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National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day was yesterday. Thank you, David and Jeremy, for your work in an incredibly complex and increasingly dangerous world. Thank you Joe, Darrel, Carol, and Jim for your careers in law enforcement on our behalf. God has used you as agents for our good.

Redeemer's Grace family, David and Jeremy are entrusted to us to pray for in a unique way. Their lives are intertwined with ours, and they are part of the expression of God's family at Redeemer's Grace. They are our brothers. I suspect that there are even more difficult days ahead as they seek to uphold order and justice and peace in a nation that appears divided against itself. I'm sure their moms and spouses pray for them. Both of them should have about another 40 people praying for them who are part of this fellowship. Consider for a moment what I'll now ask you to do. I want us to pray specifically and regularly for these men, and I want you to regularly let them know you are praying for them. Regular prayer, and regular encouragement in the form of a note, a text message, an app message... Will you make a commitment to regularly pray for and encourage these men in 2021? Is it clear what I'm asking you to do? Are you forming in your mind already a plan to do that? How will you keep your commitment? If you will commit to regularly pray for and encourage David and Jeremy, will you make that commitment public by simply standing?

Lord, consider your servants David and Jeremy. We ask for protection from evil, for wisdom in all areas of your lives, and for favor with those you encounter. Let them grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord. Let the character of Christ continue to be formed in them. They work on the front lines against evil in our culture. Protect their hearts, their emotions, and their minds. Thank you for the privilege you have entrusted us to care for, and love them through prayer and encouragement. Spirit, prompt our hearts and minds to keep the commitment we have made this morning. We ask in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Pray then...

Matthew 6:9a

How much do we really believe we should pray? If we come under assault from an enemy army, will prayer really make any difference in the outcome... like it did when the Edomites and the Moabites came up against God's people under Jehoshaphat? In that day God acted in such a way that it was the choir, not the army, that went out into the fray. God answered, and supernaturally routed and slaughtered their enemies. Can God still do that?

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What if we are infected by dread disease or fever of some sort?

Is pleading for God's intervention something we should spend time on ... like the Centurion who pleaded with Jesus to heal his servant who was suffering terribly? Jesus commended his faith, and glorified himself by healing the servant at that very moment.

What if the culture threatens to cancel us if we don't shut up about the eternal truths of God?

Does God have the capacity to open doors for the proclamation of the Gospel in spite of those who would seek to silence it ... like he did with Paul in Ephesus? Paul described what God was doing in **1 Corinthians 16**: "But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." Does God still open doors?

Or what if a godless government throws us in jail to appease those who don't want us declaring God's glory truth? Is there any value in prayer, or should we stop saying offensive things that the culture finds offensive, **like Peter didn't do**? King Herod put Peter in jail and intended to kill him, but the people of God were praying. Even though Peter was chained to 2 guards and had to pass through a batch of sentries, he was released because God had other plans for Peter.

What about those around the globe — or in your own family — who are still in spiritual darkness, apart from Christ, and alienated from God? Is the task of declaring God's glory too much, too hard, too far, too costly for God's people to really do that anymore? Have the governments around the world become so sophisticated that they can now spy out Christians and end Gospel mission, so that no one in their right mind is going to give their life — and certainly not their children's lives — to fruitless missions. That Acts 13 stuff, when the church was praying and God said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them," — God doesn't work like that anymore, so we don't need to pray like they did any more.

We sit here this morning as people who have been brought from death to life through substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because (1) God's people prayed in Acts 13, (2) God answered and sent out missionaries, and centuries later, through the Gospel witness that was first proclaimed to the Gentiles through those 2 missionaries, (3) we came to know Jesus, who came to save us from our sins. Who will we meet in the New Creation — perhaps those not yet born — who will say of us, "I came to know Christ because you prayed that God would send out people from your young church in Wichita, and you joyfully sent your children to risky, dangerous places so that I would come to faith in Christ and be delivered from the domain of darkness?"

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Is there a real need for us to be serious about prayer in our day? Is God still doing what he has done in the past? Beloved, all the power that God has expended to this point is infinitely less than the eternal, self-existent omnipotent power that he has. Not only is his power infinitely greater than all the power he has spent, his character and nature is absolutely unchanged. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. So if those in the history of the church were called to pray, and they prayed, and God changed the world, are we called to pray less, or see less of the mighty power of God on display than they were?

Prayer is a core value for us, because

- we do not have the capacity to cause our children to lay down their lives for the joy of seeing Jesus worshiped as Lord in idol-worshipping lands, including our own.
- We do not have the wherewithal to overcome oppressive magistrates who would seek to silence God's call to turn from sin and worship Christ alone.
- We do not have power to overcome efforts to cancel the Gospel by politicians and media magnates who suppose an "outdated morality" can finally be erased by censoring the Scripture.
- And we do not have the ability to survive a fiery furnace if they throw us in because we will not bow to false gods that exalt themselves against the living Lord Jesus.

But God does! So we must pray for these things, and a for a thousand other reasons besides.

This year our faith must grow, our praying must grow, and our communion must deepen, because God commands us to pray, because God works through the prayers of his people, and because God's glory is on display when we pray to prayer-answering God.

Prayer is not merely a spiritual discipline that only a few serious-minded believers do, who also home school and don't have a television. Prayer is a war-time walkie talkie, as John Piper described it, through which the people of God learn more about, and exalt the character God. Prayer is one of the means through which we become agents God uses to reshape the world into His Kingdom. It is the lifeblood of our work if we are to see those who live in the shadow of this building, those pre-teens who play on the basketball pad while we worship, those who are currently hell-bound and locked in sin come to have their spiritual eyes opened, their deaf ears unstopped, and their dead hearts made alive through the sin-crushing, life-giving resurrection power of Christ.

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Look we with me 3 things that I pray will become spurs in our spiritual sides as we move into 2021:

- The Necessity of Prayer
- Hindrances to Prayer
- The Priorities of Prayer

The Necessity of Prayer

We must come to grips with 3 truths that we may acknowledge on an intellectual basis to some degree, but often act more like practical atheists in the way we treat these 2 areas.

First, the spiritual condition of the human heart apart the awakening and converting work of Christ is incapable of overcoming its blindness, deafness, and intellectual darkness.

If God does not intervene to open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, and illumine the mind to grasp spiritual truth and see the beauty of Christ, those who are in darkness, who are separated from Christ and who are without hope will remain that way.

Ephesians 2:1–3 — And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath...

1 Corinthians 2:14 — The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Prayer is necessary because those whom you love who have not come to Christ in faith and repentance will not do so apart from God's quickening work. They will remain dead in trespasses and sins. Their minds will remain darkened, and unable to accept or understand the things of God. This will end in righteous damnation when they meet Holy God and give account for their lives. So we pray for those we love, that God will open their eyes to see the beauty and goodness of the Savior, and that they will see and feel the horror and guilt of sin committed against God. We pray that the Holy Spirit will do what only he can do as Jesus told us in John 14, 15 and 16: That the Holy Spirit will bear witness about who Christ is, that he will help them know what Jesus has said, that he will convict them of sin and righteousness that they may flee God's wrath through the atoning blood of Christ. We pray, because without the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, not one soul we encounter, not one person we share the Gospel with will be able to escape from darkness to light.

How futile the work of Redeemer's Grace Church if God does not make vivify our efforts.

Second, there is an unseen spiritual domain where war rages against our souls.

We have a spiritual enemy. If our own spiritual condition were not deadly enough, our enemy seeks to hasten the destruction of those outside of Christ, and defeat those who are in Christ through temptation to sinful loss, followed by accusations and guilt. He presents lies and arguments, distorting what God has said... and as the father of lies, he is very good at it. Consider:

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 — ³For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ...

Ephesians 6:12 — we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Matthew 6:13b — Jesus taught us to pray, “deliver us from evil.”

Christ has provided spiritual weapons of his word, prayer, and faith to overcome these spiritual battles. Jesus tells us to seek the Father’s protection from evil and the evil one in prayer. We simply disarm ourselves when we are prayerless.

We are to tear down spiritual false arguments through our knowledge of God’s Word, walking in his ways, keeping his statutes, and seeking him — and we are to pray in accord with those truths. We are to pray in the Spirit — that is, with the help of the indwelling Spirit of God, in accordance with the will of the Spirit of God, and in the resurrection power of the Spirit of God. Darrel can protect us from bad guys with Tae Kwon Do. But that is totally useless in the spiritual realm. For spiritual warfare we must take up the powerful spiritual weapon of prayer God has given us.

Third, we pray because we are simply weak in the flesh, and we must continually choose against, and be strengthened against our weaknesses through prayer.

Luke 22:39–40 — ³⁹And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

The world’s allure to often still has a sound of sweetness in its voice, even though we know it leads to death. We can easily be lead into temptation. But we can also simply give way to the temptation that comes from within because of our sinful nature. Do you find yourself easily tempted? Pray for help and reorientation to God’s Kingdom, that you not enter into temptation.

Hindrances to Prayer

There are many, but they boil down to one root issue: Pride.

Revelation 3:17 — For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

There are schedules, there are conflicts, there distractions, there are responsibilities that easily pull us from prayer to get on with what we think are the more important things of the day that must be accomplished. But the greatest weakening agent to our soul, the greatest thief of power from, and communion with God is our false sense of spiritual well-being. Our pride convinces us we are in better shape than we are. We know we haven't completely arrived and there may be one or two tiny little sins we need to address, but overall we are in great shape. That was Laodicea. But the Lord's perspective, which is the only perspective that matters, is that they were wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. When we feel the reality of our sinful hearts, our utter dependence on God, and our inability to accomplish his work in our strength, we will pray. But pride hinders us.

One passage out of dozens we could go to:

2 Chronicles 7:13–14 — ¹³When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, ¹⁴if my people who are called by my name ***humble themselves, and pray*** and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways [including the wicked way of independent prayerlessness], then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

What is the immediate antecedent to prayer and seeking God's face? Humbling ourselves. If we will not repent of pride we will never pray because we will remain independent and content with ourselves. That is what God says. That is true of us. Indeed, prayerlessness is our Declaration of Independence.

What is the condition of your prayer life? Are you praying in a way that changes the world around you? We must all allow the Word of God to expose our own arrogance, and not insist that our inadequate prayer lives are owing to anything other than our independent pride. And God resists the proud. God resists the proud. Let's stop believing that it schedules, or children, or weariness. It is simply pride that prevents us seeing power in our lives. God, as we would for others that you convict them of sin, will you convict us of one of the most offensive sins we can commit. Lord expose our pride and let us see it from your perspective. But let us not just see the sin, but the goodness of

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power and supply of our God and Savior to accomplish everything you wish. Let us delight in our dependence on you and learn new depths of your power and goodness. Let our faith grow as our pride dies.

Prayer is necessary, there are hindrances to prayer we must put to death, and lastly...

The Priorities of Prayer

I quickly note how the Lord taught us to pray in **Matthew 6**. I believe it was late 2018 or early 2019 when we were working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. I will leave the joy-producing study of the model prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 to your time of study. But I remind you that Jesus ordered how we are to pray, dividing the structure of our praying into the vertical, if you will, and the horizontal. We are to prioritize the things of God in our praying, and deal with the things of man second. This is worship-based praying. Consider the vertical concern of worship we are to prioritize: The holiness of God's name, with a concern that the sacred holiness of his name be maintained throughout our world. Would you say God's name is being honored throughout our land today? Are you prioritizing the hallowing of God's name in your workplace, in the school, in political landscape? Here again, let us bring ourselves under the authority of God's word and pray as he taught us for the glory of his name, that his Kingdom come — that is, pray for every knee to bow to Jesus, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Our priority in prayer is to match God's priority: His Kingdom coming, and his will being done. Later on in Matthew 6, Jesus states the same concept in a different say: "Seek first _____ (the Kingdom of God and his righteousness)." Then what? All these things will be added.

It is not that God is unconcerned with our needs. But it is that our God, who made us for himself, that we should glorify him, knows that when we pursue his glory, our souls will be satisfied. The secondary issues of our bread and forgiveness are fuel to accomplish the priorities of God's glory.

Do you want to see and feel power in your praying? Do you want the time on your knees to shape the world and shape your heart and mind? Prioritize your praying to focus on the things of God.

Prayer and Spiritual Journals...