

# Prayer Week 3: Prayer When You Can't

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*KBF Sermon*

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Good Morning KBF,

I hope you are all doing well on this beautiful morning! Let me pray!

This morning we are in week 3 of our 30 Days of Prayer series. At KBF we are encouraging you to re-devote yourself to a month of prayer and we hope that you have been encouraged and challenged by the two messages so far.

Last week we had a powerful message by our very own guest preacher, Medina Oiko, who preached about prayer and sovereignty. She began by telling us about a wonderful conversation between herself and her son. 'Mom, why do we pray when God can do anything?' I think Wisdom is well named as his question is one that I think every Christian asks at some point in their life. Why should I pray to an all-knowing, ever-present, and all-powerful God?

Thank you, Medina for directing us to Genesis and reminding us that prayer is part of the identity that was given to you by God. It is part of you walking out your purpose in common union, communion, with God! Church, I hope that encouraged you all to pray this week with the intention of seeing how you might be able to partner with God to bring about His plans!

The week before that, I spoke about the Lord's prayer, from Jesus' teaching in Matthew Chapter 6. We looked at the prayer line by line emphasizing the adoration, aligning, confession and petition that are found in Jesus' words.

We also looked at the importance of prayer for the individual. Not turning prayer into a show but rather making it a personal practice. Go into your room and close the door. Your father can see things done in secret...

At the end of that message, I left you with a challenge. Every day, go into your room and pray. Pray with adoration, align yourself to God, confess, and petition. How many of you have been doing that for two weeks?

If not, why not? I remember when I was first hired as a chaplain. Whenever I would be invited to a classroom, or was present at a dinner or lunch people would always ask me to say Grace. At first I was a little self conscious about this and then one night I was at dinner with some friends of mine. One of my close friends asked me to say Grace. 'Hey Mr. Chaplain can you say Grace,' he said. I declined and then he replied, 'No worries, I will say Grace, I like talking to God!'

I was so humbled that I have not said no to saying Grace since. As Christians we have the privilege and encouragement to speak to God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, it is

my prayer that you would all be confident and enthusiastic about this privilege. I hope that we can be a church, a community that is quick to pray *because* we love talking to God!

But, if I am honest, there have been times in my life when I have had trouble talking to God. This sermon is divided into two parts and I hope that I can encourage you to think about the importance of personal and communal prayer, especially when we don't feel like it!

## Part 1: Prayer When I Can't

Let us first be honest. Sometimes prayer is difficult and if we are very honest, we might not feel like we love talking to God at all. I was moved last month by Pastor Lee's sermon which talked about worshipping through the trials of our lives and I want to acknowledge a similar thing this morning. Sometimes life can throw you circumstances, conflict, or tragedy that makes you not want to pray at all.

And yet if we turn to Phillipians chapter 4 we will read things like this in verses 6-7.

**Philippians 4: 6-7**

**6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

In every situation? What does that look like in the middle of terrible times?

When I was 16 I was living in Holland. I had been there for 6 years and was really enjoying being there. I had recently become a Christian and since making that decision, I felt like life had gotten exponentially better. I had everything a young teenager could dream of. I had recently been headhunted to play basketball for a team in the National league. Despite being too young, the coach had driven 2 hours to our house to convince my parents to let me play. I made the team and because of all the travel I got to drop half of my school load. Swap study for sports? Yes please! Then to top it all off, I met a girl who played in the Dutch National basketball team and I don't know what I did to make this happen, but all of a sudden we were dating. I was on track to become a professional athlete, I got to ditch school and I was in love. I distinctly remember going home one day and thinking, God you are awesome! I should have started believing in you years ago, this is great!

It was almost a week after saying these words when I came home and my parents greeted me at the door with, 'Lorne, we need to talk.'

Never a great way to come home. They proceeded to tell me that the immigration application that they had made to move to Australia, a process that they had started some 14 months earlier, had just come through. They had decided that we were moving to Australia... in 2 months time. And despite my protesting, I had to come too.

I was making big plans for my life. Our team was the number 2 or 3 team in the country, I was dreaming of being a pro in the future, and I was in love, and in an instant, it felt like all of that came crashing down. I was about to lose everything!

Now I don't want to make this sound too dramatic, but at the time, this was the worst thing that had happened to me and I was more depressed and deflated than I had ever been. Why is this happening God? I just gave my life to you, everything is going well, and now it is all gone! Why? Pray in every situation, are you kidding me? I had NO desire to pray at all.

Plans were made to leave Holland on December 14th and I remember one winter evening I had just had enough. I jumped out of my bedroom window and ran away. My mom was so worried. She thought I was very depressed and I was running away to hurt myself. Instead, I ran into the farmer's field that was directly behind our house and I went and laid down in the dirt.

'God, you said you are good! Why would you do this? Why would you manipulate me like this!?' I yelled and cried and got all of the emotion, all of the anger and sadness out of my system. "God you said you were good and you gave me all of that just to take it away!?"

You'll never believe what happened next, but I will try and share it anyway. It was a cloudy and grey winter evening. As I was praying (if you could call this prayer) the clouds slowly started to part and the sky became a beautifully clear and starry. Then I remember this sentence came to me. I didn't hear it audibly, but it was like a thought just popped into my mind. The sentence was:

***Life is not going to be easy, but I will be with you every step of the way.***

And then, with this sentence came this feeling of peace and joy that I had never felt before. In an instant I felt a conviction that things were going to be ok. Yes we were leaving Holland, yes it was terrible that I had to give up all of these things that were so important to me but, somehow, I just knew that everything was going to be ok! I was filled with so much joy that instead of laying in the dirt I was dancing around the field praying for every person I could think of!

In this moment, the Bible came alive to me, and our verse today became tangible.

**6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

It was not pretty, it was in the dirt in the middle of a dark night. My words were raw and honest, there was no pretty prayer formula and I was all alone. For weeks I had not prayed because I was angry and I wanted to stay angry at God.

Hopefully I am the only one who has been in this situation, but if I am not, and if you are in a similar place right now. I want to encourage you, please pray, even if you do not feel like you can. Please be honest with your heavenly father! I am not trying to promise that you will have a moment like this. I have also had times where God has been silent, or I have been directed to re-read the promises in the Bible. I don't want to present a formula here that will work for you in the same way. Rather, I want to encourage you to pray, because God is faithful, however he chooses to answer! You will not find yourself in a worse place because of prayer.

That sentence, 'It is not going to be easy but I will be with you every step of the way.' still goes through my mind regularly even to this day. It is my anchor in difficult times and has helped me endure different troubles in my life. To me, this experience was an example of how **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

God did not remove me from the difficult situation, but he gave me the strength to get through it, and in doing so gave me a gift that still gives me strength today. So part 1 today. Pray, even when you do not feel like it! You can be honest with your heavenly father for He is trustworthy, in every situation.

## Part 2: Prayer When I Can't But The Church Can

Part 2. We are actually going backwards. We began by examining a few verses from the end of the book of Philippians, and now we are moving backwards to Chapter 1.

In verses 3-11 we read:

### **Phillipians 1:3-11**

**I thank my God every time I remember you.** 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that **he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.** It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, **all of you share in God's grace with me.** God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. **And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may 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.**

Let us shift our attention away from the personal/private function of prayer and move towards prayer in a communal context. Paul is writing a letter to the Phillipians and it seems that he is writing from prison and here he is telling them recipients of the letter how he is praying for them. I think his example is an important one, one that we can follow.

In these passages there are a number of things about praying for others that may be helpful for us.

### **Praying For Others (Thanksgiving/Adoration?)**

Paul starts by saying, 'I thank God every time I remember you.' What a beautiful image this presents. Imagine if every time you thought about your husband, your wife, or your children, even when you are separated from them, you thanked God for them. What a beautiful way to cultivate gratitude in your heart towards other people.

Here we can see that prayer is not just a thing that you do on your own behalf. It is something that you can do in consideration of others too. And, notice how Paul begins his prayer with **thanksgiving!**

### **Praying for the Strengthening of Their Faith (Alignment with the Gospel)**

**I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now...  
...He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

As Paul is praying for the audience here in this letter to the Philippians, he says he is praying with joy! Why, because he remembers how these people partnered with the Gospel!

Notice the ‘aligning’ that is going on here. He is calling the audience's attention to the faith that they first partnered with AND he is encouraging them that God is going to continue his work in them! Is Paul praying over them a variation of ‘Thy Kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?’ - **He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

In both of these sentences, the focus is on the good work that is done in Christ Jesus. Later in the letter to the Philippians, Paul is going to provide some more specific feedback and instruction and some of it may be tough for them to hear. What a powerful way that he is starting this letter though. By demonstrating gratitude to God, and then offer a prayer that encourages alignment with God.

### **Petition**

Here in Paul's prayer there is also petition:

**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may 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.**

He is petitioning that, through faith in Jesus Christ, God would equip the Philippians to:

1. Love in accordance with knowledge and deep insight
2. Give them discernment so they may live purely and blamelessly
3. They would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus

He is not berating the Philippians, he is not adopting a ‘holier than you’ position, instead, we can see how much Paul cares for the Philippians! Through this prayer, we see thanksgiving, alignment, and petition. But rather than being self-directed it is directed outwards to those around you.

In the middle of the prayer, Paul says this ‘**all of you share in God's grace with me,**’ and I think that this outlines such a powerful aspect of what prayer is in the communal sense. It is the recognition of God's grace, the acknowledgement that it has been given to all people, and it is a call for all to be strengthened according to this grace.

In Matthew 21:13(also see Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46), Jesus says:  
It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,'...

He is quoting a number of old testament scriptures and as he does so, he is doing so in the context of rebuke, but I think there is an important encouragement in these words. We often say that Church is the 'house of God'. Now imagine if Church was a place where you would encounter prayer. Either through your own personal prayers, or if for whatever reason you don't feel like praying, you would encounter other believers who were praying.

Imagine you walk in down and depressed and you were in the company of others who see you and begin praying,  
'We always thank God when we think about.....  
We know God is faithful and will continue his work  
Thank you, Jesus Christ, for the salvation you have granted.....  
We pray that it would help him/her to love deeply, make better decisions, and that they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness as they discover more about the salvation that is given by Jesus.

Wouldn't that be infectious?

In the first part of this sermon, I told a personal story about praying when I didn't feel like it. It was a dramatic story, but I hope you are less captured with that first part, than you are with the picture that I am sharing in the second part. I hope that none of you are encouraged to jump out of your bedroom and go lie in the dirt. Also, none of that would have been necessary if I was plugged into a church, if I was honest with other believers, and others were praying for me.

That is what is so powerful and beautiful about Church. I hope that we develop relationships here where we call each other to continue living out our faith! I hope that if we are doing well, that we would pray like Paul when we think about people in KBF. Imagine that, ..... (Ikuo, Phil, Colleen, Sakurai-san) whenever I remember you, I thank God for you and pray that your faith would stronger, your love deeper and your actions blameless! That would be great right?

And then, if we were not doing so great, for whatever reason, I hope that rather than running away and being alone and crying in the dirt, we could be honest and name what is troubling us and then gather with others for prayer. That we would be a community of open arms and strong prayers.

## Conclusion

I admit that sometimes it is difficult to pray. The circumstances of life can be overbearing, sometimes faith can be confusing, and sometimes through grief and tragedy we simply do not have the words.

My prayer is that through this 30 Days of Prayer Series we can encourage you to commit to deepening your prayer life.

Personally, I hope that through the Lord's prayer you rediscover a structure that will give your prayers power and purpose. I hope that through the encouragement of Medina's words you will confidently partner with God to seek and accomplish his will.

I hope that today you have been challenged to seek God even when you have no desire and are at the end of your strength. I hope that your personal prayers will become invigorated and that through them you find a fresh connection with your Heavenly father.

Additionally, I hope that our communal prayer, our prayer here in this community of KBF will be invigorated. I hope that we will be encouraged by the structure and purpose of Paul's prayer for the Philippians and I hope that we will model these prayers as we think about those in the congregation.

While we all love having others pray for us, I hope that we remember the words in Acts 20:35: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

With this in mind I hope that we connect with others in ways that encourage them to confess how they are truly doing so that we might pray **for** them! I hope that we will be able to grow closer as a community as we look for ways to pray and support those around us.

Psalm 133 verse 1 says:

How good and pleasant it is  
when God's people live together in unity!

I hope that we can be leaders in our community that demonstrate this good and pleasant unity. And may the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.

As I conclude here, I want to add to the challenge that was given in week one of our 30 days of prayer.

Challenge 1: Continue going into your room to pray once a day. Pray the Lord's prayer or your variation on it that contains Adoration, Alignment, Confession and Petition

And Now

Challenge 2: Partner with someone in the congregation who is not a family member. Commit to praying together regularly, once a week or once a month, and pray that God would equip them to:

4. Love in accordance with knowledge and deep insight
5. Give them discernment so they may live purely and blamelessly
6. They would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus

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