

Prayer: The Cinderella of the Church

Luke 22:39–46

Most of us are familiar with the Cinderella story—a tale of disdain for true beauty and worth, yet full of power, promise, and ultimate transformation. She’s the one who belongs at the center of the ball, yet she’s neglected, pushed aside, dressed in rags while her stepsisters flaunt their finery and steal the spotlight.

I want to suggest to you this morning that prayer is the Cinderella in many churches today. It is beautiful, powerful, essential to everything God wants to do among us and through us. But too often, it’s unappreciated, neglected, and relegated to the corners while flashier things take center stage—dynamic preaching, exciting programs, cutting-edge music, strategic planning, and the latest church-growth tactics.

Leonard Ravenhill put it perfectly in *Why Revival Tarries*:

“The Cinderella of the Church today is the prayer meeting. This handmaid of the Lord is unloved and unwooed because she is not dripping with pearls of intellectualism, nor glamorous with the silks of philosophy; neither is she enchanting with the tiara of psychology. She wears the homespuns of sincerity and humility and so is not afraid to kneel! The offense of prayer is that it does not essentially tie in to mental efficiency (or boosting our ego)...Prayer is conditioned to one thing alone, and that is to spirituality.”

You don’t need to be truly spiritual to preach, or to lead worship with beautiful music, or to post inspirational messages on social media. A sharp mind, charisma, talent, and a good platform can carry you far in those things. They can move people, build crowds, and feel impressive in the moment. But only prayer moves God. Only prayer reaches into eternity.

Yet here we are, we’ve adorned everything else with jewels and silk, but left prayer—the sincere, humble, kneeling handmaid—in the ashes.

Main Idea

Brothers and sisters, prevailing prayer (and this is the main idea) is not optional or occasional—it is a disciplined lifeline marked by rhythm, raw honesty, resistance to temptation, surrender of will, and renewal in God’s strength.

To unfold this truth, we’re going to look closely at the prayer lives of Jesus and Daniel—who both faced unimaginable pressure, and discovered what prevailing prayer looks like.

We’ll begin with the supreme example: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46). On the night He would be betrayed, facing the darkest hour any human has ever known, Jesus didn’t treat prayer as an afterthought. It was His lifeline—the place where He received the strength to drink the cup of God’s justifiable wrath for us.

Just hours earlier, Jesus had told Peter, *“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”* Now, facing His own ultimate trial, the great Intercessor pours out His soul in prayer and receives heavenly strength—just as He prayed Peter would.

I. Prevailing Prayer Has a Rhythm

To begin, prevailing prayer has a rhythm. It’s habitual and disciplined, not sporadic or only reserved for a crisis.

Look at Jesus in Luke 22:39: *“And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.”*

Prayer wasn’t something Jesus squeezed in when He had time. It was His custom—His regular place, His regular practice. Even on the night He would be betrayed, He went to His usual spot to pray.

We see this same rhythm in another saint who faced intense adversity: Daniel.

Daniel was a Jewish exile who had risen to one of the highest positions in the Babylonian (and later Persian) empire because of his

extraordinary integrity and wisdom. But that excellence stirred deadly jealousy among the other officials. They could find no fault in his work or character, so they devised a wicked trap: they persuaded the king to sign a decree that for thirty days no one could pray to any god or man except the king himself or face being thrown into a den of lions.

When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he didn't panic, compromise, or hide. He went home, opened his windows toward Jerusalem—and got down on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks to God, “as he had done previously” (Daniel 6:10) or had always done.

This wasn't a sudden burst of desperation. Prayer wasn't a last resort for Daniel. It was his first and continual resource—built into the rhythm of his life long before the crisis hit.

Church, if we pray only when we're in trouble, we're in trouble. The time to build the rhythm is now—scheduled, consistent, non-negotiable. Set a time, a place, a frequency. Make it your custom, like Jesus. Make it your daily discipline, like Daniel.

II. Prevailing Prayer Is Real and Raw

But rhythm alone isn't enough. Beyond consistent habits, prevailing prayer is real and raw. It's not polished or pretentious; it's earnest and honest before a loving Father.

In the garden, Jesus doesn't recite a tidy liturgy. Verse 44 tells us: *“And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”* He cries out, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me”* (verse 42). This is the Son of God in deep distress, pouring out His soul.

Why such agony? Why did the eternal Son—who just hours earlier had calmly declared, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”* (Luke 22:20)—now recoil in horror?

Because this cup was no mere metaphor for suffering or death. It was the cup of God's wrath—brewing with the concentrated filth of human sin and divine judgment.

As Kent Hughes powerfully explains, Jesus' plea to "remove this cup from me" was grounded in His absolute sinless purity. How could the Holy One, who knew no sin, bear to become sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21)? How could He—who had enjoyed eternal, unbroken fellowship with the Father—endure the wrath we deserved, the forsakenness that sin demands? The cup was so awful, so fearful, so dreadful, so unbearable, so appalling, so horrendous that Jesus' soul was revulsed and convulsed. Every fiber of His being rose up against it. In His true humanity, He genuinely desired—if there was any other way—to avoid the shame of the cross, the alienation, the wrath. Yet in perfect obedience, He bowed: *"Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* (v.42)

Jesus was caught between two proper desires: the natural, human longing to avoid death and wrath, and the supreme desire to do the Father's will, whatever the cost. He chose the best—with complete sincerity, knowing exactly what it meant. This was not ignorant bravado like Peter displayed nor pretense. Just raw, reverent submission.

And don't miss this: His prayer was heard—not by removing the cup, but by strengthening Him to drink it.

Reflecting on Gethsemane, the author of Hebrews explains: *"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence"* (Hebrews 5:7).

The Father answered by sustaining the Son through the horror—for our sake.

Beloved, this agony was caused by our sin. The wrath He faced was the wrath we deserved. He drank the cup of forsakenness so that we could drink the cup of communion with the Father. He was cut off so

that we could draw near—boldly, confidently, into the very presence of God (Hebrews 4:16; Ephesians 3:12).

How, then, can we neglect prayer?

The access we enjoy—the intimacy, the hearing of His voice, the fellowship—cost Jesus everything. To treat prayer casually, to push Cinderella back into the ashes, is to undervalue the infinite price that was paid.

The deepest way we show our gratitude for Gethsemane is not merely to pray more, but to pray with delight—to fully enjoy the gift He suffered so much to give us. When we come to the Father raw and real, pouring out our hearts, surrendering our will, we honor the agony of the Son. We declare, “This access is worth everything—because it cost You everything.”

We see this same rawness in Daniel—not just in the quiet consistency of chapter 6, but even more vividly in the anguished prayer of chapter 9. There, with his people still in exile and Jerusalem in ruins, Daniel pours out a prayer of deep lament and confession:

“I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, ‘O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules... O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name’”
(Daniel 9:4-5, 19).

Here is a heart broken over sin and the dishonor of God’s name—raw, reverent anguish that seeks God’s face more than His hand. Like Jesus in the garden, Daniel brings the full weight of his grief and desperation to God, trusting that God welcomes brutal honesty from a contrite heart.

This is the beauty of biblical lament: it refuses to let feelings become the final counselor. It brings every dark emotion—abandonment, confusion, sorrow—to the throne, knowing God is big enough to handle it. True intimacy with God flows from praying always, about everything—not just in crisis, but in worship, confession, thanksgiving, and even anguished lament. Raw honesty is the doorway to healing.

Bring your anger, your fear, your doubt, your “How long, O Lord?”—bring it all, like Jesus did in Gethsemane, like Daniel did in his upper room. God invites our real emotions, our pleas, our struggles. He doesn’t want performative prayer; He wants intimacy.

Raw honesty in prayer is where we deepen our relationship with Him.

Yet how different this is from much of what passes for prayer today. Too often our prayers are flippant, casual, hurried—tossed up like a quick texts message, expecting instant replies without awe, without cost, without surrender. Such lightness conveys something dangerous: that we have forgotten the holiness of God, the horror of sin, and the infinite price Jesus paid in Gethsemane for the privilege of drawing near.

Beloved, if prayer has become casual for us, it’s time to return to the garden—to the raw, reverent anguish of Jesus and Daniel. That’s where true power is found.

III. Prevailing Prayer Resists Temptation

And this kind of prayer does something powerful—prevailing prayer also resists temptation.

Jesus warned His disciples twice in this passage: “*Pray that you may not enter into temptation*” (verses 40 and 46). But what did they do? They slept. And soon after, they all fell away. Peter denied the Lord three times, just as He predicted.

The tragic irony is this: when prayer is neglected, even the closest followers of Jesus become vulnerable to temptation and collapse

under pressure. But when prayer is embraced as a lifelong rhythm, we are able to withstand the pressure no matter how fierce the opposition.

That's precisely what we see in Daniel.

Daniel's enemies knew prayer was the one area he would never compromise. That's why they built their trap around it—because a man whose prayer life is strong and consistent is unbreakable everywhere else.

Samuel Chadwick, captured the spiritual reality behind this:

“The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

Beloved, a strong prayer rhythm is our primary defense against temptation, compromise, and spiritual failure. When we're weak in prayer, we're vulnerable everywhere else. But when we pray faithfully, we arm ourselves with God's strength.

IV. Prevailing Prayer Realigns Our Will with God's

And at the very heart of this kind of prayer is surrender—prevailing prayer realigns our will with God's.

Jesus prays, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done”* (v.42). In that moment of agony, prayer bends His human will to the Father's perfect plan.

We see the same heart in Daniel's prayers—especially in chapter 9, where reverence, confession, and passionate pleading for God's glory overflow. Daniel isn't just asking for personal rescue; he's seeking God's face, longing for God's purposes to prevail, aligning himself fully with God's covenant promises.

Prayer doesn't bend God to our will; it bends us to His. It shifts us from "my way" to "Thy way." And that's where true peace and power come from.

V. Prevailing Prayer Renews and Reassures Us

Finally, prevailing prayer renews and reassures us with heavenly strength.

Notice that after Jesus prayed more earnestly, we read in verse 43, *"There appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him"* (verse 43). It's important to note here that the angel was not sent to remove the cup or spare Jesus the suffering, but to give Him strength to endure it—to drink it fully for our sake.

Again, there's a striking parallel here in Daniel's experience. In Daniel 10, we learn that when Daniel set his heart to seek God in prolonged anguish, fasting, and praying for twenty-one days, an angelic messenger was dispatched on the very first day in direct response to his words (Daniel 10:12). Yet the answer was delayed by spiritual warfare in the unseen realm. When the angel finally breaks through, he reveals the cosmic battle that Daniel's prayer had ignited.

Beloved, when we pray, far more is happening than we can see. Angels are dispatched, battles are fought in heavenly places, and the invisible realm profoundly shapes the visible one.

If we could see with our own eyes the angels dispatched, the battles ignited, and the heavenly forces mobilized by our prayers—just as Daniel's were—we'd be blown away. And prayer would never again be something we squeeze in; it would become our lifeline.

Yet we don't need to see the angels or the battles to believe—God calls us to take Him at His word.

As Paul reminds us, *"we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness"* (Ephesians 6:12).

Our primary weapon in this warfare is prayer—praying at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18).

And let's be clear: praying in the Spirit is not limited to (nor primarily about) speaking in tongues, as some falsely claim. It is praying in alignment with God's heart, will, and purposes—prayers ignited by His Word and guided by His Spirit. This is precisely what we see in Jesus, whose anguished prayer perfectly reflected the Father's redemptive plan. This is what we see in Daniel, whose 21-day anguish was sparked by the revelation of Scripture (Jeremiah's prophecy) and moved heaven to act for God's glory and the restoration of his people.

When we pray this way—aligned with God's revealed will—mountains move in the unseen realm, and breakthrough comes in ours.

Consistent, prevailing prayer brings supernatural strength, God's guarding peace, and ultimate vindication.

Conclusion

Beloved, prayer remains the Cinderella of the church because it demands humility, sincerity, and time—things our fast-paced, performance-driven culture (and often our churches) undervalue.

But what if we revived her? What if we made prayer the center again?

How do we best honor the agony of Gethsemane—the cup Jesus drank so we could draw near to the Father?

Not by neglecting prayer or turning it into a heavenly intercom to call our butler for personal wishes—but by giving ourselves wholly to it: delighting in the communion He purchased at infinite cost, taking on the Father's heart, and receiving His strength to live for His glory—especially as we pass the faith to the next generation.

As Leonard Ravenhill vividly put it:

“The birth of a natural child is predated by months of burden and days of travail; so is the birth of a spiritual child.”

Think about this: most of Jesus’ disciples were very young men—likely in their teens or early twenties—when they began following Him. Jesus invested years teaching them, urging them, and modeling prayer for them, knowing they would carry the gospel to the next generation. Daniel and his three friends were also mere youths—teenagers—when torn from their homes and taken into exile in Babylon. Yet through disciplined, faithful prayer, they overcame unimaginable pressure, preserved their faith, and passed it on—even influencing the wise men, the Magi, who centuries later followed the star to worship the child King.

As the Psalmist prays in Psalm 145:6, “One generation shall commend your works to another”—that’s the heartbeat of the faith.

That’s why I’m excited to announce that beginning Monday, January 5th, our church is launching **21 Days of Prayer for the Next Generation**. We’ll be using a powerful new resource from Strategic Renewal by that same title.

As they describe it:

“21 Days of Prayer for the Next Generation is a pathway to begin a fresh movement of lifetime engagement with the students, young adults, and children in your church and community. As you will be equipped to pray from the writings and prayers of a multigenerational team of authors, you will be inspired to more intentionally and fervently join the Lord in His work among, in, and through the next generation so that Jesus’ church is built, His kingdom expands, and His glory fills the earth!”

This 21 days of prayer devotional for the Next Generation will be available at the connection counter. I urge every one of us—parents, grandparents, singles, empty-nesters—to join in. Let’s follow the example of Jesus and Daniel: investing in the young through fervent, prevailing prayer.

Will you become a man or woman like Daniel—faithful in rhythm, raw in honesty and lament, aligned with God's heart in the unseen battle? Will you follow the custom of Jesus—praying through anguish to victory?

I urge you: Make prayer your daily rhythm. Pray real and raw prayers. Let prayer resist temptation in your life, realign your will to God's, and renew your strength for whatever lions lie ahead—especially as we intercede for the next generation.

Commit today to a specific prayer rhythm—time, place, frequency. And mark your calendar for January 5th. Seek His face daily. Watch God dispatch angels, fight unseen battles, shut the mouths of lions, strengthen you in your Gethsemane moments, awaken the next generation, and exalt His name through your life.