

Teach Us to Pray 3-28-04

Matthew 6:5-15 (NIV)

⁵"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. ⁶But 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. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹"This, then, is how you should pray: "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' ¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

In chapter five, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, we read Jesus' description of the life of the blessed man. We saw how God interprets the Law to include attitudes of the heart. The chapter closed with instruction for followers of Christ to give up their personal rights in order to express the perfect love of God, a love that is unconquerable. This chapter begins by telling us that acts of righteousness are either for the praise of man or out of love for God. One is rewarded with recognition here in this life, the other with reward from God in heaven.

We saved the Lord's Prayer for this week. As in all the instructions in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is describing for us the way God sees things. He is giving us a new perspective. Prayer was one of the three pillars of the Jewish righteous acts, but the example set by religious leaders had misled people as to what prayer was about. They held prayer as the greatest act of righteousness. Every Israelite was to say the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Numbers 15:37-41) before 9A.M. and again before 9P.M. They had prayers for every occasion, and prayers to be said three times a day. "Great is prayer," said the Rabbis, "greater than all good works." —Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT) It wasn't that they took prayer lightly. The problems they developed came about because they were always praying and fell into habits and routine just as we can do today.

⁵"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.

Jesus said that the example they were seeing was that of hypocrites. The word was used in Greek for an actor who wore different masks to play a number of roles. The person praying on the street corner was wearing his or her religious mask. Jesus told a parable to express this thought more clearly.

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else. Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed

Commented [notes1]: ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: ¹³So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—

¹⁴then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.

¹⁵I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

¹⁶Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.

¹⁷Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.

¹⁸Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

¹⁹Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

²⁰Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates,

²¹so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: ³⁷The LORD said to Moses, ³⁸"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel.

³⁹You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the LORD, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes.

⁴⁰Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God.

⁴¹"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD your God.'" Numbers 15:37-41 (NIV)

about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³'But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' Luke 18:9-13 (NIV)
Notice that the Pharisee prayed about himself. We are a little subtler when we try to do this. Instead of this direct praise, we thank God for the person that was touched by our words, the opportunity to share with someone, that God used us in some way, etc. There is nothing wrong with thanking God for what He is doing in and through your life, but that is a prayer best left for private prayer. Jesus contrasted this type of prayer that seeks the praise of men with the sinner who acknowledged their great need for God's mercy.

In our passage for today, Jesus contrasted people who love to be seen praying with the kind that God prefers, those who take time to be alone with God.
⁶But 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.
Last week we saw that God is seeking an intimate relationship with each one of us. One of the most intimate ways to relate to God is in prayer alone with Him. This does not mean there is not a public time and place for prayer. In the Lord's prayer you will see Jesus uses plural pronouns. He meant for us to pray it together, or at least to pray with the family of God in mind. But too often in our lives, religion becomes a public thing that we do, while our private relationship with God dwindles for lack of dedicated time and effort. If you look back over this week, can you say that you have spent more time alone with God than this corporate time we spend together? If the time together is more than the private time, we run this danger of being religious for what people may think of us instead of the real personal relationship that God is seeking to have with each one of us.

The Jews would stop at 9A.M. and noon and 3P.M. and bow their heads and lift their hands, palms up, to heaven and pray out loud. Some people would plan their day so that they could be in the most visible place during those hours. Their prayers would go on and on to impress those who saw them. They were particularly fond of adding as many adjectives as they could think of to the name of God. Quite impressive to everyone but God!

⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.
You don't need to chant. God is not impressed by how many times you ask, nor is He convinced by the number of ways in which you make your plea. His character is not that of begrudging father who stingily gives out his blessings on the most insistent. No! Your Father is just waiting for you to ask for the things that are good for you so that He can pour out of His abundance that which will meet your need. He knew exactly what you needed before you asked. His heart is glad when you recognize your need, just as the tax collector recognized his need for mercy. He delights to hear a request for the need He already knew existed in you. He delighted to give Solomon wisdom. He delighted to give David protection and forgiveness. He delighted to give the Apostles and us the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11:13) John writes that if we ask anything

Commented [notes4]: ¹³If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"
Luke 11:13 (NIV)

according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14) His will is to give us the things we need, the things and experiences that are for our eternal good.

In Luke's gospel, the Lord's Prayer is preceded by a request to be taught to pray. (Luke 11:1) It may have come at this point, between verse 8 and 9 and only have been recorded by Luke, or it may have been this same prayer repeated at another time. Luke's version is a somewhat abbreviated form of this prayer.

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name... Once again, please note the plural pronouns. This prayer is meant to be prayed together. Together we address the Father of us all. Acknowledging that He is our Father, reminds us that we are a spiritual family. Eastern cultures think in terms of community whereas we tend to think on individual basis. In this regard, we need to adopt Eastern culture. We are the family of God. What we do affects the whole Christian community. The fact that we are His children also reminds us that we are to resemble our Father.

Reminding ourselves that He is in heaven at the helm of the universe should give us faith to make our requests with confidence that He can do something about them. We don't just make a request to someone who may be able to slightly affect the world in some way, but the One who is all-powerful and whose will is done in heaven. We are addressing the Sovereign Almighty God. When you pray, remember that He can answer the prayer you are praying. Remember that you need to pray His perfect will into the earth.

Then we address Him as the One whose name is hallowed. He is holy, separate, over all, yet through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:6) His name is the sum of His attributes, and every characteristic of God is holy, utterly pure, and perfect. There has never been impurity or corruption in the slightest way in any of His thoughts or desires. Be careful then what you bring before Him, for He is holy! Your requests should be holy. Your desires should be holy. Your attitude in His presence should be holy. It seems this address is more for us to prepare our hearts to step from the worldliness all around us into the glory of His presence. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

Scripture describes prayer as stepping into the Holy of holies in heaven. The priest of the Old Testament never did that lightly. They prepared themselves with rituals meant to teach the seriousness of coming before God. (Leviticus 16:2-4) In contrast, the New Testament tells us that in Christ we can come before God with freedom and confidence because we are in Christ. (Ephesians 3:12) That, however, does not mean it is any less awesome and serious. I like to think of it like grabbing a hold of the ends of two power lines. I had better be grounded in Christ. I had better be serious and focused about what I'm doing. This is the place where the eternal dimension intersects with this finite world. It is nothing to take lightly. Holy is His name!

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

Following the address, we first ask for God's will and rule here on the earth. Heaven is already under the perfect rule of God. Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and John the Beloved all tell us that this world is under the rule of the evil one. (1 John 5:19) We saw in chapter four that Satan could offer to Christ the kingdoms of the world in exchange

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁴This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 1 John 5:14 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: ¹One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Luke 11:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: ¹⁹Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; ²¹And having an high priest over the house of God; ²²Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:19-22 (KJV)

Commented [notes9]: ²The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. ³This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. Leviticus 16:2-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ¹²In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁹We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 1 John 5:19 (NIV)

for worshipping him. (Matthew 4:8-9) That was not God's way or timing. Jesus will reign over the kingdoms of the world. They will become a part of His kingdom in God's time. (Revelation 11:15) We are to pray that God rules and reigns over this earth. Of course, it is increasingly so as people yield their lives to His rule. But Jesus is asking for the total rule and reign as is currently the case in heaven. That means an end of sin, an end to rebellion against God. It means an end of man going his own way in defiance of what is good. (Revelation 22:3)

The prophets describe a day when this will come to pass. (Isaiah 2:2-4) The Day of the Lord, the day of justice, will be followed by the reign of God in the earth. Sorrow and sickness will cease; wars will be a thing of the past; and Jesus will rule and reign in righteousness. (Isaiah 11:3-6) There will be no corruption in government. There will no longer be a curse upon the earth. "Your kingdom come Lord Jesus!" Every time we face death, pain and injustice, our hearts should cry out, "Your kingdom come!" Our Bibles close with this prayer, "Come Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20) The prayer has begun with a focus on God and His will and rule. Once we have that in first place, we can proceed to our needs with the right attitude. Now we can move on to our needs because our attitude is right.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

Here we are told to ask for our daily physical needs. It is a legitimate request. We need physical sustenance to continue in service. This request helps us to understand that though we may have abilities, ultimately our provision is from God. This should give us a sincere appreciation for our food. I think everyone would become much more grateful for the simple daily food we take for granted if they could visit a third world country. We are so richly blessed!

It is not God's will for people to starve, but given the fact that we have free will, wars and the refusal to share what we do have causes starvation. Most areas in which people are starving today have sufficient food to feed the hungry. The problem is that distribution is not possible because of war and greed. Millions in North Korea are starving today because of their leader's lust for power and wealth. A heart of concern will pray for them too, "Lord, make a way for them to have their daily bread." The "us" in Jesus' prayer should include them too.

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

The Apostle Paul told us not to leave any debt outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. (Romans 13:8) Love forgives the debt of others. When we forgive others, we give God the opportunity to forgive us. As we ask God to forgive us in the way that we forgive others, we remind ourselves to be generous with forgiveness. Jesus said the measure you used toward others was the one God would use toward you. (Luke 6:38) Forgive as graciously and generously as you can, knowing that you want God to be that way toward you.

This was the one part of the prayer that Jesus commented on. We'll look at verses 14 and 15 before we read the last verse of the prayer, since it deals directly with the importance of forgiveness.

Commented [notes12]: ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Matthew 4:8-9 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: ¹⁵The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Revelation 11:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. Revelation 22:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: ²In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Isaiah 2:2-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ... [1]

Commented [notes17]: ²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. Revelation 22:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: ⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: ³⁸Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:38 (NIV)

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Forgiveness from God seems to be contingent on us forgiving others. Jesus' comment couldn't have been clearer. Remember that the emphasis on Jesus' teaching is for us to love one another. It is based on His love for mankind, on His desire to see us kept from the destruction of unforgiveness, as well as to help us see our own need to be forgiven. It is wrapped up with the law of sowing and reaping. If you sow forgiveness, you will reap forgiveness from God. It isn't that God is holding it over your head as a threat; it's more like a wake up call to what is going to happen. The Apostle Paul echoes Jesus' teaching writing *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."* Ephesians 4:32 (NIV) He flips it around and says forgive just as you are forgiven, looking on previously covered sins. Jesus said forgive or you will not be forgiven looking forward to future sins.

So how does this tie in with the forgiveness we have in salvation? In Christ, we have no choice but to forgive. The Spirit of God will work in our hearts until we yield to the life of Christ in us.

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

Jesus believed in the devil. Not only did he believe he existed, he believed the devil is out to kill, steal and destroy, and that we need to pray for God to deliver us from him. Peter said that the devil was like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

(1 Peter 5:8) When was the last time you prayed for God to lead you in safety away from the enemies schemes? Sometimes we forget there is a war going on until some tragedy strikes. This is how the prayer ends.

Commented [notes20]: ⁸Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Later manuscripts added "for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen." There is nothing wrong with the addition. It is a nice ending to the prayer, but it is not in the earliest manuscripts. Did someone add it because they knew Jesus said it? Possibly. We have no way of knowing.

The problem people had with prayer was their constant use of memorized ritual prayer. Our problem today is that we get too busy to pray, but the crux of the matter is the same. God wants an intimate relationship with us, not a chanted prayer routine, not a compulsory hour, but a heart to heart communion with you personally. Jesus closed His letter to the church of Laodicea, the lukewarm church, with an invitation that would call them out of lukewarmness to intimacy. He said, *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."* Revelation 3:20 (NIV)

In the Middle East, eating is a time of communion where you share the stories of the day. You share what is on your heart and mind. Jesus desires to sit down with you and share your heart and have you share His. What an invitation! Why would anyone turn it down, except for fear of being brought out of our lukewarmness and into the life of Christ that lays down His life in love for others? He's knocking. Invite Him in!

³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;

⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

Isaiah 11:3-6 (NIV)