Thresholds
40 Days of Prayer
JOURNAL
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INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2020, you have the opportunity to journey through five, forty-day seasons, focusing on our five-fold commitments as United Methodists: Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service, and Witness. The purpose of these forty-day seasons is for all of us to gain understanding, experience new things, grow deeper in our discipleship, and to become closer to Christ.

“Forty” is used throughout Scripture, representing a significant period God was at work. In the days of Noah and the flood, it rained for forty days and nights, as God cleansed the earth, preparing it for new birth. Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years, transitioning from slavery to becoming God’s covenant people. Jesus fasted and prayed in the wilderness for forty days, enduring temptation, as he prepared for public ministry.

On Sunday, January 12, 2020, we begin our first forty-day journey, focusing on prayer. Our theme is “Thresholds,” comparing prayer to the ways we enter new spaces and places when we cross thresholds.

In fact, let’s offer that as your first new prayer practice. Each time you cross a door threshold, for the next forty days, say a quick prayer for whatever awaits you on the other side – a person, a meeting, an opportunity, etc.

In this booklet, you’ll find a daily devotional, pages for notes during the six “Threshold” sermons, and a list of suggested activities for going deeper. You may only choose to attend the services, as you usually do. Or, you may want to dive in more deeply, doing the daily devotions and a few of the activities.
That’s up to you. The point is to grow in your prayer life, and we hope this helps!

Looking ahead, upcoming forty-day seasons will include:
- Lent, Being a Cross-Shaped Community: Forty Days of Presence
- Beginning Sunday, May 17, Forty Days to Financial Freedom
- During the Summer, Summer of Service
- In the Fall, Faith & _____: Forty Days of Witness

Each of these forty-day seasons will be both similar and different, including messages in worship and a variety of other activities. I hope that they will bless you, and all of First Church, as we journey through this year together.

With Much Love,

[Signature]

Pastor Vance
January 12

Sermon Notes

Crossing the Threshold of Knowing God
Isaiah 55
January 13

John 10:27 (NIV)

My sheep listen to my voice;
I know them and they follow me.

Think of the person in your life that you know better than anyone else:
How did you get to know them so well?
Why did you get to know them so well?

Tell God how you feel about getting to know him better.
What is the difference in knowing about God and knowing God?
What would it take from you to know him better?

Sit quietly
What is God telling you about himself today?

Close
Give thanks for this time together.
John 17: 25-26 (NIV)

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Who is praying in this scripture?
Who is he praying for?
What is the prayer request?

Tell God how you feel about this particular prayer and the person praying it.

Do you feel that it has been answered in your life?
Why or why not?

Sit quietly
What is God telling you today about his love for you?

Close
Give thanks for this time together.
John 15:15 (NIV)

*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.*

*Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my father I have made known to you.*

---

What is the difference between being a servant and being a friend? Why do you think Jesus has chosen to call you friend? What would Jesus expect from a friend?

Tell God how you feel about being friends with him. Are you comfortable with this idea? Why or why not? Be honest ...

Do you count on God the way you count on your friends?

---

*Sit quietly*

What is God telling you about the friendship he desires with you?

*Close*

Give thanks for this time together.
Exodus 3: 11-12 (NIV)

*But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”*

What do you learn about communication with God in this scripture? How does God respond to Moses’ insecurities? What does it take for Moses to follow through?

Tell God where you are feeling insecure, confused, or unsure today. What will it take from you to depend on God?

*Sit quietly*  
How is God responding to you in this moment?

*Close*  
Give thanks for this time together.
Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

What do you learn about God from this scripture?
What does it mean to be brokenhearted?
What does it mean to be crushed in spirit?
Does it matter who caused the brokenness?
Does God’s presence really make a difference? How?

Share with God what it felt like to be brokenhearted or crushed in spirit either now or in the past.
Where was God for you then? Where is he now?

Sit quietly
What is God telling you about himself today?

Close
Give thanks for this time together.
Revelation 2:4-5 (NIV)

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

What appears to be most important to God in this scripture? What are some of the things we do when a love relationship is new and growing? What may happen as the years pass by? How might this relate to our relationship with God?

Tell God how you are feeling about your relationship with him. Do you feel close, far away, or unsure of the whole idea?

Share yourself with him. Share your hopes for the future.

Sit quietly
Listen for God’s voice in the silence ...what is he saying today?

Close
Give thanks for this time together.
SERMON NOTES

Crossing the Threshold of Knowing Yourself
Romans 8:1-17
January 20

**Thresholds: 40 Days of Prayer**

**Genesis 1:26-31 (CEB)**

“No God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.” God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.”

What do you think about being created in God’s own image?
How do your daily activities reflect who you are as one of God’s creations?
What is your role in the world that we have been given?
Do you see your earthly provisions as blessings from God?

As you pray today, honor God and be thankful that he includes you in his “supremely good” design. Tell him your thoughts. Acknowledge God’s power, and thank him for the specific persons and things that bless your life. Freely confess your sins to God. Ask for the strength and wisdom to better see and do God’s work. Thank God for listening.

Watch for God’s responses to your prayers!
Psalms 8 (CEB)

“LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth! You made your glory higher than heaven! From the mouths of nursing babies you have laid a strong foundation because of your foes, in order to stop vengeful enemies. When I look up at your skies, at what your fingers made—the moon and the stars that you set firmly in place—what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? You’ve made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur. You’ve let them rule over your handiwork, putting everything under their feet—all sheep and all cattle, the wild animals too, the birds in the sky, the fish of the ocean, everything that travels the pathways of the sea. LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!”

Think of times when you are amazed by earthly places of beauty and majesty. Are you honored by God entrusting this beautiful planet into our care?

Do you wonder how God can have so much love for humans, who so often fail Him?

Consider that with God-given trust and authority, comes God-given responsibility.

In praying today, thank God for being mindful of you, and for inviting you to speak with him. Specifically, give thanks for the majestic and beautiful signs of his love. Also, thank him for placing his faithfulness and trust in you. Turn all of your insecurities and doubts over to him. Ask for his peace and understanding, so that you will be able to better serve and assist others according to his will. Praise his name above all names, and wonder at the works of his hands!
Thresholds: 40 Days of Prayer

January 22

Psalms 139 (CEB)

“Lord, you have examined me. You know me. You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans. You study my traveling and resting. You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways. There isn’t a word on my tongue, Lord, that you don’t already know completely. You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me. That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it’s so high above me that I can’t reach it. Where could I go to get away from your spirit? Where could I go to escape your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave, you would be there too! If I could fly on the wings of dawn, stopping to rest only on the far side of the ocean—even there your hand would guide me; even there your strong hand would hold me tight! If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me; the light will become night around me,” even then the darkness isn’t too dark for you! Nighttime would shine bright as day, because darkness is the same as light to you! You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s womb. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well. My bones weren’t hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo, and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me, before any one of them had yet happened. God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless! If I tried to count them— they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I’d still be with you. If only, God, you would kill the wicked! If only murderers would get away from me—the people who talk about you, but only for wicked schemes; the people who are your enemies, who use your name as if it were of no significance. Don’t I hate everyone who hates you? Don’t I despise those who attack you? Yes, I hate them—through and through! They’ve become my enemies too. Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts! Look to see if there is any idolatrous way in me, then lead me on the eternal path!”

How does it feel to be completely known by God?

Are there things in your heart that you wish God could not see?

Consider a loving Father who knows you intimately, constantly, wonderfully, and completely – and who wants the best for you in all things!

Take comfort that God’s spirit is within you; he will not lose you.

In today’s praying, acknowledge God’s absolute and total sovereignty in your being. Praise God for his ever-present, unlimited, overwhelming, and incomprehensible knowledge of you. Open your heart. Tell God about the uncomfortable, embarrassing, messy, and disobedient pieces of yourself. Thank him who knows you better than you know yourself, for loving you so completely. Ask him to strengthen his spirit within you, to guide your thoughts, and to encourage you in all things.
Galatians 4:4-7 (CEB)

“But when the fulfillment of the time came, God sent his Son, born through a woman, and born under the Law. This was so he could redeem those under the Law so that we could be adopted. Because you are sons and daughters, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba, Father!” Therefore, you are no longer a slave but a son or daughter, and if you are his child, then you are also an heir through God.”

Are there circumstances in your life that weigh you down and hold you back from God’s desire for you?
Are you “adopted/born again” into the family of God?
What does it mean that God has placed his spirit in you, as his child?
How can children of God recognize and grow in his spirit?

Ask God to fill you with his spirit today. Praise him for allowing you to be completely and confidently in his family. Admit to the particular distractions and failures of your human condition. Seek his assurance when troubles interfere with your faith. Ask for the clarity and spiritual strength to live as a true child of God. Worship God the Father, as a child who is loved, treasured, and protected by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray, asking that your confidence and thankful obedience will grow in the blessed assurance of his love.
Ephesians 3:14-21 (CEB)

“This is why I kneel before the Father. Every ethnic group in heaven or on earth is recognized by him. I ask that he will strengthen you in your inner selves from the riches of his glory through the Spirit. I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you’ll have the power to grasp love’s width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you’ll know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God. Glory to God, who is able to do far beyond all that we could ask or imagine by his power at work within us; glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations, forever and always. Amen.”

Do you ever feel alone in your relationship with God? Is it easy for you to accept when others want to share about God with you? How challenging is it for you to share God’s love with others? What does the “fullness of God” look like in your life?

If possible, kneel in prayer before God the Father of all persons. Worship his name and give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ask him to strengthen your understanding and grasp of his power by showing it to you through other believers. Ask God for the courage to share your questions, experiences, and faith journey with others. Say words of thanks for the fullness of God that is present when members of his family share beliefs of redemption through the love of Jesus.
John 14:1-7 (CEB)

“Don’t be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too. You know the way to the place I’m going.” Thomas asked, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have really known me, you will also know the Father. From now on you know him and have seen him.”

Have your earthly houses included love and joy with room to spare?

Do you trust that God will have a loving and joyous place prepared for you to be with him?

Do you trust that Jesus offers you “the way, the truth, and the life” to secure that place?

How comfortable are you talking with God to show you the way?

For today, pray to God, asking that you would know him more. Thank him for the example of Jesus, and the promise of a heavenly place where love and joy will reign eternal. Air your doubts, questions, insecurities, and shortcomings to him. Say words that express your faith in his eternal plan, your thanks for his grace, and above all, your love for him.
January 26

Sermon Notes

Crossing Thresholds: Overcoming Barriers to Prayer
Matthew 5:6-13
Psalm 86 (NIV)

_A prayer of David._

1. Hear me, _LORD_, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.
2. Guard my life, for I am faithful to you; save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my _God_; have mercy on me, _Lord_, for I call to you all day long.
4. Bring joy to your servant, _LORD_, for I put my trust in you.
5. You, _LORD_, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.
6. Hear my prayer, _LORD_; listen to my cry for mercy.
7. When I am in distress, I call to you, because you answer me.
8. Among the gods there is none like you, _LORD_; no deeds can compare with yours.
9. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, _LORD_; they will bring glory to your name.
10. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are _God._
11. Teach me your way, _LORD_, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.
12. I will praise you, _LORD_ my _God_, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.
13. For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead.
14. Arrogant foes are attacking me, O _God_; ruthless people are trying to kill me—they have no regard for you.
15. But you, _LORD_, are a compassionate and gracious _God_, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
16. Turn to me and have mercy on me; show your strength in behalf of your servant; save me, because I serve you just as my mother did.
17. Give me a sign of your goodness, that my enemies may see it and be put to shame, for you, _Lord_, have helped me and comforted me.

Make a list of all of David's requests in this prayer.

Does David make any requests for material wealth?
If not, then what does he ask God to do?

Pray to God and ask him to show you your great needs that only he can meet.
As you pray, ask him to take away the pride that makes you turn to other people or things in an attempt to solve your troubles.

Sit quietly
Reflect on verse 15. How have you felt God's compassion and grace?

Close
Make earnest and personal prayers to God your first resort when trials come your way.
Psalm 86

Re-read Psalm 86, yesterday’s scripture.

As we learn more about prayer, consider the following:

Do you pray **earnestly** to God, or do you just “go through the motions” of prayer?

Do you pray **continually**? This doesn’t mean to pray all day without stopping, an impossibility. Rather do you come back to God repeatedly in prayer throughout your day? How might you begin to do so if you don’t already?

Do you pray **thankfully**? We can’t do this if we don’t truly believe that even through our trials, he is working for our ultimate good.

Do you pray in **humility**? Admit your weaknesses to God. Acknowledge that you need him totally and fully.

Do you pray in **faith**? This does not equate to taking a leap in the dark, closing our eyes to reality. Praying in faith asks you to lean on God’s character and the many instances of answered prayer. Faith rests on his power and love.

**Sit quietly**

Consider that even Jesus prayed, “yet not my will, but Yours be done.” Luke 22:42 (NIV)

**Close**

Don’t be afraid to cry out for God’s mercy.
Matthew 7:7-11 (NIV)

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.
9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

ASK!
There are many things we hope and wish for, but how many times do we stop and take the time to ask God? In order to receive, we must first ask. Go to God in prayer in this moment and ask for what you need. Pray for necessities in your spiritual life.

SEEK!
Perseverance in prayer is essential. Seek God in prayer. Be obsessed. Don’t give up until he answers. Pray the prayer you prayed above daily. See how long it takes God to answer.

KNOCK!
Think about knocking on the door of heaven. What types of things will you be carrying on the journey to heaven’s door?

Sit quietly
How does it feel when we ASK, SEEK, and KNOCK, allowing us to experience God?

Close
ASK, SEEK, and KNOCK at the door of Heaven. God will open the door and invite you in.
Psalm 143 (NIV)

A psalm of David

1 LORD, hear my prayer, 
   listen to my cry for mercy; 
   in your faithfulness and righteousness 
   come to my relief.

2 Do not bring your servant into judgment, 
   for no one living is righteous before you.

3 The enemy pursues me, 
   he crushes me to the ground; 
   he makes me dwell in the darkness 
   like those long dead.

4 So my spirit grows faint within me; 
   my heart within me is dismayed.

5 I remember the days of long ago; 
   I meditate on all your works 
   and consider what your hands have done.

6 I spread out my hands to you; 
   I thirst for you like a parched land.[a]

7 Answer me quickly, LORD; 
   my spirit fails.

   Do not hide your face from me 
   or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

8 Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, 
   for I have put my trust in you. 
   Show me the way I should go, 
   for to you I entrust my life.

9 Rescue me from my enemies, LORD, 
   for I hide myself in you.

10 Teach me to do your will, 
   for you are my God; 
   may your good Spirit 
   lead me on level ground.

11 For your name’s sake, LORD, preserve my life; 
   in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

12 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; 
   destroy all my foes, 
   for I am your servant.

In this Psalm, David seems to be facing severe trials. When you are facing trials in your own life, is your first instinct to pray?

Sit quietly

Why are we quick to pray in times of crisis, hoping for a quick answer?

Close

Pray not only to gain relief from trials, but to go deeper
Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

_____ 

Are you a Martha or a Mary?

Do you feel pulled in different directions and distracted by many things?

Do you measure your worth by how busy you are, how much you accomplish, or how well you meet other’s expectations?

Does your participation at church leave you feeling resentful, like Martha?

Sit quietly

How can you serve God and your church in love and joy? Be still in the Lord’s presence and hear God’s word.

Close

Pray to God to remind you to listen to your guest, HIM! Ask him to help you remember the most important part of hospitality, being gracious to the guest, and that he will lead you away from service that is rooted in anxiety and resentment.
Psalm 86 and Psalm 143

Re-read Psalm 86 (see January 27) and Psalm 143 (see January 30.)

Do you see similarities between these two Psalms?

The Bible, especially in the Psalms, talks a lot about prayer. Why do you think we need so many lessons on prayer?

Many times we claim to be a Christian, but at the first sign of trials, we become angry with God and bitter. We fall away from faith. We need lessons like Psalm 143 to teach us how to pray correctly when we face troubled times.

Sit quietly
What are some ways you have come to know God more deeply through trials?

Close
Pray that in times of stress and worry that you would be driven to God in prayer.
February 2

Sermon Notes
Crossing the Threshold to Grace
1 John 1:1-10
James 5:16 (NRSV)

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

When in your life have you experienced the power and effectiveness of prayer? In what ways have you shared with others about sin in your life? Who in your life needs your prayers today?

Lift up a prayer of thanksgiving for prayer itself (our ability to communicate with God).

What would it take to make prayer an intentional, daily habit in your life?
Psalm 32: 5-7 (NRSV)

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgression to the LORD,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

Reflect on a time you hid from your sin.
Reflect on a time you confessed your sin to God.
When God “surrounds you with glad cries of deliverance,” what does this tell you about him?

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for your heavenly Father’s refuge in your life.

Reflect on the powerful truth that the guilt of your sins has been forgiven. Imagine a life free of guilt!
Psalm 51:10-13 (NRSV)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Reflect on the truth that there are no levels to our Savior’s love for us.

Who do you know in your life who has been “cast away” or marginalized? Pray for them.

Pray a prayer to help you see others through your Savior’s eyes.

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for your salvation.

What would it take to have a generous spirit in all that you do?
Psalm 103: 10-13 (NRSV)

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.

What negative and harmful words have you spoken about yourself?
What lies about yourself have you held onto?
What does this verse tell us about God’s love?
What habits do I need to change in order to use my tongue to speak hope and favor upon my life?

Lift up a prayer of thanksgiving for your heavenly Father’s compassion, love, and mercy towards you.

What small act of compassion, love, or mercy can you show to someone who has hurt you?
Hebrews 10:22 (NRSV)

Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Can you imagine, just for a moment, your heart, mind, and body cleansed by the Holy Spirit?

What unclean thoughts and negative feelings will you let go of today?

Reflect on the properties, purposes, and symbolism of water.

Lift up a prayer for your heart to be cleansed and renewed. What does it mean to walk today in full assurance of faith? Let your answer guide your steps.
Luke 6:37 (NRSV)

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

What convictions do you hold so strongly that they can become vehicles of judgment?

Who needs you to forgive them?

What does it mean to forgive so that you are forgiven?

Lift up a prayer of thanksgiving for the ability to forgive others and to be forgiven by others.

What will it take for you to believe that all of your sins have been forgiven?
February 9

Sermon Notes

Crossing the Threshold to Silence
Psalm 46
February 10

Crossing The Threshold To Silence

“God’s first language is Silence.”
- John of the Cross

“Everything else is a poor translation. In order to understand this language, we must learn to be silent and to rest in God.”
- Thomas Keating

1 Kings 19:12-13 (NIV)

“12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.”

We are called to be in the world, but many times it’s difficult to hear from God with all the distractions. Listening for the whisper takes time to create stillness. Where can you go to find peace? Can you create a space for stillness in your home?

Listen for the gentle whisper. Do not be stressed if you don’t hear it right away. Allow the earthquake and fire to pass by.
Psalm 4:4 (NIV)

“Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.”

In our days that are full of noise and our own cries/prayers, it can be very difficult to hear from God. In my own days, I’m always telling God what I need, but in the evening, when I stop talking, it’s possible to sense his presence and peace. Only then can I really find direction.

When you get into bed tonight, center your heart on God as you drift off to sleep.
Psalm 23:2-3 (NIV)

“2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, 

he leads me beside quiet waters, 

3 he refreshes my soul.”

Where do you find quiet waters? Is it at the ocean, by the lake, a backyard fountain? Water is a symbol of life.

Listen for God’s voice...
“When you talk you don’t learn anything. When you stop talking and listen you can learn something new.”
-Dalai Lama

Matthew 14:22-23 (CEB)

Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone.

You are made to be in community, but sometimes you need silence to think and find your bearing. Even Jesus, after performing a miracle for the crowds needed time apart.

Wonder what he was receiving from the Creator when he went up onto the mountain alone?

What do you hear God saying to you today?
Mark 1:35 (CEB)

*Early in the morning, well before sunrise, Jesus rose and went to a deserted place where he could be alone in prayer.*

When our children were young and days had very little quiet, early morning was the only time for solitude and focused devotion.

Whatever time of day you can carve out for stillness will be honored by God.

Where do you find stillness?
1 Kings 19:11-13 (CEB)

Why are you here, Elijah?

The L ORD said, “Go out and stand at the mountain before the L ORD. The L ORD is passing by. “A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the L ORD. But the L ORD wasn’t in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the L ORD wasn’t in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the L ORD was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet.

God was found not in the strong wind nor the earthquake nor the fire. He was found in thin quiet.

Can you think of thin places to go for quiet? If those spaces are not readily available to you, think of ways to create a space in your day for quiet. Maybe a chapel, maybe a library, a trail, or if you are like Elijah, you may find a cave.
SERMON NOTES

Crossing the Threshold to Greater Faith
Psalm 65
Psalm 65:5 (ERV)

God, you answer our prayers and do what is right. You do amazing things to save us. People all over the world know they can trust in you, even those who live across the sea.

The psalmist included in his prayer “people who live across the sea.” Take a few moments to say or write a prayer for those whom you have never seen. For those who live in war zones. For siblings in Christ that are facing persecution in other parts of the world.

God’s answer is always tied with his righteousness and his character. Take 1 or 2 minutes to meditate and consider if what you have been asking God in prayer falls in his righteousness.
Matthew 19:23-26 (ESV)

“23 And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

When you pray, do you pray for things that are in the realm of “possible things,” or do you pray for things you consider impossible?

Jesus did not say that it was impossible for the rich to enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he said it was difficult. Have you ever prayed to God to reveal your spiritual wealth? Do you feel poor (in need of God), or do you feel rich (you have everything and don’t need God as much as others)?
1 Timothy 2:1-4 (ESV)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Whether you like politics or not, do you pray for people in positions of power even when you disagree with their actions or ideas? Write a prayer to God for someone in authority that you disagree with.

In this passage, the apostle Paul mentioned three ways to communicate with God: supplications, prayers, and intercessions. Write your own definitions below.

Supplications:

Prayers:

Intercessions:

Write or say a supplication and intercessory prayer for someone.
1 John 5:13-15 (ESV)

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Do you have “confidence toward God” that you will receive what you ask? Why or why not?

What does it mean to you to ask according to God’s will?
Genesis 1:1 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

When you pray, do you consider that the Being you are praying to is the Creator? If so, what can stop God from answering a prayer?

Do you mostly pray for personal things? Do you include in your prayers world concerns such as nature, governments, nations, injustice? Why or why not?
Hebrews 11:1-3 (ERV)

Faith is what makes real the things we hope for. It is proof of what we cannot see.  

2 God was pleased with the people who lived a long time ago because they had faith like this.

3 Faith helps us understand that God created the whole world by his command. This means that the things we see were made by something that cannot be seen.

James 5:14-15 (ERV)

Are you sick? Ask the elders of the church to come and rub oil on you in the name of the Lord and pray for you.  

15 If such a prayer is offered in faith, it will heal anyone who is sick. The Lord will heal them. And if they have sinned, he will forgive them.

Do you feel you exercise faith when you pray? What would be the difference of a prayer offered in faith and one with no faith?

Can faith help us understand things reason can’t? Write down a personal experience based on your answer.
ACTIVITIES

Here’s a list of activities to try during the next 40 days to deepen your prayer life.

Consider reading one of the following books:

- Walter Wangerin’s *Whole Prayer*
- Richard Foster’s *Prayer*
- Barbara Brown Taylor’s *An Altar in the World*
- Diana Butler Bass’ *Grounded*
- Thomas Merton’s *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Attend one (or all!) of the following events:

**Centering Prayer Workshop** | Sunday, January 19 | 3:30 pm
Learn the contemplative prayer practice of Lectio Divina, led by Sarah McClane in the Chapel.

**Midday Meditation Service** | Begins Tuesday, January 21 | 12:15 - 12:45 pm
Join us in the Chapel on Tuesdays for a simple service of scripture, meditation, and silence, led by Pastor Vance.

**Prayer Through Poetry** | Saturday, February 1 and 8 | 1:00 - 4:00 pm
Part Bible study, part writing workshop, part spiritual retreat. Engage with sacred texts and explore your own creativity as we look at new ways to approach God in prayer, led by Dianne Richardson.

**Learning How to Hear God’s Voice Workshop** | Sunday, February 9 | 5:00 pm
Learn ways to listen for God’s voice in prayer. Led by Pastor Vance.

**Intergenerational Prayer Walk** | Saturday, February 22 | 8:45 - 11:30 am
Meet at the church for a light breakfast, then split into teams and head out on five different prayer walks around downtown. One of the routes will be driven in the church van for those with limited mobility. We’ll pray for our community and specific locations before returning together for a time of celebration and storytelling.
ACTIVITIES

Try a meditation/prayer app:

- Headspace
- The Upper Room
- Abide

Or do any of the following:

- Take a walk, outside, and pray!
- Do some kind of art, and pray!
- Listen to your favorite Christian music, and sing along!
- “Prayer Walk” your neighborhood, praying for each house and its residents.
- When you are at a stop light, say a prayer for the people in the cars around you.
- Make a list of ALL of the things you are grateful for, and say “thanks to God.”
- Make a list of all of the things you need forgiveness for, and confess them to God.
- Make a list of your biggest hopes and dreams for your life, and make it a prayer.
- Write a “love letter” to God.
- Say a prayer before every meal you eat for the next forty days.
- Take a full, 24-hour sabbath.
- Start a prayer journal.
- Say a prayer for the church’s pastors, staff, and leaders.
- Pray with your spouse, friend, child, grandchild, etc.
- Turn off your cell phone for 30 minutes, and enjoy the silence.
- Memorize a Psalm