



Pastor Gwen's Sermon
7th Sunday after Pentecost
"Prayer"
Sunday, July 27, 2025

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. AMEN.

Today we're talking about something that's a part of every Christian's life—something we do quietly at the dinner table, aloud in church, silently in bed, or urgently from the depths of our hearts. We're talking about prayer.

Now, before we dive into the text, let me ask: have you ever felt like your prayers were bouncing off the ceiling? Like you're knocking on heaven's door, and no one was home? If so, you're not alone. I think of that tragic landslide that happened at Thredbo, a small village in the Australian Alps a few years ago. Nineteen people were buried under the rubble. All across the community, people prayed day and night. In churches, in homes, on street corners. One man was rescued after 60 hours—it felt like a miracle. But what about the other 18 who died? Were our prayers for them unheard? It's questions like these that challenge our faith. I'm pretty sure that it was the same way after the river in Texas just recently shallowed up a Christian camp, as its banks overflowed. Why were only a few saved when everyone was praying for all the victims. Why are children starving in Gaza when we pray and send money to help the relief effort. Why do wars never cease? Is it that maybe we are not praying hard enough. Are our words not adequate. Is our posture when we pray somehow wrong? And that brings us back to that same question the disciples asked Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray." How do we need to pray Lord for you to sit up and take notice of big and little catastrophes? It is no wonder that people are skeptical about prayer even when a lot of prayers are going up to God at the same time, can't God respond and do something. Well, I am here to tell you that that question has been asked over and over again throughout history, especially when things turn out differently than what we prayed for. I also wish I had the answer for all the "whys". But there is no

clear cut understandable or simple answer. I wish there was an answer that would prove that prayer works each and every time.

The disciples in our text, according to Luke, saw something in Jesus—His peace, His focus, His unwavering trust in the Father—that made them hunger for something deeper in their own prayer lives. They didn't ask Jesus, "Teach us to preach," or "Teach us to do miracles." They asked, "Teach us to pray."

And Jesus did. But not with complicated instructions. He does not require a special posture. He didn't say, "Fold your hands like this, close your eyes and bow your heads, like we teach our children when they are young. But let's face it, those things help us center to get ready to pray, both children and us adults too! Jesus simply gave them a model. A prayer that begins, "Father." That single word is powerful in and of itself. It sets the tone for everything else. It means that prayer is not a performance; it's a relationship. It's not about impressing God—it's about trusting Him.

Picture a little child running into her father's arms. The father kneels down, scoops her up, listens to her whispers—even the funny, jumbled-up ones. And he treasures every word. That's the image Jesus gives us of God in prayer. He bends down to us, not because our words are perfect, or our posture is correct, but because He loves us.

In fact, Pastor Vince Gerhardy once said that prayer isn't about us trying to reach up to God. It's about God reaching down to us. Like a father kneeling down to hear his child's whimper or whisper. That's what makes prayer possible—not our goodness, but God's grace. But let's be honest—it takes effort to pray. It takes effort to slow down, to be still, to stop long enough to be with God. How many times have we said, "I'll pray before bed," only to fall asleep halfway through "Dear God..."? We forget. We get busy. And sometimes we even doubt whether it matters.

I read a good description this week of prayer. Prayer is a gift. A daily refuge, a source of rich and inexhaustible joy. And we only begin to understand its power when we stop trying to "get it right" and simply open our hearts. Isn't that beautiful. I for one need to remember that. As I pastor, I am often times asked on the spur of the moment to pray before a meal, at the start of a meeting or gathering. When I first got into the ministry, it was one of the hardest things to do, is pray spontaneously in a group. Probably because I wanted to "get it right" instead of speaking to God like I do in bed at night or after devotions in the morning, just talking from the heart.

Jesus teaches us a prayer that includes everything we need:

"Hallowed be your name"—We begin with praise. We remember who God is. That His name is holy, and we want our lives to reflect that holiness.

"Your kingdom come"—We invite God's will into our world, our lives, our hearts. Not my kingdom, Lord—yours.

"Give us each day our daily bread"—We trust God for today's needs, not tomorrow's fears. We recognize that everything we have is a gift from His hand.

"Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us"—We confess. We ask forgiveness. And we offer forgiveness. That's hard. But Jesus reminds us that grace received should be grace extended.

"Do not bring us to the time of trial"—We pray for protection, for strength, for deliverance from what would undo us. And we trust that God walks with us through every temptation and trial. And then after he gives us this model prayer, Jesus tells a story. About a friend knocking on another's door at midnight, asking for bread. The friend doesn't want to get up—it's late, the kids are in bed. But because of the man's persistence, he does.

Jesus isn't saying that God is like the grumpy neighbor. Quite the opposite. He's saying, if even a reluctant friend will eventually help out, how much more will our generous, loving Father respond when we pray?

Our Father in heaven is an awesomely powerful God who can move mountains. And I have found that God is always more ready to hear than we are to pray. It is also true that God is ready to give us more than we desire or deserve. We just need to believe in the power of prayer.

He invites to, "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened." That's not a one-time knock. It's keep asking, keep searching, keep knocking. Be persistent. Not because God is slow to act, but because prayer is where relationship grows. Sometimes our threads get tangled, like that young woman working at the textile mill. Her thread got all knotted up. She tried to fix it herself, made it worse, and finally called the supervisor. "I did my best," she said. "No," he replied, "To do your best, you should have called me." When our lives get tangled up in knots, we need to call upon our Lord as well.

Prayer is calling on the one who can actually help. When things go wrong, when our own wisdom runs out—God says, "Call me. I'm here. I'm listening."

I know we often turn to prayer most quickly when things go wrong. True? When someone is sick. When we're afraid. When we don't know what to do. And that's okay—those are real prayers, honest ones. But prayer is meant for every moment. Not just emergencies.

We need to believe that prayer is not a burden, even though we sometimes treat it like one. Like it's another thing on our to-do list. But it's not. It's an invitation. Not a duty, but a lifeline. So how do we respond to this invitation?

Start small. Start simple. You don't need special words. The Lord's Prayer is enough. Even a few words—"God, I'm here. Help me." Or "Thank you." Or just silence, sitting in His presence. Yes, guys even in those tree stands! That's prayer, too.

And maybe we just need to remember that prayer isn't always about getting what we want. Sometimes it's about changing us. Drawing us closer to God. Helping us trust. Helping us forgive. Helping us let go. Helping to see God's way is the best way.

As I was thinking about prayer all week, I reminded myself about a trite answer I give when I tell people that God answers every prayer. And I do believe that He does. But the answer can be yes, no, or maybe later.

Sometimes the answer isn't what we hoped. But the promise is this: God hears. God answers. And God gives us the greatest gift—the Holy Spirit—to comfort, guide, strengthen, and remind us that we are never alone.

So, pray. Pray with confidence. Pray like a child who knows her Father loves her and is waiting to hear from her. Pray when life is good and when life is falling apart. Pray because God wants to hear from you just as much as you want to hear from God. And He's always leaning in. So, "Lord, teach us to pray." And He does.

Thanks be to God. AMEN