

Spiritual Rhythms | Prayer

#1: Death by Cynicism

John 11

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 5, 2025

Good morning, Grace Covenant! Whoo! ... and a Happy New Year, to say the least ... 2025, here we go!

I don't know if you noticed on your way in, but we're starting a new series for the whole semester, for the most part. The series is called *Spiritual Rhythms*. And if you saw the pole banners, we're going to be looking at disciplines and ways to become like Christ in all of life: through prayer, fasting, giving, and evangelism. And if you're thinking, *Wow, prayer, fasting, giving, and evangelism—those are some topics that people don't like to talk a lot about—well,* we're going to talk about them for a month each. It's part of our church growth strategy for 2025. We're actually thinking about changing the name of the church to CrossFit 360. And I've got a byline here: *You don't want it bad enough.* How about that? Do you think that will work?

We did want to spend a considerable amount of time on getting in the practices of the presence of God this year. And here's why—honestly, here's one of the reasons why. “They say that Aslan is on the move, and perhaps he's already landed.” Many of you know that quote is from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, written by C. S. Lewis. And it's a changing point in the storyline, because the White Witch has cast a spell on Narnia. It's been a hundred years that it's always winter and never Christmas. Suddenly, the ice and snow begin to thaw and there's word that there have been sightings of St. Nicholas. Always winter, but never Christmas ... something's changed. Aslan is on the move, and perhaps he's already landed. What that means is that the world is about to change, and we need to get ready.

And I think that's happening here, right now, on this planet in this realm. I think Aslan—I think Jesus has landed. And He's on the move. He's maybe even landed.

Last week, in the area of podcasts, the poll position on Apple podcasts in every category—the number one podcast was “The Rosary in a Year.” That's a Catholic praying system. A couple of years earlier, it was a Bible reading in a year app—that was the number one

podcast in all categories. The Christian prayer and meditation apps that you can buy are at a record high. The very popular series that you can watch on TV called *The Chosen* continues to break record after record in its viewership. In April of this year, Mel Gibson is going to return to the studios and is starting pre-production of *The Passion of the Christ: The Resurrection*. Yep. Aslan is on the move, and maybe he's already landed.

And Grace, we need to get ourselves ready. We need to get ourselves in the best spiritual shape we've ever been in, because God loves to use the clean and the holy—just like you do. Do you want a clean cup, or do you want a dirty piece of china? You use the clean.

And you're going to love what you become. If you look at it like a gym membership, you're going to love what you become four months from now. You're going to love it. We're going to practice these disciplines and understand why we do them and how to do them better. You know what? We owe it to our King.

There are three good reasons why we ought to be involved and be wanting more and getting deeper in these areas of our lives. And this week, we'll start a new series on the discipline of prayer. We want to get consistently deep in our interactions with God.

And when I was looking at all the ways we can approach this subject matter, I thought, *Let's start where people have some problems with prayer*. And I harken back to fifteen years ago when I read a book that unlocked my broken prayer life. It was called *A Praying Life* by Paul Miller. And I appreciated how Paul Miller wrote about prayer. It was like he found a screwdriver that was wedged in the gears of my prayers. I had kind of stopped praying big, bold prayers and didn't know why. He did some great diagnostic work. He wrote two full chapters on a cultural disease that destroys prayer. He called it "spirits" of this age. In other words, there is demonic influence on this, and it's certainly my biggest problem. And not only is it powerful because it's demonic, but it's also powerful because it's subtle. It's powerful because it's contagious—very infectious. It's called the spirit of cynicism—there are two chapters on cynicism.

Here's how cynicism slipped its way into my life. I'll just tell you one storyline, though I've got a dozen. When I was almost a brand-new believer, I was twenty-one years old. I'd had an epiphany that Jesus didn't die for just everyone; He died for me. It was my fault. And I had a bit of a revival in my life, and I went down to San Antonio where my family is and told my whole family about the event and introduced them to some of the truths that I had just recently

understood. And my older sister, Casey, was twenty-three, and she had had an awakening herself.

And a few months later I was home for the summer, and we were in the back, and we were swimming. And Casey has these special contact lenses. Her vision was so bad—I don't know if they make them that way today—but her contacts were hard, and they were custom-cut just for her—hard lenses. And she could even swim in them. I'm not sure that was a good idea. Well, I'm certain that was a bad idea, because when we were swimming, she lost one of her contact lenses. And we thought, *Oh, no!* We were both in our twenties and my first response was, "Let's run away from home. We are in so much trouble!"

But she was a new believer, I was six months into this, and I said, "Let's pray. Let's just pray that God would find this blue contact lens in a pool with blue tile in water that's tinted blue. Let's just see what happens."

So, we prayed and said, "Dear God, we can't afford this. We can't afford to get in trouble again. Could You find that needle in a haystack? This is harder than that. And could You do it very quickly before our parents come home? Amen."

I'm starting to walk down the steps, and on the first step I look,, and I saw on the side, on the blue tile, a bubble. Well, that's odd. So, I grabbed the bubble and said, "Casey, is this your contact lens? Because it's not mine." Right then, right there. I mean, we freaked out, as you would imagine. That was our response.

And listen, you know, we know, that the entire event was orchestrated by the sovereignty of God to show two young children believers about the power and the love of God being involved in every aspect of our lives. *Pray ... ask ... seek ... knock. Let me help you live your life.* I love that story.

Fast forward ten years, and at this point, Casey's husband had left her while she was pregnant with her second child. And having to be a single mom with two young boys stressed her body. And then, soon after that divorce, she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. And we prayed. We all prayed that the Lord would take that disease away from her. And He did not, and He has not. And it has been thirty-five years—maybe more—of just watching that disease ravish and terrorize her body. Physically, she suffers all the time, day and night. MS never sleeps, so she doesn't much either. When it started out, she could walk just fine. And then she went to

stumbling, and then she went to a cane, and then she had a walker. And now it's only a wheelchair.

And here's the demonic spirit of the anti-spiritual discipline of cynicism. I say in my mind, "You know, Lord, you can find a contact lens in a pool, but with something like an incurable disease that's going to torture her to death, we have what?"

And so, what happens is that you stop praying about things that matter too much. You stop putting too much hope—the word of the day is "hope"—in the things of God intervening in ways and in "ask, seek, knock" for contact lenses. What you learn is this: you've got to give up on your hopes and back off your hope in God. Because the cynic's saying is, "The bigger your hopes, the harder they fall."

Cynicism happens because you're just getting tired of falling. It is a demon discipline. And you start off jaded, and then you become callused. And you're callused for your own protection. It's a safety thing. And then you become enthralled with cynicism, and then you become a cynic. Then you change. You become a cynic.

And here's how it looks. You quit praying big prayers. You stop hoping for big things to take place. You kind of drift off over to the sidelines where it's safe. You're not in the game anymore. You might as well take your pads off. And, in the area of faith in life, you're not going to get back in, because there's no risk on the sideline. And before you know it, you're up in the bleachers. You don't need faith there. There's no risk. That's cynicism.

What happened to all those big, bold, heroic, specific (by the way) prayers? They got worn out of you. What happens sometimes is that you spend too much time looking at the horizontal plain and you can't see how God is working. And since you can't see what He is doing, you assume He's not doing anything. And that is cynicism. It's just this undertow that pulls you away from bold, constant prayers, and tries to get your prayer life into a place where it's safe, or just where you don't pray much at all anymore. It's out of caution, and you're afraid. That's cynicism.

Here's a great definition of the word "cynical." It's from one of the books. It's a great example, by the way. It's "doubtful as to whether something will happen or whether it is worthwhile: *Most are cynical about the politician's religious commitments.*" Isn't that the truth? I wish you knew how many times I get calls around election times for pastors to pray for politicians. How about those other three and a half years?

Multiple sources said this about cynicism. “Cynicism is, increasingly, the dominant spirit of our age.” It’s increasing, and it’s dominant, and it’s a spirit, meaning that there is something more to it.

Listen, some of you are wondering or thinking to yourself, *You know, that’s not true. Cynicism isn’t that bad.* So, you’re cynical about cynicism. Okay? So, there we go.

Cynicism is being defeated by weariness. It’s like a build-up of scar tissue. Scar tissue is to protect yourself, but it’s from frustration with not seeing what God is doing, and you’re afraid to expose yourself to another round of hope that’s disappointed. And so, fear starts constraining your prayer life. And there’s no place for fear. Everything we want is on the other side of it.

And these authors are saying that it’s the spirit of our age because it permeates our entire culture. It’s in the government, it’s in entertainment, it’s the cheapest form of humor. It’s in our family life, it’s in the Church. One author called cynicism “the master tempter.” It’s subtle and it’s contagious. It’s a spiritual thing.

Doubt vs. Cynicism

What I want to do this morning is I want to make sure that we understand this difference that makes all the difference in the world: the difference between doubt and cynicism. They look a little bit the same, but they’re completely opposite.

Doubt, first of all, is good for your faith. It’s part of faith. You can’t have a growing faith without doubt. Cynicism destroys faith and is evil.

Doubt and hope are like first cousins. They’re related to each other. I’ll show this again, but God brings doubts into your life so He can show you that, through His goodness and His power, He’s able to overcome those doubts, and then your faith grows. Doubt says, *Man, I wonder what God is doing. This is not making sense to me.*

Cynicism is telling God the way it ought to be. It’s judging God for His lack of response.

Story of Lazarus’ Being Raised from the Dead

Let’s look at John 11. I want you to see how there are two types of people showing up to the same exact event. It’s a famous event—it’s the resurrection of Lazarus. Most of you know

the story. But there are two responses to the nature and the work of God. And it's based upon blasted expectations. Everyone in the storyline has expectations, and they get ruined. And it's based on the fundamental truths that, one, Jesus loves Lazarus. Jesus can make Lazarus well. Jesus said He would show up. And everybody's disappointed.

John 11:1, 3

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one You love is sick."

Now, here's what they do with that disappointment. John 11: 1 says, "Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha." They're all relatives—brother and sisters. "So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one You love is sick.'" Lazarus's nickname in this story is "the one Jesus loves." That's the point. *He's sick, and You can heal him.*

John 11:5-6

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days.

And in the next sentence: "Jesus loved Martha ..." The narrator is in on it now. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days."

John 11:14-15

So then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,¹⁵ And for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

Wait, what? He has a purpose that’s different than everyone else’s. “So Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him ...’”

John 11:17-20

On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.¹⁸ Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

Verse 17: “On His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was just two miles from Jerusalem, and”—since it was so close—“many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet Him, but Mary stayed at home.”

John 11:21-22

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if You had been here, my brother would not have died.²² But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.”

This is the second time that expectations are going to be clearly communicated. She says in verse 21: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give You whatever You ask.”

This is doubt. This is simple doubt. *You're doing something that I don't understand. It's confusing me. I know these things to be true: You love Lazarus, You can heal him, and You missed the train, and You did it on purpose.*

John 11:23-28

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

²⁴ Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶ and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

²⁷ "Yes, Lord, she told Him, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

²⁸ And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you."

Verse 23: "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'

" 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'

" 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into the world.'

"And after she said this, she went back and called her sister Mary. 'Mary the Teacher is here and is asking for you.'"

John 11:32

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.”

This is the third time someone will declare their expectations. Verse 32: “When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’” Again, this is doubting.

John 11:33-34

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

And now the emotions come flooding out of everyone in the scene. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’

“ ‘Let’s go look,’ they responded.”

John 11:35

Jesus wept.

And here’s the passage that’s famous: “Jesus wept.”

Now Jesus knows how this story ends. The Father has told Him the whole plan all along. And in light of Jesus knowing the end of the story like you know the end of the story, He still weeps. He hates death. He hates what it does to the human experience. It’s one of the reasons He came—to kill death.

John 11:36

Then the Jews said, “See how He loved Him!”

So, in verse 36, after He weeps, “Then the Jews said, ‘See how He loved him!’” Here it is again. What do we know? That Jesus loves, loves, loves, loves Lazarus. And Jesus can save Lazarus. And He doesn’t. He is not doing what we would expect Him to do. And doubt says, *What’s up, God? You love, You have the power.* That’s just doubt.

John 11:37

But some of them said, “Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Now the cynics screaming from the bleachers have their storyline. Verse 37: “But some of them said, ‘Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?’” Are you hearing this attitude? *I’m stating the obvious here. He could heal blind men ... He can find contact lenses. But now when it matters ... This is why people don’t like to pray to You, Jesus, right here. The reason we’re having a funeral is because You didn’t come.*

This isn’t doubt. This is a person with their hands on their hips, and they’re saying, *I can’t get my hopes up with a God like You. It’s not safe. It’s easier to be cynical.*

John 11:38

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

“Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. He said, ‘You need to move that stone away.’

“Martha said, ‘He’s been in there four days. He’s ripe.’

“Jesus said, ‘Just believe so that you can see the glory of God.’”

It's as though God set up this entire circumstance, this entire event, so that some new believers would understand the power and the love of God. This is a contact lens story. He set the whole thing up so that He could display the power of God.

He literally prays this prayer: “ ‘Father, thank You for hearing my prayer. You always hear my prayers. And now everyone can know that You sent me. They're going to all know that I'm the Messiah.’ And then with a loud voice He called into the tomb, ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

And the passage says—I love this—“The dead man walked out.” It doesn't call Lazarus by his name. “The dead man walked out”—formerly dead man. And when he walks out, he's in his graveclothes. And Jesus looks at him like, *That's never going to work*. “ ‘Let's take those graveclothes off and get him some living man's clothes.’” And they do.

Those who had doubts glorified God that day, because they saw the nature of God displayed in a way that they hadn't expected. Their expectations were denied, and then they had more than they could ever ask for or imagine.

The cynics that afternoon had to choose something. They had to choose to, one, repent and beg God's forgiveness that they would have such a terrible attitude and crass view of who God is. Or they could double down and say, *Yeah, there are other tombs that are full of people. There are other ways You're not doing things.*

Doubt Helps Our Faith Grow; Cynicism Does Not

Here's the point. Doubt is good. Doubt helps our faith grow. And you can see that God orchestrates various events in our lives so that we come up against some event where we doubt maybe His goodness or His power of how He's going to reconcile things. And then, when we do, here's what doubt does. Doubt goes and tries to figure it out. We read books, we interview people that might know the Lord in a different way, we ask the Lord to give us revelation personally, we open our eyes to expectations about how He might show us what He's up to. A growing faith is just a series of breakthrough moments where we are given doubt, and then God crushes the doubt with what? He crushes the doubt with His power and other attributes I'm acknowledging today—His power and His love.

Doubt says, *Look, I don't understand what God is doing*. Cynicism is an attitude with a frown and a scowl; it's contempt.

And cynicism is so contagious. Have you ever been at a meal or an event where everyone's having a good time and the energy is positive, and then a little bit of cynicism whispers in there? And then it gets amplified with a retort, and then another amplification, and then all of a sudden, this growth it's so cheap. It's the cheapest form of humor. It just sits and observes and critiques. It's a dude in the bleachers on his fourth lite beer yelling at some college kid playing the game with a dislocated shoulder: "Come on!" There's no risk in the bleachers. There's no fear there.

You cannot grow in your life with Christ and be cynical. Because if you trace the object of your cynicism, it ends with being critical with God Himself and the way He's running things. And that's what cynicism is.

And then you look at the way a saint lives his or her life. A saint's life is daring. It's adventurous. Frankly, it's scary. It's hope-filled. His or her prayer life is feisty.

The bleachers, the bench ... they're screaming, "Put me in, coach! Let's go do something dangerous. Let's go do something that I'll have to trust You with. I have to break through some area of doubt so that I can live my life."

Learn to Hope Again

And so, how do you overcome cynicism? It's interesting that the cure is also the effect. But here it is. The word of the day has been "hope." Here's what you need to do. You learn how to hope again. Cynicism is anti-Jesus. Cynicism is hopelessness. If you hope less, it's for your own protection. It's fixed, it's fatalistic. Dreaming is foolish. Risk is dangerous. *I'm going to stay within the boundaries of what I know can happen.* You don't pray big prayers. Eventually, you probably don't even pray that much at all.

And then you compare this cynicism (which is anti-Jesus) with the life of Jesus. Look at His life within the context of the descriptive term "hope." What's His storyline? He walks into various locations, various events, and He brings this aroma of hope with Him. He just fills the room with hope. Whatever people are looking for, He brings that.

When you read the gospels, the problems and conflict that He runs into in their hope, is that they're hoping for the wrong things. And that's what happens with us. When you learn how to hope, you have to hope for the right things. We hope in the wrong things. The people with Jesus hoped in things that were less than why Jesus was there. Jesus came to answer hopes this

high, and they were hoping for things this low. And that's why there was misunderstanding and sometimes disappointment. Someone would bring a friend and say, "We hope You can cure His legs so he can walk again." And Jesus says, "Well, yeah, I can do that." But then He says, "Your sins are forgiven." *What? I was just hoping that I could walk upstairs again, and now my sins are forgiven?* That's what he should have been hoping for.

Crowds come to Him and say, "We're starving, and we'd love something to eat."

"Yeah, I can give you some food." So, He does. And then He says, "I am the bread of life. I'm going to feed your very soul."

"Okay, that too."

The Jews hoped that Jesus would conquer Rome for them. And Jesus must have been thinking, *Rome? They're like a construction company to me. They're building up a highway system for me to use to spread the Gospel. They're rotting from within already. They're not even going to be here in four hundred years. Rome? I came here to resolve your greatest hope: that someone, somehow ... that God would send His own Son to conquer death and sin. That's why I'm here.*

See, they're hoping for the wrong thing. They're hoping for the shallow, and He brings us these unfathomable depths of what He's here for.

So, when we learn how to hope again, we don't hope in the detailed outcome of what we want. That's what happened in this story in John 11. We hope in the nature and the attributes of God: that God is good, and God is powerful, and then we just see what His solution to that is. We don't hope in the outcome. We hope in the nature of God.

This is how you and I can change the world in the context of the spirit of cynicism. And the answer to that is the hope of God.

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look at this passage in Romans 15. What kind of God is Jehovah? What does He bring? And what does He do to us? Look at chapter 15 in Romans: "May the God of hope..."—what

kind of God is He?—the God of hope. This is how we change the world. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We go to the Lord, and we ask for hope. And we’re holding it there, and He has a dump truck, and we’ve got a thimble. And He just overflows us with hope. And that’s why the peace and the joy are breaking out. And we’ve got our little thimble, but we’re covered in His hope, and we walk into a room by the power of His Spirit, and people say, “Why do you have hope?”

“I have promises about eternal life. I have an intimate relationship with the God who is the Creator of the universe.”

You can’t find that in cynicism. So, when you enter the room, you enter the room as though you’ve been washed over with some powerful perfume of hope. And your temperament is joy and peace. It just spills out on everybody. You’re now hoping in that nature of God. And that nature is hope. And you’re hoping in His outcome—it’s not your outcome. Because our outcomes are usually way too shallow.

My sister—wow, this never gets easy—it’s been three-and-a-half decades. And we keep praying for her healing. And the only thing that has progressed in her life is her frailty. She had a season where even muscle spasms caused scoliosis, and she needed surgery for that. And she just becomes more and more frail. It never occurred to any of us that we might be hoping for the wrong things. Here’s the thing about her. God has changed my sister. He didn’t change her posture. Multiple sclerosis changed her posture. But He changed her as a human being. When she was young, she was a scaredy-cat. And everyone knew it. And now she’s just this fierce tiger. She is afraid of absolutely nothing. And to this day, when we have family get-togethers—we had one just last month—when she wheels in or people push her in on her wheelchair, she makes an entrance. And it this aroma of hope. It is definitely joy and peace. And I think God used the MS. On the side, I don’t know this, but I don’t know if anything was added to her life. I think the MS just cleared everything away so that we could all see what was already there, and that was courage and optimism and joy.

I mean, growing up, if you interviewed us five children, we would unanimously—she would vote with us—vote that she was by far the weakest vessel, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And now we could take another vote, and it would be unanimous. She’s our hero. God has changed her. No one saw what was underneath. But God did, and He made it visible.

But cynicism is always at our door.

Just this week I was listening to an interview with an apologist on some podcast, and he was talking about a girl in Chicago who had MS. And it had ravaged her to the point that she was in hospice. And they had 420 people pray for her. It's been documented in two different books that on one day she was healed, miraculously and completely. She went from no muscle mass to being able to stand up and walk in one day.

And the demon of cynicism, as I'm watching that interview, came on me and said, *Yeah, well, I've got somebody with MS.* And I said, *I know better now. Get thee behind me, Satan. That's not her story.* And then I said, *Not her story—yes. But maybe someday still she'll be healed.* Yeah. Thanks.

This is prayer. When we pray, we're going up to the God of hope with a little thimble. And He's got a cement truck that's backing up into us, and we're praying that it would fill our thimble and overwhelm us, so that we might bring that hope into the world around us. That's what prayer is. Don't let cynicism devour your hope.

Here's what we're going to do as a church. There are some fun little cards outside, and we're wanting one of these for everybody in the church. They're just little prompts. And here's what we're thinking: What if the church for thirty days ... whatever ... for the month of January ... what if we all prayed the same prayers on the same topics together for thirty days? I think power happens. And in the midst of all that power, we're going to maybe teach some people about the nature of prayer and how to be in a prayer rhythm. We're going to all pray on Sundays in praise, and Monday is the Lord's Prayer, and Tuesday is for forgiveness, and Wednesday is for family and friends. Thursday is for the Church, and Friday is for the nations, and Saturday is that we could all become like Christ. We'd like everyone to grab one of these on the way out the door. I'll tell you more about it in the weeks to come, how we're going to do it together. But it's a great place to start. Let's all be a house of prayer together.

My last little application and conclusion is, what do we do going forward? And I just want to pose this: that some of us need to repent. At Grace, we recklessly use the phrase "Sometimes you just need to be born again ... again." And I say "recklessly" because to be born again is a salvation event, and it's one time, and you make a covenant with God, and He swears by His own name to hold your hand and never let it go. That's a one-and-done. You can't even lose your salvation if you want to.

And then, we say “born again ... again” because so many of us have had breakthrough moments that feel just like that, when it’s a twelve-step kind of feel when in salvation and repentance you say, “I’m too broken to get fixed. Only God can fix me. Please fix me. It’s all You, God.” And then sometimes over here, there are these dense cracks, lifestyle issues, addictions. And you have to realize that you’re overwhelmed by it. Again, it’s the first three steps of the twelve steps. *It bosses me around, it’s bigger than me. But it’s not bigger than the Spirit, and I need to turn it over to the Spirit.*

So, my first “born again ... again” experience was just being a jerk. I mean, I had perfected it to the point where I couldn’t stop doing it. I needed to be born again ... again. And I’m here to tell you that I think some of you might need to be born again because of cynicism, to cast off this thing and call it what it is. It’s a spirit of evil, and it rules you. It’s your go-to play card. It’s the first thing on your playlist. Yeah, well ... what about?

And you’ve just got to confess that you’re critical towards God and the way He’s running the world around you, and that your hopelessness on the sidelines or the bleachers is a sin. And then you can get your innocence back and start praying bold, big, and specific prayers again.

So, I mean, that’s my story. I’m Matt, and I’m a cynic. Hello, I’m Matt, and I’m a cynic. Anyone? Are there any twelve-steppers in the audience? There you go. You’ve got a brother up here dying. Hello—I’m Matt, and I’m a cynic.

[Congregation: Hi, Matt.]

There you go, thank you so much. Thanks. This is a tough twelve-step group—you’ve got to say it three times.

So, let’s pray to that end. I’ll pray with you, my fellow cynics. And then we’ll get started next week with growing in our prayer life. Pick up one of these prompt cards on the way out the door, and let’s be a house of prayer.

Lord Jesus, I am grateful for the men and women who have put words to the problems that maybe we’re all experiencing, and certainly some more than others, about a cynical look at life, and a cynical look at faith. We judge You by our expectations in how we think a story should end, and frankly, it’s because our expectations are so shallow. They’re superficial. They’re physical, mostly. Then we blame You. And then we pull ourselves away from You, a loving and powerful God begging us to ask, seek, and knock. We’re spoiled little kids sometimes.

Lord, I'd ask that You would help us repent, deeply, and see You for who You are. And then we'll trust Your attributes, not Your actions, and we'll not try to figure the world out. We'll try to enjoy the mystery of Your greatness.

Lord, I think maybe there are some people here who need to be born again, but again in this area. And I'd ask that You would touch them in a great way and set them free from the spirit of this age. Thank You, Lord, that You're a God of a million chances. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.