

# Thought For The Week

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## The Power of Prayer & How to Pray

### Not the Least We Can Do, but the Most

(Adapted from Tom's sermons, August 16, 2026)

When someone faces serious illness, deep struggle, or a situation that seems beyond human help, believers sometimes say, "Well, all we can do now is pray." The words sound humble, yet they quietly diminish prayer. They treat it as the leftover option—the action taken only after every practical, medical, or financial possibility has been exhausted. Scripture never presents prayer that way. The Bible presents prayer as the most we can do.

Jesus taught His disciples, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). James adds, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16). These are not polite encouragements. They are declarations that God has chosen to involve the prayers of His people in the outworking of His purposes.

God is completely sovereign. "Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). He needs no human input and asks no permission. Yet in wisdom and grace He has ordained prayer as the means by which His children participate in what He is doing. Prayer does not twist God's arm or inform Him of facts He does not already know. It is the privilege He has given us to join Him in His work.

Jesus Himself modeled this privilege. He rose early while it was still dark to pray. He withdrew to lonely places. He spent the night in prayer before choosing the twelve. In Gethsemane His sweat became like drops of blood. The Son of God, who needed nothing, devoted Himself to prayer. How much more, then, do those who need everything need to pray?

James points to Elijah as a concrete illustration. Elijah was "a man with a nature like ours"—subject to the same passions and weaknesses every believer faces. Yet when he prayed fervently that it might not rain, the rain ceased for three and a half years. When he prayed again, the rain returned. Ordinary people of faith, praying according to the will of God, can see God accomplish extraordinary things. The principle stands: the prayers of God's people have real effect. God hears, and God answers.

Answers take varied forms. Sometimes they are immediate and dramatic. Sometimes they unfold slowly over months or years and become clear only in retrospect. Sometimes the answer is "no," "not yet," or "I will give you something better." The prayer itself is never wasted. Heaven is not indifferent to the cries of God's children.

The book of Acts supplies vivid examples. When Peter was imprisoned by Herod and scheduled for execution the next day, "earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church" (Acts 12:5). The

church did not organize a protest or attempt to bribe the guards. They prayed. God sent an angel, the chains fell off, the iron gate opened of its own accord, and Peter walked free. Later, when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into the inner prison at Philippi, they prayed and sang hymns to God at midnight. Suddenly an earthquake shook the foundations and everyone's bonds were unfastened. In both cases prayer was not a last resort after every other option had failed. It was the first and most powerful response.

Believers are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). First John 5:14-15 supplies further confidence: "And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him." When names and needs are brought before the Father, the words are not spoken into the air. They are spoken to the Father who loves His children and acts according to His perfect wisdom.

## Who Do We Address in Prayer?

A practical question often arises: Whom do we pray to—the Father, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit? Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). The normal and primary pattern in Scripture is prayer directed to the Father. The New Testament contains many examples of this practice.

It is also scriptural to pray to Jesus. Stephen, while being stoned, prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Paul pleaded with the Lord three times concerning his thorn in the flesh and received an answer that spoke of the power of Christ (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Praying to Jesus is therefore not out of bounds.

Regarding the Holy Spirit, the Bible never records a clear example of anyone praying directly to the Spirit, nor does it give a command to do so. Instead, believers are instructed to pray "in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18) and are assured that the Spirit helps them in their weakness when they pray (Romans 8:26). The consistent New Testament pattern is to pray to the Father, through the Son or in Jesus' name, and in the Holy Spirit. Addressing the Father remains the most scriptural approach, even while recognizing the full involvement of the Triune God.

## Five Foundational Areas of Prayer

The disciples once asked Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). They did not ask Him to teach them how to preach or perform miracles. They asked specifically to be taught to pray. That request still matters. Scripture instructs believers to pray about many things, but five areas form a solid foundation. When these become regular parts of a Christian's prayer life, the result is prayer that honors God and strengthens His people.

**First, pray for the lost.** First Timothy 2:1-4 begins with an exhortation that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, because this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. God's heart is clearly for those outside of Christ. If a believer's prayers never include the names of people who are lost, something essential is missing. Jesus looked on the crowds with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd and then instructed the disciples to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into His harvest. The order is important: first pray,

then go. Identify the lost people in your own circles—family members, co-workers, neighbors, and old friends. Write their names down and pray for them by name. Evangelism begins on one's knees as believers ask God to open eyes, to send someone into the path of the lost, and to grant a response to the gospel.

**Second, pray for the church.** Paul's letters are filled with intercession for the congregations. In Ephesians 1 he prayed that the believers would know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them. In Colossians 1 he asked that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will, walk worthy of the Lord, and be strengthened with all might. The local church is not sustained merely by good programs or strong personalities; it is sustained by the prayers of its members. Pray specifically for the elders and leaders—that they would have wisdom, courage, and pure motives. Pray for the unity of the body, for a people who love and live the truth, for assemblies that are times of genuine worship and mutual encouragement rather than mere routine, and for the weak to be strengthened and the strong to be patient. A praying church is a powerful church; a prayerless church is little more than a club that happens to meet on Sundays.

**Third, pray for those in authority.** First Timothy 2:1-2 continues by instructing believers to pray for kings and all who are in authority so that they may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and reverence. This is not a suggestion limited to times when one happens to like the people in office. Paul wrote these words while living under the Roman Empire, an empire that would eventually execute him. Christians are therefore commanded to pray for leaders whether or not they voted for them. Pray for wisdom for those who make and enforce laws, for justice to be done, for the gospel to have free course, and for God's people to be able to live peaceful and godly lives. Pray also that those in authority would themselves come to know Christ. Political opinions may differ, but the responsibility to pray does not.

**Fourth, pray for personal spiritual growth.** Jesus taught His disciples to ask for daily bread and to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Believers need to pray about the condition of their own hearts—asking for a greater hunger for Scripture, for strength against the specific temptations that repeatedly trip them up, for humility when pride rises, for endurance when discouragement settles in, and for a softer heart toward God and a harder resistance toward sin. David's prayer in Psalm 139:23-24 serves as a model: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Spiritual growth does not come simply by trying harder. It comes by asking God to do in us what we cannot do in ourselves.

**Fifth, pray with thanksgiving and in submission to God's will.** Philippians 4:6 instructs believers to pray with thanksgiving, and 1 Thessalonians 5:18 declares that giving thanks in everything is the will of God in Christ Jesus. Thanksgiving is not merely a closing line tacked onto a list of requests. It is a fundamental posture of prayer that reminds the believer that God has already done good long before any petition is voiced. At the same time, Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The most mature prayer is the one that ends with open hands, saying, "Not my will, but Yours." Sometimes God's answer is yes, sometimes no, and sometimes wait. Thanksgiving and surrender keep the heart steady in all three responses.

These five areas keep prayer from becoming a self-centered wish list. Prayer is not primarily about getting God to do what we want. It is about aligning our hearts with what He wants and then watching Him work.

## Persistent Intercession and Practical Love

It is relatively easy to pray once or twice for someone and then move on. It is far harder—and far more Christ-like—to keep praying when the situation does not change quickly and the need stretches across months or years. Believers are often tempted to conclude that nothing is happening and therefore to stop. Jesus specifically taught the value of persistent asking in the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. If even an unjust judge responds to persistent asking, how much more will the righteous Father respond to His children who keep bringing their requests to Him?

Jesus “always lives to make intercession” for those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). Old Testament priests died and their intercession ended. Jesus lives forever as High Priest and never grows tired of praying for His people. How then can believers grow tired of praying for one another? Paul told the Colossian church that Epaphras was “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers.” The word “struggling” indicates earnest, ongoing labor rather than a casual mention of names. That is the kind of intercession that reflects the heart of Christ.

When someone is hurting, practical help should be given whenever possible—meals, visits, cards, financial assistance, a listening ear, a ride to the doctor, help with yard or house work. These tangible expressions of the love of Christ matter deeply. Prayer must never be used as an excuse to avoid practical service. At the same time, prayer must never be regarded as somehow less than those practical helps. Prayer is not in competition with service; it is the foundation under service and the power behind it. Without prayer, practical help remains only human effort. With prayer, that help is joined to the power of God.

The greatest thing that can be done for any person whose name is on a prayer list is to bring that person before the throne of grace. The greatest thing that can be done for a brother or sister who is struggling is to pray for them with faith and persistence. The greatest thing that can be done for those who are lost is to pray that God would open their eyes, soften their hearts, and draw them to His Son. The greatest thing that can be done for the congregation itself is to pray for its leaders, its families, its young people, and its outreach in the community.

## Keep Praying

Never again think of prayer as the least that can be done. When the Scriptures are opened and the place God has assigned to prayer is seen, when the example of Jesus is remembered, and when James’s declaration is heard—“the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”—believers are reminded that prayer is among the most important work they can offer one another and the world. Therefore keep praying. Do not grow weary or lose heart when answers seem slow or situations remain difficult for a long time. The God who hears is still on the throne. He is still able to do far more abundantly than all that is asked or thought. Every time a name or need is brought before Him, something of real and lasting significance is accomplished. The intercession of the church is joined to the intercession of Christ Himself.

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. May that be true of each individual and of the body as a whole, for the glory of God and for the good of His people. Prayer is not the least that can be done. It is the most.

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# The Power of Prayer

## Not the Least We Can Do, but the Most

When someone faces serious illness or a situation that seems beyond human help, we often hear the words, “Well, all we can do now is pray.” The phrase sounds humble, yet it quietly treats prayer as a last resort—the action taken only after every practical option has failed. Scripture never presents prayer that way. The Bible presents it as the most we can do.

Jesus taught, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). James declares, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16). God is completely sovereign—“Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases” (Psalm 115:3)—yet in His wisdom He has chosen to involve the prayers of His people in the outworking of His purposes. Prayer does not inform God of anything He does not already know, nor does it twist His arm. It is the privilege He has given us to participate in what He is doing.

Jesus Himself modeled this privilege, rising early to pray, withdrawing to lonely places, and pouring out His heart in Gethsemane. James points to Elijah, “a man with a nature like ours,” whose fervent prayer stopped the rain for three and a half years and then brought it back again. Ordinary believers, praying according to God’s will, can see God accomplish extraordinary things.

Answers may come quickly or slowly. Sometimes the answer is “no” or “not yet.” The prayer is never wasted. When the church prayed earnestly for Peter in prison, God sent an angel and set him free. When Paul and Silas prayed and sang at midnight, the prison doors opened. Persistence matters. Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow so that we would “always pray and not lose heart.” Our High Priest “always lives to make intercession” for us (Hebrews 7:25). How then can we grow tired of praying for one another?

Practical help—meals, visits, assistance—should never be neglected. Yet prayer is not in competition with service; it is the foundation under it and the power behind it. The greatest thing we can do for anyone is to bring them before the throne of grace.

Prayer is not the leftover of human effort. It is the primary way God has given His people to care for one another and to seek His help. Keep praying. The God who hears is still on the throne.

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