

ALL ACCESS

Week 3

- In the book of Esther, we read of an amazing story of how a common Jewish girl gets picked to be Queen of the Babylonian Empire, and while Esther is in the early days of her new marriage to the King, her cousin Mordecai, who pretty much had raised her, learns of a plan from within the Kings camp to kill all of the Jews
- He's so upset about it, and begs Esther to say something to the king, who doesn't realize that Esther, herself, is in fact a Jew
- But Esther says that's impossible!
 - You see the king kept a tight schedule, even the queen wasn't scheduled to see him for another 30 days.
 - Anyone that goes in unscheduled and unannounced to the kings chambers would be put to death immediately
- Mordecai tells her that she shouldn't think just because she's in the palace that she would be spared. If she does nothing then she and all her relatives and people are going to die!
- And then he very famously tells her, ***“And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” -Esther 4:14 (ESV)***
 - Esther says, “Alright, well have everyone fast for me. If I die, I die...”
 - And then in the beginning of Esther 5, it says
- ***“On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace.” -Esther 5:1 (ESV)***
- The king is sitting in his throne room, he has a ton of business that they're taking care of... and then all of the sudden he hears everyone get quiet.

- He looks up to see what's going on and he sees Esther standing right there in the entrance
- Now everyone is watching to see what he is going to do, because NO ONE, not even the queen is allowed to enter into the king's throne room unannounced, if they do they will be killed immediately.
- The only way she is going to live is if the king notices her and lifts his gold scepter to her, signifying that he accepts her and grants her an audience with him
- All eyes are on the king, but the king's eyes are only on Esther...he doesn't even hesitate, he immediately raises the scepter. Verse 2 says
- ***“And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand...And the king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request?” -Esther 5:2-3 (ESV)***
-condensed
- You see, this story comes to mind because when Paul says to the church at Ephesus, ***“For through [Jesus] we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” -Ephesians 2:28 (ESV)***
 - That word **“Access”- To Be Granted an Audience with The King**
 - And this idea was so mind boggling and revolutionary, especially at this time, because for all of the generations before them, ever since the fall of man, only a select few could be granted an audience with God.
 - For so many years, only once a year, the high priest was the only person that could enter into the holy of holies, the direct presence of God to atone for the sins of the people
 - But now, Paul is saying that not just the high priest, not just select prophets or kings, but ALL OF US who plead the blood of Jesus have access to the King Himself
 - And not only do we have access, but we can approach the Throne with Boldness and

Confidence that we have favor in His sight and He is pleased to hear our request.

- So, in the first week of this series we talked about Why we pray, and for the next two week we are going to look at how we pray.
- Today I want to look at a blueprint that Paul gives is in the book of Philippians chapter 4 (If you have your bibles you can turn there)
- And next week, we are going to look at The Lord's Prayer. However, next week, just to give you a heads up, I will not be here. I will be down visiting our sending church Hope Shelby, and preaching there
- And one of my former lead pastors, Jeremy Peeler will be here breaking down the Lord's prayer for us next week and I cannot wait to hear it on our Hope Hickory sermon podcast next week
- But for today, if you would, look with me in the book of Philippians chapter 4, beginning at the end of verse 5, Paul writes: ***"The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but***

in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." -Philippians 4:5b-7 (ESV)

- PRAY
- Pastor's love to talk about their kids. Whenever Rachel and I got married I wanted to have kids right away. But she told me that she needed to have a dog for 2 years before we had a baby, so I got her baby while we were still engaged, to get that clock ticking!
- I would joke saying, "We need to have kids babe! I need more sermon illustrations, if we don't have kids I'm just gonna have to talk about you the whole time!"
- But one of my favorite stories I ever heard a pastor tell about his kids was from Skip, who was my pastor in Shelby, and told a story one

time when his oldest son Hayden wasn't more than 3 or 4 years old.

- Hayden had crawled into bed with him and Jena one night, and at some point during the night, skip was jolted awake with Hayden crawling over him, like a 4 years old would. He probably caught a foot to the groin and an elbow to the throat, But Hayden was getting up to go to the bathroom.
- And he watched his son get out of the bed, and then stop. He was staring at the large dark abyss that was the open bathroom door. Skip could tell that he was scared, and he was waiting for him to come grab daddy and have him go turn the light on.
- But this time was different, he could see Hayden almost psyching himself up.
- And skip was just laying there, pretending to still be asleep, just squinting his eyes, to see what his son does
- And Hayden turned around, pointed at Skip and said to himself, "Daddy's. Right. Here."

And then turned and walked with confidence into the darkness.

- How much more confidence would we walk through this life with, if we would remind ourselves, that our Father, our God's. Right. Here.
- That's why Paul starts this off with giving a reminder of the Presence of God. He says The Lord is at hand. Our Dad's. Right. Here.
- He says, **"The Lord is at hand; [therefore] do not be anxious about anything..."**
-Philippians 4:5b-6a (ESV)
 - Paul is saying that whenever life gets scary, whenever the pressure becomes too much, whenever we get in over our head, we will be ok, we can and will endure BECAUSE our God is with us.
- Now this DOES NOT mean, if you ever feel anxious, that means your faithless
- This DOES NOT mean that you better never worry, or feel fear

- Because those are natural feelings that God created
 - We see Jesus experience anxiousness in the Garden to point where He sweated blood
- Don't you ever feel belittled, faithless, or unspiritual if something makes you feel anxious or worried
- But we have to remember that these feelings are indicators, not dictators
- **ANXIOUSNESS INDICATES THAT WE NEED TO SEEK AN AUDIENCE WITH GOD**
 - Just like with Esther, we saw she and her cousin felt the anxiety of their people being on the brink of experiencing genocide
 - And because of that she needed to go seek an audience with the King
 - However, she also felt anxious about going before Him!
- Because she had heard the so called rules, she had heard the rumors from others, she knew the standards of other people's expectations
 - But whenever she went before the king, all of those preconceived notions were doused by his grace, compassion, and favor he showed her.
- In the same way, sometimes we can become anxious about going before the presence of God
 - We're anxious that we won't know what to say
 - We're anxious that He won't hear us, or give us the answer we want
 - We're anxious that other's will think that we're not doing enough
- It's strange how sometimes the more seriously we need to pray, the harder it seems to become TO pray
 - And I don't know why this is

- I'm sure there's a level of spiritual warfare to it, trying to keep us from accessing the real power in our lives
 - Sometimes we feel rushed, and we hear everyone say that we need to be patient and wait on the Lord and we don't feel like we have that kind of time!
 - Sometimes we might just like to complain rather than obtain clarity
- But Dr. Tony Evans says, ***“The sobering truth is that the more you worry, the less you pray. But the more you pray, the less you worry.” -Dr. Tony Evans***
- So there's a reason why, Paul says, ***“...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” -Philippians 4:6 (ESV)***
- So Paul tells us:
- WHEN WE PRAY: PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING**
- There is nothing too insignificant for you to talk to God about.
 - Sometimes we feel like we need to have a good prayer cooked up before we pray
 - Sometimes we feel like we need to have every thought and word put together just right before we go before Him
 - However, sometimes God just wants you to talk to Him
- The wonderful thing about being able to communicate with God is that prayer is the avenue in which we develop our relationship with God
- Whenever you're beginning to develop a relationship or friendship with someone, more often than not, you don't start off talking about all of the serious and heavy stuff all of the time
 - You talk about your common interests, you talk about the every day life stuff

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- I think about my friend Jake. He hit me up one day, years ago, on facebook messenger
- He just said, “Hey man, I know we don’t really know each other, but I know I need some Christian friends in my life, so you wanna hang out sometime?”
- So we did. We went and got some fast food Japanese, the next time we hung out was watching the NBA draft at his apartment, we got to bond over our interests in sports and basketball
- We’d go shoot guns in the woods or at the range, find whatever fun or stupid things to do that single christian guys in shelby nc could do
 - The list wasn’t long
 - But we became good friends. And because we were friends we could talk about everything. We could talk about sports, we could talk about girls, we could talk about our bosses frustrating us, we could talk about something funny that happened
- Nothing had to be scripted or prepared
- And because we could talk about everything, we could really talk about the big stuff.
 - When he needed to make a decision about whether or not to go coach at a new school he could talk to me about it.
 - When I needed to confess areas I had been falling short and needed accountability, I could talk to him about it
 - Whenever his momma was about to take her last breath when the cancer got too bad, he could call me to sit with him while he gave his last words to his mom on the phone
- People who can talk to each other about anything can be there for each other in everything.
- That’s why we need to be able to talk to God about anything and everything.
 - Some of us need to just take the pressure off of yourself in the relationship.

- There is nothing that you have to do to gain the approval of God. All you have to do is go before Him, and you have found favor in His sight
- Jesus has already taken care of everything that needed to be done for you to be accepted by God
- Therefore, the one thing that you never have to be anxious or worry about, is whether or not you can talk to God
- It doesn't matter how much time has passed since the last time you talked to him, it doesn't matter how long its been since the last time you sinned, it doesn't matter if you know what to say or not
- Because of the blood of Jesus, you have been given access to God, you have the favor of God, and you are pleasing in His sight
- There is nothing you could ever do to make Him love you anymore or any less
- Therefore, you can talk to Him about everything!
 - You can talk to Him about your uneventful day
 - You can talk to Him when you're frustrated in traffic
 - You can talk to Him when you're proud of something you accomplished
 - You can talk to Him when you're not sure what to eat for dinner
 - You can talk to Him when you saw something you found hilarious and share that moment with Him
- You can talk to Him about the every day, mundane, seemingly small and unimportant things.
 - Because the more you invite Him into the Everyday, the more you will be ready to invite Him into the Heavy Day.

- I don't know if we see anyone in the Old Testament that talked to God more than David did.
 - David would talk to God anywhere at anytime about anything, from being out in the field with the sheep, to making battle plans.
- It's interesting, throughout the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 8 or 9 times, it says, "David Inquired of the Lord" whenever it came to making big tactical decisions.
 - Whenever it came to fleeing Saul, making battle plans, giving orders, David would go before God first.
 - Because David had become used to talking to God
- And each time, The Lord answered, and the results were favorable. David's inquiries of God were undefeated.
- When you read throughout those narratives, it almost becomes repetitive, almost expected to read those words, "David Inquired of the Lord."
 - However, the pattern seems to get broken at the beginning of 1 Samuel chapter 27, when it says, ***"Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him..." -1 Samuel 27:1-2a (ESV)***
 - Do you see the difference here? This time David didn't inquire of the Lord, but rather his anxiety of Saul coming after him started getting so loud.
 - That instead of going before God, rather, "He said to himself, or said in his heart..." what he thought he should do

- So David and his men ended up seeking refuge in something that wasn't God, and when their plans didn't work out, David and his guys returned to find their village burned and plundered and all of their women and children had been kidnapped
- So you would think David would spring to action and go rescue them.
 - But David had learned his lesson. Even when the decision seemed obvious he still stopped, ***“And David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?” He answered him, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.” -1 Samuel 30:8 (ESV)***
- David inquiring of the Lord, 8-0, or 9-0 depending on your count or translation
- David not inquiring of the Lord, 0-1.
- So Paul says, The Lord is at hand, you don't have to be anxious for anything but whenever you become anxious, inquire of the Lord
- He puts it this way, ***“...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” -Philippians 4:6b (ESV)***
- So Paul says prayer AND supplication. He doesn't say all prayer is supplication.
- Because that word prayer indicates a general address of God
- Supplication, is talking to God about something specific.
- Paul is essentially saying, ***“Be willing to address God about everything, but also be willing to address God by expressing an earnest or anxious request.”***
- Again, Dr. Tony Evans says, ***“A moment in which you are plagued by worry is not the time for one of those general prayers for God to bless the world. To deal with anxiety, make sure your petitions are precise. Get real with God.” -Dr. Tony Evans***
- So, **WHEN YOU PRAY: PRAY SPECIFICALLY**

- For some reason, this is something I personally struggle with.
- I have a really hard time asking God for something specific
- And even I was writing this and putting this message together I was really trying to get to the bottom of why I struggle so much with specific prayers, at least for myself.
 - Am I afraid I won't get what I'll ask for? I don't want to set myself up for disappointment
 - Do I really believe that God cares about what I want?
 - Am I scared that I'll jinx it if I say what I want out loud?
- Maybe some of all of those if I'm being honest!
- But then it hit me, I probably have such a hard time praying specially because, I am equating praying about something specific with asking for something specific.
- Asking and praying aren't the same thing!
- You see, asking is a part of prayer but it's not all of prayer
 - You see too often, we pray FOR something instead of praying ABOUT something.
 - And that's exactly how we end up getting caught up just blaming God for not giving us what we want or not answering our prayers
 - When the reality is, we don't really know what we should be praying FOR because we didn't first take the time to pray ABOUT it.
 - We haven't yet processed it with God.
 - When you read the verse, notice how long it takes for him to get to the word "request"
- ***"...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."***
-Philippians 4:6b (ESV)
- You can talk to God in ALL situations. You should talk to God about a specific situation.

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Then you talk to God about what you're thankful for in spite of the situation, and then you make your request of God in a situation.

- And it makes so much sense that Paul would give these instructions in this order.
 - Because I don't know how many times there are, where I can't figure out exactly what I think about a certain situation, so I need to go talk it out with someone to really formulate my thoughts.
 - And if I were to just jump to a conclusion about a situation I hadn't taken the time to process or process with other people, I am going to make some very arrogant and naive decisions and mistakes
- So if something makes me anxious, it only makes sense that I would verbalize that anxiousness out loud to God. I should talk to Him about what I'm anxious about and why it's making me feel anxious
- For example: You could pray something like:

- *“Lord, I’m struggling with my job! I don’t feel much purpose in it, my boss never seems to appreciate my work, I don’t seem to be connecting with my coworkers, I feel restless, like I should be looking for something else!”*

- So you've verbalized your anxiousness, but Paul says, you don't make the request just yet. Paul says, give your prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING!
- So you've aired out this anxiousness, but think about what you're thankful for. You could say something like...
 - *“But you know what, thank you Lord, that I have a job. Thank you I have a way to make money and provide for my family. Thank you for being so faithful to me and providing for me every step of the way. Thank you that you care enough about me that I can talk to you about this. Thank you that this world is not my home but because of You and Your Son Jesus, I have all of eternity to look forward to.”*

- Now you make your requests: And your request, or the way you request, will normally change whenever you took out the time to process and be thankful.
- You could have gone into it thinking you were going to ask God to get you out, give you this or give you that...but now your request sounds like:
 - “So Lord, give me wisdom in this situation. Help me to be content in where I am. If you have another door you want to open for me, I pray for the discernment to recognize it when it comes. Help me be the most encouraging co-worker around. I pray that You would use me to make a difference right where I am.”
- I would be willing to bet that more people than not, do not feel like they’re connecting with God in their prayer life because they skip over one or both of the supplication and thanksgiving, and jump straight to the requests
- So when we pray, pray about everything, pray specifically, and also

- WHEN WE PRAY: PRAY WITH GRATITUDE

- Now, you may be in a situation where you do not feel very grateful or having trouble trying to find something to be thankful about
- But make yourself tell God something you’re thankful for before you make a request. Even if it seems generic.
- The more we press in, the more we will realize all of the things that we have to be thankful for
 - God, thank you that I woke up this morning
 - God thank You that I have eyes where I can see and experience this world
 - Thank You that I have ears to hear
 - God thank You that I get to experience this planet that you created
 - Thank You for creating me!
 - Thank You for providing a way of salvation for me

- Thank You for being my refuge and source of Strength
- Thank You that I get to KNOW YOU
- Thank You that I have all of eternity to look forward to to get to know You better
- Thank You Jesus! Without your sacrifice on the cross none of this would be possible!
- The more intentional we are with gratitude, the more impossible it becomes to be entitled with God
- Because the more thankful we are, the more we are reminded that even if God never answered a single prayer of ours for the rest of our lives, even if He never does another thing for us, He's already done way more than we could ask, He's given us more than we could ever deserve
 - My eternal salvation is worth more than my current job situation
 - God's acceptance greater than my last heart break
- Heavenly Citizenship is better and longer lasting than earthly success
- Tim Keller says this, he says, ***“The scales must have fallen from your eyes and you must see clearly that no matter how great your earthly circumstances become, they can never bring you the lasting peace, happiness, and consolation that are found in Christ. Unless you have that clearly in view, your prayers may go wrong.” -Tim Keller: Prayer***
- Our prayer will go wrong, because we'll begin to make our circumstances bigger than God
- We'll think that if we can just get to “this level of success” then things will be ok
- But whenever we think that way, we're gonna end up just crediting ourselves for the good things, and just blame Him or others for the bad things
- When we think too highly of this life and our place in it, we will skip the prayer and

supplication and thanksgiving, and go straight to the requests

- And in that case our request will become demands
- However, remember what we said in week 1 of this series:
- “Prayer is not the means by which we control our circumstances. Prayer is the means by which we better understand God’s presence within our circumstances.”
- And Paul promises us, that if we pray about everything, if we pray specifically, and pray with Gratitude, well then:
 - ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 4:7 (ESV)***
- He doesn’t say the Peace of God might...
- He doesn’t say the Peace of God could...
- He doesn’t say the Peace of God possibly...

- He doesn’t say the Peace of God can...
- He says the Peace of God WILL guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus
- Paul says this is a time tested, foregone conclusion that when you pray about everything, and pray specifically, and think about everything you are thankful for before you make your request...
 - No matter how anxious you are, you will experience Peace in that instance
 - Why? Because whenever you pray this way, your prayer no longer becomes about achieving an outcome, it becomes about connecting to a Person
- And that Person is God, and it is impossible to connect with God and not experience Peace.
- Because whenever you connect with the Presence of God you will have Peace that God is bigger than your circumstance

- You will have Peace that the sufferings of this present world are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us
 - You will have Peace that you have a Friend in God that sticks closer than a brother
 - You will have Peace that He accepts you, you have found favor in His sight, and He will work all things out for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose
 - You will have Peace that He sees you, He knows your circumstance better than you do, and He cares more than you could ever give Him credit for
- And that Peace can fill you with gratitude like it did David when he prayed: "**What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.**"
-**Psalm 8:4-8 (NIV)**
- You get a peace that surpasses all understanding because it is mindboggling to think that Almighty God would take the time to grant us audience and hear our requests.
 - But He does, and every single time you go to Him, you have His attention.
 - And it's not because you're awesome. It's not because of how good we have been or anything to do with us or our performance.
 - It's all because of Jesus
 - To quote Tim Keller one more time, "When we believe in Jesus Christ, we are united to Him. We are "in Him" as Paul says repeatedly. This means what is true of Jesus is true of us. Because He has the perfect and secure access of an obedient child to The Father, so now do we." -Tim Keller
 - So whenever we pray, we can pray with supreme confidence that because of Jesus, the Father will hear us, but also we pray with humble dependence, knowing that He knows best and His grace is sufficient.

- And whenever we truly wrap our minds around how much we are dependent upon God and entrust ourselves to Him, Paul says ***“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” -Philippians 4:7 (ESV)***
- That word **Guard** means: **to guard, protect by a military guard; to prevent a hostile invasion**
 - The reality is that we have a hostile enemy that wants to fill your heart with fear and flood your mind with anxious thoughts
 - But we have a defense that they cannot penetrate
 - The Power of Prayer puts our hearts and our minds into a spiritual fortress to protect us from allowing fear and anxiety to overtake us
 - But we have to want the protection
- It takes effort on our part, and it’s not a lot. It just takes time, and intentionality and properly developing the relationship
- And over time, you won’t even have to ask for the help. Because you’re so close, the help is already there
- *This makes me think back to my best friend from high school, his name was Antoine Medina. We called him Twan*
 - *Twan was my guy. And he was my guy, before I really knew he was my guy.*
 - *We first started hanging out because we were both bench players on the basketball team our junior year and we both lived on the local military base*
 - *I had a car, he didn’t and he started catching a ride home with me from practice.*
 - *Then he started catch a ride to school as well*
 - *Now I was brand new at that school that year so I didn’t really know anybody so it was cool to hang out with someone*

- And I didn't even think we were that close at the time, until there was one day after practice a couple of the older guys were pickin on me a little bit
- Not bullying or anything like that, I don't even remember what they were doing, I just remember that they were messing with me.
- That was until Twan stepped up. Now twan was a big dude. He wasn't all that tall he was about 6 foot even, but he was a beast in the weight room, and he had this long flowing curly black hair, he looked just Troy Polamalu.
- So he could be an intimidating figure
- And when these guys were messing with me, he stepped up and said, "Hey bro, you mess with one you mess with two."
- And you know what they did? They backed off. They didn't want those problems
- And I thought, "Ohhhh shoot. This is MY BOY!"

- And we were best friends for the rest of our time in high school

- Similarly, if you are a child of God, you can have the confidence in knowing that if the enemy messes with one, they mess with two.
- So if the enemy messes with you, because you belong to Him, that means they're messin' with God. And the enemy doesn't want those problems.
- God is here to guard your heart and your mind from any hostile invasion the enemy would try and throw your way
- And the enemy will only be able to mess with you to the extent in which you allow them too.
- And whenever you push away prayer in your life, you not only push away the peace and protection of God, but you push away the Person God Himself and His Presence in your life.
- Because God will not force Himself on you. He will always give you the choice to seek Him

and His presence in your life, because He values His relationship with you above all else

- And there is no relationship without a choice.
 - So choose Him. Choose to talk to Him about everything. When you get anxious, choose to talk to Him specifically. Choose to be thankful for all that He is and all that He's already done for you.
- John Calvin once said that there is nothing worse than to be “devoid of awe,” whenever it comes to our prayer lives.
- To know that when we pray we get a personal audience with the King of Kings, Lord of Lord, The Creator of All Who hung the sun, moon, and stars.
 - To know that THIS GOD grants you an audience, shows you favor, and want to speak to you personally should leave us in a sense of awe, wonder, unmistakable reverence, and overwhelming Gratitude.
 - Let's tell Him how thankful we are.