

The Disciple's Prayer | *Matthew 6:5–15*

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Illustration: conversations with my children

Everybody has days where something so significant happens that it radically changes your life forever.¹ Two of those days in my own life are (1) the day that my oldest three sons became part of our family and (2) the day that my youngest son was born.

1. Liz and I had been married for almost five years when Daniel, Aukeem, and Troy became part of our family. I remember the day the car pulled up to our house. I remember them gathering all their worldly possessions. I remember showing them the rooms that we had prepared for them. I remember sitting at our dining room table and signing all the papers as Troy (who was 2 years old) crawled up on my lap and just sat there! I look back on that day, and it makes me smile.
2. Six years later, I remember kneeling on the floor next to the bed in the birth center where Liz had just given birth to Asher. She was lying on the bed, holding Asher in her arms, and I remember looking into his face the very first time that he opened his eyes. I look back on that day, and it makes me smile.

As precious as these memories are, the real joy in being a dad is growing in my relationship with my children – watching them grow in their ability to *relate* with their parents: to talk, play, joke, dream, create, explore, dialogue.

Examples this past week:

- Driving with Aukeem & talking about life
- Sitting on the living room floor with Asher talking about dinosaurs 😊

All of my children are still learning and growing when it comes to **the art of conversational communication:**

- Asher: *vocabulary*
- My oldest three: (while they have a much bigger vocabular than my 3 year-old), they are *learning when to talk & when to listen, eye contact, body language, proximity, tone, volume, emotional engagement, energy level, staying on topic, pursuing mutually edifying topics, knowing when to change the topic, the art of conversational flow, being aware of your audience, reading the situation, etc.*

Having a meaningful two-way conversation requires way more skill than most people realize, but that's because you begin learning these skills as an infant – and you continue to learn it over the course of a lifetime. And the more a child engages in relational conversations, the more their conversational skills increase and the more mutually satisfying those relationships become.

¹ I could point to quite a few different days in my life that were life-changing in some significant way.

This is true – not only in our conversations with one another – but in our conversations with God: **prayer**. Having a meaningful, satisfying, life-giving prayer life requires work. Practice.

Many Christians have frustrating prayer lives (in part) because they don't know what they're doing. They don't know **how** to pray.

For so many people, prayer is basically just **a grocery list** that they are trying to give to God.

1. God, I am asking that You would **help** with this.
2. God, I am asking that You would **give** me this, this, and this.
3. God, I am asking that You would **provide** in these areas.
4. God, I am asking that You would **do** this thing and that thing for me.

We come to God with a **LIST** of all the things that we want Him to do for us – and then we wonder why our prayer life isn't more *life giving*. It's because relationships aren't built on shopping lists, they're built on conversations; and **that** is the essence of prayer.

PRAYER: *is responding to our heavenly Father in the conversation that He has started with us.*

There is so much that we could say about prayer – because the entire Bible is essentially a lesson on what it looks like for God's people to communicate with Him. But this morning, we want to take a few minutes and ask God to help us grow in our communication with Him by looking at the model prayer that Jesus gave His followers in the Sermon on the Mount.

Turn to **Matthew 6:9–13**

As you are opening your Bibles to **Matthew 6**, I want to note the significance of this moment for your prayer life. In this moment, you are opening your Bible because this is where prayer starts – with the Word of God.

- Prayer is not where we **initiate** a conversation with God.
- Prayer is where we **respond** to the conversation that God has already initiated with us – in His Word.

Here in the Bible...

- God reveals His character to us – so that we know who we are praying to
- God reveals His glory – so that we know what the ultimate purpose of prayer is
- God reveals His will – so that we know what to pray for
- God reveals His promises – so that we know what we can count on in our prayers
- God reveals His Son – so that we know why it is that we can pray at all
- God reveals His sovereignty – so that we can pray with unshakeable confidence
- God reveals His disposition toward us – so that we come with boldness and honesty

Story: UPS coworker asking me about my Bible. I responded, “If you had a book that served as a perfect guide, revealed truth, promised everlasting happiness, wouldn't you give you life to knowing it? He said, “*Yup. It's called Arnold Schwarzenegger's guide to body building.*” 😊

Prayer is communicating to the God we have come to know through His Word.

- The Bible is where we hear God speak.
- Prayer is where we respond.

That's why, last Sunday, during the sermon, all we did was listen to God speak through His Word together. We started 2023 with the Word of God. And now, we are asking God to teach us how to **RESPOND** to Him through prayer. In **Luke 11:1**, Jesus' followers came to Him and said, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" That's what we are asking God today; that's what we are asking God for this year.

One of my greatest desires for 2023 is for North Center to be a church that grows together in prayer. *That we would:*

- Spend time on the mountain top with God – like Moses
- Wrestle with God – like Jacob
- Plead with God – like Hannah & Abraham
- Depend on God – like Hezekiah
- Be brutally honest with God – like Job & Asaph
- Lay it all on the table before God – like David
- Come with great expectations – like Paul
- See answers from God – like Elijah
- Worship God – like Deborah & Mary
- See people set free – like the early church

When it comes to learning how to pray like this, **Matthew 6** is a really good place to start. But first let's **PRAY**

What can we learn about prayer from this passage?

First, we learn to whom are we praying? *So who is it that you pray to?*

God? *Yes.* The **Creator** of the universe? *Yes.*

The **sovereign King** of the world? *Yes.* The **holy Judge**? *Yes.*

But when we come to pray...

1. We are coming to our **Father.**²

Through faith in Jesus, we come to God as...

- His children (**1 John 3:1**).
- Adopted into His family (**Eph 1:3–14**).
- As children coming to their daddy whose love is immeasurable (**Eph 3:17–19**).³
- We come to a Father who delights to give us good things (**Matt 7:11; James 1:17**).
- Who takes pleasure in our company (**Zeph 3:17**).

² You could spend all year just thinking about that reality and still not even scratch the surface of how amazing this is.

³ See also **Rom 8:31–39; Jer 31:3**.

- Who wraps us in His love, not because of our good behavior, but because we're His kids.⁴
- Whose plans for us are always for our good (**Jer 29:11; Rom 8:28**).
- Who will never turn us away (**John 6:37**).

Though He is the sovereign and holy King of the universe, we do not approach Him the way Esther approached the King of Persia – with trepidation; but with boldness (**Heb 4:16**)... because we are not coming to an irrational, temperamental, ego-hungry king (like the King of Persia) – but to our Father.

2. We are talking to our Father *in heaven*.

In other words, He's not like our *earthly* fathers.

- He's perfect (**Deut 32:4; Psalm 18:30**).
- He sees everything perfectly (**Heb 4:13; Psalm 147:5**).
- He never gets emotionally or physically exhausted (**Isa 40:28**).⁵
- He has the ability & the authority & the power & the resources to do exactly what He wants to do for His children (**Isa 46:10; Psalm 84:11**).
- He always makes good on His promises (**Gen 46:27; Joshua 21:45**).

3. We are talking to *our* Father.

Here, Jesus is teaching us that our relationship with God was not meant to be a private affair. Yes, we are supposed to spend time with our Father alone "*in the secret place*" (i.e., **Matt 6:6**), but we are also called to have conversations with our Father in the company of other brothers and sisters.

Jesus doesn't teach us to pray, "*My Father*" – but "*our Father*". He used this plural word for a reason! He was calling us to spend time praying with one another. One of the reasons for this is that the gathered community helps us see God in ways that we never would on our own.⁶

For example:

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| • I learned about God's <i>kindness</i> by listening to | <i>Caleb Ziegler</i> | pray |
| • I learned about God's <i>holiness</i> by listening to | <i>James Alexander</i> | pray |
| • I learned about God's <i>intimacy</i> by listening to | <i>Larry Potter</i> | pray |
| • I learned about God <i>steadfast presence</i> by listening to | <i>Orvil Hamer</i> | pray |
| • I learned about the <i>joy</i> of God's presence by listening to | <i>Phil Bishman</i> | pray |
| • I learned <i>brokenness</i> in God's presence by listening to | <i>Daniel Soukup</i> | pray |
| • I learned about <i>friendship</i> with God by listening to | <i>David Bryan-Ehr</i> | pray |

⁴ See the story of the runaway son (**Luke 15:11–32**).

⁵ My poor boys have a father who gets physically and emotionally tired all the time.

⁶ When you are first getting to know somebody that you are thinking about dating, one of the things you should do *before* you date them (and *while* you are dating them) is to spend time with them in the company of their friends and family. Their family will bring out sides of them that you will never see just one on one, and their friends will bring out sides of them that you won't see one on one. Watching them interact with other people who are close to them helps you get to know them better. **And the same is true with God.**

Look at how much we have learned about prayer – just in the first line!

1. **ONE** | Our prayer life will be exponentially richer when we pray (not just in the secret place) but in the company of our brothers and sisters.
2. **TWO** | We will approach prayer with hope and boldness when we remember that this God is our Father.
3. **THREE** | We will come with great assurance that He is able to accomplish every good purpose because He is not limited like our earthly fathers. He is our *heavenly* Father.

We are not going to study the other lines in detail this morning, but I want to highlight the flow of this prayer before we close.

1. It **begins & ends** with **worship & praise** (words that are not just *to* God but *about* God):
 - You are our Father (9)
 - You are exalted high above all others (9)
 - Your kingdom is the kingdom that matters – not mine (10)
 - Your will above all else – not mine (10)
 - Your kingdom is forever (13)
 - Your power is forever (13)
 - All glory belongs to You forever (13)

When your prayers are surrounded by worship – instead of by grocery lists, it radically changes your experience in prayer.

2. In **the middle** (11–12), we lay ourselves bare before the God sees us completely:
 - We bring our *needs* before our Father [**supplication**] (11)
 - We bring our *sins* before Him [**confession**] (12)
 - We bring our *relationships* before Him (12)
 - We bring our *temptations & struggles* before Him (13)
3. Remember that prayer is relationship, which means that we aren't just talking to God; we are talking *with* God. In other words, we also need to be listening as we pray – and we do that by having our ears tuned to what God is saying to us through His Word. This is where He speaks (**Heb 1:1**).

I think the best way to do this is to develop a habit of praying God's Word back to Him.

- So, you start with God's Word: maybe it's something that you read during your alone time with God in the morning – or maybe it's something that you have memorized – or a verse that you have written down on a card or on your phone...
- And then use God's Word as a conversation starter for prayer.

CLOSE with an example | *Psalm 1*