

The Silence of Heaven and the Prayers of the Saints

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's my favorite day of the week because I get to do my favorite thing in the world, which is to worship God, and I get to do it with my favorite people on earth, and that's the church, that's you guys.

And it's really good to see some of you guys coming back. We've missed you all. And if you would please turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation chapter eight.

If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to bring one to you. For those of you who are new, my name is Sean, and I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church, and I have the privilege of preaching God's word to you this morning.

Let me pray. Revelation is the last book in the Bible, so you can flip to the back and then find it. Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word.

Heavenly Father, we ask again as we do each week that you would address us from your word, that you would humble us as your people and impress upon us deeply in our hearts your glory, your holiness, your love, your grace, so that our entire lives, all that we think and say and do will be affected and transformed by who you are and what you have done.

[1 : 53] Meet us now. Open up your word to us so that we might understand, so that it might pierce our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's word from Revelation 8, chapter 8, verses 1 through 5. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer.

And he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel.

Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth. And there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

[3 : 08] This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. If you've been with us through our series in Revelation, we saw earlier in Revelation 6 when the fifth seal was opened, we saw under the altar before the throne of God the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

And they cried out to God with a loud voice, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? So it was a prayer of the saints who had been martyred and other saints with them who had borne faithful witness to Christ, crying out for vindication and for justice.

These ideas of, you know, divine vengeance and martyrdom might seem foreign to us because we enjoy so many freedoms and so many comforts here in the United States.

But as I've been saying throughout our series in the book of Revelation, persecution is the norm and not the exception for Christians. And martyrdom has been the reality for many Christians throughout history all over the world.

We see already the beginnings of that in the New Testament. Tens of thousands of Christians were killed under the Roman Empire. Genghis Khan massacred 4 million Christians in 1214 AD.

[4 : 34] Tamerlane, who styled himself the sword of Islam, also killed 4 million Christians in 1358. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, 1.2 Armenians, most of whom identify as Christians, were killed in the Ottoman Empire.

scholars estimate that about 12 million Christians were killed under the Soviet Union, which included 106,300 Christian ministers in Russia alone.

In addition to killing 6 million Jews, the Nazis killed 1 million Christians in death camps. Scholars estimate that Christians who died from secular anti-religious violence in the 20th century number over 25 million worldwide, which is more than all previous centuries of Christian martyrs combined.

According to Open Door USA, 360 million Christians throughout the world today face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith. 360 million.

Last year alone, 5,621 Christians were killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. And you've all seen in the news how groups, militant groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Houthis in Yemen, ISIS in Iraq, Syria in Pakistan, and al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the Taliban in Afghanistan have targeted and killed Christians.

[6 : 00] We don't experience persecution that much here in the U.S. to the same degree, obviously not. But Christians do sometimes get negative publicity because of our religious and ethical convictions.

Sometimes churches get protested against and Christian groups get kicked off of college campuses. Not only that, as Christians, we are witnesses daily of how God's holy name instead of being hallowed is blasphemed on the streets and in the workplaces and on TV and all over the internet and of how God's precious gift of body and sex are misused and abused by so many in the world and of how people who are created in the image of God are mistreated and enslaved sometimes even.

we see the idolatry of money, of prestige, power, wreak havoc all over the globe. It's no wonder that God's people for thousands of years have been crying out, how long?

How long, God? Psalm 74:10, how long, oh God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

Remember? Psalm 119, 1984, how long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me? If you have felt this desperate indignation before, if you have pleaded with God at any point in your life, how long then you have joined the cry of the saints under the altar in Romans, and in Revelation 6, 9 to 11, crying out, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

[7 : 54] But we have not yet in this book seen God's answer to that plea yet. God told them in chapter 6, verse 11, to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow Christians, fellow servants, and their brothers should be complete who are also to be killed as they themselves have been in bearing witness to Jesus.

So there's this build up, this crescendo and anticipation of God's great justice right after the fifth seal, and that builds even more with the sixth seal where we see this, the pan-ultimate seal where we see the cosmic just tremblings of the sun and the moon and the stars losing their light and falling from their places, and then that's the moment we ended, chapter 6, and right at that moment that at the top of the crescendo, instead of getting the climax of the seventh seal, we got a cliffhanger.

There was a break in the scene, and then we saw the sealing of the saints of God, the 144,000 in chapter 7. So that cliffhanger builds suspense and conveys that period of waiting a little longer, God had told his servants, a little longer until I come, then I'll come to vindicate you and to judge the wicked earth.

Today in chapter 8, John resumes that scene, he resumes the seven seals of judgments, and we return to the climactic seventh seal. The saints who were resting a little longer need not rest any longer.

The wait is finally over, and God has said, enough is enough. All the prayers of the saints throughout the ages for God's name to be hallowed and for people of God to be vindicated, for God's justice to fill the earth, his glory to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

[9 : 45] It's finally being answered in this passage. And we learn from this that the prayers of the saints rouse the Lord God to bring his final judgment upon the earth.

That's the main point of this sermon. And I'm going to talk about that in two parts. First, we'll talk about the silence in heaven, and then we'll talk about the prayers of the saints. First, let's look at the silence in heaven, and how that's actually God's satisfying answer to the prayers of his people.

It says in verse 1, when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. We know that this is resuming what we saw in chapter 6 because it mentions the seal, the seventh seal.

And we also know that this continues a theme of the fifth seal because there, the souls of the martyrs under the altar were crying out to God for vengeance, to vengeance of their bloodshed on the earth.

So this verse 3, 4 also mentioned the same altar. It says, and another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel.

[11 : 04] So again, they're connected by the same key words and same themes, and the only altar that has been mentioned up to this point in the book of Revelation has been that same altar from chapter 6 before the throne of God.

And so this is not another altar or the other altar, it is the altar because it's referring to that same one. So we're resuming that scene where the saints were crying out to God and now God is answering that prayer because their prayers have come up to God as a pleasing aroma and incense.

But what kind of answer is this? Silence in heaven. Is that anticlimactic? Isn't that kind of a non-answer?

Some people argue that the seventh seal is an empty seal, that it has no content, indicating that God is resting or pausing his judgments. Still others argue that the seventh seal is simply the seven trumpets of judgments that follow, since seven angels receive seven trumpets in verse 2 which are then blown in the subsequent chapters and bring further judgment from God.

However, I don't think either of those options is quite right. First, I don't think the seventh seal is an empty seal because something does happen in verses 3 to 5.

[12 : 17] In particular, the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rise up before God and then the angel takes the fire from the altar and then throws it upon the earth which is God's final judgment.

I mentioned to you last week that the sealing of God's people on their foreheads in chapter 7 is an allusion to Ezekiel 9 and when you follow that passage in Ezekiel 9 and chapter 10, right after the sealing of God's people, God putting the mark on their foreheads to indicate that they're protected from his incoming judgments, then again, the angel in Ezekiel 10 takes burning coals from the altar that's between the two cherubims and then throws it upon the earth, scatters them over the earth.

So it's following that same sequence. So that fire from the altar represents God's judgment. It's the judgment of the seventh seal. Furthermore, when the fire from the altar is thrown on the earth, he says in verse 5 that there were peals of thunder, rumblings, and flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

If you're familiar with Old Testament theophanies, when God appears in power, then you know exactly what the thunder, lightning, and earthquake signify. The heavens and the earth tremble like this when the Lord God Almighty appears.

That's what a theophany means, the appearance of God. We saw this when we were in the book of Exodus. In Exodus chapter 19 when the Lord descended on Mount Sinai in fire, it says that the whole mountain trembled greatly and that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled.

[13 : 55] When the creator of the heavens and the earth manifests himself in creation, when the author of history breaks through and enters the pages of history, the heavens tremble, the earth splits, that's what happens.

And that's precisely what we see here with the climactic seventh seal. God is here consummating his kingdom. Do you remember what we saw in the very throne of God in chapter 4?

What emanated from the throne of God? Revelation 4, 5, from the throne came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder. Revelation goes through cycles of judgments.

There's three series of seven judgments and when each series concludes, in the seventh judgment we always see flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder.

with the seventh seal and then the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl. So these are all indicators that tell us that God himself is on the move. That the Lord Almighty has been roused from his heavenly throne to consummate his kingdom and bring final judgment upon the earth.

[15 : 07] So it's cycling through these repetitions. There's slightly more detail with each one with the seventh, from the seventh seal to the seventh trumpet to the seventh bowl and that shows a progression and the escalation of God's judgment but they're actually all same pictures, different angles and viewpoints of the final judgment.

How do we know that? To give you an example, already when the sixth seal was open in Revelation 6, 12 to 14, we saw that the sun became black, the moon became like blood and the stars of the sky fell to the earth and every mountain and island, it says, was removed from its place.

But then, that was in chapter 6, but then later in Revelation 8, 12, when the fourth trumpet is blown, it says a third of the sun was struck and a third of the moon and a third of the stars so that a third of their light might be darkened.

So if the sun has already turned black and the moon has already turned into blood and if all the stars have already fallen from the sky, then how do we darken a third of them? There's no stars left to darken.

These events do not occur in linear chronological fashion. Furthermore, Revelation 16, 32, when the seventh bowl is poured out, it says that every island fled away and no mountains were to be moved.

[16 : 26] But as we saw already in Revelation 6, 12, 14, every mountain and island was removed from its place. So if there are no more mountains and no more islands, then how do the islands fly away and the mountains fly away again in Revelation 16, 32?

So these were already removed. So these three sets of the judgments, the seven seals and the seven trumpets and the seven bowls are not chronological or linear.

They repeat a pattern in a cyclical way. They are different viewpoints of the same series of divine judgments throughout the course of church history. And the seventh of each of those is the climactic judgment of God.

That's why there's the theophany, the peals of thunder and the lightning and the rumblings. So it's like a Russian doll. I mentioned to you this before in our introduction. When you open a Russian doll, there's another Russian doll that looks exactly like it.

You open that one and there's another one. It's that cycle except the analogy would be perfect if every time you open the Russian doll, the Russian doll would actually get bigger instead of getting smaller because that's what happens in the book of Revelation.

[17 : 31] The judgments get more intense. It escalates. And so this is cyclical but there is a progression. It's not an endless cycle like a circle but rather it's like a spiral that does eventually come to an end point.

It circles wider and widens. It's wide in the beginning but then it circles narrower and narrower as it gets closer to the end and then it reaches the convergence point when everything comes to a climax.

So it's a spiral. So then Revelation 8, 1 to 5 serves narratively as the conclusion to the seven seals of judgment but also serves as an introduction to the seven trumpets of judgment.

But the seven seal is not something that happens before the seven trumpets and the seven bowls but rather it represents the last judgment, the great judgment that God promises throughout the scriptures.

And that's precisely why there is this ponderous silence in heaven in verse 1. If you've been following the course of Revelation, the silence is actually shocking because over the last several chapters, we've seen the angelic hosts and the numberless throng of God's people singing endless praises to God.

[18 : 49] The four living creatures before the throne of God never cease to say day and night, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come.

The numberless multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, they're crying out, salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb who sits on the throne. And all the angelic hosts and the 24 elders around the throne are exclaiming, amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever.

So all these praises, all these singing, endless praises over the last few chapters but then when the seventh seal is opened, there's this dramatic silence.

Imagine how unnerving that would have been from John's perspective seeing this prophetic vision. He says it lasts about half an hour.

We know that that's not like a precise symbolic number like the numbers we've seen so far, seven, twelve, 144,000. This is an approximate number, about half an hour. Most people in our culture, here in the US at least, are uncomfortable with silence, right?

[20 : 01] You're talking to somebody and if there's silence for like 10 seconds, people start to get a little queasy, right? This is about half an hour.

So imagine, climactic building, fifth seal, sixth seal, and then God stands up from his throne. It's almost like he's motioning for silence.

30 minutes. What is going on? A survey of scripture passages that speak of silence is revealing.

Habakkuk 2.20 says, Zephaniah 1.7 is especially relevant because it speaks of silence that precedes the day of the Lord's great judgment.

It says, Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near. Similarly, Zechariah 2.13 says, Be silent, all flesh before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

[21 : 15] When the king stands, everybody falls silent and looks on in anticipation. When the living God rouses himself from his throne to execute his final judgment upon the earth, all of heaven falls silent.

I don't recommend that you watch this whole movie because it's really long and it has some unnecessarily explicit scenes in it.

But if you look up on YouTube this particular scene when the first atomic bomb is detonated in Christopher Nolan's Oppenheimer, it helpfully illustrates the effect of this silence.

First, there's this tense countdown, five, four, three, two, one. And all the while, there's this frenetic buildup of orchestral instruments playing and building tension and drama.

And then it counts down, finally, to detonation time. And then everybody's waiting with bated breath. But when the bomb finally explodes, instead of a deafening boom, there's an unnerving silence.

[22 : 26] You don't hear anything except for maybe the characters breathing slowly for like a full minute and a half until the shock waves from the explosion come and reach the characters in the movie.

It's such a powerful scene because the silence conveys what a large, loud explosion can never convey. Since you can't possibly convey the blast of an atomic bomb through the speakers, no matter how amazing your subwoofers are, this scene leaves that to your imagination.

And instead of conveying the deafening sound, it conveys in that silence the breathtaking awe of the experience. There's no chattering, there's no cheering, there's just silent awe as they behold the awesome power of the atomic bomb.

That's what we see here in the silence of heaven. Compared to the awesome power of God when he rouses himself and appears in his final judgment over his creation, the atomic bomb is like backyard fireworks.

So all of heaven waits and beholds God in awestruck silence.

[23 : 54] The seventh seal of God's judgment is so staggering that it makes all of heaven cover their mouths in silence. And that silent awe is actually a defining mark of the Christian.

Commenting on Romans 3.19, which speaks of how God's righteous law makes such demands so that every mouth may be stopped. 20th century Welsh pastor D.E. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes this.

Paul now points out that when you realize what the law is truly saying to you, the result is that every mouth shall be stopped. You are rendered speechless. You are not a Christian unless you have been made speechless.

How do you know whether you are a Christian or not? It is that you stop talking. The trouble with the non-Christian is that he goes on talking. How do you know whether a man is a Christian?

The answer is that his mouth is shut. You do not begin to be a Christian until your mouth is shut. It's stopped and you are speechless and have nothing to say.

[25 : 07] The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18 illustrates the same principle. A Pharisee and a tax collector they together go up. They don't together go up. They independently go up to the temple to pray and the Pharisee's words are many.

He says, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners and unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week.

I give tithes of all that I get. His words are many. But the tax collector doesn't even dare to draw near. He's standing far off and he doesn't even dare to lift up his eyes to heaven.

He's looking down and he's just beating his breast saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. That's all he can manage to say.

His words are few because his heart is not lifted up. And Jesus says that it's the tax collector who humbled himself and not the Pharisee who exalted himself that goes home justified before God.

[26 : 18] When we truly understand the gospel of Jesus Christ, when we really see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it stops our mouths. It stops our blabbering boasts of self-righteousness and self-justification.

It stops our gabbing bluster of self-importance and self-sufficiency. It stops all the look at how great I am and look at all the good things that I've done and look at all my experience and knowledge and look at all the great things that I will do.

The gospel abases us and it humbles us into silence that says you must increase, I must decrease.

You are God and I am not. Just like Job complaining and groaning to God all throughout the book because of the calamities and the disasters and the diseases that he's been inflicted with but after seeing the glory and the awesome power of God revealed, this is what Job says.

Job 40, verse 4, Behold, I am of small account. What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.

[27 : 44] Research by neuroscientists Tomohiro Ishizu and Samir Zeki found that when a person experiences the sublime, something awesome and beautiful, that the self-referential regions of the brain, the regions associated with self-awareness get deactivated.

The more we behold God in his awesome glory, in his power and beauty, the less we are enamored with ourselves, the less we are preoccupied with ourselves have you experienced that bliss of self-forgetfulness.

Beholding God in his glory is the only way that we can escape our self-righteousness, self-absorption, and self-centeredness. When we believe that God is as big as he really is, then we become small.

How other people perceive us or think about us or talk about us become insignificant. The overwhelming circumstances of our lives seem less daunting and the glories and the pleasures of sin that this world offers lose their allure.

When is the last time you fell silent before God in awestruck wonder? So the silence, heaven, I think indicates this awe and wonder before the glory of God and his awesome judgment of the seventh seal.

[29 : 14] And the rest of the passage shows us that the last judgment is God's answer to the prayers of the saints. That's my second point. Verses three to four make the connection between the incense that's being offered from the altar before the throne of God and the prayers of the saints.

Follow along with me as I read. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne and the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God from the hand of the angel.

That connection, the incense being offered with the prayers of the saints is made even more explicit in Revelation 5 verse 8. It says that the 24 elders before God's throne are holding golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.

So it equates the prayers of the saints with the incense that's being offered. And this association between incense and prayer is something that's made in other parts of scripture as well. Psalm 141 verse 2 says let my prayer be counted as incense before you.

And when Zechariah, John the Baptist's father is doing his priestly duty and offering incense at the temple at the appointed hour he says in Luke 1, 8 to 11 that the whole multitude of the people were praying outside of the hour of incense.

[30 : 32] Offering up of incense time for that is an off time for offering a prayer. And when Zechariah encounters an angel that appears beside to the right of the altar inside the temple the angel says to him your prayer has been heard.

So Zechariah apparently is also praying as he's offering up incense. The burning of incense on the golden altar before the throne is an allusion to the golden altar of incense in the tabernacle in the tent of God in the Old Testament.

The golden altar stood immediately before the tent. Imagine that tent being the veil to the holy of holies the most holy place. It would be the incense the golden altar would be right in front of it.

It would be gold be square on the top rectangular going down to the bottom had four horns on each of its corners and that's where a priest had to come and offer up incense two times a day.

There would be a censer which is just a vessel for holding the incense the various spices and then there would be it would be on the altar and then underneath would be some kind of fire maybe burning coals so that slowly as the spices cook the aroma just wafts into all and fills the entire tabernacle of God.

[31 : 52] It was a sweet incense it's described as sweet spices stackedi and annika and galbanum sweet spices with pure frankincense there to make that blend that as by the perfumer seasoned with salt.

These are spices that we're not familiar with but maybe the closest thing that we're familiar with we can imagine is the resinous scent of the pine trees and the cinnamony aroma of mauled wine and gingerbreads.

Delicious smells amazing smells. And that's what our prayers are like before God. God is not a tired and an exasperated parent that gets annoyed by yet another request for help from his or her child.

God never gets tired. He loves to be entreated. Our prayers are sweet incense to God.

He delights in them. He welcomes them. He rejoices to answer them and our prayers are never far from God. They're literally figuratively rather right under God's nose.

[33 : 08] God's love to be entreated. He is a blessing. This is the privilege that Jesus has won for us. All our prayers go up directly to our heavenly father because we have been united with Jesus Christ through faith.

In Old Testament times it's the high priest who had to make atonement on the horns of the altar in the altar of incense once a year. They had to make a sacrifice and they had to take the blood from the sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice and then daub it on the four corners of the altar of incense to consecrate it for use.

This was a symbolic foreshadowing of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and he died on the cross for our sins once and for all and was raised from the dead so that all of us now because of his atonement can have direct access to God the Father and we can pray as much as we want as a pleasing aroma and incense before God.

And not only are our prayers pleasing before God, our prayers are powerful because of God. Look at verse five. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

The prayers of the saints were lifted up on this censer to God and then the same censer takes the fire from the altar and scatters it upon the earth as God's judgment.

[34 : 45] That's a clear connection between the prayers of the saints and God's final judgment upon the sinful world. I mentioned to you that the peals of thunder, rumblings, that's theophany, God himself appearing.

So quite literally, the almighty God rises to action in response to our prayers. This is why 19th century English pastor Charles Spurgeon was not wrong when he said, quote, prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence.

When we pray, you move the muscle of omnipotence. The seventh seal is God's answer to the prayers of the saints crying out for vengeance and vindication.

We see this also because in verse 2, the seven angels, it says, the seven angels who stand before God receive the seven trumpets of judgment that will ensue. Who are these seven angels who are before the presence of God?

We've seen them before. In chapter 1, chapters 2 and 3, the seven angels who represent the seven churches of God, who represent them before God at his throne, by his throne.

[36 : 07] So these seven angels then carrying out the seven judgment of the trumpets, there, it's all happening in response to the prayers of his people. The seven trumpet judgments that will ensue are all modeled after the plagues, the plagues that happened in the Exodus, God's judgment upon Egypt in Exodus, and that also makes the connection between prayer and God's judgment because why did God decide to intervene and deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt?

In Exodus 2, it tells us, 23 to 25, during those many days, the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help.

Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew what roused almighty Lord to rouse himself from the throne to rescue his people Israel.

It was the prayers of the saints, their cry for help. That's how powerful our prayers are. Do you seek the repentance of sinners?

Do you seek the vindication of the righteous? Then we must pray because God has ordained that he will accomplish his sovereign purposes through the prayers of his people.

[37 : 36] 19th century English pastor J.C. Ryle puts it this way, depend upon it, prayer is power. prayer obtains fresh and continued outpourings of the spirit.

He alone begins the work of grace in a man's heart. He alone can carry it forward and make it prosper. But the good spirit loves to be entreated. And those who ask most will have most of his influence.

Prayer is the surest remedy against the devil and besetting sins. That sin will never stand firm, which is heartily prayed against. That devil will never long keep dominion over us, which we beseech the Lord to cast forth.

[38 : 50]

That's how you stand firm as a believer. That's how you put on the armor of God in prayer. Sometimes I think as Christians, we can act like, you know, lost soldiers stranded in enemy territory and we're besieged by enemies and enemy shots are being fired from all over the place and you look helpless or maybe you don't even realize how bad the situation is and we think that the situation is manageable.

Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.
Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.

He might say wait, but he never says no if you pray in accordance with God's will. There are many great things that all of you guys as church members can do to serve God and to build up our church, but none of them is more important than prayer and the ministry of the word.

[40 : 22]

This is so true. Most of the weeks when my prayers are shortened or interrupted, it's not because of some grave sin. It's just because of good ministry activity.

Let me give you some practical suggestions that can help you grow in your prayer life. First, today is New Year's Eve, so I know many of you are going to make New Year's resolutions. Set a time and place for prayer.

[41:38]

A study published in the British Journal of Health Psychology, I feel like I'm quoting a lot of British sources, it's not because you guys are here, the Jenkins, it's just happened that way today. The British Journal of Health Psychology asked the control group to exercise once in the next week and 29% of them exercised.

And then they gave experiment group number one detailed information about why exercise is important for your health and then told them to go exercise and that week, that group, 39% of them exercised, only 10% more.

And then in the last group, experiment group number two, they told them to commit to exercising at a specific place, on a specific day, at a specific time of their choosing and 91% of them exercised.

The world, the flesh, and the devil already make it hard enough as it is for us to pray. It's not going to just happen.

[42 : 51] So make a plan. Find a time and place to pray regularly. Second, start praying through the scriptures. Seminary professor Donald Whitney describes how many Christians feel about prayer in his book, *Praying the Bible*.

He says, when prayer is boring, we don't feel like praying, and we don't feel like praying, it's hard to make ourselves pray. Even five or six minutes of prayer can feel like an eternity. Our mind wanders half the time.

We'll suddenly come to ourselves and think, now, where was I? I haven't been thinking of God for the last several minutes. And we'll return to that mental script we've repeated countless times, but almost immediately our minds begin to wander again because we've said the same old things about the same old things so many times.

If you can relate to this, then praying through the scriptures verse by verse can help. Because if you don't feel, if we don't fill our minds with the word of God, we're not going to have very many words to say back to God.

And this is one way we can guarantee that we are praying in accordance with God's will, a prayer that God guarantees he will answer in 1 John 5, 14 to 15. This is his will.

[44 : 03] This is the revealed will of God. And you pray this, then you know that your prayer is going to be answered. This is what we do during our midweek prayer services.

We always go through a passage of scripture verse by verse and let the word of God then inform our thoughts and our words in prayer. If you do this, then it keeps your prayers fresh because you don't have to repeat yourself tirelessly because we're really not that creative.

and you never have a shortage of things to pray for. It deepens our prayers because we can pray more with greater knowledge of what God's will is for us.

It helps us, it keeps our mind from wondering. It helps us to pray longer and more concentrated prayers. It also makes our prayers more personal because it makes prayer conversational, right?

When you're having a conversation with somebody, you listen to what they say to you and then you process that information and then respond back. When you're praying through the scriptures, you listen to what God has to say and then you process that and then you respond on the basis of what he has just said to you.

[45 : 09] It becomes a conversation. It becomes more personal and when it becomes more personal, it feels more real. You're not praying in the thin air. You're interacting with a person.

Third, keep a list of prayer requests. It's very simple to do. You can do it in any kind of form. I use index cards. You guys can use your journals or whatever. This is what I do but I also know that some of our church members have done this in the past.

You can print off the names of our church members which is all accessible online and you could write down next to their names or if you're using an index card behind their names, you could write down their prayer requests, you could write down specific scripture passages that you want to pray for them and just carry that around with you.

And you won't run out of things to pray for. You could also use the method we use on Sunday mornings during our prayers to people.

Pray in concentric circles. Start with the immediate circle which is you. Start by praying for yourself and then go to a wider concentric circle. Pray for your family. Pray for your church, our church and then a larger concentric school.

[46 : 19] Pray for your neighborhood and the city and then finally to the nations, the world and the unreached people groups. Fourth practical suggestion is simply pray with other people.

This can keep you accountable and help you to pray more. Think about it. Even if you only commit in the New Year's, nothing else but you commit to coming to our midweek prayer once a week.

You're going to pray one to two hours more than you do now every single week. That's a start.

And finally, start by praying that the Holy Spirit would fill you and help you to pray more. That's the place to start.

It could be a 10 second prayer. God help me to pray more. God answers that prayer. I've seen him answer that prayer in my life. Because ultimately, it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

[47 : 28] It's only those who have a big view of God and a small view of themselves who pray. Only those who recognize how needy they are who pray. And that's something that the Holy Spirit must do in our hearts.

It's only those whose mouths have been stopped who pray. So let's pray.

Let's pray for that out loud together. Father, help us to pray more.

Show us how glorious and holy and mighty you are. Show us your all insufficiency and our deep inadequacy.

Humble us. Bring us lower. Help us to see our neediness. Help us to see that we can do nothing apart from you. so that prayer just becomes the air we breathe through the natural language of our souls.

[49 : 01] Lord, this year, make us a church that prays more than we have ever done. so that when you move in response to our prayers and when you do mighty deeds in response to our prayers, when you save the lost in response to our prayers, that you would get all the glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.