

Recovery Steps (Week 8) – Offering and Asking

Michael Snetzer – October 23, 2013

Mark 11:23-24 says, **"Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain..."** You may be looking at a mountain of stuff right now. **"...whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."** Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you that you already know what you intend to accomplish in each of our lives through your Son's work on the cross during this season. Lord, you came in love, in power, and in truth. Holy Spirit, I pray that you would apply that which was accomplished in Christ. I pray that you would lay heavy on our hearts the Father's intentions for us so that we would know what to ask for and what your intentions are, where we should come before you and pray.

We pray that you would show us where you intend to heal and show us your power so that we might love. Jesus, thank you that you, through the gospel, have provided a fruitful vine by which we might flourish and not wither. I pray that you would prune that which is unfruitful. God, we come before you and say, "Have your way with us. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

As I said, this is an important week because we are beginning to turn the corner and move our attention from examining our vertical hearts before the Lord to the outward expression of that reconciled heart horizontally to those around us. Luke 6:43-45. I don't think I have this on a slide, so you can turn there.

It says this. **"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."**

In this lesson, we are going to explore the nature and roots of the bad fruit in our lives and the fruits' ties to an alternate kingdom. As I mentioned, we will now begin to look at our inventory sheets from a different angle. We have had the chance to confess and pray about what is in our inventories, but now we want to begin to look at the roots of our behavior.

It is one thing to repent of bad behavior. It is one thing to repent of adultery, of abuse, of drunkenness, of homosexuality, but until I begin to understand and repent of the pride and the various forms of idolatry that are leading me to act out in these ways and find rest for my soul in God, I will continue to be thirsty.

In Isaiah, it says, "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

I was talking the other day with a leader for a ministry that dealt specifically with those who are coming out of a homosexual lifestyle. I was intrigued by some of her thoughts regarding homosexuality. She said that most often, a homosexual relationship is not about the sex. Sex is not the issue. Rather, the issue is more of an identity issue and an issue of what they may be seeking through that relationship.

I thought this was very insightful regarding those who struggle with homosexuality, but what I think was missing from the equation in her understanding was that this is not unique to homosexuality. It's true for most other sinful actions as well. A man or a woman who commits

adultery may not be driven by an appetite for sexual pleasure but instead be seeking to fulfill an identity or meet inordinate desires.

She may be using sex as a means of control or finding security or belonging or some sort of misguided love. A man who subjects himself to abusive sexual relationships may not be seeking abusive sex but may be living out an identity placed on him, perhaps by a sexually abusive mother who named him Dirty Little Boy. These situations reveal behaviors rooted in mistaken identity and inordinate desires.

Now, transitioning here. Much of what we deal with as pastors, as leaders, in shepherding the flock of God relates to division in the church and fighting and quarrelling among God's people. As I sit with families or couples or friends, it is not hard for them to understand that their angry outbursts to one another are not right. They're ungodly. They are sinful. Typically, it's just a vague notion that this is wrong, and they have no understanding as to why they are doing what they are doing.

James 4:1-10 will answer this question. We're actually going to look at a slightly larger section of this Scripture, but we're going to start with James 4:1. **"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?"** I'll often ask those who are sitting before me, "Did you know that the Bible actually asks that question and is going to turn around and answer it for you?"

"Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" Already we begin to say, "Uh oh." Right? "I thought *they* were the problem." **"You desire and do not have, so you murder."** This idea... There is something you desire that you're willing to kill for. It's the same sin. We don't know if they're actually murdering each other or if they're just doing what Jesus is saying. When you hold anger in your heart toward somebody, that's the same sin, maybe just in a lesser degree, as murder. You're murdering them in your heart.

"You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." There is something you want, so oftentimes... Think back to your last argument. You probably don't have to think back too far unless you're farther along in the sanctification process than I am. In that moment, what is it that you're wanting so badly from that person that you're not getting? Approval. That's Aaron's answer. Oftentimes that is, but what is it for you specifically in that situation?

Then it goes on to say, **"You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."** In other words, your orientation is a

self-centered orientation. You want that other person to do what you want them to do to satisfy you. This has nothing to do with them in terms of their relationship with God. **"...you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people!"**

I'm not saying that, but James is saying that, inspired by the Holy Spirit. **"You adulterous people!"** Spiritual adultery occurs when you go to something or someone other than God to ultimately have your desires and needs met. **"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"** By doing that, by going to someone or something other than God for that, you're committing spiritual adultery, and you're setting yourself up against the kingdom of God.

"Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'?" What does that mean? It's never going to work. He's never going to let you be satisfied in someone or something other than him because he's jealous for your hearts. He's not going to share your hearts with anybody else.

James is giving us a picture of what the problem is. Then he's going to show us the solution. **"But he gives more grace."** In light of the recognition of what we're doing, he offers grace. He offers grace through his Son. He offers redemption. **"Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud...'"** There is a pride in saying, "I don't want it from you, God. I want it from them. You're not enough. I want the world to feed me. I want the people of the world to feed me."

"...but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter..." The laughing when you think you won that fight because you dominated that person. **"...be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."**

Quick example. Those of you who have been with me before in this lesson have heard it, but I think it just really speaks well to this idea. Before my wife and I got married, we were getting ready to get married. We were planning a wedding. She was trying to figure out the best wedding date for us to get married on. I kept going back to our pastor, who I felt was a really busy guy. I didn't want to bother him too much. He was rearranging his schedule in order to do our wedding, and our wedding date kept changing.

Finally, in exasperation, on the phone, I say, "Sonia, you're a flake," and hang up the phone. I feel very justified because in my mind, she's being very flaky. Okay? Well, at that time, fortunately, I am familiar with this passage, so the Lord just starts speaking to me and saying, **"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have..."**

I was like, "Okay, what is it that I'm wanting so badly?" So clearly, I just felt like the Holy Spirit just said, "Stability." Then as I began to think about that, think about the fact that I was looking to Sonia for stability... This is not anything against Sonia. This is human nature. Why in the world would I look to a human being who the course of their life is going to look more up and down rather than look to the one who never changes? He never changes.

At that point, as I came back under his kingdom purposes and began to look to him, as I repented from looking to her to looking to him, I felt peace in my heart again. The outward expression of that was that I got to call Sonia and apologize for putting her in the position of God. Notice here it says, **"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."** There is a demonic enticement in that that says oftentimes in that conflict, "You're going to let her get away with that?" You rise up in your pride to squish that.

Let's go to verse 13 in chapter 3. We're working backwards. I know we don't usually go backwards. **"Who is wise and understanding among you?"** I'm thinking I'm really wise in my understanding in that. **"By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."** Who is the fool in that time? You're looking at him. **"But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition..."** There was something I was wanting from her. **"...in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic."**

I was counseling a family the other day, and I was like, "Why do you think you guys are fighting? What do you think is behind all this fighting?" She said, "The Devil." I was like, "Okay. Yeah, you get it in part." I mean, that is part of it. It doesn't negate our part in it, but yeah, he is enticing us in that. **"For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder..."** God is a God of order. He created the universe in order.

Now we have disorders of all kinds. Mental disorders, physical disorders, spiritual disorders, disordered living, disordered authorities. Everything is disordered apart from the grace of God. **"...and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good..."** What's that word? **"...fruits..."** Is that what we're talking about today, fruits? **"...impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."**

We see here the motivation of the quarrelling and the fighting is selfish ambition. "I'm wanting what I'm wanting. There is something I want. I'm jealous for that. I want it, and I'm willing to do whatever I have to do that is within my fleshly ability to try to get the world to do what I want." Okay. Let's take a look here at what is called the elevation of desire.

Oftentimes, our fighting and quarrelling is birthed out of a good desire that has gone bad. It has become elevated to the point where it is no longer good. This is adapted from Paul David Tripp's section in his book called *The War of Words* which is a great book on conflict. I would highly recommend that because it is going to help us look behind the outward... It's a book behind communication techniques which don't resolve the heart issue behind the idolatrous words that are coming out of our mouths.

I may have a desire for love, respect, family, sex, security, peace, acceptance, etc. Those aren't bad desires. What happens is those desires get elevated. Then it becomes a need. "I need this from you to be okay." There is a dependency issue there. There is a dependency on something or someone other than God. That is where this jealousy, lust, coveting, idolatry begins to kick in.

There are some really well-intentioned books out there, particularly a marriage book that talks about maybe his needs and her needs and how really... I'm not saying the name of the book; I'm just saying what it's about. It seems to set people up going into marriage as, "You need to be the provider of this person's needs." If you believe you need it from this person, you feel entitled to it, right? "You owe this to me." Then there is an expectation.

I don't think an expectation... I think we have to have expectations of people, but I think it's what we're going to call a closed-handed expectation. "I can't be okay without this expectation being fulfilled." Then I begin to demand it in the lives of other people, which leads to disappointment. Why? God says he's not going to let it work. We begin to punish those (which is a deed of the flesh)

who are not giving in to our reign and rule basically for our kingdom. This is a closed-handed desire.

Jerry, a guy who mentored me for many years as a biblical counselor, said, "If there is this one track, there must be another track." I think it's evident here in the James 4 passage. This has to do with being open-handed. It's not that these desires are bad. I think oftentimes we get into a situation where we think the desire itself is bad, so a lot of times, that happens through pain. Right? If relationships have been difficult for me, I may just close my arms and fold my arms and say, "I'll never be in a relationship ever again. I'll be just fine without any."

To take it to even a deeper, more serious type of thing, think about the abuse victim, the childhood abuse victim who has been sexually abused, who has been taken advantage of by a predator. Predators oftentimes are able to identify children who have been neglected. They have this yearning to be loved, to be cared for and that sort of thing. A predator will recognize that, and in exchange for what he is looking for, he will just make much of them. They will become special to this individual.

Think about this child now reflecting back on the abuse they endured. They were like, "If I had never had the desire to love, to be cared for, this would have never happened. I will kill that desire, and I will no longer desire to be loved or cared for." The mistaken enemy there... Sometimes we blame God. Sometimes we blame a good, God-given desire. We're not to kill those desires, but we're to hold those desires loosely, and we are to look to God to be the satisfier of our desires.

In Psalm 37:4, it says, "**Delight yourselves in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**" We're always going to have desires. We're not to go to nirvana. We're not to just go to this place where we don't desire anything. No, God has given us desires because we were created in his image. Those are godly desires.

Unknowingly, in this situation where maybe I've been hurt in the past, so now I try to kill these desires for love or for relationship or anything else, I actually am elevating a different desire unknowingly. That's a desire possibly to self-protect, to have safety. There's just another desire that has taken the place. We are to hold these God-given desires loosely so that we might walk in humility and submission to him.

In that, we're able to continue with a servant's heart. If I walk into my house, and I'm not being filled by the Spirit, I'm looking to my wife to have my desires met. I perceive somehow that she is speaking disrespectfully to me. I perceive. Not that she is, but I perceive that what she is saying is disrespectful. Then I may react sinfully and angrily in that rather than if I'm walking by the Spirit that I am being filled by the Spirit.

Then I am able to, in that place, go, "Wow. Maybe she's having a bad day. Maybe there's a way I can begin to help her along in working herself out of that." Do you see the difference? One is out of a self-centered, "I want you to meet my needs," and the other is realizing I'm able to be a servant of God and helpful to others. What's going to continue to come out of me is the fruit of the Spirit, one of those being kindness. Okay? All right.

Let's look quickly at what traditional recovery programs... This is kind of now reaching out to the culture to redeem what they've said in a gospel context. We've already laid the gospel down. Now we've begun to examine our hearts in light of the gospel. Now we're beginning to see the demonic nature and root of our sinful behavior. Step six says we were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

What are defects of character, first of all? Defects of character are sinful... Actually, before I go there on that piece, let me go to tie this to the inventory sheets real quick. Let's use resentments as the example. All right, we're going to have to hurry. This is the "my role" column that I was talking about. We're going to come back. We've prayed through our inventories. Now we're going to look at it from a different standpoint. What's my role in terms of this resentment toward Mr. Brown?

Was my resentment toward him because he's kind to my wife, told my wife about my mistress, and took my job at the office? Are my resentments birthed out of selfishness and self-centeredness, or is this birthed out of God-centeredness? Is my anger more of a righteous kind of anger that leads me to confront him over the sinful ways he is relating to God, or is it, "I don't like the ways he's messing up my kingdom"?

Okay. I think it becomes pretty clear. Is it self-seeking? Is my resentment toward Mr. Brown for exposing my adultery self-seeking or God-pleasing? Self-seeking. Let me just tell you that if it's one of these, it's all of these. The reason why it's all of these is that these are characteristics of the flesh. If we respond out of the Spirit, we're going to handle an offense differently, even if it's a legitimate offense, rather than allowing it to become resentful and own us in our hearts.

Is it birthed out of a fear? Well, let's... We already have two of these. Frightened. Do you see this word "threatened" up here at the top of column four? Yeah, it's threatening to my self-esteem and my personal relationships that he is interfering with those things that I am desiring. Not that they're bad desires, but we're going to see something here in a second. It's based out of not faith but fear, fear of losing these things.

The next one says "dishonest." Am I dishonest? No, I'm being truthful. I'm angry. I'm resentful. That's not the kind of dishonesty we're looking for here. Is the dishonesty I'm looking at here birthed in a lie? It is absolutely birthed in a lie. The lie is the Romans 1:25 lie, that they worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator. Remember?

I'm looking to these people to meet these needs. I'm looking to Mr. Brown and my wife and my employer and Mrs. Jones to meet these things. Out of a self-centered fear, I'm trying to meet my own needs and trying to force people to do what I want rather than, in light of the gospel, realizing that I have been given all things in Christ, that my desire for worth, value, and love has been met through the gospel of Jesus Christ by God himself.

I was talking to a guy I was sponsoring one time, and he was struggling with low self-esteem. He was at the mall, and I told him, "Why are you struggling?" He said, "I just feel less than everyone else." I said, "Well, if you were Michael Jordan's son, would you feel that way?" He said, "No, I wouldn't feel that way." I said, "Why?" He said, "I could go into Foot Locker. I could ask for a pair of basketball shoes. They would point to Air Jordans, and I would be able to say, "Even though those are the greatest basketball shoes in the world, and he's the greatest basketball player, that's my dad."

I said, "Well if being Michael Jordan's son would make you feel that way, what if you didn't know how to play basketball?" He said, "Well it wouldn't matter." "Why?" "Because my dad did." "Okay. It's not based on your performance, right? It's based on his performance. If Michael Jordan, having the name Jordan, would make you feel that way, how much more being a child of God and being a Christian should you feel that way? You are loved by God."

It's not about self-love. It's about God's love for you in your brokenness, even when you're a lousy player. Personal relationships... It's just birthed out of a God-given desire to belong. You've been brought into a kingdom with brothers and sisters in Christ eternally, a perfect family that he will

provide for you materially whatever you need, not maybe in a way that you want, but maybe manna from heaven, maybe just enough for today until he takes you home. Then you won't need it anymore.

He says, "Instead seek after his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you." An emotional security. This is just peace. He has given us peace from him vertically in our relationship with God, but what are we trying to do? We want peace and order all around us rather than realizing that he has given us peace and order in our hearts with him so that we can live in a disordered and oftentimes conflictual world. Have that peace.

We start going and committing spiritual adultery, trying to get it from the world. Sex relationships. You're like, "Well, explain that. How is that going to happen in my relationship with God?" This is just a desire for pleasure. The pleasures that are found in the kingdom of God with our king are superior to anything you could have in a physical act of sex. Ambitions are just hope for the future. Right? You can put your hope in a lot of things, but if you put your hope in anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's going to wither and die. It's going away. Everything else is broken.

The last column here is "inconsiderate." Am I considerate of just myself, or am I considerate of my wife, of my mistress, of Mr. Brown? Am I just considering how I can get the world to do what I want? Okay. A couple of things here. I mentioned this is just the flesh. That's what's going to be really clear. It doesn't matter whether I'm angry or whether I'm stealing from people or whatever. I'm being motivated by the flesh. I'm distrusting God, right? Then I'm going to the world to meet my needs.

The same thing with stealing. Maybe my need for possessions is not what is motivating me to steal. Maybe it's the desire to belong to some group. Maybe I want to be a part of a gang, to belong. That's a God-given desire; it's just oriented in the wrong place. These are the people we're committing spiritual adultery with. This is the flesh. This is my idolatry.

We have idolatry, spiritual adultery. If you have a column that is most of the time checked, that's where you need to really consider, "Wow, I'm really idolizing this thing to the point where now I am going to almost every person trying to get this need met rather than going to God." Then this is my pride. Pride, idolatry, and spiritual adultery are what cause division within the church.

We were looking over here at the speck in our brother's eye, and here's the log in our eye. We talked about the mistaken enemy. Now we're talking about step six. We're ready to have God remove all these defects of character. How do character defects develop? First of all, character defects are just sinful patterns of relating to God and the world and people.

They develop because we have deceitful hearts. These are self-generated means of trying to live independent of God in a sinful world. I don't know God. I'm born as a sinner. I have a deceitful heart. We already covered that. I live in a world full of lies. John 16:11 says that Satan is the ruler of this world, and John 8:44 says that he is the Father of Lies.

I have a deceitful heart engaged in a world full of lies. What do you think is going to happen? Where is the truth? I am going to then... Deceitful heart plus sinful world influenced by Satan equals a faulty belief system, what I believe about God, self, others, and my circumstances. It's all based on lies. What do I need? I need God's revelation in my life to begin to speak truth to what I will not find apart from him.

This faulty belief system leads to faulty coping strategies, defects of character, and shortcomings, sin. Then the question becomes all of these defects of character. Let me talk about defects of character just really quickly. I'll go back one. Sometimes I hear well-meaning counselors talk about ways we deal with horrific events as God's grace.

What I mean by that is abuse victims who develop, let's say, strategies... See, what happens is the Enemy is crafty. He comes as a messenger of light, dressed as an angel, representing Christ, and he invites us to follow him. What he's offering are counterfeit forms of redemption. Think about cutting for a second. There is bloodletting there, right? You feel cleansed. You feel relieved, but it's not the gospel. That's a counterfeit gospel.

It's the same thing with disassociating or multiple personality disorder. I've heard it several times. I've heard, "That was just the grace of God in my life, to be able to get through this." Same thing with imaginary friends and all this kind of stuff. Satan masquerades as an angel of light saying, "Follow me in this. You can become a different person, not through the gospel, through becoming a different personality."

You hear it all the time when people are displeased with themselves. "I'm just going to recreate myself. I'm going to go get a new haircut. I'm going to go get..." These are all counterfeit gospels.

We're not talking about how we can be recreated in Christ. We're talking about, no, through the world, how we can... We develop strategies of coping, independent of God because we don't know God, that are full of deceit.

What we have to do when we become believers is begin to acknowledge that those are dysfunctional. They do not... If I have a tendency to disassociate in my personal relationships, then that's not going to function very well in the way I relate to people. I'm not saying you have the power to come out of it. I'm saying you have to first acknowledge and begin to bring that before the Lord so you can stay engaged in relationships by God's grace and only by God's grace.

You don't have the power to walk out of that, but he can break the power of sin. If you say in your heart and before others, "This was the grace of God," then you don't think you have anything to walk away from, and you'll continue to walk in that as though it were the grace of God. All of these defects of character... We're not going to go into it, but God wants our whole hearts.

We have the story of the rich young ruler. God sees what the ruler is withholding from him. Right? He sees what's in his heart, what he loves more than he loves God. He loves his stuff even though he's not going to be able to take his stuff eternally. He's going to die a really rich man, but then his soul is not saved. Right? It's a sad state.

God wants to be uppermost in our affections, which means we're willing to forsake all other things for him. Are we willing to let go of all of these defects of character? An example of this might be a guy wanting freedom from alcoholism but unwilling to let go of his grandiose behavior and the need to be the life of the party. These are real-life examples for me. I'm not willing to...

The Enemy then has a foothold and is using alcohol to allow him to be the life of the party. He will not cease to be the center of attention, but he wants freedom from alcohol. This is how the Enemy is getting a foothold in his life because he's not willing to not be the guy.

A lady wanting healing from her husband's betrayal but unwilling to give up alcohol that she was using to cope instead of coming in her pain before the Lord for healing... She's going to a counterfeit form of redemption. A guy wanting to get off meth but not being willing to give up his homosexual lifestyle...

These character defects... You might say lust. You might say grandiose behavior or whatever. I mean, this is all tied to the demonic. The Enemy entices our flesh to what he knows is our hook. Until we begin to find rest in God for that thing, he's going to continue to use that. There is, as there was in the beginning with Adam and Eve, a real personal evil behind the enticement of the fruit. Right? The serpent. He's out to destroy their lives.

It depends on what you're agreeing with in your heart. Are you going to agree and follow that, or are you going to renounce that and walk away from that and run to the Lord? Otherwise, this is how we get spiritual attachments that keep us enslaved. Okay. This is real personal evil tempting us to counterfeit forms of redemption, so we need to come to a place where we are open-handed with God and allowing him and not withholding from him, like the rich young ruler, areas of our lives or pet sins we just don't think are any big deal. He wants your whole heart.

The redeemed truth of step six is in attempting to live independent of God, we have developed dysfunctional, sinful patterns of coping. After careful examination, we have begun to see the demonic roots of our slavery to these sinful patterns. We desire freedom and become willing to come fully under the reign and rule of our great God and king.

We see in Genesis 3 this idea that there are two kingdoms in conflict with one another. You have the kingdom of God, and you have this alternate kingdom that is being led by Satan in rebellion to God's kingdom. If you turn to Genesis 3:15, it says, "**I will put enmity between you and the woman...**" He's speaking to the serpent.

There are two kingdoms on earth: this one being led by the serpent, and this other kingdom. It says, "**...and between your offspring and her offspring...**" There are offspring. When Jesus talks about the children to the Pharisees, he says, "You are children of the Devil in your self-righteousness." There are children of the Devil, and then there are children of God on earth.

The children of God are born through regeneration through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who were once in darkness are brought into light by God's plan to redeem those people, that they will now live for his kingdom purposes on this earth. This is not the American dream. This is not, "God came into this world so I can live out my dreams."

This is God coming into this world not to help us live out our story but to invite us into his, this awesome story of redemption, that from the beginning of the creation was preordained and

preplanned, and he knew that you were going to be a part of it, not because of anything in you, but because of his goodness.

We don't have anything to boast in but him. We see this. What comes with the disobedience and rebellion against God is decay and disorder and slavery and death. That's what Satan brought. He dressed it up, and it looked really good, but that's what comes of living under his authority. There are only two kingdoms. Jesus said, "If you're not with me, you're against me." You're living for Satan's kingdom automatically when you don't trust God with your life or with certain parts of your life.

That part of your life or your entire life will begin to wither and decay and will enslave you to that which you're not willing to trust him with. These two kingdoms are in conflict, so Jesus comes and inaugurates this kingdom. That's why he says, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. Quit working for this alternate kingdom. Repent and come under my leadership. Submit to me, and I will lead you out of this."

Where we begin to see flourishing in our hearts and flourishing go on, he begins to bring fruitfulness where it was formerly dead. A great section of Scripture that kind of speaks to this idea is in Mark 11. We'll look at this quickly, and then we'll talk about prayer to conclude here. We see here the triumphal entry.

"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately."'"

I just went to Israel. They have a road there that, according to tradition, is kind of the way Jesus was walking on Palm Sunday into Jerusalem. You see up on the mountain, which is actually the same place where in Genesis 22, led by his Father, Abraham, Isaac is brought up on a donkey and asked to be laid before the Lord as a sacrifice. Remember, there are a couple of men who go with him. As he is led up there, he takes his son up a little bit further and binds him and is getting ready.

He says to the two men before he leaves them, "We're going to worship, but we'll return." He either believes in the resurrection or something is going on there, or God will provide. He says, "God will

provide." Then there is the ram caught in the thicket, remember, that is provided as a substitute. I didn't know that those two places in Israel are in the same place.

Jesus comes in hundreds of years later to be the sacrifice, the Lamb of God, that in his place, in the place of Isaac, was sacrificed for his sins. You ought to compare these two texts, this text with the Genesis account. It's a great little study.

They went and found the colt and brought it back to him and laid their cloaks down. He comes in on the triumphal entry, and they're saying, "**Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!**" We know later that that's not the attitude they maintain. Why? They have a different idea of the way the Messiah is going to come. They have a self-centered view, I believe, of how the Messiah is coming.

It's even evident in Acts 1 when they ask the question wrongly, "Is now the time that has come to restore the kingdom to Israel?" not realizing that the question should be, "Is now the time that you're going to restore Israel to the kingdom?" One is a self-centered view. One is, "No, we need to be reconciled to God."

It says, "**And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything...**" He observed. Then he went out. The following day, he came back, and he was hungry. This picture of the fig tree is the picture of the Pharisees and what is going on there in the temple. "**And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it.**" There was no fruit, so he cursed it. He cursed that which is set up in opposition to his kingdom. He says, "**May no one ever eat fruit from you again.**"

Then he came to Jerusalem. He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple. "This is not my intention for my kingdom. You're there for your own self-centered profit." There is a lot of this going on in Jerusalem today. I wonder when he returns... We begin to see just this idea that under Jesus' authority, he has the ability to bring life and a curse. Everything that stands outside of his kingdom, all of the kingdoms set up against him, will not persevere. His kingdom will reign and rule forever.

Those alternate kingdoms are set up against the kingdom of God. What he calls us to is to forsake our kingdoms and to come under his reign and rule where we might receive blessing. As we think about this Thursday, we want to come with an attitude of submission and humility and asking him

to bless our land, our hearts, that he would send rain to loosen the soils so that those weeds might be removed, so that he might pull those weeds out that we were never able to pull out.

We can just clip the tops and deal with them superficially, but he can deal with them deeply as we begin to see the roots of pride and idolatry and we begin to renounce those things and turn toward him and ask him to do what only he can. As a model prayer, I want you to think about the prayer Jesus gave, and then we'll be finished.

Jesus says, "And when you pray, pray this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven...'" So we pray as his people together. He says, "**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.**" We are not here to give glory to ourselves but to give glory to him. We want him to make much of his name. "Cause your name this day to be glorified. Cause it, Lord. We're praying for that."

"**Your kingdom come...**" Guess whose kingdom I'm forsaking by praying for his kingdom: my kingdom. This isn't that self-centered prayer in James 4, "Give me what I want." This is a prayer, "Give me whatever I need to live for your kingdom purposes." "**Your kingdom come, your will be done...**" "I'm submitting my will and my plans to your kingdom purposes."

"**Give us this day our daily bread...**" "Give us what we need." This is, "Give me what I need for your kingdom." "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Why? Because when I'm not willing to forgive, I'm withholding from God because I don't trust him as the perfect judge and king, and I have to stand in that place of judgment. Guess what. There is just going to be withering and decay that happens there. As you trust him with those things, there is going to be life and the ability to love.

"**And lead us not into temptation...**" There are things you cannot see, so you're asking him for spiritual protection. "**...but deliver us from evil.**" Daily, we are to pray for his provision, his protection, his direction, his deliverance from the Evil One. We're moving from being rooted in self, which is where all this addiction, lust, anger, fear, anxiety, everything that's in the DSM-5 (if you're familiar with the DSM-5, it's a list of mental disorders), to renouncing that and re-rooting our tree in the Spirit of God, in Christ, so that the fruit that might come out of our lives would be the fruit of God's Spirit.

We humbly ask him to remove our shortcomings. *Shortcomings* is just another word for the sinful patterns of behavior. "**Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?**"

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

Here is a sample prayer of deliverance we have given to your sponsors. They have been through more training in terms of spiritual dynamics and prayer. Hopefully they'll be joining with you on Thursday as they come together. "Heavenly Father..." This would be... If you ever do sponsor somebody, this is in our sponsor guide. You have a participant guide. Sponsors have a guide also.

"Heavenly Father, for your name's sake and according to your love and mercy, we ask that you would deliver [whoever they're praying for] from any demonic influence that is tempting him or her to [blank]..." This isn't specific like, "I sinned with this person this way." It's patterns. "...so that he or she may freely serve you in your kingdom. He or she has agreed with your adversary and now renounces his ways. Spirit of [whatever], we command you by the authority of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to release [the person's name] at once."

It continues, "We command you to go directly without incident to the feet of Jesus, where he will deal with you according to his eternal purposes. We command you never to return to [blank] or to his or her family, friends, or loved ones. We bind you and all who may be assigned with you in the name of Jesus Christ and command you to go. Lord, we ask that you would fill those places previously occupied by the Enemy with the Holy Spirit and bless them in the name of Jesus Christ." Let's pray.

Lord, we're grateful that you come in love, in truth, and in power, and that you have authority over all things...the physical, the spiritual...and all you have to do is say a word. Lord, I pray that you would be glorified in our time now, in these coming weeks, in our lives, Lord, that you would make much of your name, Lord, that you would enable us by the power of your Holy Spirit, that he would apply that which you accomplished on the cross so that we might live as salt and light in this world, Lord.

We pray for freedom and for healing and for your blessing, Lord, for the work you have put before us in the small things, Lord, and anything else you may call us to. May we be faithful in the work. It's in Christ's name I pray, amen.