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Summer of Seeking / Prayer / Matthew 6:5–13

Something that you may not know about me. I used to play the trumpet. It's been a few years, but it was a big part of my life for a long time.

But when I first started playing the trumpet something that I heard almost immediately is how important it was to practice.

But here's the thing. Everyone told me that practice was important, but no one ever showed me what it looked like to practice.

So I had no idea and so what would happen is I would get into practice, play a few songs that I liked, mess around on some notes and then I'd get bored and give up. And so practice wasn't very productive. I often felt like I was wasting my time.

But then I had a friend show me his practice routine. How he would start with a warmup, then he would work on his scales, afterwards he would play a few songs that he enjoyed and then he would pull out songs that needed work.

And I took that routine on, and I found that my practice times were more productive and I started to see growth almost immediately.

The difference it makes when someone doesn't just tell us we need to do something but actually shows us.

You know I wonder if any of your prayer lives sounds similar?

Like maybe all you've heard from people is how important prayer is, but no one has taken the time actually show you what prayer is. And so often your prayers look like my practice time, you get into your posture of prayer, you say a few

things you think you should say, pray some things you want and then afterwards you wonder, did that make any difference at all?

What does productive prayer actually look like?

In our passage this morning Jesus doesn't leave us wondering.

Jesus does more than just give us words to say as we pray.

He doesn't just teach us what to say, but He teaches us what prayer actually is.

Look with me this morning at our passage in [Matthew 6:5-13](#).

These are probably some of the most well-known words of Jesus, maybe the most widely known in all of the Bible.

We call this the Lord's Prayer and many of us grew up reciting this word for word. We could say it right now from memory.

And there's nothing wrong with that, but the question we need to ask is was that Jesus' intention when He said, "Pray then like this." Like, was Jesus saying every time you pray, pray this exact prayer word for word, recite this verbatim?

It can't be right... because then we would just be doing exactly what He warns against in verse 7.

Matthew 6:7 ESV

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."***

He's saying, don't go into prayer just heaping up empty phrases, thinking that you'll be heard because you just keep reciting the same thing over and over and over again.

See, the problem with just reciting these words verbatim is you can say it and not even mean it. You can recite these words with your mouth and not mean them in your heart; they're just empty words.

If your heart is not connected to the word in prayer, then your prayer has no meaning.

This is useful in teaching people how to pray... kind of like training wheels. You know, when your kids are young and you're just teaching them how to pray, you teach them basic prayers, maybe you do teach them the Lord's prayer, or maybe you have a night time prayer that you pray with your kids like, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

But as they mature, we expect that their prayers mature as well.

I want you to understand what Jesus is doing here. He isn't giving His disciples a prayer to recite word for word, He's giving them a model, a framework to pray from.

Think of each petition as a heading, a subject line that you build upon. Hallowed be your name — that's a heading, now pray for God's name to be hallowed and worshipped.

Your kingdom come is a heading, and under that heading you pray for the spread of God's kingdom. Give us this day our daily bread — that's also a heading, now pray for your daily needs.

Jesus isn't giving you words to repeat, He's giving you a structure to follow.

Jesus is giving us a model to follow. It does away with hopelessly wandering into prayer wondering what am I going to pray about today or just repeating the same things day after day. Jesus is saying this is what your prayer should look like.

Jesus is teaching us about prayer, but not just words to say, He is teaching us what prayer is.

And here's what He wants us to know.

That prayer is about posture, not about words.

POSTURE

Prayer is about the posture of our hearts, not about the words.

I mean that's why before He gets into what prayer looks like, He tells us what it doesn't look like, do you see that? Verses 5-7.

Matthew 6:5-6 ESV

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.

Here's the interesting thing to think about. That the Jews of Jesus day prayed way more than we do. In fact there were three times during the day when they would stop and pray, and they had certain prayers that they had memorized and they would recite them, mumble them over and over again.

But what Jesus is saying is that just because they prayed a lot and said a lot of things doesn't mean they were necessarily more spiritual than you and me.

In fact Jesus is saying just because they looked like they were praying and they were saying a lot of words out into the air, but they weren't really praying at all.

Why, well because their heart posture wasn't right before the Lord... notice they were praying not for the audience in heaven, but the audience around them. They love to stand and pray in the synagogues, oh how they loved to be asked to pray in front of the congregation and they're prayers were long and lengthy and filled with spiritual language and Scripture, but the words they were saying were meant to impress the people around them and make them look good.

And they loved to pray on the street corners. Because they prayed three times a day, they would make sure they were in the busiest street corner just at the right time and as the clock struck prayer time, they made sure that people could see

how spiritual they were, right in front of everyone they would kneel and do their morning or afternoon prayers.

They may look like they're praying, they were honoring the Lord with their lips, but their hearts were far from him.

He gives this other warning in verse 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.”***

Because they had morning, afternoon and evening prayers and they were memorized prayers that they would recite over and over and over again, thinking that if they uttered these words that God would hear them or thinking if they just spoke a lot of words that God would hear them.

But the problem with memorized prayers is that you don't have to mean those words you are saying, your heart doesn't have to be connected, you can say those words and have no impact on your life.

Prayer isn't just about saying a lot of words and sounding impressive, it isn't just about asking God for things.

It's about having a heart posture open and receptive towards the Lord.

And we can be guilty of similar things; it's the danger of turning this Lord's prayer into something we just recite but not meaning it from the heart.

But there are times we can go before the Lord, and our hearts are not there; our hearts are not in it. There are times that we can be called or asked to pray in groups or in church and our prayers are more for the people listening around us than the one listening in heaven.

So what does this all tell us about prayer? Well Scripture is actually quite specific about the kinds of things that get in the way of real prayer.

Think for instance of Jesus' words in John 14:13-14.

John 14:13-14 ESV

¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

We love the implications of that don't we? Whatever we ask in His name, that He will do it.

And maybe that's what we think when we pray and we always say, "In Jesus' name." We pray these things in Jesus' name amen. But ask yourself what does it mean to ask something in Jesus' name?

Well in ancient times someone's name reflected their character, their personality, their will. That's what Jesus is saying here isn't it, not that adding His name to our prayers is some magic formula to get what we want, but what He is saying is that when we pray for something that aligns with who He is, His character His nature, when we pray according to His will He will hear us.

So we need to ask as we pray, is my prayer aligned with who Jesus is? Is it in line with His will, with what He would want for me.

And that kind of leads us to the next piece that James tells us, that James says that sometimes our prayers go unanswered because we are praying selfishly, and we may not even realize it.

But James says...

James 4:3 ESV

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Sometimes that's true, isn't it? Sometimes the motives for which we are asking God for something aren't right, we are broken people, sinful people and sometimes we pray broken prayers.

Are my prayers selfish prayers?

But husbands how about what Peter says?

1 Peter 3:7 ESV

⁷ ***Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.***

That's an eye-opening statement for us husbands isn't it. This command that we learn to live with our wives in an understanding way, that we honor our wives — and if we aren't honoring our wives, if we are mistreating them, Peter says it will hinder our prayers. That's something to reflect on isn't it.

And while Peter is speaking directly to husbands here, the broader principle runs through all of Scripture — unconfessed sin, broken relationships, a heart that is not right before God — these things get in the way of prayer.

God doesn't want your empty words; He wants your heart. And if your heart isn't right, the words don't matter.

Prayer is so much more than just talking to God, it's so much more than just asking God for things, it's more than just saying idle words.

Prayer is all about our posture before God, And part of prayer is coming to Him and offering Him our hearts.

So the question is, well then what is our posture before God? How do we approach Him in prayer.

Well here's where Jesus starts to get into our prayer, He's told us what prayer isn't, so He turns and He says here's what prayer is, here's where it starts.

It starts with knowing who you're talking to.

WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO

Prayer begins with knowing who you're talking to.

The opening words in this prayer are instructive, aren't they?

In verse 9, Jesus says, ***“Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven.”***

Don't be too quick to rush past this, it's important. Those words remind us of who we're talking to.

We're talking to our Father who is in heaven – in heaven.

Like, understand when you and I pray we are talking to the God of the cosmos, of the universe, the creator and sustainer of all of history and existence. When we pray, we are supernaturally standing before the throne of God in heaven.

Like just pause and think about that for a second. What would your posture be if you were standing before God's throne in heaven. Do you think it would flippant, or joking or humorous?

Like we aren't talking to our homie, you aren't sending a text message to your friend. I remember a few years ago I was listening to a pastor who started off praying before his message and asking God to bless his message but then in the midst of his prayer, he goes off on a tangent saying and please Lord, please let the Packer beat the Browns today, you know God we are 0 and 4 this season and we need a win and the whole congregation is bursting out laughing and I am appalled.

The audacity that we have sometimes to forget who it is that we are talking to when we go into his presence, the sacredness of that moment, to turn into something flippant and light-hearted.

Think of Isaiah's reaction as he entered into the throne room of God in [Isaiah 6](#).

He wasn't standing there boastful, but he said, "Woe is me for I am undone, for I am a sinful man." He was humbled, overwhelmed by the glory of God.

Think of Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 ESV

¹ Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. ² Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter

a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

Solomon is saying as you come into God's presence, you don't rush in, you don't come without first examining your heart, you don't rush in with your lists of needs and wants, no you come, you pause, you consider who it is that you are talking to, you consider who God is, and who you are before Him.

When we pray, it is a sacred moment isn't it? And sometimes I think we forget that, and we rush in. We have everything that we need to ask Him. But sometimes; in fact, I would say every time you come into God's presence, I think there just needs to be a moment of pause, a moment of reflection, a moment where we humble our hearts, we quiet our hearts and we remember who we are talking to.

But I love how Jesus' words balance that out.

That first part... Our Father. Our Father in heaven.

There needs to be a reverence no doubt... but there's also this deep sense of intimacy with the Lord. That we are talking to our heavenly Father.

And we can do both, like we can come to Him with respect and reverence, but with this deep sense of intimacy. That we can come before Him boldly, and confidently.

Not because of who we are, but because we have been adopted as His child. We know that, we just spend weeks in [Romans 8](#),

We know that it tells us that we have received the Spirit of adoption as Son, by whom we cry out Abba, Father, that the Spirit himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God.

That word Abba, what a small child would call their Father, Dad or Daddy, that's the kind of personal relationship God is inviting you into.

By faith in Jesus, we have been adopted as God's child, we are His sons and daughters and as His sons and daughters we have access to Him that not everyone does.

As Jesus went to the cross, He died for what kept us from God, our sin. Our sin kept us from God, but because we have been forgiven and adopted as God's child, the curtain has been torn in two, we can enter into God's presence as His child.

John 1:12 ESV

¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

That's the key, isn't it? Have you received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? Have you believed in Him and trusted in Him? Only those who have, have been given the right to be a child of God.

It's a privilege to call God our heavenly father, and part of that privilege is the privilege to be able to go before Him any time we need Him, any time we want, and pour our heart out to Him, to know that when we pray that He hears us, He sees and He knows us.

You know, it's funny, people will often ask me to pray for them, which I'm honoured and happy to do, but sometimes they'll jokingly say, put in a good word for me, or they'll hint at the fact that somehow because I'm a pastor I have better access to God or He listens to me more, but that's not how it works.

If you are a child

of God, as I am a child of God, you have equal access to Him; the reception coming from you is just as clear as it is coming from me. God's ear is towards His children.

So Jesus wants us to know who it is that we are talking about, but we also see what prayer really is.

Jesus shows us that prayer is about worship.

WORSHIP

First and foremost, prayer is an act of worship.

Look at these petitions that Jesus gives us here.

We pray our Father in heaven... but notice Jesus doesn't say that we rush into asking Him for everything we want, we start with worship.

Hallowed be your name, your kingdom your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Interesting right? I mean, is that where my prayer starts? Like, when I get on my knees or when I enter into my prayer posture, wherever that may be, does my prayer start with worship?

That word hallowed, it's a word that means holy, set apart, glorified.

Before I utter a word about myself, my prayer is, *"Lord may Your name be glorified, may Your name be lifted high and magnified. My heart's desire is that above my needs that Your name would be made great."*

Our tendency is to make prayer about us. I know I'm guilty of this so often. I hear people talk about prayer and how it makes you feel better and how it's a therapy session and sure okay, that's part of it. But prayer isn't about you.

So often we go into prayer, and we make it about praying for Aunt Suzy to get through her knee surgery and Uncle Ben to get better from his cold and for Johnny to get the job or Joan to get into the school she wants.

Those things have a place, and their important, we'll get there.

But if that is all your prayer is about, you're missing the point. Part of prayer is orienting our heart towards God and that's why it has to start with worship.

I cannot properly pray for myself or others until my heart has been set towards God.

Praying for His name to be hallowed, worshipped, praying for His Kingdom to come.

Let me ask you, does your prayer time pray for God's Kingdom to spread and grow and built up?

Like when do we start praying for the big things, for eternal things? When do we pray for God's Kingdom to come? Well it starts with the spread of the gospel.

These two things are tied closely together, that God's name would be lifted high and His Kingdom to be built and spread.

There is a sense in which we are praying for the Kingdom to come on this earth when Christ returns. We are praying, *"Come Lord Jesus Come, we want to see your Kingdom come and be established and reign."*

But part of that is in the right here right now. May Your Kingdom come not just sometime in the future, but now.

Like, may Your Kingdom come, here In Brampton, and Lord, may I be a vessel for that spreading and building. May Your Kingdom come in this province, let your Kingdom come. Let Your name be glorified in Canada and use me for that purpose. I surrender my life for the purpose of glorifying Your name and the spreading of Your Kingdom.

And Lord, not just here in Canada, but we pray for the growth and the spread of Your name and the glorifying of it in other parts of the world, that it would outshine the darkness in countries and spaces where Your name is not known.

Brothers and sisters, is this where your prayer starts? Are our prayers just simply about me and my small bubble, or are we praying about greater things, are we praying about eternal things?

Do we start with worship, hallowing the name of our God, do we pray for the coming of His Kingdom here on earth?

Do you pray for God's will to be done?

Notice three petitions in here and it's still not about me.

But God, my prayer is that Your will be done... may Your will be done in my life, in my marriage, in my job, in my home, in my church, in my healing...

And that's not always easy, is it? Because if we're honest, sometimes God's will and our will are in conflict. Sometimes what I want to see happen and what God has willed to happen doesn't line up.

Sometimes prayer is about wrestling our will and submitting to His. I have often heard people be critical about those who pray for someone's healing, or someone's blessing of a job or finances, but they end it with if it is your will.

There are some who would say, well that's not faith. If you pray for someone to be healed, or pray for someone to be blessed, or helped and add if it is your will... you're not praying in faith.

But let me ask you what takes more faith? Does it take more faith to believe that God can only work good out of your limited understanding and desires? Or does it take more faith to trust that even if God's will is contrary to yours, it's still good.

That even if you cannot see it, God's will be for your good?

Isn't that how Jesus prayed in the garden? He prayed that if there was some way that He didn't have to go through with the cross, that He would be delivered, but His prayer was, not My will, but Yours, Father.

This is what prayer is about. This is what it looks like to worship in prayer... To start with hallowing His name, to pray for the coming and the spreading of His Kingdom, to pray for His will to be done, and trust it even if it does not match with ours.

We've worshipped, we've surrendered, we've aligned our will to His — and now Jesus says, bring your needs. All of them.

Here's the final piece of prayer that Jesus give us here.

Prayer is about bringing our whole life in humble dependence on God.

HUMBLE DEPENDENCE

Prayer is humble dependence upon God.

These last three petitions.

Verse 11-13

Matthew 6:11–13 *ESV*

***¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.***

Jesus call us to pray for our daily needs. Notice the movement, we pray for our physical needs, our spiritual needs, we pray for our spiritual battles.

When you pray, bring to the Lord your physical needs. Jesus calls us to pray for our daily bread, but I think we would miss the point if we just thought He meant food, because we need more than food.

Jesus is saying bring all your needs, your daily needs, your physical needs.

It could be that God would provide food, but it could be that terrifying diagnosis from the doctor. All our physical needs, that God would help us pay the bills, heal our marriage, make us a better parent, spouse, employees, for peace, comfort, trust, faith. Pray for whatever your need is in that moment.

The question we may have is...well, why? Like why do we need to bring these needs before God, doesn't He already know? Does God need some daily reminder to provide my needs? No, remember what prayer is about, it isn't just about asking God for things, it's about aligning ourselves with God, it's about communing and drawing closer to Him.

When we pray for our physical needs, it keeps us reminded of our utter dependence upon God. That everything we have and every success we have experienced have come from His hand. We need that because it becomes oh so easy to become self-reliant.

When we go to our great paying job and come home to our nice house everyday and we assume that there is food in the fridge.

When we look at our bank accounts and see that there is always money in it, it is so easy for us to become self-reliant, to begin to think that it is me, myself that has provided all of this.

But coming to God and praying and thanking Him, saying, “Lord thank you for my job, thank you for my family, thank you for our food and our provisions. Thank you Lord for giving me the ability to work and to provide. This keeps us in humble dependence upon God for all of our daily needs because we recognize that it all comes from His hands.

But it isn’t just physical needs that we have, it’s spiritual, isn’t it?

And so we pray, “*Lord forgive us of our sin, help us to forgive others.*”

Now here's a question you might have — why do I need to ask for forgiveness if I'm already forgiven in Christ? And it's a great question. But here's the thing, it isn't for God's benefit, it's for ours. There's something healthy about bringing our sin into His presence and confessing it.

There's something powerful about being reminded of just how much we need the forgiveness that Christ has given us. It keeps us humble. It keeps us grateful. It keeps us from taking for granted, from becoming numb to what Christ has done for us at the cross.

We need that daily reminder that no matter what the day has brought, whether it is a day that I have been strong or day that I have fallen, that I am never out of need of the gospel that saves.

To be reminded daily of that promise, that if we confess our sin, He is faithful, so faithful and He is just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But here's something else this does. If I need forgiveness, if I am not out of the reach of the gospel, then neither is anyone else.

That daily gospel reminder does something in us, it reminds us that the forgiveness we have received from Christ doesn't stop with us, it flows outward into our relationships with others. Lord forgive me but help me to forgive others who have wronged me. It reminds us that the gospel we rely on is not just saving us, it is doing a work in us and through us.

Forgiveness doesn't always mean that a relationship needs to be fully restored. Sometimes that isn't possible, sometimes it isn't safe, sometimes it isn't wise. But what it does mean is this — I am not going to become a prisoner of my own anger, my own bitterness, my own hardness of heart. Lord help me to deal with the unforgiveness in my heart

But we don't just need forgiveness for the sins of the past, we need strength for the battle that is ahead of us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

We might take that as though God sometimes lead us into temptation, but we know that can't be true because James tells us that God tempts no one.

Rather what Jesus is saying is Lord as you lead me, help me not to stray.

Lord there are situations, there are scenarios, people, places that are going to lead me to be tempted. Lead me to places where I will not be tempted.

And Lord there are places, there are traps, pitfalls of evil that the enemy has set up to destroy me, to cause me to fall.

I think of the classic hymn Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love, here's my heart Lord take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.

This is praying that God would keep us, that He would keep us from stumbling, keep us from walking away, keep us from making a shipwreck of our faith. It's recognizing that just as our physical sustenance comes from His hand, the only way that we can stay strong and persevere in the faith spiritually, is by His hand.

You know, I am struck with two things, as we close, and I hope you are too.

The first is how much of this prayer is focused on God, and how much of this prayer is focused on me.

As Jesus teaches us to pray and shows us what prayer looks like, maybe you're surprised this morning that this prayer is God-focused, God-centred, His praise, His Kingdom, His will, His glory.

And how little it is about me. And how before I can properly pray for my needs, I need to orient my heart and focus towards God.

The second thing that strikes me is even in the petitions, in the things that Jesus calls us to ask for, how little our supplications are about our physical needs, about how much time He calls us to pray for spiritual needs.

Like I wonder, I wonder is this what our prayer life looks like?

Here's what I want you to know, that kind of prayer, is only possible because of what Christ has done on the cross. He has opened up the way, restored the relationship with God, tore the veil, He has made it possible for us to enter into God's presence.

So the question isn't just, "*Do you pray?*" The question is — do you know the one you're praying to? Because if you do, everything changes.