

Prayer: Fire from Heaven | FAQ

Aaron Brockett

Alright, it's so good to see all of you. How are you doing? Good, good. I want to welcome you if this is your first time to be with us. I want to welcome all of our guests who are visiting online. We have a lot of people tuning all over the world on live streaming and on Facebook live. So wherever you happen to be we're glad that you are here. We are one church in multiple locations so let's give some love to our North campus right now. They're tuning with us. We love you guys so, so much. Appreciate you.

We've had a really tough week in the life of our nation with one of the most unusual and divisive presidential elections that maybe our nation has ever seen. And right now, as you know and you're very well aware as you tune into the news and you have water cooler conversations there is a lot of hurt and a lot of division in our nation right now.

And I want to pray for us before we get started. I just want you to know that regardless of how you voted or regardless of your perspective on the election, you are welcome here and we want to give dignity and respect. It's not a matter of whether you're a republican, or a democrat, or liberal, or conservative—we primarily want to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ to everyone. And we want to demonstrate to a very divided nation what a united church looks like.

So right now I just want to pray a pastoral prayer over us before we get started and to truly bring this concern to the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, we come to You right now and we are living in days right now with a lot of confusion, a lot of division and fear. And, Father, we pray that Your Spirit would be at work in the hearts and minds of men and women all over this nation, in our cities, and in the countryside, in every state. Father, I pray that You would help us to be empathetic and understanding to the plight, fears, and perspectives of others and may we in our words and actions, in our speech and how we conduct ourselves on social media, that we would represent the love and the grace of Jesus Christ.

You've called us to be the church and so we want to be a city on a hill, we want to be a bright light that shines in a dark world. So right now I pray that You would comfort those who have some fears and some concerns. I pray that You would humble all of us. I pray that, more than ever, we would lean into You, to be your representatives in the climate in which we live. We ask this right now in Jesus' name. And the church says, Amen.

Well we are in week number four of this series on prayer and so if this is your first week, you're coming into this in week four. We've been calling this *Fire From Heaven* because of this verse that we find in 2 Chronicles, chapter 7, verse 1 which says, "When Solomon finished praying, fire flashed down from heaven." That's an incredible image but at the same time, as you read that verse, you might find a little bit of distance between your experience and Solomon's experience. You can say, "Well, that's great for Solomon but how does that help me because who can do that?"

I enjoy watching LeBron James dunk over somebody, but it doesn't necessarily make me feel any better about my athletic prowess. It kind of makes me feel a little inferior and I am just reminded that I can't do

that. So maybe this verse has the same effect on you. I know it does to me to a certain extent. I read that and I'm like, "Well, good for Solomon but what about me?"

We're four weeks deep into this series and I've been asking you to send in your questions that you have about prayer. And we're going to address a few of those today in this hour. But I would say that, as I've been reading through the questions, there is one word that just comes to mind and it's *confidence*.

I would say that there seems to be a thread through all of the questions that have come in, and the questions and the struggles that I have about prayer as well that are directly stemmed to my lack of confidence when I pray. So I struggle to pray because I'm wondering about my ability to pray or God's availability to hear, so maybe I just don't pray like I should.

I don't know very many people who would say that they are against prayer, that they don't want prayer, or that they don't want to pray more. I think the reason why we don't is because, deep down, we doubt our ability to do it or God's availability to hear it, so we don't.

I've been asking you to send in your prayer questions. You guys have done an amazing job with that. I wish I could hit all of them but there are just too many that have come in. But what I've noticed as I read through them is that there are some common ones that have come in. So I want to address some of the most frequently asked questions about prayer during our time today. So let me just jump into these. We'll get as many of them done as we can.

Here's the first one that came in. It's about posture. Do I need to be on my knees when I pray? Other questions came in. Do I need to close my eyes and bow my head when I pray? Scripture talks about being on your knees in prayer. Paul actually, when he was writing to the Ephesian church and he was talking about praying for their spiritual growth he said these words, "When I think of all this, I fall to my *knees* and pray to the Father..." So this is a posture but it's not a prerequisite.

In fact, Jesus gives very few prerequisites to prayer when he teaches us to pray the Lord's prayer in Luke 11 and in Matthew, chapter 6. He never says, "When you pray get on your knees. When you pray close your eyes and bow your head." Those are not bad things to do because your physical posture can help (and this is the most important thing) the posture of our hearts.

The posture of your heart is the most important thing and sometimes that physical posture can help you to get into that space. Here's the great thing about being on your knees when you pray. You're just reminded of how much you need the Lord's strength in your life. So don't think of it as a prerequisite just think of it as a posture.

When it comes to closing your eyes and bowing your head, once again, Jesus never mandated this. It could be helpful just for focus and for reverence. Personally speaking, when I'm praying with other people in groups, you know like holding the hand of the sweater and the squeezer, when I'm in that circle it's kind of awkward to pray with my eyes open, that's kind of strange so I'll close my eyes for focus.

But when I'm by myself I very rarely close my eyes when I pray. I usually open them. I'm a pacer (not an Indiana Pacer but a pacer) and so I like to walk around my office and I'll actually talk out loud and use my hands and gestures because it keeps me focused. So if you were to walk by my office you might think

that I'm talking to myself or that I'm crazy (and I am but I'm also praying half of that time too). It just helps with my focus.

Here's the next question: How long do we have to pray for? Is there a formula that we must follow? This is kind of like, is there a certain minimum time requirement for it to be a legitimate prayer? And then is there a formula? Well, in Luke 11 and Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us to pray. He says, "When you pray, pray like this." And He gives us the Lord's prayer. Now, the Lord's prayer, if you were just to read it, it will take you about 10 seconds. When Jesus teaches us to pray, it's a 10 second prayer.

Now, He's not saying that that's the length that the prayer needs to be. What Jesus is doing is that He's saying, "When you don't know where to start, start here." And this is an outline. This is an outline for prayer and then you can begin to fill it in. So just start here and get comfortable with it and then as you pray you can begin to extend it.

It's not a matter of how much time do I need to put in because Scripture also says in Psalm 62, verse 8, "O my people, trust in Him *at all times*. Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge." And Philippians chapter 4, verse 6 says, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about *everything*. God wants us to just be inviting Him into our lives on a regular basis.

Here's the next question: What would you say about those who pray for extremely superficial things? I've got a friend (and I don't know if friend should be in quotes—hypothetical or not) who asks for prayer for tests he didn't prepare for, sunglasses he lost ... I'd say, I don't know, I'd say Ray-Bans yes. Oakleys, I don't know. Not so prayer worthy.

Actually, this is a really good question. The reason why I included it is because this actually speaks to how our culture primarily views prayer. Many times we see it as a good luck charm or maybe like a hail Mary pass—if all else fails throw up a few prayers for me. That's not the purpose of prayer. So I would just encourage your friend by saying, "If you don't prepare for a test and you say, 'God I didn't prepare for the test please supernaturally beam the answers into my brain,' that's not the purpose of prayer." Prayer is a *connection* and a *conversation* with God.

Here's another question: I've been taught that it's good to be specific when I'm praying or to pray boldly. However someone told me that being specific in prayer is telling God what I want Him to do for me. I'm confused. If I'm supposed to be specific, but also ask for God's will to be done, what is the right way to pray and what is the wrong way to pray?

I really appreciate this question. I'm just going to let Jesus speak to this specifically in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 7 and 8. Jesus says to you and to me, "Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Jesus is giving us permission here to be specific when we pray. But being specific isn't to say, "God, this is what You have to do for me and I don't really want to hear back from You." You can be specific with God and then be open to what He might say to you, whether it's what you want to hear or not. But I would say that there's no problem being specific in prayer. Scripture uses words like *boldly address God and ask Him for things*.

You and I both know that a good relationship requires specific communication. When you're vague with a person with whom you are in a relationship with, whether it's a spouse or a friend, then there is going to be miscommunication and misunderstanding and a break down, so you need to be specific.

So fellas, if you ask your lady what it is that she wants for Christmas and she says, "Don't give me anything, let's save the money," what's that mean? This is a test right now, alright? You better get this right. It means that you better figure it out. That's what that means. And the same is true for Valentines and birthdays—I've learned that lesson the hard way. You don't do that. So it requires some specific communication. This can go both ways: husbands/wives; girlfriends/boyfriends. It's like, "Well he just better read my mind." That usually doesn't go well.

So God is saying, "Listen, be specific about your requests because God is your Heavenly Father and you're His child. He's interested. He wants you to bring Him into your world. But you can say, "God, I really desire this but if this isn't what you want, would you please help me to see it from Your perspective." That's a great prayer to pray.

Jesus modeled this for us as well. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and He was about to be arrested by the Roman soldiers and He was going to be put on trial unfairly, He was going to be beaten, and mocked, and nailed to a tree what did Jesus pray to God? Jesus, the Son of God said, "God, if there is any other way would You please show Me." The words Jesus used are, "Take this cup from me." In other words, if there is any other way to save the people from their sins, would You please show Me now here in the 11th hour?" And what does He say next? "Not My will but Yours be done."

And God said no to that prayer. Have you ever thought about that? God said no to Jesus' own prayer. He was sinless, He was perfect, He is the Son of God and God said, "No." And honestly, I'm glad He did because Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection is what gives me hope and gives me life. Jesus said, "Here's my specific request but God not My will but Yours be done." I want to learn to pray like that.

Here's the next question: Is it better to pray out loud or to be silent? Is praying out loud more effective? I already kind of told you how I personally pray. I would say that it really depends on what you mean by effective. If you mean is it effective from the sense of—is God hard of hearing. And is God like, "Hey, I really would have answered that prayer but you were mumbling and I didn't catch it." No. Scripture says in 1 Samuel 16 that God can assess the condition of our hearts, man looks at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart.

Isaiah, chapter 59, verse 1—I love this verse—says, "Listen! The Lord's arm is not too weak," some translations say, "The Lord's arm is not too short to save." It's this idea, "I'm trying to reach you but I can't because I've just got these little T-Rex arms and I can't get to you." That's not what that is saying. It says, "... nor is His ear too deaf to hear your call." It's not like God says, "I'm sorry that request just didn't get to me."

I would say that God knows but is it really effective on your part or on my part. And I've already said that it's helpful for me to pray out loud. I'm more focused. I'm more articulate when I can pray out loud. If I pray silently, especially if I close my eyes, my mind just wanders all over the place—you can pray for me in that—I'm just like, "Dear Lord ... Mmm a tuna sandwich sounds good." I just start to wander all over the place and if I can talk out loud it kind of keeps me focused so it's effective in that sense.

Here's the next question: Can Satan eavesdrop on our prayers and use them against us? Now I've honestly never had this question asked of me before. This was the number one question that came in and it was asked in a variety of ways. Can Satan eavesdrop on our prayers and use them against us?

I think it's really important when answering this to understand who Satan is and who he isn't. Some of you may not think that he is a literal being. Others of you may have this idea in your mind, kind of like our culture does, that Satan is like this cartoon character wearing red tights and horns with a pitch fork who likes to play practical jokes on us. But that's not how Scripture describes him. Satan is a fallen angel who rebelled against God. He hates God. He hates God's creation. And he hates you. So don't give him any more credit that he deserves.

Satan is not God's equal opposite. And I think that sometimes we have a tendency to think about him in those terms. It's like God is over here and He's life and He's good and Satan is over here and he's dark and he's bad. And they've got different super powers but they're equal, kind of like Batman and Superman or something, and they're kind of opposed to each other.

No. No. Don't give Satan more credit than he deserves. He is under the authority of God and his authority only goes so far. So we see in the Book of Job that Satan goes to God and he asks God's permission to get to Job. And Jesus has this frightening conversation with Peter where He says to Peter, "Peter, Satan has asked Me to sift you like wheat."

Satan's authority only goes so far. Understand that he is only a two-trick pony but he's really, really good. He's refined these skills way better than you can defend. The Bible describes him as a liar and a manipulator. In John, chapter 8 it says, "He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies," which means that he can out lie you and he can out manipulate you.

So I think a good example of how to defend against this is Jesus, Himself. Jesus, as He is beginning His earthly ministry at the age of 30, is led out into the desert where He fasts and prays for 40 days and 40 nights and at the end of that He is susceptible to temptation because He's hungry, and He's thirsty, and He's tired.

This is just a sidebar. We need to assess the same thing in our lives. When are you most susceptible to temptation? It's probably when you are hungry, when you are thirsty, when you are tired, or when you are stressed. So Jesus is susceptible to this. Satan knows it and Satan goes after Him and he tempts Him. He tempted the perfect, sinless Son of God so what makes you think that he doesn't think that he's got a shot with you? He goes after Jesus and he tempts Him. How does Jesus defend against Satan's lies and manipulation? It's through the truth of Scripture. He knows it really well.

So here's how I would answer the question. Don't be so concerned about Satan eavesdropping on your prayers and using them against you. Be concerned if you can't discern truth from a lie. So it's this idea of Satan will come to you and he'll ask this question in a variety of ways, "Did God really say ...?" So when a lie is told to you about God or about what it is that He wants from you, can you pick up on it? Do you know God's word well enough to actually be able to discern it? The Book of Ephesians says to put on the full armor of God because he's coming at you all of the time.

Here's another question. This comes from a nine-year-old. I love this question: If God knows everything, then why do we have to pray to him? And I don't know, I wonder if the nine-year-old's parents asked

him to turn this in. It's a great question, isn't it? If God knows everything already then why does He need me to tell Him? And it's not that God is unaware of things that we need to inform Him of, and it's not like God is saying, "Yeah, I already know that. Thanks for telling me. I already know that."

This is, once again, understanding the definition and the description of prayer, which is what we're really trying to drive at in this series. It's that prayer is something that we do to connect with God and to grow in our comfort and relationship with Him. It's intimacy with God is what it is. So it's not like I need to inform God or that I'm just going to tell God what He already knows. But we actually have an opportunity. We gain access to the very ear of the Creator of the universe.

I love how the author of Hebrews says this in chapter 4, verse 16. It says, "So let us come," there's that word right there *boldly*. It just means unashamed. You don't need to worry about it you just come, "boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." This is prayer. Through prayer God says, "You've got access to Me." So it's not do I have to? It's I get to.

Thinking about this last week, if I was in my bedroom at home kicking back, reading a book or whatever and all of a sudden you came walking into my bedroom and you sat down on the edge of my bed and you just started talking to me, we're going to have a problem. That's just weird, okay?

I'm going to be like, "How did you get into my house? And why are you in my bedroom? And why are you sitting on my bed? This violates the pastor/parishioner relationship." I never use that word but I probably would then. I'd be like, "What are you doing in here?" You would be violating a certain kind of space, "Why would you think that you have access to this room?"

But if one of my kids came in (and they do often, they come walking in and they sit down on the edge of my bed and they begin to talk to me) I'm not going to tell them to get out. It's not going to be weird. I want to hear from them. And we need to begin to think about prayer in that way. God has basically said, "Through Jesus, I have given you access into my very throne room." And He wants to hear from you and me.

Here's another question: If we're not hearing from God, how long should we keep asking? That's a great question. Let me just answer it with Scripture. Luke, chapter 18, verse 1 says, "One day Jesus told His disciples a story to show that they should always pray," and let's just say these three words out loud together. North, I'd like to hear you, "... *never give up*." That's how Luke tells us to pray. Don't ever give up. We could go to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 17. It says, "*Never stop praying*."

So the answer from Scripture is never. Keep on praying. And you say, "Well, I've been praying for this thing for a long time and it doesn't seem that God has done anything. And I would encourage you to do what I suggested last week. And I've had a number of you come up and talk to me about this idea. Get a journal of some kind—I've noticed on Amazon that they have these three-year prayer journals where there are three different columns and there are the dates for each year and you can just write in a sentence. Boil your requests, your concerns, into a single sentence and then date it. And then just come back to that periodically and see ...

I'm amazed at how many things that I forget. And I wonder if God answers more prayer than what He gets credit for. He may not answer on your time table, and He may not answer in the way that you specifically wanted Him to, but I bet you He's answered more prayers than you think and you've just

simply forgotten about it. But don't ever give up. Continue to petition God.

Here's another question: Are there issues that are too trivial to pray about? I would just very simply say, "No." There are no issues too trivial. When it comes to my kids, I want to hear about every detail of their day. I don't care how trivial it is because I want to hear from them. I want to have a relationship with them.

Now, do I need to maybe grow spiritually? Do I need to mature? Absolutely, but there is nothing too trivial. Just read the book of Psalms. David pours out his guts to God and he gets really raw, and he gets really real and you know what? God can handle it.

Another question, I love this. This came in multiple times both from men and women. This is from a lady: How can we as a couple make prayer part of our daily lives when he is uncomfortable with it? And then the next question was from a man. He says: Why is it so difficult for me to pray with and for my wife, one on one? How can I get better at this? There is a part of me that wonders if they were married. I don't know, maybe—maybe not. Even if they weren't this is probably true for many people within our church.

There are a number of ways that I can respond to this. The first thing that I would ask ... By the way this can be that sometimes husbands are uncomfortable with prayer, maybe wives can be uncomfortable with prayer, it can go both ways. The basic question I would ask is the person to whom you are married following Jesus? Are they a believer? And if not then you can probably understand why they'd be uncomfortable with prayer.

But if you're both believers ... Let me answer it from this perspective. If you're both believers, prayer can still be difficult and I think the first thing that we have to acknowledge is that a couple who prays together is building on a really, really strong foundation and we have an enemy who knows that and he will do everything he can to discourage that: whether it's busyness, whether it's you're tired, whether it's you're arguing, you're stressed, or whether you just lack the confidence to do it.

I've talked to a number of men and I can even speak from my own personal experience, I'll just be really real with you. It's easier for me to pray on this stage in front of you than it is for me to pray with my wife. It is. The times when I'm home, maybe I'm just tired or I'm busy. Here's the truth, Lindsay knows me better than you. Lindsay knows me at my best and at my worst.

Maybe I just got done snapping at the kids, or maybe I wasn't sensitive enough with her and it just feels like I'm posing if I go, "Honey, let's pray." You just feel uncomfortable, you're unworthy, or whatever it is that keeps you separated. A lot of men feel ashamed. They feel like, "You know what? I'm not worthy to lead my wife in prayer." So they'll shy away from it.

So I would simply say this. Have a conversation about it and acknowledge to one another, "You know what? I've got your back. I'm with you. And I respect you and I love you and I want us to pray together. So what is it that is causing us to hesitate in this and let's address it." Start where you are and begin to build on that. I bet you it'll change your marriage. It will help in tremendous, tremendous ways. It's a great question.

Here's one: Who do we pray to? God the Father or Jesus? And I would say simply this. We have to understand the role of God the Father and Jesus the Son. God is Creator, He is infinite, He is all

powerful, He is all knowing. Jesus is God's Son fully God fully man who came to pay the price of our sins so that we can be reconciled to God.

Scripture describes Jesus as a mediator. He is sitting right now at the right hand of God and He is advocating on our behalf. So to answer this we pray to God but we pray in Jesus' name because, as the author of Hebrews says, Jesus now gives us access to God.

Here's another one: If you feel like you are getting an answer to prayer, how can you discern if it truly is coming from God? 1 John, chapter 4, verse says this, "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God."

I don't know if you've ever done this before where maybe you justify a decision that you'd like to make because you say, "I feel like God is calling me to this." We have to be really careful about that phrase. It could very well be. But it could just be that I'm spiritualizing what I just really want to do.

And I think that we need to be careful that we don't trade an impulse for a verse. And so if God is leading you in a direction the first question you have to ask is, "Is this consistent and in line with the overall mega-narrative of Scripture?" God will never tell you to do something that violates His word.

The other thing is to just bring people into your life who you know, love, and trust and that you know are demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, they are following after Jesus, they know you well and just ask them their honest opinion and see what they tell you and see if there is a general theme between these different individuals and what they are saying.

I don't think that I have ever made a major, life change decision without running it past my wife and just saying, "Honey, what do you think?" Without trying to influence her in any way but just, "Honey, what do you think?" It's amazing to me at how often the Holy Spirit will affirm things through her or will actually cause me to stop and to re-evaluate them.

Here's another question: I know that prayer is real. I have always prayed, but I don't know if my prayers are good enough. My prayers are sometimes memorized. I pray for the same blessings, often times saying the same thing, day after day. Other times, I simply have a conversation with God and tell him what's on my mind. Am I really praying?

Yes. Yes. You can pray memorized prayers. That's a great thing. Like I've said the last couple of weeks pray the Psalms—especially if you don't know where to start. Sometimes we just don't know what to pray. Let the Spirit intercede for you. That's not a bad thing at all. Then other times just have a conversation with God. I'm going to say this here in a few minutes. God's not grading your prayers. He's not saying, "Well yesterday you prayed a lot better. Today, I don't know what's going on. Have you had your coffee?" He's not doing that.

God just really wants to hear from you. He wants to know what's on your heart. I love what it says in James, chapter 1, verses 3 through 4. It just urges us. God receives you as you are but He wants you to grow and I love this. It says, "For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is *fully developed*, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing."

God receives you. That's the whole message of the gospel. God receives you just as you are but He loves you too much to keep you there and He wants you to grow and to mature. But let yourself off the hook a little bit. You know what? You're going to have bad days and good days. And sometimes you'll know what to pray and sometimes you won't. And God is your Heavenly Father. He just wants to hear from you.

Another one: How do you keep prayer from feeling mundane? I've had mountaintop experiences where God's presence was palpable. After that, prayer has felt less than such. Let me just say this. We live for the mountain top experiences in our lives that come few and far between. And I would just simply say to look at the example of Jesus, Himself. Look at the example of men and women who were faithful in the Scriptures. It wasn't just mountain top, mountain top, mountain top, mountain top. It was mountain top followed by the valley, mountain top followed by the valley.

Here's the thing about a mountain top. It's a great view but usually you don't grow anything there. You grow the fruit in the valleys. So God will bless you with a mountain top and then He will take you back down in the valley where He can produce some things in your life. It's not because you've done anything wrong but it's because God is leading you somewhere. He's transforming you. He's working in your life.

Here's another question: What is the difference between petition and intercession? It's a good question. Petition is just, "God, here's my request. I'm sending it to you." Intercession is, "I'm praying on behalf of someone else."

How do I teach my kids to pray? (And I can relate to this one.) I don't want to be legalistic (hold hands, close eyes, etc.) because she's 3 years old and pushes back against what we ask her to do. I want her to want to pray. Let me just start by saying there are probably a whole bunch of things she doesn't want to do because she's 3 so maybe let yourself off of the hook a little bit here. And I totally get this. I've got four kids ages 14 to four. My three older kids—they'll pray around the dinner table. My four-year-old is yet to pray.

We'll ask her every night, "Kadence, do you want to pray?" And she'll usually just bury her face in her hands. That's usually what she does. She just doesn't want to pray. You know what? We're like, "That's okay." And we just model it. We give her space. And I trust that as you are continuing to shepherd her little heart that eventually she'll feel more and more comfortable with it as she sees you do it.

If the purpose of prayer is to change your heart and not your circumstance, why would God ever answer prayer for changing your circumstances? I'm assuming that this question has come out of what we've really been driving pretty hard in this series. We've been saying over the last few weeks that prayer is not talking to God like the clerk in the drive-through window, "God this is my order. You need to give me what I want."

Actually God wants to change your heart. I've been drilling on that every single week. But these two things are not against each other. This is not an either/or kind of thing. Once again we go back to Jesus' prayer, "God here's what I'm asking of You but not My will but Yours be done." And you can say, "God, please change my circumstances but I also want you to change my heart." I would just say this. God will not just grant your request at the expense of your heart. He knows what you want. He has long-range vision. So He's preparing and He's trying to develop you. The real question is, "God do I trust You more than I trust my own perspective and impulses."

Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers? Does He respond to them? Let me just be very straight forward and say yes I believe that He does because that's the heart of God. Listen. Even if you don't buy all of this God stuff, if you're not a Christian, if you've never given your life to Jesus, God has created you and He loves you. You've been created in His image and He is very interested in your life whether you believe in Him or not.

We look at Jesus throughout the gospels. And Jesus, as He was travelling through crowds of people, who did Jesus always find Himself with? He would always go after people who were far from the heart of God. In fact, people who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus. He would go after them. He had a shepherd's heart.

I believe that God is doing the same thing today by His Holy Spirit. So there are two terms: God's general grace and God's saving grace. We are all under God's general grace. God has given you life. God has given you your intellect. He's given you your health. And then God also desires to give you His saving grace where you trust Him and you receive His Son, Jesus, into your life. I believe that the prayer that God will always answer is whenever you acknowledge Him and say, "Lord, I want to make you Lord and Savior of my life. And turning from my sin, I'm going to trust in You." Obviously God hears that prayer.

I guess the biggest thing for me would not be that God would hear the prayers of unbelievers or not. But if you are a believer and you've got some kind of sin issue in your life that you're stubbornly holding onto and you're not going to give it up—that's when I would be concerned. In Psalm, chapter 66, verse 18 it says, "If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened," which is basically saying that if you're claiming to be a follower of Jesus, His Spirit is living in you, and there's this unrepentant sin in your life that you won't give up He's saying that that will actually create a barrier between you and God. So deal with that and bring it out into the open and confess it.

Here's another question that is really pertinent right now for what we are experiencing: How should we pray for our leaders? They didn't necessarily say political leaders. It could just be leaders in general. Can I just tell you that I really appreciate it when you come up to me and our other pastors and you just say, "I'm praying for you," or, "What can we pray for you about?" I really feel those prayers and appreciate them. I would just ask that you would pray for wisdom and discernment and that you would pray for my family. I really, really appreciate that.

When it comes to political leaders, we can take our cues from various passages of Scripture but we just came through a series back in August on the Book of Daniel. And in Daniel, chapter 4, verse 17 it gives us this truth, "The Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world. He gives them to anyone He chooses even to the lowliest of people."

And we see in the Book of Daniel that Daniel was in exile in Babylon serving under four different administrations. And he didn't necessarily, I'm sure, line up politically with all of those administrations but he was submissive to the greater authority of God and he was also submissive to the earthly authorities who were over him. And you know that Daniel was praying for them.

I would say that when it comes to our political leaders: pray for their hearts, pray for their wisdom, pray for their guidance, and pray that God would be at work. And rest on the truth that Tuesday's election didn't catch God off guard. God was like, "Yeah, this was my thousandth election." God's been through this before and He's still in control.

And we've been talking about this truth for the last couple of months. God is in control of who is in control. But I also want to say this. I've seen this a lot on social media where a lot of believers are using that to kind of shut the conversation down: God is in control of who is in control so stop talking about your fears and concerns. And we don't need to do that either. We can trust that God is in control of who is in control and we can also be a good neighbor. And we can also be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

How do you know if difficult circumstances you are going through are a part of God's plan or a result of not following God's plan? Can I just say this? We need to understand the difference between circumstances and consequences. They are not the same. So we can go through difficult circumstances and it doesn't mean that God is punishing us, or that He has turned His back on us. There are faithful men and women throughout the centuries who have been faithful to God and gone through difficult circumstances—including Jesus, Himself.

Consequences are different. Consequences are when I made a decision and now this is the consequence of my decision. It doesn't mean that God doesn't forgive you or give you another chance, but it may mean that that is why you are going through this.

We should never confuse, "Man, I'm going through this difficult set of circumstances. Has God abandoned me or is He upset with me?" No, He's probably right next to you and in you and He's walking with you through that difficult thing.

Just a few more here: Where does Amen come from? Why do Christians add it at the end of a prayer if it isn't in the Bible? Is there a requirement to end prayer with "amen"? First of all I want to say that Amen is in the Bible a lot. We see it when David prayed. We see it when Jesus prayed. All *Amen* really means is *this is true* or *we are all in agreement in this*. It's kind of like the first century equivalent of clapping. So basically at the end of the prayer we end it by saying, "This is truth," or, "I'm in agreement."

Another question: Is it okay to pray to saints? In answering this I would say that there is nothing in the Scripture by way of example, command, or precedent to pray to anyone other than God in Jesus' name.

We need to understand the definition or the description of a saint. The Bible actually says that if you have invited Jesus into your life and His Holy Spirit lives within you, and you've been forgiven of your sins that you are a saint. Did you know that? How many of you feel like a saint right now? There are usually one or two crazies who raise their hands, alright? Most of us don't feel that way. Saint?

Just turn to your neighbor and say, "You're a saint." That feels weird, doesn't it? A third of you are like, "I'm not saying that. You don't know who I'm sitting next to. I live with him. He ain't no saint." But the Scriptures teach that if you've given your life to Jesus Christ He's forgiven you of your sins and actually it's His work that makes you a saint. So we don't pray to other human beings. We pray to God in Jesus' name.

Here's the last question: Am I disobeying God if once he gives me what I'm praying for, I change my mind and pray for something else? So you're probably a lot of fun to go out to eat with on Friday night, I would imagine. Well, I don't know. If you're praying for a million dollars and you say, "God, if you give me this million dollars I'll be generous with it." And then He gives you a million dollars and you change your mind—yeah, probably not the greatest of motives.

Let me just say this. If you're using prayer as a bargaining chip then your motivations are in the wrong place. And so if you change your mind, sure I think that God will give you enough grace to do that.

Here's the thing. I've already said it before. All throughout these questions—and I would say that some of these question may be, "Really? Man I really wanted to hear that." And the other questions you didn't necessarily need as much. But maybe some of these questions you are like, "You know what? I've always been wondering that but I never had the courage, I've never had the forum to actually articulate that question." And it's really kind of traced back to this idea of confidence, "Do I have the confidence to approach my Heavenly Father?"

I just want you to know again, a very simple definition of prayer, prayer is connection with God and He wants to talk with you more. See, prayer is talking to your Heavenly Father. It's sharing with Him what is on your mind. It's processing with Him the things that you are contemplating. It's releasing what you are worried and anxious about. It's seeking His guidance and wisdom for decisions both big and small. It's confessing your sins, your secrets, and your shame that's eating away at you. And it's interceding on behalf of somebody that you love.

Listen, God is not grading your prayers right now. It's not like God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are sitting behind a table and when you pray they hold up a card with a number on it, "Well, that was a six. Do a little bit better and we'll talk again." That's not what they are doing.

I don't know if you can relate to this or not but, man, for the longest time I always envisioned that God would hear from me and that He wanted me to pray to Him because, you know, He is God. He's kind of supposed to love me because He's God. But that didn't necessarily mean that He liked me. I just kind of thought this, "You know, God? It's me again. Sorry." And God was like, "Brockett, is it you again? Are you still struggling with that thing that you told me you'd never do again?"

"Yeah." And He's like, "You've done it three times since Thursday, okay?" And it's just like this idea of, "You're annoying Me. I love you but you're annoying Me." And that couldn't be further from the truth.

In Psalm, chapter 34, verse 1 it says, "The Lord is *close* to the brokenhearted; He *rescues* those whose spirits are crushed." And I just want to ask you today is there anybody feeling brokenhearted? Anybody feel like his spirit is crushed? Listen. God is not leaning back. God is leaning in. When you approach His throne and you begin to pray God leans in like a runner in the starting blocks saying, "Man, I'm ready. I'm ready if you would just voice your concerns to Me." He's ready to hear from you right now wherever you may happen to be in your spiritual journey, wherever you may be emotionally right now. God is leaning in.

What I want to do right now is I want to, hopefully, help to give you a little more confidence to pray by just leading you through a prayer. The lights are going to come down. We're just going to spend a few minutes doing this. I want to just give you a line and then let you finish it in prayer. I just want to guide you through this prayer and then as soon as we are done the ushers will come and we'll take communion together.

Close your eyes—open them. Get on your knees if you want. Stand. Sit whatever you want to do. Let me just lead us through this prayer right now.

Thank You God for... right now what would you like to thank God for? Just articulate that to Him right now in just a few seconds. God, thank You for this.

God, forgive me for...is there anything that you've been holding onto for a long time? Any secrets or shame that have just been eating you up? Just give them to Him right now. God, forgive me for this...

When it comes to our world, I'm really concerned about...how would you finish that?

God, I have a friend who needs... just intercede on behalf of your friend, somebody you know who is just struggling with something, who just needs something. Just give that person to the Lord right now.

God, help me to forgive...do you have a name? Somebody who you need to release, somebody who you need to forgive? Just give that to Him now.

Is there anything in my life I need to deal with? God I'm just not seeing it. I've got a blind spot. Show me. Search my heart. Make me aware of it ...

Finally, God, what do You want me to see, what do you want me to hear, say, or do? Tell me. Speak to me right now in these moments together ...

Father, You are good and we love You and we pray that You would hear our concerns and thoughts and desires. May Your Spirit guide us. We ask this right now in Jesus' name. Amen.