

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**Lent 2026 ~ Deeply Transformed through PRAYER**  
**Lent 1 ~ Prayer: A Gospel Understanding**  
**Romans 5:1-11 Matthew 4:1-11**  
**February 22, 2026 – Rev'd Chris Johnson**

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Our theme this morning is prayer, so I want to begin with this prayer.

*Almighty God, without you we are unable to please you: mercifully grant us your Holy Spirit that we might learn how to pray aright, for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

How do you feel about prayer?

Is it something that is very natural to you or is it a struggle?

Is it a duty or a delight?

Have you had experiences in prayer where you have felt God so close, like there was just this thin veil between you and heaven; you could almost reach out and God was there. Maybe in a difficult situation you can testify to that peace which passes all understanding.

OR... Have you had experiences in prayer which are sometimes referred to as the dark night of the soul? Your experience has been more like Jesus' prayer on the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Have you experienced prayer as a struggle where the gates of heaven appeared to be firmly shut?

This Lent we want to explore prayer. Prayer that affects every aspect of our lives.

Prayer that affects those things which we usually think of as spiritual - scripture and worship. And prayer that affects those things we usually think of as practical, our bodies and service.

This week, however, to kick us off, our topic is 'Prayer - a Gospel Understanding'.

So how does the gospel inform our understanding of prayer? And why is Christian prayer distinctive? After all, lots of religions encourage their followers to pray. Prayer is universal. Muslims pray, Hindus pray, Buddhists pray. They even say that atheists in the trenches with bullets flying overhead, pray. The word prayer can be used in all sorts of ways without necessarily having any Christian understanding.

Many people have the idea that God is like an eternal ambulance. He should always be there 24/7 on tap; to answer us whenever we call in a crisis. So even people who don't have any faith, often will still call out in desperation, asking God to save them when they're in a pickle. So prayer is a universal instinct, but this is not necessarily Christian prayer.

It is the Gospel which defines prayer for Christians. And in the end, this is the only true understanding.

It starts in Genesis 1 and 2. We are made in the image of God which means we are capable of a relationship with God. We were made to know God, love God, enjoy walking with God in the garden of Eden and enjoy relationship with him forever.

In Genesis 3 we discover the relationship with God is broken. We have disobeyed God and there is now a great gulf between us and God. We were God's friends, but now we are enemies. We are living outside the garden in a land of thorns and thistles. We are cut off from God.

The Christian Gospel says the gulf between us and God has been mended through Jesus. Jesus death on the cross and rising on the third day provides the bridge for us to come back to God. By putting our faith in Jesus, we cross over from being God's enemies to being God's friends.

In Romans 5 this is described as being justified through faith. Justification simply means being put right with God.

Romans 5 spells out the implications of this –

- v1 we have peace with God
- v2 we have gained access into his grace
- v2 we have a hope of the glory of God
- vv3,4 we now know suffering has a purpose and if we persevere through it, we develop character and have hope.
- v10,11 we are reconciled to God

What an incredible list of blessings.

But you may well ask, 'What has that got to do with prayer? The answer is everything.

- It is only if these things are true that we can even have a relationship with God.
- It is only if these things are true that we can have the possibility of prayer.

As Romans 5 says, It is only through Jesus Christ that we have gained access into grace, in which we now stand. v2

It is only through Jesus Christ that we are reconciled to God. v's10 & 11

So prayer is not a right. It is an incredible privilege; possible only because of grace, the grace we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Some people think that it is prayer which gives them their relationship with God. No, it is actually Jesus who gives us a relationship with God, and prayer is simply our grateful response.

We don't have a relationship with God because we pray.

We have a relationship with God because of Jesus.

Prayer is our grateful response.

So what often goes by the name of prayer is not necessarily prayer at all. It may be wishful thinking, a cry of desperation, trying to earn credit points with the Divine maybe, or a technique to find peace. There are all sorts of reasons people might "pray".

True prayer must have Jesus Christ at the centre and the reconciliation he brings. So I hope you can grasp the uniqueness of a Christian, of a gospel, understanding of prayer.

Next, I want you to think about the story of Jesus in the wilderness wrestling with the devil. It is important to understand this passage in the context of the rest of the scriptures. Jesus is here doing what humanity failed to do in the garden of Eden.

In the Garden, Adam and Eve listened to the devil, believed his lies and gave into temptation. In the wilderness, Jesus likewise engages with the devil, but exposes his lies and resists temptation. Jesus' obedience stands in the place Adam's disobedience.

The Apostle Paul puts this way in Romans 5:19, “*Just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) many will be made righteous.*”

Again, this is the only way we can have a relationship with God. It is through Jesus.

So are you grasping the uniqueness of the gospel understanding of prayer? Never take prayer for granted. It is an incredible privilege to be given access to our holy God through the obedience of Jesus.

In **Vision 26** we set ourselves some goals in the area of personal Prayer and Bible reading. The key one is this.

*Living to love and proclaim Jesus we will keep a daily time for prayer and Bible reading for spiritual growth.*

Probably the most basic spiritual discipline is Daily Prayer. By this I mean a focused time of stepping aside from regular activity and simply being still before God. To give this prayer time focus I believe the Bible is essential. Reading a passage from the Bible helps us to focus on the God we are praying to. It is good to read a cross-section of scripture, Gospel, Epistle, Old Testament. Read them all through the lens of following Jesus. I’m not saying you have to have a reading from each, every time you pray; simply make sure over a period of time you cover all the word of God.

There are some great Bible reading plans out there and many of them with notes to help you understand each passage you read. My preference is Scripture Union notes, and Lynda and I personally use the **Encounter with God** notes put out by Scripture Union. But there are many online options as well.

I encourage you to use notes that take you back to the Bible. There are notes that can be quite helpful and good to read for their own sake but make sure you also have notes that help you understand the **Bible passage** for the day and let God speak to you through the **Bible**, not the notes.

It is good **not** to get hooked on any one writer or preacher, and that includes myself or any one of the clergy in the parish. Reading a variety of commentators will give you a bigger perspective on the Bible. Always come back to the Bible, let God speak to you through his word rather than a commentator.

Vision 26 encourages us to keep a prayer diary. This is about having a notebook where we write down the things we’re praying for. How often have you said to someone - I’ll pray for you and then you’ve forgotten?

A prayer diary is where you write their name down so that you don’t forget. If I didn’t have a prayer diary, I would forget half the things I’m supposed to be praying for. So keep a personal prayer diary.

But there are published prayer diaries as well. Every week in E-News we publish a list of things to pray for, for our own church, for our country, for situations in the world.

There is a PDF version which we do every week. Click on the link and you can print it out and put it beside your Bible.

There are Prayer Diaries published by the various mission agencies. Let me show you a few – CMS, BCA. Go online and you can get the most prayer points from any Christian organisation you want to pray for.

## Personal Growth Plan

I now want to explain the Personal Growth Plan to you.

The Personal Growth Plan is about adopting spiritual disciplines that point us to Christ. It is about setting yourself some goals so that you might be a more faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. Simple as that.

This leaflet gives you some ideas of where you could set those goals.

There are two main sections grouped around our 1. vision, 2. values and 3. theme for 2026.

On the left-hand side is

- our vision Living to love Jesus,
- our values Christ-centred and Bible-based, and
- our theme for this year Deeply Transformed.

This is the inward journey. This is about loving Jesus for his own sake, simply wanting to spend time in various exercises to get to know him better and allowing space for him to minister to you.

On the right hand side is

1. our Vision Living to proclaim Jesus, and
2. our values Spirit-led, Mission-shaped, and
3. our theme for this year Serving Together.

This is the outward journey.

This is about service, this is about allowing space for the Holy Spirit to lead you into servant ministry.

So with the inward journey you could set yourself some goals in those areas in the thought bubbles.

- For example, under Worship you may currently be a monthly worshipper, and now you want to commit to weekly.
- Or maybe you are someone who simply prays when you feel like it but now you commit to a specific time each day to open your Bible and spend some time with Jesus.
- Or fasting maybe one, two or three meals a week. One caution with that is to make sure you are medically fit to do it.
- Or maybe you want to set a new goal in your financial giving to God's work?
- What about exercise, going for a walk every day. You could make it a prayer walk?

And then Serving Together. (the second page)

- Under Relationships  
What is an act of love that would bless your family, bless a friend, bless an enemy? Ask Jesus to show you what it is.
- Ask God to show you your spiritual gift. Experiment. Use it.
- Under witness, you might want to set a goal to make more non-Christian friends.
- What about a goal to take a special interest in one of our link missionaries or one of the agencies? You could write to the missionary and let them know you're praying for them and that you're a member of Noosa Anglican.

Lots of ideas there.

Note the insert where you can write down your goals.

I commend to you the setting up a personal growth plan in this year of being deeply transformed serving together.

The Puritans had a very good motto – **Pray until you Pray.**

This is about persistence in prayer. Jesus said, “*Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open to you.*” Sometimes God seems hidden and out of reach, but it is persistence that reaps rewards. And by this I mean the reward of simply knowing God.

Prayer can be like the dry crusty old sponge that you put in a bucket of water. At first it resists the water, in fact he could float on top of the water for quite a while; but slowly and surely it absorbs the water, but then it gets to a point where it quickly soaks up the water and is completely filled with the water.

We have to pray until we pray.

This means taking time to let the revs come down. Cutting through the busyness of our lives until we are quiet enough to hear the still small voice.

Our praying can sometimes be like the naughty child who rings the front doorbell of the houses in the neighbourhood, but then runs away before anyone answers. We need to take time to slow down and to be still if we are to hear the voice of God.

Often our business is simply a way of convincing ourselves we are important, our lives are significant.

But a Gospel understanding will lead us to find our significance in God and God alone. Robert Murray McCheyne said, “What a man is alone on his knees before God, that he is and no more.”

We draw our significance from being

- made in the image of God,
- being justified by grace,
- having access through the death of Jesus,
- having the gift of the Holy Spirit to be the sons and daughters of God.

We therefore should delight to sit in God’s presence and enjoy the relationship.

“Who we are alone on our knees before God, is who we are and no more”.

We have to pray until we pray.

Let us pray...

*Almighty and everlasting God,  
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray,  
and give more than either we desire or deserve:  
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,  
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid,  
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask,  
save through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen*