

II. The Lord's Prayer in Biblical Perspective  
"Learning the 'Prayer of Prayers' by Unlearning the 'Prayer of Vanity'"  
Matthew 6:5–15  
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This is the word of God. Matthew 6:5–15.

**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. **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. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

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

**11** Give us this day our daily bread,

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

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

**14** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of God abides forever. May God bless this His Word to the heart of His people.

I was on a transatlantic flight to the Middle East. I made sure that I appropriately put my schedule together so that I could sleep on the trip but as the plane made its way throughout the night it encountered the dawn and the rising of the sun and I was awakened. I was awakened by two different groups of people. Each group took very prominent places on the plane where they had to be seen and stopped all flow of traffic in the aisles as they became the center of attention. They were praying and even though I did not understand their language I could tell they were saying the same thing over and over again and getting louder and louder as they prayed. It is those issues that the Lord addresses in this text before He brings the reader to the pattern of prayer. In the name of religion, hypocrisy that does private prayers publicly to be seen by people and then pagan superstition to think that God hears one's prayers when they heap up ritualistic, empty, meaningless phrases are what the Lord is dealing with in this text.

However this text is very important. Some may be thinking, "When is he going to start on the Prayer of Prayers because there was an overview in the last study?" The Prayer of Prayers will not be started on in this study either because the Lord does not bring His disciples there first either. The Lord does something in this text that has to be done on every element of the Christian life, in general, and prayer, in particular. Before one can live the Christian life, one has to repent of the way they have been living.

Before one can obey, one must repent. Before one can put on, one has to put off. Before one starts, one has to stop. This is particularly true in prayer.

In the last study it was brought out that everyone prays because when one is born they are born to have a relationship with God so people are born with a human instinct to pray. When a person becomes a Christian, by conversion, one has a compelling desire to pray rightly, regularly, habitually and from the heart. But that compelling desire does not start on a blank tablet because of one's human instinct they up until conversion have been praying. They pray the pattern that the world has taught them to pray. Before conversion, people have been building into their life self-centeredness not God-centeredness, ritualistic patterns not relational patterns, manipulation instead of communication with God. So Jesus, before He gets to the Pattern of Prayer, tells them, "Let's get rid of vanity prayer." One has to put off to put on. Before one can build in the Lord's Prayer one has to put off the prayers of vanity. Before one can pray like a child one has to quit praying like an orphan. Before one can pray in a relationship one has to quit praying in superstition. So Christ takes these verses and tells His disciples, "I know you're going to pray and I know you have been praying. So now I'm going to teach you to pray and when you pray I want you first to know what I don't want you to do in prayer."

He tells them how He does not want them to pray by giving them two prayers of vanity. The first is the prayer of vanity from the religious hypocrite and second is the prayer of vanity from the superstitious pagan. He tells them not to let those get into their prayer life. In other words, before one injects the prayer of prayers one has to eject the prayers of vanity. Like everything else in the Christian life and even perhaps more pointedly here in this text, the Prayer of Prayers cannot be fully injected into one's life until one and as one takes the prayers of vanity and eject them out of one's life. In this text, the Lord says to the disciples there are some other patterns they have already been seeing, learning and absorbing. He basically tells them to eject those prayers and inject the one He will share with them.

Before the study on the Prayer of Prayers is started here are some patterns of the world and prayers of vanity. The first one is the prayer of vanity of the religious hypocrite. Matthew 6:5 says, "*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.*" The word "must" is the same word used when the Lord says, "*You **must** be born again*" (John 3:7). One must eject the prayer of vanity of the religious hypocrite out of their life and then He gives five things about the religious hypocrite, the pattern of the hypocrite.

The first thing the Lord gives about the prayer of the religious hypocrite is their practice which is they love to pray. The second thing He gives is their posture which is they love to pray *standing*. The third thing He gives is their places which they love to pray in the synagogues and at the street corners. Then comes the clincher which is the fourth thing and that is the purpose of the prayers of the religious hypocrites. Their purpose is to be seen by men. The fifth thing the Lord says about the prayer of the religious hypocrite is that they get their reward. They will be seen. They will be acclaimed. They will get notoriety and people will talk about them and their prayer life in the public arena. Here is the key. The objective of the religious hypocrite is to take their devotional prayer life to the streets and the synagogues to be seen by men and

Jesus says they will get a reward. The result of the prayer of vanity for the religious hypocrite is they have their reward. They will have the notoriety they desire.

But before Jesus goes to the second pattern of prayer of the prayer of vanity He says to the disciples, "Let's learn from this." Matthew 6:6 says, "*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.*" This verse starts out with the word "but" which means there is a strong contrast to follow. He basically tells them, "Eject how the hypocrites pray and you do this." He then gives four things about the Christ centered disciple prayer. The first thing is a believer is to pray, "*when you pray...*". The second thing is for the believer to pray in their "secret chamber." The idea behind chamber is that it is a place of designation. The third thing is that when the believer prays in their secret room they need to shut the door. One does not need to leave it open for God to come in. In fact, the fourth thing is that when a believer goes into their secret room to pray "your Father sees you," He is already there. The invisible God who is Spirit is already there. He does not need a door, a window or an open roof. Now, why has the believer come? The believer has come to meet God.

In Matthew 6:6, the one verse of correction, He uses the word "you" eight times and it is very interesting how He uses it. Most of the time in the Bible, the reader is in desperate need of a translation team from Alabama to help the Bible translators because "you" a second person pronoun, is almost always a plural in the Bible. So it ought to be translated "ya'll". But interestingly here, very scarce throughout the Bible, "you" is used eight times in this one verse. In this verse it is in the singular and He is clearly telling the disciples He is setting up their private prayer life. "Your private prayer life is not public, it is private, in your home, in your room, with your door shut and your Father who is in secret hears your prayer and you and your Father have met. And you also have your reward. The Father who is in secret meets and sees you in secret" Jesus says. The hypocrites want the world as their audience in their prayer life. The believer desires God and intimacy and wants God as their audience and God meets the believer in their chamber.

Now one does not need to rebuild their house to have a prayer chamber. Most of the people who listen to Jesus teach this Sermon on the Mount only have a one room house. So the point is that the believer has drawn aside to meet the Thrice Holy God freely and confidently. The way has been sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ and just as the religious hypocrite has their reward by others seeing them the believer has their reward. The believer's reward is that the Father who is in secret has given the believer an audience and He sees them in secret to the core of their being.

When one has rejected the prayer life of the religious hypocrite and begun to inject the pattern of prayer by saying, "We're not going to pray that way by taking our private prayer life to the streets. We are going to meet with the Father in our secret chamber." There is another prayer life Jesus warns them about. Matthew 6:7 says, "*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.*" This warning is about the pagans, their superstitions and the way they pray in the pagan religions. Jesus says two things about them. The first thing they do is heap up meaningless, empty phrases. The pagans heap up empty meaningless phrases because this god, this idol, that has no existence

and can only be reached superstitiously perhaps can be reached through repetition of meaningless phrases and they try to affirm his existence.

Like the prophets of Baal, when God confronted them through Elijah, Elijah said, "Why do you halt between two opinions? If God be God then serve Him. If Baal be God then go serve him. Let's bring it to the fore front." (1 Kings 18:21). Elijah calls 50 prophets of Baal while he is all alone and says to them, "Let's put our gods to the test. Set up a sacrifice and call your god to bring the fire. You can't bring the fire, you're god has to bring the fire and let's see if your god will do it." So the 50 prophets of Baal agreed and began the test. These 50 prophets of Baal called louder and louder for hours and hours and finally Elijah came over and said, "This isn't working. Maybe your god is relieving himself or he's asleep or he's on a journey or perhaps he can't hear you so maybe you should get louder." So they did and finally in exhaustion they cease. Elijah comes forward simply and pointedly and says, "O Lord God, of Your people, hear Your servant. This day declare that You are the Lord Our God." With simplicity he calls on the Lord and the fire comes down. The pagan prayers whether they are religious or irreligious are always just words of punctuation and exclamation in which a "no god" is attempted to be declared as a god.

Then Jesus says two things to Christ centered disciples to prepare them for the prayer of prayers in Matthew 6:8, "...*your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*" The first thing is that Your Father *knows what you need* and the second is that Your Father knows what you need *before you ask Him*. When a believer calls upon the Lord He knows who they are and He knows what they need. God is not only omnipresent in one's secret chamber but He is omniscient, He knows what His children need. So delight in your reasoning with Him, in intimacy and passion.

Here are some practical things that will move one toward the first study of the Prayer of Prayers which will be the next study. This is so crucial. This is not preliminary stuff before one gets to the Prayer of Prayers because if one cannot eject then they will not be able to inject. If one does not repent then one will not be able to respond. If one does not put off the vanity prayers of this world one will not be able to put on. The Sermon on the Mount is radical! It talks about radical stewardship, radical giving, radical living, and the radical nature of the life of a believer bringing the kingdom of God into evidence in this world. One of the things that Jesus is responding to is how to have a radical, powerful, prevailing prayer life. But before one can build in one has to put off.

I love this text because on the one hand it is so challenging. My greatest fear when I preach on prayer is that someone may think I am an expert. I am really preaching from my knees more than anything. When I read this prayer that was requested by the Apostles on the one hand I am unbelievably challenged because Jesus makes very clear that His true disciples have a compulsion and a desire to pray and to pray rightly. I am challenged by that. "Harry do you have a desire, not just an instinct by creation, but a desire from conversion to pray and to pray rightly?" I will not be prayerless. On the other hand this also comforts me because these disciples who wanted to pray, like me, they struggle. They struggled at times to stay awake. I do not think I have arrived at prayer but if I were praying with Jesus 20 yards away from me I am not sure I would have fallen asleep but they struggled to stay awake. They struggled to pray and to pray rightly. They said, "We don't know how to pray rightly." So I see they are on the journey just like I am on the journey.

I want this Prayer of Prayers to permeate and guide as a pattern my prayer life but before I get there I know I need to do some cleaning up in my life. A way of praying that was built into me, in my narcissistic, self centered, unbelieving lifestyle that is still a default in my life I have got to get rid of. I need to eject it. So here is the first step in the life takeaways.

Step number one is that a person starts by stopping. One starts praying and praying rightly by stopping to pray wrongly. One stops by removing the prayers of vanity. The first prayer of vanity is any residue or piece in one's life of prayer that reflects religious hypocrisy. I want to get rid of hypocrisy in every piece of my life but Jesus has brought me right here to prayer. He is telling the reader very clearly that the key to understanding a religious hypocrite's prayer when they engage the pattern of vanity is to ask oneself two questions, "are your public prayers bigger than your private prayers?" and "are your private prayers done publicly to be seen by men?" The practice of the religious hypocrite is they love to pray. Is there anything wrong with loving to pray? No. Is there anything wrong with standing in prayer? No, because Jesus did that. Is there anything wrong with praying on a street corner, synagogue or in a gather of God's people? No. So there is nothing wrong with the hypocrite's practice or posture or even place so there must be a problem with their purpose which has to do with a matter of the heart. The hypocrite had a public prayer life without a private prayer life and their personal private prayer life was actually done publicly to be seen by others.

(prayer) "Lord, I want to have a personal prayer life that is bigger than my public prayer life and I do not want to do my private prayers for notoriety to be seen by others. Lord, search me out in this matter. I want to stop having a life that is out of balance in prayer. I want to stop bringing whatever prayer life I have publicly to be seen by others. I may not stand on the street corner or the synagogue but do I talk about it? Do I try to make myself out that is something that I am not in the secret closet?"

The second step in practical takeaways is one needs to stop any vestige of a superstitious, pagan pattern of prayers of vanity and that is meaningless repetition. At times I have the privilege of taking people to Israel and there is a place I love to take them because very few go there and it is off the beaten tourist path. It is called the little city of Nain. At Nain Jesus raised the widow's son (Luke 7). They have a church that is unused now, no congregation meets in it and supposedly it marks the place archeologically where the funeral took place for that widow's son and where Jesus raised him. The person that is the caretaker of the church there in Nain is Muslim and he is also the caretaker of a Mosque that is across the alley from the church. When I have gone there they have politely opened the door for me and those with me. When we are in the church I always do three things. I read the story from Luke 7 about the widow's son and share a few insights then we sing and pray to the God who gives life. Invariably when we start praying and singing it is amazing how across the alley the minuet with its megaphones and speakers will start blaring out Muslims prayers. Now that is fine with me because my God is able to hear my prayer while that is going on but as I have often heard it, it is just a continual thing of repetition that gets louder and louder. They think maybe if we get louder he will hear us but the fact is that the God of Glory does not need my loud meaningless repetition. I can come to my Father and talk with Him simply.

What Jesus is telling the reader here about the prayer of vanity from that pagan superstition is the notion God will hear me for my many words and therefore comes the mountain of meaningless repetition. Be careful here. Do not read this text and think that anytime someone is repeating something that it is meaningless. Jesus is not saying repetition is meaningless. Repetition is found throughout the whole Bible. One repeats things for importance, instruction and exclamation. God is not being meaningless when in the Word it says, "Holy, Holy, Holy" three times or when He says, "Truly, truly" instead of just one time or when He says, "Simon, Simon" in which He says it twice. If God calls your name, listen but if He calls it twice I would just run to wherever you need to be. What God is forbidding is meaningless repetition and I hear it in our prayer lives. One can be praying along and run out of something to say and throw the name of God in there and say, "Father God," "Jesus," as a bridge or punctuation instead of using it in a sacred way. So one needs to get rid of a life of prayer that is all public and a little private and or the private part is done publicly to be seen by others and one needs to get rid of the superstitious notion that it is the loudness of one's prayer or the repetitions of one's prayer that will actually gain the day with empty phrases that are being mounted up.

The third practical step is one stops by starting and one starts by starting. One starts by stopping because when one gets saved they had been praying in the wrong direction so they need to stop that and now they can start by starting. There are two things from this preliminary statement that are essential. First of start by praying this; "Lord, make my private prayer life foundational and predominant in my life not my public prayer life." I believe that prayer ought to be like an iceberg for a Christian and a church. The visible public prayer ought to be 10 percent but it ought to be built upon private prayers of intercession, devotion and adoration which should be 90 percent. A church whose prayer life is simply its public gatherings and not the people of God seeking out God in their lives, in their homes, in their rooms is a church that is still prayerless. And a Christian whose private prayer life is done publicly or who has only a public prayer life and not a private prayer life is prayerless.

What we need to do is build in our life at the core of our being this commitment to personal prayer that one personally has a prayer and that it is "my God, in my room, in my relationship with Him, with my door shut." Not only are all the words "you" in the text singular but I am convinced the phrase "secret chamber" is an echo to point one back to the Old Covenant and the Temple of God where the Temple of God is called a House of Prayer which was built around one section where the presence of God declared the glory of God and that was the mercy seat to meet God. That place was called God's secret chamber. One can check out how it was built in the Old Testament. There was no door, no open window and no open roof. God needs no door to come in and out. There does not need to be a door or window to get to God or see God. Your God is in secret and He meets with you. God has the great joy of meeting with you in secret. That needs to be the predominant and foundational piece of one's life.

The second essential from this preliminary statement is that simple private prayer needs to be confidently and relational. One does not need to go to God to give Him information He does not have. God knows before one asks Him. He delights in one's reasoning with Him. One can see this in the Psalms. He loves for us to reason with Him but when one comes declaring one's heart and reasoning with Him God is not up in

heaven saying, "Oh man, Harry I am so glad you told me that. I forgot that." God not only knows but He knows everything. He knows every contingency. He knows every contingency of every contingency. So one can go to God confidently, the way has been sprinkled clean and one can go to God relationally. One has a Father. It is like when as a child the child would say, "Dad, mom we need this" and they had already bought it because they knew but they delighted when the child would come to them.

So we have a simple prayer life that is built privately. One may think they do not have a place to go privately but Susanna Wesley had 18 kids in a four room house and she said "I have to go and meet the Lord." She trained them. As soon as Susanna would go to the corner, sit down and put her apron over her head everyone had to be quiet. One has their secret chamber to meet with the Lord and one needs to meet with Him predominantly in private in sincerity and simplicity and God is always ready to meet with that one. As the Lord's Prayer is studied one will find it is appropriate to use it occasionally in public worship but it was designed to use continually in the life of a disciple.

The fourth practical takeaway is that God has given us two assets to get us started in our prayer life. Asset number one is that God has given us the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:26 says, "*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*" We have the Holy Spirit to compel us in prayer, to make us passionate in prayer, to bring us back to the Word in prayer, to guide us, to put burdens on our heart but the Holy Spirit is the one who is there. The great sins in the world do not just take place in honky tonks and in the corners of a city. Sins in the world can take place in a synagogue, in a meeting place and they can even take place while one is praying. Holy things can be used sinfully but the Holy Spirit is there to convict, encourage and to teach us so that we pray rightly.

The second asset is that one has the Word to guide them in prayer and can learn to pray from the Word in general and the Lord's Prayer in particular. One can be guided away from religious hypocrisy and pagan superstition not only because one has the Holy Spirit but because one has God's Word to guide them in prayer. And in that Word one has the Prayer of Prayers where the Lord gives one the instrument as a disciple. He brings us to private prayer with it, to simple prayer with it and to sincere prayer with it.

The first time I dated my wife Cindy I took her to a baseball game. When we finished we went to eat. When they asked me for a table I did not ask for a table in the middle of the room. I was glad to show her off but after being with her that first time I wanted a table in the corner. I know this is a trivial example in many ways but prayer is relational. When I met Cindy I wanted to get somewhere intimate and quiet. I needed to sell me to her. I wanted to talk with her. Build your private intimate life with the Lord foundationally and predominately. The Holy Spirit is there to guide you through your weaknesses and to teach you how to pray. The Word of God is to give you what to pray, how to pray, how to frame your prayer and how to lead you in prayer. The Lord's Prayer in particular is a tool that will teach us as we go through as a pattern of prayer. This is so exciting. This is not saying "Don't pray long prayers, short prayers" but this is really going after one's heart here.

I have had a number of mentors in my life and when I was pastoring in another place I used to use Frank Barker as a mentor. I had another one also named Henry Cramendam and prayer is one of those things that both men taught me. Let me give you an example of this from each man. One time I was in an airport terminal with Frank and I said, "Frank can you share with me? I'd like to get your insight on something." Before we would talk about it Frank would say, "Well, Harry before we talk about it let's pray about it." Then we would pray. Here is what Frank would say, "Lord, Harry has got a problem, we're going to talk about it so would you give us the answers, in Jesus name, amen." We were quick and to the point. It was simple and we got it done. When I went to Henry for an issue he would say, "Oh my friend, I will meet you. We must first pray. You may meet me tomorrow at 4:30 at my home." I said, "In the morning?" He said, "Yes." I said, "What about 8:30am?" He said, "Oh my friend, early will I seek thee." I would meet with him and we would go on our knees and an hour and a half later we would get up. Both men guided me and taught me the importance of prayer.

The Bible says in James 4:2, "*You do not have, because you do not ask.*" We have an instinct and a compulsion to prayer but we become prayerless. When we do ask we ask amiss. So Jesus says, "Pray and when you pray, pray this way and don't pray that way. Now you are ready to pray this way." One of my favorite benedictions is the book of Ephesians 3:20–21, "*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*" So we are going to go to Him with everything. Philippians 4:6 says, "*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" Your God when you come is ready to give beyond what you could ask or imagine. One may ask Him about a house. He will go beyond that and give one a home. One may ask Him about children and He is going to give that one men and women of God, missionaries and preachers. One may ask Him about a raise and He will make that one a resource center for the kingdom of God.

But our God is glorious! "Pray not that way but this way" and He is ready to hear you. Come and meet Him in your chamber. He is there. One does not need repetition. Just come with your heart.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for the moments together in Your Word and that we can come to You because Jesus has made the way clean. Lord, I thank You for simple prayers. I thank You for the simple prayer of Stephen which was "Forgive them." I thank You for the simple prayers on the cross. I thank You for the simple prayer of the dying thief which was "Lord, I want to be with You in paradise." I thank You for the simple prayer of the sinner – "Lord, be merciful to me the sinner." Friend, that may be your very first prayer and in the secrecy of your heart you can now call upon Him. "Jesus be merciful to me the sinner" and He says back to you "Truly, truly he who believes in Me has eternal life." God I want to ask just one thing, help us this week to consider and commit to ejecting and putting off religious hypocrisy that is focused on public prayer and private prayer to be seen publicly. Help us not to pray like orphans that think we have to beg with meaningless repetition. As Your children may we meet You Father in secret. We will pray publicly but may the predominance of our life be secret in prayer and may we pray confidently. You are our Father and You know and You delight in hearing our requests,



our praise and You know it before we come for You are God. We pray now as always  
in Jesus' name, Amen.