

Rich Nathan  
April 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, 1996  
Teach Us To Pray

## **When Life Has Lost Its Fizz**

This week I read an article in the newspaper about how cities all across the country are dismantling their playground equipment because of safety concerns. One of the experts said that in a few years there won't be any monkey bars left anywhere in the country. Could you imagine growing up without monkey bars? I mean what do kids do if you can't hang upside down by the backs of your knees until you get completely dizzy and feel like throwing up?

But the regulators and the litigators have determined that monkey bars are unreasonably unsafe. Cities and schools are afraid of getting sued and so they are unbolting their playground equipment. They are getting rid of teeter-totters and seesaws because if you stand under a seesaw, you will get banged on the head. Of course, most two-year-olds understand that you don't stand under something that is coming down. But just to play it on the safe side, schools are getting rid of that kind of equipment. In its place they are putting beanbag chairs and other fun stuff like sand and rubberized floors so that you can fall down without scraping your knees.

You see this crazy quest for safety whenever you buy a product these days, don't you? I mean, if you bought a ladder recently you can hardly find the ladder underneath all the product safety warning labels. They have to tell you to lean the ladder up against something lest you think that you can just suspend it in air and start climbing up. You are not supposed to stand on the top rung—they have to tell you that. Don't climb the ladder

wearing high heels, gals that is unsafe. Pretty soon you will have to be told not to climb the ladder while wearing roller blades. Not a good idea! Don't try your electric radio in the shower. Don't work on your car while it is running. Don't use Tide detergent internally. I mean can you imagine that?

"Hey, Mom, do we have anything to eat?"

"Well, there is some Tide under the sink."

"No, Mom, I just read the warning labels. You are not supposed to eat Tide."

With all the safety regulations are it any wonder then that American life in the 90's is experienced as being so boring? I mean the thing that is characteristic of life in the modern world is that so many people are so unbelievably bored. Kids don't have enough work to do. They are no longer required to do many chores that mean anything. They are not milking cows or sewing or having to cook or churn butter. The typical comment of children is "It's boring. I'm bored."

And the same thing, of course, applies to teenagers and adults. Think about how much money and energy and time we put into artificially stimulating our inner beings because life as we experience it today is boring. The movie studios have to produce evermore-amazing stunts.

"Yeah, well, the last movie we blew up a 747. What do you say we blow up an aircraft carrier or a subway or the White House?"

We are so bored that everything has to become more thrilling. It is not sufficient any more to have a 200 foot drop on a roller coaster unless you can also go upside down and free fall for 50 feet.

The cure for boredom in the 90's is a whole collection of artificial stimulants. Life is not enough. We need all these artificial ways to pick us up. It is not enough any longer to run a marathon.

“Oh, a marathon? That's all, you wimp? I am involved in super marathons. We run a hundred miles. 26 miles is for novices, for babies. We run 150 miles in the desert with a canoe on our backs.”

Playboy Magazine has been having problems with its sales over the last several years. But it is not because America has become morally healthier. It is because Playboy is not hard-core enough. It is not stimulating enough for the pornography addicts. They need something with a sharper edge on it.

I believe the thing that we are going to find overwhelming us in the next decade is gambling addictions as cities and states more and more look for other sources of revenue. There is push for casinos. We are going to see an explosion of gambling addicts. I guarantee you that within five years, we will have a recovery group here for gambling addicts. The reason is, I think, the allure is that people need to create some artificial risks in their lives. Life is so risk-free that we have to create some risk.

Sports have become so routine, so mundane, that the only way for them to be exciting is to add the dimension of the possibility that we will lose money. We need a point spread. We have to bet on whether someone is going to shoot more than four 3-pointers. Whether there is going to be more than five field goals in a football game. Whether anyone will hit a triple.

We have all the artificial stimulants: bungee jumping, hang-gliding, motor cross racing.

And the same kind of attitude swings over to marriage and we are just going through the motions. It is just the same old, same old. I won't ask for a show of hands for how many of you are currently flat; the air is out of the tire in your marriage or your love life.

I won't ask for a show of hands regarding how many of you experience work or school as being boring. I know that most Americans would raise their hands if you asked: Do you find church/Christianity boring?

"Yeah, the sermons are boring and dull. The music is dull. We just go through the motions. Our kinship is dull or women's group."

You know, Jesus basically communicated to us that we, Christians, who have come to him don't need artificial stimulants in order to find a thrill in life. He said that he came to give life and that more abundantly.

Well, how do you and I get that life? How can we find enough life so that we don't need artificial stimulants?

If you or someone you are talking to is basically communicating that their life is like coke without the fizz, just kind of flat, then how do you get the fizz back? I have called today's message: "When Life Has Lost Its Fizz". Let's pray.

This is the first of a series that I am going to be doing on prayer that I am calling, *Lord, Teach Us To Pray*. And what I want to talk about tonight [today], just by way of introduction is to take a look at a church for whom life has gotten dull and boring. A church that has lost its fizz.

If you have a Bible, open up with me to Revelation 3:14-22:

*"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you*

*out of my moth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."*

Now, Jesus accuses the church of being lukewarm. V. 15, Jesus says: *"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. But because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth."*

Laodicea is a city that was located in what is now known as the nation of Turkey. About six miles to the south of Laodicea were some very famous hot springs in the city of Hierapolis. People used to travel from all over the near-eastern world to the city of Hierapolis. It was for their hot springs. They would take baths there. It was considered to be medicinally helpful. It was like the hot mineral waters in Hot Springs, Arkansas. And those hot springs were piped through some mountains to Laodicea six miles away.

But the mountains were filled with lime and so by the time the water got to Laodicea, it had lost its heat. It was lukewarm and it was full of this lime sediment so it was kind of chalky. And if you took a drink of that water, it was yuk! Lukewarm chalk. You wanted to spit it out.

And Jesus uses the image of their own local situation to say, "you are just like that water in your city, not cold enough to drink, not hot enough to bathe in. You believers in the Laodicean church are not atheists, shaking your fists at the sky, but you are not full of warm, hot zeal for God either. You are not really willing to give it all to God and go after him really hard and really risk. Share your faith. Sacrificially give. Put yourself on the line.

No, you are just in this gray middle. This fence sitting, one-foot in, one foot out. Same old, same old—just going through religious routines. You are lukewarm. Boring. Dull. Get it?”

And then Jesus goes on in v. 17 and say, *“I am rich, I have acquired wealth. I don’t need a thing.”* Laodicea was one of the most prosperous communities in that part of the world. In fact, just a few years before John wrote the book of Revelations, the area experienced an earthquake and all of the surrounding cities asked Rome for aid in rebuilding the city except for Laodicea. It turned Rome down on its offer for aid. It said, “No, we have enough of our own money. We will rebuild on our own.”

And they did. They felt so self-sufficient, so smug. Jesus goes on and says to them: You don’t realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

What an accusation. He calls them “poor” even though they were a center for banking. He calls them “blind” even though they had a great medical school that made eye salve. He said, “No, you can’t see.” He said, “You are naked” even though they had a huge textile industry there. Clothing from Laodicea went all over.

He is talking to a church that is prosperous, a church that is wealthy, and a church that is, perhaps, growing. But it is dull. It is complacent. It is compromised and has no fizz.

You say, “Well, what is the cure for this?”

Jesus tells us what the cure is in the next few verses. I want to begin with vv. 19-20, *“Those whom I love I want to rebuke and discipline and so be earnest and repent. Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”*

I believe the cure for spiritual dullness, for boredom in the church, for boredom in marriage, for life when it has lost its fizz is prayer. What I want to communicate to you is a

very different way of thinking about prayer because one of the most helpful images for thinking about prayer in the Bible is found in Revelation 3:20. Jesus says:

*“Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”*

That verse is used as an evangelistic verse very often. A verse that would be told to unbelievers. We would say to someone who has not yet received Christ as Savior. Jesus is knocking at the door to your heart. If you open up and invite him in, he will come in and live with you and reside in you and make you born again.

Revelation 3:20 is certainly a verse on evangelism, but in context, it is a verse written to Christians and gives us one of the most helpful images of praying that exists in the Bible. Because praying is, first of all, just opening the door to Christ. It is inviting Christ into your situation.

When we pray, what we are at bottom doing is giving Jesus access to us, to our world, to our families, to our workplace, to our kids. We are opening the door. So much of our lives are spent running from God, hiding from God, trying to work out problems on our own. We are strategizing. Sit there and reason through and strategize through how you are going to solve this particular mess that you have made. How you are going to overcome this particular problem. How you are going to fix your mate. How you are going to repair this relationship.

Prayer is nothing other than throwing the door open and saying, “Jesus, come into the center of this. I’ve kept you out too long!” To pray is to open the door to Christ and to give him a chance to work. And I love the fact that Revelation 3:20 says: *“Here I am. I stand at the door and knock.”* Because what we learn is that it is not our prayer that pulls God toward us or inclines God to do something that he otherwise wouldn’t do. Revelation 3:20

tells us that Jesus is already standing at the door to your heart. He is already standing at the door of your life. He is already standing at the door of your situation and he is knocking. You see God is always the initiator of prayer. It is not our prayer that gets God to come toward us.

Oh, God's back is toward us. That is what we think. He is so far away somewhere on Mars. And then we pray and he wakes up from sleeping and lazily comes toward us, taking his sweet time. That is not biblical prayer.

Biblical prayer understands that God wants in. He is pressing in on you. He wants to gain admittance. And so you throw open the door and say, "OK, I will grant you your desire Lord, to come into the center of my situation." You are not forcing God to do what God doesn't want to do. You are just responding to the knock.

And the knock often comes from life's pressures. Some of you say, "Well, I don't hear God knocking."

Are you experiencing any pressure at all? Any frustration? Any difficulty? Any upset? That is the knock of God. The Lord is saying, "Hey, let me in to this. Invite me to the very center of this problem in your life. This feeling."

I love the fact that prayer is illustrated by simply opening a door because what that says to me is that you don't have to be some brilliant mystic or be incredibly knowledgeable or be really emotional to pray. All you need to do is to open the door. Just let God into your situation. Let God into your need. Let God into your marriage. You have been keeping him out of your marriage. You have been keeping God out of the center of your sex life. You have been keeping God out of your job. Out of your self. Just let him in.

Tell me, using this image of opening the door; do you have to be a really brilliant person to open a door? Do you have to be holy? Do you have to go to a school where they



train you to open the door with a variety of techniques? Perhaps you need to read the medieval writers and how they opened doors, so that you could follow in the paths of the medieval door openers.

I am not saying that there is nothing to learn in prayer. But I am saying that, at bottom, prayer is fairly easy. It is opening up to God. It is inviting him in. With all the thousands of books, courses and schools on prayer, we have gotten the thing so complicated that the average person is scared off.

“I don’t have the time or the inclination to learn all these things. Therefore, I can’t pray.”

You can open a door and therefore you can pray. See, it is not its complexity that makes prayer so difficult. What makes it difficult is just doing it. It is easy to open a door, but you have to do it when you hear someone knocking.

The struggle of prayer, in large measure, is that we don’t do it. We don’t do it for a couple of basic reasons. We don’t do it, as we are going to find out, because we really believe, at bottom, that we really are self-sufficient. That we don’t need God in the center of our lives or need to respond to the knock of Christ on our heart in order to live productive, full, exciting lives. We don’t pray because we don’t feel the need to pray.

And we don’t pray because, friends, this is the point of attack from Satan every waking minute of your life. To cut you off from God. And to keep you from praying. The fact is that from the moment you get up in the morning, whether you realize it or not, Satan is in your face and communicating one overriding message: Don’t pray. You are too busy. You don’t feel fervent. You feel dirty. You are not worthy. It is too much to do. There are too many distractions. The room is too cold. The room is too hot. There is too much

noise. It is raining out. You have a paper to work on. Don't open the door to God. Deal with the problem yourself.

You liar, you do too!

See, we don't have to untangle all the knots in our hearts to open the door to God. We are continually lied to and told that unless we feel internally right, we shouldn't pray. Unless we feel fervent we shouldn't pray.

God doesn't ask all of those things of us as a condition of prayer. Getting straightened out is the result of prayer. You untangle all of your mixed motives, your selfishness and your upset and your anger. You untangle all of that as you open the door to God, not in order to open the door to God. God comes in and he unknots the knots.

There is a lovely picture in the book Song of Solomon, which is a love poem. I don't believe it is meant to be a story of Jesus and the church. I think it has been misused that way. I think that the church in history has been embarrassed by romance and by sexual love and so it hyperspiritualized this obviously sexual, romantic love poem. But there is a lovely image in Song of Solomon where the man is knocking on the door for his beloved. And she says in Chapter 5, *"I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen, my lover is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew. My hair with the dampness of the night."*

And she says to him, *"I have taken off my robe. Must I put it on again? I have washed my feet, must I soil them again?"*

And then we read that the lover leaves. Finally, she gets up, but her lover has left, he is gone.

It is the classic, "Do we have to?" "I have a headache." "I am not available for you now." "I hear you knocking, but I am tired." Busy...then the lover leaves.

See, that is what prayerlessness is all about. Prayerlessness is just bolting the door of your heart when Christ is knocking. It is bolting off an area of your life and refusing to get up and unlatch the door. Keeping the door locked. The problem of prayerlessness is not that it is a great sin because you are not disciplined enough. It is not because you didn't get up to check the little box on your quiet time checklist. That is not why it is a sin.

It is a sin because you are saying to Jesus "Keep Out." It is a sin because you are trying to live your life independent of God and he is knocking, knocking, knocking and you won't let him in. It is a sin because prayerlessness posts "No Trespassing" signs around some part of us. Don't come into my money problems, Jesus. Don't come into my frustrations as a mom. Don't step into the center of my conflict with a co-worker. I will take care of this one. Stay out of my career decisions or my reproductive decisions. Prayerlessness is a sin not because you lack discipline, it is because you submit to a lie that says that you can live independent of God.

By prayerlessness we say to the creator of the universe and our maker: No. I am going to try to wall off a portion of the universe that *you* made from you. I won't let the owner gain admittance to his own property. I am going to build a wall around your creation and say to you, Creator, back off.

Prayer is opening up to God. Prayer is conversing with God.

Revelation 3:20 says: *"Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him [underline eat with him] and he with me."*

You know, in the ancient world, eating with someone wasn't a matter of hey, let's grab a bite. To invite someone to dinner was to invite them into an intimate relationship with your family. The whole picture of eating together in the Bible is one of close friendship, intimate fellowship. It is a picture of two friends sharing heart to heart. Jesus

does not say, “I will come in and grab a bite with you.” He says, “I am coming in to converse with you, my friend.”

And I think it is interesting, if you go back in the Old Testament and you look at the way that people related to God, very often what you will find is that you don’t see the word “prayer” mentioned. What you do see are these wonderful conversations with God. They are prayers, but they are not called prayers.

And so you see Adam and God talking in the garden. And you see Moses having conversations with God at the burning bush. It doesn’t say, “he prayed.” He opened up his little prayer book and went through this rote, set prayer. It doesn’t say that. He just conversed with God.

But the person in the Old Testament that you see conversing with God as a friend the most is Abraham. Again, when Abraham was talking with God, it doesn’t say that he was praying. The dialogue just begins. And in Genesis 18 there is a little verse that sums up what I am talking about when I say that prayer is conversing with God as with a friend. Genesis 18, God is planning to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah and God says in v. 17: *“Then the Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?’”*

You know, in several places in the Bible, Abraham is called God’s friend. You see it in James 2:23. You see it in Isaiah 41:8. And if you were looking for a definition of friendship, a biblical perspective, it would be of disclosing one’s heart to another. Friends are people who have no secrets. The really important things in life get shared.

So when God says to Abraham, “My friend, I am not going to hide anything from you regarding my plans” he is saying, “This is my understanding of our relationship.”

And you know something? Jesus says the same thing to us. In John 15, Jesus says, “Here is the way I think about friendship.” John 15:14, Jesus says: *“You are my friends, if you*

*do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant doesn't know his master's business. Instead, I have called you 'friends'. For everything I have learned from my Father, I made known to you."*

Jesus is saying, "You know, Christian, just like God was Abraham's covenant friend, you have become true children of Abraham and God's covenant friends because of my reconciling work.

We are not born friends of God, by the way. We are born enemies of God. The most innocent little baby in the world, the Bible teaches, is born in sin. Born fallen. Born with their fist up to the sky saying basically with the first scream: No to God. No. It took the death of Christ to reconcile us to God and to make God our friend. It takes an act of repentance to turn from shaking your fist at God to being open to God.

You want to know what prayer is? It is not only opening up to God, it is conversing with God as a friend. People say, "I don't know how to pray." I would say back, "Do you know how to talk to a friend?" To sit down over a cup of coffee and just talk? You can do that. Then you can pray. That's the way people in the Bible did it.

And the third thing about prayer is that prayer is finding resource in God. You know, we in America have so often communicated that prayer is a discipline. That it is a spiritual discipline and you need to be disciplined to pray. I think there is discipline in praying, but I am afraid that the word "discipline" is used so negatively, that it almost can't be redeemed. Because discipline immediately raises the connotation of drudgery and something unpleasant. You know, it is like eating rice cakes. It is unpleasant, but you need to do it if you are going to diet. You need to fill you mouth full of something that tastes like styrofoam. But you are getting yourself disciplined.

I think we have to totally change our images of prayer. That is why I am giving this talk today. It is a conversation with a friend. It is opening the door to Jesus. And third, it is

finding resource in God. Rather than a discipline, how about thinking about prayer as an incredible opportunity of a lifetime. Resource in God.

I mean, if someone came to you and they said to you, “Look, I know that you are having financial problems. I have more money than I know what to do with. How would you like 5 million dollars?”

Would your response be, “Well, do I have to take it? OK, I guess I will engage in the discipline of taking money from you.” Or would you just start taking cash and stuff it in your pockets, in your pants, filling your coat full of money.

Prayer was never meant to be a have to or should, and you need to check the box. It is someone who is very wealthy, God, coming to you and saying, “I have everything that you need. Why not tap into me?”

See, friends, prayer is bottomed in the idea that I don’t have it and he does. I am hungry and he has bread. I have needs and he has the goods.

And the problem with the Laodicean church in Revelation 3 was that they didn’t understand that they were in need. They said, “I am rich. I have acquired wealth. I don’t need a thing.”

And Jesus said to them, “You may think that you are on top of the world, that is why you don’t pray, but the truth is that you are poor and pitiful and blind.”

You see, one of the bottom lines of prayer is getting real clear, real fast that we are in need. In fact, I would say that the prerequisite of praying is seeing that you are someone who has needs and being able to admit that. Prayer arises from “I am at the end of my rope. I don’t have any more strategies left. I don’t have any resource left to take care of this. I have tried this and that. I have pulled on that door. Nothing is opening up.” That’s when you pray, isn’t it?

People who never pray, when the doctors have given up, when there are no answers in medicine. Then you see the atheists pray. Then the atheist drags their mom out to church and says, “Will you pray for her?”

You try arguing through your problems in marriage. You fight and fight and fight. It is only when you finally come to the end of yourself and say, “You know we aren’t getting anywhere that we turn and pray.”

If you are stuffed, if you are full, you don’t come in and say, “What’s for dinner?” It is when you are hungry that you say, “What’s for dinner?” It’s when you are thirsty that you say, “Do we have anything to drink?” It is when you are in need that you look for resource in God.

Now, it is probably the case that we are not in touch with the fact that we are in need. I will tell you some of the ways that I know I am in need of God. One of the ways that I know that I am in need is that I just plain feel distant from God. My relationship with God just becomes a formality. It is drudgery. The passion, the romance, the intensity is all gone. I feel dry. It’s like our marriages when there is no longer any kiss at the door when we come in or leave. Just responsibilities, routine. Sitting down over dinner with nothing to say. When there is distance in your relationship with God, you are in need.

I know I am in need when my emotions are on edge and I have no emotional reserve. The least push gets me completely out of whack. I am just irritable and wound out. Something that one of the kids says just sends me off. If you are emotionally exhausted and wrung out, you are in need.

I know I am in need when my decisions are not well thought through. When I am being impulsive and shooting from the hip. Or simple decisions are more complicated than they ought to be.

If you are not sleeping well. You are tossing and turning and the only time you really experience any communion with God is in the middle of the night, that's the only time he can get through to you.

What is prayer? It is this honest acknowledgment that I have a need and that he has the resource. And so we go to him for what we lack. Jesus says that you don't realize you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you can become rich and white clothes to wear so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Buy from me.

I think this buying is the same kind of buying that Isaiah 55 talks about where Isaiah the prophet says, *"Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. You who have no money, come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money, without cost."* This is the buying of just coming to God. We can't earn God's resource. Nothing that we give to God would cause him to give us resource. This is the buying that is free. Prayer is a marketplace that you go to and just pick up items that don't cost anything to us. To us. They cost him his blood. They cost him his life. They don't cost us anything.

Do you have any idea how great a deal we are let in on when God calls us to pray?

You know, I used to have a coach that would gather us on the sideline. He would say, "Let me talk to you in your own vernacular." And then he would really let us have it. He thought we didn't understand what he was trying to communicate. He said, "Let me talk to you in your vernacular."

I want to do the same thing right now, team, when it comes to praying and making time for prayer. Right now, we Americans are absolutely obsessed with being productive. We are obsessed with time and efficiency. There are innumerable time management seminars and everyone walks around with their little daytimer and planner. We are always



trying to figure out how we can be more productive and squeeze in more activities into fewer moments and spend quality time with our children. Every thing we do, now, with kids must be meaningful and productive. God forbid that our children should spend two hours out in the backyard kicking a can around the backyard or playing with a stick. We have to make sure that they are in lessons that cause them to be more creative. We have to get the botanist to describe what the leaves are all about and then draw the leaves and explore color and movement, and texture. We have to give them open shelves for their toys. We can't have a toy box because that cuts down on their creativity and their exploration. They must learn to play the violin by age 3 or they are falling behind. And they have to have computer access from the time they are in the crib or they won't be able to compete with the world economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

What we do with our children, what we emphasize, the way we live life, what we press them into describes our values. Our value is productivity today. That's your vernacular. It is time. It is efficiency.

Well, I want to finish by telling you what the added value of prayer is. What is the net benefit? Why take time in the morning or over lunch or in the car alone? Why engage in the activity of prayer? Since we are so concerned about productivity, let me suggest to you that you can't do anything more productive than pray. You can't add value to your life or to your work or to your family any better than when you pray.

Well, what is it that makes prayer so productive? Let me give you a few thoughts in closing. Biblically, prayer gives us favor with the right people. The great Jewish leader in the Old Testament, Nehemiah, wanted to return to his native Israel. He was living in Babylon. He wanted to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem and reestablish a Jewish community in Jerusalem.

But in order to reestablish Israel and to rebuild Jerusalem, he needed favor from the king he was serving, the king of Babylon. And so Nehemiah 2:4 says, *“Therefore, I prayed to the Lord, the God of heaven, and the king granted my request.”* There are frequently things that you can’t accomplish without another person’s favor, without another person’s support and approval. Maybe you need a loan from a bank to start your business. Maybe you want to buy a home and the bank needs to approve your home loan. Maybe you need help from the government regarding zoning or an approval for a license. Maybe you need the support of a colleague at work in order to get a project completed. Or you need your boss’ approval or your teacher’s approval.

Proverbs 21:1 says, *“The king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord. He directs it like a water course wherever he pleases.”*

One of the reasons why people pray in the Bible is to get favor from someone who has the power to make a decision, which would positively or negatively affect your life. So many of your good ideas have never gone anywhere because you didn’t have favor on you. So many of your good intentions have never gotten off the back burner because we couldn’t generate the support that we needed to get our good intentions into implementation.

And I am talking to those of you right now who are living under someone’s thumb. You are just having an awful time at work under a boss or supervisor. You are having difficulty with someone in authority over you. You can spend the rest of your life complaining about your abuse or you can turn to God and ask for favor.

Prayer grants us favor with the right people. Prayer opens up the right doors. People in the Bible frequently pray that obstacles will be removed from their path. From their ministries and that the door will be flung open. Paul regularly prayed for open doors. In Romans 1:10, Paul prayed, *“Now at last, by God’s will, the way may be opened for me to come to*

*you.*” He encountered a lot of obstacles in being able to visit the church in Rome, but now he prays that the door would be thrown open and he would be reunited with his beloved Roman church.

Colossians 4:3 Paul says, *“Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for whom I am in chains.”*

Isn’t that the case that there are obstacles in the way of someone in your life, obstacles in the way of a family member, a parent, a brother, a sister, a wife, a husband, a child, a friend, there is an obstacle in the way of their ability to hear the gospel clearly and to respond to it and receive it?

If you care about someone’s salvation, then you will pray and you will pray often for them. That God would clear the obstacles and open the door for the gospel. If you care about ministry, you are going to pray because there are so many obstacles in your way of being able to successfully do ministry in a community, a hospital, and a school, in your work place.

I believe God allows obstacles to be put in our way to bring us to that point of helplessness where we realize that it is only you, God, who has the resource and the power to roll this boulder away. There are some boulders in front of some of you right now. Pray that God would remove them and open the right doors for you.

Prayer enables us to make the right decisions. You know, we are so concerned about wasting time and being productive. And yet, we waste so much time on doing the effects of our bad decisions. You know, we make bad choices. Impulsive choices, unhealthy choices and then we have to take so much time to clean up our messes. We hire people we shouldn’t hire and then we have to work through that relationship. We buy cars we shouldn’t buy that we haven’t really prayed about. We buy houses that are just on impulse.

We take jobs that we shouldn't take and then we have to live with all of the frustration of wrestling through a bad job choice. Why not pray for wisdom that we make the right decisions before we make a choice?

By right decisions, I don't mean should I buy the red car or blue car. I mean gaining the mind of Christ, gaining his perspectives. One of the ways that I look for spiritual maturity in another person is that I constantly ask myself: Does this person have God's perspective on things? Do they think about things the way the Lord thinks about them? God has a certain vantage point. And only through prayer can you gain his perspectives.

One of the verses in the New Testament, just to give you a quick illustration and then we are going to finish up, one of the challenging verses in the New Testament is in James 1:3 which says: *"Count it all joy, my brothers [and sisters], whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."* Count it joy when you encounter various trials because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. And perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.

I know whether someone is mature, whether they have God's perspective, in the whole way they talk about difficulties in their life. If someone is constantly complaining about difficulty, I know that they have just a superficial knowledge of God that they don't pray very much. They think that difficulties are going to destroy them. God says that difficulties are sent to develop you. But you don't move from thinking of something as destructive to thinking of something as developing without gaining God's mind.

Why should you pray? To enable you to make the right decisions and to gain the right perspective on life.

And finally, we pray in order to ignite the right desires inside of us. Friends, you don't need artificial stimulation, whatever kind you are filling your life with, in order for life

to regain its fizz. You don't need a more thrilling lover. A more thrilling mate. A more exciting vacation. A brand new car. To redecorate your home. A harder core sexual life. A different job. You don't need that in order for life to get reignited. You need Jesus.

Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." And then he went on and he said, "And whoever comes to me out of his inner most being shall flow rivers of living water." Can you honestly say that you have been experiencing rivers of living water this past week? This past month? The last few months? Maybe you need to be taught to pray.

Lord, teach us to pray. Why don't you stand?