

# Spiritual Progress

by Tim Conway

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**Scripture:** Exodus 32:11, Matthew 17:20, Mark 9:29, Hebrews 13:5, John 16:24, James 5:16, Ephesians 3:20, 1 John 5:14

**Topics:** "Fervent Prayer", "Seeking God"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Father, we come to You tonight. Lord, we are a weak lot. Lord, we serve a mighty God.

And we call upon You. Lord, I don't know what's happened in this building. I know that this conference has been held here in past years.

But I don't know the history. And I don't know if the Gospel's been preached here on a regular basis. I don't know if You've filled this place.

I don't know if this is a place of regular salvation. But I pray that it would be that. I pray that it would be a place that You would inhabit.

A place that You would fill with Your glory. Lord, please draw close to us. Draw close.

I pray that these messages on leadership, Lord, use them. We need leaders. We need pastors throughout New England.

And I pray, Father, that as we're calling upon You, You would remember our brother Paul Snyder. Lord, he served You, poured out his life for these last years there in the jungles of Indonesia. And I pray that You'd have mercy upon him.

Lord, restore the functions. Restore his health. Allow him to serve You in the future.

Allow him to return to the mission field at some point. Lord, we believe that You are the God who heals us. We believe that You are a God of the miraculous.

We believe that You do exceedingly abundantly beyond what we ask or think. And we believe that You put that in Scripture for a reason. Because You would have us to expect things from You that even go beyond our thinking and our expectation.

Father, please, amaze us. Amaze us in the life of Paul Snyder. Amaze us in the life of the church here in Portland and in the life of the Fellowship Conference here in New England.

Amaze us, Father. Do such things in our midst. Oh, Lord.

When I come to this place, I think about praying Edward Payson. And when I think about him, I think how badly... I pray that things would happen in Portland that would rival what happened in his day. That we wouldn't simply read about past historical chapters in the Christian history books.

But, Lord, that You would do such things today in New England that would cause future generations to have more books written about. Father, please, I pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Is there a problem with the volume? Okay. Well, brethren, over the next three days, we just had Clint Leiter at our church this past Lord's Day. And he brought a message from 1 Timothy 4, v. 15.

Not that I want you to turn there. But Paul is encouraging Timothy. He's encouraging Timothy that he practice certain things, immerse himself in certain things, so that everybody might see his progress.

Progress in the Christian life. It's essential. God has not called us to stagnation, but to growth.

You ever read those texts? More and more. There's supposed to be an increase. Can you think of any? Can you think of any verses that speak about more in the Christian life? Anybody? What do you got? Strength to strength.

Yes, that's a good verse. Strength to strength. You know the one I like? It's there in the Proverbs.

You got this idea that the Christian life... Is the Christian life in Scripture portrayed as starting out at noon and then night comes? What do you think? Yes and no. Right? We have the Christian life like the rising of the sun until the fullness of day in the Proverbs, but then Jesus also said we need to work while it's day because the night is coming. Both are accurate ways to look at the reality of the Christian life.

Progress. Progress. I want to talk about progress on three fronts.

Tonight, Lord willing, prayer. Tomorrow, perhaps Luke 16 and giving. And then I think on Saturday, evangelism.

If the Lord will help. Now, look, if you've heard something of what I'm going to bring tonight, I would just ask you please hear it again. The main reason I want to preach to you on prayer from this text, I feel as much as anything is as a fresh reminder for myself.

In 2011, I preached, not exactly what you're going to get tonight, but something similar. And I just feel like I need this again. Sunday morning, July 15th, not of this year, but in 1866, Charles Spurgeon preached a

message called Order and Argument in Prayer.

The words that he spoke on that Sunday morning reached my ears not long after the Lord saved me back in 1990. I bought a little book called Twelve Sermons on Prayer by Charles Spurgeon. Order and Argument in Prayer.

He preached that morning from a text out of Job. And I want you to look at it. Turn in your Bibles to Job 23.

Job 23, verses 3 and 4. Job. Job and all of his afflictions. Oh, that I knew where I might find Him.

That I might come even to His seat. I would lay my case. The King James Version says, I would order my cause.

I would lay my case before Him. I'm reading from the ESV. I would lay my case before Him and fill my mouth with arguments.

And therefore, Spurgeon's title, Order and Argument in Prayer. Here's Job, an afflicted child of God. He doesn't pray to be healed.

He doesn't pray, Lord, give me my children back. He prays what so often we feel in the depths of our soul. Lord, I just want to find You.

Job was praying. He was asking. He was seeking.

But you know what? He wasn't finding his God. That's what he really wanted. Lord, come to me.

Show me Your presence. He wanted to come before the high court of heaven is what he wanted to do and make such arguments as he was persuaded would hold weight with God. You see, he was persuaded.

However the book ends. You know how the book ends. But however it ended, here's what I know about Job.

Job felt like he had a case to make. And he thought if just he could get a hearing from God, if God would just show up, that He could lay His case before him. And you know what Spurgeon emphasized in that sermon? He emphasized that the manner in which Job approaches God ought to be our manner of approach when we pray.

Spurgeon said this, some utter whatever sentences come rushing into their minds like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds with little attention to what is said. Now don't you wish you could do that? Spurgeon's imagery. Like a herd of swine or a pack of hounds.

Do you ever think of people like that praying? Spurgeon thought like that. But we sit in prayer meetings, right? We hear one another pray. And of course, we want to encourage people, don't worry about what other people think.

But we do think things and we listen. And some people's prayers are much more effectual in prayer meetings. Have you ever been in a prayer meeting? How many of you have been in a corporate prayer meeting? I hope every hand.

Some people when they pray, they stir you up, right? And some people want to put you to sleep. Well, they don't want to put you to sleep, but they want to the way they pray. There are some people when they

pray, it kills a prayer meeting.

And there are other people when they pray, you get encouraged. And your faith is stirred. That's a reality.

And some people do. They just utter... Well, I've had to talk to some young Christians before. Just crazy.

I mean, sometimes it's like they don't know... I've had people in the church, they're praying and it's almost like they don't know what to say. But here's the thing. Should we argue? Order an argument.

That's what Job said. He wanted to fill his mouth with arguments. Clearly, this doesn't mean quarreling.

It doesn't mean disagreement. What happens when a man comes to a court of law and he comes before a judge and he's got a jury over here? He wants to argue his case. He wants to show you he's in the right.

He wants to lay his evidence out there. He wants to make the case that he is in the right. Praying like that.

That sloppy prayer. Job says this several times. Just stay right there.

You don't need to turn to these. But in Job 13.3, Job says, I would speak to the Almighty and I desire to argue my case with God. Again, in 13.15, though He slay me, I will hope in Him, yet I will argue my ways to His face.

Now that's bold. When God shows up, Job is very humbled. He repents in dust and ashes.

In Job 13.18, behold, I have prepared my case. I know that I shall be in the right. And here's the thing, what Spurgeon recognized is that when he searched the pages of Old Testament Scripture, he found that it wasn't just Job who approached God this way.

He found that the ancient saints had a tendency, they had a habit, they had this approach to God where they were careful in presenting their argument. They didn't just pray haphazardly. Now look, there are times, yes, there are times when it's necessary to rush before God.

There's times when we need to pray. We need to lift our voice. There's an emergency at hand.

But would you just rush into a court of law without any forethought about making your case just on the spur of the moment? Unprepared? Sloppy? Ordinarily, as a rule, we shouldn't come before the King of Kings unprepared, thoughtless, and unorganized. Listen to Spurgeon. See yonder priest.

He has a sacrifice to offer, but he does not rush into the court of the priests and hack at the bullock with the first poleaxe upon which he can lay his hand. But when he rises, he washes his feet at the brazen laver. He puts on his garments and adorns himself with his priestly vestments.

Then he comes to the altar with his victim properly divided according to the law and is careful to do according to the command. And he takes the blood in a bowl and pours it in an appropriate place at the foot of the altar. Not throwing it just as it may occur to him.

And kindles the fire, not with the common flame, but with the sacred fire from off the altar. Our spiritual sacrifices should be offered with holy carefulness. God forbid that our prayer should be a mere leaping out of one's bed, kneeling down, saying anything that comes to hand.

On the contrary, may we wait upon the Lord with holy fear and sacred awe. So anyway, I'm done by and large with telling you about Spurgeon and preaching that message. But I'll tell you this, that sermon impacted my own prayer life and has.

It stayed with me for the last... I'll be saved 30 years in 2020. So I'm closing in on three decades. And probably in my prayer life, that sermon of Spurgeon's has had one of the greatest impacts on my own prayer life.

I want to give you some examples. And back in 2011 when I preached this, I had my oldest daughter Charity in mind. I thought maybe I would use one of my daughters again as an example.

A daughter, I have two of them here, I can relate to this. Daughters asking me for something. And I want to use them as an example as to what I mean by order and argument in prayer.

What does that look like? Think with me here. First, let's consider a careless, lackadaisical approach. Here's what I want to put on the table.

Both of my daughters have bank accounts that are attached to mine. I can put funds in there or take funds out whenever necessary. They would probably rather I didn't take funds out at times.

But let's just suppose one of my daughters wants me to take some money from my checking account and transfer it over to their checking account. In fact, let's be very specific. My daughter would like me to give her \$300 from my account and transfer it over to hers.

So that's what's on the table here. Now think with me here. Because this all has to do with prayer.

This has to do with how we approach the Lord. Think about this. The lackadaisical approach.

I'm talking about no order and argument. I'm talking about my daughter wants me to put money in her account. She runs by me one day when I come home.

She comes out of the kitchen. She passes by and kind of mumbles to me something under her breath about I want some money. That's all she says.

She doesn't even wait for an answer. She just goes past up the stairs. That's how some people pray.

They don't really look for an answer. At some prayer meetings, I hear people pray and I really wonder, do they have a burden about that? I know a lot of the prayers that go up at our church, people do have burdens for those. And sometimes they go up because the prayer request came out in the prayer.

In our prayer meeting, people heard there was a request and they love that brother or sister and even though they might not know about it specifically, they pray for it. But some people, I'm afraid, they pray no expectation. What would you think of that? My daughter goes past me.

She asks for \$300. Just kind of mumbles it. And doesn't even engage me.

No eye contact. She goes up the stairs. I never hear about it again.

What would you think about that? I just ask you, consider your own prayers. How many of them are like that? Where you throw something up to the Lord, no expectation that He's really going to come through. You pray about it one time.

You lay it before the Lord. Why? Why would you even pray it? Well, you've got to pray about something. You just kind of put filler in there.

None of that. That's not order and argument. Let's go to a second example.

How about the laundry list approach? You ever heard in a prayer meeting? Maybe you've been guilty of this. You just pray one thing after. Give me this.

Give me this. Give me that. Give me that.

I mean, imagine this. Let's run through this scenario again. I come home.

My daughter walks by me. This time she doesn't go past and go upstairs. She makes eye contact with me.

And it's just basically, Dad, I want a phone. I want a car. I want food.

I want candy. I want a cell phone. I want money.

I want my own room. I want clothes. I want this.

That's how some people pray. There's no order in argument. It's just the laundry list approach.

Many pray like that. Asking for every conceivable thing that we want, have wanted, might want, but no case for any of it is made. Now look, I'm going to show you that this is a very biblical way to pray to make your case, to lay your arguments out there.

I'm going to show you that it is. So far, I've talked about Spurgeon. I'm giving the examples.

But I'm going to take you to Scripture. So you just hold on. But let's go back to the scenario again with my daughter.

How about the use of my name excessively approach? Can you imagine if one of my daughters came to me? And you were there. You were witnessing this. You came in the door with me.

And my daughter, she comes up and she says, Dad, please, Dad, put some money. Oh, Dad, please, Dad. Dad, can I have some money, Dad? Have you ever heard people pray like that? They use God's name like ten times in every single sentence.

I wonder whether that's vain repetition. Using God's name in vain. What is that? That sounds like you don't know what you're praying for.

You have no case to make. And you're just putting filler in using God's name. Or how about this? The unnatural approach.

Now, I don't know about the circles here, but I know that when I was first saved, I kind of cut my teeth in some of the Reformed Baptist circles. And I would hear men pray in a whole different tone than what they normally spoke in. You ever heard that? Could you imagine if you came in with me and my daughter comes up in some unnatural tone? Oh, Father, I would like You to put some money in the account if it be Your will.

Oh, could you imagine that? You'd look at me, what's wrong with your daughter? There are Christians that pray that way. It's like, be yourself when you pray to the Lord. In my estimation, you get these, oh, if it be Your will.

All these ifs and unnatural tones. That speaks to me more of unbelief and hypocrisy than anything. The unnatural approach.

Artificial tones. Repeated ifs. Ifs.

If. If it be Your will. If it be Your will.

Look, I know we need to be surrendered to God's will, but I hear the ifs so often. George Mueller said this, in my younger years, I had a good many ifs, but those are all gone. I know that the Lord has the means at His command to answer all my prayers if I come believing, asking in the name of Christ.

I mean, we need boldness. Boldness. Not a bunch of ifs, like is God going to do it or is He not going to do it? I mean, we need the boldness of Jacob.

I am not going to let you go until you bless me. I'm going to get this blessing. How about the roundabout approach? You say, what do you mean by that? Well, I mean this.

Where somebody's praying for something, but you hardly know what they're praying for or who they're praying about. I mean, if I walk in and one of my daughters says, oh Father, I would like to come into Your presence and ask You to consider showing certain favor and blessing. Please grant such mercies as I now petition Thee for... You know, I will go back to Spurgeon in a second.

Somewhere I saw, I think this is in his lectures to his students. There was a guy preaching at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. And I think it was a young guy.

And he was opening the service and he was praying. And Spurgeon actually finally went up to him and laid hold on his arm and stopped him from praying and said, you know, Son, just ask your Heavenly Father for something. You remember Abraham? Oh, that Ishmael might live before You.

There it is. You know the name. You know what he wants.

To the point. Don't beat around the bush. Extra words and excess and eloquence.

But you say, yeah, but you're making a case to make these arguments before God. Is that useless? No, I'm going to show you that is not useless. And that is not a waste of time.

Let's be distinct about what we want. What we want. Be distinct.

Say what you mean. Mean what you say. I mean, what I want from my daughter is, Dad, I want \$300.

Would you please put \$300 in my account? Now, the order and argument approach. Let's look at this. My daughter.

My daughter comes to me. Maybe she says, Daddy. Not bad to use some affection, right? That goes a long way.

Can we pray, Abba? Father? If one of them said, Daddy? Again, very distinct, to the point. I'd like you to put \$300 in my account. Dad, I have an internship and I'm taking college classes.

The internship I'm not going to be paid for. And Dad, I'm broke. You know what? That holds some weight.

We're a broke people. That's a good place. I'm poor.

I can't do this myself. I'm out of resources. And she's giving me all the reasons.

Mom thinks it's a good idea. And Dad, you wanted me to take the internship. You wanted me to go to school.

And now that I'm doing that, I had to quit that other job where I was making money. Dad, you know I have a car and I need to put gas in. Dad, you don't want me riding around on fumes all the time.

Plus, I'll be able to do some kind things for other people. And you go through... Daddy, I'll be able to help others. Dad, you said... That's powerful.

Dad, you said that if I went to school and I couldn't work and I got into financial difficulties, you said you'd help me. You remember that? Just laying the arguments out there. One after another.

Dad, knowing how generous you are, that's a good one. Dad, my friends will know how generous you are. You see, just bringing out the hammer of prayer and you whack that same nail and you drive it down deep.

That's what I'm talking about. Now listen, if we make progress in our praying, we'll make progress at this point. How to approach the Lord.

See, this has to do with... The Lord said that you don't have because you don't ask. But I'm thinking that the lackadaisical approach is not the kind of asking that God has in mind. Or the abundant, flippant use of His name.

Or laundry list approach. There's something about laying out an argument when you go to the Lord. Laying out your case.

And I want you to see this. I want you to see this in Scripture. Go to Exodus 32 please.

Exodus 32. I want you to see Moses. I want you to see how Moses... You know what Moses encountered.

He encountered the Lord God on different occasions ready to wipe out and annihilate the Hebrew children out there in the wilderness. Why? Their repeated stiff-necked attitude. Their repeated sin.

Their repeated... They spurned God over and over. They rebelled from one day to the next. And I'll tell you, when Moses came along, he didn't just say, mumbling as he went by God, oh, please don't destroy them.

And then never look for any answer. He didn't give just a laundry list. Oh Lord, would You please make sure that our shoes don't wear out? Would You please make sure that fiery serpents don't come up out of the sand? Would You please make sure we have enough water? Would You please make sure that the manna doesn't stop? That wasn't it because that wasn't what was on his mind at that point in time.

He was singular. He brought out that hammer and he had one thing in mind. Lord, don't destroy Your people.

And he laid his case out. And I want you to see it, because if you see it and it grabs you, it will help you pray. Look at this.

Exodus 32.7 This is what I want to start reading. Classic example from our Bibles of order and argument in prayer. This is huge.

If you grasp this, it will alter your prayer life. Notice this. In v. 7, the Lord said to Moses, go down, for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

They've turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people.

Behold, it's a stiff-necked people. Now therefore, let Me alone that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you. Now notice, here is where Moses prays.

Notice. Brothers and sisters, this was recorded for us. Have you ever gone to 1 Corinthians 10? Where it tells us about... Let me ask you this.

1 Corinthians 10, why does the Apostle Paul say that these things were written? For upon whom? What? The end of the ages. That's us. These things were written for us.

God wants to teach us. Don't go back there and say, well, that's some Old Testament thing. That is a New Testament thing.

That is for the people upon whom the ends of the age have come. The ends of the world. That's us.

God wants to teach us. Notice Moses' approach. But Moses implored the Lord his God.

Now notice what he said. This is what you want to know. This is what you want to learn from.

Why does your wrath burn hot against you? Just capture these two words. Your people. Did you notice what God said back in v. 7? Moses, go down for your people.

You catch that? God says, Moses, they're your people. Moses comes back and says, Lord, they're Your people. I love that.

I love that. That is powerful! Brethren, when we pray to say if you're praying for somebody and they're a child of God, Lord, they're Your people. Or if you're praying for yourself, I am your child.

I am one of your people. That holds tremendous weight when it comes to prayer. I don't want you to turn to this passage.

I want you to stay right here. You've got to stay here in Exodus. But listen to me.

Listen to this. In John 16.26, Jesus said in that day, He's talking to His disciples. He's talking to us.

In that day, and then that would be today, in that day, you will ask in My name. Jesus is saying this to His disciples. You will ask in My name.

I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf. What? Jesus is saying, you're going to pray? I'm not saying I'm going to ask on your behalf. He's not denying He's an intercessor.

But what's He saying? I'm not saying I'm going to ask the Father on your behalf. For the Father Himself loves you. Do you hear what our Lord's saying? That holds weight.

Scripture says, Father, You love Me. Powerful to plead that. I was talking about people that use the name of God like vainly repetitious.

But it is not vain repetition when you say, Abba, Father. And you use that name with purpose. Because you're using it because you know the meaning behind it.

You used to be a rebel. You used to be separate when you knew not God is how Scripture speaks. He was not your Father.

He was not your God. To come to Him and say, I am one of your people. You are my God.

That holds tremendous weight. Moses turns that thing. Lord, they are Your people.

I've never forgotten a prayer of Spurgeon's. Somewhere else. Again, I think this comes from his lectures.

Listen to him. He says, when I was wracked some months ago with pain, you know he had gout and a number of issues. He was wracked with pain to an extreme degree so that I could no longer bear it without crying out.

I asked all to go out from my room and leave me alone. And then I had nothing I could say to God but this, Thou art my Father, and I am Thy child. And Thou, as a Father, art tender and full of mercy.

I could not bear to see my child suffer as Thou makest me suffer. And if I saw my child tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt Thou hide Thy face from me, my Father? Wilt Thou still lay on a heavy hand and not give me a smile from Thy countenance? So I pleaded, and I ventured to say when I was quiet, and everybody came back who watched me, he was confident to say to them, I shall never have any such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.

I bless God that ease did come and the wracking pain never returned. That is powerful. My Father.

Notice Exodus. Let's go back here. Plead that.

We're Your people. We're Your church. We've been bought by the blood of Your Son.

Powerful. Here's a second one. Notice Moses.

Verse 11. Moses implored the Lord his God and said, O Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? You see what he's arguing now? First, it was they're Your people. Now he's arguing the past.

Have you ever heard this? Notice when David said, hide not Your face from me. Turn not Your servant away in anger. O You who have been my help, cast me not off.

You have been my help! As much as to say, You've helped me thus far. You've delivered me from time and time again, Lord. Why would You do that if You intend to bring me out this far and forsake me? Lord, You helped me.

You helped me along. You provided. You were there.

You sustained. You encouraged me. Why have You brought me through so many dangers, toils and snares like Bunyan said? Only to what are You going to forsake me now in this situation? Look, that's a powerful argument because God doesn't change in His purposes.

If He's been faithful thus far with you, He will be faithful with you to the end. What a thing to argue. Lord, You've brought me to this place.

Why? Only to put me to shame now? Far be it from the Lord. He never turns. The past is a mighty plea.

Lord, You brought these people out of Egypt. You had mercy upon them then. Notice this, v. 12.

Why should the Egyptians say? Do you want a third reason? God cares about what the Egyptians will say. Held weight. And Moses doesn't use it just once.

You know, we're surrounded by Egyptians. We are surrounded by God-haters. We are surrounded by people who mock and scoff at your God.

And to come... I remember one time, way back in the very early days of our church, we came to the east side of San Antonio. And I remember one day we were out, we were evangelizing, we were going past the Salvation Army. There's a park there, and a lot of the homeless guys that stay in the shelter there, they hang out in this park.

And I specifically, I've never forgotten, there was a man sitting at a bench. And he looked at us with contempt. And he said he was African American.

And he's looking at us as though we've come from another part of the city to this east side. And he just said with contempt, you're never going to change the inner city. You're never going to change the east side.

And I told him, you're right. We're not. But our God is.

That the Lord cares about. Have you ever read in Scripture when our Lord Himself was praying? John 17. He's praying to His Father.

And do you know what He prayed? He prayed this. He prayed, He and the Father and the Father in Him, and they may become perfectly one so that the world may know that the Father sent the Son and loved those disciples even as the Father loved Christ. That the world may know.

I find this very interesting. Several years back, I preached messages and I have from time to time preached on those seven churches in Asia Minor. Have you ever noticed Philadelphia? They were one of the faithful churches.

Nothing negative said to them. And Jesus said this. He said there are these people who claim to be Jews, but they are not.

They call themselves a synagogue. He calls it a synagogue of Satan. They claim to be Jews.

They were not Jews. And you know what Jesus said? He said the day is coming when those physical Jews are going to fall down at the feet of Christians. And Jesus said they're going to know I loved you.

It's like God is concerned about what people think. Notice Moses. Why should the Egyptians say with evil intent did He bring them out to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.

In another place, Moses said this. He said to the Lord, the Egyptians will hear of it. God said I'm going to strike them with pestilence and disinherit them.

And Moses said if you do that, the Egyptians will hear of it. You brought this people in your might from among those Egyptians. And if you do this, if you destroy these people, the Egyptians are going to tell the inhabitants of this land.

He's talking about Canaan. They've heard that you, O Lord, are in the midst of this people. For you, O Lord, are seen face to face.

Your cloud stands over them and you can go before them in a pillar of cloud by day, in a pillar of fire by night. If you kill this people as one man, the nations who have heard of your fame will say, you know why? You know why? It's because God wasn't able. I'll tell you this, God has concern for the glory of His reputation and honor.

And you can pray that. I have often remembered those man's words. Lord, that guy scoffed at the ability to transform the east side of San Antonio.

Lord, remember his words. You're not a god like the god of the nations. You're not like the Egyptian gods.

You're not like the god of Catholicism. You're not like the god of this easy believism out here. You're the true and the living God.

Lord, arise! Your name depends upon it. Very powerful way to pray. Fourth, we want to argue God's promises.

Notice this. Exodus 32.13 Remember. Oh, that holds weight with the Lord.

Father, remember what You have said. Men may be liars. Not our God.

If He has said it, He is going to do it. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self and said to them, I will multiply Your offspring as the stars of heaven and all this land that I have promised I will give to Your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever. Oh, this is big.

Promise. Promise. Search your Bibles to learn to pray right.

When you read the Bible, there's many things that we should learn. There's many things we should perceive. There's many ways to be admonished or be encouraged.

But when you read your Bibles, be thinking about promises that you can take to God and plead. We should give the Lord no rest whatsoever when we seek something from Him that He promised to give. Moses is saying this, Lord, if You kill all these people, Your promise is going to be brought into question.

Lord, I've often thought, Lord, You have said the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. If we don't see any people saved, where's the proof of that? Lord, Your promise is going to be brought into question. David prayed this way.

1 Chronicles 17.23 Do as You have spoken. Jacob prayed this way. You said, I will surely do You good.

It was said of George Mueller, sometimes he would search the Scriptures for days before he presented his petition to God. And then when he found the promises with his open Bible before him and his finger upon the promise, he searched. You know what? Why? Why would a man take the time to search his Bible for days? Because he wasn't playing in prayer.

He meant to bring arguments and order his case before God in a way, who's going to argue about whether Mueller ever saw his prayers answered? He knew so many prayers answered, they go without number. He would pray with his finger upon that promise. He would plead that promise.

And so, he received what he asked. All the time. You want a promise? How about this? How about the Lord Jesus Christ? Yes, He's talking to His disciples before He goes to the cross.

But you need to hear His qualifier here. Listen to this promise. You want a promise to plead? Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me, not Peter, James, Paul, John, whoever believes in Me, whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do and greater works than these will he do because I'm going to the Father.

You ought to plead that promise all the time. Do you recognize? Here's Jesus getting ready to leave His disciples. Go to the cross.

He's not going to speak with them much more after this. Not directly. He comes back 40 days, but we don't know what He said then.

Those last recorded words, John 14, 15, 16, then His prayer in 17. And He goes, we know what was said there. He's preparing these guys.

He said, I say these things to you so that when they come, you don't fall away. What a thing. If you believe in Jesus Christ, the works that He did, you will do and greater works.

What are you going to do? Say, that can't be, so I'm not going to plead it. You need to take a promise like that and plead it every single day. Lord, Portland, Maine, there are some of Your people here.

Your people. You're our God. You sent Your Son to this earth.

He is the Word of God. He came to speak Your truth. And He came and He left us these words, Father, we were told that we who believe, not just if we're apostles or first century disciples or happen to find our name in the book of Acts, it says if we believe.

We've got believers in this room. That's a promise. You want a promise? There's a promise.

What are you going to do? Walk out of here in unbelief? It's not true. Can't be true. We don't raise the dead anymore.

I'll tell you this, you preach the Gospel and make a disciple and somebody's born again, you're raising the dead, at least to the degree that man is involved with it. You say, what can it mean? No, it may not mean that you're going to heal a thousand lepers. I've got to believe that what it means is that the Spirit of God was given to the church on the day of Pentecost and such things would happen throughout the history of the church that are going to go above and beyond what the Lord did in His limited little scope right there in Canaan during those three years.

Because the truth is, you're reaching people and have the ability to reach people in parts of the world that He never reached out to. His was very limited ministry, limited time, limited scope. He primarily poured Himself into 12 men.

Primarily went from village to village in the land of Canaan. How about this? If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, what does Scripture say? How much more what? How much more what? To give the Holy Spirit to them that ask. Ask.

Promise. Promise. You say, Lord, we're not experiencing revival in New England like on the days of Pastor or in the days of Nettleton or in the days of Edwards.

Lord, where are those days? Are you praying for the Spirit? Are you laying hold upon the Lord and not letting go of Him? Are you wrestling with Him like Jacob did and even when He puts the hip out of joint, even though it takes all the fight out of you, you still cling even though you're all broken now and you have nothing left in you, but you know this, I've got to cling to Him because there's no other hope anywhere else. What do you think would happen if you lay hold on Him for the Holy Spirit and you don't release until there's outpourings of that? What promises do we have? Think of this. Think of promises of good made to others.

You ought to be able to go to Hebrews 13 and look in there and say, it says I'll never leave you or forsake you. You know where the author of Hebrews got that from? Not any words that were spoken directly with your name attached to it. Those were spoken in a couple of different places in the Old Testament.

But specifically, let's just mention Joshua. The angel of the Lord. I will never leave you or forsake you.

Do you know that the author of Hebrews grabs hold of that promise and he brings it forward all the way into the New Testament and he says, that's our promise. Have you ever read that in Christ Jesus, all the promises of God are yea and amen in Him? Have you ever read that? You can plead the promises. Think of that.

Jacob, Lord, You have promised to do me good. I can take that promise. That's mine.

That's been bought by the blood of Christ. You can take every promise for good in Scripture. You can personalize that.

Or how about the indicatives? You say, what do you mean? I'm talking the indicative verbs, the mood of verbs that you find in your Bible. An indicative verb indicates something that's true. Let's just take what Jesse preached on.

I imagine that Acts 14, probably chock full of indicative verbs. Why? It's a narrative. It's telling you what happened.

It's indicating. Can I look at that and say, huh, Paul and Barnabas went throughout the churches in Acts 14 and they appointed elders in every church. What if you have a church and you don't have elders? Or you have a group of people somewhere but there's no leadership like Jesse was talking about.

Some people, you don't have good leaders. What a thing to be able to go to Scripture and say, Lord, you know what I read? I read in every single church, what was Titus supposed to do? Go to Crete and go through all the cities and appoint elders. Well, obviously not to the city council.

The point was that there's churches in all those different cities. What a thing to be able to pray. You take those indicatives and you make them part of that hammer to whack that thing you're asking for.

Lord, You did this in Scripture. There's no example in Scripture of churches that were pastorless. They went about appointing them.

Why? It was necessary. Lord, that's the example You give us in Scripture. That's the indicative.

Or how about imperatives? Let the imperatives be a promise. Be holy, for I am holy. But what do you read in Scripture? God causes you to will and to do of His good pleasure.

Jesus said it. Without Me, you can do nothing. And so you look at one of these and you say, Lord, You're calling me to do things that You say without You, I can't do.

And so that must be a promise that You're going to give the grace for me to do it. Find promises in the indicatives. Find promises in the imperatives.

Find promises in the prayers of Scripture themselves. Listen to Paul praying. He said that he was thanking God in every remembrance of some of these churches.

He was praying that the Father, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give them a spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Having the eyes of their hearts enlightened. For what? That they might know the hope of their calling.

They might know the riches of this inheritance in the saints. They might know this incomprehensible, immeasurable power that's been unleashed through the cross. You want that for your churches? I find Paul is praying that.

Why would we not pray that? Why would we not learn from those and take it? Listen, if God inspired him to pray that way, then that speaks to me of a promise that we ought to have every expectation that God would give us this Spirit and give us revelations of His Person, of the glory of His power. Or you could go further beyond promise. So I've dealt now with what? Your people, the past, what the Egyptians will say, God's promises.

How about God's character? Notice this, in Numbers 14, v. 17, Moses says this, Now, please, let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying... Notice the Lord's character. The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression. Jump down to v. 19 of Numbers 14.

Please pardon the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of your steadfast love. Notice that. Lord, You are a God of steadfast love.

Just recently, in my own preaching, this sermon series I've been doing back at home, Paul prays according to the riches of God's glory, they might be strengthened with power through the Spirit in their inner man. Strengthened. Why? So that they might know, they might conceive, they might have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know this love of Christ.

What was he pleading? Lord, according to the riches of Your glory. Oh, if we're praying according to the character of God and then we don't get answers, or we just pray, we cry out, we ask for these things, certainly we should expect something impressive, something that accords with God's character, something that's life-changing, something right after this, God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond what we ask or think. Would you not expect that if He gave us a text like that, that it's because He wants us to expect and think big? Didn't Newton hit on it? Large petitions with thee bring.

Why? Because you're coming to some little tiny God? He has ears and can't hear? That's not what Newton said when he wrote this song. Large petitions with thee bring. You're coming to a king.

You're coming to the king of kings. Argue that. We have as a God.

Have you argued that way? Do you lay the case out? You know what? The Catholics pray. The Methodists pray. The Episcopalians pray.

The dead Baptists around here pray. The false religions pray. The Jehovah's Witnesses pray.

The Mormons pray. They pray to Allah. What are we going to be satisfied if we pray to the one true and living God and our prayers go unanswered just like theirs? Or their demons rise up and do more for them than our God does for us? Are you going to be satisfied with that? Is there not a place to argue that way and lay that case before God? Lord, we have such a God as You, and they don't have a God like You.

Have you ever read there? When God's people were in Egypt and those plagues came, God made a difference between the people. It was light in Goshen. Have you ever read that? Whereas it was dark over here.

The firstborn of the Egyptians died. Whereas the firstborn of the Hebrew children were spared. We should expect God to make that difference.

Lord, You've always made a difference between Your true people and those not Your people. You've always shown Yourself to be the God. You've shown throughout the ages there is a God in Israel.

Now brethren, we might ask ourselves this question. Why would we need to persuade God when Scripture says He knows what we need before we ask? Why? I'm going to give you one answer here. In fact, we need to look at this.

We're going to end by looking at this. Look at Matthew 17. Matthew 17, of course, we have the transfiguration.

And you remember, right after the transfiguration, as our Lord came down from the mountain with His disciples, a handful of His disciples. Matthew 17. If you look down around verse 19, 20, 21, you know what you'll find? Lord, we encountered a man who had a son with a demon.

Why couldn't we cast him out? What did the Lord say? Why couldn't they do it? Unbelief. Have you ever read the reason in Mark 9? What does he say there when they ask? Turn there. Mark 9. Maybe about verse 28, 29.

Why does the Lord need order? Our case ordered. Why does He need arguments? Why does He need us to plead His character? His promises? Why? Why plead that we're His people? I'll tell you this, we find that example in Scripture. You ever heard anybody argue this way? Father, if You didn't spare Your own Son, but You gave Him up for us all, perhaps You wouldn't withhold any other good thing.

You ever hear somebody argue like that? Maybe somebody inspired? Why? Why lay forth cases like that? Is it necessary? Well, look here at Mark. What does Mark 9.29 say? Why couldn't they cast that demon out? This kind goes out. It's a textual issue.

They all say prayer. You've got the King James or the New King James that says prayer and fasting. So, Matthew, Mark, are they messed up? Contradiction? Listen, the primary thing that we need to recognize is this.

As we recite our strong reasons before the Lord that He should give us the things that we plead with Him to give us, it's not for Him so much. It's for us. See, they needed the prayer and fasting.

Why? Because Jesus is saying in one place, unbelief. It's almost like He's saying the prayer and the fasting would address the unbelief. Well, see, it does.

It does. You know what happens when you do what Mueller did? When you search the Scripture looking for the promises and looking to make the case, it will make you bold as a lion. It gives you confidence.

It will increase your faith in Him. That's what happens. That's what happens when you're in a prayer meeting and somebody begins to pray like that, and they're laying their case out, and they're arguing, and they're laying the promises of God, and they're making this whole case and pleading, and it will stir the whole assembly up to pray.

Why? Because everybody's face is being encouraged. What happens is you begin to see God bigger and bigger and bigger, and His character comes upon your mind, and His promises come into your ears, and you begin to latch hold on them. And yes, God has said it.

And yes, God is like this. And yes, God has done this in the past. And yes, the blood of Jesus speaks.

And yes, we are His people. And you become confident. Yes, I'm going to lay hold upon God until I get this.

That's the issue. Extended prayer and fasting tends to promote our faith. Without faith, it's impossible to please Him.

Why? We have to believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of them. See, you have to believe this. You have to believe that He is a rewarder of them who seek Him diligently.

Not haphazardly. Not randomly. Not sporadically.

Diligent seeking of Him. God is very pleased. God is pleased when we plead His character, His promises.

Why? He gave those promises to be believed. He gave those promises for us to plead. He puts His character on the line.

You don't dishonor God when you're calling upon God's character and God's promises. And you can be bold. That is not presumption.

It's not. Not when God has given promises. I fear it.

We fear being presumptuous. And our primary problem is unbelief. I'm convinced of that.

So build your case carefully. Set forth your arguments. Remember, the blood.

If He didn't spare His own Son, what an argument! How will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Ask Him for what is now needed. Ask for it plainly. Bring forth your arguments.

You all have needs. There's people in your life that aren't saved. There's darkness all around us.

You've got your own battles with sin. Your own battles with weakness. Your own battles with coldness.

Your own battles in your churches. There's battles everywhere. We have an enemy.

He's more powerful than any of us. But He that's with us is greater than he that's in the world. We've got needs.

We're a needy people. Apply it. Apply it in your dealings with the Lord that your own faith might be strengthened.

Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, our Lord says, if you have faith. So I encourage you to do this. Pray in a way that's going to encourage your faith.

And when you order your prayers and you produce your arguments, it does massive things for your faith. And God answers those prayers. That is one of the primary components of successful prayer is that we have faith.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, those disciples long ago who said, Lord, teach us to pray.

Importunity He taught them. Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you will find.

Knock and it shall be opened unto you. Everyone who asks, everyone who seeks, everyone who knocks, you've given us promise that our prayers are not in vain. Lord, help us.

Help us. Help us pray. Help us wrestle with the angel of the Lord and be successful.

Help us to learn to pray as Moses did and Jacob did and David did and Job. Help us to be as the saints of old in our prayer life. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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