

Series: On a Mission from God

2 Feb 2025

Matthew 9:35-10:5, Luke 11:5-13, Colossians 4:2-6,1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Lord, please be with us and help us as we look at the Bible together. Teach us the particular thing that you want each one of us to learn this morning. And then help us to apply it in our lives. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

This morning, we are continuing our series on mission, and we are going to talk about the key issue, the one that underlies everything else, the one that the Lord Jesus calls us all to do. We'll be talking about prayer. We may not all be able to speak publicly, but we can all pray.

The Anglican Church in Australia is having a time of special outreach between Easter and Pentecost this year, HOPE25. (All of the bishops in Australia are supporting this initiative, and Psalm 133 tells us that the Lord bestows a blessing where there is unity.¹) The whole church has been called on to pray as we prepare for this. To pray for guidance for what we should do. That the Lord would prepare the hearts and minds of people to be open to hear and respond to the gospel. To prepare us to speak and explain the gospel to them, and know how to welcome, love, care for and nurture them.

What is prayer?

Prayer is talking with God. It can be comforting, scary, challenging, easy, hard, need courage, be formal, extemporaneous, once-off, persevering, for guidance, in good times and bad. It can be praise, desperate petition, with words or groans. We expect to see God's answers, but sometimes our prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling. These can all be part of our experience.

So why do we pray, and what, when, where and how?

This is a huge topic. This morning we'll just scratch the surface on what, I hope, will be helpful to us at St George's, at this time in our history.

So why pray?

1. Jesus told us to pray

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matt 26:41).

Earlier on, when he taught his disciples how to pray, what we know as the Lord's Prayer, he says "when you pray", not "if you pray". It is something that he assumed they (and we) would be doing.²

He said that we should not make a show of it, "6 But when you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what you do in private, will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

So, prayer is to be like breathing for us, and our Father in heaven hears and answers.

2. Jesus prayed

We need to follow Jesus' example. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we.

¹ Psalm 133:1-3, John 17:11b

² Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-4

Jesus prayed all the time.

He fasted and prayed for 40 days in the wilderness before his public ministry began³. He often went off to pray alone⁴, sometimes all night. Sometimes he took his disciples with him⁵. In the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed in agony on his own that he would not have to endure the cross, but God's will be done. The disciples slept⁶. And he prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail.⁷

3. It makes a difference

John Dickson, in his book *The Best Kept Secrets of Christian Mission*, opens the chapter "The Hidden Mission – Promoting the Gospel with our Prayers" with a story from his past. His Scripture teacher in high school had worked faithfully in his school on the North Shore of Sydney for years with little observable "fruit". Then in 1982 everything changed. She hosted evangelistic events in her home with as many as twenty young people crammed into her lounge room, eager to ask questions and listen to the guest speakers that she had invited. At least six students gave their lives to Christ for the first time. Three of them are now in full-time ministry, including John Dickson himself.

A few years later, John Dickson asked her what she attributed her "success" that year to.

Her answer, "Prayer. We prayed earnestly, regularly and specifically for your school, and the Lord in his grace answered us."⁸ That year there had been a citywide prayer movement and her particular group had prayed for Sydney's North Shore.

Is that what we need to do at St George's now? Definitely, yes!

On a larger scale, history has been changed by prayer, including the course of the Second World War⁹ and the fall of the Berlin Wall¹⁰. I'll tell you a bit more about that later.

So what should we pray for?

1. For renewal

Pray that God would pour out his Holy Spirit here at St George's, at this time and at this stage in our journey. And Lord, help us to be expectant and ready.

Every revival in history has been preceded and accompanied by times of intense prayer:

- On the Day of Pentecost.
Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem, "⁴⁹I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24) So, after Jesus ascended, they returned to Jerusalem. "¹⁴They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." (Acts 1:14). Then, the Holy Spirit came in power and the world has not been the same since.¹¹
- Martin Luther. "During the winter of 1512, [Luther] locked himself in a room within the tower of the Black Monastery at Wittenberg and prayed over what he was discovering in the Scriptures. As a result, the Reformation was born after that season of prayer and study of the Word."¹²

³ Matt 4:1-2, Luke 4:1-12

⁴ Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12-13

⁵ Luke 11:1-4

⁵ Mark 14:32-42

⁷ Luke 22:31-32

⁸ *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, John Dickson, p62

⁹ *Rees Howells Intercessor*, Norman Grubb, (orig, 1952) 2011, CLC Publications, pp 231-257

¹⁰ *Red Moon Rising*, Pete Greig, pp33-36

¹¹ Acts 2:1-4

¹² *Prayer: The Key to Revival*, Yonggi Cho and Wayde Goodall, p13

- Zinzendorf. On the 12th of August, 1727 Count Zinzendorf started a 24/7 prayer meeting with Moravian refugees in Herrnhut, Germany.¹³ It lasted for 110 hundred years. He is known as the father of the modern missionary movement.
- John Wesley. Apparently, Wesley normally rose at 4am to spend 4 hours in prayer before he started riding his horse to proclaim the gospel around England. When he was too old for this, he prayed 8 hours a day.
It is generally recognised that Britain avoided a revolution, at the time of the French Revolution, because of the effects of the prayer and the subsequent revival and the accompanying justice and social reform.
- The revival of 1949 in the Hebrides off the coast in far northern Scotland, started with many people praying earnestly. Two of the more fervent prayer warriors were two elderly sisters who were “shut in”, one was nearly blind¹⁴
- Today – “24/7 Prayer is an international movement of prayer, mission and justice, which began accidentally in 1999 and has grown virally to reach more than half the nations on earth.”¹⁵ “A 24-7 Prayer room is a creative prayer space that enables a chain of unbroken day and night prayer, bringing friends, communities and churches together to seek the presence of God.”¹⁶

Lord, make us ready here at St George’s. And help us to be diligent in prayer.

2. For our leaders

Our leaders are on the frontline. They are often tired, stressed, alone, vulnerable, face difficult situations that need wisdom and/or perseverance. Let’s commit to pray for them regularly. Pray for Victor, Bishop Richard and the other leaders in the church throughout Australia.

Pray for them that they may fearlessly preach the gospel. If Paul needed prayer for this, so do our leaders:

¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Ephesians 6:19-20

That the gospel may spread rapidly and be honoured. Paul again asked

3 ... brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you. 2 Thessalonians 3:1

And that God would open doors

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Colossians 4:2-4

Only God opens doors and hearts. We can’t do it, but God can.

3. For friends and acquaintances

John Dickson tells of an older lady who babysat them as children and how she prayed for the family faithfully for many years¹⁷. We can all do that.

¹³ <https://timetogetready.org/prayer/count-zinzendorf-and-moravian-prayer-movement>

¹⁴ “Transformations 2” video by The Sentinel Group https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xy1_qHcXo4Q

¹⁵ *Red Moon Rising: Rediscover the Power of Prayer*, Pete Greig and Dave Roberts, p12

¹⁶ https://www.24-7prayer.com/join_in_posts/what-is-a-24-7-prayer-room/

¹⁷ *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, pp 73-75

And this is particularly relevant for us. Today we are launching something both exciting and concrete to help us pray together. These bookmarks are designed for each of us to write the names of four people that we want to come to know the Lord Jesus. We can put them in our Bibles, or somewhere that will remind us to pray for them each day. We are planning to run Alpha between Easter and Pentecost, 12 weeks away. That gives us 8 weeks or so to pray for them, then perhaps we can invite them to Alpha. More on that in the coming weeks.

When and where should we pray?

In 1 Thessalonians 5, we read that we should pray continually. “¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

And in Philippians 4:6 “⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

So, we should pray constantly, in good times and bad, with thanks, wherever we are, for this is God’s will for us.

For us today, remember the bookmarks.

How should we pray?

1. With compassion

In Matthew 9 we read

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

John Dickson¹⁸ points out that the meaning of the Greek word translated as “compassion” here has the meaning (as an Australian would say) “he was gutted”. Jesus was deeply moved because the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd.

³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

In Matthew 10:1 we read, “Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.”

Before Jesus sent out the twelve, he called all the disciples to pray.

So, what is our part? What does Jesus ask us to do? To pray. Dickson also points out that the meaning of “ask” is to “plead or beg”, it is heartfelt.

The Anglican Church throughout Australia has been called to prayer for HOPE25. Let’s make it gut wrenching pleading that many who are “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” may come to know the Lord Jesus and commit their lives to him – across Australia and at St George’s. Remember the bookmarks.

2. In the name of Jesus

What do we mean when we say at the end of a prayer “in Jesus’ name”?

¹⁸ *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, John Dickson, pp62-65

- We pray to our God and Father through his only Son our Lord Jesus¹⁹.
- We have access to God because of what Jesus has done when he died on the cross.²⁰
- We pray according to his will (e.g. he wants all people to be saved)²¹, for things that line up with his character (e.g. he is good)²² and what he taught (e.g. love and forgiveness).²³

3. By starting small

Pete Greig, in his book *Red Moon Rising* records this story.

In 1982, at the height of the Cold War “the pastor of Leipzig’s most dignified church ... called people to pray every Monday night. At the start there were often fewer than a dozen people huddled together in this cavernous Gothic barn where Johann Sebastian Bach had premiered some of his finest choral pieces. Seven years later ... eight thousand people crammed into the church ... Outside on the streets and in other churches there were as many as seventy thousand people ... Within a week the prayer rally for peace had grown to 120 thousand, and the East German leader had been forced to resign. Within a fortnight [there were] three hundred thousand protestors ... four weeks later ... the Berlin Wall came tumbling down.”²⁴

4. With perseverance

Remember the parable that Jesus told about the man who kept knocking on his friend’s door in the middle of the night when he needed bread for an unexpected visitor. The man would get up and give him the bread because he kept knocking²⁵. Then Jesus continued,

⁹“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Luke 11:9-10

One of the greatest examples of praying with perseverance, at great personal cost, is the life of Rees Howells²⁶. The Lord led him through many experiences including being part of the Welsh Revival and setting up the Bible College of Wales relying on God totally for finances. This prepared him for the task of intercession that God had for him.

For six years he led a team of intercessors at the Bible College who prayed earnestly for hours each day, particularly for significant times during the Second World War. Each time something happened that was unexpected and seemingly miraculous that changed the course of the war.

There were four great prayer battles – the invasion of Britain, Alexandria, Moscow and Stalingrad, later identified as Hitler’s four great blunders. Then followed prayers for the Second Front and D-Day.

At St George’s

What is happening at, with and for us at St George’s, particularly with HOPE25 rapidly approaching? What are we doing?

¹⁹ Matthew 3:17, John 3:16-17, Matthew 16:15-17

²⁰ Mark 15:37-38 (There used to be a huge curtain in the temple in Jerusalem. It was about 18 metres high, 9 metres wide and 2.5 cm thick. It separated the Holy of Holies, the place that represented God’s presence, from the rest of the temple. When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain was torn from top to bottom.), John 14:6

²¹ 1 Timothy 2:1-4

²² Acts 10:38

²³ Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 5: 44-46, Luke 6:38 ...

²⁴ *Red Moon Rising*, pp33-36

²⁵ Luke 11:5-13

²⁶ *Rees Howells Intercessor*, Norman Grubb

How, when and where do we pray?

- Well, we have morning prayer on Zoom each weekday morning. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to join.
- The staff team prays each week for needs that we can write on the “welcome cards” on each pew. And I’m sure that they pray about a lot more as well.
- There is a time of prayer for HOPE25 each Sunday between 9:15 and 9:45 am in the Parish Room. Again, all are welcome and encouraged to join us each week, or whenever you can.
- There are “the prayers of the people” during the services every Sunday. There are other informal prayer groups, and there is prayer as part of our Bible study groups.
- Many people at St George’s use a prayer app to help them. If you’d like to know more about that, have a chat to someone younger than me.
- And now we have the bookmarks to remind us to pray.
- This isn’t just for a few. It is for all of us. We can do it!

Let’s all commit to pray for HOPE25, both here and around the nation, that many people will be drawn to the Lord Jesus. It is a time of intentional outreach between Easter and Pentecost this year, so let’s be intentional about our praying for it too.

We can pray individually or with a partner or in a prayer triplet, in person, by phone, or Zoom ... We can pray when we are walking, gardening, washing up ... as well as in a quiet time that we set aside.

We can pray that our worship of the Lord at St George’s will be so deep that anyone who comes in will be aware of being drawn into the Lord’s presence. That we will all find healing, peace, refreshment and restoration.

We can pray claiming the promises in the Bible, things like “God ... wants all people to be saved” and “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²⁷ There is no end to the ways we can pray. We just need to do it.

This morning, let’s each ask the Lord to show us if there is one more way or time that we can commit to spend in prayer, individually or joining with others, each week or each day, for 5 minutes or half an hour, or whatever the Lord lays on our hearts. And remember the bookmarks.

Let’s pray.

Our Father, we thank you for the great privilege that you give us, that through the Lord Jesus we have access to you to bring our praises, our concerns and our needs. Help us never to take this for granted, but help us to come to you faithfully, often and in all circumstances.



We remember that Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.”

We ask you today, “the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into your harvest field”, here at St George’s, across Tasmania and the rest of Australia.

We pray these things in the name of your Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen



28

²⁷ 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Matthew 28:18-20

²⁸ “The Lone Reaper” by Kristy Wherrett, 1989