

Back to the Basics: Prayer

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Date: 25 January 2026

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[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, January 25th, 2026. My name's Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here.! Happy New Year! This is the first opportunity I've actually had to say that to the majority of you, and I hope that 2026 has started off in positive ways for you.

So we can also recognize the tensions that seem to be continuing to escalate around the world more and more every day. And I'm the last person to be political. But we can also recognize that even in these things, God is still in control.

And maybe you're thinking, well, that's a really pastor thing to say. But I mean it sincerely. That's why I can smile, is that God is in control, no matter what it may seem like.

Don't be afraid of the future. Lean into God and trust Him. And walk ahead into what this new year has for you in Him.

Did you plan for any resolutions as the new year rolled over into 2026? And if you did, how is that going? A couple of snickers.

[1:12] If you've already let your resolutions slip, don't worry because you're in good company, it turns out. Statistics show that most people have given up on their resolutions.

Any guesses? Within a couple of weeks. Good answer. The majority of resolutions are discarded by, any guesses on that one? February.

February. February. And so, as I've said in January's past, this time of year is always good for refreshers and reminders. It's an opportunity for us to re-anchor ourselves in what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

And so, as you know, my plan is for us to take a deep dive into the book of Romans this year. But I also had a strong sense over my holidays that I want to spend some time on two shorter series before we get there.

Before we launch into Romans after Easter. So now you know the timeline. So we're going to be spending the next eight weeks on two series. The first is called Back to the Basics.

[2:19] And we're starting that today. And then, over the next four weeks, we're going to be taking a bit of a discipleship survey. We're going to be considering the important topics of prayer and scripture and confession and service.

And we'll be reminded of the role that those things play in our growth as disciples of Jesus. Then we'll be spending the next four weeks after that in a series called Beginnings.

As we're going to explore through that, how we have an amazing opportunity to begin again in our lives. As we worship and serve a God of, thank God for this, second chances.

Our God is a God of second chances. So I'm excited about exploring all of these things together over these next months. But today we're beginning a new four-week series called, as I said, Back to the Basics.

And as you may have guessed, it's a series about the basics. The foundations of our faith. And it's going to be an awesome journey together, I believe, as we return to the feet of Jesus.

[3:24] To be reminded about what it means to be his disciples and back to where the church originally began. And I think it's fitting because we just finished studying Acts together in depth.

Alright, so this week we're starting with, as you can see on the screen, prayer. So when we talk about Jesus, have you ever wondered how he was able to accomplish all that he did in such a short period of time?

What was the secret to his ministry? Well, as we hopefully all know, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God the Father.

We know that Jesus accomplished what he was destined to do because he was crucified on the cross and raised again to life after three days.

But the question still remains, how? How was he able to accomplish it all? Well, Jesus has the benefit, hopefully you know this too, of being the divine Son of God.

[4:35] That helps, there's that, right? But there's another part of his life here on earth that can't be understated. And that is his prayer life. Jesus was always in conversation and communion with the Father.

And from what we know in the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it appears that Jesus kept a regular rhythm of prayer throughout his life. And so if prayer was a regular foundational part of Jesus' life, the only Son of God, then it needs to be a foundational part, I believe, of our lives as well.

Maybe you know the author Richard Foster. If you don't, I highly recommend him. Hopefully that's big enough on this screen. It's small on the monitor at the back. Richard Foster says this, To believe that God can reach us and bless us in the ordinary junctures of daily life is the stuff of prayer.

But when we pray, genuinely pray, the real condition of our heart is revealed. This is as it should be, Foster says. This is when God truly begins to work with us.

The adventure is just beginning. I love this quote from Foster because he is absolutely right when he refers to prayer as an adventure.

[6:00] Is that the word that pops into your mind when you think of prayer? I hope so. Maybe not. Maybe it's the word that pops into lots of people's minds, I'm sure, is afterthought.

Right? Prayer can tend to be an afterthought. But I think we can reclaim it as an adventure again. It's an adventure in faith, in vulnerability, in hope, in sadness, in grief, in all the seasons of our lives, all the stuff that life throws around us and on us.

Prayer is quite simply holy ground. And so there's much more to prayer than I could ever cover in a week. So we're embarking on a series of 50 sermons.

No, we're not. But today we're going to take a closer look at just a few of the ways that the Bible describes prayer. And the first thing that comes to mind is something that we see in the life of Christ.

that he was constantly, constantly in communion and prayer with the Father. Constant prayer.

[7:15] It's a daunting task. Do you pray before bed and wake up halfway through the night or in the morning and go, oh, you left the phone off the hook, you started a prayer, and fell asleep.

Well, the disciples did it. So you're in good company on that, friend. So I know that there's some of you in the room that have already tuned me out. Because you believe I'm going to ask you to do something impossible.

Is that fair? Maybe the idea of constant prayer sounds like a trip to the dentist to you. Something that you dread.

Something that is anything but an adventure. But I don't believe that God would invite us to do something that we could never do. And even if he did do that, I trust that he sent his Holy Spirit to help us.

Which is something we're going to talk about a little bit more later. But for now, let's turn our attention towards 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians. So if you see it on the screen there, you can turn to 1 Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18.

[8:27] You probably know the passage, and I will read it for us as well. 1 Thessalonians 5, 16 to 18 says, Thanks, Ellie.

A little punctuation there? Yeah! In this passage, Paul talks about several things that we should be doing all the time. Always rejoicing.

Always praying. Always giving thanks. And he goes on to say that this is the very will of God in Christ Jesus for our lives.

So here's the important part. Maybe you know this, maybe you don't. There aren't many places in the Bible where we're told explicitly and clearly that something is the very will of God for us.

But here it is. In fact, there's many people, maybe in this room right now, who spend huge chunks of their lives trying to figure out what God's will is for them.

[9:40] Is that you? Is that fair? I didn't get a chance to do it, but I bet you if you did a Google search, God's will for my life. There's probably lots of hits. What does God want me to do?

Well, here it is in 1 Thessalonians. Sermon over. Pretty simple, right? But of course, the obvious problem is that it's not so simple, in fact.

It's not easy in the midst of a billion distractions and temptations in our lives to remain dedicated to prayer or dedicated to being thankful or smiling.

And yet that's God's desire for us. It's a life of constancy with him, being anchored in him. So it's amazing to me to think that the creator of the universe wants a consistent relationship with us, with you.

Going back to the funeral again on Wednesday, we sang the song, Jesus Loves Me. And I had a few people say to me afterwards, that is such an amazing song.

[10:50] And I said, well, I said, if you think about it, when I think back to my childhood, Jesus Loves Me, and some of these other songs we learned as kids, there are deep, deep theological truth in there.

Absolutely. So to me, I think sometimes someone sings Jesus Loves Me and we go, oh, that's for kids' church or whatever. Do it today.

Hey, sing the song in your head or out loud if you want to annoy your partner in the car. But sing the words of Jesus Loves Me and I dare you to not find amazing truth, comfort, and faith in there.

So here's an idea for all of us when it comes to prayer. Instead of seeing this constant prayer as an impossible burden, try to think about the blessing of a heavenly father who wants all of you, all of your life, all of your thoughts, all of it.

He wants it all from you. He wants that relationship with you. You've heard me talk about praying in my car when I'm driving sometimes with my eyes open.

[12:02] But praying about the simple stuff of life, right? Do you ever have those little conversations? You don't need to begin with, thou, Lord, my gracious God, I fear thee.

And just have a conversation with him. He knows you. He loves you. The ordinary stuff doesn't always have to be crisis-level prayer or desperate prayer or afterthought prayer.

Try thinking of your prayer life as an ever-open line of communication. A phone call that never comes to an end with someone on the other end who never tires of hearing from you.

This is not the kind of conversation, you've had them, I'm sure, I've had them, where you say, you start to throw in things in a long phone conversation like, anyway, right?

So, there you have it. Interesting, right? These are all wrap-up kind of phrases, very Canadian, but wrap-up kind of phrases.

[13:09] God doesn't have those for you. He wants to talk to you. He wants to hear from you. So, let the Father's love and desire for you ignite a passion again in you for bold prayer.

Speaking of bold prayer, it takes practice, right? It's admittedly difficult to recognize the fact that we must have reverence and awe for God and at the same time be bold in our prayer life, right?

I think people struggle with that to be able to be conversational with God and have that closeness of relationship while recognizing creator of the universe. So, that's why I love, in lots of ways, that the writer of Hebrews frames this concept for us.

Hebrews 4, 14 to 16, you can turn there as well. Hebrews 4, 14 to 16 says this, Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

[14:32] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Friends, we can have confidence and be bold at the same time as we approach the throne of God because of what Christ has done for us.

Christ was both fully God and fully human, and he was tempted as we are tempted. So, when you offer your prayers to God, you can trust that he understands and empathizes with your situation. He knows. This is not, as I said before, an aloof God who just simply can't relate. So, going further, we read in 1 John 5, 14, and this is the confidence that we have towards him.

If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. There it is again. Confidence. In both passages, the same Greek word is used, and it originally meant freedom, openness, confidence, boldness.

It means those things. So, I love the idea of having freedom when we come to God in prayer because I think people who understand they are free have an easier time being bold.

[16:02] Because Christ has set us free, because he is such a great high priest, because he fully understands what it means to be human, we can boldly bring all, not just some, but all of our prayers to him.

Ready for the hard part? Here's the hard part. To be both constant and bold in prayer is, as we've recognized, a huge task. It's a huge ask. It takes practice, it takes faith, and hopefully, I think, it will take you out of your comfort zone.

And with that said, I can also tell you that the world around you needs your consistent and bold prayers. I'm not even going to say especially now, but especially now.

In fact, you, maybe you don't know this, you also need consistent and bold prayers in your life from others on your behalf and for yourself.

Friends, life is just too complicated. It's too frustrating. It's too much at times. And we need the same thing that Jesus needed and modeled for us when he was here on earth.

[17:19] We need prayer. We need fellowship with the Father. But we don't just need prayers ourselves. Everyone needs prayer.

That includes the people, here's the hard part, you don't want to pray for. People you may not like, including your enemies and adversaries.

Those folks also need your prayers. As I was preparing this sermon, I thought, do I have any enemies? But I mean, seriously, do you ever think that to yourself?

Like when we think in terms of an enemy, that's a hard one, right? Because if you're a people pleaser like me, I don't want anybody to even feel annoyed with me, let alone be an enemy.

But Jesus said in Matthew 5, 44, It's hard, right?

[18:26] Right? In this verse, Jesus gives one absolutely clear direction. To love your enemies and to pray for, this is action and intention here, to pray for those who persecute you.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Jesus prayed for his enemies to the last. So now, to be fair, persecution looks different for Christians in different parts of the world, right?

Somebody laughing at you when you say that you went to church on Sunday, somebody laughing at you at work or somebody you know isn't a person of faith, I guess that's persecution, but not to the same degree, right?

So we need to be aware. For you, it might be somebody who bullies you, teases you about your faith. It might be an abuser or someone in a former relationship, someone who has deeply hurt you. So whoever that is, it comes to mind when I say your enemy, that's the person or people that need your prayer. And in fact, here's how Jesus further explains it for us in Matthew 5, 46 and 47.

[19:40] This is very convictive language. If you love those who love you, what reward do you get? Do not even tax collectors do the same?

And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even Gentiles do the same? So I think, probably, it's pretty easy for us to love and pray for people who we naturally love, naturally feel kinship with, naturally care about.

But I think it can be truly difficult to pray for people who have harmed us or wronged us in some way. People have hurt or offended us, especially when they don't show any remorse.

Can you relate to that? And yet, those are the people Jesus is talking about us being intentional in praying for. These are the people, Jesus tells us, who need our prayers.

Praying for somebody who you are frustrated by, don't agree with, someone who's hurt you, what kind of faith does that take?

[20:58] Right? You have to humble yourself, let go of your pride, get over some things. I'm not saying forget about things. Forgive and forget

is a very bad expression.

But trusting that God has got it so you don't have to hold on to things like that. So at the end of the day, aren't we also glad that in Romans 5, verse 8, it says, even while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Even in our sin, Christ traded his life for ours without hesitation. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

So as I said near the beginning, prayer was an integral part of Jesus' life and ministry. No matter what else was going on, he always made time for prayer.

He always sought fellowship with the Father. There's many times throughout the New Testament where Jesus says, Kate, you do your thing, I'm going to be alone. I'll be back.

[22:06] Many, many times that happened in Scripture. Mark 1.35 is an example. It says, Jesus made space for prayer.

And as we seek to learn from him and as we seek to continue to grow as his disciples, we need to acknowledge the power of prayer in the life of Christ as we've done this morning.

As we follow him, we must also seek to be people of prayer because it's a fundamental piece of life with Christ.

Constant prayer. Bold prayer. Prayer for everyone. Here are your challenges for this week.

What time every day this coming week can you stop and pray? I won't check your homework, so don't panic. What big thing or concerning thing or hard thing do you need to be bold about in prayer over this coming week?

[23:26] What enemy or adversary needs your prayer this week? Make space for all of it. just as Jesus did.

Amen.