

**‘Hear Our Prayer’**  
**Lent Course 2025 Session 5**  
**Daniel – Constant Prayer**

Welcome to the fifth and final session of our Lent Course, Hear our Prayer. I hope that in the past four sessions you have thought about how you can strengthen your personal and communal life of prayer and how you can pray with greater ambition. I hope you have also gained some sense of the power of what you do when you pray as you unleash into the world the hope of the resurrection.

We are going to end up with another great prayer warrior of the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel. And as we do so our final theme will be constancy in prayer.

Imagine your life were in mortal danger. Imagine you were a passenger on a hijacked plane, or a prisoner of conscience, or part of a persecuted church. What would that do to your life of prayer? I suspect it would go one of two ways. You may just be too terrified to pray and would have to rely on the prayers of others. Or fear might motivate you to get on your knees and pray with real fervency. I remember listening to a long interview by Terry Waite, a Christian who spent four years as a hostage in Lebanon. He said he couldn't trust himself to pray in his heart because he would sink into self-pity. So he prayed the prayers he remembered from being a choir boy: psalms and hymns and the prayers of the BCP. Terry Waite had a pattern of prayer that was well established, and so in danger he had something he could fall back on,

Which is the experience of Daniel. The prophet Daniel lived during the years when many of the Jews were held as captives in Babylon following the fall of the City of Jerusalem in 597 BC and his skills and intelligence meant he rose to a powerful position at the heart of the life of the state. That placed him in danger and constantly he was in situations where it would have been much easier for him to renounce his faith and the practices it entailed.

A particularly good example comes in Chapter 6 which is all about the god one should pray to. The subjects of King Darius grow jealous of Daniel's superior skills and abilities and set a trap by persuading the king to pass a law that stated that the only person anyone should pray to was the King himself. Anyone who prayed to a god other than the King would be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel prayed only to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and so this cunning law placed him mortal danger.

He could of course simply have stopped praying, or prayed in secret. But not Daniel. He is proud of his faith and continues to pray openly and publicly three times a day. He maintains the routines and disciplines of his spiritual life by praying constantly. And it is that constant prayer that saves him. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, but instead of being torn apart by the wild animals, he is saved by the action of God. Daniel was faithful to God in prayer and so God was faithful to Daniel. It was those who plotted against him who found themselves eaten by the beasts.

Daniel teaches us about the power of constant and disciplined prayer under all circumstances, and that when you have a pattern of prayer, it will be robust enough to see you through any of life's changes or dangers. And in the same way Jesus offers plenty of teaching about the need for constancy in prayer.

There is a good example of this is in Luke Chapter 18. I sometimes think that we read the scriptures with such serious voices and long faces that we lose the humour that Jesus uses to make serious points, and this chapter feature characters who could have been lifted straight from a comedy sketch.

Jesus summons up in our imaginations a judge who has no respect for God or for people. But he meets his match in a determined widow who simply will not be silenced. She keeps going back again and again to this miserable judge who eventually backs down and grants her what she wishes. If an unjust judge relents, Jesus says, how much more will the God who loves you listen when you pray? Then he concludes, when

the Son of Man comes will he find any faith on earth? Be persistent, pray with faith, don't give up Jesus is saying.

Let's be clear, all prayer is good and powerful and effective. But there are massive benefits in constancy in prayer, in persistent prayer, and carrying on praying whatever the odds. I use the church's Office of Morning and Evening Prayer as the heart of my prayer life. I know I am just going to say it, whatever happens. There are times when, to be honest that prayer feel dry and unrewarding, when God feels miles away, and there are times when it is a total and complete delight. Whatever, I just carry on and get it prayed, and the more I do so the more I am aware that it is when prayer feels hardest that God often uses us most powerfully as prophets of hope.

The word 'discipline' is one that has a poor reputation these days. We tend to associate it with getting told off in school, being made to stand against walls or write out 100 times, "I will not pick my nose with Mr Ridge's pen lid," which did once actually happen to me. But discipline comes from the same word as 'disciple' and a disciple is one who learns through prayer. So discipline in the life of prayer is not something to be afraid of. Rather it is the vehicle by which we can pray constantly and persistently as Jesus asks us to do.

When I look back to the major periods of revival in the history of the church in the west every, single one of them has been hallmarked by small groups of Christians bringing persistence and determination to the life of prayer. The massive fourth century expansion of the church was the time when many Christians went into the desert, alone or in community to offer their whole lives to prayer. In the middle ages the Franciscans and then the Dominicans brought tremendous revival by giving people new ways to pray, especially the poor. The renewals brought by Methodism, the Oxford Movement and the Evangelical Revival were characterised by huge commitment to spiritual discipline and constant prayer.

So as this course reaches its conclusion, I want to invite you to reflect on what it would mean in your own life to pray constantly. When this session ends, you could of course resume your life exactly as it was five weeks ago. Or this could be the start of a fuller and much richer life of prayer, one that will change not just your life but the lives of those around you. So why not set for yourself a new rhythm or rule of prayer?

The rhythm of prayer that you set for yourself will be unique to you. It will depend on your other commitments, on the nature of your family life, on whether you work or are retired and on the state of your health. It will also depend on personality and character. The way men pray can be very different from the way women pray. The prayer life of someone with a neurodivergence will again differ markedly from that of others. So your rhythm of prayer will be yours and not someone else's. This is not a competition to see who can be the most holy!

In the notes with this course, there is a very simple template that you might like to use to set a rhythm for constant prayer. But before you fill it in, let me go through what it will ask you to consider.

First, when will you pray communally? Remember attendance at a weekly act of worship, for most people on Sunday, is the very heart of the Christian life. This is where loads of the praying is going to get done in company with others, and it is virtually impossible to maintain patterns of personal prayer without worship at the heart of your life. So this goes first into a rhythm of prayer. Likewise under communal prayer, being part of a prayer group or small group would fit in to your rhythm at this point.

Second, when will your times of personal prayer be? Morning? Midday? Evening? Late at night? In the monastic tradition the times of prayer are the fixed point around which everything else is built. It is a way of hallowing the day and setting all time apart as sacred to God. Most of you are not monks and nuns. However there is rich wisdom in setting apart a time each day to pray, even if you can't always stick with it. So when will it be?

Third, what structure are you going to use in those times of prayer? Remember there is huge choice and whilst you shouldn't change constantly, there is nothing wrong with keeping it fresh. You might use some of the wonderful apps that are available such as Pray as you Go, Lectio 365, Universalis or Daily Prayer. You might work your way through a book of the Bible as a springboard to prayer. You might set your own pattern of prayer. You might pray the Rosary. Look around and find what is best for you.

And then, as you make this Rhythm, bear in mind the following questions:

First, where will there be space for the following types of prayer?

**Thanksgiving.** In a world of entitlement, developing an attitude of gratitude changes the way we relate to everything and everyone. Make plenty of space simply to give thanks to God for what he has given you, because everything we have and are is gift from him.

**Confession.** Turning back to God regularly to confess sin, seek a new start and acknowledge our dependence in him is a critical part of prayer. It opens up our hearts to receive and frees us up to serve.

**Intercession.** Ask and you will receive, Jesus says. Make some space to pray with ambition, asking God to change his world and bring in his Kingdom.

The second question is this: How will you make space to listen to God as well as to speak to him?

Good prayer is conversation, yet so often our prayer bombards God with words and with demands. Remember from time to time, just be still, empty your mind and listen. The most powerful way God speaks to us in this way is in his Word, and phrases and expressions will often leap off the page because that is what God wants to say to you at that moment. But there are many other ways of listening and hearing what God has to say. One is pure, simple, sustained silence.

The third question is this: How will you be accountable for your life of prayer?

It is easy to set a Rhythm of prayer but much easier to let it slip! I wonder if that's why, just after teaching about persistence in prayer, Jesus asks if the Son of Man will find any faith on earth? So being accountable to someone else is a very good way of keeping you're praying going, especially if it is someone who can bring new ideas and freshness. That accountability may lay within a small group. It may come from your Vicar or a member of the clergy. Or you may want to use a Spiritual Director. Whatever you do, it is really good practice to have someone you can speak to about your life of prayer and where you are with God.

If we had any idea at all of the power we unleash when we pray, we would never get off our knees! You might be rich or powerful or influential, but whatever role you occupy, nothing you can ever achieve in this life can compare with what you do when you pray. Our prayers shakes the world to its foundations and brings heaven to earth. So get praying. Enjoy it. Pray persistently, pray expectantly. And see how God uses your life to bring joy and hope breaking into his world.