

PRAYER: Reorienting to What Matters

Matthew 6:9–13

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, is the opening sermon of Jesus' ministry. He included an essential component on prayer. Doubtless the disciples were there taking it all in and maybe even throwing in an "Amen" from time to time. But sometime after that, in Luke 11, they realize that head knowledge has not completely grown into mature practice, so they say to the Lord, "Teach us to pray." At that point they had made the connection between Jesus' prayer life, his Kingdom focus and his power. They *knew what he had said*, they needed to grow in *doing what he did*. Jesus then responded by returning to his primary teaching on prayer. It also does us well to return to the foundations of Christian living from time to time and be reminded of them. Part of the grace of prayer is that it points us away from the rebellious ways of the world and away from our own deadly ways and reorients us to the life and mission of our God.

My goal this morning is not a thorough exegesis of Jesus teaching on prayer. Most of us, if quizzed on the model prayer, would be able fill in the right answers like the disciples. I think our greater need is to be stirred to our need of prayer and spurred to **practice** prayer. The disciples saw both prayer and power at work in Jesus' life and realized the deficit in their own lives. They were becoming hungry for change and growth in prayer. How is it with you this morning? Is your kingdom focus as clear as the Lord's? Is resurrection power at work in all you do? Starting with me, I suspect all of us need to say, "Teach us to pray." My goal this morning is to help us to see the grace and goodness of prayer for our souls in a dark, disoriented world, and have us leave with hearts hungry to taste and see the Lord's life-giving goodness in prayer. Let's read and pray to that end.

Matthew 6:7–13 — 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. ⁹Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread, ¹²and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[PRAY] Teach us to pray. For your glory, for your Kingdom, and for our good, teach us to pray.

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What is the chief end of man? *The chief end of man is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.*

Let's hold in our minds how the very act of prayer as Jesus taught helps us to accomplish our assignment: to glorify our God, and to enjoy him forever. Prayer begins with the glory of God and orients our thinking, our gratitude, and affections to our God.

In vs 9–10 — Prayer first orients us to our God, His Kingdom, and His Mission

Part of the wonderful grace of Lord's, Day worship is that gives us one day out of seven to re-orient to what is pure, what is true, what is enduring, and what is of ultimate value. We set aside the coarse cacophony of a dark and rebellious world, and bring our hearts and minds under God's truth. It is a reset, in a sense. We step away the grime splattered on us during the week and reorient to truth and resurrection power for the week ahead. In a similar rhythm God has established prayer to reorient us to the truth of who he is, to his holiness and righteousness, and to prepare us for the time of communion and effective prayer we are entering.

The model prayer Jesus lays out begins with the One who sits on the throne of all creation. That's about as good a place to start as you can get. Remember from our time in Revelation that all created things bow before God in heaven. As his will is now being done in heaven, so it will be done on earth.

As he is right and pure and holy, we know what righteousness, purity, and holiness are. It is the refrain of his holiness that echoes forever in heaven. Prayer washes away the scales from our eyes that would deceive us about what is morally right and true. God is the standard of holiness, so we pray that his holiness would blanket the earth and that his holy name would be honored and treated as holy. As we pray in this manner we are equipped to deal with the blasphemous claims that arise misrepresenting God. For instance, there are people who claim to be Christian, yet say that the killing of children in the womb is consistent with the character of God. There are entire denominations that have embraced immoral acts expressly forbidden in Scripture. If we advance no further in our prayers than stating the truth of who our God is, our minds are transformed by truth and we are far more equipped to see and reject lies and wickedness than if we neglect prayer.

When you pray, are you being reoriented to God, his character, and his Kingdom? We are prone to rush through praise and adoration and thanksgiving in order to get to our list of needs. Many, if not most of the prayers in the Psalms, spend the majority of their time praising and reciting the excellencies of God. We rob ourselves of the faith-building aspects of knowing our God when we

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quickly check the box of praise in order to move on. Further, we rob God of the glory he is due. If you need fuel for praise, make a note of some suggestions I'll make and spend time reading and praying through them for the next couple of weeks. Go to the Psalms — 96 is a good starting place, but any of them in 90's serve as a good launch pad. Write down what is said about God and begin your prayers in the same way, making them personal declarations, if that helps. Or start in Isaiah 40 and work your way through a chapter a day for a week or two. Make a note of what God says about himself and what he will do — look for first person pronouns — and write down everything you see about God in the chapter for that day. Begin your prayer time not merely reading those aloud, but thanking him for doing those very things in your life. Your faith will begin to grow, as will your praying.

Prayer orients us to his eternal kingdom — which is our home. Jesus inaugurated the kingdom when he came to earth. We have seen that in the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. We see the same statements in Matthew's Gospel as Jesus begins his ministry. The King has come. We currently live in the conflict between the kings and kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of our Lord and Christ. But that conflict is not permanent. When the Lord brings history to a conclusion, the kingdoms of this world are made the kingdom of our Lord and Christ. Godless kingdoms and rulers may proliferate now as dupes of the prince of the power of the air, but they are all brought down by our King. He counts them as dust on the scales. He laughs at them. We need to rehearse this in prayer, to recite these truths, because we need to know where our bus is headed, if you will. Our destination is not the United States. It is not some socialist utopia, as though that were a thing. Believers are headed to the new Jerusalem, where the Lamb is the light of the city of God, and the will of God is being perfectly done. Prayer orients us to this. When we pray that his kingdom to come, this is what we are praying for. We are asking in accord with the certainty that is soon to be revealed. We can get disoriented in a dark world, as though we were traveling through a long, dark tunnel. Discipline and obedience in prayer fills us with hope and expectation that our destination is not one of despair, but light and life.

An impoverished prayer life can leave us with a sense of fear or despair that we may not even connect with our impoverished prayer life. Prayer buttresses our minds with truth and kindles faith as daily we are reoriented to this: Our God is King; He created all that is for his glory and is preeminent over all rulers, authorities, powers, and dominions. Though the world is dark, the Light of the World, the Holy Lamb of God has conquered. Prayer, like a refreshing rain, quenches brittle fires of faithless fear so that we are not disorient or consumed.

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Are you anxious about the future? Is there fear or despair about what is coming? Do you question whether praying has any benefit at all? Consider if a lack of time or focus in prayer on God, his kingdom, and his mission is destabilizing your faith or leaving you vulnerable to the fiery darts of the devil. It is with the shield of faith — fashioned and made strong by the things we know to be true about God — that we quench those fiery darts. Oh, I urge you to grow in your praise and adoration of God, knowing that as his will is being done in heaven, so it shall be on the earth as well.

And that is his mission: that all of his creation be restored under his rule and reign on earth as it already is in heaven. Oh, how our praying for others will grow and mature when we grasp that his mission is to call people to believe him and turn from treasonous self-rule to submission to the Lord Jesus! Having our praying shaped by his mission helps us to see meaningful ways to pray for others. For instance, when I see something that opposes the rule and reign of Christ in someone's life, I can ask God to deal with that specifically. If someone is seeking satisfaction with money or possessions, I can ask God to make those things tasteless in their mouths empty in their souls; I can pray that they would taste and see that the Lord is good, as we sang from Psalm 34. If someone craves the approval of others or chases one misguided relationship after another, I can pray that they will find their hope in Christ alone and realize their value is based on his purchase of their soul on his cross.

I am convinced that our praying will move from dryness to delight if we will diligently practice being oriented to our God and his kingdom and mission. Now, let's turn our attention to the next section which will add even more fuel and delight to a time of communion in prayer.

In vs 11 — Prayer orients us to our dependence on God's supply for his work

Give us this day our daily bread... Let's begin with the daily aspect of prayer. The daily, manna-like rhythm of prayer is baked in to the Christian life. It is not an optional ingredient, or something to be done if there is extra time. Everything else is to be done if there is adequate time, but prayer is to be baked in to daily living — **Give us this day...**

Prayer is something that believers often struggle with. I've heard people say many times that prayer is hard. I wouldn't dispute that. I've said it myself. Part of what we consider hard is the actual minutes and hours that are required in order to pray. Consider this: As we carve out time in prayer, we are oriented to the fact that our lives are measured partially measured by time. In other words, my days and years are part of the resource that God has given me to glorify him and enjoy him forever. If I am

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“too busy” to pray, I have disoriented to fact that my time is not mine to do with as I wish. Every minute, every breath, every heartbeat, every bit of energy I am given is subjected to his glory and agenda. We can fairly easily see that the money that God gives us is a resource that we are to use to advance his kingdom. But our time is every bit as much a resource that God has given that we are to use for his purposes. As God calls us to ask for daily bread, that daily meeting becomes a sweet time of communion with our God who delights to give us what we need. Prayer is definitely an acknowledgment of our dependence on God as we ask him to provide for our needs. But does it not also stir your heart to know that eternal God delights in our company and communion with him. The daily rhythm of prayer reflects the call of Jesus in John 15 to abide in him.

God both understands our need of him and delights in communion with us. So he instructs us to carve out time to sit at his feet in order to understand his love and grace seen in his provision. That is fantastic! This is not transactional relationship, but one of love with our Father. As Jesus teaches us to ask for daily bread, let's not miss the direct connection that he made in John 6 that he is the Bread of Life. As he is the ultimate source of our physical food, he alone nourishes our soul with spiritual food. Prayerlessness robs us at the soul level of the spiritual nourishment we must have.

If your schedule is too busy for prayer, your schedule is disoriented to God and his Kingdom. I am not saying that the things bumping prayer from your schedule are bad things. But they are robbing you of the greater thing: communion with, and awareness of dependence on God. A simple reminder from Jesus' encounter with Martha in Luke 10. She complained that her sister Mary wasn't doing enough cooking and cleaning. Jesus said to Martha, “one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” If our busyness robs us of prayer, we have lost what is good and necessary: communion with the Lord. A schedule adjustment is mandatory.

Parents, I know your schedules may feel at times like you aren't in control. God does not intend it to be so. Let's deal with that truth. You may have to make some hard decisions. Orient both yourself and your children to what will not perish or fade. Teach them to value communion with God above all else, because when all else is gone or taken away, all they will have is Christ.

vs 12 — Prayer orients us to our Sin and our Savior. — Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Prayer orients us to the wages and debt of sin and the need for forgiveness. It orients us to the reality that we are sinners — all have sinned... The verb form for sinned is not referring to something done once or twice in the past; it means that we all continue to sin, sin, sin,

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sin. As we sin daily — perhaps even by the minute, we must be restored to the communion that is ruptured by sin. We must confess it before it rots us out and becomes gangrenous. Prayer puts us in remembrance of the Gospel, it is Christ who has purchased our forgiveness by paying the price for our sin. He is the One who delivers from God's coming wrath. (1 Thessalonians 1:10) As we come to him in faith and repentance, God remembers our sins against us no more, instead charging them to the account of the sin-bearing Savior.

As prayer orients us to our own sin and to the source of forgiveness in Christ — that he remembers our sins against us no more — it orients us to the reality of human relationships in a fallen world and how we respond to those sinners who against us as sinners. I sin and my sin sends shockwaves into the lives of those around me. You sin, and it adds to the waves of the deadly consequences of sin. The whole of our lives are lived on a tempestuous sea of sin that continually rocks us — yours, mine, and ours. Prayerlessness leads to gracelessness in my dealings with others. I will ignore the rough seas my sin has caused, but charge others with rocking my lifeboat by their sin. We are to forgive we have been forgiven. Prayer keeps us sensitized to sin, it keeps us confessing our sin, being refreshed by grace and forgiveness, and shapes us into a conduit of grace to others who sin against us.

Lastly, prayer orients us to the reality of our enemy, the weakness of our sin nature, and the victory of our King. We have a real enemy who wages war against us, targeting our old sinful in an effort to destroy us. In prayer we fight where the real battle is: **Ephesians 6:12** — we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Spiritual wickedness must be fought with spiritual weapons. God has given us such weapons through prayer and his word. though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. **2 Corinthians 10:4** — the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. Prayerlessness leaves unarmed in the middle of a battlefield that is set against us.

In closing, an extra resource in addition to God's word. I've already pointed you to the Scriptures to build your faith and orient you to God. But an additional help that I want everyone to take: A hymnal contains prayers that have stood the test of time which can serve as kindling for cool hearts and distracted minds. Keep it next to your bible. It may help you express your heart needs to the one who loves you and gave his life for you. Let's pray for growth and help in prayer. **“Teach us to pray.”**