

# PRAYER AND PRESENCE

THE PURSUIT OF GLORY

## GOING DEEPER

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

October 15, 2017

## Discussion Guide

### WHY PRAY?

#### CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

#### GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- IN YOUR MIND, WHAT IS PRAYER?

#### DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- USING THE NOTES, TALK ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER IN AMERICA TODAY. FEEL FREE TO MAKE ANY ADDITIONAL ANECDOTAL OBSERVATIONS REGARDING PRAYER.
- READ MARK 9.14-29 OUT LOUD. SEEK TO IMAGINE YOURSELF IN THE TEXT AS AN EYEWITNESS TO THE EVENTS. READ THE TEXT AGAIN.
- WHAT DO YOU SEE OR NOTICE AS YOU WITNESS THESE EVENTS?

- AS YOU EXPERIENCE THE TEXT, WHAT CONNECTIONS, IF ANY, EXIST BETWEEN PRAYER, FAITH, AND POWER? WHAT MIGHT BE THE NATURE OF THESE CONNECTIONS?
- DO YOU FEEL THAT PEOPLE GENERALLY CONNECT PRAYER, FAITH, AND POWER IN THE WAYS JESUS DOES? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MODERN CHURCH, IF ANY, CAN YOU DRAW FROM THESE CONNECTIONS?
- THINKING THROUGH THIS EPISODE IN JESUS' LIFE, WHAT REASONS, IF ANY, MIGHT WE HAVE TO ENGAGE IN THE REGULAR PRACTICE OF PRAYER? WHAT MIGHT THIS PRAYER LOOK LIKE? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DOES THIS DIFFER FROM THE WAY YOU ARE NOW PRAYING?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO PRAY IN THE WAY JESUS SEEMS TO BE ENCOURAGING HIS DISCIPLES TO PRAY? WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS YOU FROM PRAYING IN THIS MANNER?
- YOU MIGHT CONSIDER CONCLUDING YOUR TIME AS A GROUP IN PRAYER, SEEKING TO PRAY IN LIGHT OF THE IMPLICATIONS YOU HAVE DRAWN FROM THE TEXT.

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

#### *PRAYER IN AMERICA AND AMONG EVANGELICALS*

PRAYER IS PERHAPS THE MOST COMMON SPIRITUAL PRACTICE IN AMERICA. MANY AMERICANS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OR BELIEFS ENGAGE IN SOME PRAYER-RELATED ACTIVITY ON SOME REGULAR BASIS. THE LATEST IN-DEPTH RESEARCH AVAILABLE ON PRAYER PRACTICES IS THE 2014 POLL CONDUCTED BY THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER. IN THIS STUDY, RESEARCHERS DISCOVERED THAT 55% OF ALL AMERICANS

PRAY DAILY OR MORE WITH 68% OF ALL CHRISTIANS AND 79% OF ALL EVANGELICALS REPORT ENGAGING IN THE PRACTICE OF DAILY PRAYER. WHEN ONE INVESTIGATES THIS CLAIM WITH RESPECT TO EVANGELICALS, CONSIDERING TYPICAL MARKERS ASSOCIATED WITH EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY—INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE AS THE WORD OF GOD, BELIEF IN HEAVEN/HELL, BELIEF IN GOD—THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF EVANGELICALS WHO PRAY DAILY OR MORE HOVERS AROUND 80%.

WHILE HIGH NUMBERS OF PEOPLE REPORT THEY ENGAGE IN THE DAILY PRACTICE OF PRAYER, THE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE PRAYING VARIES HIGHLY ACROSS AGE RANGES, GENDER, AND RACE. OLDER AMERICANS PRAY MORE THAN YOUNGER AMERICANS. PEOPLE WITHOUT COLLEGE DEGREES PRAY MORE THAN THOSE WHO POSSESS THESE DEGREES. WOMEN PRAY MORE THAN MEN, AND BLACKS AND HISPANICS PRAY MORE THAN WHITES. THESE FINDINGS HOLD TRUE AMONG EVANGELICALS WITH THE MOST STARTLING DIFFERENCES FALLING ALONG GENERATIONAL AND GENDER LINES.

WHILE THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S DATA REVEALS WHO IS PRAYING, AN AUGUST 2017 REPORT BY THE BARNA GROUP REVEALS THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF THESE PRAYERS. IN THIS STUDY, 95% OF PEOPLE WHO PRAY MOST OFTEN PRAY BY THEMSELVES, WHILE 5% PRAY MOST OFTEN WITH OTHERS. FURTHER, WHEN PEOPLE PRAY, THE PRIMARY CONTENT OF THEIR PRAYERS INVOLVE THEIR OWN IMMEDIATE NEEDS AND CONCERNS. PERSONAL GRATITUDE AND THE NEEDS OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY TOP THE LIST FOR WHICH PEOPLE PRAY MOST OFTEN, FOLLOWED NEXT BY REQUESTS FOR PERSONAL GUIDANCE IN CRISES AND HEALTH AND WELLNESS.

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THESE RECENT FINDINGS, IT APPEARS THAT AMERICANS (AND EVANGELICALS) HAVE HEALTHY AND ACTIVE PRAYER LIVES. HOWEVER, PEOPLE RARELY TURN OUTSIDE THEMSELVES OR THEIR IMMEDIATE NEEDS TO PRAY FOR THEIR WORLD, INJUSTICES, OR THE CRISES OF OTHER PEOPLE. FURTHER, THE PRACTICE OF CORPORATE PRAYER IS EITHER SHUNNED OR NOT TAKEN UP WITH ANY SERIOUS INTENTION.

## The Text

### MARK 9.14-29: PRAYER AND POWER

THE GOSPEL OF MARK IS THE EARLIEST OF THE GOSPELS TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN. CHURCH TRADITION STATES THAT MARK WROTE THIS GOSPEL BASED UPON THE PREACHING OF PETER WITH THE CAVEAT THAT PETER'S PREACHING DID NOT MAINTAIN THE ORDER OF JESUS' MINISTRY; THAT IS, CHURCH TRADITION IS FIRM ON THE ISSUE OF AUTHORSHIP BUT FROM A VERY EARLY POINT HAS QUESTIONED THE CHRONOLOGICAL FLOW (NOT

HISTORICITY) OF MARK'S GOSPEL. IF TRADITION IS CORRECT, THEN THE CHRONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS (MATTHEW, MARK, AND LUKE) AND JOHN ARE EASILY UNDERSTOOD BECAUSE MATTHEW AND LUKE BOTH MADE USE OF MARK IN THE WRITING OF THEIR GOSPELS WHILE JOHN DID NOT. THIS MOST LIKELY IMPLIES THAT THE CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN IS THE MOST ACCURATE CHRONOLOGICAL RECOUNTING OF JESUS' MINISTRY. IT IS THEREFORE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE HOW BEST TO USE CHRONOLOGY AS AN INTERPRETIVE TOOL WITH THE GOSPEL OF MARK. WE CANNOT ASSUME THAT ALL EVENTS AS WRITTEN BY MARK ARE DISORDERED AND THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS CAN PROVE IMPORTANT IN UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE THREADS. IT IS PROBABLY BEST TO ASSUME THAT WHEN THE NARRATIVE FLOWS WITHOUT LITERARY TRANSITIONS THAT WE HAVE A SINGLE BLOCK OF CHRONOLOGICALLY COHERENT EPISODES. HOWEVER, WHEN WE ENCOUNTER A LITERARY TRANSITION, SUCH AS A COMPLETE CHANGE OF SUBJECT OR LOCATION, WE HAVE ENDED ONE BLOCK AND BEGUN ANOTHER. WITHIN THESE BLOCKS ONE MAY USE CHRONOLOGY TO INTERPRET THE TEXT BUT ACROSS THESE BLOCKS ONE SHOULD PROBABLY HOLD MORE LOOSELY TO CHRONOLOGICAL POINTS UNLESS THERE IS GOOD EVIDENCE FOR DOING SO.

THE EPISODE IN MARK 9 CONCERNING PRAYER (MARK 9.14-29) IS DIRECTLY TIED TO JESUS' TRANSFIGURATION (MARK 9.2-13). JESUS HAS TAKEN PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN UP A MOUNTAIN WHERE HE WILL BE TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM, LEAVING THE REMAINING NINE DISCIPLES BEHIND. WHEN JESUS AND THE THREE DISCIPLES RETURN, THEY FIND THE REMAINING NINE SURROUNDED BY A CROWD, LOCKED IN A DEBATE WITH THE SCRIBES. THE SCRIBES WERE A SUBSET OF THE PHARISEES, A GROUP OF MEN WHO WERE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS AND LAWYERS OF THE TORAH. HOWEVER, UPON SEEING JESUS, THE ENTIRE GROUP (DISCIPLES, SCRIBES, AND THE CROWD) IS FILLED WITH WONDER AND RUNS TO GREET JESUS. WHILE SEVERAL REASONS CAN BE RAISED FOR THIS RESPONSE, A DESIRE TO SETTLE THE PRESENT DISPUTE BEING ONE OF THEM, THE PRIMARY REASON APPEARS TO BE THE APPEARANCE OF JESUS' PERSON. IT SEEMS THAT JESUS' PRESENCE HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT UPON PEOPLE. HAVING NOTICED THE DEBATE, JESUS INQUIRES AS TO ITS NATURE. INSTEAD OF HEARING A REPLY FROM THE SCRIBES OR THE NINE DISCIPLES, JESUS IS MET BY A MAN WHO STEPS FORTH FROM THE CROWD. THE MAN RELATES THAT HE HAD BROUGHT HIS SON TO JESUS TO BE DELIVERED FROM A SPIRIT WHICH HAS ROBBED HIS SON OF HIS SPEECH AND BROUGHT ABOUT EPILEPTIC-LIKE SYMPTOMS. SOME INTERPRETERS HAVE SOUGHT TO POINT TO A MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS OF EPILEPSY OVER A SPIRITUAL DIAGNOSIS ARGUING THAT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD DISEASE WAS THOUGHT TO HAVE SPIRITUAL ROOTS. WHILE THIS MAY BE TRUE, CONDITIONS

LIKE EPILEPSY REMAIN SPIRITUAL IN NATURE, EVIDENCE OF THE FALLEN STATE OF CREATION AND ARE THEREFORE IN THEMSELVES AN EXPERIENCE OF EVIL.

THE PROBLEM AROSE WHEN THE MAN COULD NOT FIND JESUS AND INSTEAD WENT TO THE REMAINING NINE DISCIPLES FOR HELP. HOWEVER, THE DISCIPLES FOUND THEY COULD NOT DRIVE OUT THE SPIRIT. THIS BROUGHT SHAME NOT JUST TO THE DISCIPLES BUT TO JESUS AS THESE DISCIPLES REPRESENTED HIM IN HIS ABSENCE. CULTURALLY, THEIR INABILITY INDICATED AN INABILITY ON THE PART OF JESUS. JESUS IS THEREFORE RIGHTLY FRUSTRATED WITH THE SITUATION. THE DISCIPLES MADE IT APPEAR AS IF THOSE WHO ARE CAUGHT IN THE GRIPS OF EVIL CAN FIND NO HELP FROM JESUS. ON TOP OF THE SITUATIONAL FRUSTRATION IS THE FRUSTRATION BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE REALITY THAT THE DISCIPLES HAD ALREADY BEEN GRANTED AUTHORITY TO CAST OUT SUCH FORMS OF EVIL (MARK 3.15; 6.7) AND THEY ALREADY HAD PRACTICE DOING SO (MARK 6.12-13). JESUS' FRUSTRATION BOILS OVER IN A STATEMENT OF EXASPERATION, ONE IN WHICH HE SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT HIS DISCIPLES ARE NOT UNLIKE OTHER PEOPLE. THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE LITTLE FAITH; THAT IS, THEY DO NOT APPEAR TO BE ABLE TO ORIENT THEIR LIVES AROUND GOD.

JESUS INVITES THE MAN TO BRING HIS SON AND SEEING HIS CONDITION EXPRESSES COMPASSION BY INQUIRING AS TO THE NATURE AND DURATION OF THE AFFLICTION. HAVING EXPERIENCED THE FAILING ATTEMPTS OF THE DISCIPLES, THE MAN EXPRESSES GUARDED HOPE THAT JESUS MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP, BUT HE OPENLY ACKNOWLEDGES DOUBT BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE FAILURE OF THE DISCIPLES. JESUS REPLIES THAT ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR A PERSON WHO HAS FAITH, A PERSON ORIENTED AROUND GOD. WHILE THE MAN UNDERSTANDS JESUS TO BE CALLING FOR AN INCREASE OF FAITH ON HIS PART, MOST LIKELY, JESUS IS COMPARING HIMSELF AGAINST THE DISCIPLES. UNLIKE HIS DISCIPLES, HE IS COMPLETELY ORIENTED AROUND GOD. THIS KIND OF PERSON, JESUS, CAN BRING THE FULLNESS OF GOD TO SITUATIONS LIKE THIS AND ACCOMPLISH WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE.

WHEN THE CROWD GATHERS, JESUS HEALS THE YOUNG MAN AND GIVES HIM TO HIS FATHER. UNDERSTANDABLY, THE NINE DISCIPLES ARE BAFFLED AND CONCERNED. WHY COULD THEY NOT DO WHAT JESUS WAS ABLE TO DO? JESUS REPLIES THAT THE KIND OF AFFLICTION THEY ENCOUNTERED REQUIRED PRAYER TO BE OVERCOME. WITH THIS STATEMENT CONCERNING PRAYER, JESUS IS NOT REFERRING TO PRAYING OVER A PERSON IN ORDER TO RESCUE THEM FROM AFFLICTION. RATHER, HE SEEMS TO BE REFERRING TO AN ONGOING ACTIVITY OF PRAYER WHICH SOMEHOW IS RELATED TO FAITH IN GOD. THIS PRACTICE

OF PRAYER WHICH ENCOURAGES ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD PREPARES THE BELIEVER TO ENCOUNTER AND OVERCOME AFFLICTION BECAUSE AS THEY APPROACH THE ISSUE THEY BRING GOD WITH THEM TO THE ISSUE.

## REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

PRAYER IS IMPORTANT. ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH, THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF TAKING UP THE LIFE OF CHRIST. JESUS LIVED A LIFE MARKED BY PRAYER. HE PRAYED BEFORE HE MADE BIG DECISIONS (LUKE 6.12). HE PRAYED FOR THE NEEDS OF HIS FRIENDS (JOHN 17). HE PRAYED FOR COMFORT AND PROTECTION (MATTHEW 26.36-46). PRAYER SEEMED TO BE PART OF THE PATTERN OF JESUS' DAILY LIFE (LUKE 4.42). HOWEVER, EVEN IF WE PUT THE LIFE OF JESUS ASIDE FOR A MOMENT, PRAYER REMAINS IMPORTANT, AND NOT JUST FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH. PRAYER IS THE MOST COMMON SPIRITUAL PRACTICE IN AMERICA, SOMETHING PRACTICED BY BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS ALIKE. IT IS ALMOST AS IF PEOPLE ARE INNATELY DRAWN TO PRAYER, DRAWN TO REACH OUT AND CONNECT WITH THE DIVINE IN A CLOSE AND INTIMATE WAY. WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL FAITH TRADITION, PRAYER IS THE MOST USED SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. OVER 96% OF EVANGELICALS PRAY AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK, WITH THE MAJORITY PRAYING DAILY. HOWEVER, PRAYER CAN BE ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD AND UNCOMFORTABLE OF PRACTICES.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT ONE OF THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE OF QUESTIONS IS THOSE WHICH INVOLVE PRAYER REQUESTS. I HAVE NEVER REALLY KNOWN HOW TO RESPOND TO, "WHAT CAN I PRAY ABOUT FOR YOU?" HONESTLY, I DON'T HAVE A LIST READY FOR SUCH MOMENTS AND MY ATTEMPTS TO GENERATE A LIST ON THE SPOT LEAVES ME WONDERING WHETHER THE ITEMS ON MY LIST ARE WORTHY OF PRAYER. DOES GOD REALLY CARE ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_? TYPICALLY, I MEET THIS QUESTION WITH AN AWKWARD SILENCE AND THEN FUMBLE OVER SOME WORDS WHICH PROBABLY DON'T MAKE SENSE. I HAVE BEEN ON THE OTHER END OF THAT SILENCE ENOUGH TO KNOW I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO STRUGGLES WITH THE QUESTION. EVER HEARD THE QUESTION ASKED IN A GROUP? THE SILENCE CAN BE DEAFENING. NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE STRUGGLE WITH THE CONTENT OF OUR PRAYERS, BUT THIS ISN'T THE END OF OUR STRUGGLE WITH PRAYER. WE WRESTLE WITH HOW TO PRAY.

I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW MANY TIMES I HAVE FINISHED PRAYING AND THOUGHT, "WAS THAT GOOD ENOUGH? DID I SAY IT THE RIGHT WAY?" I CAN KNOW THE NEED. I CAN KNOW MY DESIRE. I CAN'T FIGURE OUT THE BEST WAY TO SAY IT. IS THERE EVEN A BEST WAY? I PRAY EVERY DAY AS DO MOST OF YOU, BUT JUST BECAUSE I PRAY DOESN'T MEAN I AM COMFORTABLE WITH IT.

I WANT TO BE COMFORTABLE. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING SEEMS TO IMPLY SOME LEVEL OF COMFORT WHICH I HAVE NOT YET FOUND (1 THESSALONIANS 5.17). So, HOW DO I/WE BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH PRAYER? FOR ME, I HAVE TO RETURN TO THE BASICS, TO START OVER WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF PRAYER. YOU SEE, WHEN I AM HONEST, I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TAUGHT I SHOULD PRAY. HOWEVER, NO ONE EVER TAUGHT ME HOW TO PRAY OR EVEN WHAT CONSTITUTED REAL PRAYER. I THINK MUCH OF MY DISCOMFORT WITH PRAYER HINGES ON AN AWARENESS THAT I DON'T FULLY GRASP WHAT I AM DOING. FOR ME, UNDERSTANDING STARTS WITH THE "WHY" OF SOMETHING. WHY SHOULD I DO IT? TELL ME THAT AND I WILL TRY TO GRAPPLE WITH WHAT I AM TO BE DOING. So, WHY SHOULD I PRAY? AS I READ SCRIPTURE AND EXPERIENCE A LIFE OF FAITH, I AM COMING TO UNDERSTAND THAT PRAYER IS NECESSARY BECAUSE IT IS PRAYER WHICH EMPOWERS ME TO DO THE WORK OF GOD. PRAYER=POWER. WELL. . .NOT EXACTLY LIKE THAT BUT PRAYER CONNECTS ME WITH POWER BECAUSE PRAYER CONNECTS ME TO GOD. PRAYER MOVES GOD TO THE CENTER OF MY LIFE AND WITH GOD AT THE CENTER, ALL OF HIS POWER IS AT THE CENTER OF MY LIFE. HIS POWER IS A POWER I DO NOT HAVE ON MY OWN BUT ONE WHICH I NEED IF I AM TO DO THE WORK OF GOD IN THIS WORLD. So, I PRAY, NOT BECAUSE GOD NEEDS ME TO PRAY, BUT BECAUSE I NEED ME TO PRAY. I NEED GOD AT MY CENTER.

## REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

PRAYER IS IMPORTANT. ALMOST EVERYONE GRASPS THIS, BELIEVER AND NON-BELIEVER ALIKE. WE SEEM BENT TO REACHING OUT TO THE DIVINE IN A CLOSE AND INTIMATE WAY. WANTING TO PRAY AND PRAYING IS NOT THE ISSUE. THE ISSUE IS FEELING COMFORTABLE DOING IT. EVER SAT IN A GATHERING OF BELIEVERS AND HEARD SOMEONE INQUIRE ABOUT PRAYER REQUESTS? OR, LET'S ONE UP THAT ONE. EVER SAT IN A GATHERING OF BELIEVERS AND HEARD SOMEONE ASK FOR VOLUNTEERS TO PRAY? THE SILENCE CAN BE DEAFENING. FINALLY, SOME BRAVE SOUL WILL STAMMER A FEW HALTING WORDS, SOME IN AN EFFORT TO SPEAK WITH GOD BUT MOSTLY IN AN EFFORT TO END THE TERROR OF BEING HELD HOSTAGE UNTIL SOMEONE PRAYS. . .OUT LOUD. WHILE WE MAY PRAY, IT IS APPARENT WE STRUGGLE BEING COMFORTABLE WITH IT. WHY IS THIS? I THINK THAT MUCH OF THE ISSUE COMES BECAUSE IT IS ASSUMED THAT PRAYER IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL KNOW HOW TO DO IT. YES. WE GET THE IMPORTANT PART, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE KNOW HOW TO DO IT. WE NEED TO DO SOME WORK, SOME FOUNDATION WORK IF WE ARE EVER TO FEEL COMFORTABLE PRAYING. So, WHERE DO WE START? WE NEED TO START WITH WHY? IT IS THE QUESTION OF EVERY TODDLER AND BELIEVER SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND PRAYER.

IT IS ONE OF THE MOST FOUNDATIONAL OF QUESTIONS. So, WHY PRAY? WE PRAY BECAUSE PRAYER EMPOWERS THE PEOPLE OF GOD TO DO THE WORK OF GOD. WITHOUT PRAYER, THE PEOPLE OF GOD CANNOT DO THE GOSPEL-ORIENTED WORK THEY ARE CALLED TO DO, A POINT WE MIGHT NEED TO REMEMBER WHEN WE THINK OF THE LAST TIME WE SAW THE CHURCH MAKE A GOSPEL-IMPACT ON SOCIETY. THE KIND OF PRAYER WHICH BRINGS POWER TO THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER IS PRAYER WHICH BRINGS GOD TO THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER. THIS IS REALLY THE ESSENCE OF FAITH, A LIFE WITH GOD AT THE CENTER. A LIFE WITH GOD AT THE CENTER IS A LIFE WITH ALL OF THE POWER OF GOD AT THE CENTER. PRAYER BRINGS GOD TO THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES. IT BRINGS GOD INTO OUR LIVES IN AN INTIMATE WAY, NOT JUST INTO A SITUATION BUT INTO THE ONGOING RHYTHMS OF EVERYDAY LIFE. WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO PRAY IN THIS WAY? PERHAPS PRAYING THIS WAY INVOLVES RETHINKING WHAT WE ARE TO SEEK IN PRAYER. WHAT IF YOU SPENT TIME EACH DAY THIS WEEK IN PRAYER—MAYBE 5 MINUTES TO START—NOT ASKING FOR THINGS BUT ASKING FOR GOD, FOR GOD TO BE AT THE CENTER? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO TELL GOD YOU WANT HIM, AND TO ASK HIM TO GUIDE YOU INTO PRAYING MORE IN THIS VEIN AND TO GUIDE YOU INTO AN ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF HIM? YOU MIGHT TALK WITH A SPIRITUAL FRIEND ABOUT OTHER FORMS THIS MIGHT TAKE, BUT WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO START PRAYING FOR PRESENCE, THE PRESENCE OF GOD AT THE CENTER.



SENIOR  
PASTOR  
**BLAKE**  
SHIPP

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