

## WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE TALKING TO?

### 40 Days of Prayer

*Pastor Warren's sermon transcript*

### 40 Days of Prayer – Week 3

(Note – may only be reproduced for use as a participant in MCF's 40 Day of Prayer campaign)

Welcome to 40 Days of Prayer, and if you'll take out your message notes. You know, one of the things that irritates me most is when people call you on the phone and they don't identify themselves. You know what I'm talking about? They just call and they just start talking, you're supposed to like, "I'm supposed to know who this is?" When you don't know who's on the other end, it affects your conversation a whole lot. You don't know what you're gonna say. You're a little more guarded. You don't know what tone to use. Is this the Pope or the Pizza Guy? You don't know what words are appropriate. You don't know how to address them properly.

If you don't know much about the person, you're more formal. I can always tell people who are part of Saddleback when I'm out in the neighborhood and those who aren't because I'll be pushing my cart down the aisle in the grocery store and somebody says, "Hey, Pastor Rick, how's it going?" But when someone says "Hello, Reverend Warren." "You talking to me? Moi?" You clearly don't know me if you just called me Reverend. Okay? So proximity and relationship determines how you talk to somebody. What you know about somebody determines your conversation.

Now the same is true with God. I wrote at the top of your outline there,

### **Your understanding of what God is really like shapes everything else in your life, including your prayer.**

Nothing influences your life more than how you view God. Now a lot of people have misconceptions about God. I made a list here. Some people think God is the grumpy god, cranky, angry, upset all the time, never can please him. Some people have the crouching tiger god, ready to pounce on you when you make the wrong move. Some people have the flakey father god, he's moody, he changes his mind continually about you. Some people think of God as the cosmic cop, that the whole goal of God is just make sure you keep the rules and who wants to talk to that; or a dictator god, always demanding more and more and more and it's never enough; or the Santa Claus god, where he's making a list and checking it twice. Are you naughty or nice? Some people have what I call the Play-Doh god, which is you make him into any form you want, or a Mister PotatoHead god, that would be a better one, you can put him all together.

I like to think of God as ... well, I'm sorry it doesn't really matter what you like to think. When it comes to God, it's what is he really like, not what you like to think of him as because you're just guessing. It's extremely important that you know the real God. If you have a misconception about God, prayer's gonna be a duty, a drudgery, it's gonna be boring, it's something I have to do, I've got to do, I should do, I must do. And guilt motivation doesn't work, folks. So, you don't guilt yourself into praying and God doesn't want you to pray out of guilt. You gotta have the right concept of God. A. W. Tozer wrote "what comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you, because it affects everything else in your life."

So what is God really like? Well, God has many characteristics. He is all-knowing, omniscient, he is all powerful, omnipotent, he is omnipresent, it means he can be everywhere at the same time. The Bible tells us God is holy, God is just, God is kind, God is loving, God is faithful.

There are many, many characteristics of God that we have done studies about before, but I want us this morning to just look at the goodness of God, because it is the goodness of God that is the basis for all prayer. If God is not a good God, you have zero reason to pray, you have zero motivation to pray. Now, the only reason there's any good in the world is because God is a good God and God is the Creator and his goodness is in the universe. You can't spell "good" without "God". If there's no God, there is no good, there's no right or wrong, there's no good and bad.

People say why is there evil in the world? Real simple, God doesn't force us to do good. All the evil in the world is because God gave us a free choice and we choose not to do good a lot of the time, so do a lot of other people, and that causes all the evil in the world. Evil is really easy to explain. The hard thing to explain is why is there good in the world. If you believe in random chance and survival of the fittest, then everything should be "whoever dog eat dog", "whoever wins, that's just tough luck." The only reason there's good in the world is because God is a good God.

Now because God is always good, we know four things about prayer. And I want you to understand these because when you understand how good God really is, you're going to enjoy prayer. It's not a duty, it's a delight. When anytime prayer becomes ritual, boring to you, it's 'because you don't understand how good God is. People say "well, I just don't love God enough." No, that's not your problem. Your problem is you don't understand how much God loves you and how good God is to you. Everything in your life is a gift of God's goodness. Let's look at four implications of the goodness of God in your life and how that's gonna change the way you pray from now on. All right?

Number One - Because God is always good,

### **1. God's plans for my life will always be good**

God's plans for my life will always be good because God is always good. People say, "is there anything God can't do?" There are a lot of things God can't do. He can't deny himself. He can't be evil. God is good, so by nature, he cannot do evil, he cannot do bad. Everything God does is good. And so, because God is good, God's plans for my life will always be good.

Now I want us to look at some Scripture. Jeremiah 29:11, God's talking, "*I know what I have planned for you*", says the Lord, "*I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. My plans will give you a hope and a good future,*" there's that word again, "*and when you call to me and you pray, I will listen to you!*" You see the connection between purpose and prayer, between God's plans for your life and prayer.

Now I've said this many times, you're not an accident, there's a purpose for your life. There are no accidental parents, but there are no accidental children. Your parents may not have planned

you, but God did, and he wanted you alive. Now, God didn't have to create a plan for your life. He could have just let you be born and have no plan. He could have let you be born... He doesn't necessarily have a plan for every ant, for every mosquito, except to bug you.

But God has never made anything without a purpose, really. Everything has a purpose and has a plan. God could have created you without a plan, but he gave a plan for your life. Why? Because he loves you. He loves you. He is a good God. And he put a lot of thought into creating you. And you say, "well how do I know God's plan?" God's plans for your life are revealed... God's plan is revealed and it is realized through prayer. The more you pray, the more you're gonna understand God's plan for your life. He says there "I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you, to give you hope, to give you a good future, and when you call to me and pray to me, I will listen to you."

Look up here on the screen. The Bible says this, David says in Psalm 31:19, *"God, your goodness is so great!"* Everything good in your life is a gift of God, everything good in your life. *"God, your goodness is so great! You have stored up great blessings for those who honor you."* Now, notice it says "stored up?" That means God thought about it, it means intentional thought in advance. When you store up something, you plan it in advance. Did you know that God has already planned the blessings he has for the rest of your life? Why? He's a good God. God, your goodness is so great, you've stored up great blessings. I haven't even got 'em all yet, for those who honor you. *"You do so much for those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world!"*

That's why we're going 40 Days of Prayer. I want God to bless your life before the watching world, but you can miss those blessings, they're not automatic. The Bible says "You have not because you ask not." You've got to learn to ask, you've got to learn to pray. And it is prayer that reveals your purpose and your plan, God's plan for your life. And its prayer that reveals and shows you the blessings in your life. You have not because you ask not. I want you to experience those blessings.

So God says, "Everything I do in your life is good, I don't have any bad plans for you, they're not plans to hurt you." People say, "um, God's getting even with me." God does not get even with people. I've said this many times. God is not mad at you, he's mad about you. He says, "I am a good God, I have good plans for your life." Other people have bad plans for your life, and you may make some bad plans yourself, but God has good plans for your life. You say "well, Rick, not everything in my life is good." God didn't promise that. He didn't say everything that happens in your life will be good. He says "I have good plans for you." You can miss God's plan by your own decisions. God did not promise that everything in your life will have a happy ending.

Friends, we live on a broken planet. Everything on this planet is broken, nothing's perfect, nothing works perfectly. Your body is broken, have you noticed that? It doesn't always work the right way. Your mind is broken, it always doesn't think the right way. The weather is broken, the economy's broken, relationships are broken, everything on this planet. Nothing is perfect.

So God didn't say "I promise you perfection." That's called heaven. We should not expect heaven to be on earth. In heaven, no sorrow, sadness, sickness, suffering, but here there is brokenness.

But God says, "even in the middle of all this brokenness, I have a good plan for your life." And He says, "even when you make bad choices, I'm greater than your choices and I can even fit the dumb decisions you've made into a good plan." What a God! He can turn crucifixions into resurrections.

Romans 8:28, *"We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose."* If you say "God, I give you my life. Jesus, I want to have a relationship with you. I want to fulfill the purpose you made me for." This is not a promise for everybody in the world. Everything is not working together for good for everybody in the world. Everything is working together for good for those who give it all to God. It says those who are saying "God, I want your plan, your purpose for my life." It doesn't say all things are good, it says they all work together, even the bad and even the bitter. God says "I can put that in the mix, yeah, I can throw that in, too."

I've used this illustration before that, when you make a cake, the individual ingredients don't taste good. Flour by itself does not taste good. Raw eggs do not taste good. Vanilla by itself does not taste good. Baking powder, baking soda doesn't taste good. Oil, Crisco does not taste good. But you put them all together and let God work them together, that's called batter, I like that. God wants to take the bitter, put it in the batter, and make you better. I've never said that. Somebody should tweet it, okay. I'm gonna say it again, that's pretty good. God takes the bitter, puts it in the batter, and makes you better. And sweet and sour sauce, that tastes pretty good, but sour by itself, uh-uh, but God can fix it all. Why? Because he's a good God, he's a good God.

Now, the more you pray, the better you're gonna know your purpose. And the better you know your purpose, the more God can use everything in your life, even the stuff that people plan against you.

You know the story of Joseph in the Bible, where his brothers sold him into slavery, but he ends up being second in command in Egypt and, years later, he confronts his brothers and he says in Genesis 50:20 *"Your plan was to hurt me, but God turned your evil plan into a good plan to save the lives of many people."* That's called redemptive suffering.

Sometimes you suffer for the benefit of other people. That's what Jesus did for you. When he died on the cross, that's redemptive suffering. He wasn't paying for his sins, he didn't have any, he's paying for yours. And sometimes, like in Joseph's case, God takes the bitter, and he makes the world better because of what you went through. God says "It's not all good in your life, but I can use it all for good and fit it into the plan, even the hurts and the sins of other people, even when you're an innocent person and you've been hurt by others." Was that good? No, it was not good when you were hurt, but can God use it for hurt? Yes, because God is a good God, and he loves to bring good out of bad. Anybody can bring good out of good, God brings God out of bad.

So, the more you trust the goodness of God, the happier you're gonna be. Romans 5:3, *"So we can rejoice when we run into problems and trials..."* What? That sounds kind of masochistic. Oh, happy day, I'm in a problem. He says, *"We can rejoice when we run into problems..."* You can be happy even in the middle of pressure and trials and troubles and tribulation. Why? Notice the phrase *"for we know"*, circle the phrase, *"for we know."* Happiness in life depends on what you

know, not what you go through. You can take two people, put 'em through the same circumstances, one of them is happy, one of them is devastated. Why? Because it's what you know, what you know makes a difference.

We can be rejoicing when we run into problems and trials, for we know, what'll we know, that they're good for us. Why? Because God is a good God and God says "I'll even use the bad stuff in your life for good, if you'll let me. It doesn't happen with everybody. If you'll let me, I'll use the bad for good in your life." We know that they're good for us, they help us learn patient endurance.

God's much more interested in your character, what you become, than your comfort. You're not taking your car to heaven, your cash to heaven, your career to heaven, your china to heaven, you are taking your character. The only thing you're taking to heaven is you. God wants to grow it here on earth before he takes it into eternity. How does he do it? Through all these different things, and he says, "I'll use it all, I'm a good God." And he says everything that God does in my life, he says I'm gonna use it for good.

On earth, God's more interested in your character. This is not heaven, so don't expect life to be perfect. It's not. But he says, "I can even bring good out of bad." Now I want you to write this sentence down:

Everything God does in my life, he does for my good.

God's not trying to get even with you, God is trying to grow you. Everything that God does in my life, he does for my good because he is a good God.

So that's the first thing that we learn, that God's plans for my life will always be good because God is a good God. He doesn't have bad plans for your life. The more you get to know God, the more you understand God's plans. All right?

Number two - second pillar of God's goodness, because God is always good,

## **2. God always gives me what I need, not what I deserve.**

God always give me what I need, not what I deserve. If you and I got what we deserved, we would even be here. Psalm 103 says this, verse 10 and verse 12, "*He [God] has not treated us as we deserve. He has not treated us as we deserve for our sins or paid us back for our wrongs.*" Why? Because Jesus Christ paid for all your sins and all your wrongs. And if you had to pay for your own sins and wrongs, then why did Jesus die on the cross? That's called double jeopardy. If you've put your trust in Christ, all your sins have been paid for, so why would you have to pay for them. He's already paid for them. He's not treated us as we deserved for our sins, paid us back for our wrongs... "*(In his goodness), [this is what he's saying] he has taken our sins away and removed them as far as the east is from the west!*"

I like that he says from the east to the west because there's no end to east and west. There is a north pole, there is a south pole, there's an ending to those. He says God takes your sins and he

just wipes them out. One verse in the Bible says he puts them in the deepest part of the sea, metaphorically, and then he puts up a "no fishing" sign. If God has forgiven you, you need to forgive yourself.

Now God is good, he gives me what I need, not what I deserve. This guy in the Bible, King David, commits adultery and then, to cover it up, he has the wife's husband murdered. Pretty big sins, murder and adultery, right up there at the top. Did David deserve to be forgiven? No. Did David deserve mercy? No. But David knows that God is a good God and so he asks for mercy. Here's what he prays, Psalm 51:1-2. If you are in a big sin right now, you need to go read Psalm 51. *"God, in your goodness, have mercy on me. [Not because I deserve it, because you're a good God.] Have mercy on me... Wash away all my guilt; and make me clean again. From my sin, cleanse me."* All of that is based on who God is, not who you are.

Let me make this real clear to you. God forgives you, not because you're good, God forgives you because he's good. It's not based on your goodness. You say "well, if I'm just so good in this area, then God will forgive me." Uh-uh, won't happen, doesn't matter. God forgives you, not because of your goodness, God forgives you because he is a good God. He has a plan, and that's a good plan, and when you blow it and you need forgiveness, he gives forgiveness because he is a good God.

Now here's the cool thing about this. Not only does God forgive your sins when you come and ask, say "God, I know you're a good God. You're a merciful God, I ask you to show me mercy, I ask you to forgive my sin," not only does he forgive us, he welcomes you back. Now this is a big deal. He does not reject you when you sin, he receives you back. This is the exact opposite of what people do. When you hurt somebody, when you sin against them, do they want to receive you back? Absolutely not. They want to be stand-off, they want to be distant, they want to push you away, they want to reject you, not receive you. And yet, God says "Even when you sin, because I am a good God, I will receive you, I will not reject you." God is unlike people in this.

I'm a pastor, I've been a pastor for a long time. I've talked to tens of thousands of people, so I know your little secret. Some of you said, "I'm leaving right now." And I'm gonna put it on the screen here in just a minute. No, I'm a good pastor. What I know about every one of you is one of your deepest fears is the fear of rejection and you'd do almost anything in your life to avoid it. You don't want to be rejected by anybody. You want everybody to like you and love you and you don't want anybody to think you're a doofus. So you say "I'm not gonna get out on that dance floor at that wedding, I can't dance," because somebody will look at it and they'll go "Look how stupid she looks." And much of your life you've planned in order to avoid rejection. "I don't do these certain things, I don't go to these certain places, I only have these certain friends." I limit my life because I don't want to be rejected. It is a deep, deep fear that you have, the fear of somebody finding out what you're really like.

Years ago, there was a book called *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?* And the answer is because if I tell you what I'm really like and you don't like it, I'm up a creek without a paddle 'cause I'm all I've got. So we spend most of our lives wearing masks, pretending to be people we're not, because if you really let people see what you really are, you're afraid they would reject you. It's one of your deepest fears.

But because God, listen, is good, and always good, and never bad, God will never, never reject you, even when you sin against him, and you hurt him, and you don't do what he has told you to do. You can come back, he will receive you, not reject you, just come back to him humbly.

Look at this next verse, Psalm 27:10-13, *"Even if my father and mother abandon me..."* Some of you've been rejected by your parents, "you're no longer my son, get out of my life, I don't want to see you again, you've hurt me too much or whatever." *"Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close..."* Do you hear the tenderness in that verse? Everybody wants to be held close. God will hold you close. David says, *"My enemies are waiting for me to fall..."* [They want me to fail, and they know I'm a sinner, they know I'm imperfect. My enemies are waiting, so they can just say 'dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-day,' say you did it.] Yet he says, *"even if my mother and father abandon me, my enemies are against me, yet I will remain confident."* Why? Look at the rest of the verse. *"I remain confident that I'll see the goodness of the Lord while I'm living here in the world."* You messed up, you screwed up, you made a big mistake. God is the God of the second chance. Why? He is a good, good Father. He's good and gracious.

Now, because God is always good, and God is always gracious, when we pray we can be always bold and always confident. We don't have to come slinking in to God, with our tail between our legs and kind of mousey, we just come and say "God, you know I blew it, but you are a good Father, that's who you are. And this is who I am, but it's who you are that matters." Good is good and gracious always, so we can be bold and confident always in prayer. You don't have to slink around and say "I wonder if I should pray this or not." Pray anything you want to pray about and God will hear it.

Hebrews 4:15-16, the Bible says, *"(Jesus),"* talking about Jesus, *"understands our weaknesses..."* In fact, God knows your weaknesses better than you do. He even knows the weaknesses you have that you don't even know are weak. *"Jesus understands our weaknesses [and our temptations], for he faced all of the same temptations that we do, [here on Earth,] yet he did not sin"* because he was perfect. *"So let us come boldly with confidence,"* circle that, boldly with confidence, *"let us come boldly with confidence to the throne of our gracious, [our good] God."* He's talking about prayer. *"And there we will receive his mercy, and we will find the grace to help us when we need it."* All right?

So, how do I know God is good? Because everything he does in the world is good. God's plan for my life will always be good, he's not gonna steer me in the wrong direction. I will steer myself in the wrong direction, but he won't. And God always gives me what I need, not what I deserve. So when I need forgiveness, he doesn't give me judgment because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Now here's the third one, third factor for God's goodness, because God is always good, this almost sounds like heresy, but it's right out of the Scripture...

### **3. God puts my good above his own good.**

Because God is always, always good, he puts my good even above his own good. Friends, this is the heart of the Gospel. This is the Good News, that the King sacrifices himself for the peasants. The reason I know that the Bible is true, rather than a fairy tale, 'cause in the fairy tales, everybody dies for the king. Protect the king at all cost! Protect the queen at all cost! Protect the princess at all cost! And all the peons and the peasants and the slaves and the soldiers, everybody's dying to protect the king. There's only one story in the world where the King dies for the people. It's called the Gospel.

This is what makes our faith different from every other storyline in the world. God says you've sinned, you deserve punishment, you deserve to go to hell, but I'm a good God and I love you, and I'm also holy and just, somebody's gotta pay for your sins. So here's the deal, I'll do it, I'll pay for your sins. I will come to earth as the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and I will die for your sins. You're not dying for mine, I'm dying for yours. God doesn't have any sins. This is the Gospel, this is the King sacrificing himself for the peasants. This is the ultimate expression of love; the Shepherd dies for the sheep.

Look at this next verse, Jesus says, John 10:14-15, "*I am the good,*" there's that word, "*I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own sheep and they know me... and I will sacrifice my life for the sheep.*" Really? That's unbelievable, that's almost too good to be true. I could stumble over that. You're gonna die for me? If any of you had a flock of sheep, would you die for your sheep? Absolutely not! No shepherd in history has died for his sheet. They're just sheep. But God, the Creator of the universe, is a good God. He dies for you. The Shepherd dies for the sheep. "I'm the good Shepherd."

Look up here on the screen. John 15:13, "*The greatest love you can have is to give your life for others.*" So when you look at the cross, whether you're wearing one around your neck, or you see it on a hospital, or you see it in the cemeteries, or you see it wherever, Red Cross, whenever you see a cross, you just remember that is the symbol of God's goodness. It is the greatest symbol of the goodness of God. It is a picture, the perfect One dies for the imperfect one. Nobody has ever offered to pay for your sins, except God. Nobody ever will offer to pay for your sins, except God. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He didn't die from the Romans, he died love in the first degree. It was love. "I love you this much, I'm willing to die for you." Why? "Because I am the good God, and all that is good in the universe comes from me and all that is bad in the universe comes from when you reject my goodness and do what you want to do."

Here's the mind-blowing thing. Not only did Jesus die to pay for your sins, that's good enough right there, but he has another thing he does. In that there is a great exchange, he imputes his goodness, he puts his goodness inside you. He takes all the bad out and puts all the good in, in God's eyes. It's like blood transfusion. This is the great exchange.

Look at this next verse in the Bible, 2 Corinthians Chapter 5:21, "*God took the sinless Christ,*" he'd never done anything wrong, "*and poured into him all our sins.*" Jesus takes the guilt from every rape, every murder, every gossip, every lie, every molestation, every evil, every tax evasion, everything done wrong ever in history. "*God took the sinless Christ and poured into him our sins...* [all the sins of the world. Then, here's the unbelievable part,] *Then, in exchange, he poured God's goodness into us!*" Are you kidding me? When God looks at you, he does not see

your sin. He sees God's goodness. He sees the goodness of Christ. He takes all the bad out. He puts all the good in. This is the great exchange.

Does anybody remember the name Monty Hall? That was the TV show "Let's Make a Deal." Behind door number one, door number two, door number three, and you pick, let's make a deal. In the eternal Let's Make a Deal, there are three eternal. Open up door number one, you have sinned, you need to pay for it, go to hell. That's door number one. Door number two, you have sinned, you're gonna try to pay for your sins by doing some good things. You can't be good enough, doesn't work. Door number three, door's open, Jesus Christ says, "Here's the deal, I'll take all of your guilt, all of your sin and I'm gonna give you all of my goodness." That's a deal. What a deal!

This is the best news in the world, friends! That's why we grow Saddleback Church. It's why we start new campuses, it's why we do the Peace Plan, because everybody needs to know there's an exchange available out there, like a blood transfer. How 'bout you want to get rid of all the badness in your life and get all the goodness of God in your life and then you go to heaven, which is a perfect place. You're not getting there with all your badness. You're only getting there with all of God's goodness, but it's already been paid for and it's free. Why? Because God is a good God. What a deal. What a deal!

Notice the next verse, Romans 4:25, *"Jesus died for our sins and rose again,"* that's Easter, *"to make us right with God,"* and then here's the phrase, *"filling us with God's goodness."* In God's eyes, God does not see any sin in your life, the one you did today, the one you're gonna do tomorrow, he doesn't see it. He sees all the goodness of Christ poured into you. If you were to die tonight, and you were to go to heaven, and you say "now, God, about that sin yesterday," he'd go, "what sin, what are you talking about?" It's all been wiped out, it's all been washed away, it's all be paid for, it's all been taken by Christ. He'd say, "What sin, what are you talking about?" All he sees is the goodness of Christ in you, that is the Good News. That is amazing!

Now what in the world does what I've just talked about for the last five minutes have to do with prayer? It has everything to do with prayer. And if you don't understand what I just said, you'll never understand prayer. This is amazing. What God did for you at the cross makes prayer possible.

Look at the next verse, Romans Chapter 8 in the Bible, verse 32, *"Since God did not spare even his own Son, but gave Christ up for us all..."* He sent his Son to die for the sins that you committed and I committed. *"Since God didn't spare even his own Son, but gave Christ up for us all, won't he now also give us everything else we need?"*

Do you see the logic of this verse? That when Jesus Christ died for you on the cross, he solved your biggest problem. Any other problem you have in your life is small potatoes. Jesus Christ and God loved you enough, in their own goodness, in God's goodness, to die for you, don't you think he loves you enough to help you with your bills and your health and your relationships. Everything else in your life is small potatoes. There is nothing you can't bring to God in prayer. If he loved you enough to die for you, He loves you enough to answer your prayer.

All right, now the fourth truth, because God is always a good God, this is the hard one, you're not gonna like this one... We said God is good, so he always has a good plan for your life, and God is good because he always gives you what you need, not what you deserve, and God is good because he puts my good ahead of his own.

Here's number four, because God is always good,

#### **4. He does not say yes to every request.**

There's nothing in the Bible that says that everything you ask for, you're gonna get, no matter how self-centered or off-base or whatever it is. God does not say yes to every prayer request that I make.

We talked about this last week. No loving parent would ever give a child everything they ask for. You're not a vending machine. God is not your genie, he's not your magic wand, he's not your vending machine. A vending machine will give you stuff that's not good for you. God would never give you something that's not good for you.

But what about the stuff that I think is good for me, and he says no to. Last week I told you that God always answers every single prayer, not always the way you want, but you always get an answer. Remember I told you, facetiously, last week that there are four ways that God answers: yes, no, wait, and you've gotta be kidding me.

Let me give you another way to look at this. I want you to write these words down. God answers every single prayer, one of four ways. **When the request is not right, God says no.** God has said no to a lot of your prayer requests, and parents say no to their kids for a hundred good reasons, and God doesn't owe you an explanation for every time he says no for something you ask for. You'll know it, when you get to heaven, but you're not gonna know all the reasons God said no. But no is an answer. You say, "you didn't answer me." Yes, I did, I said no. That's an answer, no. So God says no when the request is not right.

When the timing is not right, God says it's a good request, but not yet. **God says slow.** Write down that word, slow. No, slow. Slow means I intend to give this to you, but not yet, the timing is not right. There's a big difference between a delay and a denial. No and not yet are not the same thing. Now, if you don't understand that, it means you're immature because kids don't understand the difference between no and not yet. If a parent says to a kid not yet, they think it means no and they have a fit. Maturity is when you learn the difference between no and not yet. A delay is not a denial. So sometimes God says no, but sometimes God says yeah, I'm gonna give this to you, but not yet, slow, it's gonna be awhile. It might even be years, you don't know, slow, God knows.

Sometimes the request is right and it's an okay timing, but you're not right, and God wants to do something in your life before he gives it to you. You're not ready to handle the answer, because often his answer's a bigger one than you want to get. And when God wants to give you something that he's waiting on you, **he says grow.** That's an answer. Sometimes God says yeah, I'm gonna give this to you, that's a good request, that's fine, but you're not ready to handle it. It's

like giving a little kid travel luggage to carry into the airport, they can't carry it, it's too heavy. And so sometimes God's answer is yeah, I'm gonna give it to you, but grow first. And once you grow up spiritually in that area, I fully intend to give this to you.

Now when the request is right, it's not some self-centered thing, and the timing's right, and you're right, then **God says go**. That's the fourth one, all systems go, green light, I'm gonna give it to you right now. All four of those are legitimate answers. Many times, God will say no, many times he'll say slow, many times he'll say grow, and many times he'll say go! This is it, I'm gonna give it to you right now. But each of those are answers to God.

Luke Chapter 11, Jesus says this, verse 11-13, *"You fathers – if your children ask for a fish to eat, would you give them a snake instead? Or if they ask for an egg, would you give them a scorpion?"* This is obviously humor by exaggeration. *"Of course not! So if you, as sinful people, know how to give good gifts to your own children, how much more will your Heavenly Father,"* who's a good, good Father, *"give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*

The point God is saying here is God's never gonna give you anything that'll be hurtful or bad for you. But he says if you, being an imperfect parent, know how to give good gifts to your kids, and you do know how to do that, certainly God, who is the perfect and always good Heavenly Father, knows how to give good gifts to you, but he'll never give you anything that is not good for you in that moment.

Sometimes we ask things we don't really know what we're asking about. One time, the mother of James and John, who were two of the disciples that Jesus picked, the 12 guys who traveled with him, she comes to him like a good mom, she's proud of her boys, they're traveling with Jesus. She goes up to the Lord and says "Lord, when you get to your Kingdom in Heaven, can my boys sit on either side of you?" I can just see a mom doing this. And John's going "Oh, mom, come on." And in Matthew 20:22, Jesus replied, *"You don't realize what you're asking for!"* You have a limited perspective, you don't see the whole picture, you don't realize, ma'am, what you're asking for.

Many times, God has wanted to say that to you. You don't realize what you're asking for. You don't really want that, what you want is something different, so I'm not gonna give you this because you think you want this, but it's not really what you need. It's not good for you, it's not really even what you want. You don't realize what you're asking for. And in that point, when God says no, you need to just go, I trust a good, good, Father more than I do my own judgment, 'cause I think this would be good for me, but God, you've got the bigger picture and you can see my whole life in front of me. I don't know where this turn is gonna take me. I don't know, but you do, and if you say no to that job, or no to that engagement, or no to whatever I've asked for, I'm just gonna trust that you are a good Father, because you can see what I can't see, and I don't realize even what I'm asking for." As Garth Brooks said, "Thank God for some unanswered prayers."

Now let's just be honest. It's easy to trust God's goodness when things are going good. No sweat. Everything's going good in my life, God is a good God. The test is can you say that when everything's bad in your life, when things aren't working out, when you're not seeing the

changes, when you're not getting the answers, when it seems dark, when you feel alone or afraid. When things are not going good in your life, can you still say "You're a good, good Father, that's who you are, that's who you are, that's who you are." That is the ultimate test of your faith and God is going to test your faith thousands of times in life. Do you trust your feelings? It's easy to feel good when God is good and things are good, or do I trust the faith, that God is good even when I can't see it, that the sun is still shining when I can't see it.

The test of your faith is not how high you jump in praise, singing a song, when things are going good in your life. The test of faith is how straight you walk when everything sucks. And you're still going straight, I'm still trusting in the goodness of God, I did not get that job, I just got fired, I'm trusting in the goodness of God, that his plans for my life are good plans. God, I trust you. I don't see it, but I trust you. Ultimately, I'm gonna trust you, when things don't work out.

When my wife got breast cancer, the month we launched the Peace Plan, I'm going "Come on, Lord, we're trying to do something serious here. This is for you." And the Lord's going "Rick, don't you think I know that." And I don't know if my wife's gonna die, and I'm praying for healing, I don't care if it's my miracle or medicine, it doesn't matter to me, just for healing, I don't want to lose my wife. And month after month, I'm holding the bedpan while she vomits into it, and she's going through all this radiation and chemo and surgery. Is God a good Father when your wife's got cancer? Yeah, yeah.

When I have two prayers in my life, that I've prayed every day for over 40 years, and I'm still waiting for the answer, is God a good Father? Yeah, yeah, he's still good.

When my youngest son lost his lifelong battle with mental illness that I had prayed every day that God would take away and he takes his own life and he makes a permanent solution to a temporary mood, is God a good Father when your son commits suicide? Yeah, yeah, yeah. He's still good.

Not everything that happens in the world is good, not everything that happens in the world is God's will. There are a lot of things that God doesn't want to happen, but he's given us a free choice. It's your greatest gift and it's your greatest curse, 'cause he's not gonna force you to love him. Is God a good God in that moment? Yeah.

The moment of ultimate test of your faith is when you can say, like Job, when you've lost everything, all your family, all your crops, all your business, all your health, you've lost everything, and Job says, "You give and take away, you give and take away, but my heart will choose to say, Lord blessed by the name." You're a good, good Father, even when I've lost it all, I trust you. That is maturity, that's where God wants to take you, that you do not live your life based on your feelings, that you live your life based on the truth, that God has a plan and if I'll follow that plan, it's a good plan. And even the bad things that happen, God says "I'll fit that into the plan, too."

You know, a lot of times when you pray for stuff, it doesn't happen. Let's just get real honest here, okay, let's talk about this. Most or many of your prayers you have not seen the answers to.

You know, this week, on Wednesday, I got a terrible stomachache, I mean it was "bowled over in a fetal position and you can't handle it" kind of pain. And I'm lying there, bowled over in pain, and I cried out to God, "God, take away this pain." You know what happened? He didn't take it away. Anybody ever been there on that one? He didn't take it away. And actually the pain lasted several hours longer. It eventually subsided, but he didn't take it away.

Now what does that tell me about prayer, that prayer doesn't work? No, I've seen it work too many times. That God isn't good? No, God is good, whether I'm in pain or not. That God doesn't care? Of course, God cares. That I should give up on prayer, because I don't get everything I selfishly ask for every time? No. God is not a vending machine, He's not a genie, I said that. And prayer is not a painkiller. It is not a painkiller that takes away all of your pain. God has not guaranteed a pain free life to you, that's called heaven, but not here on earth. Nowhere in the Bible does it say God wants you to live pain free. Actually, pain keeps us from many times getting into worse situations. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God said prayer will make every single moment in your life easy. It is not God's job to make every moment of your life easy, you'd never grow up. You'd be immature, you'd be spoiled, you'd be incredibly self-centered. It just doesn't say that.

So, when I'm in pain and I pray and I don't see the answers, should I give up? No. My job is to keep praying, keep trusting God with the answer, because I know that everything he does and everything he allows in my life, he will use for good. And so I accept a no, or a slow, or a grow, or a go because I know that God is a good, good Father, even when I'm in pain.

If a doctor does a surgery on you and cuts you open, that's gonna cause some pain. But if that surgery saves your life, it's a lifesaving surgery, and you are in pain in the surgery and then you're in pain in the recovery, do you say that's a bad, bad doctor? No, he just saved your life.

When God doesn't immediately end your pain, as he didn't mine, he was just saying to me in that moment "My grace is sufficient for you, Rick, you can handle a little pain in your life, you can handle a lot of pain in your life." I've had a lot of pain in my life. In fact, almost everything I've learned in life, I've learned through pain. I've learned nothing from pleasure, zero, zip, nada. I learned very little from success, but I learned boatloads through pain. And God is more interested in making me a man of God than he is in making me comfortable. God is more interested in making you a man of God than making you comfortable. God is more interested in making you a woman of God than making you comfortable. Comfort is gonna go on for trillions and trillions of years in heaven, but right now, you're in the grow up stage, and so not everything you ask for you're gonna get. Otherwise, that's like Midas touch, everything turns to gold. If you never had any pain or difficulty in your life, how strong, how mature would you be? Not very. You don't know God is all you need, until God is all you've got. And then you realize God does everything for good.

Isaiah 55:8-9, God says "*My thoughts are completely different from yours...*" which is why he doesn't answer the way I want him to many times, "*and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*" And Rick, you're praying at one level

and I'm thinking about your life at another level, 'cause I want a good for your life even more than you do. Will, I trust him.

Number five, last one, finally, because God is always good,

### **5. He invites us to live with him forever.**

Are you kidding me? God wants to show you his goodness, not just while you're here on earth. God is going to show you his goodness forever and ever and ever and ever and ever and ever, for all of eternity. Wow! Because God is always good, he invites us to live with him forever.

Two verses, then I'll close. 2 Thessalonians, *"Our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who loves us, has given us by his grace, [his goodness,] an everlasting encouragement..."* I'd say so. Heaven's called an everlasting encouragement because it never ends. *"... And a good hope,"* there's that word good, *"and a good hope that will last forever."* Forever, circle that, forever. Now he says, *"May this encourage your heart..."* Even when you're in pain, that no matter how much pain you're in, it's not gonna last forever, but heaven's gonna last forever. Joy's gonna last forever, hope's gonna last forever. *"May this encourage your heart and give you strength for every good thing",* there's that word good, *"that you do and say!"* And God is good to us, he wants us to be good to other people.

We did that entire series on Psalm 23 a year ago, and the last verse of Psalm 23:6 says this *"Surely goodness, [God's goodness,] and love will follow me all the days of my life."* That's good, but then he adds this in, *"and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!"* That's a good plan.

Why am I saying this? Why are we covering this at the very start of our small group studies? Because until you're absolutely convinced that God is a good God and that he's always good and that he never does bad in your life, until you understand the goodness of God, your prayers are gonna be powerless and passionless and pointless.

On the other hand, when you realize, no matter how I feel and no matter what it looks like, God is for me, he's not against me. God is a good God and he wants what's good for me, more than I even want it myself, and he know what will make me happy more than I know it myself. God is a good God and that's the foundation of all your prayers. Now your prayers become passionate and purposeful and they've got a point to them, and you have power in your prayers.

So let me ask you this: What do you want to see happen in your life in the next 40 days? I want you to commit the next 40 days to learning how to pray. I'm going to teach you in the weeks ahead, both in small group and here, how to pray effectively. It starts with the goodness of God. Nothing's more important in your life than you learn how to pray effectively, friend. It's the way that you tap into God's power, God's presence, God's peace, God's purpose, God's plan. It's the way you tap into all of that. So what do you want to see in the next 40 days? Start thinking about that. The Bible says *"You have not because you ask not"* (James 4:2).

The Bible says Satan is not afraid of your plans. Satan is not afraid of your schemes. Satan's not afraid of your budget or your strategy. Satan is not afraid of your programs. But he's scared to

death of your prayers, because that's where you tap into God. And he knows that any time God wants to do something really cool, really great in your life, or in your family, or in your job, or in your community, or in your church, or in our nation, he starts by motivating you to pray.

So if you're going to commit to praying and learning how to pray the next 40 days, buckle up! Get ready for the adventure of your lifetime. We've just been through a time where we've had three major hurricanes, an earthquake in Mexico, a church shooting in Nashville, and now the largest mass shooting in American history in Las Vegas. I've been consumed by these the last several weeks, helping hundreds of churches, the money that you gave, over a million dollars, we've been distributing it in the disaster areas to churches as they care for the people. I've been on the phone all this week, talking to pastors in Vegas, coaching them on how to counsel the people, the difficulties. We had people in our area who died in Vegas. Only about 10 people were actually from Las Vegas, they were from everywhere else, who died.

Our nation needs a spiritual awakening. Our nation needs revival. Our nation needs God. Things happen when people start praying together.

These last two verses on your outline, Psalm 119. I want you to pray this this week, this verse, pray it every day. Verse 37 and 40, *"Lord, keep me from paying attention to what's worthless."* You might write out next to that cable TV, social media. If you spent as much time checking in with God in prayer as you do checking your Facebook, you'd be a whole lot stronger. *"Lord, keep me from paying attention to what's worthless. (Instead) let me live by your Word..."* You need to get in a small group, where you're going to learn the Word. *"I want to obey your principles. Please renew my life with your goodness!"*

And then make this your prayer, Lamentations 5:21, *"Bring us back to you, God..."* You can pray this every day. *"Bring us back to you, God; we're ready to come back. Give us a fresh start."*

As your pastor, I'm asking you to pray three things every day this week. Lord, revive my heart, revive my small group, and revive our church family.

Father, you are a good, good Father. There are many people here in pain. You're still a good, good Father. We've all had prayers that weren't answered the way we want them to be answered. You're still a good, good Father.

Help us to remember that your plan for our lives is always good, so we choose your plan, not ours. Help us to remember that you always give us what we need, not what we deserve. Thanks for that. And thank you that you not only forgive us, but you pour your goodness into us. Thank you that you're not mad at us, that you're mad about us. Thank you that you amazingly put our good above your own good, and you did that through the cross, by dying for the sheep. You didn't spare your own Son, so you certainly give us what else we need.

And Lord, even though we don't always understand it, we thank you don't say yes, go to every prayer request. Your goal is not to make our lives easy, but to grow us up. We realize that your thoughts are not ours, your ways are higher than ours, and a lot of stuff we don't understand, and we won't understand until we're with you in eternity.

And thank you that you've invited us to live with you forever in heaven. If you've never opened your life to Christ, say "Jesus Christ, I want to accept your gift of heaven, I want to accept your gift of forgiveness, I want to accept your gift of a new life. Jesus Christ, I want a relationship with you, I want to put my trust in you."

I pray, Lord, that in the next 40 days together, you will revive my heart and all of our hearts. You will revive our small groups, all of them. You will revive our church family. Only changed people can change the world. I pray this blessing in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and everybody said Amen.