

Because the Time is Short - Pray

Our Identity in Christ

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Amen, please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 4. The title of the message is much the same as it was last week. We're looking at 1 Peter 4:7 to 11, and the title of the message is, "Because the Time is Short, Pray." Last week it was just "Because the Time is Short." We looked at the overall theme of this passage, these five verses, 1 Peter 4:7 to 11, and this time we want to look particularly at the implications of the shortness of time and the need for us to pray. So because time is short, pray. 1 Peter 4 verses 7 to 11.

7 The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint. 10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to You this morning as always aware of our great need of grace and we come because You have commanded us to pray, and we pray this morning along with the disciples who came to Jesus when He had been praying and they said, "Lord, teach us to pray." That's the desire of our hearts, Lord, teach us to pray. Use Your word to that purpose and draw our hearts to You that we may not be people who seek Your face more and more fervently in these dark days. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

So because time is short, pray. That's the emphasis, the first thing that he says in this passage. He's making the point very clear, as we saw last week, kind of an announcement, a declaration, a startling declaration at the beginning of verse 7, "The end of all things is near." He's saying that everything that needs to happen before Jesus ushers in the final end of all things, it has happened, and we saw last time that "The end of all things is near," the tense of the verb has to be near literally means to have drawn near. It's something that happened in the past time and was completed in the past time with

ongoing results. That's the Greek perfect tense, completed action in past time with ongoing results. And what Peter is saying is with what Jesus has done, the coming of Christ, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, his virgin birth, his perfect and holy life, his atoning sacrifice, a once-for-all sacrifice for sins, his glorious, victorious resurrection, his ascension, bodily ascension to the right hand of the throne of God, everything has happened now that needs to happen to bring in and to usher in the final manifestation of God's kingdom on this earth so that the kingdom of God truly has come near. The end of all things is at hand. It has come right beside us and everything that needs to happen has happened, he says. And so the urgency is the moment, at any moment, Jesus can return and because of that, then live in light of it.

And so in this passage, we see he works out three key implications that we should pray, we should love one another fervently, we should serve one another faithfully, and so this morning, we're going to look at the issue of prayer. He says, if we really saw things as they are, we would pray. Remember the two key verbs in this entire passage. There are 11 verbs in the passage, but the two key verbs, the two main verbs are both found in verse 7, and they're both imperatives, the only two imperatives in the passage, the only two commands. In English it looks like there's another one or two, but really there's two imperatives in this passage and they are in verse 7. Participles that follow kind of borrow an imperatival force from these two main verbs but these two main verbs are the main verbs in the passage. The two main verbs are "be of sound judgment" and "be of sober spirit." These are the two commands, be of sound judgment and be of sober spirit. Literally, these two terms speak of really the same thing. They're saying the same thing, very near synonyms, slightly different in nuance, but essentially saying, "Wake up, be alert, see things as they really are."

The word for "sound judgment, be of sound judgment," is a word which sometimes other places when it's translated not, here's a verb, "be of sound judgment," other places as an adjective, it is translated "sensible." It's translated adverbially in the gospels of being in one's right mind. The story of the Gerasene demoniac, that was the demon-possessed man who lived among the tombs in Mark chapter 5, Luke chapter 8. Man possessed by demons lived among the tombs, like he lived in the cemetery. He's distressed, possessed by a multitude of demons. Remember when Jesus encounters this man, and he asks the name of the spirit, they said, "Legion, for we are many." He's possessed by many demons. He's a man of incredible strength, but he's out of his mind, he's crazy. A number of times they chain him to try to restrain him from harming himself because he gashes himself as just a normal course of his life. Jesus encounters him and delivers him and after he delivers him from the demons, it said that people coming up and finding out about it and hearing, they see him, this man who had been naked, running naked among the tombs, now clothed and in his right mind. He now has a sound mind. God has delivered him from his insanity, demon-inspired insanity, and now he sees things as they are. That's the force of the first verb, "be of a sound judgment," a sound mind, right mind, see things as they are, suddenly everything made sense. I mean, he encounters the Lord Jesus Christ and he's saved, delivered from the domain of darkness, and now he's in his right mind.

It's the force. He's talking to Christians who have been saved, but he's saying now you must live with a saved mind. In fact, literally, this word that is translated "sound judgment," literally in the Greek, combines two words that are put together and the first word is saved, and the second word is mind. A saved mind, a sound mind. And he's exhorting us. The imperative is, because you now have been saved, have a saved mind. Cultivate a right way of thinking. That's the first verb in verse 7, "be of sound judgment," and then the second verb imperative is "be sober." Be sober. Literally to be free from intoxication, to be free from the influence of substances. That's the literal meaning of the word and so the idea again means to be able to see things as they are. When you're intoxicated, if someone's intoxicated, it affects their senses. They can't trust the way they see things.

And so he's basically saying in two different ways, we need to make sure we see things as they truly are. He's saying as Christians, it's not something that's just a given and automatic. You have to labor at this. You have to labor at having a sound mind and a sober mind and essentially, if you have a sound mind and a sober mind, the inevitable result is prayer. That's really the force of the language here. He gives the two imperatives, "be of sound judgment, be of sober spirit," the NASB that I'm reading, New American Standard says "for the purpose of prayer." The NIV says "so that you can pray." But literally in the Greek it says "unto prayer." It's have these two, do these two things, have a sound mind, have a sober mind, and the result is prayer. He's saying the reason, you know, you may ask yourself, and I know I ask myself, why don't I pray more? He says one of the reasons we don't pray is because we don't have a sound mind. We don't really see things as they truly are, that if we saw things, if we could cultivate a heart to see things as they truly are, the inevitable result is prayer. You've got to see things as they are. When you see things as they are, you will pray and what helps you see things as they are is the end of all things is near. So to meditate on that, to stay in the word then is to cultivate a heart of prayer.

So we want to look at this question, why don't we pray more, and the outworking of these two imperatives helps us to see the answer. We don't pray because we don't see things as they truly are and we need to see things as they truly are. And so I want to give you four points this morning that speak about the things that we need to see in order to see things as they truly are that flow from this passage. The first thing that we don't see, that if we did see it we would pray, is we don't see the urgency of the moment. The urgency of the moment. We think that we have plenty of time. We don't understand that time really is short, the end of all things really is near, and we get kind of intoxicated with worldly, the worldly schedule, the idea that as people think in the world that, as Peter says in 2 Peter, they're going to say, "Hey, how can you talk about the end of all things? Everything continues just as it has always been." He says they'll say that right until the end when suddenly it won't be that way because Jesus will return. Isn't it easy to fall into that mindset of the world that tomorrow's going to be just like today, next year's going to be just like this year. I mean, yeah, we see things happening in our culture and we can think about things that are getting better in some ways and worse in a lot of ways, but we tend to think that things are just going to come on just like they have. I mean, you think about it, however old you are, every day you've wakened up, you wakened up, the sun rises,

sometimes it rains, sometimes it doesn't, you go through your day, you go to bed, you wake up, you start all over, right? It has a repetition and just, it lulls you to sleep. The reality is, if we understood the urgency of the moment, if you knew, I said last time, if you knew that you only had 24 hours to live, how would it affect your choices?

This is the effect of this passage and there's really a wonderful illustration, I think, that Peter in his own life experienced. Turn with me to Mark chapter 14 because the point is, if you knew what was coming, listen, if you and I really knew what was coming, we would pray and what I want to suggest to you, listen to me for a second here, what I want to suggest to you is part of our problem is we don't see the unseen realm and what is actually happening of massive import all around us every moment, that prayer really makes a huge difference. We don't understand how utterly urgent it is that we should pray and part of that is we don't understand the urgency of the moment.

In Peter's own life, turn to Mark 14:32 and let's consider this circumstance and the contrast between Peter and James and John and the disciples and Jesus. "They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He," that is, Jesus, "said to His disciples, 'Sit here until I have prayed.' And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.'" Now think about the magnitude of this moment. Jesus stands the day before the cross, he is in the shadow of the cross, all his life has come pointing inevitably to this moment when he shall offer himself as an atoning sacrifice, he shall bear the wrath of God for our sins, he shall literally bear our sins in his own body on the cross. The magnitude of this moment weighing on the Son of God but the disciples don't know it even though he tells them. He's told them, "We're going to Jerusalem and I'm going to suffer at the hands of evil men and I'm going to die and I'm going to be raised again." He's told them that, that directly as I just told you, and they are unable to comprehend it. And now, he tells his dearest friends, Peter, James, and John, he takes them out of the other disciples to himself, and he shares and opens his heart. He's distressed, he's troubled, he says, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. I could almost die anticipating the agony of the cross."

Now think about your close friend telling you that and look what happens, verse 35, "And so He," that is, Jesus, "went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.' And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep?'" Even you, Peter? "'Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him." You know, Mark is the one who was a close companion of Peter and he writes essentially Peter's gospel. He interviewed Peter, that was the main source for this humanly speaking, this divine word that we have in Mark's gospel, and so you have Peter's heart being unpacked for us. "And listen, our eyes were heavy." He almost wants

to apologize as he says this. "I know it's impossible to believe that we could be so uncaring and unkind, but we were just so tired."

"And He came the third time, and said to them," verse 41, "'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!'" Luke's gospel tells us that when Jesus was praying in Gethsemane, he was in such anguish, just a stone's throw away from his three close friends, he's in such anguish that he sweat drops of blood, that the capillaries began to burst because of the enormous intensity of the anguish and stress that the human Christ, fully God, fully man, yet in this humanity, the weight of the agony that he was anticipating, not the physical agony of the cross merely, but the spiritual agony of being cursed by the Father in our place overwhelmed him so that he sweat drops of blood and yet his three friends are asleep. Why are they asleep? Because they don't understand the magnitude of the moment. If they understood, if they had known what was going to happen the next day, they would have stayed awake and prayed with him. The same is true of us. Why do we pray so little? When we get to heaven, that'd be probably one of the things we're crying about. It says he wipes away every tear from our eyes, just be thinking about how much time we've wasted, how little we prayed.

We need to understand the urgency of the moment, and that's what Peter's telling us, calling us to in this passage, "The end of all things is at hand." Time is so short, we must pray. You say, "I don't have time to pray." You know, often when I'm counseling with someone or discipling someone, did you do your homework? "I didn't have time this week. I just couldn't find time." And you really explore that a little bit, you know, everybody has 168 hours every week without fail, 168 hours, we all have the same amount of time. We all are busy, I mean, various levels, but it's amazing what we find time to do. You know, if I dig a little bit, did you have time to watch the ACC tournament? "Oh yeah, I did have time to watch that." Did you have time to watch your favorite TV show? "Yeah, I had time to do that too. But couldn't find time for God's word like I needed to and for prayer." You see, we have time, the question is why do we not use our time more wisely? It's because we don't see the enormity, the urgency of the moment. If we knew everything was coming to a head, we would pray and we need to cultivate in our hearts the awareness of that, and you do that through saturating your mind with the Scripture, meditating on these things. David says, "Teach us to number our days that we can walk according to Your will." Teach us to number them. Know that life is short.

So the urgency of the moment. One of the reasons we don't pray is because we don't see the urgency of the moment. Secondly, we don't truly see the ferocity of the enemy. The ferocity of the enemy. It's interesting, Peter here, it says "be of sound judgment, be of sober spirit." He uses that verb, "be sober," three times in his epistle. In fact, the verb "be sober," translated "be sober" in this verse, only occurs six times in the New Testament. Six times total in the New Testament. Three of those are in 1 Peter. Chapter 1 verse 13, he says, "Therefore prepare your minds for action, keeping sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." You see

that shortness of time again. The reason you're to be sober is because Jesus is coming back. In fact, he said that previously in verse 5 of chapter 1, you're protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. It's ready to be revealed. The salvation's ready to be revealed. We're in the last time. It's imminent. It's coming. Verse 7 of chapter 1, he says, "So that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." He says, live your life in light of the coming, the unveiling of Jesus, which is just around the corner. It's just over the horizon. It's just beyond today or even just beyond this moment. It could be today.

But he says "be sober" there in 1:13. He says it in chapter 4, verse 7, our text, "be of sober spirit." And he also says it in 1 Peter 5:8, "be of sober spirit, be on the alert, your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." One of the reasons we don't pray more is we don't see the ferocity of the enemy. We don't see the reality of the enemy that opposes us. We don't know that we are not adequate for the enemy and therefore we don't pray. I mean, think about the difference that if you, you know, when I walk out to go get my mail, for instance, at night, or last night I walked out to go check on something in my backyard. You know, when I walked out to my backyard, I did not once think about being attacked by a wild predator. You know, I wasn't afraid of that. I walked kind of just leisurely to the place I was going to and I checked on something and I went back into my house. It was about 8:30 or so, it was dark. But you know, if I was in the Serengeti, and I actually have not been in the Serengeti, but I have been in Africa, we went on a mission trip to South Africa, and part of the time we were there, we did do a safari. And at night, we slept inside an enclosure, this massive fence around us, so that if we did have to get up in the night, walk outside, we weren't going to encounter a lion. But I still was even a little bit aware of it because when I walked outside at night there, there were all kinds of antelope and warthogs inside the fence. Those animals are pretty smart. They know that at night, it's good, they keep that fence open, it's good, let's go in there and hang out. But if you know a lion is prowling around looking for someone to devour, it changes the way you think. It creates an urgency, doesn't it? That's what he's saying. If we understood the reality that we do have worse than living there, we have a spiritual enemy that is desiring to devour us every moment of every day and the urgency of it, and we would pray.

It's interesting, I showed you that passage, we looked at Mark 14, it's interesting, Jesus says in Luke 22, really striking, he says to Peter, before all that happens, at the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, he says to Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat." What does it say next? "But I have prayed for you." Think about if Jesus hadn't prayed for Peter. Peter ends up denying him. What if he'd not prayed for him? What would have happened? "I prayed for you. I prayed for you that you would be protected from the evil one." That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer when they ask him, "Teach us to pray," "Deliver us from evil." Pray for that.

If we saw the reality of the evil that is around us, we would pray more. In fact, turn back over toward the beginning of your Bible, just past Hebrews and Colossians and Philippians to Ephesians 6. One of the verses that speaks about the urgency of prayer is

Ephesians 6:18. Paul in writing to the Ephesians says in 6:18, "With all prayer," listen, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times." Think of how emphatic that is. He could have said, "Pray for me," he says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." He's saying pray all the time for everybody at every moment.

Now, it's interesting the context of that. Verse 18 flows out of 6:10 to 17. Ephesians 6:10, the armor of God. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." He says take up the full armor of God and then he ends up that discussion in verse 17 with the helmet of salvation, and then he says with all prayer, pray at all times. You see, it flows out of understanding that we stand against an enemy who is coming against us and if you know the enemy is coming, the enemy army is right at the door, you prepare to fight and he says, the key part of fighting is pray. You've got to pray if we understood the reality of the spiritual forces.

So when you are living your daily life, daily life, fighting the flesh is not just dealing with your own sin, it's dealing with spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places. Witnessing to your family member, son, daughter who's unbelieving, you're sharing the gospel, what's happening? A spiritual war is going on. It's not just you and them having a conversation. Their eyes are being blinded by the god of this age actively deceiving them and so if you want to see success, you need to pray. We should pray at all times. We should pray even as we're holding forth the word of life. Pray for the person that God will open their eyes. Pray that Satan will be bound. Pray.

If we could see the reality, we would pray. It's interesting. Daniel, I think, illustrates both of these first two points. I say we don't pray, the first two points this morning, because we don't understand the urgency of the moment and we don't understand the ferocity of the enemy, right? We don't understand the urgency of the moment and the ferocity of the enemy. Turn with me to Daniel chapter 9. I mentioned this last Sunday. I want to show you the passage and look at it together because Daniel, he understood the urgency of the moment and he understood the ferocity of the enemy and it made him a prayer warrior. Daniel chapter 9 verse 1, "In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes." I mentioned last week that Daniel understands that he's been in captivity for 68 years; 70 years was the length of captivity, he's reading Jeremiah and he says it's about to be over. God's about to bring an end to the captivity, 70 year captivity. The nation of Judah has been taken and transplanted from Israel, the land of Israel, to Babylon. Daniel's been there the entire time, taken with the first group of captives in 606 B.C. He's reading probably in 538 B.C. and he reads this and he calculates 68 years. It's time for God to answer this prayer. I

mean, it's time for God to fulfill his promise. Though Daniel has a high view of the sovereignty of God, he knows that God accomplishes his purposes through prayer and he sets to praying that God will do exactly what he said. Now, that's where we, in our natural wisdom, we think, "Well, God's already said He's going to do it. I don't need to ask Him about it. He's already got that covered. I'll just enjoy myself." No, he wants us to pray.

So the urgency of the moment, yeah, something's about to happen. Why does he feel that urgency? I think also because he has seen with his own eyes, in a profound way, the ferocity of the enemy. One of the things that you see in the book of Daniel, I invite you to read it, put it on your list of things you want to read soon. The book of Daniel. I preached to it back in like '07, '08, '09, something like that, and it was really helpful to me in my own life. One of the things that you see, I'll just give you a couple things about the structure of Daniel. Daniel chapters 1 through 6 are six historical, recounting six historical events that happen in Daniel's life in chronological order, starting with after he first gets taken captive, they're supposed to eat the meat and the food of the Babylonians, and Daniel realizes he can't do that because God's dietary laws apply to him. Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a statue, gold head, silver, bronze, and iron, and it represents four kingdoms. Chapter 3, Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are going to be thrown into the fire because they won't worship, the idol which Nebuchadnezzar set up. Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is humbled by God. Chapter 5, Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, is found wanting by the Lord and remember the handwriting on the wall that says, "mene mene tekel upharsin, you've been weighed in the balances and found wanting." Daniel comes, interprets the dream, "This very night, the kingdom is taken from you," and the Babylonians are conquered by the Medo-Persian Empire. Chapter 6 now, after the Persians have taken over and the Medes have taken over, Darius the Mede makes that foolish rule about nobody pray to anybody except me for a period of time and Daniel prays and Daniel's thrown the lions' den as an old man, probably 80 some odd years old.

So that's his life. The people of Israel are heading back to the land, but then chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 are an overlay on the previous six chapters. You have visions that happen in chapter 7 that if you look at it chronologically go back before chapter 5. And then you have another vision, there's three main visions, and these three visions are times where Daniel is given the ability to see the true spiritual character of the nations. The first vision in chapter 7, he sees four dreadful beasts coming out of the sea, and they represent these four kingdoms. He sees a lion with wings and it's Babylon, and it's fierce, and it's terrible, and then he sees it give way to, let's see, I forget now, a bear up on one side, and the bear's the Medo-Persian Empire, and it's got ribs in its mouth, and it's devouring, and then it gives way to a leopard with wings, and then the leopard with wings gives way to this dreadful, terrifying beast. He can't even give you something that it looks like. He's never seen anything like it. It has iron teeth. And as he sees it, it's doing battle with the saints and overcoming them and he sees, his eyes are opened to see the heavenly places, and he sees the Most High God on the throne. And he sees that this beast and the horns coming off this beast are warring with the Most High God and he's so troubled by the vision that he can't get over it. You read the chapter, and he's, I mean, what's happening is

the Lord is declaring victory for his kingdom. Great news, it all comes out good, but when Daniel is encountered by an angel sent to him, his question is, "Hey, tell me about that fourth beast. I don't understand it." And he's so scared, and the angel's like, "It's all going to work out." But he tells him about the beast, explains it anyway.

What's going on? What's happening is the unmasking. Daniel has lived out in history the realities that are now being unmasked. What's showing, those beasts are showing the spiritual character and rebellion of the kingdoms of this world against the kingdom of God and you're seeing the true evil underbelly that is there in the world system. In chapter 8, he sees more of this vision, a vision of a ram and a goat and the audacious pride of the kings of this world, spiritual wickedness. Then chapters 10, 11, and 12, he actually sees even more vividly, sees a man in linen talking to him, he finds out in chapter 10 that once he had set himself to pray, listen to this, this is amazing, he starts praying, he prays for a period of three weeks. An angel appears to him, the man in linen, and it says, "When you started praying, I was sent immediately to you." Prayer makes a difference. "When you prayed, God answered but," he says, "listen, I've been withstood by the Prince of Persia for these three weeks until Michael, the archangel, came and helped me, and now I've come to give you the message." Listen, we're looking into what Paul's talking about in Romans 6, principalities and powers.

The veil's pulled back. Daniel's seen that. The veil's been pulled back he saw in chapter 7, he saw in chapter 8. And so in chapter 9, he has this word from the Lord that the Babylonian captivity's about over. He knows that, listen, for Israel, for Judah, the southern kingdom to be taken away from the Babylonian clutches is not just a matter of physical victory. It's a spiritual war. And so he knows he must pray and so in chapter 9 we saw he sought the Lord with prayer and with fasting because he sees the reality. The ferocity of the enemy requires that we pray. God has ordained it that we pray. It's one of the hard things for us, especially I think in circles of Reformed believers, our church is, we would call ourselves a Reformed Baptist church, that is a church that believes in the doctrines of the Reformation and we have a high view of God, a high view of Scripture, a high view of the sovereignty of God. We believe what the Bible says about God's sovereignty, just like Daniel did. You read Daniel, he had a high view of the sovereignty of God. Look what he says in chapter 4, or listen what Nebuchadnezzar says in chapter 4, that nobody can thwart God's purpose, his purpose will stand. So he has a high view of the sovereignty of God. We have a high view of the sovereignty of God. Sometimes that can lead us to be complacent about prayer. In fact, it's a very easy thing to happen.

My favorite professor in seminary was a man named Doug Kelly. He's written several books. One of them is the book, "If God Already Knows, Why Pray?" Systematic theology professor. I heard him teach, I mean, the best lectures I heard in seminary that I remember to this day were by this man, powerfully used of God, exalted in the glory of God, and I heard so much about the sovereignty of God, the invincibility of his plan. But here he writes a book, "If God Already Knows, Why Pray?" Because the Bible says so. And listen to what he says, "Prayer changes the world. It makes good things happen because it gets God's will done and thus brings down his best blessings. This is the message of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the experience of God's people

throughout the ages. The God of the Scriptures has great blessings stored up for his people, but He has so planned it that those blessings can only be released by the prayers of his people." Do you hear that? He has blessings stored up for his people, but he has so ordained it, so planned it that those blessings can only be released by the prayers of his people.

Prayer does change things and if we understood the need for prayer, the urgency of the moment, the ferocity of the enemy, we would pray. Thirdly, the inability of the believer. If we come to understand our utter inability, I mean, we understand the ferocity of the enemy, we know that we can't stand up to that. We're no match for Satan. We're no match for much of anything, I mean, we are not mighty in and of ourselves. We're like, as Gideon rightly saw himself, you know, "Who am I that the Lord's going to use me to defeat this enemy?" But he makes us mighty through prayer. Our utter inability and helplessness. drives you to prayer. When you see the enormity of the moment, the urgency of the moment, the ferocity of the enemy, your own inability, it drives you to pray.

Great example, again, that brings some of these points together, the urgency of the moment and the inability of the believer, the story of Jacob when he was praying, Genesis 32. Some of you will remember that story. Many of you will remember that story. If you haven't heard it, Jacob, whose later name is changed to Israel, in chapter 32 of Genesis, in this moment, he's been away in the land of Aram. He fled from his brother Esau after he stole his birthright, stole his blessing. His mom said, "You need to get out of town. Esau's gonna be mad." So he fled for his life and he went up to where her family was from, and he marries Rachel. You remember the story of Rachel and Leah. After he's been there a number of years, well over 14 years, probably something like 20 years, he then comes back, and now he comes back with 12 kids, all kinds of herds and flocks. He's a wealthy man. God has made him a wealthy man. He's coming back to Canaan, because that's his home, and he sends word ahead to Esau because he's thinking Esau may still be holding a grudge. And he turns out to be right. Esau is holding a grudge. He sends a servant ahead to Esau and he says, "Listen, your brother Jacob is coming home. He's got all kinds of flocks and herds. He's looking forward to kind of having a reunion with you." I mean, he's just trying to lay it on smooth and the servant comes back and says, "Esau has already started on his way to greet you, he and 400 men." An army. Jacob is perplexed. He just has, I mean, 12 boys, one daughter, some servants, flocks and herds. He's got no way he can fight against Esau. So he makes a plan. Remember, he prays. The first thing he does is he prays. Right away, he prays. He's asked the Lord to remember his covenant. and he prays and then he develops a plan. He decides he's going to have his family divided into two camps and he's going to send servants ahead that are giving gifts and they're all to lay down on the ground and then they get to Esau and he gives them exactly what to say and he has all that worked out. But what happens that night is he is alone beside the Jabbok, the stream there, and the Scripture says that a man wrestled with him all night long and the man turns out to be God. God has manifest himself in a physical body so that Jacob had a wrestling match that went all night long, and Jacob held on to him and held on to him, and God allowing himself to be wrestled with. Think about that. And to be held on to so that he can't get away, and he says, "Let me go, for it's

almost morning. You can't see me and live. Let me go." And Jacob says, "I won't let You go unless you bless me." And he says, "I will bless you and your name is no longer Jacob, heel-grabber, it's Israel, prince with God, for you have striven with man and with God and have prevailed."

That is a picture of persevering prayer. He will not let God go until God blesses him. How did he get the spirit of prayer? Why didn't he pray like that a week before? Why didn't he pray like that the night before? Because the urgency of the moment wasn't there. He prayed because he had to pray and we need to pray that God will open our eyes so that we would see reality because if we saw reality, we would have to pray. We would see there's so many seismic things at stake that need, require prayer because God has ordained, even though he's sovereign over all things, he has ordained that he only brings blessings through prayer. In fact, it brings the fourth point, the necessity of prayer. We said the enormity or the urgency of the moment, number one, the ferocity of the enemy, we need to see that, the inability of the believer, fourthly, the necessity of prayer. God has ordained that prayer is necessary. He's chosen to move his kingdom through prayer. James 4:2, you have not because you ask not.

God already knows, why do I even need to pray? Well, you don't need, I mean, in one sense, that's logical from a human standpoint, isn't it? If God already knows the numbers of hair on your head, he knows the thoughts before you think them, why would you need to voice your thoughts to him? That's reasonable from a human standpoint. But God says man ought always to pray and not to faint. God says pray without ceasing. God says devote yourselves to prayer. God has willed that he only gives his blessings to people when they pray for them. Prayer is absolutely necessary. We see it from the beginning of the Bible. Let me just mention a couple of passages, you look at them. Genesis 18. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah and one of the most striking things about that story is Genesis 18 verses 17 to 32. Remember, Abraham sees three men, and it turns out one is the Lord and two are angels. He just sees three men. He knows that it's the Lord somehow manifesting himself to him, but he invites them to sit down and have a meal, and they do, and that's when Rachel laughs when God's going to promise that he's going to have a son and all that. But they walk out, and the four now are standing together, and the Lord says, apparently to the angels, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do?" Fascinating. God doesn't need Abraham's go ahead. Why's he doing that? He's inviting him into the council because God desires a relationship with us. He invites Abraham in and he says, "I've heard an outcry from Sodom. The wickedness there is so great that I'm going to have to go down and see what's happening." And Abraham knows about Sodom because his cousin Lot is there and he knows how wicked it is. And he enters into a dialogue with God where he prays and says, he understands the Lord's going to destroy it. It needs to be destroyed. Remember what Abraham does? "Lord, if You find 50 righteous, would You consider relenting from Your plan to destroy Sodom?" God says, "Yes, I'll do it for 50 righteous." "Let me speak again, how about 40?" "Yes, if I find 40 righteous, I will relent." "How about 30?" He goes all the way down. I think it's actually 50, 45, 40, 30, 20, 10. Six times Abraham asks the question and God lowers the number. Why is that? Prayer makes a difference. Now it didn't make an ultimate difference to Sodom, they still got destroyed, but prayer makes a difference to God. Had

there been 10 righteous, Sodom would have still been there. There weren't. Why does the Lord put that? He's showing us prayer makes a difference. "Don't think that My sovereignty means I don't use prayer."

Exodus 32. After the people sin and make the golden calf, God tells Moses, listen, "While we've been talking and I've been giving you these laws, the people have already abandoned Me. They're worshiping an idol. My anger is burning against them. I'm going to destroy them. I'm going to destroy them. Get out of my way. I'm going to destroy them." That's what God says to Moses. Moses starts praying. "Lord, don't do this. What would the Egyptians say, that You brought Your people out just to destroy them? No, Lord, please change Your mind." That's what Moses says, "Please change Your mind." You know what the Spirit says, what the Scripture says happened? God changed his mind. Now, put this in the context of all the Bible says. The purposes of God stand from eternity. God wasn't ultimately going to destroy his people. Now, at that moment, though, listen, at that moment, he really was determined to, in one sense, and if Moses had not prayed, if Moses had not prayed, listen to this, if Moses had not prayed, they would have been destroyed. But God would have let it happen if Moses would not pray. Do you see that, the balance of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man? If Moses had forgotten to pray, God would have made a rock pray if he needed to. But somebody had to pray.

Isn't that amazing? For the purposes of God to be carried out, someone had to pray and God gives you and me the blessing and privilege of prayer. And your prayers make a difference. He's saying that from the very beginning of the Bible, "Look, yes, I'm sovereign," just like I read earlier, "I have My purposes and My plans and they're all laid out, but I have purposed that the blessings that I have in store for you will not come but through your prayers." And the beautiful thing is the Lord puts us in circumstances that make us pray. He makes us see how weak we are, so we pray. He makes us see how evil the world is getting, so we pray. And when we pray, we not only see God's blessing, you know what the beautiful thing is? Prayer changes us, changes our hearts, makes us in line with God, it makes us see what really matters. But prayer is not just seeking God's favor, it's seeking God's face. It's seeing him, it's knowing him, it's loving him.

And so Peter is saying, if you see things as they really are, you will pray. So what do we need to do? We need to pray that God will show us things as they are and we need to get in his word. We need to saturate our minds with his word so that the dullness and the stupor that sometimes we take in through the world, that the numbness will go away and we'll have clarity of vision to see the things we talked about, the urgency of the moment, the shortness of time, the ferocity of the enemy, our utter inability, and the absolute necessity of prayer. We need to pray that prayer that the disciples, when they said to Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the wonder of Your ways. We just confess in how we marvel, Lord, when we see how Your sovereignty, absolute utter sovereignty relates to

our responsibility and how it all fits together in such a beautiful way. We could never have imagined that You would do the things the way that You've done, that You would actually make Your kingdom and the advancement of it dependent upon the prayers of Your people. Help us be humbled by that, motivated by that, to see the privilege and the honor that You bestowed upon us to be a part of the outworking of Your eternal plan through prayer. And set Your people to praying, Lord. Make us people of prayer. We know that has to happen, first of all, by becoming a believer, by being saved. Only truly then can we call out to You in prayer. And we thank You that Jesus has done everything necessary for our salvation. We pray for those that don't know You here today that they would repent and believe the gospel, Christ has taken their sin, given them His righteousness, and invites them to receive Him as their Savior, their Lord. And Father, make us all more and more people who just commune with You that we would be people who pray fervently, we pray earnestly, and we pray without ceasing. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.