

April 26, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

Growing up in Kentucky our family watched our Wildcats with a religious exuberance never displayed at church. If the game grew tighter we drew closer to the 25 inch TV. If a player was shooting crucial free throws, my mom rubbed her folded hands together in a circular prayer-like motion and repeated “come on baby, come on... you can do it” squealing in delight at every made basket. My children sometimes honor her by doing the same! As a child, I prayed for wins and sometimes wondered why God did not answer my prayers? Did not Jesus say “*ask and you will receive*” (Matthew 7)? I wondered if I “*lacked faith*” or was “*doubleminded*”, two reasons I was told God did not answer prayers. (James 1) If I had “*faith the size of a mustard seed*” I was told I could move mountains, so surely, my prayers could help Melvin Turpin handle Patrick Ewing in the 1984 NCAA semi final? (Mark 11) Alas, they did not.

In the church I grew up in we did not print prayers in the bulletin, like our centering prayer this morning.

Lord, teach us to pray

So we might awaken to the wonder of your presence.

So we might feel gratitude for your gift of life today.

So we might discover your kingdom... .

Lord, teach us to pray, Amen.'

Like many Christians I thought of prayer as asking God to do something for me. But what if prayer is God changing my heart, redirecting my treasure, shaping my soul, guiding my feet along the right path? What if we prayed : “*Lord, your kin-dom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven... Lord, guide my treasures, guide my heart?*”

In seminary, Cricket, an old friend and our referee called on me to lead a prayer before our league basketball game. It may have been the first time that I felt the pastoral weight of my pastoral office. What would God want from us for the next hour? I looked at my Methodist teammates and our Lutheran opponents. Deshawn worked construction and wore a big knee brace. Henry was ejected the previous week and stood yelling just outside the exit doors so long, I felt compelled to apologize to the Presbyterians on behalf of our church. “*Let us pray, Lord, some of us have to go to work tomorrow, keep us free from injuries. Lord, help us all remember this is not the NBA or NCAA. Lord, help us remember our opponents love their children and worship you too. Lord, help us remember in James 3 where it asks ‘who can tame the tongue, it is a fire set blaze by hell’.* Help us Lord. Forgive us Lord. Creator and Christ, this is a recreational league, recreate us in your image., Amen.” The Lutherans got tickled and

invited me for beers after the game. It is a silly story, but what if we prayed, *“Lord, what do you want me to do this hour, this day, this week, with this job ... Show me how to help bring about your kin-dom? Lord, guide my hands, my heart, my mind, my goals, my treasures!”*

Prayer invites us to dwell in God’s presence, to ponder who we are and what God calls us to do. In the heart of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spends a chapter talking about prayer and money. Why does Jesus pair money and prayer? Friends, often both money and prayer become vehicles for our aspirations, dreams, plans and values? .

The children invited us to ponder
Where is your treasure? Where is your heart?
The answer’s not always so easy to see.

When we linger in Matthew 6 this week, letting it wash over us, it blends faith, money and prayer, helping us focus spirituality about how we live.

Don’t make a show of your faith
Don’t make a show out of your giving, generosity, or doing good
Don’t make a show out of your worship or prayer
Don’t try to impress people with clever prayers

Instead, pray like this
“God may your kingdom come on earth as in heaven
Your will be done
Give us what we need today.
Forgive us and help us forgive others
Keep us on the right path
Deliver us from evil. Amen”

Stop living for stuff, it just falls apart
Where your treasure is your heart will be also
You can not serve God and wealth.
Don’t worry about material possessions,
When did worrying add a single minute to your life?

God who paints the fields with wildflowers
and gives the sparrow her song,
already knows what you need.

*Before anything else seek God's kingdom
Keep doing the right things and everything else will fall into place."*

You can not serve both God and Wealth. Jesus tells us those values collide, but the problem is that we have to use money. John the Baptist might have eaten bugs and foraged wild honey, but Jesus, James, Martha and John had trades. Few people can move to the wilderness and live off the grid. Money is an almost necessary tool for civilization. Jesus paid the Temple tax and taught us about priorities using a Roman coin. So what guides our use of money?

If we are not praying about where we work, how we do business, what we buy, what we drive or where we live, what we save or what we give, then what guides our use of money? If we do not pray about our treasures, Jesus warns our hearts will follow the market gurus' wisdom and the cultures' definition of success?

Jesus tells us to stop putting our treasures, time, talents, and worry into things that wear out. Jesus tells us not to take our identity from coats, cars, houses, and luxuries that moths, termites, rain can destroy. I once got a brand new pair of Land's End Khaki. The day I took the tags off I ran past a door chasing the dog and the pocket caught on latch and ripped a 2 inch tear. I am glad my story is not about a new car or house!

Jesus advises us to lay up treasures in heaven. Invest in loving neighbors as yourself, invest in things that are excellent, worthy of praise, enduring, eternal, inexhaustible, and humane. The fruits of the Spirit, the product of prayer and practice, the life goals of Christian faith are not material possessions but deeply human values: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking with humility. (Galatians 5, Micah 6:8) Work, invest, spend with that in mind. Prayer empowers us to step away from what our neighbors and the Tic Tok influencers are doing. Prayer grounds our treasures and hearts in Christ's values, priorities, ambitions and attitudes. Prayer guides our money and life goals, reminding us that only faith, hope and love remain. (1 Corinthians 13)

So may our prayers move beyond simply asking God to do something for us and push into the deeper waters? Perhaps God is calling us into a different way of life? Prayer changes us, it changes our treasures, it changes our hearts, it changes our joys and even laments.

Maybe this week pray, "Lord, teach me to pray... Lord, your Will be done, your kin-dom come" and ask God to help you think about how you are spending your time, talent, and treasure? Maybe in prayerfully ponder how your treasures are guiding your heart? What

are we treasuring? What are we building? What is first most, before everything? What do we love? What do we celebrate?

Today is Celebration Sunday. This week I wrestled with the theme of Celebration Sunday and the scripture. I asked Heather how these passages about prayer and money relate to “celebration”? Heather said, “just preach the texts, the celebration is that we’re baptizing a baby today. The celebration is welcoming the McIntire’s back to Belmont after years of their service to churches across the Tennessee Conference. The celebration is our children singing and bell choirs ringing. The celebration is the announcement of the generosity. The celebration is 180 people breaking bread with glad and generous hearts. The celebration is the faithfulness of this church. The celebration is the way the church lives, that people are leaning in and seeking to help us build God’s kin-dom right here on 21st and Acklin as in heaven.” May our prayers help us align our time, treasure, and talents so that we spend the good gift of our lives on things that remain- the things of heaven. amen