

“Kingdom Prayer”

Matthew 6:5-8

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What important truth does this statement capture?

Prayer is a confession of faith.

This sermon is for those who pray, **not** for those who don't.

It is not the point of this sermon to make anyone feel guilty about his or her lack of praying.

In the text before us today, Jesus doesn't say, “You **ought** to pray”.

He says, “**When** you pray...”

Why do you pray?

Habit?

To **get** things?

To soothe your mind?

“The Lord's Prayer,” sometimes called the “Our Father” is a model prayer.

What does it model?

Well, you say, it models **how** to pray.

Yes, Jesus specifically says, ““This, then, is **how** you should pray.”

And in Sundays to come, we will look at the content of his model prayer.

But before getting to that, it seems important to “camp” for a while on what Jesus emphasizes **about prayer** even before he **models** such prayer.

Stand with me please, open your Bible to Matthew 6; watch and listen to our text in its context:

Matthew 6:1-18

"Be careful not to do your `acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven

So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

This, then, is how you should pray:

`Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one. '

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

In these verses Jesus draws a sharp contrast between hypocrites and what he wants from his followers.

In verse 1 of this chapter, he instructed his followers not to do their “acts of righteousness” to be seen by others but only to serve God.

Beginning in verses 2 and 5 of this chapter, Jesus used the illustrations of **giving** and **praying** to teach that he wants his followers, Christians, to “play or live to an audience of one” – God. In verse 16 he teaches us the same about **fasting**.

But it is on the subject of prayer that he gives the most instruction.

Who do you pray to?

In verse 5, Jesus said, I don’t want your prayers to be a statement to others in the guise of talking to God.

Our prayers ought not to be a short sermon, or an announcement, or worse yet, gossip, for the hearing of those around us.

That’s hypocrisy – pretending to be talking to God, when in actuality we are talking to others.

Even in public prayer, while it is true that we are leading others in prayer, we are still only to be talking to God.

Maybe it is not in your actual prayers that you parade before others, maybe it is in taking pride in being known as a man or woman of prayer.

You pray much in order to be known as one who prays.

Jesus says, don’t do that.

Let your prayer be between you and God.

When he says go into your closet to pray he probably didn’t mean literally into a closet because private places in a house were probably unheard of in his culture.

He does mean to let our prayers be prayers to God not statements to others about ourselves.

Who do you pray to?

You say, "I don't pray to others, I pray to God." Do you?

There was once an article on prayer that went something like this: "People must engage in...prayer for the following reasons. People today are being constantly assaulted from the outside by so many things, like work, haste, telephones, correspondence, the honking and noise of traffic, the radio, (television), and movies, that they absolutely must erect a wall to protect themselves against this avalanche of impressions and demands. The best way to prevent one's being completely absorbed and devoured by these impressions is to enter into a state of inward composure which must constitute a kind of counterbalance to our present way of life, which is so constantly turned outward." (Thielicke, 17,18)

In this, prayer becomes little more than "centering" or quieting the mind.

Some people are really talking to themselves when they say they are talking to God.

But Jesus says, "Prayer is not a soliloquy but a conversation with a person, with your Father in heaven.

We don't go through the motions for anyone else's sake nor even just for our own, we are in conversation with our Father.

Then in verses 7-8 he adds another very important teaching about prayer.

Matthew 6:7 "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

"Babbling" is an onomatopoeic word like "buzz" or "hum" where the word actually sounds like what it represents.

In this case it means nonsense sounds - babbling.

Historians tell us that other religions in Jesus' day used long magical incantations in their prayers. (Blomberg, Matthew, 118)

These were nonsense syllables comparable to "abracadabra".

There were religions where the people just said the names of their gods over and over again.

Muslim prayers are to be recited five times each day.

Hindu and Buddhist prayers are better if they are longer and more repetitious because repetition is the soul of their prayers.

The Jews of Jesus day had many prayers commanded of them:

- The “eighteen prayer” of 18 parts was to be prayed three times a day.
- The Shema, twice daily,
- Then there were confessions, table prayers, and doxologies.

I can't know someone's heart but it seems that this kind of thoughtless repetition is almost begged when someone is given 10 “Our Fathers” or “Hail Marys” as penance.

Why did some pray that way?

Jesus said they thought they would be heard because of their many words.

They believed they had to get or earn God's attention.

I'm reminded of the prophets of Baal in Elijah's day.

God's servant Elijah challenged the false prophets of the mythical god Baal to prove his existence.

1 Kings 18:26-29 “Then (those prophets) called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "O Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.”

Sometimes even today people pray with many words as if by heaping up words they might better capture God's attention.

I have been in prayer meetings where it seemed that some believed that if we could get everyone praying at the same time and get a lot of noise resounding, energy flowing and emotion showing, it was better prayer.

I have also been in prayer meetings where it seemed that some believed it was only quiet, slow, Elizabethan English that opened God's ears.

Some people prattle on in their prayers because they think they have to get God's attention and coerce, cajole or earn his favor.

We must not become legalistic in our praying – as if more prayer equals better Christians.

Knowing that someone else prays hours a day ought not to make us feel spiritually inferior nor that person spiritually superior.

In fact our praying with many words may be nothing more than an expression of our distrust of God -

as if we feel we have to convince God to help us.

Or that He will only do so if we earn his favor by acting sufficiently needy and desperate by our cries and many words.

I'm not saying we can't have a long conversation with God but it ought to be a conversation.

Some of you might remember Jesus parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18.

Doesn't it teach that banging on the doors of heaven is the way to get God to act?

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'" For some time he refused. But finally

he said to himself, `Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming! And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

In the parable we are likened to the widow who persistently asks for favor.

But it is important to see that God is not likened to the egocentric, selfish, judge but in fact **God is contrasted with him.**

Jesus is teaching that surely ***if*** such an evil person, as that judge, would give what the widow wanted, **you can certainly expect your God** to meet the needs of his chosen ones who ask.

God doesn't have to be coerced.

What is Jesus getting at when he says, in Matthew 6 "Don't keep on babbling...?"

Many words - few words, energetic words, loud, soft, celebrative or solemn words; the way we say the words is not the key to prayer.

Matthew 6:8 "Do not be like them..."

They thought **their prayers** made the difference.

They thought the style, the length, and the persistence of their prayers is what moved their gods to act.

Their faith was in their praying.

Do we pray as if we are hedging our bets?

We aren't convinced prayer makes any real difference but we can't be certain, so we pray, as if our prayers **might** be the payment necessary to get God to unlock his willingness to intervene for us.

Yes it is true, in chapter 7, Jesus teaches that persistence in prayer is **an expression** of faith.

Matthew 7:7-8

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

It is not that persistence makes an unwilling God act, but that persistence in prayer is an expression of trust in God.

Yes it is true, in James 4:2, we are taught that God chooses to give some things **only in response** to prayer.

James 4:2

“You do not have because you do not ask God”

But we are not to assume that our badgering, our many words or babbling is what finally moves God’s hands.

The point Jesus is making, I believe, is that our understanding of God is reflected in our praying.

What do we really believe about God?

Is the God of our prayers truly there and is he generous or stingy?

Their view of God was that he must be convinced.

But says Jesus, your Father is not like that.

Matthew 6:8 **“your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”**

“Father” here is the Greek “pater” but it translates the Aramaic, which was Jesus’ language.

Jesus word would most likely have been, “Your Abba knows what you need before you ask him.

It is an intimate familial term close to our “daddy” or “papa”.

This term of intimacy between a child and his father was used into adulthood.

It is the warmest Aramaic word for this relationship.

“The male parent” or “Pa” doesn’t cut it.

The word “father” also carries the idea of responsibility with it.

This “Father” of ours is responsible for us, to guard, provide and guide.

Isaiah 65:24 “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear”.

Most people, then and now, have no concept of God as intimate and personal as this.

This “Father” in Jesus mind, is the father in the story of the Prodigal Son.

- This is the ‘father’ who grieves over his son’s choices, but doesn’t stand in the son’s way.
- This is the “father” who waits through agonizing days and nights of his son’s rebellion.
- This is the “father” who, when he sees his son returning home, runs to him with open arms
- This is the father who doesn’t demand payment but celebrates his son’s return.

The title “father” denotes our God as the one who goes before us and who turns us back and welcomes us home.

Helmut Thielicke wrote, “He is already there, even before your need comes. He is already there ahead of the waves that threaten to engulf you. I, your Savior, am already there, before your sins; you have only to claim what lies ready for you to use. For the blessing and the help and the salvation are there, ready at hand. Don’t you see that all your efforts, your chattering of empty phrases, your crying is like battering down a door that is already open? Don’t you see what a terrible distrust this is of him who has opened the door and is waiting for you, as did the father of the prodigal son? What you are doing in these furious prayers is like writing threatening letters to your Father, telling him he is obligated to help you, when all the while this Father is thinking of you day and night and waiting for the first sign that you are willing to come home. When you know that someone loves you and is near to you, it does not require many words, but only a quiet sign, a glance, a little suggestion, and he will understand. Should it be any different with your Father? Your Father who know what you need before you ask him?” (Thielicke [Life Can Begin Again](#) 105)

We aren’t to pray as the pagans do.

We are to pray as children confident of a father's love and willingness to do the very best for us.

My son is still young enough and I haven't failed him enough times yet so that when he asks me for something, he expects that I will get it for him –he trusts me, he expects I want the best for him.

Now I want him to mature to the place where he will trust me even when I tell him what he wants isn't best for him.

But the point is that his faith is in me, not in the way he asks.

God is not impressed with much prayer or little prayer – he's impressed with prayer **in faith** – our trust in **his** love and power **not in our** much praying.

We aren't concerned about technique,
we aren't concerned about how long we pray,
we aren't concerned about getting everything "right" so that
God will then be pleased enough to respond to us.

I know a man and woman who have prayed for their sons for over 60 years.

They have asked God specifically to bring their sons to saving faith and obedience to God.

60 years!

It doesn't appear that God has completely answered their prayers.

Why do they keep praying?

Because their faith is in a gracious God;
their faith is **not in the answer nor in the way they pray** the prayer.

They will keep on praying because they trust God will do what is right and because God has called on them to express that trust in prayer.

Their faith is in God not in certain results.

Jesus says that is how we are to pray.

John Calvin captured it well:

“Believers do not pray with a view of informing God about things unknown to him, or of exciting him to do his duty, or of urging him as though he was reluctant. On the contrary, they pray in order that they may arouse themselves to seek him, that they may exercise their faith in meditating on his promises, that they may relieve themselves from their anxieties by pouring the anxieties (on Him); in a word, that they may declare that from him alone they hope and expect, both for themselves and for others, all good things. (Calvin in his Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists p314

The God you pray to – what is he like?

Is he a petulant God waiting for you to get it right?

Is he a stingy God waiting for you to deserve it?

Or is he your willing father desiring your trust?

At the beginning of this sermon I made this statement:

Prayer is a confession of faith.

We pray because we believe!

It’s all about relationship.

If we turn prayer into a mechanism instead of a conversation we will lose hope or get bored.

But if it is a conversation with our Father, communion with him, and an expression of our trust in his love – it makes all the difference.

We aren’t going to him to get something, as much as we are going to him to be with him.

Yes, we let him know our needs, but he is more important to us than our needs.

Matthew 6:7-13

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Stand with me please and pray with me, “The Lord’s Prayer”

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN,
HALLOWED BE THY NAME.
THY KINGDOM COME,
THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD,
AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS AS
WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO SIN AGAINST US.
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER,
AND THE GLORY FOREVER.
AMEN!