

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

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By Pastor Stan

Matthew 6:5-9

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INTRO.

-- Our vision at North Center is to make disciples, and we like to use a diagram called "The Disciple's Cross" to illustrate what it means to be a disciple.

-- The circle at the center of the cross reminds us that disciples seek to keep their lives centered on Christ. The arms of the cross represent the disciplines, the ways or means God has given to us to keep our lives centered on Christ: living in the Word (Bible), praying in faith, fellowshiping with believers, and witnessing to the world. Each year we take a different part of the cross to emphasize. This year we will be emphasizing prayer. Throughout the year we will be stressing the vital role that prayer has in the life of a disciple. We will seek to learn more about prayer, and, more importantly, to increase, deepen, and grow in the practice of prayer.

-- To launch this prayer emphasis, I am beginning 2015 with a series of sermons based on the Lord's Prayer. Each week we will take a different part of the prayer, seek to understand what Jesus is teaching us about prayer in that part of the prayer, and then to put that into practice.

I. The 2 Contexts

-- The Lord's Prayer actually occurs in two Gospels, in Luke and in Matthew, and in each Gospel the context for the prayer is different. The most probable explanation is that the Lord's Prayer is a model or guide that Jesus used at different times during His ministry to teach His followers how to pray.

A. Luke 11:1-4

-- One place where we find the Lord's Prayer is in Luke chapter 11.

Cf., Luke 11:1a

-- Luke, more than any other Gospel, pays attention to Jesus' prayer life. So as we come to Luke 11, Jesus is doing what we often find Him doing in this Gospel - we find Jesus off by Himself praying. Seeing how important prayer is to Jesus, His disciples come to Him and ask Him to teach them how to pray. Jesus responds to this request by giving them what we call "the Lord's Prayer." We call it the Lord's Prayer, of course, because the Lord Jesus is the one who gave it to us; but, in a sense, it could also be called "the Disciples' Prayer" because it is a model that Jesus gives to His disciples to teach them how to pray.

Cf., vv. 2-4

-- You notice that the Lord's Prayer as it's recorded here is similar to the one that most people know but not exactly the same. There are two reasons for that:

1. The familiar Lord's Prayer is based on the King James Version, and we are reading it from the ESV, and

2. The Lord's Prayer that we are most familiar with comes largely from the Gospel of Matthew.

B. Matthew 6:5-13

-- The second place where we find the Lord's Prayer is Matthew chapter 6.

1. The Context

-- The context for the Lord's Prayer in Matthew is different from that in Luke. Here in Matthew Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer as part of His Sermon on the Mount, which comprises chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel.

-- In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is telling us about life in God's Kingdom - in other words, life as a disciple who is living a Christ-centered life. A primary theme that Jesus emphasizes throughout the Sermon is that discipleship is not a matter of outward rituals but of inner experience.

Discipleship doesn't come from outward conformity but from inward transformation. Discipleship comes from a heart that has been born again - that has been given life through Christ and now desires to know, follow, and please the Lord.

2. The Application to Prayer (vv. 5f.)

-- Starting in verse 5 Jesus shows us how this truth about our discipleship applies to our praying.

a. Negatively (How Not to Pray)

-- Jesus begins the application by telling us how not to pray.

(1) Not Like the Jewish Religious Leaders (vv. 5-6)

-- First of all, He tells us that our praying should be different from the way that the Jewish religious leaders in that day prayed.

vv. 5-6

-- The religious leaders in Israel loved to pray in highly visible locations in the synagogue and even on the street corners. They loved these locations because they desired for as many people as possible to see them and to be impressed with how good and righteous they were.

But Jesus' disciples aren't to follow their example. Jesus' disciples are to pray in "secret," private places because they aren't praying to be heard by people - they're praying to be heard by God.

Don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is not saying that it's wrong to pray in public where others can hear us. In fact, Jesus Himself prayed in public as did the 12 Disciples. What Jesus is addressing here is not so much the setting for our prayers but the motivation for them - why we are praying, and, especially, are we praying to impress other people or are we praying to express our hearts to God.

(2) Not Like the Pagan Gentiles (vv. 7-8)

-- Jesus also says that the way His disciples pray is to be different from the way that the pagan Gentiles in that day would pray.

vv. 7-8

-- The prayers of the pagan Gentiles were the babbling repetition of words and phrases that the pagans thought had some kind of a magical power and if they repeated them enough they could get their gods to do certain things.

-- Jesus explains why we don't need to pray this way in verse 8.

v. 8

-- Jesus says that when we pray we aren't telling God something that He doesn't already know. God already knows everything about us - He knows everything we need. And more than that, He cares about us and what we need. Notice that Jesus refers to God as our Father; the implication is that God not only knows about our needs - He cares about them, like a father. When we pray, we aren't trying to get God's attention - we're not trying to get Him to do something for us that He doesn't want to. So, if God is already aware of us and knows about our needs and cares about meeting those needs, then why should we have to pray?

The answer to that question is what Jesus is about to give in the following verses that we know as the Lord's Prayer.

b. Positively (How - and Why - to Pray)

(1) v. 9a, "Pray then like this..."

-- The Lord's Prayer is a model, a guide to teach us how and why to pray.

(2) vv. 9b-15

-- The Lord's Prayer that is familiar to most people - the Lord's Prayer that we customarily pray - is based largely on the way these verses are translated in the King James Version. Notice that the ending "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" is not present here in the ESV or in most newer translations. The reason is given in the footnote, which explains that that part of the prayer is not contained in the older and better manuscripts. I'll talk more about that when we come to that part of the prayer in a few weeks.

II. The Prayer: "Our Father in Heaven"

-- As I said earlier, in the weeks ahead we'll be looking at each part of this prayer and what Jesus teaches us about prayer in each part. Today, we're looking at just the opening words of the prayer: "Our Father in heaven." What Jesus does in those words is not only teach us how to pray but why we pray. What Jesus is telling us here is that prayer is not so much about getting something from God but experiencing a relationship with Him.

A. "Our Father"

-- Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus refers to God as our "Father." Jews in Jesus'

day would typically talk about God and address Him with some form of the word "Lord," but Jesus teaches us to think of Him and to address Him as "Father." In teaching us to call God "our Father" Jesus is revealing to us some important truths about who God is.

1. A Person

-- First, addressing God as Father reminds us that He is a person. Later this year episode 7 of Star Wars is scheduled to be released. Now, I really enjoy the Star Wars movies, but when you watch them you need to be aware that they have lousy theology. What is the term for god in the Star Wars movies? "The Force." In the Star Wars movies God is described as "The Force," which is an impersonal reality that pervades the universe and contains both good and evil. But in calling God "our Father," Jesus is telling us that God is not some impersonal "force" but a person. Whenever the Bible speaks of God, it speaks of Him in personal terms - He has intellect, emotions, and will. We can communicate with Him - we can know and be known by Him.

2. Creator

-- To call God "Father." Also reminds us that He is the Creator. He brought into being all that exists. The universe didn't begin as the result of impersonal chance but by the personal decree and act of God the Father.

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Deuteronomy 32:6 "Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?"

3. A Loving God

-- To call God "Father" tells us that He is a person and that He is the Creator, and it also tells us that He is a God of love. He not only created us; He cares for us.

Matthew 6:25-26 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

-- Some of us may have not had earthly fathers who showed us love, but Jesus is telling us that we all have a heavenly Father who loves us and cares for us and desires for us to have a close, intimate relationship with Him.

B. "In Heaven"

-- Jesus instructs us to address God intimately as "Father" but not casually, without proper honor and respect. God is our Father - but He is our Father "in heaven." He is the majestic, sovereign, creator and ruler of the universe.

Isaiah 6:1-5 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" **4** And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

-- We are to come into God's presence, but we are to come with humility and awe.

Hebrews 4:15 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need

When we come to God, we come to Him seated on the throne; and the one who is seated there is the Father of mercy and grace.

-- What Jesus teaches us in the words "Our father in heaven" is that real prayer always keeps in balanced perspective these two truths:

That, on the one hand, He is the majestic sovereign God who sits on the throne of heaven, and that, on the other hand, the one on that throne is our Father who invites us to come and receive mercy and find grace in our time of need.