

Prayer

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[0 : 00] Apparently, Lee chose the exact same passage for Wednesday night.

! So, if you would, turn with me to 1 Chronicles chapter 16. And I hope that I do not just repeat what Lee said. I did not hear anything that Lee said.

I have made up my prayer. It's like, Lord, just let us agree, please. And I'm sure that we will.

Hopefully, if you're hearing this for the first time, I hope that you're blessed by it.

If you're hearing this for the second time now, I hope that perhaps I hit a different perspective as we go into this. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to read chapter 16, starting in verse 1.

And I'm going to read through to verse 13. And here's what it says. It says,

[2 : 31] Pray with me, please. Lord, I pray that you would just bless these words, Lord.

That I would be transparent that you would speak through me. And that you would use this morning to teach us as we dive into your word, Lord.

I pray that you are honored by everything said this morning. And it's in your also name, I pray.

Amen. Now, I want to focus on two verses in this passage.

What we're going to focus on is verses 11 and 12 throughout this morning. I'm going to read it one more time for you, just to keep it fresh in our minds. In search for the Lord and for His strength.

Continually seek Him.

Remember the wonders He has performed, His miracles and the rulings He has given. I want this morning to talk to you about prayer. It's something that is, God's kind of given me this vision of being a more praying man.

[3 : 38] And also in us, the staff leading the church to pray throughout the month of February. It's obviously been on the forefront of my mind. And as I was reading this, it struck me, the idea of continually seeking God.

Now, the passage is interesting. Because it actually has a parallel passage in Samuel chapter 6. You'll find this passage. There's a parallel of it.

And David's psalm of thanksgiving that he gave to the priest is not found there. In fact, it's something that through the Holy Spirit was added by the author of Chronicles.

It comes from several different psalms throughout the book of Psalms. But the original translation really kind of ends there in verse 7. Basically, the original translation in the New American Standard is probably one of the few English translations that points that out for us.

The original translation basically says, And David gave them a command to give thanks. And that was kind of the end of it. And the chronicler, as he's writing and as the Holy Spirit is inspiring him, chose to add what we have here, this psalm of thanksgiving.

[4 : 49] This beautiful, beautiful kind of compilation of several of David's psalms. And it just struck me. Continually pray. As we launch our prayer initiative next month, our verse is Romans 12:12.

That's our theme verse. And it basically says, it says, be constant in prayer. Be constant in prayer. Now, before my wife and I were married, this is where I'm going to talk about my mother-in-law. I promise it's good.

Before my wife and I were married, obviously you meet the family. You know, generally a good idea before you run off and get engaged or married. It's a good idea to go and meet the family.

And so we went over there one evening. And one of the first things I noticed about, at that time, my mother-in-law to be, or I didn't even know she was my mother-in-law to be at that time.

One of the first things I noticed was that she was a praying woman. And let me tell you how I knew that. She kept this, like, phrase.

[5 : 47] She would say, I'm going to add that to my prayer list. And it could be, it wasn't necessarily, like, deep and heady things, you know. And it wasn't necessarily about what you might typically

consider adding to your prayer list.

I started to notice that she would say it about annoying things. Things like animals that she found annoying. You know, we might talk about their neighbor's dog that barks in the middle of the night. And she's like, I'm going to add that dog to my prayer list. And it just was confusing to me. And then I started to notice my, Tony, we were dating at the time, my wife-to-be, and she would get annoyed whenever her mom would say that.

And I just, like, this seems a good thing, adding things to your prayer list, but it is an odd thing to add a dog. And then they had a dog at the time, and it was kind of old and sick and becoming troublesome.

And she's like, I'm going to add him to my prayer list, too. And I began to notice that she was praying death on these poor animals. And to me, I thought it was hilarious.

[6 : 47] My wife, if you know my wife, loves animals. She did not think it was hilarious. Not at all. And at that time, I had this pet turtle. And when I say I had this pet turtle, my wife had a pet turtle.

However, she was staying with a friend in an apartment that didn't allow animals. And so I had a pet turtle. I hated that turtle. I don't even, I think his name was Tertullian.

It was named after a famous theologian. You can go look him up. And Tertullian had medical issues. I won't go into it, but it was terrible. And he was dying a very, very slow death.

And I would just, Tony, let me put the thing out of its misery. If we had had Kylie Bradley there, we would have been set. It's like, let me put the thing out of its misery.

And we would go, we would have this conversation and talk about, you know, how will we put poor Tertullian out of his misery humanely to end this miserable life when he's existing.

[7 : 48] And I, you know, I came up with all kinds of things. I was like, I could shoot it. But we live in the middle of New Orleans. And if you fire guns off in the middle of New Orleans, bad things happen. People return fire. And so, you know, I'm not going to shoot it.

And I was like, well, I'll just, I'll just put it on the road and I'll just run over it. And it's, I mean, it's a little tiny turtle. I was like, that's going to be, it's going to be quick.

Maybe painless. And I thought this was a good idea. I was like, yes, that is the way that we're going to do it. And Tony, no, you can't do that.

He might look up and see the truck coming. And so finally, when I met my mother-in-law-to-be, I was like this.

I was like, Chris, her name's Chris as well. Makes for a confusing family reunion. Would you add Tertullian to your prayer list? And she immediately said, yes, Chris.

[8 : 49] I will add Tertullian to my prayer list. And her prayer was answered when I threw it in a ditch. Anyway, my mother-in-law is a praying woman. A praying woman.

We, as a church, in all seriousness, we're called to be a praying people. If you read, you don't have to read far into the Gospels. And Jesus is a praying Savior.

And as you kind of read through Matthew especially, you see it again and again and again. And one of my favorite passages about Jesus is Matthew chapter 21.

And if you're familiar with it, Jesus, like just absolute departure from what we've seen from his character to this point in the story. In Matthew, you see him come to the temple and he makes a whip and drives out these money changers that are defiling the temple.

And the words that he says, he drives them out. He said, listen, it is written that my father's house is to be a house of prayer. A house of prayer.

[9 : 50] We, as a church, are to be a praying people. Now, understand this about the temple and this story. Motives aside, I understand their motives were impure.

There was a reason they were doing business in the temple. And they were greedy. But motives aside, practically speaking, that business had to happen somewhere in that area.

If you've got people from all over the world traveling and giving tithes at the temple, you do have to change money eventually. You can't just accept anybody's money. It has to be money that's useful to you.

And so there's practical implications that needed to happen. Again, I'm not discussing their motive. If you're giving sacrifices, you've got to have animals available for giving sacrifices.

These things were necessary in the temple system. And it's easy, just like the Pharisees, for us to let business and practice, the practical things of every day, to distract us from what really needs to be done.

[10:58] It can consume us. It can distract us from being a praying people. Martin Luther, the great reformer, was known to be a praying man. That's one of the things that we know about him.

The other thing we know is he was a busy man. A very busy man. This is the guy that translated the entire Greek New Testament in about 11 weeks. Translated it into the German language.

Pretty busy man. He wrote massive commentaries. He wrote other theological documents. He was leading a reformation in his area. He was a busy man. But even despite all that busyness, despite all the things that he had to do, it said that he prayed for at least one, but usually two hours a day. I don't know about you, but one or two hours a day, I don't know that my prayer even approaches that on most days. It's usually only when I need something that I might pray that much.

But we're never so busy, never so practical like Martin Luther. We're never so busy, never so caught up in the things that we should forget to pray.

[12:02] It's a necessity. C.S. Lewis says this, And so then we look at verse 11 and 12 of David speaking here in Chronicles.

Search for the Lord and for His strength. Continually seek Him. Remember the wonders He has performed, His miracles, and the rulings He has given.

Continually seek the Lord. Prayer is not an escape. It's not some place that we go to from time to time. It's not a tool that we have in our toolbox.

It's like, you know, when I need prayer, I've got that tool available to me, but only when I need it. It's not a tool. It's not a treatment for when something ails us, whether it's physical or emotional or spiritual.

It's not a treatment that we just pull out when we need it. It's not a luxury that we can do without. And it's not optional. It's the breath in our lungs as believers.

[13:10] Martin Luther put it great. To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. Now we know that certain things happen to our bodies when we have oxygen deprivation.

Your brain begins to slow down. Your brain begins to die when you have oxygen deprivation. Your heart is affected. Your motor skills. It's more difficult for you to do things if you don't have enough oxygen.

And just like that, if you as a believer do not have enough prayer, you will be affected. You'll be affected by that. Now I could spend all morning telling stories about prayer.

And I think if we polled the audience, then you would have all kinds of stories to offer how prayer was effective in your life. Or you noticed it moving in someone else's life. Just mighty acts of God. Mighty acts of God that happen in answer of prayers. But I think here in this passage, in chapter 16, and then we're going to go back and look at some context, because I've always been told by my professors that context is the message.

[14:17] You must look at context. This story of what we just read, the conclusion, is a mighty, mighty story of the necessity of prayer in our lives.

And you need to understand about the story. Really, you have to go back to chapter 13 of Chronicles. You can turn there if you'd like. And let me read just a couple verses out of 13 to see how we came to this conclusion of the ark getting moved to Jerusalem and this mighty psalm that David wrote for us.

It says, starting in verse 1, it says, David consulted with all his officials, including generals and captains of his army. And he addressed the entire assembly of Israel as follows. If you approve, and if it is the will of the Lord our God, let us send messages to all Israelites throughout the land, including the priests and the Levites in their towns and pasture lands, let us invite them to come and join us.

It is time to bring back the ark of God, for we neglected it during the reign of Saul. And so this is kind of the beginning of our conclusion in chapter 16 in Chronicles here.

We need to understand something. Something good is about to happen. The ark is about to be moved. But in all the goodness, it says that he consults his captains, he consults his generals, he consults Israel, he consults everybody.

[15:47] Should we move the ark? Are you agreeable to that? And if it's God's will, we're going to do it. And of course, no one's going to say, no, that's a bad idea. We shouldn't move the ark back to where it belongs.

We should just leave it. It was at some farmer's house at this time. We should just leave it there. No one's going to disagree at this point. And so they're all in agreement. And it says that as they're moving it, if you skip ahead a few verses, in verse 8, it says, David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments, lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

Things are happening. People are excited that the ark is going to be moved. Everyone's in agreement. And they're just passionate about what's happening.

And then tragedy strikes. Some guy named Uzzah, as the ark is being carried along on this cart, something happens, and it looks like the ark's going to fall.

And so Uzzah does what I believe everybody in this room would do. And he reaches out to steady the ark, and God strikes him dead. All that passion, all that excitement, and God strikes Uzzah dead.

[17:13] What? They're doing a good thing. They're moving the ark. So why? Why? Why did that excitement, and passion, and energy, and praise, turn to tragedy?

If you skip to chapter 15, you understand why. David sums it up in a couple words. The tragedies happened. They kind of left the ark where it was for three months.

And David's like, it's time again. And he starts preparing the people to move the ark. And this is what he says, why they failed the first time.

He says, we failed to ask God how to move it properly. He asked his captains and generals. He asked the people, let's move it.

But they failed to ask God how to move it properly. They neglected to pray. They were caught up in the moment. Caught up in the business of moving the ark.

[18:22] You see, their motives were pure. They wanted to move that ark. It was a good motive that they had. Their cause was just, there was nothing wrong with wanting to move that ark to the capital.

Nothing wrong with that, for preparing a place for that ark. But ultimately, it was reckless. The celebration and praise and excitement are all poor substitutes for prayer.

If they had just asked God, Uzzah would still be alive. But they didn't. They were oblivious. Now, I know a thing or two about being oblivious.

I think most of us men in here know a thing or two about being oblivious. I am especially oblivious. It's just something like, I have no ability to multitask.

I can't do it. Impossible. You can ask my wife. No ability to multitask. Like, we'll watch TV, and Tony's watching TV, and has this little foot massage thing going, and is on her phone looking at Facebook, and everything is being paid attention to.

[19:32] Like, I'm just, I watch TV, or I look at my phone, and I don't use the foot massage thing. But if I did, I would have to just use that. It wouldn't be any sort of multitask.

I just, I can't do it. I'm oblivious. It's, I'm no more oblivious when it comes to my wife's hair. It, she gets her hair cut. Now, I understand, I notice, like, if you go from, like, hair to no hair, I can pick up on that.

I understand. There's something different. Now, my wife didn't always have, she has short hair now, but she didn't always have short hair. One time it was pretty long, and she'd go and get her hair cut, and get, like, half an inch off, you know, just to trim those split ends.

You know, y'all know what I'm talking about, ladies. And so she, she comes home, and I've been at work all day, or I've been doing something, all day. And here's my wife, and she's, like, striking just, poses that you would never strike.

Never. And it's, it's a warning. Guys, we understand. We're like, something is different. And so I begin.

[20:45] Those are some nice shoes. Did you get the new shoes? I love those shoes. No. That shirt. It just really brings your eyes out.

Is that a new shirt? No, I've had this since before we were married. Never fails. I never, like, you would think I would learn, and be like, your hair is different.

But I don't. I'm oblivious. It's absolutely oblivious. There's nothing worse than your wife showing up on a Wednesday night, and all the girls running, I love what you do with your hair. It's been, like, three days since she got a haircut.

I'm not lying when I tell you she colored her hair once, and I didn't notice. Complete color change. Oblivious. Israel was oblivious.

They didn't pay attention. They were blind to what was happening because of a lack of prayer in their life. For me, a lack of paying attention to my wife. They were oblivious.

[21 : 47] Absolutely oblivious. And tragedy strikes. David's words are so important. Search for the Lord and for His strength. Continually seek Him.

But some of you may be asking, why? Why are they moving the ark in the first place? And in fact, in order to understand that, you have to go even farther back.

In fact, we gotta change books. You don't need to turn there. But in 1 Samuel, we learn why they're moving the ark or why it's even been gone. Because understand, the ark was an important artifact for Israel.

God in His wisdom was revealing things to Israel, and they weren't, you know, they were kind of stuck on items still. And so they were stuck on the ark.

The ark was the evidence of God's presence. No ark, no presence of God to the Israelite mind. And that may seem silly to us, modern man, and for us as redeemed people by the blood of Jesus Christ and having the Holy Spirit dwell in us, that may seem silly, but to the Israelites, it was not silly at all.

[22 : 59] It was the evidence of their God. If there was no ark, then there was no proof that God was with them. And so, if you turn all the way back in 1 Samuel, there's this tragic story.

It kind of begins in the same area that you have the death of Eli, one of the famous prophets of God. And Eli has not been a good father. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are terrible sons, and do some just horrific things as far as the sacrifices and as far as some of the women in Israel.

These horrific things. And there's a battle with the Philistines and Israel is slaughtered. And so a messenger comes to Eli and Eli's like, what has happened?

And he says, Israel is slaughtered. Moreover, your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead and the ark of God has been taken.

Our evidence of the presence of Yahweh God is gone. It's in the hands of the Philistines. And so Eli dies right in that moment.

[24 : 08] Falls back and breaks his neck. And then as you march forward, the next two chapters have this really crazy insight. It's an amazing story. I encourage you, read 1 Samuel.

Amazing story. The Philistines are like, we got Israel's God. What are we going to do with it? Well, we're going to put it in our room full of gods. And so they take it back to their city and they put it there with their god, Dagon.

I almost said Dagon, but that was wrong. Dagon. And you have this amazing narrative about a battle between two gods.

Really just one god and a statue. But there's this battle that takes place. And so the Philistines leave the ark in there, in their temple. They come back the next day and poor Dagon's on his face before the ark.

They're like, well, that's strange. Must have been an earthquake. So they set Dagon back up and come back the next day, poor Dagon's on his face except his hands are broken off. God just embarrasses this idol, this little god the Philistines have set up.

[25 : 12] And so the Philistines begin to get a little wise. I'm like, wait a minute. And not wise enough to send it back at that point. God sends like an infestation of rats and other medical issues. And so Philistines are feeling like, we're done with this.

This is, this is, we're not keeping this. And so they come up with this plan. We're going to send it back to Israel. They get a couple oxen and they're like, if God's really with this, we're going to put it on the cart behind the oxen.

The oxen are going to take it off and take it to Israel. And so they put it on the cart and what do the oxen do? They start walking to Israel. Like, that was a good idea guys. God must be in it. And so the people of the area of Beth Shemesh in Israel look up from tending their fields and they're like, the ark of God.

How exciting. And so they run over, they grab the cart, they chop the cart up and kill the poor oxen that were pulling it and offer a sacrifice. And they're excited.

But in that moment it says, the Lord killed 70 men because they looked in the ark. So there's already some bad history with this ark moving.

[26 : 24] 70 men. Now, we don't know why they looked in the ark. They could have just been curious and dumb. They could have maybe not known that they're not supposed to look in the ark. They could have been concerned that the Philistines had taken some of the items out of the ark and they wanted to make sure they were there.

We don't have that insight into it. But God kills 70 men and they're like, whoo, we don't want any part of this. And so they leave it at the house of a guy named Abinadab. And they ordain a guy named Eleazar, these names, tough. Eleazar and his son to be in charge of it. And it says this, it says, the ark remained in Curiath-Jerum for a long time. 20 years in all. And during that time, all Israel mourned because it seemed the Lord had abandoned them. Are you understanding how important the ark is to the Israelites?

Why they keep moving this thing even though they keep dying because they're not asking God how to move it? It's so important. In their excitement and haste and their passion over the presence of God, the evidence of that presence, they neglect to pray and they become vulnerable.

[27 : 42] Seek his face continually. Seek his face continually. Now this story, it's a just a single example of what happens when you don't pray.

Just one example. You may say, that's just one. But the Bible again and again and again, it's not like some hard to grasp concept of that just maybe suddenly hits you like when you read some obscure verse in scripture like Chronicles 16.

Again and again and again, God says, pray. Pray. As far as prayers recorded in the Bible, there are 650 individual prayers recorded.

That doesn't include verses on prayers. There's thousands of those verses on prayer. Just a few. If you're computer savvy, get on Google and just type what does the Bible say about prayer? And it will, you can't even count the results of how many websites talk about prayer. But just a few verses for you. Philippians 4.6 talking about prayer.

[28 : 49] It says this, pray about everything. 1 Thessalonians 5.17 says never stop praying. Ephesians 6.18 says pray at all times. Colossians 4.2 says devote yourselves to prayer.

Romans 12.12 which is our verse for our prayer initiative. Be constant in prayer. This isn't some obscure concept. God keeps saying again and again, pray.

It's your life blood. It is that conversation with me. Pray. And then as an example, this story about the ark, here's what happens when people don't pray.

And so why is it that in my own life, why is it that I don't pray? How can you even make it through a day without seeking the face of God?

But we do it every day. Pray. Again and again and again, the Bible tells us to pray. Israel was most vulnerable in its strength.

[30 : 02] The context surrounding this whole ark story, it begins in a place of weakness for Israel. Philistines destroy them. But at the conclusion of it, when David wants to move it, David is now king.

Not only is he king, he's united all the kind of tribal structures of Israel. He's united the nation of Israel. It's not just a bunch of tribes anymore. It is a nation.

David, not only is he united the nation, he's defeated the Philistines. Everywhere David goes, Philistines die. David is strong, restores the national pride of Israel.

Israel, because of David, because of God's blessing on David, is strong again. They're at their strongest point and it is then in that moment that they're most vulnerable.

It is in that moment when God seems most available to them because they have the ark and they're moving it that everything falls apart and tragedy strikes.

[31 : 07] And so this morning, I warn you, it is in your strength that you are most vulnerable. It is when God seems to just be raining blessings on your life that it is so easy to just cut off that conversation.

To not seek the face of God continually. Let me tell you, God is blessing Highland Park. Those of you who've been here a long time know that.

I've only been here a little over two years and I know that. If you're new, just know God's blessing Highland Park. He has blessed us financially. He's blessed us with, just take a look in the nurseries and children's church.

There are so many children. He has secured the future of his church by blessing our church with children. God's blessing is on us. God's blessing is on us.

It is in this moment that we're most vulnerable. Because it is in this strength and this comfort of Highland Park that we may forget to pray.
[32 : 16] So I encourage you this morning. Pray. Be a praying people. This isn't just Highland Park. It's a house of prayer. prayer. I encourage you to get involved next month with the prayer groups. Spend just 30, 45 minutes once a week with a group of church members praying for our church. I encourage you to do that.
Don't be caught vulnerable because you felt that you somehow had strength to stand on your own. Thank you.