

Week 11 Summer Series In His Footsteps/ Pt 3 Praying Strategically

September 13, 2025

Opening Monologue

This past summer, we've been journeying through a series titled, "In His Footsteps." If you missed any part of it, you could catch up here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEjFNZW2Xbi&list=PLQAIEVI_g0O4dxdKhjf3vFcJ4V5P2eBbi&pp=gAQB

This Sunday, we're bringing this series to a close, and I pray it has been a blessing to you!

Several weeks ago, I preached a two-part sermon on "Praying Strategically". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4HB3unIEjg&t=2s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atd4Wb-Exxs>

Well, the Holy Spirit has led me to deliver a third part to conclude this series, so here we go!

I believe we all long for breakthroughs and victories in our lives—times when the clutter and chaos are cleared away. Yet, it's easy to settle for the status quo, just getting by, until that becomes our normal way of living. Life can start to feel like survival mode rather than revival.

Hmm!

Let me put it this way: if we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12), then we'd better UP OUR GAME! As Christians, we need to elevate our walk with Christ, because sloppy Christianity will hinder our hearts and homes. Some of us are praying very little, others not at all, and some feel they don't want to bother God. This Sunday, we're going to dive in deep and explore Biblical Breakthrough!

Are you ready to go deeper with the Lord, to walk further with the Holy Spirit, and to pray harder, stronger, and longer? Those are some loaded questions! This Sunday, we'll unpack these ideas and so much

more. Come join us to be encouraged and equipped by the Lord's Word.

Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Blessings in Christ!

Rev. Brad Standfest

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 11 Sermon Series: In His Footsteps/ Pt 3 Praying Strategically" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Texts

Matthew 16: 24-25

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2016%3A%2024-25%20%20&version=NIV>

Matthew 6:9-13

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206%3A9-13&version=NIV>

Matthew 17:14-20

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2017%3A14-20&version=NIV>

Acts 13:2-3

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2013%3A2-3&version=NIV>

1 Corinthians 7:5

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207%3A5&version=NIV>

Matthew 21:21-22

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2021%3A21-22&version=NIV>

John 15:7

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015%3A7&version=NIV>

Ephesians 6:18

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206%3A18&version=NIV>

Sermon Reflections Prayer & Fasting

Jesus provided us with a profound model for prayer in the Lord's Prayer, found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, offering a blueprint that guides believers in approaching God with reverence, dependence, and purpose. This prayer not only structures our communion with the Father but also aligns with broader New Testament teachings on prayer, emphasizing persistence, faith, thanksgiving, and spiritual warfare. As we explore its elements, we see how it invites us to praise God, seek His will, rely on His provision, pursue forgiveness, and request protection—all while approaching His throne with confidence, as encouraged in Hebrews 4:16, where we are urged to draw near boldly to receive mercy and grace in our time of need.

We begin with adoration: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." Here, we give the Lord praise, declaring that holy is His name. This opening echoes Jesus' own teachings on prayer's humility and focus on God's glory, as seen in Matthew 6:5-8, where He warns against hypocritical, showy prayers and instead calls for sincere, private communion with the Father who sees in secret and rewards openly. Approaching the throne with confidence, we honor God's holiness, setting the tone for a relationship marked by awe and intimacy, much like the New Testament's call to pray continually with thanksgiving, as in Philippians 4:6, which instructs us not to be anxious but to present our requests to God in every situation.

Next, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Beyond the straightforward plea for God's sovereign rule, Jesus is inviting us to intercede for heaven's reality to break into our earthly circumstances. Father in heaven, would you break off a piece of heaven and bring it to earth? Bring a miracle, bring us a breakthrough. This petition aligns with New Testament truths about praying in faith for God's intervention, as Jesus taught in Matthew

21:22: “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” It also resonates with the persistent prayer modeled in Luke 11:5-13, where Jesus encourages us to ask, seek, and knock, assuring that our heavenly Father gives good gifts to those who persist, including the Holy Spirit to empower our lives.

Then, “Give us today our daily bread.” Lord, we thank you for providing all of our needs and abundantly more. This request underscores our daily dependence on God as our Provider, reflecting Jesus’ assurance in Matthew 6:25-34 not to worry about material needs but to seek first God’s kingdom, trusting that He knows what we need before we ask. It ties into broader New Testament theology, such as Ephesians 3:20, where God is praised for doing immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine through His power at work within us, encouraging prayers of bold expectation.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Lord, help us to walk with a humble heart and attitude, and let us be gracious so that forgiveness abounds in our hearts. Jesus emphasizes the reciprocal nature of forgiveness here, linking our reception of God’s mercy to our extension of it to others—a theme reinforced in Matthew 6:14-15, where He states that if we forgive others, our Father will forgive us. This mirrors New Testament calls to pray for enemies and those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), fostering humility and reconciliation, as seen in Colossians 3:13, urging us to forgive as the Lord forgave us.

“Lead us not into temptation.” Lord, protect us from our own evil desires that entice us to sin. This plea acknowledges human frailty and seeks God’s guidance away from trials that could lead to downfall, aligning with James 1:13-15, which explains that temptation arises from our own desires but that God provides a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13). It encourages vigilant prayer, as in Ephesians 6:18, to pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of requests.

Finally, “Deliver us from the evil one.” Lord, protect us from Satan and his demons, for we know we wrestle not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). This closing petition invokes divine protection in spiritual warfare, echoing Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17:15 for His disciples to be protected from the evil one. It integrates with New Testament truths like Romans 8:26-27, where the Holy Spirit

intercedes for us in our weakness, helping us pray according to God's will, and 1 John 5:14-15, assuring confidence that God hears prayers aligned with His purposes.

In essence, the Lord's Prayer is not merely a recitation but a transformative framework that embodies New Testament prayer principles: approaching God in faith (Mark 11:24), with persistence and humility, in Jesus' name (John 16:23-24), and empowered by the Spirit. It calls us to strategic, fervent prayer that battles spiritual forces, seeks breakthroughs, and aligns our lives with heaven's reality, ultimately glorifying the Father whose kingdom, power, and glory endure forever. (1, Rev. Standfest)

Fasting in the New Testament

Fasting, as a spiritual discipline, appears in several instances in the New Testament, often tied to prayer, repentance, or seeking God's guidance. Here are the key references to fasting, focusing on specific examples and contexts:

1. Jesus Fasts for 40 Days (Matthew 4:1-2; Luke 4:1-2)

Context: Before beginning His public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasts for 40 days and nights, facing temptation from Satan.

Details: This fast demonstrates Jesus' reliance on God and spiritual preparation. He eats nothing during this period, highlighting a profound act of self-denial and dependence on God's sustenance (e.g., Matthew 4:4, where Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live on bread alone...").

2. Fasting by John's Disciples and the Pharisees (Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35)

Context: The disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees question Jesus about why His disciples do not fast, as they and the Pharisees regularly do.

Details: This leads to Jesus' teaching on fasting (see below for His specific words).

3. Anna's Fasting and Devotion (Luke 2:36-37)

Context: Anna, a prophetess, is described as serving God in the temple with “fasting and prayer” night and day, awaiting the Messiah.

Details: Her fasting reflects a lifestyle of devotion and worship, emphasizing fasting as a means of drawing near to God.

4. Fasting in the Early Church (Acts 13:2-3; Acts 14:23)

Acts 13:2-3: The church in Antioch fasts and prays while worshiping, leading to the Holy Spirit's call to set apart Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for missionary work.

Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in the churches, committing them to the Lord with prayer and fasting.

Details: These instances show fasting as a communal practice for seeking God's guidance and blessing in significant decisions.

5. Paul's Fasting After Conversion (Acts 9:9)

Context: After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul (Paul) is blind for three days and neither eats nor drinks.

Details: This fast, likely involuntary due to his spiritual encounter, accompanies his repentance and preparation for his new calling.

6. Potential Fasting by Paul (2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27)

Context: Paul mentions “hunger and thirst” and “fastings” (KJV) among his hardships as an apostle.

Details: While these may refer to voluntary fasting or involuntary deprivation, they suggest fasting as part of Paul's spiritual discipline or suffering for the gospel.

What Jesus Says About Fasting

Jesus provides direct teaching on fasting in the following passages, emphasizing its purpose, attitude, and timing:

1. Fasting with the Right Heart (Matthew 6:16-18, part of the Sermon on the Mount)

Text: “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Key Points:

Fasting should be done privately, not for public recognition.
The focus is on sincerity and devotion to God, not outward displays.
God sees and rewards genuine fasting done in faith.

2. The Timing of Fasting (Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35)

Text (from Matthew 9:14-15): “Then John’s disciples came and asked him, ‘How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?’ Jesus answered, ‘How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.’”

Key Points:

Jesus compares His presence with His disciples to a wedding celebration, where fasting (associated with mourning) is inappropriate.

He indicates that fasting will be relevant for His disciples after His departure (i.e., after His death, resurrection, and ascension).

This suggests fasting is tied to spiritual longing or seeking God in times of need or absence.

3. Fasting and Spiritual Power (Matthew 17:21, disputed text)

Context: After Jesus casts out a demon that the disciples could not, some manuscripts include Jesus saying, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (1)

A Guide to Biblical Fasting: Unlocking a Deeper

Relationship with God

Fasting is a powerful spiritual discipline that opens the door to a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. As Jentezen Franklin emphasizes, fasting is not just abstaining from food or water but a sacred act that unlocks heaven's blessings, slams shut the gates of hell, and brings breakthroughs in your spiritual life (p. 9). This guide explores the biblical foundation, benefits, and practical steps for fasting, drawing from scripture and Franklin's insights to help you grow closer to God.

What Is Fasting?

Fasting is the voluntary abstinence from food, drink, or specific pleasures, typically as a religious observance, to focus on God through prayer, repentance, and seeking His will. It's a way to crucify "King Stomach" (p. 19) and dethrone the "dictator within," prioritizing spiritual hunger over physical desires. As Franklin notes, fasting shifts our focus from temporary satisfaction to eternal blessings, countering the mistake of Adam and Eve, who "ate themselves out of God's will" for fleeting gratification (p. 21-22).

Why Fast? The Biblical Foundation

Fasting is a recurring theme in scripture, practiced by every major biblical figure and always yielding rewards (p. 56). It aligns with Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Here are key purposes of fasting, rooted in biblical examples:

- **Seeking God's Guidance:** The early church fasted to discern God's will, commissioning Paul and Barnabas for mission work (Acts 13:2-3).
- **Repentance and Humility:** The people of Nineveh fasted in response to Jonah's warning, leading to God's mercy (Jonah 3:5-8).
- **Breaking Spiritual Strongholds:** Daniel's 21-day fast broke the power of spiritual resistance, releasing God's angels (Daniel 10:13).
- **Spiritual Preparation:** Jesus fasted 40 days before facing temptation, equipping Him for ministry (Matthew 4:2).

- Intercession and Mourning: David fasted for his sick child (2 Samuel 12:16), and Ezra fasted for protection (Ezra 8:21).

Biblical Examples of Fasting

The Bible records various fasts, from half-day to 40-day durations, each with significant outcomes:

- **40-Day Fasts:**

- o Moses (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18): Fasted while receiving the Ten Commandments.
- o Elijah (1 Kings 19:8): Strengthened for his journey to meet God.
- o Jesus (Matthew 4:2): Prepared for His ministry through fasting.
- o People of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5): Fasted corporately, averting judgment.

- **Shorter Fasts:**

- o Esther (Esther 4:16): Three-day fast for God's favor.
- o Daniel (Daniel 1:12; 10:3): 10-day and 21-day partial fasts for revelation.
- o Paul (Acts 9:9; 14:23): Fasted for spiritual breakthroughs.
- o Cornelius (Acts 10:30): Four-day fast led to divine encounter.
- o Others: Hannah (1 Samuel 1:7, 18), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4), Judah (2 Chronicles 20:3-4), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Joel's call for corporate fasting (Joel 1:14; 2:15).

Fasting is one of three core duties in Matthew 6—fasting, praying, and giving—forming a “triple braided cord” that strengthens spiritual life (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

The Spiritual and Physical Benefits of Fasting

Fasting is a “secret source of power” that releases God's anointing, favor, and blessings (p. 9). Franklin highlights its transformative effects:

- **Spiritual Benefits:**

- o Deepens intimacy with God, making you more sensitive to His voice (p. 141).
- o Breaks spiritual oppression, depression, and the “spirit of heaviness” (p. 167).
- o Brings clear direction for decisions like jobs or relationships (p. 177).
- o Targets loved ones for salvation or deliverance from destructive behaviors.
- o Provides fresh revelation, vision, and purpose.
- o Humbles the heart, rooting out unforgiveness and bitterness.
- o Strengthens endurance against adversity.
- o Restores “first love” for God, countering spiritual dryness (p. 70).

• **Physical Benefits (p. 42):**

- o Slows aging and flushes toxins, acting as a “spring cleaning” for the body.
- o Sharpens mental clarity and sensory faculties (sight, hearing, taste, smell).
- o Breaks addiction to junk food and uncontrollable appetites (gluttony).
- o Allows the body to heal naturally.

Fasting also breaks poverty’s grip, as seen in Job 42:10, where God restored Job’s fortunes doubly after he valued God’s Word above food (Job 23:12; p. 89).

Types of Fasts

Franklin outlines three types of fasts, each suited to different needs and capacities:

- 1. Absolute Fast:** No food or water (only with medical approval due to health risks).
- 2. Normal Fast:** No food, but plenty of water, juice, or broth.
- 3. Partial Fast:** Abstaining from specific foods (e.g., the Daniel Fast: no bread, meat, or sweets, only vegetables and water for 10 or 21 days; Daniel 1:12).

The early church fasted regularly on Wednesdays and Fridays, a practice John Wesley required of ordained pastors (p. 178). Jesus, our

ultimate example, fasted before ministering, suggesting we should follow suit (p. 151).

Practical Tips for Fasting

Fasting requires faith (Hebrews 11:6) and discipline (Hebrews 12:11), yielding a “harvest of righteousness and peace.” Here’s how to fast effectively:

Before Fasting

- **Plan Ahead:** Choose a start date and fast duration, considering your schedule. There’s never a “convenient” time to fast (p. 26).
- **Start Small:** Beginners should skip one meal, then progress to a full day or longer (p. 19). “You eat an elephant one bite at a time” (p. 34).
- **Prepare Your Body:** Reduce food intake gradually; avoid heavy meals like pasta Alfredo or excessive sweets before starting.
- **Pray for Guidance:** Seek God’s direction on the fast’s purpose and length.

During the Fast

- **Focus on God:** Combine fasting with prayer, Bible reading, and serving others (Romans 12:1). Fasting without spiritual focus is just dieting.
- **Stay Hydrated:** Drink at least one gallon of distilled water on the first day to flush toxins. Hot water with honey and lemon can replace stimulants like coffee or tea.
- **Avoid Stimulants:** Eliminate coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate to prevent caffeine withdrawal headaches.
- **Get Rest and Light Exercise:** Rest adequately and take short walks, avoiding strenuous workouts.
- **For Medical Needs:** If diabetic or on medication, consult a doctor. Take prescriptions with a small cracker if needed, or give up a favorite

food instead of a full fast.

- **Guard Your Heart:** Plead the blood of Jesus and put on the “full armor of God” to resist spiritual attacks, which may intensify during fasting (p. 63).

After the Fast

- **Break Gently:** Start with light foods like raw salads, fruit, or bran cereal. Avoid greasy, fried, or heavy foods (e.g., no KFC or pasta Alfredo).
- **Maintain Discipline:** Fasting’s private devotion leads to public rewards (p. 145). Continue seeking God to sustain spiritual gains.

Cautions and Biblical Warnings

Fasting must be approached with the right heart to avoid pitfalls:

- **Avoid Pride:** Jesus warned against fasting for show (Matthew 6:16-18). Fast privately for God’s glory.
- **Don’t Neglect Righteousness:** God rejected Israel’s fasts when they ignored justice and compassion (Isaiah 58:3-7).
- **Learn from Esau:** He traded his birthright for a single meal, valuing instant gratification over God’s blessings (Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:15-17).
- **Avoid Israel’s Mistake:** The Israelites craved meat over God’s manna, leading to death at the “Grave of Lusts” (Numbers 11:4-7; p. 34). True satisfaction comes from God’s Word (Job 23:12).

The Power of Corporate Fasting

Corporate fasting, as seen in Acts, brings intimacy with God and empowers the church (p. 139). When believers fast, pray, and praise together, as in 2 Chronicles 20:20-21, God moves powerfully. Franklin notes that fasting, prayer, and giving form a “triple braided cord” (Ecclesiastes 4:12) that strengthens communities and brings revival.

Overcoming Spiritual Dryness

If you're spiritually dry, serving God "leftovers" through heartless routines (p. 70), fasting can restore your "first love" for Jesus (Revelation 2:4). It breaks the monotony of "church as normal" and rekindles enthusiasm (p. 80). As Matthew 5:6 promises, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Fasting fuels this hunger, aligning you with Hebrews 11:6: God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

A Call to Fast

Fasting requires faith (Hebrews 11:1; Romans 10:17) and a willingness to prioritize God over physical desires. As Franklin says, "If I want new wine, new miracles, new closeness with Him, then it's time to call a fast and shed that old skin for the new" (p. 167). Whether you're in a "winter season" or seeking breakthrough, fasting invites God's presence, as Joel 2:12 urges: "Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning."

Practical Encouragement

- **Start Small:** Even skipping one meal can be a step toward breakthrough.
- **Expect Opposition:** Spiritual attacks may come, but they're a "back-handed compliment" from the enemy, signaling your impact (p. 63).
- **Trust God's Reward:** Fasting aligns you with God's promises, bringing clarity, healing, and revival.

Conclusion

Fasting is a sacred invitation to draw closer to God, break spiritual barriers, and experience His power. By humbling yourself and seeking Him diligently, you can overcome spiritual dryness, gain clarity, and see God move in your life and others'. As Jesus, our example, fasted before His ministry, let us follow His lead, trusting that "more of God, less of me" will lead to a life transformed for His glory. God bless you on your fasting journey! May it bring you closer to His heart and unleash His power in your life.

Commentary on Main Scriptures

Matthew 6:9-13

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven: The right kind of prayer comes to God as a Father in heaven. It rightly recognizes whom we pray to, coming with a privileged title that demonstrates a privileged relationship. It was very unusual for the Jews of that day to call God "Father" because it was considered too intimate.

It is true that God is the mighty sovereign of the universe who created, governs, and will judge all things—but He is also to us a Father.

He is our Father, but He is our Father in heaven. When we say "in heaven," we remember God's holiness and glory. He is our Father, but our Father in heaven.

iii. This is a prayer focused on community; Jesus said "Our Father" and not "My Father." "The whole prayer is social. The singular pronoun is absent. Man enters the presence of the Father, and then prays as one of the great family." (Morgan)

"There is no evidence of anyone before Jesus using this term to address God." (Carson)

Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven: The right kind of prayer has a passion for God's glory and agenda. His name, kingdom and will have the top priority.

Everyone wants to guard their own name and reputation, but we must resist the tendency to protect and promote ourselves first and instead put God's name, kingdom and will first.

Jesus wanted us to pray with the desire that the will of God would be done on earth as it is in heaven. In heaven there is no disobedience and no obstacles to God's will; on earth there is disobedience and at least apparent obstacles to His will. The citizens of Jesus' kingdom will want to see His will done as freely on earth as it is in heaven.

"He that taught us this prayer used it himself in the most unrestricted sense. When the bloody sweat stood on his face, and all the fear and trembling of a man in anguish were upon him, he did not dispute the

decree of the Father, but bowed his head and cried. 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' " (Spurgeon)

A man can say, "Your will be done" in different ways and moods. He may say it with fatalism and resentment, "You will do your will, and there is nothing I can do about it anyway. Your will wins, but I don't like it" or he may say it with a heart of perfect love and trust, "Do Your will, because I know it is the best. Change me where I don't understand or accept Your will."

One might rightly wonder why God wants us to pray that His will would be done, as if He were not able to accomplish it Himself. God is more than able to do His will without our prayer or cooperation; yet He invites the participation of our prayers, our heart, and our actions in seeing His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one: The right kind of prayer will freely bring its own needs to God. This will include needs for daily provision, forgiveness, and strength in the face of temptation.

When Jesus spoke of bread, He meant real bread, as in the sense of daily provisions. Early theologians allegorized this, because they couldn't imagine Jesus speaking about an everyday thing like bread in such a majestic prayer like this. So they thought bread referred to communion, the Lord's Supper. Some have thought it referred to Jesus Himself as the bread of life. Others have thought it speaks of the Word of God as our daily bread. Calvin rightly said of such interpretations which fail to see God's interest in everyday things, "This is exceedingly absurd." God does care about everyday things, and we should pray about them.

"The prayer is for our needs, not our greeds. It is for one day at a time, reflecting the precarious lifestyle of many first-century workers who were paid one day at a time and for whom a few days' illness could spell tragedy." (Carson)

"Sin is represented here under the notion of a debt, and as our sins are many, they are called here debts. God made man that he might live to his glory, and gave him a law to walk by; and if, when he does any thing that tends not to glorify God, he contracts a debt with Divine

Justice.” (Clarke)

Temptation literally means a test, not always a solicitation to do evil. God has promised to keep us from any testing that is greater than what we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“God, while he does not ‘tempt’ men to do evil (James 1:13), does allow his children to pass through periods of testing. But disciples, aware of their weakness, should not desire such testing, and should pray to be spared exposure to such situations in which they are vulnerable.” (France)

** “The man who prays ‘Lead us not into temptation,’** and then goes into it is a liar before God ... ‘Lead us not into temptation,’ is shameful profanity when it comes from the lips of men who resort to places of amusement whose moral tone is bad.” (Spurgeon)

If we truly pray, lead us not into temptation, it will be lived out in several ways. It will mean:

- Never boast in your own strength.
- Never desire trials.
- Never go into temptation.
- Never lead others into temptation.

Matthew 21:21-22

JESUS SAYS THE DISCIPLES CAN PRAY FOR ANYTHING / 21:18-22

21:18 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. After their stay in Bethany overnight (21:17), Jesus and the disciples got up and headed back into Jerusalem. Bethany was about two miles outside of Jerusalem, making it a suburb of the city. Somewhere along the way, Jesus mentioned that he was hungry. Jesus’ hunger portrays his humanity. He was fully human, just as we are, and can sympathize with our human experience and daily needs. When we pray to him, expressing our weaknesses and troubles, we can be confident that he knows what we are facing. He has faced it too (Hebrews 4:15).

21:19-20 And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once. Fig trees were a popular source of inexpensive food in Israel. In March, the fig trees had small edible buds; in April came the large green leaves. Then in May, the buds would fall off and be replaced by the normal crop of figs. This incident occurred in April, and the green leaves should have indicated the presence of the edible buds that Jesus expected to find on the tree. This tree, however, though full of leaves, had no buds. Fig trees require three years from the time they are planted until they can bear fruit. The absence of buds indicated that the tree would not produce figs that year. The tree looked promising but offered no fruit.

Jesus did not curse this fig tree because he was angry at not getting any food from it. Instead, this was an acted-out parable intended to teach the disciples. By cursing the fig tree, Jesus was showing his anger at religion without substance. Jesus’ curse did not make the tree barren of figs; instead, it sealed the way the tree had always been (see 13:13–15). Jesus’ harsh words to the fig tree could be applied to the nation of Israel and its beautiful temple. Fruitful in appearance only, Israel was spiritually barren. Just as the fig tree looked good from a distance but was fruitless on close examination, so the temple looked impressive at first glance, but its sacrifices and other activities were hollow because they were not done to worship God sincerely (see Jeremiah 8:13; 24:1–8; Hosea 9:10, 16; Micah 7:1). The temple displayed beautiful architecture, but contained barren ritual; it was ripe for destruction. Most likely, Jesus was not limiting his condemnation of fruitlessness to the temple or Judaism of that day. This action displays his stand against all hypocrisy—any religious people who make a show of bearing fruit but are spiritually barren.

After Jesus spoke these words, the fig tree withered at once. Mark told the story in two stages: Jesus cursed the tree on Monday, then the next morning, Tuesday, Jesus and his disciples passed by the same fig tree, and in the morning light, they could see that the tree had died. Jesus had done more than condemn the tree, he had killed it. **When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?”** they asked. This parable of judgment on spiritually dead people revealed a severe judgment. The early church

later applied this parable to the total destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

21:21 Jesus answered them, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ it will be done.” Jesus did not explain why he cursed the fig tree, and we don’t know whether the disciples understood Jesus’ meaning. Yet his words to them could mean that they must have faith in God. Their faith should not rest in a kingdom they hoped Jesus would set up, in obeying the Jewish laws, or in their position as Jesus’ disciples. Their faith should rest in God alone.

Jesus then taught them a lesson about answers to prayer. Jesus had cursed the fig tree; the fig tree had died; the disciples had expressed surprise. Jesus explained that they could ask anything of God and receive an answer. Jesus again used the words “truly I tell you” to introduce this important message. They should not have been surprised that a fig tree could be withered at Jesus’ words. Jesus was using a mountain as a figure of speech to show that God could help in any situation: This mountain (referring to the Mount of Olives on which they stood) could be thrown into the sea (the Dead Sea, that could be seen from the Mount). Jesus’ point was that in their petitions to God they must believe without doubting (that is, without wavering in their confidence in God). The kind of prayer Jesus meant was not the arbitrary wish to move a mountain of dirt and stone; instead, he was referring to prayers that the disciples would need to faithfully pray as they faced mountains of opposition to their gospel message in the years to come. Their prayers for the advancement of God’s kingdom would always be answered positively—in God’s timing.

MOUNTAIN MOVERS

Many have wondered about Jesus’ statement that if we have faith and don’t doubt, we can move mountains. Jesus, of course, was not suggesting that his followers use prayer as “magic” and perform capricious “mountain-moving” acts. Instead, he was making a strong point about the disciples’ (and our) lack of faith. What kinds of mountains do you face? Have you talked to God about them? How strong is your faith?

21:22 “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.” This verse was not a guarantee that the disciples could get anything they wanted simply by asking Jesus and believing. God does not grant requests that will hurt people or that will violate his own nature or will. Jesus’ statement was not a blank check to be filled in by believers, not a “name it and claim it” theology. To be fulfilled, requests made to God in prayer must be in harmony with the principles of God’s kingdom. They must be made in Jesus’ name (John 14:13–14). The stronger our faith, the more likely our prayers will be in union with Christ and in line with God’s will; then God will be happy to grant them. God can do anything, even what seems humanly impossible.

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Program, Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, Guzik, David, Life Application Bible Commentary, Factbook Logos bible, Barton, Bruce B., and Philip Wesley Comfort. 1995, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B. 1996, Barton, Bruce B., and Grant R. Osborne. 1999. Barton, Bruce B. 1996. Matthew. Life Application Bible Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. Guzik, David. 2013. Matthew. David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible. Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik. Franklin, Jentezen. 2008. Fasting. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

Sermon Notes:

Week 11 - In His Footsteps, Part 3: Praying Strategically

All this past Summer we have been in a Summer Series Titled: In His Footsteps...

It has been a Wonderful Series... Walking in the Footsteps of Christ is a continuous Journey...

If you missed all the Sermons or some of the Sermons here are the AVC Connections to find & listen to them...

YouTube, App, Facebook/ Website

[Let’s Pray]

Several Weeks ago in Our Series I preached a 2 Part Sermon on Praying Strategically... Today is going to be Part 3 to conclude this Summer Series...

There was a Sports Slogan in the boys Locker room in Jr High School that read:

No Pain... No Gain

You may Absolutely hate that Slogan like I used to... But it's Oh So True...

Actually... I believe someone stole that Slogan from Jesus... Christ puts it this way: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." Matthew 16: 24-25

I believe we all want Victory & Breakthroughs in our lives... Don't we...

Are you satisfied with Just Getting By in Life?

Are you okay with your Boss when you turn in your work and they say..." that's pretty good" ... "That will get us by?"
(Fantastic, Wonderful, Awesome)

Are you that person when asked... How was your day... (You Know) "You know just another day in paradise?" (Really this place is nothing like paradise)

We can't live with just Being content with the Status Quo- That's called a Participation Trophy

Look... Let me put it to ya like this...

If we are wrestling not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6:12)... We better UP OUR GAME!!

Christians we need to Up our game because sloppy Christianity is NOT going to lead to Breakthroughs & Victories...

Are you willing to go Deeper with the Lord... Further with the Holy Spirit... And Pray Harder, Stronger, and Longer...

Some of you are Praying Very Little... Some not at All... Some don't want to bother God...

Do you remember the Model Prayer Jesus gave us? (The Lord's Prayer)

Let's Read it: Matthew 6:9-13

This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

- **Are we Praying for Heaven Come to Earth- Jesus did?**
- **Are we walking in Forgiveness or do we Hold Grudges?**
- **Are we commanding the Evil One to stay away?**

Did you know the Disciples had some issues with Prayer and Belief? I want to Discuss this Important Lesson

[Paraphrase of story of Matthew 17: 14-20]

Let's Read this Account

Matthew 17:14-20 When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. "Lord, have mercy on my son," he said. "He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him." "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." Jesus rebuked the demon, and it

came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fast. (84 NIV, NKJV, W. Saxon Gospels 990)

Say what... Prayer & Fasting... No Pain, No Gain...

**There is multiple N.T. texts referencing Prayer & Fasting-
Let's Peek into some:**

As the Church Fasted & Prayed they sent out Paul & Barnabas to do the work of the Lord. (Acts 13:2-3)

They appointed Elders through Prayer & Fasting (Acts 14:23)

Married couples are encouraged to Fast & Pray (1 Corinthians 7:5)

Listen... If your seeking Revival, Breakthrough, Victory... Or Overcoming some Serious stuff maybe your Prayer Life should go a Little Deeper...

Honestly... I challenge you to take your Prayer Life Deeper & Incorporate some Fasting... Keep a Praise Journal as you will experience Breakthroughs & Victories...

I want to close this Morning with some powerful truths from Jesus & One from Apostle Paul...

Jesus said: Matthew 17:20 "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Matthew 21:21-22 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you

believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

**Are you Speaking to your Mountains to Move or are you
Allowing them to Rest on your Life?**

**John 15:7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.**

**Ephesians 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with
all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert
and always keep on praying for all the saints.**

Closing Prayer

Devotional Questions

1. The Lord’s Prayer

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-13

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’

Question: What does this prayer guide us to praise and pray for? (Reflect on sermon notes if needed for deeper insights.)

Faith, Prayer, and Fasting for Breakthrough

Scripture: Matthew 17:14-20

“When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus... ‘Lord, have mercy on my son,’ he said. ‘He has seizures and is suffering greatly...’ Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed... Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, ‘Why couldn’t we drive it out?’ He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’ [Some manuscripts add: ‘But this

kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.']”

2. The disciples had a hard time freeing this young man from his condition; what kind of prayer did Jesus say this kind takes?

3. Are you willing to go deeper in your prayer life and incorporate fasting into your Christian Walk?

4. Fasting and Prayer in Marriage

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 7:5

“Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

Question: What are married couples encouraged to do?

5. The Early Church’s Practice

Scripture: Acts 13:2-3

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”

Question: What did the church do?

6. Bold Faith in Prayer

Scripture: Matthew 17:20 & Matthew 21:21-22

“He replied, ‘Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you’” (Matthew 17:20).

“Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself

into the sea,” and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’” (Matthew 21:21-22).

Question: Are you praying boldly to command your mountains to move?

Are you praying with the confidence that nothing is impossible for God, as the sermon’s closing scripture (Matthew 17:20) emphasizes?

7. Praying in the Spirit

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Question: Pray in the what? Is that foreign to you? Are you praying in the Spirit?

Question: Reflect on how you can invite the Spirit to lead your prayer life more deeply, aligning with the sermon’s call to pray “harder, stronger, and longer.”