

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
"Receiving Grace Through Prayer"
(Part II of "Awakened to Grace")
May 31, 2026

Scripture

Daniel 6:1-23
Luke 11:9-13

Core Idea and purpose

Core theological ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- (05/24/2026) Grace saves us from the guilt and power of sin

Core theological idea: When we pray, we 1) receive God's grace and 2) invite God to intervene in a given situation.

Challenge/purpose: To encourage people to pray with the expectation that God will answer

The Sermon

As followers of Jesus Christ, the most powerful thing we can do is pray. This, however, doesn't mean we should pray and not do anything else. God often uses prayer as a call to action. When we watch a news story about some great injustice, we pray about it and then write our congressional representatives, participate in a boycott or attend a non-violent protest. When we hear that someone we know is in the hospital, we pray about it and then visit that person. When a friend is facing financial hardship, we pray and then pull out our phones to send money through venmo. Oftentimes, however, there is nothing we can do to help - except pray. Well, that's when we remember that prayer is the most powerful thing we can do.

To fully appreciate why prayer is the most powerful activity ever conducted by humans, we must understand what it is. Many people think of prayer as communicating with God. This is a good way to understand it. When we think of prayer in this way, we must remember that effective communication occurs when all parties are talking **and** listening. We must learn to hear God's still small voice.

There is another understanding of prayer. We can think of prayer as 1) Receiving God's grace and 2) Requesting God's intervention. Let me say this again: We can think of prayer as 1) Receiving God's grace and 2) Requesting God's intervention.

Grace is God's unconditional love that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit. Remember Romans 5:5, "...hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been

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given to us.” This is grace and the hope and peace it gives us empower us to be the courageous and loving people God created us to be.

When we pray, we request God’s intervention in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. This could be a celebration. We should invite God as we celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and family gatherings. Of course, the situation to which we invite God could be a challenge or tragedy. We want God to help us out. Keep in mind, we are asking God to intervene and not simply to participate. This means God is in charge and we act in accordance with God’s loving will. The Lord is good, loving, just, and wise, so it is best for God to be in charge.

This combination of receiving God’s grace and asking God to intervene is what makes prayer so powerful. We see this happening in the model prayer given to us by our Savior & Lord, Jesus. Let’s take a close look at it.

- I. The Model Prayer’s beginning
 - A. The model prayer starts with, “Our Father...”
 - This acknowledges who we are addressing/worshipping.
 - What does it mean to address God as Father? How else might we address God?
 - B. The model prayer continues with, “...who art in heaven”
 - What comes to your mind when you make this comment about God?
 - This is saying something about the greatness of God. In the original Greek, the word “heaven’ is in the plural. It says “...who art in the heavens”. Hebrew tradition conceives of 3 or 7 levels of heaven, depending on which source you read. For the sake of this sermon, we’ll stick with the three levels. The first level is the earth’s atmosphere, where we find fog, birds, and clouds. The second level is space, where we find the sun, moon, planets, and stars. The third level is where we find the throne room of God and all the spiritual beings, such as angels. By saying, “...who art in the heavens” (plural), we are saying that God is everywhere and all around us in both the physical and spiritual world.
 - C. By acknowledging that we are speaking to God and declaring God’s greatness, we open our hearts to God’s grace. The model prayer then invites God’s intervention with 6 requests.
- II. The six requests
 - A. The model prayer’s first requests is, “Hallowed be thy name”.
 - What comes to your mind when you make this request?
 - When we say this, we are asking God for God’s name to be honored.

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- B. The model's prayer second request is, "Thy Kingdom come" and the third request is, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
 - The third request explains the second request.
 - What comes to your mind when you make these requests?
 - C. The fourth request is, "Give us this day, our daily bread".
 - What comes to your mind when you make this request?
 - We ask God to give us whatever we need to do God's loving will. Not too much or too little but just enough so we learn to depend on God.
 - D. The fifth request is, "Forgive us our trespasses [Some translations say sins or debts] as we forgive those who trespass against us."
 - What comes to your mind when you make this request?
 - E. Finally, the sixth request is, "and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."
 - What comes to your mind when you make this request?
 - We are asking God to empower and change our hearts so we do not fail to love God, neighbors, and self.
- III. The ending
- A. The model prayer ends with, "For thine is the kingdom, power, and glory for ever & ever. Amen."
 - What comes to your mind when you pray these words?
 - In Matthew and Luke, Jesus' model prayer does not have this ending. It was added by the church. (Our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters strictly adhere to Matthew and Luke by not saying this ending when they pray the model prayer.)

Jesus also talks about the dependability of prayer. In Luke 11, Jesus promises, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

When we ask, God will give us grace and intervene in our situation.

When we seek, we will find guidance, resolution, and grace. The guidance and resolution to our problem may not come right away, but they will come.

When we knock, the Lord will answer. God answers all prayers.

There's a country song by Garth Brooks called "Unanswered prayer". The main chorus is, "Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers. Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs. And just because He doesn't answer doesn't mean He don't care. 'Cause some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers" This is a great song, but it would be more theologically accurate if the lyrics said, "Sometimes I thank God for saying NO....And just because He says

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NO doesn't mean He don't care. 'Cause some of God's greatest gifts is when God says 'NO' Now, I don't know if that would sound good, but it would be more theologically accurate.

God listens to and answers all prayers and enjoys saying 'yes'. But, sometimes, because God loves us, God will say 'no' or 'not yet' and intervene in a different way. Remember, God knows what's best for us. On Halloween, when a kid wants to eat all his/her candy that night, the parents say, 'NO!' because they know better than the kid. In the same way, God knows what's best for us better than we do. Also remember, God considers the needs of everyone in each situation, not just your personal need. When a homeowner prays for sunny skies during his cookout & pool party, the farmer across town might be praying for an end to the drought. God may say 'no' to the homeowner and 'yes' to the farmer. Does that mean God loves the homeowner any less? Of course not.

When we pray, we can expect God to give us grace and intervene in the situation about which we are praying. We see this in the story about Daniel and the Lions' Den. Daniel was a praying man. Nothing would stop him from praying. At a minimum, he went to his upper room, faced east, towards Jerusalem, and prayed three times a day.

God showed Daniel favor by enabling him to move up in the ranks and become second to King Darius. Then some of the nobility became jealous and plotted against him. They knew he would never stop praying to God or pray to any other deity. So, they convinced King Darius to pass a law stating that everyone would pray only to King Darius for the next 30 days. If anyone was caught disobeying this law, the king's army would throw that person into the den of hungry lions.

Daniel, of course, ignored this law. He continued to pray 3 times a day. Scripture doesn't tell us exactly what Daniel prayed. But I can imagine Daniel praying something like, "O Lord, you are the mighty and sovereign God. By praying to you, I am putting my life at risk. Protect me, O Lord" or he may have prayed Psalm 7 which starts with, "I take refuge in you, Lord, My God. Save me from all who chase me! Rescue me!" By acknowledging that he was addressing the Sovereign Lord God, Daniel opened his heart to God's grace. By asking for God's protection, he invited God to intervene on his behalf. God did intervene. When the soldiers threw Daniel into the lions' den, God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths.

When I was a student pastor, I had a disagreement with the church council about a particular issue. We didn't get into a big argument, and we didn't yell at each other. We kept everything respectful and loving. But I thought the specific issue we were discussing was important and I was upset that there were members of

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the church council who disagreed with me. We were prepared to discuss and decide the issue at the next church council meeting. On the way to the meeting, I stopped my car and prayed about it. As I prayed, my mind went to Isaiah 6. In this passage, God tells the Prophet Isaiah to deliver God's message to the Israelites. God then tells him that most people will ignore him and his ministry will falter but that's ok because faithfulness to God is what is most important. I then realized that if the church council does not listen to me, that's ok, I just need to remain faithful to God.

In that situation, I opened my heart to God's grace when I stopped my car to pray. God intervened, not by following my wishes, but by changing my heart and perspective. God often intervenes, not by changing the situation, but by changing the prayer's heart and perspective.

Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do because when we pray, we receive God's grace and ask God to intervene.

So, let's pray.

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Outline

- I. As followers of Jesus Christ, the most powerful thing we can do is pray.
 - A. This, however, doesn't mean we should pray and not do anything else.
 - God often uses prayer as a call to action.
 - When we watch a news story about some great injustice, we pray about it and then write our congressional representatives, participate in a boycott or attend a non-violent protest.
 - When we hear that someone we know is in the hospital, we pray about it and then visit that person.
 - When a friend is facing financial hardship, we pray and then pull out our phones to send money through venmo.
 - B. Oftentimes, however, there is nothing we can do to help - except pray.
 - Well, that's when we remember that prayer is the most powerful thing we can do.
- II. To fully appreciate why prayer is the most powerful activity ever conducted by humans, we must understand what it is.
 - A. Many people think of prayer as communicating with God.
 - This is a good way to understand it.
 - However, when we think of prayer in this way, we must remember that effective communication occurs when all parties are talking **and** listening.
 - We must learn to hear God's still small voice.
 - B. There is another understanding of prayer. We can think of prayer as...
 - 1) Receiving God's grace
and
 - 2) Requesting God's intervention.
 - C. Let me say this again: We can think of prayer as

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- 1) Receiving God's grace
and
 - 2) Requesting God's intervention.
- D. Grace is God's unconditional love that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit.
- Remember Romans 5:5, "...hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."
 - This is grace and the hope and peace it gives us empower us to be the courageous and loving people God created us to be.
- E. When we pray, we request God's intervention in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in.
- This could be a celebration.
 - We should invite God as we celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and family gatherings.
 - This, of course, could also be a challenge or tragedy.
 - We want God to help us out.
 - Keep in mind, we are asking God to intervene and not simply to participate.
 - This means God is in charge and we act in accordance with God's loving will.
 - The Lord is good, loving, just, and wise, so it is best for God to be in charge.
- F. This combination of receiving God's grace and asking God to intervene is what makes prayer so powerful.
- We see this happening in the model prayer given to us by our Savior & Lord, Jesus.
 - Let's take a close look at it.

III. The Model Prayer

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A. The Model Prayer’s beginning

- The model prayer starts with, “Our Father...”
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- The model prayer continues with, “...who art in heaven”
 - What comes to your mind when you make this comment about God?
 - This is saying something about the greatness of God.
 - In the original Greek, the word “heaven’ is in the plural.
 - It says “...who art in the heavens”.
 - Hebrew tradition conceives of 3 or 7 levels of heaven, depending on which source you read.
 - For the sake of this sermon, we’ll stick with the three levels.
 - ✓ The first level is the earth’s atmosphere, where we find fog, birds, and clouds.
 - ✓ The second level is space, where we find the sun, moon, planets, and stars.
 - ✓ The third level is where we find the throne room of God and all the spiritual beings, such as angels.
 - By saying, “...who art in the heavens” (plural), we are saying that God is everywhere and all around us in both the physical and spiritual world.
- By acknowledging that we are speaking to God and declaring God’s greatness, we open our hearts to God’s grace. The model prayer then invites God’s intervention with 6 requests.

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B. The six requests of the Model prayer

- The model prayer’s first requests is, “Hallowed be thy name”.
 - What comes to your mind when you make this request?
 - When we say this, we are asking God for God’s name to be honored.
- The model’s prayer second request is, “Thy Kingdom come” and the third request is, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” then”
 - The third request explains the second request.
 - What comes to your mind when you make these requests?
- The fourth request is, “Give us this day, our daily bread”.
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C. The ending

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IV. Jesus also talks about the dependability of prayer.

- A. In Luke 11, Jesus promises, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”
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 - So, they convinced King Darius to pass a law stating that everyone would pray only to King Darius for the next 30 days.
 - If anyone was caught disobeying this law, the king’s army would throw that person into the den of hungry lions.
 - D. Daniel, of course, ignored this law.
 - He continued to pray 3 times a day.
 - Scripture doesn’t tell us exactly what Daniel prayed.

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- But I can imagine Daniel praying something like, "O Lord, you are the mighty and sovereign God. By praying to you, I am putting my life at risk. Protect me, O Lord"
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- he may have prayed Psalm 7 which starts with, "I take refuge in you, Lord, My God. Save me from all who chase me! Rescue me!"
- By acknowledging that he was addressing the Sovereign Lord God, Daniel opened his heart to God's grace.
 - By asking for God's protection, he invited God to intervene on his behalf.
 - God did intervene.
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VI. When I was a student pastor, I had a disagreement with the church council about a particular issue.

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- I then realized that if the church council does not listen to me, that's ok, I just need to remain faithful to God.

E. In this situation...

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- God often intervenes, not by changing the situation, but by changing the prayer's heart and perspective.

Let's pray.