

From Our Lips to God's Ears: The Practice of Prayer, Part 2

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, March 3rd. So it's important that because we're in a series on prayer still, whoever is praying for more snow, knock it off.

We're good. I think we've got it covered. No, but in all seriousness, that moisture is so needed. My name is Kent Dixon. It's my joy to be the pastor here.

So we're continuing, as you can see, in our sermon series, from our lips to God's ears, living a life of prayer. And over these weeks, so far and a few more, we're going to be continuing to explore different aspects of prayer, to be reminded of why it's so critical that we seek to be people of prayer. And last week, in part one of our sermon titled, The Practice of Prayer, I was unkind to you because I said we were going to cover four things, we only covered two.

So how to pray was the first thing we looked at last week, with the Lord's Prayer as a model and a guide for how we can form our own prayers.

[1 : 08] We also considered when to pray, suggesting both scheduled and spontaneous prayers. So this morning in part two of The Practice of Prayer, we are going to be looking at two new and equally important aspects of prayer in practice.

That is, with whom we should pray, alone or with others, and for what we should pray, besides the things over the weeks that we have considered, the many things we've considered.

So let's begin with, for with whom we should pray. So we're very fortunate to be able to learn from the teaching and examples of Jesus.

So many different ways, so many different examples, so many different topics. And prayer is another great way that we can learn from him. And we learned a little bit last week from the Lord's Prayer.

So what about praying alone? Well, having just encouraged his listeners to not be showy, to not babble endlessly in prayer, Jesus says in Matthew 6, verse 6, But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen.

[2 : 26] Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Jesus encouraged the practice of praying in secret, of praying alone.

But why would it be, why should it be important to pray alone? Well, I'll give you some quotes. One reason, first of all, is that private prayer builds our habit of prayer.

It builds, as I talked a little bit about last week, it begins to build our prayer muscles, right? It begins to build our discipline of prayer through regular exercise, just like with any kind of exercise.

So here's the quotes. Author V. L. Crawford says, Prayer, I love this, Prayer is the spiritual gymnasium in which we exercise and practice godliness.

Pastor and evangelist Frederick B. Meyer said, Prayer is educative. The man who prays grows, and the muscles of the soul swell from this whip cord to iron bonds.

[3 : 34] It's a powerful image. But, here's another quote, The opposite is also true, and maybe you've heard this phrase before. Seven days without prayer makes one week.

Seven days and spiritual weakness. So private prayer also builds a tighter bond and a closer connection with our Heavenly Father.

Do you connect deeply with people in large groups? I don't. I need to have deep, meaningful interaction. I am happy to interact in large groups, but one-on-one is really the way I'm wired.

So just as in prayer, one-on-one, time alone with God, it's just you and Him. Right? And as in any important relationship, the more time you spend with God in prayer, the more time you invest in that relationship, the more we strengthen that bond, that relationship, that fellowship.

And private prayer really is a true test of sincerity and devotion, I think. But how? Well, praying privately ensures that we're not praying to put on some kind of show for other people.
[4 : 51] We don't advertise that we're praying privately, generally. I don't think I've ever in my entire life heard someone say, oh, I spend time alone with God all the time.

Oh, let me tell you. Which is good, by the way. So our audience, in that case, becomes God alone. There's freedom in that.

If you're not, whether consciously or subconsciously, trying to pray well in an audience, when it's just you and God, there's a freedom to that. He doesn't care what your words are.

He just wants your heart. So maybe that's encouraging, or maybe it makes you nervous. It's impossible to try to falsely impress God.

Got it? Because he knows you better than you know yourself. He won't be fooled by big words or showy displays.

[5 : 49] He's not fooled by that. That passage in Matthew that we just read makes it clear that private prayer will be rewarded openly, it says.

So, but how does that work then? If nobody knows, where's the reward? Well, I believe those rewards will come in the form of answered prayers. And then when the prayers that we've prayed privately are answered, people see the fruit of that prayer in your life.

People will begin to see the results of your private prayer being answered by God. That's a pretty neat demonstration. So we know that this life and this world is not all that there is.

So I also believe that the rewards that are being talked about there in Matthew, the rewards of a dedicated prayer life will also echo in eternity in ways that we can't even begin to understand.

I believe. So it's important for us to recognize that then maybe some alliteration will help you to remember this. You know me, I'm a language person. Private prayer should be a priority in the practice of praying brought to you by the letter P.

[7 : 11] Private prayer should be a priority in the practice of praying. So what about praying with other people? Well, we read in Matthew 18, verses 19 and 20, if you're still in Matthew, that Jesus said, again, I say to you, and you know this one, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For, say it with me if you want, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. When God's people are united in prayer, it's not about numbers, even the requests of two or three will be answered by our Father in heaven.

In Romans 8, verse 34, Paul says, who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised.

Who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us. Right now. Paul didn't say that. But that's what he means. Jesus is right now, in the presence of the Father, interceding on our behalf. When we gather in prayer with other people, Jesus himself is with us.

[8 : 37] We've been reminded of that a few times in our series so far, that Jesus is interceding with the Father on our behalf when we pray. Jesus makes a way for our prayer to be heard by his Father and our Father.

Christians in the early church often prayed together. So let's look at some examples of that in the book of Acts. And there's a whole string of Acts references there.

So if you flip to Acts, you can work your way through it with me. So Acts 4, verses 23 and 24 says, 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 then that passage continues into the prayer of the people. Acts 12, verse 5 says, So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer was made for him to God by the church.

People were praying for Peter's behalf while he was in prison. Acts 12, verse 12 says, When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying.

[9 : 56] So we're seeing over and over and over a quality, a characteristic inherent in the early church was being people of constant prayer. Acts 16, verse 25 says, About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

The Christians of the early church gathered together to pray in times of trouble. When they were in prison, people were praying for them. They were praying for themselves.

They were praying for God's will to be done in his church in spite of their imprisonment. Acts 20, verse 36 says, And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Acts 21, verse 5 says, When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey. Then they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed. Who wants to pray on a beach? I do. The Christians of the early church prayed for each other when someone was leaving their fellowship or community. [11:08] They sent people. You've seen that we have done that in our own congregation here. We bless and send people when they're going on their way. Whether they're going on a mission like Vernon Cathy are, or whether being called by God to move somewhere else.

We've also noted that in the past that people can gather together with others to pray for the specific needs of another person or people. Needs for provision, for health and healing, for encouragement. Anything we need God's help to provide for or to have happen. And that's one of the functions of our prayer list and our updates in the newsletter every Thursday. Is it's a constant reminder of people that we can be praying for.

People who need our prayer. People who need us to be lifting them up. Also, lots of opportunities to celebrate with people at times. I believe there's an opportunity for other immediate blessings when God's people pray together.

What does that look like? Well, as there's a closeness of relationship and fellowship that we can develop in times of prayer. We're building our relationship with God in those times, but also with one another.

[12:29] We are being vulnerable, in a sense, open and sharing with one another in community with God. There's a sense of unity and strength as well when we pray together in unity.

unity. There's a sense of God resonating with us as his disciples, as his people. So we should definitely pray with other people when we can.

That's important. It's important for them. It's important for us. It's important for lots of reasons. So now that we've considered the importance of praying together or praying alone, a bit of both, let's consider for what should we pray.

So as we noted last week, we reflected on Jesus' model for prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and it suggests many things that we can pray for or about. But there's also many other places in Scripture where we find suggestions for subjects of prayer.

And so let's take a moment to consider some of them. So I've listed them. So as opposed to writing out the references, you can have a listen. But these are the ideas.

[13:44] Matthew 6, verse 11, of course, encourages us to ask God for our daily bread, for our physical daily needs, for the practical things that we need. Colossians 1, verses 9 to 12, says, And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.

for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

So we can pray for ourselves, for our practical needs. We can also pray for personal growth in being more like Christ, for praying for more devotion to God, for both ourselves and for others. We can pray for, as the slide indicates, we can pray for our families, our spouse, our children, our parents, our siblings, for protection and provision, for the enrichment or healing of relationships. Who has broken relationships in their lives? If everyone doesn't put up their hand in their mind, we all have, we're human, right? We all have broken, strained relationships.

[15:24] We are estranged from people we deeply love. Almost all of us, I could guarantee. We can pray for those relationships to be restored. We can also pray for growth and strength in the spiritual journeys of other people.

Or that they would come to know Jesus themselves. Do you know someone that you deeply care about who you know does not know Jesus? It's hard, right?

You don't want to have that awkward phone call. So, now a good time for you and Jesus and me to have a chat? Gulp. But you can pray for them, right?

You can pray for those opportunities. You can pray that if it's not you, that God will use someone else in their life. What about someone you know who's drifted away?

Who grew up in the church? Who deeply loved the Lord? That's hard. You want to see them in heaven, right? It's very hard.

[16:28] But again, we can be praying that if it's not us that God will use, that he will draw them back to himself. Jeremiah 29, 7 says, But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf.

For in its welfare you will find your welfare. So this is Jeremiah, obviously, specifically. But there's an important perspective here. We can pray for the communities where we live.

We can pray for the places where we work. Our co-workers, our leaders in our work communities or places like that. Right here around our church.

That's one of the greatest things about some of the community engagement sessions we've had. is that we're beginning to build stronger relationships with people right in our community. Many of whom have never set foot inside this building before.

We can pray for peace and unity to reign. I don't know about you, but every time I turn on the news my heart breaks for conflict and division and anger and frustration and pain in our communities, in our city, in our country, around the world.

[17:48] The world is groaning like it has never grown before. We can pray for people to care for and serve each other again rather than seek their own way, seek their own self-interest.

God's love John 13 verse 35 says, By this all people will know that you are my disciples. How? If you have love one for another.

We can and should also pray for our church. Is that a shock? We should pray for love for each other in this community. This community.

A desire for unity to be always part of who we are. Always prevail. Philippians 1 verses 9 to 11 says, And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

We should pray for the continued spiritual growth of every person who calls Braem our home. Not just the prayer list. You think of that at times?

[19:13] Do you pray for people in our church? I often grab the directory and will just randomly pick people that I pray for. So you might be the target. But that's important.

And again it's a discipline, right? It's something that we need to remind ourselves to do. And I'll give you some strategies in a minute. So 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 1 says, Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored as happened among you.

So we're praying for each other. We should also pray for God's word and the gospel to be shared boldly in every area of our church, in its teaching, in its ministries.

This is a group of people who are devoted to the word of God. I know that. Psalm 33 verse 12 says, Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.

Are we a Christian nation? Proverbs 14, 34 says, Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

[20:33] Do you pray for Canada? We should pray for our nation, that there would be a repentance, a renewed awareness of who God is.

Faith used to be part of the DNA of our country. I think our DNA has become deficient. We should pray that our leaders in all orders of government, civic, provincial, national, would govern wisely, would govern with the will of God, whether they know it or not, driving their decisions.

We want God's will to be done, right? Doesn't have to be a rhetorical question. Do we want God's will to be done? We want Jesus to return. Is that fair?

You ready for that if it happened right now? So we have a part to play in that. Do you recognize that? As followers of Jesus, God's made it clear that his timing involves us to some extent as his disciples.

His ultimate desire is that all people will come to him. that all people would turn to him and declare him as Lord. And we have a role to play in that.

[21:54] Do you remember that? I often forget. Paul said in Romans 10, verse 1, brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Ephesians 6, 18 to 20 says, praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints and also for me, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,

for which I am an ambassador in chains, Paul said, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. I pray that for each one of us that we would have a boldness, a fearlessness to declare the gospel. If it's changed us, it can and will change the world.

Will we take part in that? We should pray for people who desperately need God and do not know him yet, haven't found him yet.

We should also pray that God would prompt us in recognizing the people in our own lives that we may need to be bold and brave in approaching.

[23 : 16] What have we got to lose? Versus, what have they got to lose? You get me? What do we have to lose, but maybe a bit of embarrassment?

What do they have to lose but eternity? James 5, verse 14 and 15 says, is anyone among you sick? Let them 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 has committed sins, he will be forgiven. So what does that tell us?

We should be praying for healing for people when they have health issues. And we do that often. And that's an obvious way that we can and should be praying. That's an entry level prayer.

Then continuing in James 15, verse 16, therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

[24 : 23] It's a great verse, isn't it? The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. We can also pray for spiritual strength and peace of mind for people as they face physical challenges.

For anyone who is facing or has faced a physical challenge, you know that the mental and spiritual battle is equally as strong in those seasons.

We get discouraged, we get depressed. That's another way we can lift people up in prayers, that they would be encouraged and healed. Jesus' earthly ministry, here's another example, his personal priorities were always focused on the least of these.

We see it over and over and over. So that's a good indication that that's a place where we can place our own priorities as well. We should pray for people who have been cast aside, people who are struggling to meet the standards of society.

They've been forgotten, they've been sidelined, lost, due to poverty, due to other issues, children who have been forgotten or abandoned, people who are new to our country, who are struggling to fit in, struggling to belong, desperately want to belong, but are not everyone's priority.

[25 : 53] We should also pray for people in other countries who are oppressed by their own governments or other influences in their part of the world. Anyone who is deemed to somehow be less significant by a seemingly false standard of society needs to be the focus of our prayer and attention.

So, yikes, do you feel overwhelmed? Pastor Ken, how can I possibly pray for all of these things? You've given me such a list. This morning is overwhelming.

It's okay. It's okay. So, I hope that doesn't leave you feeling massively overwhelmed, but rather encouraged by the things for which you can pray.

We don't have to cover them all ourselves. That's why we pray together. That's why we are all in prayer. And during your scheduled prayer times, you can identify some of these specific things to pray for.

And I promise, I'd give you strategies. Here they come. So, any moment you feel prompted, God, the Holy Spirit will prompt you to pray for certain things at certain times.

[27 : 04] He will bring things to your mind if you are open to hearing his voice. So, there are many, many things for which we can and should pray. So, how about suggestions for prayer strategy?

How would that help? You can incorporate some of these things in different ways. things that we've looked at this morning. So, hopefully strategies sound good. Sometimes I like them.

If you have a daily prayer time, look at it this way. On Mondays, pray for your family. Pray for immediate, extended family members.

Pray for their physical and spiritual well-being. On Tuesday, pray for the church. Pray for people from Braemar, for Christians and congregations in and throughout the world.

Wednesdays, pray for the community, for community leaders, your neighbors, people where you live, the neighbors around our church. Thursdays, pray for our nation, for elected officials, for efforts

to bring peace and righteousness to our country.

[28 : 12] On Fridays, pray for the world, for world peace, for nations that are closed to the gospel. On Saturdays, pray for, I've called them their castaways, for the poor, homeless, jobless, people who are in prison, people who are sick, for widows and single mothers and fatherless children.

Or, if that approach seems daunting, Pastor Kent, I do not pray every day. How dare you imply that I should? Now, this can be small times in prayer, right?

Focused small times. This is not all day. So, if that approach seems too daunting for you, a simpler strategy might include praying for your family on your, if you have a prayer day, pray for your family in the morning, pray for the church at noon, pray for the community in the evening.

And these are just suggestions, just things to hopefully inspire you, to get you thinking about how you can move forward in your prayer life. So, these are just suggestions just to help you, give you some ideas, some structure.

But I do encourage you to develop a strategy. Develop something that suits you personally, but do develop one. I've been in the pew hearing this kind of message all my life.

[29 : 42] Has it changed my prayer life? not always, but I hope that this time might be different for me and for you. So, my friends, take this first step in developing, considering the things that we've looked at this morning as priorities of prayer, considering praying alone and with others, and developing an intentional prayer life.

I also ask and I pray that God will richly bless and encourage you as you seek to deepen your connection with him and others through prayer.

Amen.