

Introduction...

Matt 6:5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

For some of us, the command of Christ to call God “Our Father” comes with some difficulty or personal baggage. For some of us, the Fatherhood of God is a bit challenging because you grew up without a father. Or maybe you grew up with an angry and abusive father who never showed grace, or perhaps a weak one who never stood up for you to protect you. Some of us were blessed with wonderful fathers, strong and safe, with big hearts and firm hands; I thank God for my father.

Others may struggle with the Fatherhood of God because they consider it sexist and would prefer to worship a goddess. But God hasn’t revealed Himself to us in that way. He is never called goddess, mother, or queen in the Scriptures but rather God, Father and King. Here in Matthew’s Gospel we see the Fatherhood of God referenced 44 times, second only to John’s gospel where God is called Father 109 times.

The Fatherhood of God is foundational to Christianity. The whole goal of Christ’s mission is to reunite us with our heavenly Father.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the way, the way to what, the way to the Father. When a person comes to faith in Christ they are adopted into God’s family and made a child of God and an heir of the Father’s kingdom right alongside Jesus.

Rom 8:15 You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Transition...

Through Jesus we have a relationship with God that is defined as a relationship of a father to his child.

This is the theme of **Matthew 6**, the middle section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. 10 times in chapter 6 alone we see Jesus refer to our relationship to *Our Father* and that is the theme of this chapter, ***Life in relationship to the Father***. Our relationship to God through Christ changes everything. It changes how we give, it changes how we pray, it changes how we eat, it changes how we spend and save our money. It changes how we deal with worry and anxiety.

Our relationship to God is amazing and this morning we are going to talk about what our prayers should look like now that we have a relationship with God as Our Heavenly Father? **With God as our Father, how should we come before Him in prayer? That's the question that Jesus is answering for us in this passage and He gives us 4 principles that should guide our prayers.**

Sermon Focus...

I. We should pray with a sense/knowledge of God's Gracious Presence (V. 6)

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Jesus wants us to know that prayer is not an audition, it is an opportunity to draw near to God. It is not an opportunity to gain spiritual brownie points, it is an opportunity to lay our hearts bare before our Father. Prayer is a heart to heart, not a negotiation, and **Jesus wants us to put ourselves in a position where we can pray with an undistracted sense of God's gracious presence.**

Why is it important to pray with a knowledge/sense of God's ***gracious*** presence? **Well for one, because our Father who sees even our secret prayers sees everything else that we do. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows our needs and the deepest, darkest sinful part of our soul.** He knows the sin struggle that we hide from everyone else. He knows us truly, fully, more clearly than we can imagine; and yet, He loves us and has made a way for us to come to Him like a child.

Ephesians 2 tells us that "We were dead in our trespasses and sins... were by nature children of wrath, ***but God***, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, ***(He)*** made us alive together with Christ – **by grace have you been saved.**

It is by grace that we have peace with God and a relationship where we can come to Him in prayer.

We come empty handed, repenting of sin, and trusting in Jesus alone; but we can come. We can come to God in prayer because He is gracious. We don't earn our way in. We don't bribe our way in. We don't have to build up a good reputation so that He will think we are worth His time. **His grace has made the way.**

And when we come, Jesus tells us to go into our room and shut the door and pray. Now, the word here for ***room*** can have two possible meanings. We can see it as just an interior room of the house that is tucked away from distractions or it could mean the storeroom where the family would keep all of their valuables. **Think, quiet closet or hidden treasure room.** One commentator says that we should have in mind the treasure room where God is ready to reward us with good things when we pray.

In one sense, the reward refers to when God answers our prayer. In those cases, the reward may be the salvation of a loved one, or the restored health of a friend. It may be that God opens that door for a new job or a long-hoped for relationship. But sometimes God says "no" to our request and that is a different form of reward. **Sometimes the reward is growth in spiritual maturity where we**

realize that, "God will only give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything He knows (Keller)."

Sometimes the reward is that He refreshes our soul reminding us that we are no longer orphans, no longer prodigals, no longer lost; but His dearly loved sons and daughters. **Either way, Jesus wants us to learn to pray with a sense of God's gracious presence and His grace never runs dry. His grace is renewed for us each day so that when we make our way into that quiet place and cry out to our Father, we find fresh mercy for our need.**

So, we pray with a sense/knowledge of God's Gracious Presence...

II. We Should Pray with a knowledge of God's Fatherly Generosity (v. 7-8)

V. 7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

First, Jesus wants us to pray with our hearts in the right place, which is the opposite of the hypocrites. Their hearts weren't fixed on God, their hearts were focused on how prayer made them look to others. **Here in verse 7, Jesus wants us to pray with our minds in the right place**, which is the opposite of the Gentiles. Jesus tells us not to use empty phrases nor to use mindless repetition in our prayers, thinking that these will gain us God's ear.

In 1st Kings, we read about **the prophets of Baal** who would spend hours crying out to their false god hoping to wake him up to their needs. **Buddhists spin prayer wheels** that contain written prayers and they believe that each turn of the wheel sends that prayer to god. **The Greek and Roman Oracles at Delphi and Dodona practiced a form of mystical prayer** known for mindless mutterings that were interpreted as the will of the gods. In many ways, **the Catholic practice of praying the Rosary or lighting prayer candles** falls into this category; because the idea is that God will hear and bless you based on how long the candle burns or how many turns of the Rosary you perform.

But Jesus forbids such prayer. He wants us to pray with our minds engaged in conversation with God. Who doesn't need to be woken up with our many words. God doesn't need to be appeased by our repetitive devotions. He already knows our needs and He wants our prayers to be guided by the knowledge of who He is, and how He cares for His needy children.

As a father, I am nowhere near omniscient, but I have a pretty good idea of what my children need. When they come to me with a need or a request my desire is to be generous even gracious. There are times when the answer is no, but because I love them I want to try to explain to them why the answer is no. I want there to be a wise reason for the no but saying "yes" is so much more fun.

Now, I am an imperfect father, but my desire is to be generous with my kids because I love them, and I want them to be happy. I want to give them good things, cool things, fun things. But my desire to be generous doesn't even come close to God's desire to be generous.

Who is God? He is the universes Creator and Sustainer. He is holy, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent; and He is our Father. He knows everything, even our needs before we present them to Him. We don't have to persuade Him or manipulate Him into caring for us, He loved us before we were born, and He will love us forever and **He desires to give us the best gifts in the world.**

In Romans 8, under the heading of *God's Everlasting Love* we read this,

8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Jesus wants us to **pray with a knowledge of God's gracious presence** and **with a knowledge of God's Fatherly Generosity**. But there is so much more. Let's look at the Lord's Prayer or what we might call the model prayer and we will see that Jesus wants us to pray with our mind both on Heaven and earth.

III. We Should Pray with an eye on the Kingdom of God (v. 9-10)

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

I don't think there is any harm at all in memorizing and praying this back to God, so long as your heart attitude is right. But I do tend to think that this is meant to serve as more of a model prayer than a repetitive prayer. **This prayer is like scaffolding or guardrails that help us as we form our own heartfelt prayers to God with one eye on Heaven and one on earth.** There is something here about prayer that Jesus wants us to take hold of and it all starts with honoring the name of our Heavenly Father. **"Hallowed be your name..."**

This prayer is a plea for God to cause His name to be set apart, revered in the hearts and minds of everyone. We should want this, we should want our Father's name to be praised. We should want our Heavenly Father to receive the respect and honor that He is due.

Also, don't miss the fact that as a Christian you are praying to your Heavenly Father. Embracing God as Father is part of our discipleship as Christians. When we call on God as *Our Father* it reminds us that we are His children and He knows what is best for us. Our prayers are echoing in the throne room of Heaven. Our prayers are pinned up on Our Father's refrigerator. God hears you and His heart is inclined to you because you are His child.

The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question, "Why Did Christ command us to call God "Our Father?" and the answer reads, "because Christ wants to kindle in us what is basic to our prayer – **the childlike awe and trust that God** through Christ has become our Father." Childlike awe causes us to respect and revere the name of God. Childlike trust causes us to know that there is nothing greater than our Father's will being done.

Praying for God's will to be done is like praying for every hindrance to God's plan to be removed. We are praying that God would overcome the blindness that plagues humanity when it comes to knowing and loving and worshiping God. We want God's greatness to flood the earth in such a way that everything is changed by it. We are praying for Heaven to invade earth, for all the wrongs to be made right, for all injustice to cease and for true justice to be poured out. We are praying for all tears to be wiped away and for God to take His place on the throne in our midst.

Jesus wants us to pray with an eye on Heaven and a longing to see the reality of Heaven invade the reality of earth. But this doesn't mean that we forget about what is taking place on the earth.

IV. We Should Pray with an eye on the kingdom of this world (v. 11-13)

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

I could be wrong, but it seems that Jesus wants us to pray for three things here: our body, our heart, and our soul

The first part of this prayer is for the needs of the body, the need we have for physical nourishment. Jesus wants us to know that God is concerned with even the most basic needs that we have. He also wants us to remember that the basic needs that sustain us in life are a gift from God's hand. **We take too much for granted.** Jesus wants us to pray for God to meet every daily need that we have, and He wants us to thank Him for every daily need that is met.

The second part of this prayer focuses on the needs of our heart. We need forgiveness and we need God to soften our hearts so that we can forgive others. Jesus wants us to pray that God would forgive us our sins (missing the mark) and that we would forgive others when they miss the mark.

This is such an important part of our Christian discipleship. It is such a pressing need that Jesus expands on it in verse 14-15 showing us that our forgiveness of others is tied to our forgiveness from God. So there are a couple of things we need to talk about here.

When we were drawn to faith in Christ, when we first believed in Him and turned from our sin, the Bible says that we were saved. When we believed we were justified before God, which means that we were declared to be righteous in His sight. Our sins were forgiven, and Christ's righteousness was credited to our account. All of this is true in a legal sense. But in a relational sense, we need to continually seek restoration and forgiveness.

This is the point of I John...

I John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus wants us to come to God confessing our sin and seeking forgiveness. But He also wants us to forgive others when they sin against us. He wants us to cancel their debt, to overlook their offense and to pardon someone for the wrong they've done to us. Jesus even tells us that our refusal to forgive others will keep God from forgiving us. Does this mean unforgiving people lose their salvation? **I think it means that a hard and unforgiving heart is evidence of someone who has never truly experienced God's forgiveness; or they are so hardened by sin that they have forgotten.**

In **Matthew 18**, Jesus tells the parable of the unforgiving servant, a man who had been forgiven a huge debt but who wickedly punished those who owed him. Jesus called the man wicked. He pointed out, "I showed you mercy because you pleaded with me, but you refused to show mercy to those who pleaded with you" and He ordered the man to go to prison until he had paid off his original debt. **The point is that an unforgiving heart reveals an unforgiven heart.**

Finally, in verse 13 Jesus teaches us to pray for the needs of our soul. The world, flesh and the Devil are not at rest. Don't let yourself succumb to spiritual overconfidence. We need God's help to remain faithful in the daily battle against the temptation to sin. So, Jesus tells us to ask God for protection, for guidance and for deliverance. Let's remember **1 Corinthians 10** which says,

1 Cor 10:12 Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted

beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Conclusion...

How should we pray, now that we have a relationship to our heavenly Father? **We should pray with a sense of His gracious presence. We should pray with the knowledge of His Fatherly generosity. We should pray with our mind on the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this World.**

He wants us to pray sincerely, humbly and confidently. He wants us to pray with His saving grace as fuel, in fact we can't come to God unless we come through Jesus, through the fountain of flowing grace. But by faith in Christ we come and pray. He wants us to pray from the heart and from our head. He doesn't want vain repetitive babbling. He doesn't want pseudo-spiritual and hypocritical speeches. He wants honest prayer to flow from the hearts of His children to their One True Father in Heaven.

Maybe you are here, but you have never known God as your Father because you've never embraced Jesus as your Savior and Lord. That is the most fearful state in all the universe for you to be in. But you don't have to stay there. See your sin for what it is, an insult to the God who made you. understand that Jesus is the ONLY way that you can come to the Father. Turn from your sin and come.

Don't come to your God pretending to be something or someone you are not, He can see straight through that. But come as you are, open your heart to His saving grace in Christ. Repent and receive Jesus as savior and Lord, and when you bow before Him in prayer you will find all the love you will ever need. Come broken and find His compassion. Come needy and find His supply. Come confused and find His Wisdom.