



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from June 6 afternoon through June 13 morning

The Sermon on the Mount, Week 8

Matthew 6:5-15

“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. 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. 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 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. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

As Jesus continued to teach about motives, he moved to the topic of prayer. He taught his followers to use the same approach about prayer as they should for giving to those in need: do not seek to be seen by others. In fact, he used almost the exact same phrasing as he did in verses 2-3. The religious leaders made sure to pray in public places so other people would see them praying. These men desired the praise of people and that is the only reward they would receive. Instead, Jesus taught that his followers should pray in a private place so that only God would see them praying, and they would then receive a reward from Him.

In addition to this teaching, Jesus also offered another truth about prayer: specific words and phrases, and longer prayers do not gain the attention of the Father:

The first saying is aimed not now against the ‘hypocrites’, but against praying as the Gentiles do. Prayer in the non-Jewish world was often characterized particularly by formal invocations and magical incantations, in which the correct repetition counted rather than the worshipper’s attitude or intention.

R. T. France, Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 137.

Jesus taught that God the Father already knows what people need before they ask Him in prayer. He then shared an example prayer that has been memorized and recited for ages. It has been called “The Lord’s Prayer” but some have noted a better title is “The Disciples’ Prayer”

because it was given to teach followers of Jesus how to pray. While this prayer has been memorized and recited, most Bible scholars agree that it was not intended to be prayed verbatim but instead as an example that could be used to form personal prayers to God. The following detailed breakdown can help in demonstrating the elements of a disciple's prayer to God:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Acknowledging God as Father is reminder of the disciple's relationship with him. Although God is omnipresent, thinking of Him as "in heaven" gives to the disciple the correct perspective of God as high and lifted up. In the same way, the realization that His name is "hallowed" leads one to have a reverence for God. This opening phrase is one of worship because God is holy and worthy of praise and this should be the disciple's mindset when entering into a time of prayer to Him.

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

The kingdom of God was often a focus of Jesus' teachings. In short, this kingdom is God's plan for the redemption of mankind through His one and only Son, the Messiah. His coming kingdom was an ongoing work that began in the Garden of Eden, continued through Abraham and the nation of Israel, culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ and then spread throughout the entire world through the birth and growth of the New Testament church. In praying for that kingdom to come, the disciple acknowledges that this kingdom work is the top priority in life. Asking for God's will to be done here on earth just as it is in heaven means praying for His ways to permeate this world. Of course, the personal aspect of this prayer means that the disciple seeks to personally further His kingdom and do His will.

"Give us this day our daily bread ..."

God desires for the disciple to rely on Him for the most basic of needs. When a follower of Jesus asks God for provision, there is an acknowledgment that even food and shelter are gifts that are given by the Father and not a result of human effort alone. This aspect of prayer also brings to mind the truth that God is good and does not withhold good things from His children.

"... and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

The disciple is to ask God to forgive sin. Sin is a serious matter and must be dealt with; after all, Jesus gave his very life so that human sin could be forgiven. Unconfessed sin leads to a broken fellowship with God. As God forgives his followers, so His followers must also forgive others who have sinned against them.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The Greek word translated "temptation" in this phrase is more commonly understood to mean "testing" rather than "temptation" in the sense of being enticed to sin (it should also be noted that James 1:13-14 states God does not tempt people with evil). Jesus then was teaching the disciples to petition God not to bring them into circumstances where they would be tested. The underlying truth here is the reality of human weakness; disciples must embrace this truth and

consistently seek God's help in all aspects of life. In addition, the disciple is to pray that God will "deliver ... from evil" which most likely means to be saved from Satan's influence and tactics.

Jesus closed this section of teaching with a truth that reinforces the portion of the prayer found in verse 12. Just as this verse referenced the disciple's active fellowship with God that is restored when sin is confessed, so these final two verses of the passage reference this fellowship as well. If a disciple is unwilling to forgive the sins of others, that follower will experience a broken fellowship with God.

Other passages from this week's reading:

- **Luke 18:1-14** (The parables of the persistent widow and the pharisee and tax collector)
- **Daniel 6:1-13** (Daniel continues to pray to God in his home even though a law was passed that forbade him to do so)
- **Revelation 4:1-11** (John sees a vision of God on His throne in heaven with creatures and elders around Him worshiping)
- **Exodus 16:2-8** (God provides bread from heaven so His people can eat)
- **1 Corinthians 10:12-13** (God allows testing but always provides a way of escape)
- **2 Thessalonians 3:1-3** (Paul asks for prayer to be delivered from evil people and reminds his readers that God will guard them against the enemy)
- **Colossians 3:12-13** (Paul instructs believers to forgive one another as God has forgiven them)

Discussion Questions

1. Public prayer is fairly common in local church settings such as worship services and meetings. (Keep in mind, Jesus prayed in public and in private.) How do you think Jesus' teaching about praying in secret lines up with this practice of public prayer? Can we pray from our hearts when we pray in public? Explain your answer.
2. In what way can you apply Jesus' teaching about "empty phrases" and "many words" to your own times of prayer?
3. What does it mean to you to know that God knows what you need even before you ask Him? If He knows what we need before we ask Him, why do you think He still wants to hear from us?
4. How does beginning a time of prayer with praising God put us in the right mindset to commune with our Heavenly Father?
5. In your own words, describe what it means to desire God's kingdom to come and His will to be done.
6. When we ask God for provision, forgiveness and deliverance, how does that affect our attitude and actions as we live in this world?