

Matthew 6:5-15

Good morning! My name is Matthew, one of the pastors here. It is a joy to gather with you and a joy to bring Christ to you through the Scriptures. The apostle Paul, as he reflects on the spiritual battle to be fought, says at the end of Romans 7, “For I find this law to be at work, when I desire to do good, evil lies close at hand.”

The enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, and his prey may not so much be the overt sinner, but the religious man. Not the partaker of sin, but the prayer warrior. Satan profits little by making evil things evil, but profits much by making good things evil. Do we stop doing good, absolutely not, but we realize that doing good gives a special opportunity for evil. How I wish we could just determine to follow Christ and our flesh would gone, but instead our flesh particularly enjoys religion. It becomes a playground for sinful desires to hide, masking themselves in self-glory and self-righteousness.

Jesus speaks directly to this issue in Matthew ch. 6. The religious performance of giving, praying, and fasting, he says, beware! Beware of practicing your righteousness before men. Last week we looked at giving, and this week we look at praying. How do we pray in a manner worthy of the gospel, that avoids the self-glory and instead that glorifies Christ. That is our subject today which we will look at under three headings, we must pray with the right motive, on the right basis, and with the right aim.

Pray with the right motive

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. 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.”

We see it here strongly in prayer. **V.5 “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love** (there’s this heart component, love, so their satisfaction, pleasure, and hope is being aimed somewhere.) Okay where? **to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, why? that they may be seen by others.**

There it is, that’s what they are aiming their hearts at. They want to be seen by others. It’s about self-promotion, their reputation, and the praise of man. to be seen by people is the real meaning—the nuanced text highlights this, tense—after being seen, they love to pray. And implies when not being seen they don’t love to pray. —Quarles

But how does Jesus respond, He says, **“Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”** You say, what reward? Exactly what they were searching for, they wanted to boost their reputation, feel good about themselves. Jesus says, they got that.

Then Jesus turns to the disciples, He’s got another way for them to pray. He says, **“when you pray, go into 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 lays before the disciples this reward language. He’s contrasting the reward of those who are seeking the blessing of man, with the reward of those seeking the blessing of God. This almost identical language is used for each section here, giving, praying, and fasting.

The pharisees had turned these very good things on their head and made them evil. Prayer had become about exaltation of man, not the exaltation of God. A means of communion with God became a means of consuming their fleshly desires. The synagogues and street corners were strategic places they could go to be seen praying.

So Jesus is encouraging the disciples in the complete opposite direction. He says go be by yourself, and shut the door. The point is not that you have a prayer room, and have to go in there and shut the door every time you pray. Jesus prayed outside all the time and public prayer was a part of Jesus’ life and its assumed in the

plural nature of the prayer Jesus is about to outline. The point is, when you pray, you must pray with a heart that is seeking the glory of God.

But, there is something to be said for private prayer, it's almost like it is a strategic weapon against the flesh's desire to be seen. It takes that temptation away. And it seems Jesus command here to pray alone also becomes a measuring rod for us. A man's spirituality in his closet, when no one's looking and no one finds out. What does it say about a man's spiritual state if he prays often with people and he never prays alone.

But, just because you got alone and prayed, doesn't mean you don't still have the flesh to battle with, you can just as easily come away from isolated times with the Lord checking off the box in legalism, saying to yourself, wow, I'm awesome. And you just can't wait to tell someone about your prayer time. You ever felt that, you've spent time with God, you've prayed, read your Bible, or did a good deed to someone. You just have to tell someone. Or you keep it secret, but inside you are elevated... so proud of your discipline.

Jesus is not against talking about your prayer life, He's talking about that payoff that your flesh gets when you pray or when you tell someone that you prayed. You can just hear the crowd. It's sneaky and subtle, that's why Jesus says beware, it might not obvious.

He says in 6:1 **"Beware** of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." Then Jesus goes on to talk about each discipline with this theme running throughout.

There is a warning in the disciplines. This word "beware" cannot be taken strongly enough. It is critical. One commentator points out, *"Our Lord's emphatic language intimates that what he warns them against is an evil of great magnitude, and an evil which they were in great hazard of incurring; an evil, to borrow the quaint language of Matthew Henry, that they were 'in great danger by, and in danger of.'"* John Brown 259

Beware of what... practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them. That's the big warning here. Seen by men or seen by God.

So what's your motive in prayer? Do you want the blessing of man or the blessing of God? It's that simple and that absurd. (My girls crying for the praise of their sisters). When you pray is there something in you that takes pleasure in hearing yourself pray, or someone else hearing you.

For those of us that have trouble praying either alone or with others. What does it say about your relationship with God if you don't talk to Him. What would you think about my marriage if Ashley told you I never talked to her. Our relationship would be in trouble, right? God wants you to talk to Him. He's eager to hear from you.

We must consider that silence in prayer may also be a sign of self glory. It's the reverse indicator of being a loud mouthed, long winded, prayer warrior. We don't pray because we are afraid of what someone else might think, which is concerning ourselves with our reputation, which when it boils down to it, is also the pursuit of our own glory. We aren't pursuing our glory in praying, we are trying to save our glory by not praying. Not always, I'm just saying its something for us to consider.

Pray on the right basis

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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Here the focus has shifted from having the right motive, to what people are trusting in as their basis for being heard by God. First He contrasted their prayer life to the Jewish leaders, not its contrasted with Gentile pagans. The gentiles prayed, they prayed to all sorts of gods, and what was typical of their prayer life was long winded prayers, filled with empty phrases (possibly magical combinations of words), why? Because they had no guarantee that fill in the blank god would answer them. They "think" they will be heard for their many words. Don't be like them when you pray.

At the core of that thought is that man can control and manipulate God. There is something man can do to get God to hear him. Treating prayer as a formula, or magic, or as a ritual, things like prayer beads, prayer flags, chanting, cutting, sacrificing, none of that gets anywhere with God. No amount of words or struggle or tears can merit God to listen to us. That would make God our debtor and God is no debtor to man. Your prayers become empty when you think that they have power in and of themselves. We have zero ability to coerce God into hearing and answering our prayers.

Not only does this practice of prayer downgrade the sovereignty of God, it belittles the grace of God. The first thing Jesus does to correct this terribly ineffective and God-dishonoring manner of prayer, is to point them to the true nature of God. What you believe about God and who you believe God to be has every implication to how you will pray.

Don't be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

He doesn't say, your God. He says your Father. When God's not your father, fear and anxiety in prayer are totally appropriate, and thinking you have to muscle your way to get His ear totally makes sense. That is not the way to pray to God because that is not who God is. He is your Father.

Matthew 7:11, If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

You are to let go of any anxiety or fear when you come to God in prayer. You are coming to your heavenly Father. You don't need to wonder if He's going to hear you because He's your father. And you don't need to wonder if He's going to bless you because He's your father. He's sovereign and loving, He knows, Jesus says, what you need before you even ask Him. God knowing your needs is not dependent upon you telling Him, like He needs you to inform Him. He's omniscient. He knows the number of hairs on your head.

Our knowledge of our Father's knowledge of us frees us from hypocritical prayer. "God is more ready to bless us than we are to receive." -Lloyd Jones

Whatever the gentiles were imagining their gods to be, they were not imagining them to be their heavenly Father. He's not someone to find rest in (as someone who's already bent toward blessing us), He's someone we have to coerce to bless us. As a dad i was bent to bless my children before they even came out of the womb. My disposition was to bless them, my eyes fixed upon them.

At the core of their prayer life is their view of God, that's what is driving their practice. Whatever they imagine God to be, they don't imagine Him to be gracious and loving. That is why Jesus first points the disciples to the character of God as their Father.

You can feel how focused they are on themselves here, either they have a lot of pride that they can force God's hand in their own strength, or they are operating out of anxiety and fear hoping that if they just say enough words, or the right words, God will hear them.

But what if we still don't know what to pray for? Jesus tells us.

Pray with the right aim

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."

Jesus here holds out to the disciples a pattern for praying. Do you have to pray these exact words every time you pray. No, that's not the point. It's pray like this, not pray this prayer. He's trying to give us a framework, to give our prayers a certain focus and variation, that is particularly pleasing to God, and good for our souls and good for this world.

You might say, hold up, I thought we were supposed to just be free in prayer, this sounds like restraint, like law. I'm afraid of falling into mindless praying, won't this restrict my freedom in prayer. That's the same argument a lot of Jazz musicians use why they won't study Classical. Jazz is prized for its freedom and heart, Classical for its structures and mind. But the best sound comes from those that have been trained in both disciplines. And they would tell you that the form releases their heart rather than restricting it.

Yes, we are to be as free as we can when we talk to God. What He wants is your heart, not a formula, that is true. We've already seen that, God knows what you need before you ask Him.

But the other truth we wrestle with is that our hearts shape our prayers and our prayers shape our hearts. What I care about I am going to pray for, and what I pray for I start caring more about. It's like giving, where your treasure is there your heart is. And certain prayers are more or less like Christ. We don't always fall into the most God-glorifying patterns of praying. James says we pray and do not get because we pray with wrong motives. Other places in Scripture we pray and do not get because we don't pray according to the will of God.

So Jesus is not saying, drop your heart and stop being free in your prayer life. He is saying quite the opposite, let these structures serve to free you up in your prayer life. When we pray with the content that God wants us to pray with, it should free us to be more ourselves (cause we are praying according to our new nature), and more vibrant, and more earnest, and with greater intimacy with God.

So as we look at the Lord's prayer, let's keep that in mind. It's a form for our hearts to follow to get in sync with God's heart. After the initial address, "Our Father who is in heaven (which, as we have seen, is a loaded address), there are six main petitions, split into two groups. The first three focus on God, "Your name, Your kingdom, Your will, ... and the second three focus on our needs—give us, forgive us, deliver us."

1. hallowed be your name.

This is kind of a strange way to talk. It's one of those things maybe we have said our whole lives but never really understood what it meant. It's a prayer, not a statement. "May your Name be kept Holy." (ISV). I have been helped immensely by John Piper here. When we pray hallowed be your name, we are praying, God, your Name be Holy, in me, and across the earth. But, it is more than mere holiness. Why? Because God's holiness is unchanging, that's the given, our prayers can't change God's holiness. so it's that the holiness of God lands in our hearts, as those that see Him as holy. But, it goes even a step farther, because even the Devil believes in God's holiness. So it is rather an esteeming of God's holiness, a treasuring of, a worshiping of, honoring, glorifying, and taking joy in.

Hallowed be your name is to pray, may your name be worshiped, in me and across the earth.

2. Your kingdom come

This is a prayer that has an eye toward the second coming of Jesus. That's when we believe the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested.

"The gospel is itself, above all, the announcement that God's promised rule has now begun in and through the work of Jesus the Messiah...so the disciples are thus encouraged to pray that what was begun in the ministry of Jesus, what they have now begun to participate in, may be experienced in all its fullness."

We are praying for God to once and for all, do away with darkness, it's a longing for the day when Jesus will be enthroned over all the earth, in a new heavens and new earth. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

3. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This is a prayer for obedience to God's law. That obedience would mark us. We don't come to salvation through faith and grace and then downplay the moral law. No, God saves us and is creating in us Christlikeness, this is the process of sanctification. That more in more we would obey God.

Next, we move to focus on our needs.

4. Give us this day our daily bread. (daily bread)

This is a prayer for food. God I'm a physical creature and if you don't provide for me I am going to die. How much have we lost this sense in our overstuffed all you can eat culture? This prayer could be for physical Health in general.

5. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. (daily mercy)

This is a prayer for hope. We have been forgiven in Christ, but yet we are always, this side of glory, still approaching the throne asking for forgiveness. And we are checking our hearts, forgiving others. This is not teaching that we must forgive in order to be forgiven, but that the evidence of our forgiveness by God is that we would forgive others. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

This is very important, as Jesus explains only this part in v.16

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

Our proof of sonship is in our forgiveness of others.

And lastly,

6. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (daily protection)

We have had our past sins covered in grace, and now we are praying that we will not sin in the future. This is basically praying the promise from

"that we have no strength for living a holy life, except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptations acknowledges that, unless God deliver him, he will be constantly falling."³⁷⁷ The verb implies helplessness "The disciple does not pray that God will assist him in battling the evil one. The disciple is so weak that there is little match for the Devil. He needs a Savior, not an assistant; a Hero, not a helper. He needs a Champion who will fight the enemy [for him]."

This variation here in the Lord's prayer covers all of life for us. God's Name to be worshiped. His Kingdom to come. His will be done. Prayers daily for health, for mercy, and for protection. All our prayers can in some way or another fit up under one of these categories.

There is a certain way that these prayers relate to one another. It's almost like there is one main prayer and 5 supporting prayers. The main prayer being the first, God be worshiped, exalted, treasured. And then the question is how? How does God begin to be treasured and worshiped in people's hearts. And the answer is by answering the next five prayers. In other words, as God answers all the other prayers, this primary and central prayer of God being treasured in our hearts comes about.

And so what we want to see here is that the climax of all prayer, no matter what you are praying for is worship.

Here's how John Piper puts it.

"It is not wrong to want God's gifts and ask for them. Most prayers in the Bible are for the gifts of God. But ultimately every gift should be desired because it shows us and brings us more of Him. . . . When this world totally fails, the ground for joy remains. God. Therefore, surely every prayer for life and health and home and family and job and ministry in this world is secondary. And the great purpose of prayer is to ask that—in and through all His gifts—God would be our joy."

Is your prayer life aimed at getting and treasuring God? Is it rooted in a desire for His glory.

Prayer is not supposed to be a burden, it is to be a joy, but we must do prayer how God has commanded us, with the right motive, on the right basis, and with the right aim.

But in this too, we will fail, and our hope is not in our prayer life. Our hope is the one who perfectly prayed on our behalf, and who continues interceding for us at the right hand of God. In following His example, let us pray.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way, **4:14, "Since then we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, Let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."**

God listens to us because He is gracious. He listens to us not because of our performance, but because of Christ's performance on our behalf. Believers get into the family of God, have God as their Father, as they are in Christ. In Christ, you are as accepted and heard by God in prayer today as you ever will be. It's on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection. The thief on the Cross and Paul in Prison both pray and are heard on the same basis.

Our basis for prayer is Christ. Jesus has secured our welcome and acceptance before God our heavenly Father.

Let's pray.