, look at the people who are available when it's my turn to pick, and I'm like, "Sounds good. I guess I'll just take that guy."

I'm telling you, most years it doesn't work out very well for me. I don't do too terribly well, and I don't win that many games. But that's okay.

Listen, when Jesus picks His team here, He doesn't walk in like that. He doesn't just show up and say, "I'll take that guy." That's not what happens. He spends the entire night before this massive decision in prayer.

Jesus doesn't want to do this on His own. He wants the wisdom and the will of God the Father to shine through this decision, and so He prays.

If you look at the end of verse 12 in the ESV translation, it says He "continued in prayer to God." Literally, the Greek here would say He prayed "in the prayer of God." It's a very unique phrase. This is the only time you're going to find this phrase anywhere in the Bible.

Here's what it's saying: Jesus wasn't simply praying to God. Jesus was praying in conformity with the will of God.

He didn't go before God and say, "God, I've got this really big decision to make, and here are all the different options I've got. God, I've already decided that I want to choose this option and not the other ones. So, God, would You bless this decision that I want to make?" That's not what He does.

He says, "God, I want to be in line with Your will. There are all these different things in front of Me, all these different options that are there. God, I want You to lead Me, guide Me, and direct Me to where You would have Me go. God, I have a decision. Show Me Your will."

We make a lot of decisions every day, don't we? We decided what time we were going to wake up today. We decided when we were going to get out of bed. We decided what clothes to wear. There are a lot of decisions we make every single day. Some people say we make as many as 10,000 decisions a day.

As Christians, as we walk with the Lord, we've got to trust that the Holy Spirit is doing what Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do in our lives. As we walk with Him, the Holy Spirit is our guide and our counselor, giving us wisdom and discernment in these day-to-day decisions. So we can trust, as we walk with the Lord, that moment by moment we are living in a way that is honoring to God with these decisions.

But there are other times when we have these big decisions in front of us, and we know there's going to be a moment in time when we have to make them, like Jesus choosing these disciples here. We have time before the decision. We get to step back, slow down, follow the example of Jesus, and pray, asking God to show us His will and lead us where He would have us go.

If Jesus needed that time in prayer before a big decision, my goodness, don't we need to spend time with the Lord before we decide? Pray for the wisdom of God. The Bible says He will give it to us, and He will give it to us generously.

James 1:5 says:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

— James 1:5

That's what Jesus does here.

Then think about what happens. Jesus prays. The Lord guides Him to these 12 men. These are the ones He's going to entrust the gospel to. These are the ones to whom, as Jesus ascends to heaven, He's going to say, "Guys, you need to go and make disciples of all nations." These are the ones He tells, "You're going to be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth."

And they did. These are the guys who would help lead and shape the early church, who would plant churches on several different continents. These are the guys who wrote much of what we read here in Scripture today.

This was a big decision for Him to make, and it was done with the wisdom of the Father.

Let me ask you: What decisions are in front of you right now? Because we've all got something. What decisions are you facing? Maybe decisions with your kids, family members, or parents. What decisions are you facing with your finances? What decisions are you facing in your relationships, dating, engagement, or marriage?

What decisions are you facing, and how are you facing them?

I encourage you to slow down. Make sure you have wisdom from God shaping your next steps. Pray. Pray that you would make your decisions in line with His will and His way. I'm telling you, you're always going to be better when you go His way.

Pray before you decide.

Pray Before You Get a Big Head

Finally this morning, I want to encourage you to pray before you get a big head. I'll explain it.

Turn over to John chapter 6. In John chapter 6, Jesus feeds the 5,000. Think about that. Jesus is outside teaching in the countryside, in a rural area. There are hills around, and He's teaching this group of people. Thousands of them are gathered there. It's getting close to dinnertime, and they don't have a caterer who's shown up to provide a meal for all these people.

The disciples are like, "Jesus, what are we going to do?"

Jesus says, "Well, y'all go find some food."

"How are we going to do that?"

Then they bring a little boy to Jesus. Think of it: They've got a kids' meal. Literally, they have a kids' meal that they've taken from a kid who's volunteered to share it. Jesus looks at this kids' meal. He prays. He blesses it. Then He just starts breaking the pieces off.

Before you know it, thousands of people are fed, and there's still food left over. Think about the miracle that is.

It's like you going and getting a kids' meal. Go to Chick-fil-A. You get your kids' meal with the four or five nuggets in there. Then you go to a high school football game on a Friday night. You get into the stadium. There are thousands of people there. The concession stands are closed. They want dinner, but they don't want to leave and miss the game.

What do you do? You take those nuggets and just walk up and down the aisles. You wash your hands first, but you're reaching in there and passing out these nuggets. Five nuggets turn into thousands of nuggets, and everybody in the stadium is filled.

Think about the reaction of the crowd that night. They're going to go nuts. If you've got that talent, show up at my house at dinnertime anytime you want. I'd love for you to share that with us.

But that's what happens. The crowd sees Jesus do this. They've never seen anybody do that before, of course. So they're like, "This is the One we've been waiting for. This is the One we've been waiting for."

Look at John 6:14:

When the people saw the sign that He had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.

— John 6:14-15

What's happening? The crowd sees it. They can't control themselves. They say, "This is the One. This is the Savior." So they're going to force a crown onto Jesus' head.

But Jesus knew that wasn't God's plan. Jesus knew He was going to wear a crown of thorns before He wore the crown of a king. So what does He do? Look at John 6:15. How does it end? It says Jesus got out of there. He withdrew again to the mountain by Himself.

What's He doing on the mountain? He's praying. That was an easy guess, right? We're talking about prayer. He's on the mountain, and He's praying.

Mark spells it out for us in Mark 6:45-46. The crowd wants to make Him king, and it says:

Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He dismissed the crowd. And after He had taken leave of them, He went up on the mountain to pray.

— Mark 6:45-46

Mark 6:45 says, "Immediately." The Greek word there is incredibly forceful. He's not saying, "Hey, guys, would you please take off?" He's not saying, "Guys, I'll handle it from here on out. You guys just get in the boat and go relax." This is a forceful demand, a command Jesus is making to His disciples.

Why would He do that? Think about this for a minute. Why is He forcing the disciples out of there in this moment?

Because it would have been natural for the disciples, who were on Jesus' team, to go along with the crowds. Put yourself in their shoes. They've just seen their guy perform this incredible miracle. It's not the first for them. They've seen Jesus perform miracles before. Now they hear the rumblings of the crowd saying, "Hey, He should be the King."

The disciples, in their minds, have to be thinking, "Yeah, He should be the King. He should be the King. He's the One God sent. He should be the King."

In that moment, it would have been natural for them to soak it up and wish that Jesus were on the throne. Because if Jesus is the King, what does that mean for these 12 disciples?

But Jesus knew that wasn't God's plan. He knew that pride and catering to the crowd weren't what God had for Him. So He sends them away and heads to the mountain to pray.

Prayer enabled Him to resist the temptation of pride, the temptation to soak up the glory. Prayer kept Him focused on God's plan and God's direction for His life.

Listen, when you have those mountaintop experiences - and all of us do - they're great. When you hit a home run in life, when people are really singing your praises, I want to encourage you to step back. Step back for a moment and pray.

I'm not saying don't enjoy the moment. Absolutely enjoy it. Encouragement is good for our souls. It's a godly thing. Barnabas is lifted up in the book of Acts as a great example of encouragement.

I'm just saying, like Jesus, don't let the big moments take you somewhere God never intended for you to go. Before you get a big head, step back and pray.

I can't tell you how many really bad and destructive decisions are made in the moment of an emotional high. Step back, and in success ask God to keep your heart focused on Him and loving others. Ask God to help the successes of your life point other people to Him.

We can learn so much from the way Jesus prayed. As we read the Gospels, we see this incredible pattern: In every situation, in every scenario, what does Jesus do? Jesus prays before anything else.

Let's make sure that's our pattern. Let's be a people who pray before anything else.

There are a lot of people who turn to the Lord in prayer when life gets hard. They turn to the Lord in prayer when they're facing a crisis. They turn to the Lord in prayer when they want or need something. But Jesus treated prayer as the engine that drove everything else.

Let's be like that. Let's pray first and let that drive everything else in our lives.

My prayer, as I've been praying for this morning and for the next several weeks in this series, is that we wouldn't show up on Sundays, hear about prayer, and then walk away doing nothing with it.

I've been praying that God would grow and expand all of our prayer lives, that we'd pray like we never have before, that we'd grow in prayer in a massive way this fall, and that every single day we would draw closer to Him because of the way He leads us to pray.

We have no idea the massive difference prayer can make in our lives. Let's not just talk about prayer. Let's be about prayer, just like Jesus.

There's an interesting note in Acts 11, at the end of verse 26. It says:

And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

— Acts 11:26

Why? Why would a group of people who didn't know Christ in one city look at this other group of people and make up a word to describe them? Because that's what happened. Nobody was using the word "Christian." It wasn't a thing.

They looked at this group of people, and they made up a word to describe them because "Christian" means "little Christ" or "of the party of Christ." Why would they call them that? Because they looked at this group of people and said, "These people are doing what Jesus Christ did. They're living like Jesus Christ lived."

Let's do that. Let's be a people who live like Jesus. And that starts by praying like Jesus.

I want to encourage you, I really do, to grow in your prayer life. Maybe get a little notebook, something like this,

and write down on a daily basis the things you're praying for. You can go back and look at it. You can see your consistency in your prayer life as you do this. You can see your growth in your prayer life. You can see where and how God is answering prayers in your life.

Maybe you keep it in a note on your phone, but find some way to do it. Make it your plan to grow in prayer. I'm telling you, like football practice and the dentist, it is not accidentally going to happen. You've got to make a plan to grow in your prayer life.

Let's make it our priority to pray.

Let's do it now. Would you pray with me this morning?

As we bow together, I just want to encourage you, no matter who you are or what's going on in your life or prayer life, to offer up this prayer before God. Just tell God, "God, thank You that You've invited me to pray. Thank You that I have the ability to come before You in prayer, knowing that You'll hear me, knowing that You are listening."

Thank Him for the privilege of prayer.

Then, from there, get serious with the Lord about your prayer life. Maybe you've got this consistent prayer life, and it is life-giving to you every single day. If that's the case, thank Him. Thank Him for that, and ask Him to give you the strength to keep going and to lead others and teach others to pray.

Or maybe you'd say this morning that your prayer life just sort of happens when it happens, and it's not a priority or it's not consistent. If that's you, get before the Lord today and say, "Lord, I know I need to make a change here. God, help me make that change. God, help me to pray before anything else."

He tells you that He listens to His children. He tells you that if you ask, He'll help you to do just that.

In just a second, we're going to stand and sing one last song. As we do, we're going to have pastors down here at the front, and they're here to pray with you about whatever God's doing in your life.

Maybe God told you this morning that you need to start praying for a specific decision or a specific situation in your life, and you'd just like to pray over that alongside somebody else. We'd be honored to pray with you about that.

Maybe you heard this morning that the Lord hears the prayers of His children, and you're wondering, "I'd like to pray, but I don't know if the Lord's going to hear me. I don't know if I'm His child."

We know that we become His children by trusting in Jesus Christ alone. In fact, the Bible tells us in John 1:12 that when we believe in Jesus, we become children of God. We are adopted into the family of God.

So, if you're here today and you just want to talk to the Lord and ask Him to bring you into the family, if you're ready to trust Christ and become a Christian, we'll have pastors down here who would love to pray with you about that as well. Just tell them, "I'm ready to trust Christ." We'll show you exactly what that means in God's Word and answer any questions you might have.

The point is, we can all go before the Lord in prayer, and we're going to do that together.

God, we love You so much. We thank You for the way that You love us and the way that You listen to us. It's in Your name we pray.