

How to Be More Effective in Your Prayer Life

By James Moreland

James Moreland:

I'd like to say once again what a special time this has been for me and my wife. This is the fourth Sunday evening we've been together with you, and next week will be our last week this semester. We'd love to come back sometime if we'd be invited. But.

[Audience Cheers]

But, thank you. But I just want to let you know that that my wife and I have looked forward to this all week long, every week. We've loved being here. And it has been a real joy for us. We've enjoyed worship and enjoyed your hearts. And I know that you all are busy, but you would not be here if you didn't want to grow as a Christian.

Brothers and sisters, I just returned from Ohio State late last night. I got home about eleven o'clock, and I have been at Ohio State for two or three days at a conference for Christian intellectuals from around the country, and it was a very interesting time. I walked around the campus. Ohio State's got something like 50 to 60 thousand students. And it is, as I walked around the campus and as I listened to professors from colleges from all over the country, most of them secular colleges. There is an unprecedented emptiness on the part of your generation. There is a hunger for something that's very desperate and deep. The suicide rate, as I've shared

with you before, is rising quickly, and there is a tremendous emptiness. And the and the problem is this: pop culture and pop artists are now providing the leadership for your generation. It is primarily movie makers, television producers, and songwriters that are providing the leadership for people your age. And these, this class of people are themselves deeply confused inside with the result that there is a tremendous loneliness and emptiness on the part of college students and high school students. And I come, I come with a real sense of, of need, and next week, in our last time, I'm going to invite you to join my wife and me and others in dedicating your life to changing the world. I made--I dedicated my life to doing that in 1969. And I have [inaudible], and my wife made a dedication of the same sort, and we are two radical people and we are, we will never quit. Talk about giving up--you know we're never gonna give up. You can forget that. There will be no giving up. And I want to invite you next week to think very seriously about devoting your whole life to changing the world for Jesus Christ, and I want to talk about what that doesn't mean. And I'll tell you right now, it doesn't mean going into full-time Christian work. It might or it might not.

But tonight, I want to talk to you about how to grow as a Christian. When my wife and I got married, we were in Dallas Seminary and we had both been on Campus Crusade staff for several years and moved several times. And so we decided, well, we had two years of seminary left, we were living in a two bedroom apartment and we were going to stay there for two years until we got out of school. Unfortunately, my wife had to drive about 45 or 50 minutes one way to work, and it was about an hour and a half or longer round-trip. We live in Dallas, she worked up in North Dallas. The rent on our apartment went up twice the first year we lived there, and we had another fee slapped on us because we had a freezer. I had was cleaning swimming pools and I had 10 little swimming pools and a business I had; I was cleaning them and I was taking about

25 mile round-trip just to get to my pools. And we were just running ourselves ragged, trying to make ends meet and to get hither-tither and yon, and we were not able to devote ourselves to the work I believe God had called me to do. So my wife and I began to pray that God would give us a place to live, completely rent free. And we began to ask the Lord if he would be gracious enough not only to give us a place to live that didn't cost anything, but if he would make it closer to the seminary, and closer to my swimming pools, and really close to where Hope worked, and we began to pray this. We didn't share it with anybody.

It was about four or five weeks later that I went to Colorado to teach a class and I was there for a few days and I got a phone call from my wife, Hope, and she said, "Well, Jay, guess what happened?" And I said, "What happened?" She said, "He did it." I said, "Who did what?" "The Lord answered our prayers." Turns out that a lady came up to my wife at Arnold's of Dallas where she worked and said, "Listen, I happen to know your husband's in seminary. Could you all use a place to live rent free?"

[Audience murmurs and claps]

My wife said, "Well, what do you mean?" Turned out that there was a multi-millionaire, worth probably 150 million dollars, who had a home in the center of Dallas, in the center of the city of Dallas in what's called Highland Park County. You're familiar with Highland Park, Dallas. But, you know, it's a very, very wealthy area of Dallas. They had a garage apartment behind their mansion that was a little containe, nice little apartment where they needed a couple to live so that when they went to Wimbledon or China or wherever.

[Audience Laughter]

The couple would move into the main house and make sure their 12 year old daughter got to the bus stop, and got to school and everything on time, and it turned out that God gave us that place to live. We paid not a penny to live there. Hope's trip to work was cut down to a 15 to 18 minutes. Five of my 10 pools were within a mile and a half of the house and it was close to Dallas seminary, and it was an unbelievable coincidence. It was an, it was a specific answer, a prayer.

A few months, several months ago, about a year and a half, two months ago, my daughter Ashley came up and mentioned, said, "Dad, can we get a pool table?" And I just I told her, "Well, honey, really, I don't think we can. I can't afford it right now, and I just don't think we can justify the expense." Deep in my heart, I felt like it was a good thing to do for a number of reasons. I thought it was the sort of thing where it would provide a place where people could come over and, you know, when guys come around, I kind of like them at my house, not somewhere else--and you be the judge as to why that's true. But so, I told the Lord, I said, look, listen, I got to tell you, Lord, it'd be nice. I'd really like you to provide a pool table for us. It would be something, I think, that would be good for the family, and I tried to reason with him and persuade him about it. And one of the most important forms of prayer, by the way, is persuading God that you have a case. Seriously, you look at the Old Testament prophets, and one of the keys in prayer is that you lay out a case on paper as to why you think God should answer your prayer and you read your case to him. And this is it, read it, go through the points. And I did. I said, I've got some reasons for this. Here's why I'd like you to answer the prayer. Two, three weeks later, my wife and I go to my daughter Ali's soccer game. They're about I don't know

how many kids on the team, 14, 15 kids, and all the parents are there. And one guy comes up, comes up to me and says, "Would you could you use a new pool table?"

[Audience murmurs and gasps]

Now, I'm not kidding you. I said to him, I said, "You've got to be kidding me, Jim. I've been praying for a pool table." And this guy's a believer, and he said, "Well, I'm an answer to your prayer." And I said, "Boy, you sure are," I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I've had a guy who's been renting a house for me for six months and he has left. He hasn't paid his rent and he's gone, and he left about a two thousand dollar new pool table in that house, and I get to get rid of it." And he said, "I've got a truck, and if you can get five or six guys and pick that thing up, you can use the truck and it's yours. I want to get this thing off my hands." and I--and so God answered those prayers.

Now, I shared this with you. I shared this with you not because I want you to view God as this gimme-gimme thing. That's not the point. I picked the pool. I could have picked something like, I have hundreds of examples of this. I could have picked more substantial examples. But I picked the pool table just because it's a little picky, unique thing that meant something to my family. And I picked it because Jesus Christ cares about the little details of your life and he has invited us to make our requests known to him. Now, he doesn't answer all my prayers any more than he does all yours. But God is a God who answers prayer. He's also a God who comes to us in time of need if we will learn to experience his presence.

When I first joined Campus Crusade staff, I'll never forget I had been dating a girl at the time, and we had broken up, and we were going through--I was, I knew she was back at the

University of Missouri going to college, and I was on crusade staff in Colorado and I was living in an apartment with another guy. And I was just, I was kind of on my own. And I had this little roll-away bed from a motel that I'd gotten to sleep on. And it was, it was a very lonely situation. And I was just--it was, it was one evening I was just kind of by myself, and I went into the room, closed the door, and I got on my knees and I began to simply pour my heart out to the Lord and I'll never forget it. I felt a presence come into that room and I can only tell you that God surrounded me with his reality. And I felt enveloped by a warm, caring, it was a slightly frightening thing because I could tell whoever it was, was a good bit bigger and smarter than I was. But there was a warm, tender presence that came into that room and strengthened me in a way that I will never be able to thank him enough for.

Last year, I think I shared this with you a few weeks ago. About a year ago, I was wrestling with a decision and I was grappling with perspective on something I can't share with you. But I was in the living room on my knees in a particular place I like to pray alone, and the Lord came and stood in front of me. And by that I mean, I could tell his presence was right there. I didn't see a vision. Some people do, I did not. And God, the Lord Jesus spoke to me. He placed a thought in my mind that came from him as to what to do, and it had a twofold aspect to it. And within 48 hours, I had two different people that I respect give me the same message without knowing that I was looking for it, and I have, I have obeyed what the Lord told me ever since. And I will tell you, it represented a huge unburdening of my heart at that time.

Now, I want to say, I say this to you because, look, you're young and you've got problems and you come into this auditorium this evening. Some of you are suffering from guy-girl difficulties. Some of you were struggling with friendship relationships. Others of you are struggling with things about your appearance or things that you don't like about yourself, what

have you. And I tried to tell you last week that the most important thing I can say to you last week was to just be patient and to realize you're still very young, and you, and you will be able to look back on your life and say, with all honesty, I have had a good life if you stay close to Christ. Now, you might not believe that right now because you're coming here tonight and you're hurting, and doggone it, you have--and I was the same way when I was your age--but what your problem is, you think, you know, I'm hurting now, and, gosh, if I'm still hurting like this, you know, five days from now even, I mean, that's like an eternity at your age. Your four months seems like forever. You know what? What if I'm not married in four months or, you know.

[Audience Laughter]

And, and you think, and you, and I just want to tell you to relax and to be patient because God--you, when you get to be my age, if you will practice some of the things I'm going to share with you the rest of our time, you will look back on your life and you will see heartache in your life. I'm not going to deny that. And you'll see time is when you were when God did not answer your prayers. But you will look back on your life with a deep sense that there has been a companion with you who has taken care of you.

Now, I want to talk to you tonight about how to grow spiritually. Now, when you reach 25 years of age, assuming you're not there yet. What are you going to do between now and the time you're 25? And for those of you older just pick a relevant date.

[Audience Laughter]

How are you going to be? How are you going to guarantee that by the time you're 25, you are going to be much more mature than you are now. How are you? What are you going to do so that by the time, let's say you're 25, you're going to have an awful lot more faith. Your faith is going to be more stable and strong. Your sense of peace and calm and strength inside and confidence and God is going to be more real, so you're not having to crank it up. What are you going to do now? I can guarantee you God isn't going to pour it on you like milk. It's not going to happen just by having a Christian T-shirt on and kind of walking around and listening to music. Right. How, what are you going to do? That's what I want to talk about tonight.

And we have a problem because brothers and sisters, the church at this period of time has been giving you a message that isn't true. And the message is basically a picture of spiritual growth. And here's what that picture looks like. It says here, if you'll do this, you'll grow spiritually, number one: you got to attend church or a service you need, you will sing in worship to Jesus, you hear the Bible taught, and if you combine that with, with Christian fellowship and if you'll try to have a quiet time once in a while, you'll grow spiritually. Now, there's, there's nothing wrong with what was recommended. The problem is it's not intense enough because Christianity isn't another set of activities like tennis that you add to a secular life. You understand? Am I making sense to you? Your relationship with God has got to be the core of who you are. Now, that doesn't mean that you are only thinking about God and you're not doing your homework or anything else, especially if you're in my class.

[Audience Laughter]

But the problem is that you are not going to, by the time you're 25, if all you do is read a few Christian books and try to have a quiet time now and then, and go to church and fellowship group. And even get involved with small Bible study, and sing praise hymns, that's not enough. And all of those are good activities.

Now what's missing? This is the main thing that's missing. That you--that has been left out of what you have been told. And it's this is: what is missing is bodily disciplines and training exercises that you do every day, bodily discipline and training exercises. Now, I know that one over like a lead balloon because you don't know what I'm talking about, so let me clarify this. Suppose you wanted to become good at the piano. Could it be enough for you to meet once a week and sing about playing the piano? Hear somebody give a talk about piano playing, hang around piano players and drink coffee and talk about piano. Golly, what a scale that was. Stuff like that.

[Audience Laughter]

(Laughs) I mean, do you think that's. Or what about learning to play tennis? Yeah. Same thing, you hang around a tennis player. Now, now, what would be missing in that? Practice. Now, if you're going to if you're going to become good at tennis, what do you have to do? You have got to get your body involved. You can't just get your mind involved. You've got to bring your body into it. And guess what you have to do? You have to do some things over, and over, and over, and over again. Why? Because what you've got to develop is a piano or tennis character. What's character? Character is your set of habits. If you want to know what a person's character is, a person's character is all of their habits. What's a habit? It's, it's the way you think

and feel and behave without having to will to do it. Let me say it again: your habits are the way that you feel, it's the way you think, and it's the way you act without having to will to feel that way, or without having to will to think that way, or without having to choose to behave that way. A habit is something that's triggered without you even having the will to do it. And you are the sum total of your habits. And if you want to become good at the piano, you've got to develop piano habits. That means you've got to develop a piano character. If you want to become good at math, you've got to develop a math character. You've actually got to develop certain ways of thinking and feeling and behaving that make you good at math.

Now, what's the point? If you want to be good at the Christian life, you've got to develop a Christian set of habits. You've got to develop a Christian character, just like you have to develop a piano character. And just as you cannot develop a piano character unless you get your body involved in doing some things over and over again, you cannot develop a Christian character unless you get your body involved over and over again, repetitively. Let me illustrate it.

Oh, 10 years ago, I debated one of the top atheists in the world. Guy named Kai Nielsen. I was asked to debate him at the University of Mississippi. I had just received my Ph.D. in philosophy about a year or two before then. I'd had one journal article I'd submitted for publication. This man had written 285 journal articles and 20 books on defending atheism. He was so well known that for my Ph.D. at USC they'd give a set of books you've got to read to pass your doctoral exams, and his writings were required readings to pass my Ph.D. at SC. He was the president of the Canadian Philosophical Association. And I shared with you that we got on a platform and we debated 3 hours on the existence of God.

Now, how did I have the courage to do that? It wasn't because 10 years before then, I'd read books on evangelism and played tapes on it and listened and sung songs about it. What I actually did is I actually went and shared my faith with people over and over and over again. One on one. And I first went up and I'd say, listen, if you have a few minutes, I'd like to talk to you about how you can know Jesus Christ personally. Ah, get out of here. Okay? I got rejected, but I kept doing it. Eventually, I got to the point where I was willing to walk into a sorority or a football, football team, pro athletes; so I could speak to that group. Then eventually it went on. What made the difference? How did I develop an evangelistic character? By repeatedly performing certain behaviors over and over again.

If you want peace and joy in your life as a Christian, you've got to practice spiritual training. You must you must undergo training exercises. As a Christian that involved the use of your body. Now, just to prove this, let me show you some biblical passages. And then I want to get very practical with you. Please turn to Romans chapter 12. Romans 12. (Pauses) This is a passage you're familiar with, I hope. It says something very important, and I want to call your attention to an aspect of this passage that you may not have thought about. Paul is, is exhorting us to become dedicated to spiritual growth. And look what he says in Romans 12, verse 1, He says, "I urge you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present," what? Notice he does not say to present your mind. He does not say to present yourself. He says to present your body. What's your body? It's this thing right here. Okay? Now you think, Okay that sounds interesting. What. what does that mean? What does it mean to present your body? Okay, turn to Romans 6, and he clarifies what it means. He clarifies what it means.

(Pauses) In Romans, in Romans 6, in verse 12, Paul unpacks what he means, what he's going to say, and Romans 12 and look what he says, "Therefore, don't let sin reign," where, "in

your body that you should obey its laws and do not go on presenting," now, look very carefully, "the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but instead present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead," And what? Your what? "Your members." What are the members of your body? Your stomach, your intestines, your legs, your mouth, your ears, your eyes. If sin exists in your body, according to the Bible, your body is not evil, but it contains evil and sin resides in your body parts.

Now, what does that mean? That means, stay with me, because I'm going to give you a practical application, but I want you to get the theory here. Sin dwells as habit in your body. Illustration: I'm a lefty. I can write with my left hand, and if you asked me to write a paragraph from the right hand, I couldn't do it if I wanted to. Now, why is that? Because there are certain habits of writing that exist in my fingers and in this part of my hand. When I sit down to write a sentence, I do not will intentionally to write the English letters the way I do. I don't have to even think about it, do you? I can do it by what? Habit. Where do those habits exist? In my body. If you want to learn to play tennis, you've got to do certain things over and over and over again in order to form what? Habits. Where do the habits reside? In certain regions of your body. If you're swinging improperly, it's because certain parts of your body are veering away from the way you've trained them to behave.

Now, similarly, sin resides throughout your body and you can almost begin to feel when you are, if you're--suppose you're in the habit of being anxious. There will be localized places in your body that you will begin to feel that anxiety well up. By the way, same is true with anger. One of the greatest cures for anger is fasting, because what fasting does is it's a way of presenting your comfort zone to God, to retrain it, to be able to live when it's not comforted, to feel okay. Now, I'm going to come to fasting later, but fasting is a way of presenting your

stomach to God, your members to God as instruments of righteousness. Why do you want to do that? Because right about in here is where your anger and your anxiety resides. Sometimes it's a little higher, but if you can gain control of your stomach, you can reprogram your anger and anxiety which resides in your body not to run in a certain direction.

If you are the kind of person that needs attention and you talk a lot to get attention. One of the things you've got to do is to retrain your tongue. If you're a sour person and kind of depressive, that sourness will reside in certain areas of emotion throughout your body and right here, and one of the ways that you can become less sour is if you will train yourself to smile. This is not fake. It's not that you're trying to be dishonest. It's a form of training. And what, what you have to do if you're going to grow spiritually is you've got to bring your body parts into your Christian life and do repetitive behaviors to change the habits that reside in the members of your body.

This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, "I buffet my body," train it. And this is why he says in Colossians 3:5 to present your members to God. He says it again. Now, let me just say now again, before we move to some practical application here. Think of your Christian life as a sport or as a learning to play a musical instrument. And I mean this literally, if you learn to play the piano, you want to develop a piano character, and all that means is you want to develop certain piano playing habits that reside in your members that you don't have to even think about when you sit down. You understand that? If you have to sit down and play a piece and will to play it, you're in trouble. If you guys are tempted with pornography and you get to a point and you have not trained the members of your bodies to be able to handle that by getting away from it, you will, you will give into it. And what you've got to do is start by dealing with food and

things of that sort, and you have to retrain your body. Now, what I want to talk about is some specifics and I want to then move. I've given you some biblical passages.

What you want is a Christian character. You want a Christian set of habits. What kind of habits? Those that will give you strength, and peace, and joy, and calmness, and courage; and an ability to handle your depression, and your anxiety, and your heartache. You want a character that is harder to defeat. How do you do that? By practicing disciplines of the spirit. Sometimes, I simply call them bodily training exercises. These are training exercises for spiritual, not piano character, (laughs) okay? These are training exercises that will help you get better at life instead of getting better at math or something else.

Now, I want to be very clear and clarify. I'm going to give you; I'm going to suggest three of them for you tonight. There are about 15 that are typical. But I'm going to suggest 3 this evening. And before I do, I want to give you a couple of more words on it. Just think of fasting for a minute. These disciplines are not to be viewed as works. You are not to view these as attempts to impress God so that he will think, well, maybe I ought to grant him a few more requests because look at all the fasting they're doing. This it has nothing to do with trying to make God impressed with how spiritual you are. This has nothing at all to do with that. Furthermore, these disciplines--this is very important, there's a lot of confusion on this. These disciplines do not exist so you can get good at the disciplines. The disciplines exist so that you can get good at living.

Let me give you an example. You play the scales not so you can get good at playing scales (laughs). You, you play or when you, if you're on a soccer team, you practice certain drills not so you're good at the drills. You play scales so you can be good at playing Bach or Beethoven or something of that sort. Similarly, you practice fasting, not so you can get good at

fasting. In fact, you practice fasting so you need it less and less. You practice fasting so that you can get good at remaining calm and controlling your anger and anxiety. That's why you practice fasting. Now, there are other reasons to fast, but I can't cover that tonight. So a discipline is something that you practice. It involves your body and it is not there so you can get good at it. It's there so you can get good at life.

Now, I want to warn you that if you begin to practice some of these, you ought to anticipate trouble at the beginning. And I'll explain that in a minute. Let me suggest three disciplines for you to begin with. Jesus Christ practiced every single one of these. And if He needed them and He did, you have to understand that as a human being, Jesus Christ grew. He certainly, He was the son of God, but He was also a human and in His human nature, He regularly practiced disciplines of the spirit and the one of the single, the single most important of the disciplines is the discipline of solitude and silence, the discipline of solitude and silence.

Would you turn to Mark chapter 1 verse 35? Mark 1:35. (Pauses) Here we see Jesus after He had expended Himself; He'd given out a lot of energy. We find in verse 35 of Mark 1 a custom that was a part of His life. The verse 35 it says, "And then the early morning, while it was still dark he rose." And by the way, don't worry about getting up early in the dark. That was because these people went to bed early. Remember me mentioning the sleep thing. There, there, there is a discipline called watching, where you deny yourself sleep in order to wait for God to come to you. And it is a discipline. Sometimes it's, it's kind of a thing where you get up in the middle of the night and you go somewhere and you wait for two or three hours, you wake up at 2:00 and you wait. That is a discipline. But Jesus, getting up early is because he probably went to bed at 8:00. So don't, don't, don't get hung up on that part of it. No, I'm serious because many Christians look at these and they think they're kind of like taking bad medicine. Oh, man, does

that mean, I got to get up early. No, if you're going to bed late, get up late. Don't skip class, for heaven's sake.

[Audience Laughter]

Alright. Verse 35, "In the early morning while it was still dark, he arose and he departed and went out to a lonely place." Now, I can't, I don't have time this evening to demonstrate all the places in the Gospels where Jesus got away by Himself in a quiet, lonely area. The discipline of solitude is the discipline of going to be alone without talking or hearing noise, if possible. And you add the discipline of silence to solitude and silence is the, is, is refraining from using your mouth to talk. It is keeping your mouth shut. It is training yourself to be quiet. And it's also denying yourself the right to listen to anything, to music or things of that sort. Solitude is without any question the single most important thing in my wife's life and in mine that has changed our Christian life. This is absolutely critical.

Now, why is this important? Here's the problem. We all have baggage. We all have insecurities and problems. Right? Now, we're also good liars. We lie to ourselves. We don't like to face our stuff, do we? So guess what we do. We learn, and we're real good at this, we learn to work out our problems by setting up our social systems to sustain us as dysfunctional people (laughs). Not a cheery picture, and it's not the whole truth. But we do it. Some of us do it by talking all the time. Others do it by unhooking and kind of, you know, when you walk past them they don't look up, and the reason is they don't want to be rejected. So they reject you first by not looking at you. They don't want to make eye contact. Or we surround ourselves with people that

keep us adrenalized and high energy. Now, guess what? Now friendship is wonderful, and it's not all unhealthy. Don't hear me saying all your relationships are sin.

[Audience Laughter]

Only part, only part of it is sin, okay? But, but guess what happens? What happens is if you continue to need that social system to feel okay about yourself, you're going to be controlled by it and you're not going to change because the social system has an interest in keeping you the same. Now, what you've got to do is to train yourself to unhook from that social system. You've got to get away from it. You've got to learn to distance from the people that you love and care about and that you're around, and to get away from them.

I was talking to my daughter Ashley today. When you're, if you're inclined, if you're lonely and nervous and you're inclined to call somebody on the phone cause you need to be around somebody, that's maybe that's not a bad idea. But I'm suggesting that you sometimes train yourself, before you go for that phone, to learn to be alone that evening or that afternoon or practice that. I'm not denying the importance of friendship. Don't hear me say that. But I am saying that if Jesus Christ, and if the great people in the history of the church, and all the great ones, have told of the need for regular periods of learning to be alone and quiet, you need it, too.

How do you do this? It can be as simple as trying to take a walk for 30 minutes to 45 minutes by yourself if that, if that's all you can do. Another example is if you could drive in your car, if you have, if you have a ways to drive to work and you've got, say, 30 minutes, one way to try to get in your car, and drive slowly if you can and to be quiet; turn everything off and learn to

sit and relax and be quiet. Another thing you can do is when you when you're around, people socially practice being quiet and not speaking. Now, don't be weird about it.

[Audience Laughter]

But, so now the next week on campus, people are emailing me because no one is talking, what's going on? You know, I don't want that. But, but this is, this will be, this is strength for your soul. Now what, now here's what's going to happen if you do this. If you get another, another wonderful thing, if you can, is to try to get away on Saturday mornings or some morning when you study, go buy yourself somewhere and get away from people. And if you can take just a little bit of time to walk and to be alone and to contemplate before you study, do it, if you can. Now, what's going to happen if you do this is you're going to--the first thing that will happen to you is you'll get fidgety, and antsy, and insecure. And that's, that's what you should expect, because what that will tell you is how desperately you depend on your contact with other people to feel okay about yourself. And you will never grow with Jesus Christ if you never learn the art of being alone. Solitude is critical.

Secondly, forgive me for going quickly, but I want to get through three of these. The second one is the discipline of frugality. Frugality. Frugality is, is refusing to use something you own for your own pleasure. Frugality is refusing to use something that you own for your own pleasure. Now, now, please hear me. It is not because there's something wrong with what you own. It is training yourself not to need it. Here's an illustration. Frugality would be abstaining from the radio or from any kind of music for a week to two week period. Frugality would be abstaining from television, let's say, for a month here. Here's another example of frugality. Now,

you may think this is a little silly, but it is refusing to wear attractive clothing in social situations where it threatens you not to look attractive. One of the most important things you can do is to train yourself to wear clothing that is very plain. Now, let me finish the sentence here. When you go someplace to wear clothing, that that is that people, you know, people will probably think is not wildly inappropriate, but they'll just think it's kind of mayonnaise, and to learn, to learn that that's okay.

Listen, when I cleaned swimming pools, my mom and dad are blue collar workers and I was going to these people's houses cleaning their pools. And I look like some just some pool cleaning guy, and these people treated me like just a scummy blue collar guy. That's not my view. That was theirs. And I did not tell them, there were people I would not tell that I was smarter than they were and had more education because I wanted not, I wanted not to need them to know that. Now, I am not saying there's anything wrong if you have nice clothing and makeup and all that to enjoying it and feeling praise--enjoy your nice clothes. Don't hear me saying that. But maybe you say to yourself, I need this too much. Then maybe what you should do is to train yourself to refrain from using your nicer clothing in situations and go for the clothing that it's not going get as much attention in order to train yourself, that you can deny yourself those things and you can still be okay.

Fasting is another example. I recommend that if a person wants to practice fasting that they, they start with a meal of one meal a week and they, they start by, by forgoing lunch; eat breakfast and then forego lunch. And if you'd like, if you want to go further than that, then I would suggest that you forgo breakfast and lunch, and you might even be able to get it up longer than that. Now the point of fasting, again, this is not to impress God. It is to train yourself to

unhook from things that are you're relying upon to feel comforted so that you can face what's really bothering you and work on it. Is this making any sense?

See, see, look. If we're not careful, we live day to day primarily wanting to feel good and comforted, and not to feel uncomfortable. And there's nothing wrong with that. But, after a while we start using this as our God. And what, what the discipline of frugality says is, not that there's anything wrong with the radio, not that there's anything wrong with television, not that there's anything wrong with nice clothes or food. But there comes a time when you'd say, I'm going to unhook from this for a period of time simply to learn to improve my swing. You get the point? To work on my character, my habits.

The first one then is solitude. The second one is frugality, including I would put fasting, which is the refraining from using food for a period of time. And the third one is prayer as a discipline, prayer as a discipline. Now you can view prayer in one or two ways, and I've already talked to you about this, but I want to give you some tips that we've already shared. I'll try to make this quick, because I know you need you need to go. But prayer as a discipline is different than prayer, as a way of trying to get your requests answered. Prayer as a discipline is a form of training exercise, and when you take on prayer as a form of training, your body position makes all the difference in the world. If you want to train yourself to pray, there are certain things you need to do. And I've already shared a couple, but let me list some things that will change your life if you'll make them part of your regular prayer life. And the first one is, as I've already told you, the use of the Jesus prayer. The Jesus prayer is the prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." You pray that prayer 100 times a day and it will change your life.

Now, here's why. You get up and you're thinking about 50 different things, and you have no interest in talking to God or anything. So what you do, I'll get, I do this when I come to work.

I get in the car and I'm thinking about my day and I start, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me," and say it out loud if you can. Lord Jesus Christ... if you're driving in a car, you have to learn to say it without your lips moving because people think you're crazy.

[Audience Laughter]

So you can learn to do it. You say, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. After you say it about 10 or 15 times, guess what happens? You're actually thinking about the prayer, and now you say (emphasizing a different word each time), Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me; Lord Jesus Christ. You emphasize each word. Now your mind is focused on God. Then what I do, is I take two or three Bible verses I've memorized and I use those as occasions to pray for my life and my world. So I will say something like "Trust in the Lord and do good, and Lord, I am trusting you this morning for Allison and Ashley and Hope," and I'll pray for their needs and then do good. And I'll say, "Would you give me opportunities today to do something for my students that will strengthen him, especially Joe?" I'll say something like. Now, guess what happens after you do that? What happens to you? Your mind wanders, doesn't it? How can you bring your mind back? Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, Lord. So when you find your mind wandering in prayer, you use the Jesus prayer as an exercise to return your mind back on God. It's a form of training, that's all it is. It's not enough way to impress God. So I have found the use of that simple prayer as a way of getting me to focus on God. Now, I only need to say it five or six times and I'm there because I've said that prayer so many times. Now, if I say it five or six times, my mind is there and then I jump into these verses

I love and I use the verses to direct me and my prayer. When my mind wanders, what do I do? I bring the Jesus prayer back in.

Okay, that's, that's tip number one on prayer. I'm going to give you a four tips on this and then I'll, and then we'll close. Number two; remember when you pray to present the members of your body to God as instruments of righteousness. What does that mean? You have to pray on your knees regularly. You need to pray occasionally with your hands held up in the air. And I would even recommend, if you are very needy, that you lay on the floor and prostrate, prostrate yourself before God on the floor with your hands out or you get on your knees and you pray to God like this. And if you're uncomfortable like that, you find a place where you can get on your knees and put your head in your hands and you pray out loud as much as you can. Do not pray in your mind. Now, when you go to bed or other times, don't just lay there and pray in your mind. You get on your knees and pray out loud. And I'll tell you why. Is it because God will hear you? No. Remember, we're not talking about impressing God. If you want to talk to God, you can talk to Him quiet and without, that's no problem. This is in order to train yourself to get better at the spiritual life. And if you don't believe me, you try it. You compare what it does to your life to pray on your knees, out loud to the Lord compared to just praying on your bed silently in your mind, and you'll see the difference. Again, this is not works. It's not an attempt to impress God. It is a form of presenting the members of your body to God as instruments of righteousness.

The third thing that I recommend is the use of imagination. I've already shared that with you. You get a good picture of Jesus and put it over your bed or put it somewhere. And when you go to pray, you look at that and you get fixed in your mind a picture of the Lord or some scene in the Bible. Maybe there's a favorite gospel scene that you love, that you can just envision Jesus doing something. Maybe it's reaching out and touching and healing somebody and you

want to picture Him touching you. It might be that you see yourself with warm rain coming down on you as you talk to God and you envision God simply bringing a warm, gentle rain all over you. You come up with a way of using your imagination when you pray to God and it will help you focus your attention on Him longer.

Okay first of all, the Jesus prayer, the use of a repetitive prayer to train yourself to stay in prayer longer for longer periods of time; the use of the Jesus prayer when your mind wanders from prayer. The second thing: pray on your knees. Try to find ways to use your body in different postures and to pray out loud whenever you can. This will change your life. The third thing is the use of the imagination when you pray. Try to imagine Jesus, as I told you in the car. Picture Him sitting next to you and reach out and literally touch Him. As you pray, picture him standing in front of you. Use your imagination. And then finally, pray regularly for the things you want. Don't pray once and think, "Well, I told him once." You pray regularly for the things that you want, regularly. There are passages, Luke, 18:1, I'm not going to go into them because we're running out of time. There are passages that talk about keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on praying.

I'll tell you a story. I have a friend who, who works at, the place--I can't share the details, but I'll just tell you, there was a secretary in this, in this friend's office that had been there a year that my friends said was one of the most malevolent, evil people he had ever met. There was a spirit of malevolence about her life, and she was undermining the entire office and they could not fire her, and indeed, they couldn't even suggest for certain reasons I can't go into. And so she had them in her control. My friend said to me, this happened about five, six weeks ago. He said, "Would you join me, would you dedicate yourself with me to praying that God would remove her from this office? There is no hope other than that because she is not going to leave. She's

been here a year and there's nothing we can do and she ain't leaving." I began to pray 30 or 40 times a day for the next two weeks that this woman, and I prayed specifically that God would put thoughts and feelings in this woman's mind that that told her I hate it here, I got to get out of here. And about three weeks ago, I had breakfast with this friend and he said, "You're not going to believe it. Yesterday, she resigned. She left. She's out of here." And we prayed her out of there.

[Audience Laughter]

And I'm telling you. And guess what? I'm praying for you, (laughs) no but (laughs). But the guy just gets up and leaves (laughs). Unfortunately, sir, I was praying that you stay. But in any case, that just goes to show the power of free will.

[Audience Laughter]

But in any case, the point I'm making is that I didn't just ask the Lord that one time, I stayed with it. You got a problem in your life? You pray about it all the time. Now, listen to me. Suppose you've got something you're really struggling with. I want to close with this. You mentioned it to the Lord regularly throughout your day. But you also need to remember that there may be a loving reason why God is not going to help you with that problem now. You've just got to, at the end of the day, folks, you can't make your happiness be dependent on your

answer to prayer. You've got to be willing to trust God after you--but don't just mention it to Him once.

Now, in closing, if you in addition to Sunday night and worship and your Bible study, and you're hearing the word taught, which is critical, and in addition to your friendships with brothers and sisters, if you will, bring to that the practices, training practices, that involve repetitive actions with your body, there are about 15 of them that are typical. You can find them in Dallas Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. But if you will practice solitude where you get away on a fairly regular basis and learn to be quiet without a lot of noise, if you will practice frugality, you don't have to do all this at once. You pick one or two of these that speak to you. Don't try to wear clothes you don't like and go without food and to cut off your radio on TV tomorrow, okay, and do it all by yourself. I mean, now wouldn't be the thing to do (laughs). Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me; you'd better pray that if you do that, I'll tell you.

[Audience Laughter]

But you just pick something that says; ask the Lord Jesus Himself tonight. Say, "Lord Jesus, is there one of these that would be good for me?" Ask Him to help guide you in that He'll do it. And you pick some of these: frugality or perhaps some of these disciplines in prayer, and I promise you, I'm not. This isn't empty words. I'll give you my word that if you will work these into your Christian life, they will change your life. And by the time you're a middle aged, your Christian faith will be much stronger than it is right now.

Guys, I really love you. It's been, it's been such a privilege. And I want to close in prayer. I look forward to our last time together next week. And would you let me pray for us now this evening.

Our precious and our wonderful Lord Jesus, we've come to know that You did, in fact, raised from the dead and we have come to know that You are still alive. We know that You're here with us, and that You work with us, and You have much, much that you want to accomplish in this world. And it's almost impossible for us to express the gratitude we have that You've given a place for us and Your great mission. Help us find that place and play it with excellence. But Lord Jesus, in the meantime, I know that my young brothers and sisters here this evening come to this time with, with real struggles because of their age and the culture they live in. You know, their problems. Would You help them if they step out and reach out to You? Would You strengthen them? Would You guide them into some disciplines that will be good for their souls and help them become more like You? In Jesus' name, amen.

God bless you, and I'll see you next week.

[Audience Cheers and Applauds]