

# A Trusting Christian in Prayer

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**Bible Verse:** Matthew 6:9-13  
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On Sunday, I gave a message that I titled, "Therefore I Will Trust You," from Proverbs 3:5, and 6, which says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." And from that text we said that God blesses trusting obedience and we looked at how revealed certainties should lead us to a position where we trust the Lord more than we trust our own judgment; we have confidence in Christ over our perception of the circumstances around us. And that's a far more far-reaching principle than it might seem upon a simple explanation because we live in an environment both in culture and in the church where people are conditioned and think that it's natural and right to live life and make decisions based on how they feel and based on evaluations that they make in the moment based on their existing perceptions. The church is filled with people that live that way and that's not biblical Christianity, it's not biblical thinking, and it leads people into a tighter and tighter circle of subjective responses to life that eventually self-destructs or lashes out at others around them. That's not the way that God intends us to live. That's why the Scripture says there, "do not lean on your own understanding." And not only do we, I'm speaking broadly, culture in the church, even within Truth Community Church sometimes, not only do we lean on our own understanding, we lean on our feelings and we respond and we evaluate everything in response to that and it's a long, slow, deliberate process of teaching over time whereby God leads us into the way that a biblical mind is actually supposed to operate. We look at revealed certainties and say, "I will trust him no matter what." We look at revealed certainties and watch this, beloved, we say, "I will obey him no matter what. I will follow the Scriptures even if it seems contrary to my personal perceptions of life, personal perceptions of the situation."

I'm here in a very pastoral mood here tonight. I'm not here at all to be confrontational, but I do want you to realize that what I just said in those prior three minutes is that the principles are a colossal collision with the way that many people live their lives and I just lay that out and we'll come back to it, you know, over time and perhaps even in today's message. And so God blesses trusting obedience and we're just looking at things to see how we can trust God. We know that I don't need to tell anybody, "Hey, you're supposed to trust God." Everybody in this room understands that, you're supposed to trust God. The harder question is how do I trust God, and one of the things that we said from that passage is, is that we look at these revealed certainties about the nature and the character of God, the salvation that Christ purchased for us at the cross, the reality of the

indwelling Spirit, the future hope that is ours when we will see Christ face to face, all of these wonderful, wonderful things that God has done for us and we look at those and we let that be the anchor of our thinking so that when trials or difficulties or problems come up, we are not so driven by our subjective approach to life that we fall into a vortex of doubt and uncertainty and angst, instead we reason from the revealed certainties that we know and say, "Because these things are true, therefore I will trust him. I will trust God with my future. I will be confident in the future because I know these things to be true," rather than saying, "I know these things are true but life is so hard now and I've got to figure something out." The difference between these revealed certainties, "therefore I will trust," versus these revealed certainties, "but life is difficult." That's a contrast of massive proportions, and that's what we looked at on Sunday, and if you didn't hear that message, I'd encourage you to download it and hear it. If you did hear the message and you were with us, I'd encourage you to download it and listen to it. You know, repetition is the key to learning and so everyone should listen to that message again. It's pretty fundamental.

But all of that by way of introduction here this evening, to say this, that message seemed to strike a chord. There was an unusual amount of response to that, people saying, "That helped me. I'm glad you said that. You were speaking to me," those kinds of responses in an elevated sort of way. It seemed to have hit the mark. It seemed like that was an arrow that was shot from the pulpit and it hit its target and encouraged people. I'm glad for that. It's always helpful, just so you know, it's always helpful for a pastor to get feedback like that. If something really helps you, it's good for the pastor to know that because it says, okay, it's not so much about the encouragement that it brings in ministry, it does that, but it says, oh, okay, I see what people are dealing with. It helps me know what I should do next and tonight's message is kind of along those lines. This is a follow-up message. to "Therefore I Will Trust You," and if you're taking notes, the title of tonight's message is "A Trusting Christian in Prayer." A Trusting Christian in Prayer. This is one of the ways that we work out the implications of Proverbs 3:5-6, is that we find ourselves praying in a certain kind of way and I want to set this up by way of introduction.

It seems a lot longer than it was, but at the end of 2022, most of you know, I took a study leave and we were away for a few months, and one of the things that happened in the midst of that time away where things were able to slow down and I was able to step back and think about my own walk with the Lord and where life was, one of the things that came out of that in my self-assessment of that was the sorry condition of my own prayer life. That's just true. I stepped back and I considered the course of things and I realized that there was a sorry, very sorry condition, a dilapidated condition in my prayer life, you might say. Now understand, it wasn't that I didn't pray. I had a pattern that I followed. The pattern kind of became an end unto itself. Without going into details, my pattern of prayer had become cold and mechanical. Now I know that none of you can imagine anything like that happening in your own life, in your own prayers. I say that jokingly, obviously. But the nature of things, and I want to give you just enough detail to set the context so that this message will help you. I had a narrow focus in the predominant way that I was praying before my study leave. It was a narrow focus with lists of people from Truth Community Church, the needs of Truth Community Church, and I would pray for those things. Now listen, a pastor should pray for his people. I did, I still do. I pray for, if

you're a member of Truth Community Church, I pray for you on a regular basis. But beloved, to just have a prayer list or a number of prayer lists and going through those, the fact that you go through the lists that you yourself generate doesn't mean that you're being effective in prayer or that you're really cultivating any intimacy with God whatsoever, not necessarily, and I found that to be the case, and this message kind of flows out of some of the things that I thought about in response to that when I looked in the mirror and said, I don't like what I see. Here's the thing: in prayer for a trusting Christian, there should be far broader and deeper affections in our heart that lift us beyond mere concerns about other men, about other women for that matter, other people, more than things that are horizontal. There's a vertical dimension to prayer that is, if you think about fixing a pancake, if you don't flip the pancake, it's not going to be fixed right. It's going to be black on one side and kind of doughy on the top. You've got to flip it and you need to bake it. You need to griddle it on, I just turned a noun into a verb there, you've got to griddle it on on both sides there. Prayer is something like that and as I was on that study leave, I had the opportunity, and I thank God for it, and I thank you and the elders for giving me that opportunity, I had the opportunity to read a number of Christian biographies that helped point my mind in a better direction and the things that came out of that are what I want to share with you here this evening.

And so I invite you to turn to Matthew 6 for our text tonight as we go to what's traditionally known as the Lord's Prayer. I want to read that to start, and I'm hopeful, I'm actually confident that already there are stirrings in many of your hearts that say, I'm glad I'm here tonight, glad I'm watching over the live stream, because I yearn for a greater intimacy with God and I want to see some direction. I want that for myself and that the Spirit of God has already prepared in you a thirst for the things that we're going to talk about tonight. And so in Matthew 6:9 through 13, our Lord said this. He said,

9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10  
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11  
Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also  
have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver  
us from evil.

Now, look, I've taught on this passage many times, but tonight's message is new. It's a new preparation that I've done. In fact, we're going to return to the Sermon on the Mount whenever we do and we'll eventually come to this passage and I'll go through it in a more detailed verse-by-verse exposition. Tonight I want to take it in kind of an overview approach, a thematic approach as we walk through the text and I want to present it differently tonight, just to stimulate your thinking about your own prayer life, to give you a sense of direction that you can take and begin practicing, you know, as soon as you want, and be able to lay hold of these things and start to develop perhaps a different and better approach in your own prayer life, like I needed to do. And so we're going to see that we can exercise our trust in God that we talked about on Sunday, we can exercise that trust and we should exercise it in prayer and we can exercise that trust with four ongoing prayer themes that I'm going to show you from this text. And let me just say, let me just preface it, this is really important to understand my intent here this evening. What

I'm laying out for you over the next 40 minutes or so, these are themes to practice over time. These are things to meditate upon and to talk to God about as you walk through the day, you know, as you're down on your knees in prayer, as you're meditating. These are themes to practice over time that come directly from our Lord's teaching on prayer. This is not, and if you're taking notes, you should underline the word not, this is not just another list to give you to go through and to treat as a checklist. "I did this. I said this." Check, check, check, everything's good. It's not that. It's not a checklist like that. It's far deeper than that. We're talking about the formative, shaping affections of the believing heart in Christ. The formative affections of the one who knows Christ and trusts in him and lives life in light of his providence and lives light in light of a conscious sense of his love that lives life in response to the revealed certainties that we talked about on Sunday, okay?

So these are themes, not a checklist, and part of our problem, part of the deep problem that we have is that we come to Christianity, we come to God with such a legalistic mindset. We come with a legal mindset, especially those of you that have been exposed, and I'm sorry to be this direct, but I say this to help you and I know some of you were brought up under Bill Gothard types of principles and things like that, and that creates, it cultivates a certain mindset and approach to the whole way that you think about Christianity. And so I don't want you to think about it in terms of rules and things like that from maybe the past teaching you've had. These are about affections. These are about heart desires. This is about a deep inner response, not outward compliance with what a teacher has given to you, okay? And I say that about Bill Gothard and others like it, just to help you not to cause a conflict in what I said.

Four ongoing prayer themes here is what I want to give to you tonight and I've alliterated them to help you remember them and they all start with t-r. They all start with t-r. And let me just say this, these four themes, I'll just give them to you at the start here: the Trinity, point number one, the Trinity; secondly, trials; thirdly, trespasses; and fourthly, triumphs. Trinity, trials, trespasses, and triumphs, okay? These are the four themes that I want to give to you and those are just labels to help you remember these things that we're going to look at.

And so let's talk first of all about the Trinity and I'm using, I use the term Trinity here not specifically to that we would make the Triune essence of God, the undivided essence with three persons to make that in a narrow sense the focus of our prayers. It's just a mnemonic device to talk about the nature and character of God broadly speaking, okay? Point number one, the Trinity, and to develop yourself as a trusting Christian in prayer, you need to, and our Lord teaches us, to remember the God to whom we are praying and to remember him in an earnest way. Immediately when you do that, you're taken out of the realm of checklists and prayer lists. I could probably make an argument that prayer lists are not in the end a healthy thing, but I'm not making that case here this evening. When we pray, we are praying to an infinite God of infinite perfections with infinite glory who is of infinite worth, and to engage a time of prayer with him that's reduced to earthbound lists is an insult to his glory. Can you imagine going to the King of England, going to the governor of your state just on an earthly level, and doing nothing to

recognize his position? I know in the coarse, vain culture in which we live that's becoming increasingly common, but there's a certain respect that is due to human beings who hold positions of rank and authority. Well, multiply that by infinity and recognize that when you come to prayer, you're coming to an infinitely great being who has the right to our worship, has the right to our affections, has the right to an earnest, sincere, humble recognition of who he is.

You remember the God to whom you're praying in an earnest way and so, and I'm not at all going to give this what it deserves, we're just talking about themes to stimulate you, to help you in response to Sunday's message. Notice in verses 9 and 10, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'" There are three petitions that are in those two verses, and they are all God-ward in their focus. "Our Father," speaking of intimacy, "in heaven," speaking of his reign and his majesty. He is at once an intimate Father to us and at the same time he is a glorious God reigning from heaven and we address him to the throne which he occupies at the core of the universe. And along with that, "hallowed be your name," name being the sum of his attributes, the sum of his perfections. Everything about God is revealed in his name, the God of glory, the God of grace, the God of greatness, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign in all things, ruling in providence, and revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fully God, fully man, two natures in one person, undivided, unmixed in their essence. And all of these things, and you just go on and on, and you just see how great and glorious he is. And verse 10, "Your kingdom come." He's going to return to earth. He's going to intervene in world history and establish his throne in Jerusalem. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The name, every tongue will confess and every knee will bow before that great name. "Your will be done," your sovereign, your moral will must be obeyed, your sovereign will will be accomplished. There's just all of these magnificent themes wrapped up in these brief words.

That's the God, beloved, here's the point, that's the God that we are praying to, and so, as you come to prayer, one of the things that a trusting Christian does and it's not easy, at least I don't think it's easy. We're so earthbound and we, you know, you're kind of emotionally driven like I often am, just kind of wrapped up in your own little world and your own thoughts and everything kind of wound tight on that. Really hard, really hard to step back from that, slow everything down, set aside the things of earth, and recognize the divine royalty to whom we speak, and to attribute to him the glory that is his due. But what the trusting Christian does, the trusting Christian does is over time, he or she conditions himself, herself, practices, grows in an understanding that when I come to prayer, this is not simply, I am not just sticking my credit card into the vending machine and then punching the numbers so that I get the result out in the little dispenser that I desire. That is a deplorable way to approach prayer, that this is where I can get what I want, as if my will and my desires were the driving factor in prayer. We need to undertake a spiritual insurrection against the selfishness of our own heart and rebel against, not God, rebel against the selfishness of our own heart and say, "I don't want to pray that way. I don't want to pray that way anymore. I repent of ever having prayed that way. I am speaking to the glorious Trinity, the glorious Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I'm

speaking to the Creator, the Sustainer, the Redeemer, the one who will consummate world history," and just by nature of his majesty, he is entitled for me to come and acknowledge him, respect him, worship him without any strings attached, without any ulterior motives, without rushing through it so that I can get to what I really want to talk about and that's how I need God to help me. No, we contemplate the Trinity, we remember that Jesus Christ is King and he will return to set up his kingdom. We remember that this God is our dear Father. There is this intimacy that we have and we speak to him in love, you know, and no wife appreciates it when her husband treats her just as someone who has tasks to do, "Get the laundry done. When is supper?" blah, blah, blah, all those things. No wife wants that. No wife wants to be treated like that. You know, a wife, a woman wants to be appreciated. She wants to be loved. She wants to be nourished and a mechanical, cold, list-based thing is going to make a marriage very brittle and vulnerable.

Well, multiply it by infinity. This is what a wife wants. This is what God deserves. And look, look, got a lot of things I've been thinking about for a long time trying to come out right now. Look, this is what God's entitled to. This is what's right, that we would love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and that we would respond to him like that. He is not a being for us to use. He is the ultimate being whom we are to love and worship from the bottom of our hearts and that needs to become that we all need to grow in an earnest practice of that kind of faith that recognizes him and honors him appropriately, and you kind of view prayer in this life as the training camp for what we'll be doing throughout all of eternity. We get to practice now what we'll do in perfection in heaven. Read Revelation 4 and 5 and get started there.

All of that to say that as we contemplate God the Trinity, it will lead us away from our mere fixation on men, our mere fixation on our own desires and our own problems, and beloved, the beautiful thing about this is that you begin to cultivate an inner secret life in your heart that becomes the ultimate place, the ultimate throne of your worship and the wellspring from which all of the rest of your life flows out. Jesus said up there in verse 6, Matthew 6:6, "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." There should be a secret dimension to all of these things. So we remember the Trinity. We remember who God is. We slow ourselves down. We say, "Let me stop here and remember what it is that I'm doing and to whom it is that I'm speaking, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, my Creator, my Judge, my Savior, my King." And then let that take you in a direction of worship.

That's one of the themes that you cultivate over time and like I say, this is not a checklist. This is not something you do once and then you move on. This is something that we will continue to grow in until the Lord takes us home because you never perfect this, you just grow in it and cultivate even just the desires and the aspirations to pray in this way. Secondly, use the word trials. Use the word trials. And again, just like with the word Trinity, I'm using the word trials in a very broad, expansive way to cover a whole list of things that go beyond the adversities that are in your life at the moment. Number two, trials. The Trinity, now trials. And you see this, I believe, in verse 11, as our Lord teaches

us, "Give us this day our daily bread," that we are to pray for our daily bread. And bread was a main sustenance, a main food at the time, and Jesus is using the term bread here for a broad representation of our needs in life, and so it is right and it is appropriate for us to ask, "Well, what are the needs of life as I approach God today? What is it that lies ahead? What's in my day today? What are the challenges that are ongoing? Give us this day our daily bread." Here's what I want you to see and again, to help, you know, probably for some of you to lead you away from looking for...the idea of this is not to figure out what button to push so that God will give you what you want and your needs get met in that way. That's not the idea, that's not the purpose of this approach and what Jesus is teaching here. Yes, we can lay these things out, we can come and lay our needs out before him, John Calvin said the purpose of prayer is so that we would pour forth our hearts before God and that was in the context of the propriety of prayers of complaint, which maybe we'll talk about on Sunday, depending on the way my heart is leaning for Sunday. It's not about getting what you want and I know, and I'm just so sickened and so tired of the approach to prayer and the teaching on prayer that just cultivates an expectation of God will give you what you want and how can you get God to give you what you want and that has nothing to do with the spirit of prayer that Jesus is teaching us today. If God gives us what we want, praise be to his name, but that's not the preeminent purpose that we lay our needs before him, that we lay our trials and the weaknesses that we have in life day by day. That is not why we lay those things before him, it's just to treat him as a problem solver. That can be, I suppose I should say, that can be just such a selfish approach, a utilitarian approach. "God, I want to use you to make my life easier and to make all these problems go away." And again, just making the comparison to a marriage, the wife just simply wants the husband to have the honey-do list and fix this and take care of that, and can't you provide better and all of that? Nobody wants a marriage that's like that, do they, where it's just a utilitarian thing about the duties and responsibilities and what you can do for me. No one would like a marriage like that and some of you are probably in marriages like that. I'm sorry, but if your experience is like that, then it's just proving my point. It's just proving my point that this is not the way that human relationships should be approached and far more then when we bring our trials and needs before God that we would treat it in a way that we just want him to do something to fix us and we bypass his regal majesty for the sake of the preoccupation that we have with our own circle of life. Pretty convicting, isn't it, to think about these things. You know, welcome to the divine chastisement that I felt in those past months.

Well, what is the purpose then, you say? I've always been taught, you know, you ask God, you get from God, all that. What's the purpose then of saying, "Give us this day our daily bread?" Well, beloved, when you look at the rest of Scripture and let Scripture inform the perspective on this kind of praying, here's what you want to write down for this second point on trials, the nature of prayer and the nature and the purpose behind this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," is not preeminently to get what you want, but to do something else much deeper in your heart. It is to draw you away from a spirit of self-sufficiency, a spirit of pride, and toward a sense of humble dependence and trust upon God, that we would come to God and by simply saying, and I'll explain this more when we get to it in a few months, beyond simply saying, "Here's my need, please meet it," what this is teaching us to do, it is teaching us a spirit of dependence on God, that,

"God, I am dependent upon you. I need you to help me. I look to you as my Father and my provider. I do not presume on that. I do not take it for granted. I consciously set myself before you and humbly ask you for your help." And again, beloved, what I want you to see is that this is an arrow straight into the heart of the pride and self-sufficiency of man.

Let's look at some Scriptures here that will help us see this. Turn to the book of 2 Corinthians 1. 2 Corinthians 1 and notice in all of these things the urgent sense of reliance and felt need that the Apostle Paul describes as he talks vertically about his prayers and his dependence upon God. 2 Corinthians 1:8, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many." Paul says, "I was so burdened, I knew it was beyond my strength. I felt like there was a death sentence on my life and the purpose of that was to teach me not to rely on myself, but to transfer my reliance, my hope, my trust on God who has such power that he can even raise men from the dead." He said, "These afflictions were teaching me not to rely on myself." "Father, give us this day our daily bread." You see what we're saying is that there is this spirit of reliance that is being set forth, this sense not of selfishness but of dependence that says, "God, if you don't help me, all is lost."

Let's read on, turn to chapter 12 to a more familiar text, 2 Corinthians 12. And as you're turning there, when you understand this sense of dependence that prayer is designed to create, then it enables you to pray from a different perspective also. Not from desperation, but dependence. Not from frustration, but trust and just recognizing that as you are praying through these things, these trials, these needs and all of that, you have an awareness that God is cultivating in you a sense of dependence upon him, which is the real point of it all. A sense of dependence that the trials are sent to bring you to. The sense of dependence that prayer is designed to express rather than just smoothing out the path so that you don't step on any rocks as you're walking through life. I need to hear this as much as anyone.

So in 2 Corinthians 12:7 we read this. Paul says, "So to keep me from becoming conceited." Do you see it there? I'm not conceited. Paul said, "In order to prevent me from falling into the sin of conceit and pride, God did something to me." He said, "because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations," he had been talking earlier in the chapter about how he was caught up into the third heaven and he saw things, he heard things that men are not permitted to express and there was a purpose, an apostolic purpose for that, and having experienced something like that, you'd be tempted to pride, "You should see. You know, I'd love to tell you about it, but I can't. I can't tell you because I'm not allowed to, but what I heard, oh man, wow, I'm telling you." Paul said, "keep me from becoming an arrogant oaf like that, becoming conceited." God did something, "a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me to keep



me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore," Paul says, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Paul here is expressing the exact opposite, the exact opposite of what so many of us have been conditioned to think about prayer. Bring your trials to God and he'll make them go away. "God, I have this need, meet it today so I can go on and have what I want." Paul says it's the exact opposite. God sends us afflictions, God sends us insults and weaknesses, God sends us people who lie against us and all kinds of other adversity, he's doing this for a spiritual reason to accomplish a very important spiritual purpose. On the negative side, he's keeping us from becoming self-sufficient, self-confident, proud, boastful, arrogant, conceited. That's on the negative side. On the positive side, he's teaching us the sufficiency of his grace, showing us that walking day by day in dependence upon him is superior and learning by experience, learning in practical life that his sustaining grace is really all we need. And Paul says, "Therefore, now I'm content to have the weaknesses, to have ongoing weaknesses, to have ongoing insults, ongoing hardships, ongoing persecutions, ongoing calamities. I'm content to have that because I more greatly value the spiritual benefit that they bring to me, that they become the occasion in which the grace of God is poured out on me." The grace isn't poured out on self-sufficient people, on the self-righteous. Jesus said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." It wasn't the self-satisfied Pharisee in Luke 18 that Jesus pronounced justification on. It was the humble man saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I need grace. I know I'm not what I should be. I need grace." Jesus says that man went away justified rather than the other.

You see, beloved, and when you understand this, remember the whole theme here is the trusting Christian in prayer, is that as we think through the needs that we bring to God, as we think through the trials and the different aspects and opportunities that are in front of us, what you do in prayer is that you condition yourself to bring all of those things, you train yourself over time to be bringing these things more and more before God, saying, "I need your help." In the words of Jesus from, I believe, John 15, "Without me you can do nothing." And, "God, I have things before me. I can't do this on my own. I ask you for grace. I ask you for help. I ask you to supply my need here. Not because I just want what I want, but because I depend on you. I need you. I rely on you. I hope in you. I will fail without you." That's the sense in which we have. God's pleased to bless that. But, you know, if we stopped and thought about this, and we're not going to here today, if we thought about it from this perspective for very long, we would start to see that Paul's exactly right. We all don't like being uncomfortable. None of us like being uncomfortable. None of us like being pressed in by trials until we start to see this principle that those adversities and the difficulties and the needs and all of the opportunities, blah blah blah, all of that is just the platform on which God pours out his grace on the one who is self-consciously dependent upon him.

And so, you know, let's take a moment. I want to take a moment and just give you the opportunity to think about what's, you know, what's pressuring you here tonight, what's pressuring you in this season of life, and to invite you, to encourage you, to call you, to view it from a different perspective. Not, "God, make this go away," but, "God, I'm dependent upon you. Be gracious to me here. No matter what you do with the circumstances, I'm just articulating, I'm laying before you how needy I am and how I must have your grace or all is in vain."

In like manner, you don't need to turn there for the sake of time, but in 1 Peter 5:6 and 7, we read this, "Humble yourselves, therefore," humble yourselves, therefore, "under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Casting all these trials upon him because he cares for you. "Lord, I humble myself and I admit that I am not adequate for what I have to do. I'm not adequate to go through what you've placed in my life. I admit that. I humble myself. And yet, Father, I do that because I know you can supply the need, and I know that you care for me." Hebrews 4, "Let us therefore come to the throne of grace with confidence that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need," Hebrews 4:16. Time of need, dependence. Come into the throne of grace asking for his help. My friend, your heavenly Father loves you. He cares for you. And to teach you that, he sends you trials that weaken you and humble you so that you would turn to him and that he would be able to prove his love for you in the end. Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."

And so we come to express our dependence, our need to humbly ask for grace. You know, so many people, I know my dear mother is like this, she hates to ask anybody for help. She does not like to ask anyone for help, and here she is 90 years old, you know, but sometimes she needs help, and so she learns to ask for help. Well, we're all conditioned by our pride and we want to be the tough guy, we want to be the all-competent one. There is no such thing as an omni-competent person, contrary to what I've heard others say. The whole idea of God and trials and life and providence and prayer is that we would learn our dependence and that we would gladly express it in a trusting way to the God who cares for us. Cast all your anxiety upon him because he cares for you.

So we've seen the Trinity, we've seen trials, thirdly, trespasses. Trespasses. Go back to Matthew 6 and I can only wish that not teaching this message out of such a profound history of failure in my whole approach to all these matters we're talking about here today. But thirdly, trespasses. Faithful prayer, trusting prayer, contains an ongoing element of confession of sin. An ongoing element of confession of sin. There have been teachers over the years who have said Christians should never confess their sin. That's a direct contradiction of the way the Lord taught us to pray and so it's not that you come and you confess your sins once at conversion and then you never confess them again. Charles Spurgeon said, "I fear that a Christian never stops repenting because I fear that he never stops sinning." And so, of course we keep repenting, of course we keep confessing sin over the course of our Christian life, because we never reach perfection in this life; we all stumble in many ways, James says. Well, in the context of walking before a holy God,

we have to deal with that before him. We have to deal with our rebellion, deal with our indifference, deal with our sin. Deal with your sin. Not simply first person plural, second person singular, your sin. Well, faithful prayer contains an ongoing theme of confession of sin.

Look at verses 12 and 13. This is what Jesus taught us to pray. Don't blame me. Look to your Lord and submit. Verse 12, Jesus said pray like this, "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Once again, there's a negative and a positive. There's a reactive and a proactive. Let's look at it from that way, there's a reactive and a proactive dimension to this confession of sin that our Lord teaches us. We, in a reactive way, we come and we say, "Lord, I've sinned against you," sin here being treated like a debt that we owe, that we can't pay, and so we come and say, "Forgive me of the debts, forgive me of what I've accumulated, forgive me of the sins that I have committed prior to coming to you, and that I have not yet confessed to you. Lord, forgive me as I respond to my spiritual failures. God, forgive me." And there's this element of forgiveness. There's a whole subject for when we get to this. So we come and we confess our sins to God, "Lord, I confess my anger, confess the angry way I responded in that situation. Confess the lust. I lingered over that image on my device. Lord, you know what I was doing. I confess the gossip. I confess my cold-hearted prayers. I confess. I confess. I confess." You know, once you get started, the list can go pretty far.

We've got a lot to confess because we all stumble in many ways and so, you know, Jesus teaches us to confess our sins in that way. What does this do? It develops that principle of humility all over again. "God, I'm not here claiming you owe me anything because I know I've fallen short. I'm sorry. I react to that. I confess it. I pray that you would cleanse me." Do you know what that does in the context of this trusting prayer that Christians do? It mortifies, it puts to death over time your sense of entitlement before God. This is really, really important and again, we talk about these things because Scripture helps us understand it in simple language that a child can understand, and yet we realize as we come to this that we are looking at a massive collision between the biblical approach to prayer and the way that most of us have been conditioned to think about it, and the way that many people would teach you to think about it, you know, get from God what you want. Well, wait a second. Wait a second. On what basis do I come to God with that sense of carnal entitlement to him? On what basis do I feel entitled before God? Humility? Dependence? Yes, absolutely. A proud sense of impatient entitlement? Absolutely not!

The book of Lamentations, just after Jeremiah, you don't need to turn there, but Lamentations 3:39 and 40. This is a wonderful passage that maybe the Lord will give me opportunity to teach on but listen to it. I'm quoting from the NASB, the New American Standard Version here. Jeremiah is expressing things after the fall of Jerusalem when God sent the Babylonian army to destroy the city as discipline for their sin and to carry them off into exile. Things were really hard, really difficult, far beyond anything that any of us have personally experienced and in the midst of that, as Jeremiah is lamenting over the destruction of Jerusalem, he says this, listen to me, he says, "Why should any living

mortal, or any man, Offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the LORD." He says, "How can I complain to God in light of the way that I've sinned against him? I have forfeited any sense of entitlement before him. How can I complain about difficult circumstances when God still has given me less than what my sins deserve? How can I complain about difficulties when I deserve greater difficulties than I have?" And so Jeremiah says, "Let us examine and probe our ways, and return to the LORD."

My point here this evening is that as we're confessing sin, it cultivates that spirit of self-examination, of humility, of confession, and we come dependently, content with whatever God in his grace responds to us with, rather than demanding that he do this or that, because it's what seems best to us. Remember, we put to death on Sunday, relying on our own understanding. We trust in the Lord with all our hearts, we do not lean on our own understanding, and we certainly don't lean on our own righteousness as a basis upon which God should deal with us. You don't want to do that. That's foolish. You're not righteous. You deserve far less than what God has given to you. And so all of this just moves us into the realm of humility and dependence.

Now, that's looking at things reactively, proactively, just very quickly in verse 13. We desire holiness to a point that we actually ask God to help us in it, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." "Now, God, having dealt with my sins up to this point, as far as I'm aware of them, I now ask you to keep me from evil. Order your providence in a way that will lead my steps away from evil and into righteousness." And so we're confessing sin. You know, 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he's faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," and it's a pattern of ongoing confession that John describes there. And what all this confession does, not all that it does in the sense that it's this and no more, but rather all of these things, all of this approach to confession does this for us, it just cultivates, again, that sense of humility, that sense of dependence, that sense of gratitude, and as we confess our sins, as we remember the shed blood of Christ, it cleanses our guilty conscience, it renews our joy, it humbles us, and we're set to go forward yet again.

So the Trinity, number one. Number two, our trials. Number three, our trespasses. Fourth and finally, our triumphs. Our triumphs and here I expand beyond the Sermon on the Mount as you continue to read in the rest of the New Testament in the progress of Revelation, there is an ongoing prominent theme of thanksgiving in prayer. Thanksgiving in prayer and so when I'm using the word triumphs here to refer to the blessings, the joys, the gifts that we recognize that God has given to us. We look around in a material way, we see measures of prosperity that are unknown in much of the world. We look at relationships the Lord has given to us. We see the friends and the family that he's given, the loved ones. And we think about the blessings that come in the ongoing course of the Christian life. Triumphs. The good things that God gives is what I mean by that. Again, this is just a mnemonic device to help us remember. The Trinity, trespasses, trials, and triumphs.

And so just one verse, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, you don't need to turn there. There's so many more that you could look at, particularly in the prayers of Paul. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." This is the will of God for you. Now look, so much foolish energy is wasted on people trying to define and figure out the exact will of God for the circumstances of their life. "What's the will of God? Should I become an astronaut or should I be a doctor? And what's the will of God for me?" None of that stuff's revealed but people focus on that and if they don't figure it out, they think they've missed the will of God. Well, you know what, just push all that stuff off the table and focus on the clear things that God has clearly revealed that are his will for your life. Before you worry about whether you're going to be an astronaut or an engineer or a doctor, take some serious time to ask yourself whether you are a grateful Christian in the circumstances that God has given to you. "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." If you're not being thankful, you're not in the will of God. Forget about all the other stuff. What about your inner man? Who are you inside?

And beloved, coming back kind of full circle to what I said, the checklist, prayer list approach to prayer does not lead you into a thankful spirit. That legal approach doesn't cultivate the spirit of thanksgiving. What you need to do is to step back and reflect on who God is. Reflect on his goodness. You know, in the language of the hymn that we used to sing when I was a kid, you know, "Count your blessings. Name them one by one. Count your many blessings. See what God has done." So do you have health? Do you have friends? Can you pay your bills? Has Christ saved you from sin and Satan? Do you have a Bible? Give thanks and give thanks in a spirit of confession. "God, forgive me for how much I've taken for granted. I've taken it for granted for years, but God, today, right now, I'm not taking it for granted. God, thank you, thank you for blessings, material and spiritual. I'm grateful, Father. I'm not asking for anything. I just want to thank you for what you've already done and what you've given me and what you're going to do. That's enough for me," the trusting Christian says. That kind of praying over time will cultivate contentment in your heart over complaint. You show me a complaining Christian, you show me a bitter Christian, I'll show you someone who does not give thanks to God in prayer. Those two things are mutually exclusive.

And so what we do with these four themes is that we rehearse them over time as we approach God in prayer. It gives balance to our prayer lives. It gives direction to our prayer lives. It gives us a revealed pattern to express ourselves in prayer and it gives us a freshness that's applicable to each day. And so prayer will change as we think through these things and we appropriate them into our lives. As we prepare our minds and our hearts before we even start to pray, we prepare our minds, say, "Okay, I'm getting ready to pray here. What should I be talking about? The Trinity, trials, trespasses, triumphs. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've got a lot to talk about here. I've got a lot that I want to express to my God."

Let me just say this last thing. Remember Martha and Mary in the gospels? Martha busy doing things when Jesus was there. Mary just wanted to sit at his feet and hear him teach. Martha said, "Make her do something." Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are bothered

about so many things. Mary has chosen the good part and I'm not going to take it away from her. Mary wants to sit at my feet and hear me teach, I'm not going to send her away. What are you talking about?" Beloved, those long prayer lists like I used to use, tends to make you focus on earthly things and lose sight of the very one you're talking to, the very one you're praying to. Like Martha in her preparations, you go to prayer and you actually miss Christ himself while you're flapping your lips. You don't want to be that way. That's not what God called us to. Prayer is so much more than that. Trusting God is so much more than that.

And so my encouragement to you is to take these themes, think through them, start to use them to cultivate variety in prayer over time. Your prayer life, beloved, is like a garden, a garden that needs nutrients added to it and needs weeds pulled out. You need to turn away from bad patterns and start to cultivate new things. And yet while you're doing that, I'll just say this one more time, don't turn these themes into just another list. "Well, I covered the four of them, I got it done." That's not it at all. That's not it at all. If that was the takeaway I failed miserably as a preacher yet again. See, there is a precious inner life to be developed in prayer. This is available to every trusting, obedient Christian to pray like this and so I just ask you whether you will appropriate this and make it your own.

*Father, we thank you, thank you for blessings, material and spiritual. We confess our sins before you, Father, sins of thought, word and deed, sins against you, sins against man. There's just a prevailing sinfulness still about us, Father, that we confess and repent of before you. We bring our needs before you. We cast our burdens before you. We cast our anxieties because you care for us and acknowledge our dependence upon you. All of this, Father, in recognition of the great Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one eternal essence, three persons, Jesus Christ, two natures, one person. We're lost in the majesty of your perfections. We pray that as you help us to trust you in light of revealed certainties, that you would help us cultivate this kind of prayer that would be pleasing to you and a new fresh course of life in our inner man. May it be true for each one. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.*

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