

“Praying Like Fools” // 1 Kings 18:36–45 //

21 Days of Prayer and Fasting, January 2024¹

Prayer Video

Happy New Year, everybody. Our DPAC services were incredible... over 16,000 in total attendance across seven services. I don't have specific numbers of how many professed Christ, but this is a pic we snapped at the end of one of the services when I asked people to turn on their lights indicating they were putting their trust in Christ.

Behind almost each one of those lights is a story—sadly we can't share them all. We don't even know them all. But I can share one. One of those lights belongs to someone who was a first time guest to our church. She had been befriended by one of our members who was a coworker of hers. Our member had actually been thinking about resigning her job when this lady approached her one day and asked her why her life looked so different from everybody else's. They started to talk and our member discerned that God was at work in this lady's life, and (this might be the most amazing part of this story) our member made the decision to stay at this job for a while solely to

¹ Works Consulted: *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools*, Tyler Staton; Tim Keller, “[Fire on the Mountain](#),” sermon preached September 19, 1999 at Redeemer City Church; Craig Groeschel, “[Which God Do You Serve?](#),” preached at Life Church [date unknown]; James MacDonald, “Grace When I Am Wavering (1 Kings 18:17–40),” sermon no longer available online; Paige Benton Brown, “[When Despair Invades Gospel Work \(1 Kings 18–19\)](#),” October 24, 2017; Tony Evans, “Praying and Waiting for God's Timing,” preached at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship [unsure of date]; David Jeremiah, “One Man Against the World,” preached at Shadow Mountain Community Church, October 14, 2017. And others as noted throughout. See also past messages preached at TSC on 1 Kings 18, James 5, and Daniel 9–10.

continue her relationship with this lady, believing God had put her in this lady's life to bring her to Christ. So, she invited her to our Christmas at DPAC services, and at the end, in the gospel presentation, this lady TURNED ON HER LIGHT. She texted our member the day after DPAC and said, **“As I was sitting there in the message and it all made sense . . . I cried last night because I felt like I belonged and it wasn't because of something superficial like what job I had or how much I owned . . . Last night I found Jesus . . . I can't remember the last thing I was this excited about!”** One story among many.

To pull this off, we had more than 2,000 volunteers—if you were one of those, whether on stage, production, helping greet, park, with kids, in the prayer room, anything, would you stand up?

Words can't convey how grateful I am for you, who volunteer your time to serve our community in this way. I'm always moved because for every one person you see on stage, there are two offstage who show up at the theater at DPAC before any of the rest of us and stay long after we go home—they aren't dressed in Air Jordans or sparkling outfits; they're wearing sweatpants and headsets and running around to make sure everything goes according to plan. They don't want you to notice them—in fact, they would say that if they are doing their jobs right you won't think about them at all, only about the message coming from the platform. I'll use just one as an example—Mary Beth Dalton, our programming director, who stood just off stage for every second of all seven services to make sure everyone was in place and on time, and if you don't think that was stressful, then you don't know what it's like to manage Hank Murphy. So, I don't have a glass of anything up here, but I want to raise a toast

to the unseen volunteer army of The Summit Church—one more time, Summit, could we express our appreciation to them?

This weekend I want to talk about another group of unseen warriors at our church, arguably the most important group of people in our church. We have a ministry at the church called the Boiler Room—it's a group of people who gather at each campus, during each service, to pray throughout the entirety of the service.

The ministry borrows its name from a similar ministry at Charles Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle in the 1800s. **Charles Spurgeon was arguably the most famous preacher in history.** He pastored the largest church in the world during his day. His congregation was several thousand strong—and that during an age without microphones or electricity! (Imagine that! Imagine if we gathered 10,000 strong in a room with no microphone or electric lights.) In addition to the large weekend service, more than 25,000 people were on a paid subscription service to get a written copy of his sermon the moment after it was delivered.

He was one of Christian history's most talented preachers, but whenever he was asked the secret to his power in preaching, he didn't talk about any rhetorical strategies or stage abilities; he pointed to a team of intercessors who gathered in a small room directly beneath his pulpit who prayed non-stop during every second of his preaching—it was, literally, the boiler room of the building. ***"God has a soft spot for the unglamorous, secret work of prayer"* (Charles Spurgeon).**

That's what **I want to talk about this first weekend** of the new year. You see, for the last several years, we've kicked off the year in January

with a thing we call **21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. It begins on Friday, Jan. 12—so, this coming Friday. I'll give you more info on that at the end. But I wanted to use this first weekend of the year to help you get ready for it, since it starts this coming week.** And listen, I want everyone who considers this church home to participate in it. You say, "I've never done anything like this before, it scares me." Well, you're going to expand your horizons this year. And we've got some tips and strategies to make it very doable for you.

I'm gonna kick this off by taking us through 1 Kings 18--so turn there if you have your Bibles—this is one of my absolute favorite Old Testament stories—but today we're going to look at the back part of the story that very few people pay attention to because they get so distracted by the first part. You see, the first part of the story is so good they never make it to this part. It reminds me of how I've discovered that a couple of my favorite restaurants here in the Triangle have the most amazing appetizer selections but I never get to them because the main entrees are so good that you don't have space for it. (You know, traditionally, appetizers are supposed to be small bites of something that just prepare your palate for the main course, but here in America they are full-on second meals.) So, I've told Veronica that sometime I want to go to these restaurants just to do the appetizers. We'd have to make the decision, "Tonight, we're not doing entrees, only appetizers."

Well, think of today's passage like that. Most people never notice this part of the story because the first part is so good—but there's so much in this last little part of this story that teaches us about prayer.

1 Kings 18 is the story of Elijah's battle with the prophets of Baal. It's an amazing story, and since I'm not really going to preach to you

about it, let me at least summarize it so you have context for what comes after it.

It was a time of deep spiritual apostasy in Israel. King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel, who were currently in power, were two of the worst rulers in Israel's history, and the whole nation, it seemed, had given itself over to serve Baal, a demonic god popular in the Mesopotamian region.

Elijah was the prophet God raised up to speak out against this wickedness, and the first thing he did is show up in Ahab's court (this is chapter 17) to tell Ahab that in response to Israel's wickedness, God was going to withhold rain.

You see, **God had promised in Deuteronomy, several hundred years before**, that if Israel walked away from him, he'd withhold rain from the land, causing a famine. So, in chapter 17 vs. 1, Elijah announced to Ahab, "God's patience has run out, and he's going to do what he said he'd do." And so the rain completely stopped—for three years, not so much as a drop, which leads to a terrible famine. **Think of that as Act I.**

Act II starts in chapter 18. It's now been three years of no rain, but Israel still hasn't returned to God—so Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a spiritual battle on top of Mt. Carmel to determine which god is the true God, and the test will be which god answers prayer by sending down fire from heaven on a sacrifice.

What ensues is an amazing, entertaining story. The prophets of Baal go first—there's about 400 of them, and for about half a day they pray for fire. And as the day goes on, they start to get desperate. They start

dancing before Baal, hooping and hollerin', screaming up toward heaven; they even start cutting themselves to get Baal's attention. But nothing. You have to give them an "A" for effort—few people in history have prayed with such passion and devotion.

Meanwhile, **Elijah's been off to the side**, sitting in a lawn chair with his sunglasses on and a margarita in his hand (at least that's how I picture it), just taunting them. Check out vs. [27]: **And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Perhaps he is musing,** (which in Hebrew means "daydreaming"—in other words, "Yell a little louder! Maybe he's off somewhere staring aimlessly into space, thinking god-thoughts; or maybe he's scrolling through demon-Twitter and you just need to yell a little louder to get his attention") **or** ("maybe", Elijah continues) **he is on a journey,** (or, this is the best one) **maybe he is relieving himself,** (by the way, the Hebrew there literally means "taking a potty break"—the NIV really tries to clean this up by saying, "Maybe he is busy" but that's not what the Hebrew says. Elijah says, "Yell a little louder, maybe he's on the job and he's got the fan turned on and he can't hear you") **or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened."** (That's called righteous smack-talking. I love it.)

Well, despite all their dancing and their cutting, Baal never answers, and eventually, these prophets of Baal collapse in exhaustion.

Elijah then walks calmly over to his altar, looks at it, and says, "This is not difficult enough," and he orders four huge jars to be filled with water and dumped over the altar. Then he says, "Do it again," and so they do it again. He says, "Again," and they dump 4 more. So now this altar is swimming in 12 huge jugs of water—it's very UN-flammable—and Elijah gets down very calmly on his knees and says, "Show 'em, Lord," and immediately, **38 the fire of the Lord fell**

and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (When you've got a fire that burns up stones and dust, you've got a hot fire.)

39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." By the way, literally, in Hebrew, the phrase "the Lord is God" is "Eli-jah," Elijah's name, so it's kind of a cool double-entendre moment. Eli-jah. Eli-jah.

And thus, the battle is won. Israel has turned back to God through the bold prayer of Elijah. **That's the part of the story a lot of people know; the "main course," so to speak.** But it's what happens next that I want to focus on today.

41 And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." (Elijah says, "It's party-time, Ahab, because now that the people have acknowledged the Lord as God, even though you haven't, God is going to restore the rain.") 42 So Ahab (who is always in the mood for a good party) went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. (Now, "put his face between his knees" doesn't translate real well into English, but what the writer is saying is that Elijah got into the fetal position to pray—honestly, it was kind of awkward.) 43 And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," **seven times** (he does this). 44 And at the seventh time (this servant) he said, "Behold, a little cloud about the size of a man's fist is rising from the sea." And (Elijah) he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" 45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.

Elijah's prayers literally changed the weather, bringing both rain and revival to Israel.

Prayers of that type have four characteristics, all four of which you see in that short paragraph; characteristics I want you to write down, think about, and use to shape your 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting.

And by the way, let me say this right up front, lest you think, "Yeah, this is just an Old Testament thing for a special prophet; I'm no Elijah." But James in the New Testament uses this story specifically as an example of how we should pray today, and he literally says (maybe you remember this from the James series last fall), "Elijah was a man JUST LIKE YOU (in other words, don't consider him a super-prophet; he's a man just like you; he puts on his toga just like you, one sleeve at a time) and these are the answers he got; and if you pray like he did, you can expect these same kinds of answers." So what we see in Elijah's prayer here we're supposed to emulate, and see the same results. Four characteristics:

Difference-making prayer is...

1. Word-based

When Elijah declared, in verse 1 of chapter 17, that there would be no rain, it was, as I noted, based on **Deuteronomy 11:13–17** where God had said, "*Israel, if you worship idols, I will shut up the heavens so that it won't rain.*" Elijah prayed that into existence. And when Elijah declared, in chapter 18, that God would send rain again, that was based on the latter half of that promise in Deuteronomy, where God said, "*If after you give yourself to idols, you repent and turn away*

from them, and return to me, I will open up heaven and let it rain again.”

In both cases, Elijah was simply praying God’s promises back to him.

The Bible, I’ve heard it said, is a book of promises. Some scholars say upwards of 3,000. Our job, you see, is to mine through this book, like we’re mining for gold or Bitcoin, unearthing these promises and praying them back to God.

Prayer is not a random wish-list we present to God. Prayer is the process of discovering what God wants to give us and asking him for it.

Tony Evans says, *“Prayer is how we make contact with what God has already decreed. Prayer does not make God do what he hasn’t planned to do; prayer releases God to do what he has decreed to do. Where there is no prayer, there is no contact, and where there is no contact, you will not get what God has declared for you to have.”*

He’s saying: Think of prayer like the electricity running through the walls of your house. At any given point, there’s enough electricity there to power your refrigerator, run your heater and your TV and the washing machine and the blender, but until you plug that wire into the socket, until you make contact with it, none of that power benefits you. You could be standing right beside the plug, with no access to that power, simply because you’ve never plugged in. (By the way, that might be a terribly accurate description of many people in this church. Standing right next to the power, but they’ve never made contact with it through prayer!).

Some of you made a decision this year to read through your Bible.

And that’s awesome. Even better is to pray your way through it. Unearth every promise and pray them back to God.

Did you ever watch the show *Friday Night Lights*—about the Texas high school football team? Do you remember the phrase the team always repeated before a game? “Clear eyes. Full heart. Can’t lose.” Effective prayer—prayers that bring the power of God; prayers that give you clear spiritual eyes and make it where you “can’t lose”—come from hearts full of Scripture. Clear eyes; hearts full of Scripture—therefore can’t lose.

Listen: Trying to pray without knowledge of the Scripture is like trying to fire a gun with no bullets. Learn your Bible and pray out of it.

Difference-making prayer is Word-based. Second, difference-making prayer is:

2. Spirit-led

This is the counterbalance to the previous point. It is true that God had declared in his Word that he would withhold rain for idolatry and restore it after repentance, but God never gives the SPECIFICS OF WHEN that will happen. No, Elijah discerns, in his spirit, that God is ready to act on those promises. He discerns in his spirit that God is ready to act on his word and that’s because, of course, Elijah is a prophet.

You see, the Bible says that God doesn’t do anything without first revealing it to his prophets: Literally, **Amos 3:7:** *“For the Lord God does nothing without first revealing it to his servants the prophets.”*

Two times in this story we see Elijah discern in his spirit something God wants to do. In **1 Kings 17** Elijah says, “God says that now is the time he’s going to withhold rain.”

The second time is vs. **41: And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain.”**

- But wait a minute—did you notice that when Elijah said that, that there was no rain on the horizon? AFTER Elijah says this, we read, he bows down in the fetal position to pray, and he has to pray for seven extended times before there’s even the first cloud in the sky!
- **So, what’s this** “*I hear the sound of rushing rain*” business? Ahab looked up; he couldn’t hear any sound. Nobody else could see anything.
- But Elijah, because of his proximity to God and his prophethood status, could hear something nobody else could hear. Elijah, through the knowledge of the Spirit, hears things and discerns things that no one else can.

Now, you say: “Well, J.D., like I said, Elijah was an Old Testament prophet. What’s that got to do with me?”

The New Testament says that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we all have some access to the prophetic gift. Peter said in **Acts 2**, at the coming of the Holy Spirit, “*Your sons and your daughters [all of them] will prophesy.*” Paul said in **1 Corinthians 14:4**, “*I want all of you to prophesy.*”

The Spirit can give us insight when God wants to do something so that we can pray it into existence. You see, Jesus said virtually the same thing that Amos did when Amos said, “For the Lord God does nothing without first revealing it to his servants the prophets.” Jesus’ version

of that is **John 15:25**: “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing.” “But I call you friends,” he says, “because I’m going to show you what I’m doing **and invite you to participate in it.**”

Your proximity to God determines what you hear. When you have rid yourself from idols, like Elijah had; when you are walking closely with God, listening for his voice, his Holy Spirit is able to speak to your human spirit about the application of certain Scriptural promises.²

That means you’ll sometimes hear things other folks don’t—CAN’T—hear. Now, I will always remind you—there’s a little ambiguity in this. We don’t need you running around here declaring yourself the mouthpiece of God; we are always to hold what we think we discern the Spirit saying in our hearts loosely—always in submission to the Scriptures and also in submission to other believers in the church. Lots of us, well-meaning people, even people in the book of Acts, got things wrong, or sometimes they got the specifics wrong. (Sometimes for people speaking through the gift of prophecy in the New Testament, it’s like they knew the direction the Spirit was going but not all the specifics.) So, we hold what we think the Spirit is saying loosely. But it’s undeniable that in both testaments we see a Spirit-led discernment when it comes to praying into existence the promises of God.

So, we pray based on the Word, but with a deep sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit. At The Summit Church, we like to say we’re **Word-fed** and **Spirit-led**. Both are necessary in the Christian life.

Difference-making prayer is 1. Word-based; 2. Spirit-led, and #3 (and this is the heart of the message):

3. Unglamorous, Slow, and Persistent

² This point I adapt from Tony Evans’ message on 1 Kings 18:36–45.

OK, I pointed out that Elijah, when he prayed, adopts the posture of a woman in labor. He gets into the fetal position. Why does the author give us this detail?

It is because he is teaching us something very important about prayer. Difference-making prayer is work—it's long, laborious, and sometimes painful.³

The New Testament has several names for this kind of prayer:

- James calls it “effectual, fervent” prayer.
- Jesus calls it “persistent,” even “impudent” prayer.⁴
- Paul calls it “unceasing.”
- The Puritans called it “prevailing.”
- Whatever you call it, the kind of prayer that brings new life to the nation, God's spiritual rain from heaven, is slow and laborious.

Get this, y'all: Elijah prayed for the fire to fall once and God answered; but for the rain to fall, he had to pray seven times. Seven, of course, is the biblical number of completion; which meant it felt like Elijah prayed and prayed and prayed with no seeming response but Elijah wouldn't give up.

I think about that servant coming to Elijah after, say, the third time Elijah had prayed from the fetal position. And the servant says, “Still nothing, Elijah. You know, sir, all due respect, but I'm not sure this is working.” But Elijah says, “Servant, I know what the Word says, and I also know what God told me in my spirit, and then I heard in my spirit the sound of this storm ... and servant, when the written Word lines up with what God is telling me in my spirit, then I go into labor and start pushing, and if nothing is happening yet, I gotta keep going until I suck that rain cloud out of heaven.” And finally it appears, like a

³ This insight (and some of the ensuing applications) I owe to Tyler Staton's *Pray Like Monks; Live Like Fools*. See p. 154, ff.

⁴ Luke 13; Luke 18.

small cloud, just the size of a man's fist, and you gotta keep praying because God wants to send the storm but it only comes from unceasing, unyielding, relentless prayer.

So many people are attracted to the big, quick answer to prayer; the fire falling from heaven. I say it once, and BOOM! The fire falls. But new life comes to the city only through persistent, unceasing, belabored prayer. **The question is who is willing to do this secret, unglamorous, slow, persistent work of prayer.**⁵

I've told you the story of D.L. Moody, who carried around in his pocket a list of 100 people he knew who needed Jesus and prayed for them every day. For years. At his funeral, I told you 96 of the 100 had become Christians. I told you that a 96 percent success rate isn't bad. But then, I told you, it gets better—at the funeral, the remaining four were in attendance and they all accepted Christ there. And some of you were inspired, you clapped when I told the story, and some of you made your own list. But here's the question: Did you persist in the secret, unglamorous work of labored prayer? For many of you, you wanted Elijah's first experience: You expected to pray for fire once and have it fall immediately. But new life comes through that belabored, repetitive, seven-time prayer. Who is going to do that in our church?

The work of prayer is secret and unglamorous. Sometimes you have to pray and pray for what feels like seven repetitive times. And even when God answers on that seventh time, all you see is a cloud about the size of a man's fist. It's not even a full answer. It's just God giving

⁵ By the way, when Jesus talks about the Spirit working through us in the NT, he uses the same image: In John 7, Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:38–39). The English phrase “within them” comes from the single Greek word *koilia*, which means “the womb.” Jesus calls us the “womb” that God's Spirit inhabits and works in to create new life. It doesn't happen in one mighty, glamorous firefall. It happens through slow, unglamorous—pardon the graphic nature of this metaphor—pushing out of new life.

you a glimpse that he's working. That little small, insignificant cloud is him saying to you, "I hear you. Trust me. Don't give up."

There's a few things I am praying about that I will not give up on. Not ever, ever, ever. Like Müller, many of them are about people dear to me who are not yet believers. I may never see them come to faith. But I will plead with God about it until my dying breath. And if he doesn't give them to me before I die, I'm confident that, like D.L. Moody, he will give them to me after.

And y'all, every once in a while God gives me little glimmers—little clouds the size of a man's fist—that's happened recently; the full rain cloud hasn't come yet, but I see that small cloud, and I know it's God saying, "I hear you; I hear you. Don't give up. Don't despise the day of small beginnings."⁶

Oh, friend, I'm telling you, don't give up. Pray until you get an answer. Maybe it'll take seven weeks. Or seven months. Seven years. Or seven decades!

I remember the story of **Joan and Tommy Swain** in our church. Many of you don't know them, but Joan really got on fire here 30 or so years ago—before I got here. But her husband Tommy didn't want any real part of it. She came, and he stayed at home. So Joan prayed for him. And prayed and prayed for him. And she stayed with him. Eventually he moved out, left her—for 20 years—but she kept praying. And then, in February of 2009, through some pretty remarkable circumstances, God saved him, brought him back—we baptized him here in the spring of 2009—I can still remember the joy of that moment. And they are now reunited to God and each other and they served in our church together every weekend until they were medically unable—all this because a woman prayed faithfully for him for 20 years and didn't give up. Who knows what is happening up there?

⁶ Zech 4:10

Hear me: This story is an invitation for you to engage in the secret, hard, unglamorous, slow, persistent work of prayer. Everybody wants the quick prayer, the worship moment where the fire falls. You want to see revival; you want to see the signs and wonders. But who is ready to labor in secret prayer? Who is ready to wrestle through seven cycles of laborious waiting if that's what it takes?

Finally, #4, difference-making prayer is...

4. Audacious

Let me read you the last part of this story because it is so awesome: **And [Elijah] said [to the servant], "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" (Remember, all they'd seen up to this point was a single cloud on the horizon about the size of a man's fist.)** **45 And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode and went to Jezreel. 46 And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he gathered up his garment and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.**

OK, I love this image so much. Ahab's in a **horse-drawn chariot**. And because he's the king, of course, he's got multiple of the strongest horses in the land pulling that chariot. With all that horsepower, he's in the equivalent of the Lamborghini of his day. And he's going to Jezreel, which is 15 miles away. And he's booking it to beat the rain that Elijah says is coming. So he takes off.

And then Elijah, with no chariot, "gathers up his garment," which means he pulls up his robe and tucks it under his belt—in other words, he's not got on his racing clothes. He's not in Lululemon joggers or anything; he's got on a full-length robe that he's tucked up under his belt. And he takes off on foot for a 15-mile journey. And the old boy outruns Ahab's chariot. He's like The Flash. I mean, I just wish

I'd been there when the old boy in a robe streaked past Ahab in the chariot. Ahab's booking it and Elijah is like (zoom!).

What a bizarre end to this story. (I mean, of all the miracles Elijah did, I think this one has to be the coolest.) But still, you have to ask, "What's being communicated?"

Here's what I think it is: Prayer—when you realize that God really is the one fighting for you; when you perceive that he hears you and answers you—gives you an energy that nothing else can.

- Elijah reminds me here of Caleb, who at 85 said, "I'm gonna go take that mountain for God. I started when I was 40 and now I'm 85, but God has given me strength at 85 that I had at 40. Because he's still fighting for me."
- One day, your strength will fade. Mine will fade. Your eloquence will fade. Your influence will fade. People won't look to you to lead; they may not even come to you for advice. But if you are mighty in prayer, see, I don't care how old you are—you might be laid up right now in a hospital bed as an invalid—but if you are mighty in prayer, you can still move mountains, bring rain clouds out of the sea, and outrun horses. *"Even youths (the elderly Isaiah said) shall faint and grow weary, and young men shall fall utterly exhausted; but those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they will mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run, and not grow weary; they shall walk, and not faint."*
- Listen, I'm not getting any younger. And one day, and I hope it's not anytime soon, but you guys here at Summit will find me too old and irrelevant to be your pastor. You'll be like, "Nobody has even heard of Nicolas Cage anymore; why do you keep referring to him?" And when that day comes, I'll step aside. And I hope I do it gracefully. But see, I'll never stop praying for you. One day that will become my primary role in this church. But by prayer I'll be able to outrun whatever cool, trendy little skinny-jean-wearing whippersnapper you bring in here to replace me. My power is not in my youth or my strength; it's in the secret, unglamorous work

of prayer. God's got a soft spot for that, and so less concerned that I am about being mighty up here for you, I want to be mighty there for you. I know I won't be able to be a perfect dad for my kids, but I want them to be able to say that nobody ever prayed for me like my father did.

I've quoted **Tony Evans a few times in this message**. Let me wrap this up with a story I heard him tell, that brings a perfect end to this passage illustrating all four characteristics—and then I'm going to give you some specific instructions about getting ready for the **21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**, which starts this coming Friday:

Tony Evans says, "I was doing an evangelistic crusade in Columbia, South Carolina. It was Sunday night, the first night of the crusade, when somewhere between 15–20,000 people had gathered in the stadium for us to preach the gospel to. Before the service, all the ministers and the planning committee went downstairs, underneath Brice stadium, to pray. A gentleman came in and said, 'We've just been warned that a major storm is coming and it will be here by 7:00.' It's now 6:00 and the meeting is supposed to begin at 7:00. So we went into prayer. We prayed that God would hold off the rain and allow the service to go on. All the ministers prayed, but every minister, including me, prayed a safe prayer.

Let me tell you what a safe prayer is. A safe prayer is, 'Lord, if it be thy will, don't let it rain.' See, you throw that 'if it's your will' into that prayer, because that way, if it still rains, you can get God off the hook. So we prayed that safe prayer.

But at the end of the prayer, a 5'1" lady named Linda, not a minister, a lay-sister, said, 'May I pray?' And here is the summary of her prayer. She said, 'Lord, we are here doing what you asked us to do. You asked us to win people to Christ, you asked us to proclaim your Word; we have spent money, time, and energy

putting this crusade together, doing what YOU told us to do. So you would embarrass yourself if you let it rain, because you control the weather. So therefore, Lord, [and *here's where it got crazy*, Dr. Evans said], I command you to stop the rain.'

He said, "All the preachers looked at each other and waited for lightning to strike this poor little 5'1" woman commanding God to stop the rain. We all walked up into the stadium; it's now 7:00 and time for the service to begin. The emcee comes out and says, 'Ladies and gentlemen, we know rain is supposed to come. We're just going to go as long as we can go.' As we begin the service, it's black and thundering behind us, and you can begin to hear the rain. It begins to mist, and you could see people were beginning to leave. I'm looking down from the platform; Linda is in the crowd, sitting next to a gentleman who opens up his umbrella and puts it over her. Linda takes her hand and pushes his hand back and refuses the umbrella.

"And then it happened," Dr. Evans said. "As we sat there at Brice Stadium, with our own eyes we saw the rain clouds split; half of it went around this way, half of it went around that way, and then the rain came back together at the other end of the stadium."

"The preachers were being spiritually polite, but Linda gave an effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous person. She got down and put her head between her knees and pushed and pushed, metaphorically speaking. Like Jacob, she said, 'I'm not going to let you go until you do something. I'm going to give birth to a miracle.'"

Now, my point is not that you should never say, "If it's God's will." No, we always pray in submission to God's will, believing that he always knows best and will sometimes overrule us. We always say, like Jesus did, "Not my will, but yours be done." The point is that there comes a time for boldness—when we say, "God, it's time for you to be

glorified. The Word says it and my spirit senses it." And we boldly ask for it. We say, "Pour it out here now, God. Now. It's time." And the sheer audacity and impudence of our prayer (both biblical words, by the way) moves heaven.

How do we know God is ready to answer prayer that way? Well, see, it's because the point of the story is not the awesomeness of Elijah. No, one day, a prophet greater than Elijah would come, and when he called down fire from heaven on a sacrifice to show that the Lord was God, that fire of judgment went into himself. And then, he put that fire into us as the Holy Spirit to shine a light to the gospel in the world. God has said, "I have made you a light to the nations! So ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance. Call unto me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things you have not yet known."

Our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting starts officially this coming Friday, Jan. 12. And it will end with regional prayer nights on Feb. 2 (you'll hear more about that later).

I want everyone to participate. Here's what I want you to ask: What do you want to see God do? Family/ church / world / our city? And for 21 days, let's labor in prayer for that.

You say, "Well, what's the fasting bit? Are you saying we'll go 21 days without food?" Most people choose a set of things to fast from. Some people will choose a couple of days a week to fast through a meal and devote that time to prayer. Some will give up something for a month. The classic thing to give up, of course, is food, and that should be at the top of your list, but some people choose other things—video

games, TV, eating out, whatever. For resources on fasting—that will give you ideas on how to fast, instruct you on what to do while you are fasting; help you understand the theology behind fasting so that you don't fast like a heretic—you can find all of that on our website (summitchurch.com/prayer).

Another way we want to help you: On our [SUMMIT APP](#), there's a new "Daily Revival" feature. Just open the app and it's right at the top. It will give you daily prayer prompts throughout this entire 21 days. It's also a one-stop place to do your daily quiet time. It's a place where you can submit prayer requests that other people WILL pray for—I do it every day; and every day on the app you can get up-to-date prayer requests from some of our missionaries and church planters that you can pray for every day.

Again, I want to challenge you to do something bold this season. Go for it. TWENTY-ONE days of focused prayer that involves some form of fasting. And even if you can only take baby steps on the fasting front, do something.

Finally, (summitchurch.com/prayer) **let me use this moment to invite you to participate in our prayer ministries, like the Boiler Room or prayer groups that meet throughout the week. Again, go to summitchurch.com/prayer to get started, and talk to your campus pastor about specific ways to be involved at your campus.**

Summit, God is doing something! He's moving in our hearts on this like never before.

- And it fills me with anticipation. I sense God moving my spirit.
- **It's like J. Edwin Orr said, "Whenever God is ready to do something new with his people, he always sets them to praying."**

Invitation: We want to open up these altars for prayer.

- God's word to me over the break: *"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert ... to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise" (Isaiah 43:18, 21).*
- It made me ask: What new thing are you asking God to do? Maybe you should come down here as a way of saying, "I'm covenanting to pray for this, like a woman in labor, and not to give up until the answer comes. Coming forward is my declaration to God that I'm serious about this; I'm full of expectation, and I'm not giving up." I'm coming down. Maybe you want to join me in it.

Hey, maybe you need to come to Jesus. The whole point of all this is God wants you to know him. That's what all these prayers are ultimately about—people coming to know Jesus as Savior. Maybe you need to receive Jesus personally as your Savior today. That's what Jesus prayed for you. That's what we've prayed for you. Come, and take the hand of one of our prayer team here at the altar and tell them you want to accept Christ. What a great way to start the new year.

Let's all stand right now, as our worship teams come—if you have something to pray about as we begin this new year, or you need to receive Jesus or do some kind of business with him, you come—right now. These altars are open...