Trust the King – How to Pray Pt. 1 – Matthew 6:5-8 – November 15, 2026

For the next two week we are going to talk about prayer…How to pray part 1

- One of our pillars is prayer – Unceasing Prayer…believing firmly in the power of prayer
- Prayer is one of the most important privileges God has given His children

You have the opportunity to communicate directly with the Creator of the Universe

Do you believe firmly in the power of prayer? Do you believe it changes this world?

Here are four truths behind that conviction

a. <u>We believe prayer connects us to the God who has all power</u>

- Prayer is powerful not because of the person praying, but because God who hears
- The power of prayer is found in the power of the One to whom we pray

b. <u>We believe prayer invites us to depend upon God rather than ourselves</u>

- Prayer acknowledges that we are insufficient, but God is sufficient
- It demonstrates our need for His wisdom, strength, provision, and direction
- Prayer is an expression of our dependence upon God

c. <u>We believe God accomplishes His purposes through prayer</u>

- Throughout Scripture, we see God responding to the prayers of His people
- Prayer matters because God has ordained it as the means…He accomplishes His work
  - Prayer is not merely talking about what God can do
  - it is bringing our needs before the God who can do it

d. <u>We believe prayer changes us as we draw closer to God</u>

- Prayer does not simply change our circumstances; it changes our hearts
- It teaches us to trust God's timing, submit to His will, and find peace in His presence
  - Sometimes God changes our circumstances through prayer
  - Sometimes He changes us in the midst of our circumstances

We believe firmly in the power of prayer because we believe firmly in the power of God

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.

<u>Big Idea - Prioritize sincere devotion over religious display</u>

In 63bc there was civil war in Judea over who was going to be the High Priest

- Two brothers Hyrcanus II (here-can-us) and Aristobulus II (Air-is-tob-u-los)
- Aristobulus was held up in Jerusalem and Hyrcanus was held up to the East

Both men sought out help from the Roman Emperor Pompey the Great…expanding Rome

- Pompey ended up siding with Hyrcanus and laid siege to Jerusalem
- After two months…Rome taken control of Jerusalem and Hyrcanus was High Priest

Pompey then did something outrageous…went to the Temple…went into the Holy of Holies

Here is interesting thing…Pompey was discouraged when he went into the Holy of Holies

- Why? Because there was nothing in there! No images of God…no shrines…no statues
- First Temple = Arc of Covenant | Mercy Seat | Tablets of the Law | Cherubim over Arc
- Second Temple = None of that…everything was stolen or destroyed by Babylon in 586

In the holiest place on planet earth there is nothing physical to pray to…empty room

Proves an important point…we do not pray to objects, and it doesn't matter where we pray

We don't pray to crosses with statues of Jesus on them…no saints…no candles…no trinkets

We pray to unseen God who is all powerful and all seeing…How we pray matters! 4 Don'ts

1. <u>Don't Pray for Recognition (v. 5)</u>

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.

Have you ever noticed how differently people behave when they know someone is watching?

- People often act differently when they know they are being observed
- They may work harder, speak differently, or try to make a better impression
- Why? Because they want others to be impressed by them

I remember being a young Christian and being terrified to pray out loud…wrong

- We can pray to sound spiritual rather than to communicate with God
- We can use impressive words rather than sincere words

a. Recognize the Danger of Public Performance When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.

- Individuals appeared to be devoted to God…real motivation was to receive attention
- Were more concerned about their religious reputation than their relationship with God

Jesus is not condemning public prayer:

- Solomon prayed publicly at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8).
- Daniel prayed openly despite the threat of persecution (Daniel 6).
- The early church prayed together (Acts 4:24).

The problem was not where they prayed - The problem was why they prayed

There is a difference between praying publicly because you want to honor God and praying publicly because you want others to honor you

b. Resist the Desire for Human Approval – When you pray out loud…don't want moron

For they love to stand & pray in synagogues & at the street corners, that they may be seen by others

Notice that Jesus doesn't say they loved to pray - Loved the opportunity to be seen

- Synagogues and the streets – Nothing inherently wrong with these places
- Problem was these individuals deliberately used visible locations to attract attention

We can take something God intended for His glory and use it for our own glory

<u>When human recognition becomes our motivation, prayer becomes our performance</u>

c. Refuse the Reward of Human Recognition - Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward

- The hypocrites wanted recognition, and they received it

People noticed them - People heard them – People admired them | <u>That was their reward</u>

Something you don't know about me…I used to oversee an improv comedy team

- We performed at a little Christian Coffee Shop – We had a variety show night
- Guy write out a long prayer and perform it for the audience…it was performance

This is not how we are supposed to pray publicly…we are having a conversation w/ God

⇒ <u>Do I pray differently when people are listening?</u>

⇒ <u>Are you more concerned with impressing people or pleasing God?</u>

⇒ <u>Have you ever been concerned about how others perceive your prayers?</u>

Don't pray for recognition; pray for relationship

2. <u>Don't Neglect Relationship (v. 6)</u>

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.

One of the greatest dangers in any relationship is allowing familiarity to replace intimacy

- Husband and wife: live house - eat table - sleep bed - gradually become strangers
- The same thing can happen in our relationship with God
- Attend church - sing worship songs - read our Bibles – neglecting personal fellowship

Prayer is about spending personal time alone with the Lord

a. Make Personal Time with God a Priority - But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door

- Jesus is making it a point that you prioritize private prayer
- First-century Jewish setting, many homes had an inner room provided a place of privacy
  - Most of us don't have an inner room for praying…what we do have is bedrooms
  - A lot of us have spare bedrooms…what if you used one of these spaces for prayer
- Jesus is emphasizing the importance of personal, undistracted communion with God

Notice that Jesus says when you pray, not if you pray

- Jesus assumes that prayer will be a regular part of the Christian life
- Prayer is not supposed to be an occasional activity reserved for emergencies
- It should be a consistent expression of our relationship with God

The day of my son's wedding…hustle and bustle…I pulled him into a room…talked

A Christian who desires to grow spiritually must cultivate a consistent life of prayer

b. Eliminate Distractions That Hinder Your Relationship - shut the door

- Do you know what Jesus would say in 2026? And put your phone away!
- Jesus doesn't just tell us to enter the room; He tells us to shut the door

Genuine communion with God requires intentional separation from distractions

- Shutting door represents deliberately removing things that compete for our attention

I worked for two brothers in Chicago…Luke and Landon…Luke distracted…Landon only

Think about how difficult it can be to have a meaningful conversation with someone when your phone keeps ringing, the television is playing, and other people keep interrupting

You may be physically present, but mentally somewhere else

Minds wander - Schedules occupy our thought - Responsibilities compete for our attention

Jesus is teaching us to make room for uninterrupted fellowship with our Heavenly Father

Give you a trick if your mind wanders in prayer…talk out loud

c. Develop a Personal Relationship with Your Father - pray to your Father who is in secret.

- Prayer is not merely a religious exercise. It is a personal conversation with our Heavenly Father
- We are not approaching a distant stranger. We are approaching our Heavenly Father

We can: Burdens – Confess sins – Express gratitude – Seek wisdom – Share fears/concerns

The greatest privilege of prayer is not simply getting something from God

it is getting to spend time with God

And God sees your faithfulness - And your Father who sees in secret will reward you | Promise

- Jesus reminds His followers that their Heavenly Father sees what happens in secret
  - People not know how much pray – burdens you lift – battles fight on knees – Father

Something deeply encouraging knowing our private devotion is never overlooked by God

⇒ Priority: Have I made personal time with God a priority?

⇒ Distractions: What is keeping me from giving God my undivided attention?

⇒ Relationship: Am I seeking God's presence or simply His provision?

⇒ Faithfulness: Am I as devoted to God in private as I appear to be in public?

3. Don't Rely on Repetition (v. 7)

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. – Conversation that just doesn't go anywhere

- Word "empty phrases" carries the idea of babbling or speaking thoughtlessly
- Jesus says the Gentiles believe they will be heard because of their many words

In the pagan religious practices of that day, people often believed they could influence their gods through lengthy prayers, repeated phrases, and elaborate religious ceremonies

Baal in 1 Kings 18:26–29 – Cried out – Danced – Repeated phrases for hours – attention

If we say enough, do enough, and repeat enough, perhaps our god will answer – Not God

There are many pagan religions who repeat names of their gods, memorized formulas, and give lengthy expressions b/c believed the quantity of their words could influence their gods

- They believe if they say enough, repeated enough, right formula…attention their deity

Jesus says His followers must not approach prayer that way

Consider three false assumptions Christians can sometimes make

a. Longer prayers are always better

- Nothing wrong with praying long prayers…Jesus Himself spent extended time in prayer
- But a long prayer is not automatically a powerful prayer…some most powerful few min

b. Repeated prayers are always more effective

- Repeating a request is not necessarily wrong - pray for my children a thousand times
- What he is warning against is praying mantras – What is a religious mantra?

Word, phrase, or statement that someone repeatedly recites as part of a religious practice, often believing repeating it will bring spiritual benefit, peace, blessing, or closeness to God

Buddhist – Hinduism – Islam – Catholics with Hail Mary Full of Grace w/ Rosery

Jesus says that is not how prayer works with the one true God

c. Certain words make prayers more powerful

- People think must use certain religious phrases or expressions to get God's attention
- But God is not moved by religious vocabulary…responds goodness, will, and wisdom

Three things Jesus is teaching us about prayer:

⇒ **Prayer Is Not About Impressing God** – Fancy religious words or mantras

⇒ **Prayer Is Not About Manipulating God** – Long winded and repetition to bend God will

⇒ **Prayer Is About Communicating With God** - Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual.

God is not impressed by our words; He desires the sincerity of our hearts

4. Don't Doubt God's Readiness (v. 8)

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

- Greatest struggles Christians face in prayer is wondering whether God is really listening

Does God hear me when I pray? Does God care what I'm going through?

Sometimes we approach prayer as though we are trying to convince God to care about us

God is not reluctant to hear us, unaware of our needs, or unwilling to care for us

- We don't have to inform God of something He doesn't know
- We don't have to persuade God to care - your Father knows what you need

Before you speak…God knows | Before you ask…Understands | Before you explain…aware

- **Physical Needs** - He knows when we need provision, protection, strength, and help
- **Emotional Needs** - God knows…discouraged, overwhelmed, lonely, afraid, or hurting
- **Spiritual Needs** - God knows our need for forgiveness, wisdom, holiness, and strength

before you ask him - This is the central emphasis of the verse

Jesus is teaching that God is already aware of our needs before we ever bring them to Him

- So why pray? James 4:2 "You do not have, because you do not ask." | Withhold

God is not unwilling to respond

God's readiness to hear us does not mean He will always give us exactly what we request, when we request it, or in the way we expect

A loving father doesn't always give his children everything they ask for…best

Sometimes God answers 'yes' – Sometimes 'no' – Sometimes 'wait'

⇒ Don't confuse God's silence with God's absence

⇒ Don't confuse God's timing with God's reluctance

⇒ Don't confuse a different answer with a lack of love

Big Idea - Prioritize sincere devotion over religious display