

INTRO: My greatest sin, my most egregious sin, my most habitual sin is the sin of self-dependence. Far too often I live as though I don't need God. I live as though I have a better idea than God. I don't acknowledge God as often as I should. I don't lean on Him as I should. Instead, I lean on my own understanding. I don't ask God for help as I should, I just barge through to get the job done. I don't rise earlier to pray when I'm busy, I rise earlier to get to work. My greatest and most continual battle with the flesh is the sin of self-dependence. *I regularly believe the lie that I can do it on my own.* That I'm sufficient by my own power and strength. And even as I confess this sin to you, I've been guilty of self-dependence this week...so many times.

Saints, *self-dependence is the true essence of all sin.* Thinking that we can do something without God. Thinking that we know better than God. Thinking that we don't need to live by faith. Thinking that "we got this one." That we are sufficient in ourselves without God and apart from God. And of course we'd never actually say that, but we live like it. Even as followers of Jesus, we are constantly battling the lies of self-sufficiency. We claim to be people of faith, people that are depending on the Holy Spirit, *but in actuality — we often live as though our faith is in ourselves.* Our dependence is on our spirit & our power, not God's spirit & God's power.

Yet — if the Christian community is anything, we are a people that is entirely dependent upon God. Is this not how the Christian life began? *The very message of the gospel declares that you and I are an entirely dependent!* The message of the gospel is NOT, God helps those who help themselves. The message of the gospel is rather, you cannot help yourself. You cannot do anything to merit or earn the favor of God. The Christian Gospel is not you do 50% and God does 50%. It is not you do 80% and God does 20%. The Christian gospel is you can do nothing to save yourself, which is why Jesus cried out on the cross — IT IS FINISHED! *Everything necessary to redeemed sinful men and women is finished - Jesus accomplished it all!*

Brothers & sisters — if you are a Christian today, you are entirely dependent upon Jesus and you know it. But here's the point — the way the Christian life began is the way it must continue. *The Christian path doesn't start with dependence and then graduate to some measure of independence.* Main St. for the Christian is continual dependence on God for all things! After all, did Jesus said — *apart from me you can do nothing!*

HOWEVER: The temptation for each and everyone of us is to slip back into our old ways — to try to live the Christian life in the flesh. To think that we have something to offer. That we can somehow do this Christian thing on our own. Of course we would never say it that brashly — but it is how we often live.

And so this morning we are going to look at **The Church Dependent:** *being a fervently dependent community of faith.* If we are going to be a biblically defined community of faith — then we must be a dependent community of faith!

Throughout the Scripture & Christian history — this posture of dependence is the posture of prayer. Simply put — *prayer is the posture of active dependence on God!* Prayer is not getting busy for God — prayer is actively depending and actively waiting upon God to do what God alone is able to do!

This morning, I'll be talking about DEPENDENT PRAYER, because prayer is not something you do occasionally as a follower of Jesus but rather prayer it is the very essence of your life as a Christian. I love how the word describes Elijah in **James 5:17** — *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently*. Did you hear it — not unlike us! A normal man of faith. A man with temptations. A man with struggle. A man with trials. But a man who prayed fervently and earnestly (for he was dependent)!

Church family — I long for Redeemer to be a church family that is radically dependent upon God. I long for Redeemer to be a church that is fervently dependent upon God. I long for Redeemer to be a place that pleads with God to move mountains and then watches God just that. And so — my hope and my prayer is that our time in the Word this morning might move us just a few more yards down the field in being a faith-family that is fervently dependent! A faith-family that knows what it means to be fervent in prayer both individually & corporately!

This morning, we are going to look at several key passages in the Word of God that will help us become a Dependent Church! I trust that these passages will help us better understand what active dependence upon God is and is not. But more than that, I hope that we'll be moved to be a people of more earnest & more biblical prayer because of our time in the Word today. It might be hard for you to turn all over in the Word this morning — but you are welcome to try. My sermon notes will be online and on the app later this week if you want to ponder these truths later in the week.

PRAY:

OUTLINE: 5 Foundations of Fervent Prayer

#1: The Dependent Church is Constant in Prayer

If you are a follower of Jesus here this morning, it started with prayer. Now don't hear my wrong — I'm not saying that some prayer saved you. But at some point, you came under conviction by the Holy Spirit. The Word of God began to make sense to you. You knew that were a sinner before a Holy God. You knew that Jesus had died in your place so that you might be made right with God. And at some point — you talked to God about that! At some point — you confessed your sin and you confessed that you were done living with self as master and you embraced Jesus as your Savior & Lord.

Saints — to put it bluntly — *you cannot be a Christian without prayer*. What I mean by that is that at some point you communicated with, you talked with God about your need for Him. Communion or communication with God is prayer. Your Christian experience began with you talking to God. You acknowledging God. You admitting to God that you desperately needed Him.

Wouldn't it just make sense that the Christian life continues as one of continual and regular communion with God (which is prayer)!

This is why the Apostle Paul would say things like — *pray without ceasing* (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**). Why must we pray without ceasing, because communion with God is the life-blood of the Christian.

TRUTH: Throughout the entire Bible, Old Testament & New, people of faith are characterized by regular patterns of prayer. **WHY:** *Prayer is the Continual Acknowledgement that God is God and I am Not*

If prayer is anything, it is the continual reminder that God is God and I am not God! Think about it — every time you pray, you are admitting that there is a God and that you are not that God. You are admitting that you are either grateful for this God or that you need this God (or both).

Again — why do you think the Bible tells us to *pray without ceasing* (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**)? *Because we need the regular reminder that God is God.* We need the continual reminder that we are not God.

QUESTION: How long does it take for you to forget that you are not God? You leave the parking lot and someone cuts you off. In that moment you are not thinking, that person probably is having a really hard day. You are not thinking, I bet someone just cut them off and they had to swerve. You ARE thinking — how dare they invade my self-sovereignty. How dare they not take me into consideration. How dare they don't treat me as though I'm the most important person in the universe. We forget that we are not the center of the universe real quick.

Saints — may I encourage you as your brother in Christ and as your pastor — put regular rhythms of prayer into your life to simply remind yourself that you are not God and that God is God. Say that. It's good for you. I often start talking to the Lord with those words — “Lord, I'm not God and I'm glad I'm not God. Forgive me for acting as though I was god today. Thank you for being God.”

Prayer is the continual acknowledgement that God is God and that I am not God. Prayer is how the Christian life began and prayer is how the Christian life must continue for prayer is the continual acknowledgement that I actually need God!

#2: The Dependent Church Worships through Prayer

We have a major misconception about worship today, and that is that worship is music and music is worship. But in actuality — music is one component of our worship.

Jesus actually taught that prayer is a primary means of worship — for in prayer we get to submit our will and our ways to God. And what could be more worshipful than actually saying — God, I gladly submit my desires to you because you are God and I am not.

Remember how Jesus taught His disciples to pray? Did he teach them to pray for a better quality of life? Did he teach them to pray for their pain to go away? Did he

teach them to pray for a bigger house or new wheels? Did he teach them to pray for their felt needs? Not at all!

Jesus taught His disciples — *Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 7:9-10)*. The preeminent purpose of prayer is that God’s will may be done on earth as it is already being done in heaven.

This *example prayer* begins with worshiping & adoring the God of heaven (i.e. hallowed be your name). And it continues with a longing for God’s kingdom to come. For God’s will to be done right here, right now!

KEY POINT: Prayer is not so much about changing God’s will (we’ll talk about this a bit later). First and foremost, worshipful prayer is about changing my will to agree with God’s will.

You see worshipful prayer at the very core owns & acknowledges that I am not God and that God’s ways are truly better than my ways. And so worshipful prayer is glad to submit to God’s will and God’s ways.

SADLY: The Christian Church today has turned prayer into a glorified genie relationship. We rub the lamp. We ask for what we want. We hope against hope that God might do this or that...rinse & repeat the next day. But saints — this is not how the Bible views prayer or how the Bible teaches on prayer. This is a man-centered perversion of prayer.

Prayer is about us learning to submit our will and our ways to whatever God’s will and God’s ways are! Sometimes — God’s will agrees with ours. But often, God’s will and God’s ways are entirely contrary to ours (after all - the Word of God actually says — *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isaiah 55:9)*).

HEAR THIS: God is a the quintessential Good Father. He is doing that which is ultimately for His glory and the good of humanity. But just like a toddler is often confused by what his parents are doing, so we are confused by what God is doing. And so we, like a toddler, kick and scream trying to get our Good Father to change His mind. Instead, *we should put on the posture of true, biblical, worshipful prayer and submit our will and our ways to Gods.* We come to him with the posture of I am not God, you are. I do not understand your will and your ways, but that’s okay - I will submit to you by faith because I know that you are good and you do good.

APPLICATION: Imagine with me a situation where God’s good will for your life is to be financially strapped (has that ever happened to you - lol)? How do we typically pray — Lord, give me more money. Lord, meet my needs. And to be far, that’s a fine prayer to pray. BUT WHAT IF — God’s good will for you is to be financially dependent upon Him? What if God is exposing your covetous or materialistic heart? What if God is exposing your trust in the American dream and having all your financial ducks in a row? What if God wants to grow your faith by making you broke?

Do you see how worshipful prayer might look like submitting to where God has you and asking God to make you more like Jesus? Do you see how we often pray for the trial to go away, but worshipful prayer is submitting to the trial and trusting the sovereign God who is over the trial!

Saints — *prayer is the realignment of My Will to God's will* — earnest & fervent prayer is an act of worship because we are actively submitting to God!

#3: The Dependent Church is Righteous in Prayer

You might ask — what do you mean Pastor J? How does righteousness connect to prayer? Thanks for asking!

Throughout the Scripture, both the Old Testament & the New, the Word of God makes clear statements about God listening to those who fear Him, who obey Him, who walk in His ways, who are living righteously by faith!

Listen to **Psalm 66:18** — *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.* Think about that statement — if I had cherished iniquity in my heart. The idea in **Psalm 66:18** is not that you are battling your sin (like we all do) but rather that you are living in unrepentant sin. You are hard-hearted in your sin. You are like, “I know what God says, but I don’t care.” The Lord clearly says in Psalm 66:18, that kind of person *The Lord would not have listened.*

How about **Proverbs 28:9** — *If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.* If you stop hearing (to hear is to listen and to obey) the Law of God (i.e. His good instructions for all of life), the Word says that even the prayer of such a person is an abomination! *Here's the point Church family — God will not be mocked.*

KEY POINT: If you are not interested in living life on God’s terms, if you are not interested in living the life of faith, then coming to God in prayer is a sham. You are treating God like a genie in a bottle at that point. You are trying to appear spiritual, but no one is fooled (especially not God). You are not interested in God’s will being done on earth as it is done in heaven, because you are not living in submission to God’s will.

HARD REALITY: It is impossible to pray for God’s will if you are not living in God’s will!

James 5:16 is clear — *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

Some have tried to argue that this “righteous person” are those who simply believe in Jesus (for after all, those who believe in Christ are made righteous by faith & everyone loves to quote at this point, *your righteous deeds are as filthy rags OR no one is righteous, not even one*). Yet, this is not the context of the book of James. James is all about actually living a righteous life by faith. Not so that you are

righteous but because you have been made righteous by God, live like it. REMEMBER: Live out who you already are! Living righteously according to the Bible, is simply to live rightly before God by faith. To actually take God at His Word and live like it. This is why throughout the Bible, we find stories like this:

Deuteronomy 9:18-20 — *Then I lay prostrate before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the Lord bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me that time also. And the Lord was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. Moses was righteous (meaning he actually lived by faith and he submitted to God's revealed will & ways). And when Moses prayed, God listened — the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

2 Kings 20:2-5 — *Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, saying, "Now, O Lord, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Hezekiah was a righteous man by faith — when He cried out to God, his prayers were heard.*

Succinctly — *The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry (Psalm 34:15).* Prayer is not a tool to manipulate God to do your bidding when you are living however you want. Prayer is the outgrowth of a righteous life. Prayer is the cry of the heart that is actually striving to live the life of faith by grace. Prayer is the natural and normal response for the person who is actively submitting to God's revealed will.

REALITY: Christians love to talk about praying for God's will, even though they are not living for God's will. **ILL** — I was a student ministries pastor for a long time. Lots of conversations about big life decisions (college, career, marriage, and the like). Christians want to sound spiritual when making "big life" decisions. My answer was always the same — how are you doing obeying God today? If you are living at home, are you honoring your parents? If you are in school, are you doing your work diligently for the glory of God? Are you submitting to your boss and working hard for the glory of God at your job? Are you using your money for the glory of God? You get the point — we can talk about wanting God's will // we can even pray like we want God's will — but are we living as though we want God's will?

HERE'S THE POINT: God hears the righteous. If you want God to hear your prayers, live the life of faith. Joyfully submit to God's will and God's ways. Then cry out to God. This is the kind of person God delights to hear!

Psalm 66:18-20 — If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. *Blessed be God*, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!

The Lord did indeed hear the psalmist! But notice, the writer of Scripture doesn't take credit. He doesn't pat himself on the back. Hardly! He gives glory to God for His steadfast love and faithfulness to hear the prayer of His own!

Saints — if we want to be a church that is fervently dependent on God, if we want to be a covenant community that God delights to listen to — then we must be a people that actually works out the gospel and walks worthy of the gospel by grace. For the Lord delights to hear those who are living rightly by faith!

#4: The Dependent Church Confess Sin through Prayer

To be clear — a dependent life, a life of continual prayer — is not about perfection! After that last point, some of you are thinking, “well then, I can't pray!” I'll never match up. God won't ever hear me!” But don't check out — we must say everything that Scripture says!

The Lord isn't after perfection, He is after faith. The Christian life begins by faith and it continues by faith! And one of the key components of faith is the continued confession of sin. Confessing sin isn't just how you become a Christian. Confessing sin is the well worn path for the Christian!

If prayer is anything, prayer is confessing our continued failures to live for the glory of God. As we confess sin, we are reminded of God's infinite mercy and grace. *The heart that has been transformed by the gospel is not interested in hiding sin but is eager to bring it into the light through confession.* We aren't being saved every time we confess sin. But we are being reminded of our continual need for gospel grace and gospel mercy. We are being reminded that the gospel does indeed save us from past, present, and future sins.

Listen to David as he confesses his sin to the Lord in **Psalm 51:3-4** — *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. It is silly to hide your sin from God* (He knows everything already). Yet when we humble ourselves before the Lord and we actually confess our sins, we are agreeing with God regarding the nature of our actions (they are sin before God and our fellow man). We are asking God to be gracious and merciful to us, not because we deserve it, but because He is merciful. *And so confession is Main St. for the Christian.* It is the normal ebb & flow of our daily lives. When we approach God in confessing prayer, we are obeying Jesus — *forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.*

REALITY: Hear me loud and clear — living a righteous life by faith is not about perfection. It is not about never failing. It is about confessing our sin when we fail to live as we ought. It is about running to our good God & Father — being honest about

our sin — then confessing & forsaking it. And the Lord is eager to hear those who are confessing and forsaking their sin — *If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened (Psalm 66:18)*. In other words, if you do not cherish iniquity in your heart, if you are eager to confess and forsake iniquity — the the Lord is eager to listen to you when you cry to Him!

#5: The Dependent Church is Fervently Expectant in Prayer

It is in vogue today for many Christians to expect little from God. Christians say things like, we shouldn't presume on God (which is true). There is a *your will be done* put on the end of every prayer as more of a, *what a prayed for probably won't happen* kind of statement.

Yet throughout the Word of God — those who lived by faith cried out to God with expect and fervent prayer. Throughout the Bible, we see men and women pleading with God. Women like Hannah — pleading for a child. Men like Moses — pleading for Israel. Unquestionably in the Bible, men and women cried out to God with the expectation that their prayers would be heard and be effectual! To put it bluntly — they actually believed that prayer worked!

DISCLAIMER: Now at this point, some of you are thinking — but Pastor Justin, God's ways are unchanging. Not only that, God is sovereign — He rules and reigns over all things. He does what He pleases. And you are correct. But again, we must say what Scripture says!

The simple truth is — throughout the Bible, when God's people pray, God works!

THE QUESTION ARISES: How does this work? And the answer is, we don't always know! What we do know is this — the God of Heaven delights to hear and answer the prayer of His children who are walking by faith!

Sometimes it is as simple as **2 Chronicles 30:20** — *And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.*

Other times its a bit more of a story as it is in **Numbers 14:13-23** — *But Moses said to the Lord, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For you, O Lord, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, 'It is because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.' And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, 'The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.' Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast*

love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now.” Then the Lord said, “I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.

Clearly there is a connection between Hezekiah praying and the Lord answering. There is a connection between Moses praying, and God sparing Israel. We must not logically or theologically endeavor to explain this away. We must take the Word at face value — prayer does indeed effect the mighty workings of God!

Jesus would pick up on this theme and say things like — *And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith (Matthew 21:22).* And again in **John 16**, *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (v. 7).*

Obviously such passages have been misused and abused. They have been taken out of context and used to say ridiculous things like name it and claim it. These verses have been twisted to mean that God will help you accomplish whatever you want, if you just believe. They have become a sort of self-help and self-actualization mantra, which is clearly NOT what the Word of God is saying.

What Jesus IS teaching is that if you are living the life of faith (which we have already discussed). If you are actively submitting your will and your ways to Gods, then you are abiding in Christ. You are not *cherishing or hiding inquiry in your heart* as Psalm 66 says. You are not using God as some genie in a bottle.

But rather, you will be praying in accordance with God’s will. You will be crying out for the things that matter to God. And those are the prayers that God is eager to hear!

CHURCH: Think with me — dream with me! Let's say that we become a faith-family that is eagerly, joyfully, gladly, living the life of faith. We are submitting to God’s Word in our lives, our hearts, our finances, our homes, our desires, our temptations. We as an entire community are truly living by faith! We would prayer fervently & expectantly for God to do mighty things that are in accordance with His character & His will!

MAYBE: Like Paul we’d pray:

Colossians 1:9-12 — And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious

might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

We will actually be praying God's will for God's people! We won't be praying selfish, carnal desires. We won't be praying felt needs prayers. We will be pleading down the power of God to transform lives by gospel power. We will be crying out to God to help us each individually and corporately actually live the life of faith. We will be praying for the ability to sacrificially love and serve one another when we don't want to. We'll be praying for gospel boldness and gospel compassion so that our neighborhoods and communities will be transformed by gospel power. We will be praying for promotions at work so we can give more generously to gospel work. We will be pleading with God to redeem those who are far from Jesus. For we know that this is the will of God!

Church Family — *prayer does indeed mountains WHEN the people of God are praying for those things that delight the heart of God!* Get serious about what God is serious about and you'll see God show up time and time again!

CHURCH FAMILY: Let's plead with God for opportunities to kill our own sin. Let's plead with God for opportunities to share the gospel with those around us. Let's plead with God for more opportunities show His sacrificial love towards others. Do you know why we are afraid to pray these prayers saints — because we know they are the kind of prayers that God will hear & answer!

RBC — may the Lord cultivate in us a heart of fervent dependence. And as He does this — may we be a people that fervently cries out to God to display His power and His might in our lives, in our faith-family, and in our city for His glory & for the joy of all people!