



Sermon – March 27, 2022  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Matthew 6:5 – 18*

*Hebrews 4:16*

*Psalms 54:2*

Well as you're seated, let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to the book of Matthew chapter 6. Matthew 6. As we turn there, if you're a guest and joining us in the room or online for the first time, welcome home. You picked a great Sunday to get your start here at Central. And the reason is because for the last few months we've been journeying through the book of Genesis. But now as we prepare our hearts for Easter just a few weeks away, we're going to spend some time wrestling with a portion of the Sermon on the Mount recognizing the fact that Easter changes everything. So back in 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle Paul tells us that if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, we are the most to be pitied. That we should eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. But if Jesus is raised from the dead, and we know that He is, then that changes everything about us including the way that we pursue God through prayer. And that's one of the reasons I'm so excited about this season in our church. Starting today, we're going to be launching a 21 day prayer initiative as a church. You've heard us talking about it over the last several weeks and I'm going to walk us through it as a part of our message today. But I want to challenge you even now to be readying your hearts for that. And specifically you'll notice in the seat back right in front of you, there's a card that looks like this. Feel free to go ahead and grab that now. Because one of the things we're going to be doing as we walk through the text today is I'm going to be challenging you to identify one specific prayer request that you want to write down on this card and turn in at the end of the service today. Specifically, at the end of the message during the response song, we're going to have a chance to have already written these out and during the response song, I want to invite all of you to take a step of faith and bring these cards to the front, lay them at the steps, share a short prayer over them, and return to your seats as we are worshipping during that response song. Because we know that if Easter changes everything, then that ought to have a profound impact on our prayer life.

I was just at the dentist earlier this week. And I enjoy almost everything about going to the dentist. But there's one thing that I dread. You know, it's not the sharp objects that they're stabbing into your gums. It's not the bright lights that they have shining on you that often get

into your eyes. It's not even whenever they've got their hands shoved into my mouth and then they're asking me questions I can't actually respond to because my mouth is wide open and there's something in it. Now there's one thing that I dread every time I go to the dentist. And it's often a question that comes late in the dental appointment. How's your flossing going? I just fear it every time I go in there. Because I don't know what I'm going to say. Because the truth is, and my dentist is Craig Scasta, our deacon, I don't floss very often, Craig. I just want to be transparent here today. 40 years old, my teeth are doing just fine without it. I don't feel like I have a huge need. In fact, if I get something stuck in my teeth, I'm from Texas, I'll just use a tooth pick, not a piece of floss. But every time that question gets asked, I'm wrestling with, what do I say? Do I deceive and make it seem as if things are better? Or do I acknowledge the deficiency because I've reach a point in my life where I am content with complacency when it comes to flossing. I wonder how many of us face that same reality when it comes to prayer. That we often dread if somebody asks us, how's your prayer life going? What are things like for you in your prayer life towards God? We dread it because we know it's not what it ought to be. It isn't where it needs to be. It's not as good as it should be. And we have this low grade guilt that we don't measure up to God's expectations or other's expectations or even our own expectations about it. And the problem is you've lived this long with the life this good, perhaps you've just become satisfied with mediocrity in your prayer life. Do you find yourself complacent this morning when it comes to pursuing God in prayer? Well, if that is you, this text has a word for you and for all of us. Because what we're going to find this morning as we start this passage in Matthew chapter 6 in verse 5 is Jesus is calling us to prayer. And He's calling us to a life-changing pursuit of prayer. And I want you to follow along with me with the way that He talks about it here in Matthew chapter 6, beginning in verse 5. Notice what He says:

<sup>5</sup>And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. <sup>7</sup>And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Let's pause now to turn our hearts to God in prayer as this moment.

Father, we're coming to You, Lord, knowing that You know our needs before we ask them. That You are the giver of all good gifts. That Your word tells us that we do not have because we do not ask. And so this morning, Father, I'm praying in this moment as we turn to Your word that You would do a work in our hearts to reignite a fire to pursue you in prayer. And specifically, I'm lifting up this next 21 days, God, as we as a church commit to pray, commit to fast, commit to pursue You in a fresh way in advance of Easter. That You would meet us in that pursuit and You would not leave us where we are but change us to me more like Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

So this text here is coming from the Sermon on the Mount. And I want you to remember what's happening in the book of Matthew at this time. So Jesus has gone through His baptism, He's been in the wilderness to face temptation from the devil, and He is now performing miracles and teaching and drawing crowds. In fact, Matthew 4:24 tells us that Jesus' fame is spreading all

over the land. And the people have gathered with Him and now we have recorded before us perhaps the most important sermon in the history of the world. This Sermon on the Mount. Where Jesus is walking us through what it looks like to live the good life in the kingdom of God. And at the center of the heart of the Sermon on the Mount is this call to pray. One of the reasons I'm so excited about this 21 days is that part of what we're going to be doing together is journeying through this book called 21 Days to Childlike Prayer. You may have noticed as you came in the doors today that there were some tables there with black cloths on them. Those tables have these books and we want to invite you to grab one book per household on your way out. And the reason for this book is we want to spend about 15 minutes every day reading one chapter from this devotional book and wrestling with its call to pray. It's written by my friend Jed Copping. Maybe you remember Jed being with us last Summer and teaching us about prayer. It's going to be at the heart of what we do. And what this book is going to help us unveil is exactly what Matthew 6 is revealing to us. Is that if we want to experience life-changing prayer, there are four key things that need to be true about our hearts as we pursue God in prayer.

And these four key things Jed is going to walk through in week one of this book. And they spell out an acronym, B-E-S-T. That if we want to pursue God's best for our prayer life then we need to embody what we find here in this Sermon on the Mount. And the first of these four keys to life-changing prayer you'll find in the passage we already read, verses 5 through 8. The first is the B: believe God can do anything. Believe that God can do anything. Now what we have to recognize as we're talking about prayer is that prayer is at the heart of our spiritual warfare with the kingdom of darkness. That it is a battle of belief vs unbelief raging in our hearts each day as we wrestle with whether to give our problems and our plans and our purposes over to God. And what Jesus shows us here at the start of this text is that there are two ways that people can be pulled toward prayer. There is one pathway to prayer through hypocrisy and another pathway to prayer through humility. So look back at the text. Notice the way the hypocrite prays. The hypocrite pretends for others and depends on himself. So look back at verse 5. Look at how he pretends for others. It says:

<sup>5</sup>And when you pray, you must not pray like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

Now look down at verse 7. Look at the way that they depend on themselves. It says:

<sup>7</sup>And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think they will be heard for their many words.

So here's the key. How do you know if you're a hypocrite when it comes to prayer? Jesus is saying hypocrisy in prayer is such when you are more concerned that your prayers are seen on earth than you are concerned that they're seen in heaven. It's about perception. It's about performance. And he sets that aside and says, the way to pursue God and life-changing prayer is not through hypocrisy but through humility. And look at the way that shows up. Notice with me the contrast there. The hypocrite in their prayers is saying, I can do anything through my great prayers. But the humble are saying, God can do anything through my weak prayers. A great God responding to weak prayers can do anything that is needed in this world. That's why he's saying, believe that God can do anything. In the heart of humility in prayer, you see it on display

there, look back in verse 6. Why should we believe that God can do anything? Look at the end of 6. It says:

<sup>6</sup>...And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So our Father sees. But notice down in verse 8, at the end of verse 8.

<sup>8</sup> for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

It's not just that He sees, but that He knows. God doesn't just care, He is capable. He sees and knows. And if He sees and knows, then that means we can believe that He can do anything in our life. Let me tell you. That is a truth that should fuel us during this Easter season. Over these next few weeks, we're going to be remembering the way that East changes everything. And the reason we can believe that God can work in our prayer life is because we've seen the work He's done through His Son. That the holy God of the universe looked upon the sins of the world and rather than respond only in judgment, sent His one and only Son to take on flesh to live a perfect life. To die the death that we deserved. To go to the cross. Defeat the grave. Be raised again from the dead. To pour out His Spirit upon us. If God can do that, He can do anything. It's one of the reasons I want to challenge us over these next three weeks to read. As we work through this text, there are four specific next steps I want to challenge you to take. And the first one is to commit daily to read from this book. And I just want you to hear Jed's heart in writing this so it will set the stage for what you're going to do this week. Listen to what he says.

Over the past several years, I have seen prayerless people start to pray and see actual specific answers to prayer over and over. I'm praying that God would use this book to do the same for you as well. I'm praying that Jesus becomes so real to you that you talk to him in prayer every day, that you see specific answers to prayer, and that you too feel comfortable helping others experience Jesus through prayer. Am I promising that God will answer all of your prayers just like you want? Absolutely not. But I believe that 21 days from now anyone who reads, engages in the process, and applies what they learn in this book will be able to pray in a way that enables them to experience God's power in their day-to-day life as we have. That's right, anyone. Why? Because the secret to a "daily, life-giving, see-specific-answers-to-prayer" type of prayer life isn't found in becoming more spiritually sophisticated. It only requires that we become more childlike.

That sets the stage for the rest of our journey through the book of Matthew. Because I want you to see beginning in verse 9 that there is a second key dimension to life-changing prayer. It's not just to believe that God can do anything. But also to embrace our childlike identity. That's the E in B-E-S-T. Embrace our childlike identity. And notice the way He talks about it in verse 9.

<sup>9</sup>Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. <sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

So Jesus is showing us here that the heart of humility in prayer will manifest itself by embracing a childlike identity. And why is it that we need that childlike identity rooted in humility? It's because pride prevents prayer. Pride tells you that you don't need God. That you can do things on your own. And yet what we find here in verses 9 and 10 is that Jesus says, we must embrace

a childlike identity if we want to have a thriving prayer life. And that childlike identity shows up in at least two ways. You'll notice in verse 9 the way that it shows up in terms of childlike dependence. So He says there, pray then like this: Our father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Notice what's happening. You might lose the force of this but for someone in that culture to refer to the God of the universe as their father would be breathtaking, shocking, way too intimate, way too close, way different of a relationship than most people would see it. And yet, that's what Jesus does. He calls God our Father and He is inviting us into dependence upon Him. He calls us our Father. But also, He points out where He is. You see at the end of verse 9? Our Father in heaven. One of the things I love that Jed will point out this week in the book is that this childlike dependence is rooted in both realities: that God is our Father and that He is in heaven. In other words, because He's our Father, He's willing to work in our lives. And because He's in heaven, He is able to work in our lives. And for that reason, we should come to Him in prayer with childlike dependence.

But He also calls us to a childlike boldness. Look back at verse 10. Look at how bold this prayer is.

<sup>10</sup>Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This is a prayer of spiritual battle. He is calling on God to advance the kingdom of light against the kingdom of darkness to impose His will against our enemy in our life and in the world around us. You can't get more bold than that. It reminds me of the way the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 4:16 has this to say. He says:

<sup>16</sup>Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

And the challenge I want to lay before us, Central family, during these 21 days is that we would pursue God with this type of childlike boldness. Because what Hebrews 4 is driving at is he's saying, when we come to God in prayer the main thing we are called to bring is desperation and boldness, bringing before God our needs. Oh, God, this is what I need in my life. This is what has to happen. This is where my desperation lies. And then what occurs is when we bring God our needs, He gives us His grace. He manifests His mercy. I've got some friends in the church here that are raising young kids at home and it was getting close to bedtime and it was time for their bedtime routine including their nighttime prayers. And so, their young daughter, she was carrying her sippy cup or whatever she was drinking from, and they wanted her to set that down so it wasn't a distraction during prayers. And so they asked her to set it down and she was unwilling to consent to their request. So then things escalated from there to eventually the mom had to take that sippy cup away and set it down and tell her, she could have it back when the prayers were done. And once that dispute was settled, then they asked the daughter if she would like to pray. And here's how she prayed, Jesus, I pray that I can have my cup of water back. Amen. And then when that prayer was done, she immediately grabbed the sippy cup and went on about her way. Think about that kind of boldness. That in front of a parent, given the needs, there is no reluctance, no hesitation, no resistance, there is just the boldness that can only be explained by the childlike reality in her life. And how much more so should that be true for us who come to God through Jesus? I love the way the author, Paul Miller, says this about our prayers. He says:

Jesus isn't just the Savior of my soul, He's also the Savior of my prayers. And my prayers come before the throne of God as if they are the prayers of Jesus.

And so the second next step I want to challenge us to take is not just to read daily through this book, but I want to personally invite you weekly to gather with others in our church to pray on Wednesday nights. So starting this Wednesday night, and for the next several weeks as we culminate towards Easter, our normal Wednesday night activities at 6:00 will continue as usual. But our equip class will now have a prayer focus in it. And I want to challenge you to come, bring that childlike identity, not just as an individual, but corporately. And this particular week, we're going to focus some of our prayer time on the two open minister positions we have in our church. Because let me tell you right now. I'm excited at what's happening. Just a brief update. We have a candidate, both for our missions role and our worship role. They've been through our staff interview process and unanimously put forward to our vetting committees. They've been through our vetting committee process. They've been unanimously put forward now to our deacons and our deacons will get to interview both of these men tomorrow night. And if God keeps things on the path it looks like it's heading, then this Wednesday night, we're going to have the chance during that equip class time at 6:00 in the Family Life Center to have an interview time with both of these men. For you to get to know them. But part of the reason we will do that is not just to vet them but to pray over this entire situation. To come with the kind of childlike identity that God is calling us to here in this time. And I want to challenge you right now as much as you're able over these next several Wednesday nights to come and let's pray together corporately.

And that's going to set the stage for the third dimension of life-changing prayer that's right here in the text because Jesus doesn't just focus on how we pray, but what we pray. If you'll look back in verses 11 through 13, you'll see the S in that acronym B-E-S-T. The S is to specify your request. Specify your request. So notice how it goes on there in verse 11.

<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup>and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

So as I'm talking through this third dimension of life-changing prayer, I'd like to invite you to pick this card back up. Hold it in your hand as we're doing it. If you've got a pen, grab it. Because in just a minute or two, I'm going to be inviting you to write down a specific prayer request right now. You'll notice at the top of it, you can mark if it's a request for prayer or an answered prayer. You can list it out on there. And if you're up for it, you can put your name on it or you can leave it anonymous. Whatever you feel comfortable with. But I want you, even as I'm speaking God's words over us from God's words over us, that you would be asking God to show you what it is that He would have you write down on this card in just a moment. Now I'm curious, how many of y'all were like our family on Monday night when the big storms rolled through who spent a little time close together in a safe space in your house. Anybody else that was there like that with us? OK. Some of you are like, "What are you talking about? It's no big deal." Normally when we pray for the weather, it's generic prayers. God would you bring some rain because my grass is about to die. God would you provide some precipitation to help our fields grow. Would You stop the rain because we've got an outdoor wedding to go to. It feels as if it's generic and vague. But my guess is, Monday night for many of us, our prayer life about

the weather was a little bit more specific. God, would You spare our house? God, would You spare our neighborhood? God, would You spare our street? God, would You spare our community? God, would You spare our state? In other words, when the stakes went up, so did the specificity. And what Jesus is showing us here is that specific prayer should be at the heart of what we pursue in our prayer life with Him. One of the things that Jed is going to unpack throughout our time in this book over the next 3 weeks is the idea that specificity leads to visibility. That when we pray specific prayers, it gives an opportunity for the invisible God to become visible in our life as He meets our needs with what is best. And notice the three types of specific prayers that we see on display here in verses 11 through 13. You'll see in verse 11 that we're called to pray specifically for provision. So it says there,

<sup>11</sup>Give us this day our daily bread,

He's speaking about our deepest needs. Our greatest desires. Bread. The ability to sustain life. He's saying, pray for that provision. Pray that God would provide. And I'm sure that's not just when it comes to physical needs, but spiritual needs and emotional needs and mental needs and social needs. Every need that you have is an opportunity to come to God with specific prayer. But he goes on there. He challenges us, second, to pray specifically for pardon. So look in verse 12.

<sup>12</sup>and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

In other words, our deepest sins should drive us to our most specific prayers. Remember, Isaiah 55:7, the way that it talks about how God, through His coming Messiah, will work to set us free from sin. One of the things that it says is that through that Messiah, God will abundantly pardon. He will separate us from the judgment we deserve for our sins. And so when we come to God in confession and repentance, it's not some vague request for forgiveness. It's substantive. It's specific in the confession. You're acknowledging, not just that you've done wrong, but what wrongs you have done. Praying for God's forgiveness. Praying for victory in a way that sets the stage for the third type of specific prayer we see here. It's not just for provision and for pardon, but look at verse 13. He says to pray specifically for protection.

<sup>13</sup>And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

In other words, our deepest spiritual battles should drive us to the most specific spiritual prayers. When satan tempts us, when the flesh entices us, when the world allures us, we should take those moments as an opportunity to turn back to God for the kind of protection that Jesus calls us to pray for right here. To set us free from the sin that could so easily entangle us. And maybe for you, if you find yourself given over to that secret sin right now that nobody knows, the first specific prayer request you need to write down on this card is that God would give you victory over that sin for the next 24 hours. You walk faithfully for that 24 hours and stack another 24 hours, and then another 24 hours. That's the kind of heart to pray for protection that Jesus is calling us to here. So right here in this moment, I want you to pick this card up. Because I'm going to ask you now to take a moment to write this down. I'm going to get a pen out myself up here at the front and in the middle of this message we're just going to bring our specific requests to God. We've seen several different ways he's calling us to pray specifically: for provision, for pardon, for protection. And what I want to challenge you to do is to write down that specific

request. Write down that thing that's been nudging at your heart. Write down even that thing you're not even sure God could do, but man if He worked in this way it would make the invisible God visible in your life. I'm going to give you about 30 seconds right now to start writing that down. I'm going to do the same up here. Ask God to guide you in this moment. I mean, I've had in the last few weeks in the lead up to this, we've had people that have started reading this book before we even released it to everybody else, because they've heard we're going to be doing it. And one man wrote down a prayer request specifically that God would open the heart of his boss because he needed to have a difficult conversation with him. And he prayed specifically for how that conversation would go and a few days later, they sat down and boom, God showed up. He answered that prayer exactly the way that this man desired. There was another man who was had, his spouse was at a crossroad with her work, wasn't sure if she was supposed to continue in this job or to move something else. And within 24 hours of writing down this prayer, she saw a clear sign of which way she should go. And for you kids that are in the room, this is for you as well. I know one kid in the room who's struggling with fear about playing baseball with live pitchers. They got beamed a while back, hit by a pitch, they're unsure about what it's going to be like the next time in the batter's box. And you can pray for that, God to overcome that fear. Or maybe you're someone as a child who's wrestling with bad dreams that come up every night in your prayer life, uh in your sleeping experience. Maybe you can ask God to set you free from that. I don't know what the Lord's laid on your heart. But I know that God moves through the specific requests of His people. So let's take time now, I'm going to give you about 30 seconds to write this down as I write mine.

Take another 10 seconds.

Feel free to keep writing if you are still working on it or if the Lord hasn't put anything on your heart. Perhaps by the end of this message, He will. What I want you to see on the screens right now that in addition to your personal requests, there are two specific church-wide prayer requests I'm going to call our congregation to pray for during the days ahead. And they're grounded in our theme verse for these 21 days. Notice what it says there. Psalm 54:2 says:

**<sup>2</sup>O God, hear my prayers; give ear to the words of my mouth.**

That's the theme verse for this time together. That God would hear and that God would respond. And I hope if you're taking notes, you'll write down that passage, Psalm 54:2, so you can have it as a note in there to keep coming back over this time. But one of the reasons that we selected Psalm 54:2 is it goes hand in hand with the two church-wide prayer requests I want us to challenge, be challenged to pray for repeatedly during this time. You'll notice on the screens that the first one is we want to pray that over the next 6 weeks, between now and May 15<sup>th</sup>, that God would raise up 54 of you who would apply to participate in the training program we started talking about last week. That's that two-semester training program launching this Fall to take us deeper into God's word, to equip us to be more faithful in ministry and in life. And I'm praying that God will raise up 54 of us. Psalm 54. But then the two will also remind you, Psalm 54:2, to pray specifically for our two open minister positions. I gave you the update earlier. But there are still additional steps to go. And I want us to pray as a congregation that over the next several weeks that by Easter Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, that God will finalize the plans to bring these two men as our next ministers for missions and for worship. So every time you see Psalm 54:2 it will remind you to pray for 54 of us to step into that training program and for these 2 men to come as



ministers. That's the type of specificity that we are seeking during this time. Not just individually, but corporately. And the reason that we should pursue God with that type of specificity we're going to find on display right now down beginning in verse 16. Because we've seen so far 3 of the dimensions for life-changing prayer and I just want you to notice one more before we draw things to a close.

What's the T in the word B-E-S-T? The word T, the letter T is for trust God to do what's best with your request. To trust God to do what's best with your request. And we'll see that beginning down in verse 16. Notice how He begins to speak about fasting. He says:

<sup>16</sup>And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup>But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup>that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

My guess is, if your spiritual life is anything like mine, that low grade guilt you sometimes feel about how your prayer life doesn't measure up to what it should be, you feel that on turbo charge when it comes to the subject of fasting. What is that supposed to look like for us? Well, the reason that we turn our attention to this passage about fasting when we're talking about trusting for God to do what's best in our request is that one of the best ways we can demonstrate our deep trust in a great God is through fasting. That's what Jesus is talking about here. That prayer and fasting go hand in hand as we turn our requests over to God and trust that He will do what's best. And what does that look like? What does fasting even look like today? Well, what we find is that Jesus and the whole Bible make clear that fasting is setting aside actual food for the pursuit of spiritual food. What it means in our lives is that we are saying, no, to food so that we can say, yes, to God for a season, for a moment, for a meal. We are saying, we would rather hunger for the food of this world so that we might have a greater hunger for the food of the heavenly world. And what we find here in the text is that we are called to connect fasting and prayer. That they mutually reinforce one another and amplify our pursuit of God. So I love the way one author, John Mark Comer talks about fasting. He says, fasting is a way to turn your body into an ally in your fight with the flesh rather than an adversary. And that's what we want to do in the weeks ahead together as a church. So why is it that we should pursue fasting? Well, notice what Jesus says there beginning in verse 17. We should pursue fasting because fasting fosters a trust in God that He will do what's best for our request by fueling in us a hunger for God. So notice how it says it there in verse 17.

<sup>17</sup>But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face.

And the key phrase I want you to focus on is right there at the start of verse 17; when you fast. Notice the phrase. It's not, if you fast. It's not, if you ever get around to fasting. It's when you fast. There's an expectation that's there. That this will be a regular pattern in our lives. That the circumstances of our lives would be such that it would regularly drive us to a hunger for God that satisfies our desire, not through physical food but supernatural food as we pursue God in prayer. And that's what fasting can do for us. He's telling us there, as Jesus speaks, He's telling us that abstinence can be the avenue for abundance. That God can meet our needs when we say, no, to our deepest desires for food. But it's not just about a hunger for God. Notice also here that

fasting fuels our trust in God's ability to answer our prayers by doing what is best by not just a hunger for God, but a hope in God. Look at verse 18 at this hope.

<sup>18</sup>that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So how does this fasting cause hope in God? It reminds us of the reward set before us. It reminds us of the destination in a way that motivates us on the journey. So last week was Spring Break and our family took a road trip up to Dallas and I'm sure we're not the only family in this room that's ever done this. We had two possible ways we could drive home from Dallas to College Station. One of them probably had less traffic and was an easier ride, but the other one had Bucees. Which do you think we chose? We took option 2. And when we made that decision, we also didn't eat much at lunch. We didn't snack on the way there. We withheld ourselves from food for a season for the joy that was set before us. For the reward that was to come. That there was a short term suffering for a long term breakthrough. That's the picture that Jesus is giving us here when we open our hearts to God through fasting. That we would voluntarily embrace the suffering of withholding food from ourselves for a moment so that we can pursue a greater reward. So that we can demonstrate to God our trust in Him grounded in our hope from Him. And the last challenge I want to give us as a congregation, the last next step, I want to invite each of you into is to join us weekly on a fast on Wednesdays. So we've already talked about how on Wednesdays we're going to be gathering together at 6:00 p.m. in the Family Life Center for our prayer time. And what I want to challenge you to do is to commit, as you're able, to fast during those days. And that can look a couple of different ways. Maybe for some of you, that means you might choose to skip two meals, both breakfast and lunch. For others of you, you might skip one meal, either breakfast or lunch. Maybe others might have limitations from a medical standpoint and you can come up with a creative alternative that allows you to participate. The point is that we can hunger for God individually and then come together that night to pursue God corporately. And what we'll do is we'll have times of prayer and at the conclusion of those Wednesday night meals, we will have the opportunity to break that fast together. We'll have refreshments that will be available at the conclusion of that prayer time, both as we enjoy some food and fellowship, and continue to pursue God in the season. Maybe you've never done it. Or maybe you haven't fasted for a long time. Would you step into this moment with us so that our hunger for God will be on display to God in a way that exhibits the trust we have in God to do what is best for our requests.

As we prepare to close, just want you to look at this card one more time. Maybe this card is still blank for you. It's not too late to write something down. Maybe you need to wrestle through what God needs to do in your life through provision, through pardon, through protection. Perhaps for a prayer for comfort or care. Maybe hope or healing. Maybe you need to write down something related to a dilemma or a desire or your plans or your problems. But as we close, before I pray, just want you to read over what you wrote one more time. And to pray in the quietness of your own heart that God would move in response to your specific requests and in just a moment I will pray for us all and we'll prepare to respond to God by coming down here to the front and placing these cards at the steps. You take a moment to pray silently before I pray over all of us.

Father, Your word tells us that if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, we can command a mountain to move and it will move. That's the kind of power You have, God. The work that You're going to do in these next 21 days isn't on the basis of our righteousness, our discipline, our effectiveness, our perseverance. It's going to be because of the power of Your Spirit responding to the weak prayers of Your people. And I pray that, Lord, in the days ahead, You would strengthen us for this journey we're about to embark on as a church. Would You help us to be consistent in our reading of this book? Would you help us be relentless in the writing of these prayers? Would you help us to be faithful in gathering to pray on Wednesdays? And would You help us to be desperate enough to fast each week, God? We're not doing it for our sake, but for Yours, God. And I pray for the requests that are on these cards, Lord. That You would move in them and through them. And whether or not You change the circumstances that prompted that prayer, Lord, I pray that You would change our hearts in the process. That You would do abundantly more than we ask or imagine in this time. We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.