

Breaking the Cycle of Performative Prayer

Lakewood Family Church | Dr. Jonathan L. Vorce | May 31, 2026

Matthew 6:5-15

Story Illustration

Picture this — last year a high-powered executive posted a 60-second video of himself praying loudly in his glass-walled corner office every morning. Hashtag **#BlessedAndBoss**. The comments poured in: “So inspiring!” But his marriage was crumbling, his kids barely knew him, and he privately admitted he hadn’t felt God’s presence in years. Jesus is talking straight to that guy... and maybe some of us today.

Introduction

- In **Matthew 6**, Jesus is unpacking the *“righteousness of the kingdom”* — how our everyday relationship with God is supposed to look different from the world around us, especially in the private practices of giving, praying, and fasting.
- **Verse 1** sets the tone for the whole chapter: *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.”*
 - We’ve already seen Jesus apply this to charitable giving.
 - Today we turn to the second act of righteousness: prayer.

I. THE PROBLEM: PRAYING FOR AN AUDIENCE (Matthew 6:5)

A. Don’t pray like the *“hypocrites”* — the performers of Jesus’ day.

1. They loved to stand in the synagogues or on street corners so everyone would notice.
2. Their motive? *“That they may be seen by others.”*

B. Jesus’ blunt diagnosis: *“They have received their reward in full.”*

1. The applause of the crowd — that's all they get.
2. Zero reward or intimacy with the Father.

C. Jesus is NOT banning all public prayer.

1. He prayed publicly Himself (**Matthew 11:25; John 11:41**).
2. The apostles did too (**Acts 27:35**).
3. The issue is motive — praying to impress people instead of connecting with God.

II. THE SOLUTION: PRAYING FOR GOD'S EARS ALONE (**Matthew 6:6-15**)

A. Pray to Be Seen by Your Father, Not by People (**v. 6**)

“Go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen.”

1. The “secret place” isn't magic — it's about undivided attention.
2. The person who prays much in private is the one truly praying to be seen by God.

♦ **Story Illustration:** Maria, a single mom, started waking up fifteen minutes earlier to pray in her tiny laundry room (the only door that locked). No Instagram stories, no audience. Within six months her teenage son — who had been spiraling — gave his life to Jesus, and her impossible work situation flipped. She still calls that laundry room “the throne room.”

B. Pray to Be Heard by God, Not by Impressing Him with Words (**vv. 7-8**)

1. Avoid *“vain repetitions”* like the pagans who thought they could wear God out.
2. Your Father already knows what you need before you ask.

C. Pray According to the Pattern Jesus Gave Us (**vv. 9-13**)

1. *“This, then, is how you should pray”* — not a rigid script, but a beautiful blueprint.
2. Notice the stunning simplicity — short, honest, and straight to the heart.
3. The content of kingdom prayer includes:

- a. **Reverence** — *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name”* (honoring who God is).
- b. **Surrender** — *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*
- c. **Dependence** — *“Give us today our daily bread”* (physical needs).
- d. **Forgiveness and freedom** — *“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”* and *“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”*
- e. **Worship** — *“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”*

- ◆ **Story Illustration:** A stressed-out dad in our men’s group last year started praying the Lord’s Prayer out loud every morning while driving his kids to hockey practice. One day his eight-year-old interrupted: *“Dad, you keep saying ‘forgive us as we forgive.’ Does that mean I have to forgive my sister for eating my twinkie?”* The whole car got quiet... and real forgiveness happened before they even reached the rink.

D. Pray with a Merciful Spirit (vv. 14-15)

- 1. Jesus doubles down on the forgiveness line because it’s that important.
- 2. If we refuse to forgive others, we block our own forgiveness.
- ◆ **Story Illustration:** Two lifelong best friends in our church hadn’t spoken in four years over a business deal gone wrong. One of them told me, “Pastor, I pray every day but nothing feels right.” I asked him to pray for his friend by name — out loud — right there. The moment he whispered, “Lord, I forgive him,” the dam broke. Within a week they were reconciled, and both said their prayer lives caught fire again. Unforgiveness is the silent killer of vibrant prayer.

CONCLUSION

- Prayer is one of the greatest privileges we have as children of the King — direct, unfiltered access to the throne of grace.
- The question for all of us this morning isn’t “Do you pray?” but “Are you praying in a way that your Father in heaven actually hears and answers?”
- This week, find your secret place. Ditch the performance. Use Jesus’ pattern. And keep a merciful heart.
- Next Sunday we’ll watch Jesus tackle the third act of righteousness — fasting — and discover how even that can become an intimate feast with God.