



**Sunday, May 14, 2023**

**Sunday Sermon:** Pastor John VanderWindt

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:7-11, 21:22 Romans 8:26,27, John 14:13,14, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 1 John 3: 19-22

**Sermon Title:** Daniel: Faith Expressed in Prayer



Connect groups. An important part of doing fellowship together. One of the highlights of Connect groups is not just sharing about life, but a highlight of Connect group is to be able to pray together. So today, we are looking at this concept of prayer. If you're following along in D6 or if you looked at the bulletin, you saw all these passages lined up and you're thinking, "Whoa, yeah, that's a lot." So, maybe like me, you tab them before you got to church this morning so you can find them. But if you didn't do that, don't worry because we're going to put them on the screen today as we go through them.

We're also looking at this in light of the Lord's Supper which we're going to celebrate immediately after the message. The Lord's Supper is this place where Jesus came to us and through His disciples, He said, "I want you to remember how I gave you my life so that you may have life." And He gave two elements. He gave the bread and the wine and He said, "This represents my body and blood. As you partake in it, remember."

I want to begin a little bit with that image. The image of bread. And rather than juice, I'm going to use water because Jesus also said, "He is the bread of life and He is living water." Last week, we talked about Daniel. We noticed that Daniel prayed three times a day. Many of us (in common culture in the west) eat three meals a day. Then we snack in between. But Daniel prayed three times a day. Maybe for us this morning, this image of the bread of life and the living water will remind us that the concept of prayer needs to become part of our daily life. Just like food and drink.

If you think about making meals and having meals three times a day, and then there's your morning coffee and your afternoon tea and your bedtime snack, does our prayer life look like that as well? Think about the amount of times you eat or drink. Do we pray in that way? So we're going to look at a number of passages and we're going to look at the concept of prayer and the privilege that we have because of what Christ did on the cross. That we may enter that throne room of God in prayer. And let's begin there.

Dear Lord, we come to you this morning. We thank You that we are able to approach Your throne of grace, Your throne of truth, Your throne of love, Your throne of life. May we approach it, Lord, and bring to You our praises, our thanksgiving and our requests. Lord, we ask that as we now look through scripture, You will open our hearts, that our hearts may hear from You and that we may hear Your voice. Lord, we give this time to You and we ask that this may be the beginning of a conversation that has no end. Lord, we are able to ask this because of the powerful name of Jesus. It is in Jesus' name that we come to You and ask for Your blessing. So let it be.

So we're going to look at a number of passages. We're going to begin with **Matthew 7:7-11**. It reads as follows. **7** "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

**9** "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? **11** If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Many of us know this first phrase of, "Ask, seek and knock." As we may know, this is part of the Sermon on the Mount. If we think back to some of the other verses in the Sermon on the Mount, we also have that verse which says, "Seek first the kingdom."

So let's talk a little bit about seeking God for a moment. Do we really seek God? This week, I came across a prayer written by Justin McRoberts and it hit me in the concept of seeking. I'd like to share it with you. I want you to see if any of these seekings play out in your heart.

The prayer is actually called, I do not seek God. A prayer of confession. "I do not seek God. I seek control. I do not seek God. I tell God where to be. I do not seek God. I tell God where I will be so that God can meet me there. I do not seek God. I tell God who God can be. I do not seek God. I tell God who God can be for. I do not seek God. I tell God who I am and suggest God get on board with the movement. Teach me to pray so that I can be formed, so that I can hear clearly, so that I can be challenged by what is true and good and beautiful. So that I can let go. So that I can see my own biases. So I might see and hear and feel what it is that drives me to pray at all."

When I read that, I thought, "Wow." When I think about seeking God, do I really seek God or do I seek God for something that I'm looking for? On the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom", it is a reminder of how we need to seek God first. And in **Matthew 7:7** where it says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you," that seeking peace is really important. When we seek God and then when we ask, we will ask for what God desires. Not for what we desire.

Many of you may have seen the picture in which Jesus stands at the door and knocks. For the Jewish rabbi, this concept of knocking is equivalent to the aspect of prayer. It is opening up the doors to the throne room of heaven. By knocking, you're asking God to say, "I will hear you." You are asking God to open the door so that He may hear your pleas, and that He may then understand where you're at.

Now there's something very important which you need to see from this. In English translation, it says, "Ask, seek, knock." When someone says, "Go ask somebody" for something., the intent is that you will, at one time, ask them. But that's not the way the words are written here. This, "Ask, seek and knock" is actually a continuing command. So another way to translate this is to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. Don't stop. May it be the driving point from which you live.

Then if we go back to the other part where it says, "Seek first the kingdom," the verse just after that is one that we talked about in January, where it says, "Do not worry." So the antidote to worry is to continually seek the kingdom, continually seek God, and continue to ask for God to look at that. Then we read in **Jeremiah 29:13**, where it says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

So the first part of prayer is to take an honest evaluation of, "Am I really seeking God? Am I doing that aspect of looking toward what God desires?" Or am I praying so that I go, "You know, Lord. This would be really nice if I got this. Can you help me out here?" Do we seek God's will in all of this?

Then Jesus goes on and he says the part about this asking for bread and asking for fish. Then at the end, it says in **Matthew 7:11**, "... how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" That's an important part of the asking. God will give the gift that you're looking for when it abides by His way.

Interestingly enough, we're reading the piece out of Matthew but this same piece is also in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**. It says, "**16** Rejoice always, **17** pray continually, **18** give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Continual, continual, continual. Regularly, regularly. Consistent. With thanks. So it becomes part of our life.

Now the reality is this. There are lots of times in life which aren't so good. At those times, it may be really difficult to pray because you're thinking, "Yeah, I know but right now, I'm not in a space

where I really feel like praying right now. Things just aren't looking good. I don't feel that God has given me good gifts right now. In fact, right now the world is against me. How am I supposed to pray at this point?"

Let's turn to **Romans 8:26**. It says here, "**26** In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. **27** And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

In **Romans 8:26** - "In the same way, the Spirit helps us." One of the first things we need to ask is, "What does it mean by, 'In the same way?'" In the same way as what? The verses just before Romans 8:26 are verses which talk about hope. In fact, **Romans 8:25** says, "**25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

So as we are patiently waiting for the hope we don't have, we still move on. In the same way that we hope, it says that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. The key word there is "help." The Spirit doesn't just do it for us. The Spirit understands that we are weak and we need support. So the Spirit helps us during that time. The Spirit walks alongside us and says, "Here, let me be the person that you lean on. I will carry you through this. But we'll do this together."

Think about the number of times in which you may have helped a child. There are two ways to do it. One is, you can say to the child, "Okay, I want you to help me carry this box. You walk over here and I'll just carry it." Well, then the child was like, "I didn't do anything. I was just walking along." Or you could say, "Here, you pick up that end and I'll pick up this end and together we will carry it." And we both know that you're carrying the entire weight. But the child is participating in that. Many ways when God says that the Spirit will help us, we know that it is the Spirit who is carrying the heavy part of the burden. But we are still participating in that. And God leads us in that space.

Then there is the next piece where it says in Romans 8:26, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

Have you had times when you are just honestly saying, "Lord, I just don't know what to pray in this situation. I don't even know where to begin. It is so horrifying." Or have you had times when you are just not sure what you're able to say? Or maybe you're at a place where you say, "I don't even have the strength to pray right now." When it says the Spirit intercedes for us with wordless groans, that doesn't mean the Spirit doesn't know what to say. But the Spirit brings our prayers to God in a language which God knows in a deep way.

Earlier on in this chapter, it talks about creation. All of creation groans for the coming of Christ. There is this aspect of longing that the Spirit brings our prayers to God for us. He does that even in a way which we may not understand. But he has now become the translator. And then as we read at the very end of **Romans 8:27**, it says, "... because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." The Spirit knows what God's will is

because the Spirit is God. Oftentimes, when we pray and we're not totally sure what to pray, the Spirit acts as our translator and says, "Here's what the will of God is. Let me bring that through the throne of prayer and allow me to pray."

David Garland says in one of the commentaries that I was reading says, "Our sufferings become an occasion in which we experience the presence and the assistance of God's Spirit himself. Lamentation can be transformed in the assurance of security into God's eternal love." In those times when we don't know what to pray and we simply ask the Spirit to intercede on our behalf are times in which it is just being with the Spirit. Have you ever had a time where you were just in someone's presence and that was enough? Nothing needed to be said.

I remember when I was younger, my dad and our family went to New Mexico. We were staying at a church there with the minister and the minister went on some visits. My dad asked if he could go along and so they did. They went to one person's house and at the house, they sat down. They had something to drink. About 45 minutes later, they left. And the lady of the house said, "Thank you. It was so good being with you." I found out later that not a word was said for 45 minutes. They just sat in each other's presence. Just having the other person there is all that was needed.

So we go on to think about, "Okay, so we need to ask and seek and knock continually. Even in those times when we don't know what to say, we need to seek God and seek the Spirit to speak on our behalf. Then we get to **Matthew 21:22** which says this, "**22** If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." If you believe. Just before that in **Matthew 21:21**, Jesus says, "**21** ..."Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

So if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. This aspect of believing, right? It kind of goes back to the aspect of seeking. Do I really seek God? Maybe we could say the same with believing. Do I really, really believe that God will do it or that He's capable of doing it? Do we have faith like Esther did? Where she said, "I'll go. And If I perish, I perish." Do we have faith like them that says, "We know that our God is able, but even if he doesn't, it's not going to change anything?" Do I have faith like that? Do I really believe without any doubt? I think we all go through times of doubt, don't we? Times when we're not sure. Jesus says here, "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask."

Here's a really neat part about this verse. In English, we don't do so well with this. The word "you" can be singular or it can be plural. In Greek, it's very obvious as to whether it's singular or plural. In **Matthew 21:22**, if you translate it and you're from the South, it would read, "... and if y'all believe, y'all will receive what y'all ask for in prayer."

Think about the value of Connect groups. When we're going through these times, if you all get together and pray, you will receive the answer from God in prayer. So yes, we are to pray

individually but we also need to remember the importance of communal prayer, of being together unified as the body of Christ and praying.

On April 30, we gathered at Murray Street Baptist and we had a prayer service where people from all over Peterborough gathered in prayer. Those are such important times. Heads up, we're going to do one again at the end of June as I hear now. So, plan on that one.

But we need to spend time in prayer together because when we come together and pray, not only do we support each other, but we also hear together. And remember that we're looking for the will of God. We're looking for the kingdom, and what does the kingdom say? And when we gather together and pray, we hear what God is saying as a group and we know that God is answering.

So we need to say to each other, "Let us gather together and pray." In that way, we can encourage the other person or yourself or myself when I'm in those moments of doubt that I'm not alone. Because we all know what self talk does when we're alone. In those aspects of doubt or anything else. But when we're with people to support us, when we're with people who are praying with us and for us, that goes away and we can move forward in faith.

So we move on to the next passage, **John 14:13-14**, which says this, "**13** And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."

Now, there are two things that are really interesting about this verse. Notice how this is a verse which directs us to pray specifically to Jesus. With most of our prayers, we go, "Lord God" and then "In Jesus' name we pray." But here, Jesus is reminding us that we pray to Him. And He will do it. Just like in Romans 8, we talk about the Spirit being with us and praying to the Spirit to intercede for us. So here we see how we pray to a Triune God, and we can pray to Father, we can pray to Jesus, the Son and we can and should pray to the Holy Spirit as well.

But here He talks about praying "in my name." We know that there is power in the name of Jesus. We know that when you pray in the name of Christ, things happen. But I want you to think about it just slightly differently this time, going back to this concept of asking, "Am I really seeking what is godly?" Rather than saying, "Lord, we pray for this and in Jesus' name, make it happen," what if we turn around and we say, "Okay, Lord, I'm praying for this. Would Jesus put His name on this?"

You know how when you sign a document, you put your name on it and you say, "I agree to this." Sometimes when we talk about praying in the name of Jesus, we need to think that rather than saying, "Yes, I'm going to call on the name of Jesus to pray for this," maybe we need to think, "Here's my prayer. Would Jesus sign the bottom line?" Would he say, "Yes, I agree with this. I agree and accept all the conditions of this prayer."

It makes us look a little bit more deeply at what we are praying. Are we praying for things "... so that the Father may be glorified in the Son." When we pray, are we constantly praying to glorify

the Son and the Father? Or are we praying for our own needs? It's not bad to pray for our needs. God says we should. As He says, "Do whatever I ask. Ask me." We should ask Him for our needs. But our needs always need to be met in the aspect of glorifying the Father and He will do it.

**John 14:6** says, "**6** Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" So in this same piece, Jesus is saying, "You need to ask me. You need to come to the Father through me. I will be there for you. I will be that person alongside you."

So we need to ask for God and we need to look to Him to give us what we need. But then there are times when God says no. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** is one of those times. Partway into verse seven, it says, "**7** Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

**9** But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. **10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So here is the apostle Paul in the height of his ministry who is dealing with something and he is pleading with God to take it away. And God says, "My grace is sufficient for you." As far as we know, we don't know exactly what the thorn in the flesh was but we're pretty sure that it was never taken away, and Paul dealt with it for all of his life. But he understood that God's grace was sufficient.

So we pray and God says, "No, I'm not going to do that for you" or God says, "Just wait a minute." There's a minute as in 60 seconds. Right? And then there's "Wait a minute." We all know how long that lasts, depending on the person. And to God, a day is 1,000 years and 1,000 years is one day. So when God says, "Wait a minute," it could be a while. But God says, "In those places of wait, in those places where I am not answering it the way you wanted me to answer it, my grace is sufficient for you. Trust me, I will be with you. My spirit is with you. My grace is sufficient for you."

Then Paul ends with this, "**10** That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

That's quite the prayer. I'm not sure I could pray that tomorrow morning. "Dear Lord. Please give me insults and difficulties today so that I may be weak and that You may be strong." But then, when we think of the challenges we face in our life, do we take those opportunities to say,

"Okay, Lord, I am weak. Please make me strong in this. Please help me to understand that your grace is sufficient so that I may be as You have desired me to be."

And that leads us to **1 John 3:19-22**. "**19** This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: **20** If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. **21** Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God **22** and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him."

Well, I think to be honest with you, all of us can say that our hearts condemn us. We've all sinned. But here's the beautiful piece in this. If you look at **1 John 3:20**, it says, "... we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." God knows where we're at. God knows that when we don't keep His laws, it's not because we don't love him. It's because we are sinful people.

We saw a Mother's day video with kids (before the sermon.) The theme of, "Do you hear me?" Think about the times your kids have done something which you told them not to do. Maybe for some of you, you don't have kids like that, but I didn't grow up in that place. But think about the time your kids have done stuff where you told them not to do something. Then they do it.

I mean, the first time they do it, you're like, "Seriously?" And then they do it again and you're like, "I thought we learned this one." And then as they get older, the things they do just get bigger. Then you're like, "Are you thinking?"

Each time we do that, God says to us, "I know where your heart is."

And the question is, at the end where it says, "... if we keep His commands," we don't keep God's commands so that we stay on His good side and we check everything off on the checklist. We keep His commands because we want to be in relation with Him. And when you are in relation with somebody, you want to do as they want you to do so that you can grow in your relationship. So when God says, "If you love me, you will keep My commandments." (**John 14:15**.)

The aspect of keeping commandments is showing the love of God. And here he says, "I know your hearts. Because I know your hearts, you can ask for whatever you want. If it fits with my will, I will give it to you." Think about your kids when they ask for things. In your mind, you're going, "Can I do this?" You want to give them everything you can. But if your kid asks for bread, you're not going to give them a stone. God is the same way. God desires to give us His gifts. In fact, if you flip over just a little bit into **1 John 5:14-15**, it says, "**14** This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." This goes back to the confidence piece, right? When Esther approached the king, she did not know whether the king was going to extend the orb or not. But I can guarantee you, anytime you approach the throne of God, God will extend His invitation to you. And we can now, because of



Christ's death and resurrection, boldly approach the throne of God and come to Him in all things.

So let's go back to our daily aspect here. In our daily piece, do we really seek God or trust him at all? **Psalm 62:8** says this, "**8** Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." God says to us, "I am the bread of life. I am the living water. I invite you to eat and drink all day long. Pour out your hearts to me, and I will be your refuge." God, as our refuge, says to us, "I am your refuge because I love you. As a sign of eating and drinking and as a sign of my love for you, Jesus came to earth to be one of us in the incarnation."

### **The Lord's Supper**

Jesus, when He came to earth said, "I love you so much that I am going to break open the Holy of Holies so that it is not just the priests who may enter once a year into the presence of God, but now you may all enter daily into the presence of God. And Jesus said to His disciples, "I invite you to spend time with me. As I leave, I'm going to give you a meal to eat to remember."

We do this in church in ways in which we say, "For those who believe in Jesus, we invite you to partake in this meal." Jesus said, as we said earlier, "I am the bread of life. I am the living water." On that night before Good Friday, Jesus took bread and He broke it and He said, "This is my body." [Pastor John, tears the bread.] "This is the bread of life and I am allowing my body to be torn and broken for you so that you may have the bread of life anytime you want."

Afterwards, Jesus took the cup and he poured and he said, "This is my blood, the life stream of my body. The living flowing parts of me that I have shed for you, so that you may drink of the living water at all times. So that you may always have bread and water. That at any time day or night, the throne room of God is open and you may, in confidence, approach the throne of God and say, "Lord, hear my prayer." [Pastor John pours the water.]

I invite the elders to come forward as we will distribute the bread. I invite you to take the bread and I invite you to take it and to hold it and to think of Jesus as the bread of life and how He shed His body for you. And then we will gather together and eat it together.

[The elders pass out the bread.]

On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus took the bread. He broke it. He blessed it and he said, "This is my body broken for you. Take it, eat it. Remember and believe that I've opened up the throne room of heaven for you to approach the Father at any time. And in pure hearts before Him, you may eat."

[The congregation eats the bread.]

As we pass out the juice, we again invite you to take a cup, to hold it, to reflect as we sing about what Christ has done for you in the shedding of His blood.

[The elders pass out the juice.]

After supper, Jesus took the cup. He said, "This is my blood, which I have shed for you." He blessed it and said, "This is so that the throne room of Heaven and the curtain between us and God is torn down so that we may approach God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit at any time in prayer. And we can ask for whatever we desire in Christ's name. Drink it, drink all of it. Remember and believe that Jesus died for a complete remission of all your sins.

[The congregation drinks the juice.]

In **Ephesians 3:14-19**, Paul writes this, "**14** For this reason I kneel before the Father, **15** from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. **16** I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **17** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, **18** may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, **19** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

And that is our prayer for each of us. That we may know beyond the shadow of a doubt, of Christ's deep love for us.

I invite you to stand to extend your hands and receive from God, His blessing and His love. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*