

# From Our Lips to God's Ears: The Power of Prayer

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[ 0 : 00 ] So welcome here for this Sunday, January 21st. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. It's good to see people back. It's good to see people who thawed since last week and have returned.

And I don't know about you, but I'm pretty happy that the temperature is climbing. No, I will not comment on the jersey that I'm wearing. I was actually going to take it off before I began to preach, and someone said, don't you dare, so I'm not daring.

So last week we started in a new sermon series called, From Our Lips to God's Ears, Living a Life of Prayer. And over the coming weeks, we're going to explore many different aspects of prayer and be reminded of why it's so critical that we seek to be people of prayer.

Now, I wasn't sure if I was going to share this or not, but I'm gonna. I talked to Michelle about it, and I said, should I say this, or does it seem weird? Will it freak people out? Oh, she's looking at me like, don't say it, it'll freak people out.

So many of you, well, some of you will know that I am highly spiritually wired. So I sense things, and that's not meant to freak Baptists out, because I am certainly as North American, Caucasian Christian as you can ever imagine.

[ 1 : 19 ] So I had an interesting experience. I've had lots of interesting experiences in that way that I can tell you about over time. But there was one that was very interesting to me this week.

I was asleep. I had a nightmare. And in this nightmare, there was a presence of some kind that I can't even describe to you. Weird, right?

So I woke up the next morning thinking, thank you, Jesus, for leading me in that. But there was a sense of something while I was asleep, and then God gave me the ability to pray while I was asleep.

Weird. But cool. But weird. Weird. So anyone who's freaked out now, join the club, because I was a little bit. But it was very interesting.

A very interesting experience. So to me, if your ministry, if your church is not a threat, the enemy doesn't care.

[ 2 : 26 ] You're irrelevant, right? You're vanilla. You're not interesting. You're not a challenge. You're not a threat. So for us as a church in this place, in this time, to be facing challenges, I think, is not a bad thing.

So over the coming weeks in this series, transitioning back there, I thought it was important to share that because it directly relates to this series and talking about prayer, and particularly this morning. So we began last week by considering the purpose of prayer and considering why and in some ways how we should pray. And we're reminded of that helpful acronym, which everyone seemed to know, which I thought was awesome.

And Michelle said, well, duh, everyone knows this acronym. ACTS. So everyone could recite it as I paused and said A stands for. So that was really neat and encouraging to me.

So we looked at this as a reason for how we pray or why we pray. So adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or as Vern suggested last week, even submission can be represented by that S.

[ 3 : 37 ] And so this morning we're continuing in this series, and we're going to explore, and this is why I shared that personal story, the power of prayer. So I haven't met many people for whom prayer is a natural rhythm of their life.

Can you relate to that? Something that they do as easily as breathing. But for many people I've met, that is their experience. It feels natural and comfortable for them, and dare I say, easy, perhaps.

And I certainly know some people like that, but not a huge number. And throughout church history, you can read people who you would think, perfect example of a Christian leader, of a holy Christian man, a holy Christian woman, someone connected to God who said, I don't know how to pray. Lord, give me the strength to pray, because I don't know how to do it. So that's a reminder for us that we're in good company when we think, how do I do this? So maybe you can relate to, hopefully, why you should pray.

And you've also heard me say, don't overpower yourself with a sense of obligation. I should do this. So I'm an overthinker, as you know. I should do this.

[ 4 : 55 ] Oh, I should not have said or done that. You can get bogged down in that kind of a rut in your life, and it's not helpful. So maybe you have a sense of why it's important to pray, a sense of why we should pray.

But maybe at times in your life, you've wondered, well, is there any point to my prayers? In the grand scheme of things, do my personal prayers make any difference?

Are they relevant? Will they, does God hear them? Will God act on them? And fortunately for us, Jesus himself anticipated that people would become slack in their prayers.

So let's hear some encouragement from Jesus himself and from the Apostle Paul about prayer. And feel free, you can see the references on the screen.

So I will read these passages, but don't hesitate. If you have your Bible with you, there are Bibles in the pew in front of you. Go ahead and turn and follow along. So as most of you know, I read from the ESV generally.

[ 6 : 01 ] So this parable that Jesus told. And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, in a certain city, there was a judge who was neither feared God nor respected man.

And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, give me justice against my adversary. For a while he refused, but afterwards he said to himself, though I neither fear God nor respect man.

Yet, because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice. So that she will not beat me down by her continual coming. And the Lord said, hear what the unrighteous judge says.

And will not God give justice to his elect who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? And wondering if he would find faith on earth, for example, people praying.

When he returned, Jesus pondered in Luke 18, verse 8. Jesus said, I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.

[ 7 : 12 ] Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? Jesus wondered about us now, back then.

The Apostle Paul also frequently and strongly encouraged Christians to be diligent in their prayers. And there are some references there as well. In Ephesians 6, verse 18, Paul mentioned praying always with prayer and supplication.

In Colossians 4, verse 2, he mentioned to continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving. And in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 17, Paul encouraged us to what?

Pray without ceasing. And if we become slack in our prayers, might it be an indication that we don't really appreciate the power of our prayers?

If we become slack in our prayers, it's something to consider. Because the Bible reminds us over and over of the specific ways in which prayer is powerful and in which it benefits both us and other people.

[ 8 : 26 ] So first, what are the specific ways? Let's look at some of them together this morning. Through prayer, we have access to God's forgiveness. The Christian can find forgiveness through the blood of Christ, as we read in 1 John 1, verses 7 to 10.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and the word is not in us. So with this in mind, we're encouraged to repent of our sins and pray.

As we read in Acts 8, verse 22. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

[ 9 : 37 ] Don't we want the comfort and assurance of knowing that our sins are forgiven? Second, through prayer, we can receive peace from God.

As I mentioned last week, the antidote to anxiety is to pray. As we're reminded in Philippians 4, verse 6, and I told you this verse has become a theme verse of my life.

Do not be anxious about anything. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God.

And continuing in verse 7, Paul reminds us that the result of our prayer, the supplication and thanksgiving, will be that peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

It will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Don't we want the peace of mind and heart that surpasses understanding? Third, through prayer, we can receive strength from God.

[ 10 : 46 ] Paul prayed that the Ephesians might be strengthened in their inner man, as Paul worded it. That they would gain spiritual strength. Ephesians 3, verses 14 to 16 says, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

As we know that God is infinitely capable of doing this, we read in Ephesians 3, verse 20. I love this benediction.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we could ask or think, according to his power at work within us, Paul says.

And the best part to me is that we're not just limited to praying for God's strength for ourselves. As we've prayed this morning for God to encourage Vernon and Kathy.

When we need to be strong, we can pray for ourselves, but we can also pray for others in their challenges, in their times of difficulty. We can pray praises to God on behalf of ourselves or others.

[ 12 : 06 ] So don't we want the kind of strength and power that's beyond our comprehension? Any other yeses? More yeses?

A few yeses? Don't let the yes be dominated. Share the yes. So fourth, through prayer we can receive opportunities from God.

And Paul was a great example of he had a high level of awareness of this. Do you recognize opportunities that come your way through God's blessing, through God's provision, through opportunities that I don't know about you, but for me, God will sometimes say, I want you to do this. And you cringe and say, ooh, that feels incredibly uncomfortable. So do you step in or do you step back? Paul realized that God provided him with opportunities to teach other people, to build relationship with other people, to connect other people with his Lord and Savior.

So 1 Corinthians 3 verse 5, and I like the NASB translation here for the wording in 1 Corinthians 3 verse 5. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 16 verses 8 and 9.

[ 13 : 50 ] Paul says, But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has been opened to me. Paul was open to how God was leading.

Paul was open to how God was calling him, No, stay here. I need you here. In 2 Corinthians 2 verses 12 and 13, Paul says, When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. So even though Paul wants to be where Titus is, he is listening to the Lord's opportunities.

He's looking for that to lead him, to be the thing that guides him. So recognizing that opportunities come from God, Paul asked for prayers from others, so that those opportunities would keep presenting themselves to him.

In Colossians 4 verse 30, or verse 3, sorry, Paul asks, At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.

[ 15 : 12 ] Paul was aware of his circumstances, but also seeking God's guidance, seeking God and what doors he might be opening. So through prayer, don't we want God to give us opportunities to introduce people and lead other people to Christ?

Fifth, there's 16 of these, by the way. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding. Through prayer, we can receive boldness and confidence from God.

So this is a little bit longer passage I'll read from Acts. When the apostles needed boldness, they prayed and God delivered. We read in Acts 4 verses 23 to 31.

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

Who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.

[16:34] For truly in this city, there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

And now, Lord, they ask, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your words with all boldness.

While you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

When Paul needed to be bold and confident, he asked other people to pray for him. As we read in Ephesians 6, 19 and 20, Paul, first of all, is speaking slightly differently about a different topic, but he says to pray for each other, but then also for me, he says, that words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I'm an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

Don't we want to have the boldness and confidence that we need to speak to others about Christ? Yes. It's kind of a rhetorical question. Six out of 16.

[18:20] Through prayer, we can receive wisdom from God. We see that throughout Scripture over and over and over. And to clarify this a bit here, wisdom is not simply information or knowledge.

Do you recognize that? It's different. Information or knowledge is Google. Does Google make people wise? Reserving judgment.

But wisdom is insight that helps us make the best use of information or knowledge that is available to us. Does that make sense? Through prayer, Christians have access to wisdom that is solid and trustworthy.

As we read in James 1, 5 to 8, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But let him ask in faith with no doubting. For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.

[19:28] He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. It's about how and with what heart we come to God when we seek wisdom from him.

So don't we want the kind of wisdom, the kind of insight that God can provide us? Seventh, through prayer we can receive healing from God.

Those who are sick should ask elders to pray for them. That's what scripture teaches us. James 5, verses 14 and 15 says, Is anyone among you sick?

Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he is not, if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. When I read that passage and I think about anointing with oil, I will forever be reminded of visiting Marina Trapko in the hospital shortly before she passed away.

[20:38] And she said, I have this vial of oil. And I in my head thought, oh, extremely Caucasian, white pastor, oh no. And she said, would you anoint me with oil?

And I said, Marina, I'd be honored to do that. And I said, I don't really know what I'm doing, but we'll figure it out together. And so I made the sign of the cross on her forehead and I put my hand on her head and I said, bless you, my daughter.

Bless you, child of Christ. And she said, that was pretty good. Anyone who knows Marina? Yeah. Knew Marina well, loved her well.

Can't wait to see her again. I digress. James also reminds us that those who have sinned should confess. So I've been reading and listening to podcasts and reading things lately. Confession, repentance, sin. These are not words we hear in the church that much anymore. And that concerns me. And I'm not saying in our church because I believe we're focused and we're anchored.

[ 21 : 49 ] But if we're just telling good stories and making people feel as good about themselves and their lives as we can, I think we're missing the point.

And I think we're straying from the gospel. So don't we want God's help when we are in physical need, when we're in physical distress or others are?

Eighth. And finally, this morning, through prayer, we can receive peace and tranquility from God, particularly in light of an uncertain future.

The scriptures proclaim that God has ultimate control over the nations. Does that give you a sense of relief, a sense of peace, in spite of all the unknown?

Daniel 4, verse 17 says, The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom He will and sets over it the lowliest of men.

[ 22 : 56 ] Now, that's not for you to read into that. God has appointed a lot of lowly people into places of power. Not at all. It is to remind us that God is ultimately in control.

Romans 13, verse 1 to 7, Paul says, Let every person be subject to the governance of authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.

Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Paul continues. Then do what is good, and you will receive His approval. For He is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid, for He does not bear the sword in vain. For He is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

[ 24 : 08 ] Therefore, one must be in subjection, subjection, subjection, yes, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience.

For because of this, you also pay taxes. For the authorities are ministers of God attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them.

Taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Now be reminded that this is through the lens of God's control, God's authority. So with this in mind, we're commanded to pray for our rulers.

Not always easy, probably. Pray for people in positions of authority over us that we may lead a quiet, Scripture says, the American Standard Translation says tranquil in the translation, which I like too, may lead a quiet and peaceful life.

[ 25 : 17 ] We also learn this in 1 Timothy 2, verses 1 to 4. first of all, first of all then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead, here it is again, a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God, our Savior, who desires that all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Friends, don't we want to live in peace and tranquility ourselves, but don't we also want that for our communities, for our nation, for the world?

So this morning, we've recognized that prayer is truly a powerful act. It's an attitude in our lives that can be a blessing, not only to the person who prays in faith, but also to those for whom the prayers are offered.

There is help in time of need from God. We have a wonderful high priest who understands our problems, and because of that, through Jesus, we can approach God boldly in prayer any time to receive mercy and grace when we need help.

[ 26 : 46 ] Don't we want mercy and grace for ourselves and others whenever it's needed? James 5, verse 16, declares, the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Other translations word it as the prayer of a righteous person, someone who is seeking God's will, in other words. New King James Version says, avails much. The NASB says, can accomplish much.

The NIV says, is powerful and effective. So if the Bible declares this to be true of our prayers, the prayer of just one righteous person, Scripture tells us.

What do you think the prayers of many righteous people, people who are seeking God's will together, might accomplish? My friends, do we honestly and genuinely believe in the power of prayer?

Then let us pray always. Let's continue earnestly in prayer. As Scripture encourages us, let us pray without ceasing.

[ 27 : 57 ] Amen? Amen. Amen.