

*You Can Get There from Here*  
*All Access Pass: A Series on Prayer*  
*Hebrews 10:19-22*  
*March 1, 2009*

Today we begin a series of messages on the subject of prayer that will lead us through the season of Lent. Maybe you are thinking that you already know what prayer is and how to do it. Maybe you think you already know everything you need to know about prayer. But I suspect not. I suspect that even the most devoted, Christ-centered saints among us sometimes feel like amateurs in the arena of prayer. Prayer is at once, I think, one of the most basic practices of the Christian life, and one of the most mind-boggling. Prayer is – after all – simple: It is – quite simply – conversation with God. That’s it. Conversation – with – God. But that’s why it’s also mind-boggling: Because it is conversation – *with God*. We often have too small a concept of prayer, I think. “Let’s have a little prayer.” I’ve said this before: There are no “little” prayers. Because when we pray, we are speaking with a big God.

One writer has said this about prayer: “...prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you can’t imagine.”<sup>1</sup> Some of you came forward last week during worship to commit or re-commit yourselves to practices that would help you to grow in your relationship with God. One of the most catalytic practices in which you can engage for growth in your spiritual life is prayer. That’s why we are spending these next five weeks focusing on it. If you will commit to the practice of a daily time with God in prayer, *you will be changed* – in ways you can’t even imagine. If you will commit to the practice of a daily time with God in prayer, *your relationship with God will grow* – in ways you can’t even imagine.

Lent is a particularly good time to focus on prayer, I think, because Lent is meant to be a season of self-examination and reflection on one’s relationship with God. Since at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian church has observed the season of Lent – a season of 40 days, not counting Sundays, that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the day before Easter. There are traditionally three purposes for the season of Lent: 1) For new believers, Lent is a time of preparation for baptism through a period of instruction in what it means to follow Jesus. 2) For those who are Christ-followers, it is a time to review and renew their commitment to Christ. 3) For those who have fallen away or wandered away, it is a time to be restored to faith and fellowship with God.

If you are a new believer, or if you are at the point in your journey where you are exploring Christ, we hope you will embrace these weeks as a season of instruction in the ways of prayer. If you are already a follower of Jesus, we hope you will use these weeks as a time to review your commitment to Jesus and renew what has become, perhaps, old and stale, especially in regard to prayer. If you are someone who has fallen away or wandered away or even run away from God, I pray that this will be a season for you to *reconnect with God*, and most especially, through prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, p. 60.

Have you ever come to a door or a sign that says: “STOP! No entry beyond this point”? Maybe at the airport or the hospital. When I go to conferences, I usually get a name tag like this one. The tag shows that I am a fully registered participant and am allowed to enter the various conference venues. I can attend the plenary sessions and the workshops, the meals and the special events. The tag says I’ve paid my registration fee and so I am allowed to enter. I have access to the conference and all that it includes. The tag is my all-access pass. Here’s what I really want us to get over these next five weeks: We have an all-access pass into the presence of God.

Now, our Scripture text today is not one I ever really thought was about prayer. It does not mention prayer specifically. But what I learned when I studied it got me so excited, I had to share it with you. What I found here is the source of the title for our series: *All-Access Pass*. [Bibles, note sheets]

Hebrews 10:19-22: “Therefore, brothers [and sisters]...” Okay, we have to stop right there. First of all, remember that whenever you see the word “Therefore,” you have to ask “What’s the ‘therefore,’ there for?” The writer of Hebrews has just spend 9 ½ chapters talking doctrine – *what* they should believe and *why* they should believe it. The author of this letter was writing primarily to Jewish converts who were quite familiar with the Old Testament and the system of sacrifices that defined Jewish worship and their life with God. He has written that, just as the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place in the Temple with the blood of the sacrifice to secure forgiveness of the people’s sins, so has Jesus, our High Priest, gone into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the sacrifice – His own blood. The writer says that “He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered himself.” He says that “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

“Therefore...” Now, he turns to the “so what?” of the doctrine. So what should we *do* as a result of believing that Jesus died for our sins so that we might be forgiven? “This is what you *believe*, now let’s look at how what you *believe* affects how you *behave*.” You see, your doctrine must always affect your deeds. What you believe will always impact how you behave. If it doesn’t, you might ask yourself if you really believe what you say you believe.

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most Holy Place...” This is where I really started to get excited. “The most Holy Place” is the ‘holy of holies’ in the tabernacle or the Temple, the place of God’s presence. It was so holy, it was hidden behind a curtain, where only the High Priest could go, and he could go there only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Beyond the curtain in the holy of holies was the ark of the covenant. This was the place God had said He would meet personally with Moses. It was the very place that God’s presence was made known.

“...since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place...” KJV: “Having boldness to enter...” NLT: “we can boldly enter heaven’s most Holy Place...” Here’s what this means: the Greek word used here which is translated ‘confidence’ or ‘boldness’ means ‘freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech; speaking frankly, openly without ambiguity; free and fearless confidence; the right to say *anything*. Friends, this passage is about *prayer*. The writer is saying that we can go right into the very presence of God – the Holy of holies – without

reservation, without pause or fear, we can speak openly and honestly with God about anything and everything. We have the *right* to say anything to God.

Here's why I got so excited about this word: People very often tell me they feel unsure about *how* to pray, what words to use or not use. Some think there are special words for prayer, an esoteric language of some kind that they do not know. People sometimes think there are certain things they shouldn't pray for, are unsure about whether or not they should ask God for this or that, tell God they are angry or upset or broken-hearted. One writer has translated the verse this way: "since we have authorization for free access..." We are authorized to freely access God *just as we are*. We have the right to say *anything*. Free and fearless confidence to come into the presence of God. Free and fearless confidence. I love that!

Then there are those who believe that this kind of "free access" is available – but not for them. Their sin is too big, their failures are too many and too frequent. Not so. This Scripture teaches that we have freedom to speak frankly with God. Free access to God. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. "...we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place *by the blood of Jesus*." The high priest entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sacrifice, very often a lamb, as commanded by God. We can boldly enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus. You see, what matters is not who *you* are or have been or what *you* have done, what matters is who Jesus is and what He has done.

Heb. 10:19-22. Just as the high priest was washed before putting on His priestly robes and was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice before entering the holy of holies, the place of God's presence – so are we washed by baptism and confession of our sins, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus *so that* we may enter the holy of holies, the very place of God's presence. The place where we may confidently, boldly, freely, honestly, authentically, sincerely, and completely bear our souls to God. We draw near to God, not fearing His anger or disapproval or disappointment or rejection, but expecting and receiving only His love and His forgiveness and His power and His guidance. If you get nothing else today, please get this: If you are a believer in Jesus, you have an all-access pass to enter the presence of God and speak honestly and openly with Him about anything and everything. And not only do you have God's *permission* to do so, God *longs* for you to do so. You don't need special words or tone or posture. You have freedom to be bold with God. To ask Him for what you really want. (He knows anyway, you know.)

To tell Him you don't understand why your husband left you or why your child got sick. To cry out to Him for hope in the midst of your despair over your broken dreams, for strength to endure whatever pain or difficulty you may be experiencing. To call to Him in the midst of your fear of the loss of your job or the return of the cancer. To call out for guidance and direction. Freedom even to shake your fist at Him in anger over what you perceive to be the bad things He has allowed to touch your life. He has given you permission for all of that. Authorization for free access. Freedom to speak frankly with Him. An all-access pass to draw near to God in prayer.

Now, we don't want to merely *talk* about or *teach* about prayer during this series: We actually want to get you to pray. To that end, you will see some new banners hanging in the front of the sanctuary. In front of these banners are baskets with small crosses. We invite you to take one or more of these crosses at any time during these next few weeks, write your prayer need on the cross and attach it to the banner. You don't have to put your name on the cross. God knows.

Each time you pass by these banners, we invite you to stop and see the needs posted there and to pray for one or more of them.

On the Message Notes page in your bulletin, you will see several Next Steps you can consider. My prayer is always that you will discern the next steps God is asking you to take along your journey with Him. Memorize Hebrews 4:16. We have a memory verse for this series. Here's the good news: You have five weeks to memorize it. We have set it out for you phrase by phrase. "Let us then approach [same as 'draw near'] the throne of grace with confidence [this is the same 'confidence' as in Hebrews 10] so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." The phrase to memorize this week: *Let us then approach the throne of grace...*

Prayer Challenge: Commit - I mean really, now, make a decision – commit to a dedicated, non-negotiable time of prayer *each day*. At least 15 minutes. And I don't mean just the 15 minutes while you're driving to work or putting on your makeup or making the kids' lunches. I mean 15 minutes of stillness before God. If you already do 15 minutes, challenge yourself to increase that to 30.

Prayer Covenant: Make a Prayer Covenant with one or two other individuals, a commitment to pray for them *daily* one of the prayers in Scripture, i.e. Eph. 3:16-19 OR Col. 1:9-12.

We have an all-access pass to God. Heb. 10:22, NLT: "...let us go *right into the presence of God* with sincere hearts fully trusting Him... When we pray, we are authorized to enter the very presence of God Himself. The throne room of the King of the universe. There are no limitations on what we can say to Him. And there are no limitations on who can come – as long as they come through Jesus. You may believe that you have no right, no authority, no possibility of drawing near to God, because of what you've done in your life – or what you did this week or even this morning. And you know what? You're correct. *On your own*, you have no right, no authority, no possibility of drawing near to God without being overcome by His majesty and overwhelmed by the purity and power of His presence. But thanks be to God – you're *not* on your own. "We have a great priest over the house of God" – *you* have a great high priest, Jesus, who goes into the presence of God on your behalf and presents you to the Father and says: "This one's mine, Dad. So listen to her. Listen to him."

It cost God something to give you this kind of access to Himself. That's what we remember at this Table. "Do this in remembrance of Me," Jesus said about the sacrament we call Holy Communion. "Do this in remembrance of Me: in remembrance of My sacrifice for you, in remembrance of My body, broken *for you*, in remembrance of My blood, poured out *for you* on the cross. I have opened a new way, a living way, into the presence of God for you. And not merely the *presence* of God – communion with God. Connection of your heart with the very heart of God." Because of the blood of Jesus – and *only because of the blood of Jesus* – you can draw near to God. And so, Jesus commands us to remember. This all-access pass is free to us, but we must never forget what it cost the Father. The spilled blood of His Son. The broken body of His own child. By the blood of Jesus, because of Jesus' death, you have access to the throne room of God, but more than that: You have access to the very heart of God. You *can* get there – *from here*.