

# Resolving Conflict By Prevailing in Prayer

*Epistle of James*  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 4. We return this morning to our exposition of that chapter in which James is concerned to help us to resolve our conflicts to allow the Lord to work in changing our hearts, change us from the inside out. We've seen in the first six verses that he's been presenting to us the nature of the problem. He started out asking the question, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts? Where do they come from?" We used the word "wars and battles" and those are the literal renderings of the Greek words there. Where do wars and battles among you, from where do they come? Why are there these conflicts and quarrels and where do they come from? They come from your hearts. They come from the desires in your hearts, he says, and so he's telling us right up front that the problem is us. It's not the circumstances around us. It's not the people around us. The reason that we are in conflict is because of our own sinful hearts, the desires that drive us. Many times, desires for good things, in fact, most often desires for good things is that the problem is not what we want, it's how much we want what we want. We want good things but we want it too much. We want it more than we want God.

So these desires than lead to conflict and so he tells us that in the first couple of verses of this chapter, and then he wants us to see how ugly it is, and so in verse 4, he tells us that allowing this kind of conflict in our lives is much worse than we realize. I mean, nobody likes conflict, or at least nobody should like conflict but it's worse than that, he says, that when you are allowing the desires in your life to rule you so that you are in conflict, you're in an ongoing state of spiritual adultery. So he unmasks our desires to show us how awful it is. It's spiritual adultery. It's sinning against our husband. It's being unfaithful to our husband, Jesus Christ. It's spiritual treason. We saw that a couple of messages ago, unmasking our desires. He wants us to hate our sin.

Then last time, two weeks ago, we looked at what he was saying at verse 5 and he's saying you're committing spiritual adultery, spiritual treason, and the Spirit of God is inside of you as you do it and he is jealous for you. So you are committing infidelity in the presence of a jealous husband. The purpose James has in this chapter is to capture our attention to wake us up out of spiritual slumber and to say, "You've got to do something. Do you see what a mess we are in?"

That's the force of the first five verses. Now, verse 6 after he's attempted to basically undo us, just to kind of smash our allusions at how well we are doing. He says, "You think you're doing well spiritually, look at the conflicts around you. Look how many conflicts you have in your life. Look how often you lose your temper. Look how often you speak harsh words to other believers, family members. These things come from your heart and they are spiritual adultery, they are acts of spiritual treason against the Spirit of God who lives inside of you. You've got to do something." Verse 6 is the first inkling of real hope and encouragement. He says that God gives more grace. Where sin abounds, there does grace much more abound. James is telling us his own version of that in verse 6.

Then in verses 7 to 10, he starts applying this. In those four verses, we have the first imperatives of the chapter, the first commands in the chapter are in verses 7 to 10 and you have 10 of them. Ten commands. Boom. Boom. Boom. This is what to do. So I want to us as we read it, with the context in mind, we're going to spend this morning looking at the first command, submit yourself to God, and I'm going to suggest to you that it is the hinge upon which victory turns, and I think it's the most important command of the 10. He lays out this one first and then the other nine, in a sense, kind of work out what it looks like, and we're going to see that this submitting to God is something that you do in prayer, and so the title of the message, basically we've been titling every message in this series "Resolving Conflict." That was the first message, and then we said a few weeks back, a number of weeks back, "Resolving Conflict By Waging War." You've got to turn the guns against our own hearts, right? You've got to fight against yourself. You've got to kill sin or sin will be killing you. So resolving conflict, resolving conflict by waging war. Then it was "Resolving Conflict By Unmasking Desires." Resolving conflict by understanding the nature of God, the last time, two weeks ago. And today, today's title is, "Resolving Conflict By Prevailing in Prayer." Resolving conflict by prevailing in prayer. I'm going to suggest to you that verse 7, he's picking up as he turns the focus back to God, he's picking up on what he started to talk about in verses 2 and 3, that is, that the beginning of the turning from conflict to peace is to pray.

Remember how we went over the five steps in the progression of an idol? I want you to write these down again and maybe somewhere as a reference point. We're not going to explain them all very clearly but the way an idol progresses, the way that these desires cause conflict, and we said that you have a desire, that's the first step. This is the bad way that it works. We want to replace it with a whole new way of doing it and James is going to show us how to do that. But the way it starts, you have a desire, number 1, many times a legitimate desire, "I want my child to be obedient. I want my child to be a believer. I want my spouse to love me. I want my spouse to get saved." Any of these desires, good desires, all of those are good desires, but when we want them too much, that becomes the second stage, a demand. A desire becomes demand. Demand, number 3, is we submit. That is, the desire becoming a demand, we must have it to be happy, we must have it to be fulfilled, and therefore we submit to this what's now become a god, a functional god. A good thing has become a functional god. It's ruling our hearts. That idea, "I want my child to be a believer," a wonderful desire but if it rules your heart, then you are consumed with it and you are not faithful to God and you are resenting the fact that they

are not, you maybe are mistreating them, you are angry at the Lord, you're not being faithful to him. It's consuming you, then it's become a demand and now you are submitting to it.

So it's desire, demand, submit, number 4, serve. Now serve the idol and number 5, you destroy those who get in the way of the idol. That's why you have conflicts. Someone gets in the way of something that you want, you have a lust, a desire that has become a demand that you are now submitting to, that you are serving, and someone gets in the way of that and you destroy them. Remember our illustration of Ken Sande, he just lost it with his kids. He wanted peace and quiet. He wanted them to behave. They weren't doing it and he started yelling at them on the way to church and he had to confess, "What I was wanting more than I wanted to please God was I was wanting just some peace and quiet as I drove to church, and since they weren't giving me what my idol was, man, I let them have it." It wasn't a godly, "Children, you need to repent. You are sinning. I'm going to have to spank you when we get to church." It could have been a godly way of handling it. He was yelling at them, you see. That's sin. So that's the progression of an idol: desire, demand, submit, serve, destroy. We're going to replace that and I've already given that sketch to you. Again, I just want to remind you of that.

Now let's read the text and we're going to see that verse 7 is the hinge. We'll read verses 1 to 10.

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you by your Spirit, a Spirit that is jealously longing for all of our hearts, that you would do your work in us through your mighty word for the glory of your Son the Lord Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.*

Resolving conflict by prevailing in prayer. Now, when he says, "submit therefore to God," that's the first, remember the first of 10 imperatives. Ten imperatives in verses 7 to 10. Submit to God, 1. Resist the devil, 2. Draw near to God, 3. Cleanse your hands, 4. Purify your hearts, 5. Be miserable, 6. Mourn, 7. Weep, 8. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, 9. And humble yourselves, 10. And those don't look like very fun imperatives, do they? This is not a feel-good message. I really believe in the end it's wonderful. When God tears down, he builds up. When his word cuts to the heart and exposes, it heals. The glory of the Gospel, we see how much we need Jesus and we find in him everything that we ever wanted and we didn't find it until he broke us down and showed us how much we needed him.

So that's what he's going to do, but on the front end, well, you can see James has some hard words for us because we need them. We don't see sin the way we ought to see it. We have a low view of it. We think it's a small thing but to God it's a very big thing and God is right and we're wrong. We need to see it like he sees it and the victory comes from seeing it like he sees it. So what he's going to tell us here and what he has been telling us is that the turning point is prayer and the decisive point of victory, the hinge point is not just prayer but it is submission in prayer. It is submitting in prayer to God. That's the turning point. This is the hinge upon which victory turns and you go from being an agent of conflict to being an agent of peace. You go from being an idolater to being a true worshiper of God in living it out. It happens here. Now you've got to continue doing the other things he's going to say, we don't just stop here, but this is the hinge upon which the door... In fact, the first point of the outline, there are two main points and the first point is: the hinge that closes the door on conflict. The hinge that closes the door on conflict, first point, and it is essentially prayerful submission to God. That is the hinge, prayerful submission to God, submitting to God in prayer.

That's what he says in verse 7. The first imperative in the whole passage is, "Submit therefore to God. I've laid out the problem with great clarity, painful clarity. You're not only having conflict," remember we talked in the first message, you're having wars and battles and right after, remember in the passage as you flow from chapter 3 into chapter 4, he was talking about chapter 3, Christians ought to be people characterized by peace. Peace ought to be all around you, and he says in chapter 4, verse 1, but what you have is wars and battles. The first thing, you ought to be ashamed. We ought to be ashamed that we're not agents of peace walking around making peace all the time. It's crazy that we're not. That's the first thing he says, and he says the problem is in our hearts. We have these desires that control us, and then he says it's spiritual adultery, it's spiritual treason, and it's doing it in the face of God who is right there with you.

Now, having laid out all that, he says this is what you've got to do. First of all, you've got to know that God is a God of grace. The God who is jealous is also a God of grace and mercy and lovingkindness. So when you see that he is after you, because in a sense what you see in verse 5, he's chasing you. He's determined to have all of you. When you see he's after you, the way that you respond to him is you don't run from him, you run to him because you know that the God who is after you is a God of incredible lovingkindness

and mercy. There is no sweeter place to be than submitted to him. So that's what he's going to tell you to do. That's what we all need to do.

So prayer that submits one's self to God, this is the hinge and I think he picks it up in a very interesting way. Remember we saw this earlier. I gave you the five-step anecdote, in a sense, to remember desire, demand, submit to the false god, serve the false god, destroy those around you. Now remember what it was, it was desire. You start with a desire, there is nothing wrong with a desire, I mean good desires, but instead of letting it become a demand, you turn it into a request. That's the second step. He said in verse 2, after he said, "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." Verse 2, "You do not have because you do not ask." He says what you should do when you have a desire is take it to God in prayer. Who provides for you? You go to God. So you aren't getting something that you think you need and you really value and you think is important and you think is good, what should you do? Go to God and pray. You don't have because you don't ask.

Then we didn't really spend time on this, I skipped over verse 3 so that we could get here. Actually, I have to tell you I accidentally skipped over it and then the Lord just showed me it was good in his providence that it was because it makes more sense to put it here with verse 7. Because verse 3 he says, "When you do ask, you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend it on your pleasures." You go to God and you say, "God, give me what I'm asking for and I just want you to give it to me." And we treat God just like prayer is just you are taking a laundry list to God and he's like a waiter and you say, "I'd like this this, this, this and this in this order, please. Alright, I'm waiting." We think that's what prayer is. That's not what prayer is biblically. Prayer is taking your request to God, it is talking to God, but it's much more than just taking a laundry list, it's communication. It's two-way communication. He says, "You want to spend it on your pleasures. You don't want to align yourself with him, you don't want to relate to him, you go to him just wanting what you want and you think he is a means to your end." God will never be a means to your end. He will never be a means to anyone's end. He's not interested in doing what you want to do but he's so much more wonderful than that. He's interested in you being with him, going where he wants to go because he knows that's the very best thing in the world for you.

I mean, we're like children who would like to name our diet. Imagine like if I were two or three years old and my parents started letting me determine what we're going to eat at every meal. "Well, I'd like to start with a hamburger for breakfast. And I then would like to chase that down with some M&Ms and ice cream. And that sounds good for lunch and dinner. And tomorrow I'd like, maybe we'll do some pizza and we'll do some more ice cream, and we'll do some more M&Ms and we'll do some more whatever." That wasn't that much good candy back in the sixties. It's gotten a lot better. You know, we didn't have so many things that we have now. Sorry, I digress. The whole point is you don't let your child determine that because a child doesn't know what's best for him. You'd grow up deficient. You wouldn't have strong bones. You wouldn't grow up well at all. You would grow up starving to death, ironically, even though you are eating all this junk. You don't have the nutrients you need.

So as a parent, a loving parent doesn't give a child what he wants, he gives a child what he needs. How much more God? He loves us and gives us what we need. And when you pray, his goal is in prayer to help change what you want so that you want what you ought to want, and then he gives it to you, and what happens along the way is you are in a relationship. That is the hinge upon which conflict, the door is closed on it in your life. I mean, you have to keep doing it. You have to keep closing the door on conflict. It's something you have to do every day, many times a day. There are opportunities for conflict, how do you do it? You learn how to turn to God in prayer and submit yourself to him in prayer and you then become an agent of peace.

That's the hinge that closes the door on conflict. It's essentially seeing that prayer is really getting on God's agenda and realizing that that's best, and now I'm on his team and I am no longer cooperating with the devil and the flesh and the world. I'm on God's team doing God's business. And until that happens, until you really submit to God, you are on the other team. You and I are on the other team. We may sound good, we may bring up Bible verses to support our point. You need to be this way, the Bible says this, but our tone and our anger and our attitudes betray the fact that we are an idolater at that point. We're just using the Bible to justify it.

So the hinge that closes the door on conflict is submitting to God in prayer. Now that's said, now I want the second point we're going to spend more time on that. So essentially just to sum that up, the first point, it means completely yielding to God. Submit yourselves to God. In fact, the verb is *hupotasso*. The preposition *hupa* means under, *tasso* means to order and arrange. So it means to arrange and order under. It's a term that used a lot in military context. You submit to the leader. You go where he wants you to go and you do what he wants you to do. You might think you have a better idea of how this battle should be fought but a battle that's going to be won, there has to be one general who is directing. And so *hupotasso* means to get yourself under that. In fact, this is actually, it's an aorist tense verb. All 10 of these verbs are aorist tense, actually. I mentioned all 10 imperatives, verses 7 to 10. It's really striking in the Greek because the dominant tense in the first six verses where he is describing the problem, the dominant tense is the present, the Greek present; 19 out of 24 verbs are in the Greek present. Now remember present tense is not in Greek is not so much about the time of action but the kind. That is, it describes continuing ongoing action. That's what Greek present is.

So 19 of those 24 verbs in the Greek present and the idea is ongoing action. For instance, you lust and do not have. The idea is in the Greek the verb is you are lusting, you are wanting, you are desiring. Do you see the continuing nature of that? You are lusting. You are wanting. You are wanting and you're not able, the next verb is you are not being able to get it. So you are in a state of lusting continually and not being able to get continually, so then you are murdering continually. That's the way it flows, the first six verses, and then verses 7 to 10, he says in 10 aorist tense, he changes the tense to aorist, and aorist is, again, the kind of action it's not continuing and ongoing, it's punctiliar. It's like a period. It's a point. So he's saying submit to God. Take a decisive asked to submit, and then resist the devil in a decisive way, and then draw near to God, and then cleanse your

hands, and then purify your heart. And all 10 of those aorist tenses emphasize decisive action. You've got to make a decision. You've got to move. You've got to act. To stop this ongoing problem requires decisive action and the first and key decisive action begins with submit yourselves to God.

Really what you see is the decisive movement in conflict. We're having conflict. The decisive movement is to turn to God. You have not because you ask not. Start praying. Here I am in conflict, I recognize I'm in conflict. I see I've got anger welling up inside of me. Listen to my tone of voice. What's going on with that? Why do I sound angry? Have you ever found that happened to you, you know, you're talking and you think, "Why do I sound like I'm angry?" Sometimes we don't know it. A lot of times we don't even know we sound how we sound, right? Especially I think sometimes guys, sometimes we're less sensitive to that. Patti has shown me through the years, "You know, you sounded so harsh in that." I'm like, "Really? I was trying to ratchet it down. I thought I was doing a great job." I guess you should have heard me if I hadn't been trying. No, but she's hearing something. Why is that tone there? What is it I'm wanting that I'm not getting? There must be some lust going on, some desire that is inordinate, out of balance. I'm wanting something more than I should.

So you recognize that, what do you do? You don't just work in your own strength to deal with it. You turn to God. That's the decisive movement, you see. Here I am and I'm looking at people and I'm thinking my problem is people and that they are not on my agenda, and James says the thing you've got to do because you are continually thinking like that and you're doing stuff and you're murdering and you're wanting, the decisive movement is stop, turn to God. Pray.

That's what he says in verse 2, "You don't have because you don't ask." So you pray and then in praying you've got to pray the right way because verse 3 says you nullify your prayers because you really aren't praying as God defines prayer. Prayer isn't just taking a laundry list to God. That's how the world sees it. That's how the world sees prayer and that's how a lot of false Christians see prayer. You take a laundry list to God and you do certain things to manipulate him so that he will give you what you want. That's basically paganism and a lot of times it disguises itself as Christianity. That's the Catholic Christianity. If you do these things, you say these prayers, you say the words, you do this, then it's like a vending machine, you hit this button and you put a quarter in and boom, out comes what you wanted. God is a machine. That's the way the world sees it but God is not a machine and if you're thinking he is a machine, you will not get what you want from God.

That's the point in James 1. James talks a lot about prayer. Remember in chapter 1 when he says, "If you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Then he says, "If you ask him but you don't ask him the right way in faith, that is looking to him, submitting to him, trusting in him that he will give you the answer when you want it, don't think you're getting anything from God. Lest that man think he's not going to get anything from God." He ends up the book talking about prayer too when he talks about the prayer of like Elijah. So prayer is a big part of his emphasis for us to understand.

So he says you've got to pray. You have to turn to God in a decisive way but your prayer has to result in submission to him. I mean, "Submit yourselves therefore to God." In fact, it's actually, it's interesting in the Greek, I said it's aorist tense but it's passive voice. It's translated in some of the translations better, that I think the NASB would have been better to do like the ESV and the NIV and I think that King James even do, "Submit yourselves to God." But perhaps one of the things that's a little bit complicating for the translators is it's actually passive voice. A middle voice is, okay, active voice, let's remember about verbs. Active voice verb in the active voice means the subject is doing the action of the verb. That's an active voice verb, right? I hit the ball. That's an active verb. Middle is the subject is doing and somehow receiving the action of the verb or doing it in a way that I am hitting the ball, that's not really good. I'm hitting myself. That would be sort of a middle verse. I don't know why I'm doing that. You probably need to pray for me. I'm hitting myself. But anyway, the idea is the subject is doing and receiving the action. The passive voice is the subject is receiving the action. I was hit by the ball. The ball hit me. Hit, the ball did something, I was hit by the ball. That's the passive voice. That's enough English. I'm already confused myself.

But the idea of this verb is it's in the passive voice which would normally be translated, "Be subjected," that is that you are the recipient of the action. Someone is acting upon you and subjecting you to God. Now of course, strictly speaking you can't just be passive but it's a command. It's saying, "Allow yourself to be subjected to God." In other words, "Subject yourselves to God," but you have to realize you can't do it in your own strength. I think that's the reason it's in the passive voice. You have to have God act upon you. The Spirit that is jealous for you must help you to be subjected to God, but you must willingly embrace that. That's what he's saying and that happens in true prayer. When prayer accomplishes its ultimate purpose, that's what happens.

So that is the hinge. It's prayer that results in submission and subjection to God. What's happened then is I wanted something and maybe it was a good thing, right? I was wanting it too much but I asked God for it rather than demand it and submit to the false idol. I ask God for it. I request it. Now let me go and walk through those five points. I didn't do that, did I? You have a desire. This is the right way to do it. You request, 2. 3, you submit. Again, it's the same third point as over here, but here you're submitting to God. 4. You serve God. 5. You edify. You become an agent of blessing. You see, the other way you become an agent of destruction, you tear down. 5. This way you edify, you build up because you are now on God's team. And you see the hinge even of those five points, desire, demand, submit, the turning point is submit.

So what happens then is you have a desire, you go to God with it and you say, "Lord, I really want this. I really want my husband to understand me and to take time to listen to me. He never listens to me, Lord. You see this. He never takes time for me. He takes time for everyone else. I've told him this. I've told him again and again and again. I need him, I need him to listen to me." That's a reasonable desire. She wants her husband to listen to her. She needs his leadership. She needs his involvement. She needs his love, right? But if that becomes a demand, then she will not honor God in her life. She will try to

manipulate her husband. She will do things like, you know, use the old thing, if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. I'm not gonna let anybody be happy in this house because I'm not happy. The world says, happy wife, happy life, right? It's because of basically how effective female manipulation can be. We are all manipulators, right? That's just the reality.

So she can do that, "I want him to pay attention to me and I'm going to make him pay attention to me and I'm going to start doing things, even sinning in different ways and having bitter attitudes and stuff." Wait a minute, are you going to do that? Are you going to demand and submit to this false god of wanting that more than you want to please God and then serve that false god and then destroy your children by the example that you're setting, by the fact that you're hurling insults against your husband occasionally? You're talking about what a bad guy he is and stuff to your children? You see, you're destroying because you have a false god. You want something too much.

Or rather than that you say, "Lord, I want my husband to love me. Isn't that reasonable? You want our marriage to look like Christ in the church. You want our children to see the glory of a godly marriage. He says he loves you, Lord, why won't you make him pay attention to me?" And you keep praying and you keep praying and you keep praying, and then you keep submitting to God, you submit to God as you pray, what happens is you realize, "Wait a minute, what's most important in this is for me to honor you. I can't make this person do what I want them to do. You can and for some reason you're not and I submit to your agenda for my life. I am your servant. I'm not my own. This marriage is not for my pleasure, it's for your glory, and I want to be submitted to you to live for your glory in this."

It doesn't mean that you don't confront your husband. Yeah, you still do that but you do it with a totally different attitude. You submit to the Lord in prayer, then you serve the Lord who is your Master, and you edify, and your edification may often be a word of reproof to your husband. "Honey, I really believe that you're not doing what the Lord wants you to do in this area." And you have made yourself an agent, you may actually find that that word actually brings about some change. All these years of doing it your way have amounted to nothing. You've driven the wedge farther apart. Don't do it God's way because you want him to immediately give it to you. "I'll try his way and see if it works and if it doesn't, I'll go back to the old way." No. You embrace God's design, submit to the Lord, serve the Lord, edify, glorify God. That's the plan.

So now let's talk about the second point. The hinge that closes the door on conflict, the first point was, prayer that submits itself to God, that submits yourself to God. Allow yourself to be made subject to God. Allow the word of God, the Spirit of God, to make you subject to him. It's a great work. That's why I think the passive voice. It's something that has to be done. It's not something you can do yourself. Now how does that work? Number 2, the second point, the first point, the hinge that closes the door on conflict, the second point, how the hinge works. What does it look like? What is prayer that submits itself to God?

Well, first of all, let's just make a quick definition of prayer. Prayer is communication with God. It is talking to God and listening to God. Isn't that what communication is? Doesn't all communication involve two-way talking and speaking and listening? Sending messages and receiving messages, right? So that's what prayer is. Now with God, we're not sitting there listening for a voice, we're not reading some weird books other than the Bible. That's not a weird book. We're listening to the Bible because that's God's word. The way that you pray and listen to God is its meditation on the word as you talk to God about your concerns. You read his word, you share with him your heart, your burdens, you're listening to his word, you're allowing the Spirit to work through the burdens that you're talking to him about, and you see how he will use his word to speak to you and show you things, and that is two-way communication. Prayer and meditation.

So a conflict happens. Go back to the woman who wants her husband to love her. He forgets their anniversary. You know, to me that's when you shouldn't get so upset about it, I don't think. But actually I always remember it. My wife is more likely to forget my anniversary than I am because I'm a numbers guy. I just think in terms of numbers so I'm always know what number it is, I know what day it is or whatever. Now, I might forget to plan ahead and do something good for it, yeah, that's a very good possibility. That's a very good possibility. Anyway, this woman who wants her husband to love her, her husband forgets their anniversary, passes by it, doesn't even say anything about it, what does she do? She should go to God with that. That really is, that's bad. Her husband has failed to love her as Christ loves the church. He's failed to love her as his own body. He's already not even noticing that she's upset, she's hurting. He's checked out. So what she does, she should turn to God and go to him and, "Lord, I've been asking you to help my husband to pay attention to me, to love me, and I don't know why he's not. You know his heart. And I'm hurting but I realize as I say this, I know that I need you more than I need anything else; that you told me in the word that I'm to submit to my husband as unto the Lord, that he's to love me as Christ loved the church, but the reality is that I'm to look to you as the one who loves me. You're to satisfy all my needs. You are the great I Am. You're everything that I need. You're the bread of life, Lord Jesus. You're the light of the world. I need you. And then out of the overflow of me being filled up with you, then I can serve those around me. And I'm going to have to talk to him. I know I need to talk to him and gently reprove him and let him know that he has blown it. Help me to do that in a way that will edify him and challenge him to love and good works." What happened there is along the way she submitted to God. She remembered that it's not about me getting what I want. I'm a servant. I'm here to glorify you in a godly marriage. So that was that submission. That's the hinge.

So let's talk about that a little more now. Let's look at the pieces. I want to talk about prayer biblically and give you three subpoints under prayer. It's really amazing. The more that I see this in Scripture, it's just amazing. God's infinite wisdom, because let's think about this. This church, we are Reformed. We believe in the sovereignty of God in every area of life, and so reasoning naturally, if God is sovereign over everything and the word "providence" itself means that he has foreordained, everything that comes to pass, whatsoever comes to pass has been foreordained by God. Everything that happens has been foreordained by God. If that's so, why pray?

One of my professors at seminary, Doug Kelly, wrote a book, "If God already knows, why pray?" I think that's a great question. Well, the answer is because God says to and in the word as you read the word, you see that God says to for a lot of very good reason, because the way God has chosen to work is to use prayer. In fact, he foreordains, whatsoever comes to pass is foreordained and he's always using the prayers of his people as a key ingredient in making it happen.

So there are three points on prayer I want to talk about under this subpoint how the hinge works. The first point is in the Bible, though God is sovereign over everything, prayer makes a difference. First point: prayer makes a difference. It's right there in verse 2, "You have not because you ask not." Jesus in Matthew 7, "Knock and it will be opened to you. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find." The implication if you don't knock, it won't be opened. If you don't ask, you won't receive. If you don't seek, you won't find. James is going to say in chapter 5, verse 16 of this same letter, "The effective prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much." Don't ever think that prayer does not matter; that prayer doesn't accomplish things. Biblically, prayer is like Spurgeon said, prayer is the slender nerve that moves the mighty hand of divine providence. That's the biblical picture.

Now why? God doesn't need to make it where prayer is the slender nerve that moves the hand of divine providence, but he chose to, to let us have the privilege of being involved with him in accomplishing the furtherance of his kingdom. Amazing. That is staggering, that you and I who are dust of the earth, who are besought with all of these lusts and inappropriate levels of desire, hearts that are idol factories, God wants to let you and me be a part of building his kingdom through prevailing prayer. Prayer makes a difference.

You see this from the beginning. I just want to mention a passage and I'm going to summarize it really quickly and I encourage you to look at it. Genesis 18, the very beginning books of the Bible. Genesis 18:20 and following, God has met with Abraham. Remember when the Lord meets with Abraham? He sees three men walking toward them so the Lord made a visible manifestation as a man, the angel of the Lord, apparently, I think the second person of the Trinity manifests himself as a person and two angels are with him and they look like men. They come up and they sit down and they eat. They prepare a meal and eat together with Abraham and after the meal is over, they go for a walk, the three of them and Abraham, and the Lord said, the Bible says the Lord said, "Should I keep back what I'm about to do for my servant Abraham? No, I shouldn't," basically. "I've come down," he goes on to tell him, "I've come down to investigate the evil that's going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. A great outcry of their wickedness has come to me and I've come down to investigate and see what's really going on." Now this is the Lord accommodating our ability to understand. He really knows what's going on but he's showing this is the kind of God he is. He doesn't make just whimsical determinations to bring about destruction without complete knowledge. He's accommodating our understanding to show us that. "I don't act without coming down and getting all the facts. You think I do because you've listened to Satan."

Now he comes to his friend and he says, "I want my friend Abraham to know what's going on. I've come down to investigate that." Now Abraham knows his cousin Lot is over there and Lot is in Sodom and that Sodom is about to be destroyed. He's probably gotten wind of how bad Sodom is too. I mean, this is a wicked place and you read on in chapter 9 and you see how incredibly detestable it was. What's amazing is God tells Abraham what he's going to do because the Lord knows that he's put Abraham in this place to pray to him.

Do you remember what happens? Abraham says to the Lord, "Lord, I know that I'm just dust of the earth but may I venture to speak to you? Would you spare the city of Sodom if there are 50 righteous people there?" And the Lord says, "Yes, I'll spare for 50 righteous." Abraham says, "May I dare to speak again? I know I'm flesh. I dare to speak to you. May I ask you another," and basically six times he makes requests. He says, "How about 45? If you find 45 righteous will you spare it?" "Yes, for the sake of the 45." "How about 40? For 40 will you spare it?" "Yes, for 40." 30, 20, 10. "Yes. Yes. Yes." And then the Lord leaves. What's up with that? Now there weren't 10 righteous there and Sodom gets destroyed but God goes and gets Lot out and his family, remember? But why is that there? That's to show you that God really values prayer. He put Abraham there to intercede for those people and his prayer made a difference.

Now, God was always going to do that and he put Abraham there to pray that, but if you're in Abraham's place, what's the message? Pray and if you don't pray, it won't happen. Now in reality God will find somebody else to pray. Remember what Jesus said, "If these are silent, the stones will cry out"? God will make it happen but the message to you and me is don't miss what God's telling you and me to do. That's amazing. So prayer makes a difference.

The second point, the second subpoint under how the hinge works, first prayer makes a difference, secondly, prayer makes us different. Prayer makes us different. This, I think, is the highest purpose of prayer. There is something about prayer that makes us different. It's interesting, another passage to look at later and I'll just summarize again. Luke 18:1-8. Jesus tells a parable that Luke says, "Jesus taught this parable to teach us that men ought always to pray and not to faint, not to lose heart." He tells about a woman, a widow who's been treated unjustly in some kind of business dealing, and she goes to the judge and the judge doesn't hear her case. He doesn't have time for her and she goes the next day and he doesn't hear her, and she goes the next day and he doesn't hear her, and she keeps going and she keeps going and she keeps going until finally this judge, even though he's a wicked man, he doesn't really care about justice, says, "I'm going to give her justice just so she'll leave me alone." Jesus says pray like that. Why? We know that you are good. It should only take one time of us telling you what we need. No, he says pray like that.

Why? Because there's something about praying and asking and asking and asking and asking again. What's happening is you're realizing through the repeated asking how dependent you are upon God. "It can't happen any other way than if you do it, Lord. And by letter me ask 127 times, I now know that and when it happens, I'll give you the glory." So we get to know the Lord through it and the beauty of it is, is so that he can share his

heart with us. God is so much more wonderful than we would believe on our own. We just see what's a means to an end but he's all about the relationship. I mean, we're talking about the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit, who have always existed in relationship, always a fullness and joy of communion before the world was. Loving one another. Contentment and joy and bliss. Creating the world not for any sense of need in them, of course not, there is no need in God, but to share the fullness with us. Jesus defines the whole of the Christian life, "Love God. Love your neighbor." Two relational commands. It's all about that. If you get that right, you get everything.

So he says, "Listen, what I want, the reason I have ordained prayer as the means to accomplishing the outworking of my plan is because I want to bring you into my heart. I want you to know me as I know you." So it's that repeated prayer, "Lord, make my husband love me," that you find out how much your Father loves you and you find out that that is all you need, and you wouldn't have found it out if you weren't in that circumstance of need and pain. How good God is.

Prayer makes us different and so then what happens is our hearts are changed and we now want what he wants. We don't want just what we were asking for, for our own pleasure, we want more of Jesus and we want everybody around us to have more of Jesus. So now when we pray, man, our prayers are moving the hand of providence. "When you pray and ask anything according in my name, that is, in accordance with who I am and what my purposes are, you will have it." This is the kind of prayer that moves mountains and real mountains are not the mountains of physical healing and things like that. That's just peanuts. Real mountains are when you see someone come to Christ, when you see someone who's wrapped up in all kinds of bondage to sexual sin or some other kind of sin, liberated and it's prayer that's learned through this kind of yearning and repeated prayer and praying and asking and pleading with God that becomes submitted to the Lord that then God says, "Now my servant is ready. He's like Abraham now. I'm going to let his prayer move history." That's what God wants for you and me.

So prayer changes us. Prayer makes a difference. Prayer makes us different. And third, prayer makes everything different. Now, let me quickly hit on prayer makes us different. I forgot one thing. Jacob, Jess read earlier Genesis 32. He prays and he asks the Lord exactly what he wants and he reminds the Lord, it's a really good prayer in verses 9 to 12 of Genesis 32, "Hey, you promised me you were going to make me a great nation and here this guy is about, he's coming out to kill me. Esau is not coming with 400 people to have a welcoming party. He's coming to kill us but you promised that you would make me a great nation, remember?" And then after he prays, he goes about maneuvering things to make it the way he wanted, just like Jacob's always been a great negotiator. I mean, he's a conman, remember? He conned his brother out of his birthright, then his blessing. Then he went over and found a conman that was even better than him at first, Laban, who did the switcheroo and gave him Leah instead of Rachel. But Jacob ends up out-conning Laban and here he's about to meet his brother Esau with 400 men and he goes into mode, "I know what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna set all these different companies apart and they're going to meet Esau and say, 'They are from your servant Jacob who is coming from behind us and they're gifts to his Lord Esau.' And maybe by the time I get

there, he won't kill me." He prays. He asks the Lord. He does all this stuff, then the Lord comes after him. God, in a sense, picks a fight with him. Jacob wasn't looking for the Lord on the other side of the Jabbok. The Lord came to him and started wrestling with him.

God often does that. When you really seek the Lord, the Lord will appear, first of all, as your enemy, but you hold onto him because he's not your enemy. He's not your enemy. Cling to him like Jacob did and what happened? He touched his thigh, the sinew of his hip, and his hip was dislocated. I mean, the Lord he could have done it at any point. He's letting him wrestle with him. This is the kind of God that we serve. The one who hung the planets in their orbit is allowing himself to be wrestled with and held onto and is asking, "Let me go." What kind of amazing God this is. He just touched his hip, I mean at any point, game's over. But he just touches his hip to remind him how powerful he is, and then he says, "What's your name?" "My name is Jacob." It means heel grabber. "Now your name is Israel, which means one who strives with God; one who strives with God and prevails."

Jacob was never the same. He was in a situation where he was overwhelmed with desires and he was going into mode, idolatry mode of, "I know how to handle this my way," and he's protecting and he's lining up all the people. If you read on into chapter 33, it's very interesting. He starts out with his two companies but the text is real clear, Jacob went on ahead of them to Esau. He didn't wait for all the manipulation. After the change has happened in his heart, he knows God is going to be faithful to me. I don't have anything to be afraid of. And he goes out in front. Now he bows down to Esau. He shows him respect because, "I really did sin against you. You've got real reason to be angry with me but I know God's got me in his hand. There is nothing that you can do to hurt me."

But he got out in front. God changed him. Prayer changes us and then prayer changes everything. That's the third point. When prayer changes you, prayer changes everything. It's like black and white becomes full color, high definition. Now I'm seeing what God sees and I see how he's orchestrating all these things and like the psalmist says as he looks at desolation and then he has eyes to see, "Lord, you have done it and it is marvelous in our eyes," Psalm 118. It changes everything. Suddenly you are that agent of victory but you are content and joyful. You're an agent of peace. You're not bringing conflict to the situation. You may be getting conflict but you now have the ability to see what God is doing, you see the need of the other person, your heart goes out to them and you're finding love in your heart that you didn't know was there, sympathy for this person. This woman who wants her husband to love her is sitting there saying, "I see that he's never learned. I think about his life and how he grew up. I think about how discouraged he is at work." And she starts respecting and honoring and expecting nothing in return, pouring out agape love, and you see the glory of God descend on that home because prayer has changed everything.

She has submitted herself to God and when you submit yourself to God, there is no limit to what God will do. He may not give you what you want. He may not give you what you want. He may not give you the salvation of your child but if you submit yourself to him,

you will find strength and you will find glory somehow in the midst of the pain and you will find that Jesus is sweeter and more precious than you ever imagined, and that's what God wants for all of us. Everyone who is his child, he wants this, and if you're not his child, why are you not? A God like this, why would you hold out on him? Why would you not surrender today and repent of living for yourself and place all of your faith in Jesus Christ, God the Son who died on the cross to pay for the sins of everyone who would ever believe? He rose again. Repent and believe on him today. And for those of you that know him, we need to repent and surrender to him.

Submit yourselves therefore to God and let him do his glorious work.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we rejoice that you are more wonderful than we would ever imagine, and we confess with Isaiah we're a people of unclean lips and we dwell among people of unclean lips when we see you as you are. Forgive us, Lord, for grumbling and complaining and serving our idols. Forgive us for loving the world. Help us hate our sin and help us love our Savior. Lord, help us to be people who make peace and extend peace and exude peace in the midst of a dark world that is perverse and that needs the Gospel. Lord, help us to apply these things and to walk in these things this week for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*