



Righteous Praying #1

Matthew 6:5-8

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Good morning. Great to see you out on a travel weekend. I know a lot of our people are away and I have taken that into account in what I have prepared to say today. Sometimes you just want to run into the pulpit, because you believe that what the scriptures have to teach is going to be so immensely helpful to the people that you are preaching to. This is one of those days for me. I am excited about what I have to say to you this week and the next two weeks. Phil is going to be out of town the next two weeks, so I am going to steal a couple of days in December from him.

We are going to address the whole matter of righteous praying. And if you will forgive me, I'll just skip over the typical stuff that you do at the start of a message that they teach you in the seminary – that you have got to engage people. I have important things to say to you today that I just want to get right to.

While I was preparing this message on prayer – with much trepidation I might add, feeling the weight of being completely unworthy to speak any words whatsoever to you about the whole matter of prayer – I found online a story by a Christian author who interviewed ordinary people about prayer. And this is what he said – he just did some man-on-the-street kinds of interviews. You tell me if you see yourself in what he says here. He said this:

Typically, the results of my interview went like this: I would ask, “Is prayer important to you?” “Oh, yes, prayer is important to me.” “How often do you pray?” “Every day, sir – I pray every day.” “And approximately how long do you pray?” “Five minutes... maybe seven.” “Do you find prayer satisfying?” “Not really...”

The author went on to say:

Many of those I talked to experienced prayer more as a burden than as a pleasure. They regarded it as important, even paramount, in their lives and yet they felt guilty about failure in prayer.

I wonder if any of you can identify with those sentiments. The truth is, if we were given freedom to be honest with one another, and if we trusted one another enough to be honest about it and not try to keep up the spiritual veneer that we put on so well every Sunday, I

would venture to say that most of us could identify with the plea that the disciples made to the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 11, verse 1, when they said:

Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples.

Now two dangers about speaking about prayer come to my mind when I address an audience that considers itself to be well taught. Two dangers that I want to lay out before you – and this is just by way of introduction. These aren't the only dangers of talking about prayer – there are others, but for those of us in GraceLife, these are the two that I would call to your attention, just to start to stimulate your thinking about what we are going to see from the Lord's words here today.

First danger that I would say is the danger of *unintentional self-deception*. Unintentional self-deception. Our general familiarity with the biblical teaching on prayer can deceive us – I say this without fear of contradiction – our general familiarity with the teaching on prayer can deceive us.

It can deceive us into thinking that we pray more and pray better than we actually do. The fact that we can quote a few verses on prayer and that we can affirm the importance of it, and maybe we pray before our meals, makes us think that we pray more and we pray better than we actually do. We are unintentionally deceived – self-deceived. We grade ourselves higher than what is warranted.

Unintentional self-deception also leads to another result. This is still the first danger and still by way of introduction. General familiarity with prayer, general familiarity with the teaching of the Bible and the general hanging out with other Christians, can insulate you and me from a conviction over our own prayerlessness. We are so insulated from it, we are so inoculated, that we are not even cognizant of the fact that we don't pray at all like we should.

In either event – either thinking that we pray more than we actually do, or we are just insulated from a conviction over our own prayerlessness – we are unintentionally deceived, self-deceived. And we mislead ourselves into thinking that knowing teaching about prayer is the same thing as actually praying well. We have got to sweep that aside; we have got to put that self-deception away. We think we are okay when we really are not – that's unintentional self-deception.

There is a second danger that I am particularly concerned about for you as the flock here in GraceLife. The second danger goes to the other extreme and is that *you fall into despair* because you know that your prayer life is inadequate. And day by day, time after time, you are convicted and you say, "I know I don't pray like I should; I've got to pray more; I've got to pray different..." – and you go on and on like that.

You know that you should pray and pray with greater passion, greater intensity, greater faithfulness, but you realize that you fall short. What true Christian among us hasn't at

some point been discouraged by their inadequate prayer life? I would venture to say not many, although you can't take really accurate statistics about that point.

Now to be sure, there are some Christians that enjoy a vibrant prayer life – I know some of you are like that and I thank God for that. Thank God that there are some that have tapped into that. But I can't help but feel that they are in the minority. I won't justify that statement beyond saying that that's my assessment of the situation. But those people – the Christians, particularly within our body here, that enjoy a vibrant prayer life are probably in the minority; the rest of us fall into that other camp.

Wherever you fall on that continuum – either unintentionally self-deceived and congratulating yourself for something that isn't really true about your life, or recognizing the reality and saying, "I'm so tired of this" – somewhere on that continuum, wherever you fall, I trust that what we are going to study together today and next week will stimulate you to a deeper intimacy with God in prayer.

I realize – and you don't know how many times I have recited in my mind as I was preparing this – how many sermons on prayer have I heard in my years as a Christian. How many sermons on prayer have you heard? How many books have you read? But this is where the Lord has brought us on His teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. And what I want to say is this: I think that you may be surprised by what the Lord teaches on prayer here in Matthew 6.

I think it can help you right where you are at in your prayer life, even if you are lying on the floor absolutely discouraged and saying, "I have never prayed right, and I doubt if I ever will." If that is you, beloved, I've got great words of hope and encouragement for you.

What I want to do is this: I want to start out today looking at some of the general biblical teaching on prayer, just to kind of set the stage for what Jesus says in Matthew 6. And then next week we will go into the passage in more detail. But basically there are three things about prayer that I want you to see and I want you to stimulate your thinking on. We kind of need to get our hands into the dirt as it were and kind of work things out, get things clear in our minds again. I'd start with this first biblical principle and that is:

1. The Call to Prayer

All I'm going to do right now is to give you several verses from the New Testament and let you see how pervasive the biblical call, the biblical mandate, to prayer is. I was frankly surprised as I saw how widespread and how pervasive this is throughout the New Testament. And when you start to see that, it starts to have an impact on your mind and on your heart and you say, "God places a priority on this; God places a priority on prayer."

And beloved – hear me on this – if we say, and we do, we say that we believe the Bible – we say that we are committed to obeying the scriptures, that we want to be biblical in our

approach – then what the Bible has to say about prayer has to kind of stop us in our tracks and we have to take stock of ourselves; this isn't a one-time thing. Jot these verses down and I will read them to you.

In Romans 12, verse 12, the apostle Paul said:

Be devoted to prayer.

In Ephesians 6:18, that same apostle said:

With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the spirit.

What I want you to do is just jot these down, and then go home and look them up and let your eyes fall on the page – let it sink into you how much God talks about this.

Philippians 4, verse 6 – familiar verse, where Paul says:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be known to God.

Colossians 4:2:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.

Maybe the Lord would bless us and the Spirit would call that verse to mind when we start to drift off into sleep when we are praying: “Keep alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17:

Pray without ceasing.

1 Timothy 2:8:

I want the men in every place to pray...

Hebrews 13:18:

Pray for us...

James 5:16:

Pray for one another...

The last one – I could have chosen others, but not to belabor the point – 1 Peter 4:7:

Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Beloved, multiple New Testament writers in multiple New Testament books emphasized the importance of being devoted to prayer, of being of sound judgment, of being of sober spirit, of being alert in prayer – pay attention in prayer, the scriptures say. Pray continually; pray as a habit of life.

We could expand this topic even more and multiply all of this emphasis, this call to prayer, if we considered the New Testament gospels or the Old Testament and looked at the Psalms and looked at other places, but I think the point is clear enough.

Over and over again, the Bible impresses upon you as a believer in Jesus Christ to be a man, to be a woman, of prayer. We praise God; we confess our sins; we give thanks; we make requests both for ourselves and for one another; we honor Him; we worship Him – we pray.

Now, here is the challenge for someone who teaches an audience that considers itself to be well-taught – and I welcome that challenge, but it is a challenge: I haven't told most of you anything that you haven't already heard a thousand times before. This call to prayer and emphasizing that may seem to be very basic – and perhaps it is. But beloved, hear me: Sometimes we have to get back to the very foundational basics to our spiritual lives back on track, and say, "The Bible is clear on this. The call on my life is clear on this."

Vince Lombardi was a famous coach of the Green Bay Packers football team during the 1960s. He won 5 championships with them in 9 years. And at one point, the team had not been playing well. And so he called a team meeting and with 50 or more professional football players in front of him – people who played football for a living, people who were the champions at their profession – he told them that they needed to get back to basics. He took a football and he held it up in the air. He said, "Gentlemen, this is a football."

Think about that: "This is a football!" The players could have said, "Of course we know that!" Max McGee, one of the wide receivers for the team, said, "Slow down, Coach, you are going too fast for me." (Laughter) But in his wisdom as a football coach, Vince Lombardi was saying, "Let's go right back to the very start and start from there."

Beloved, that's what I'm saying to you today as we talk about prayer: This is a football. This is foundational; this is fundamental. And beloved, let that basic fundamental about your Christian life sink into your mind with a fresh vigor and a fresh conviction today: God repeatedly calls you to pray in the Bible – He commands it.

And for you as a Christian who says, "I believe the Bible; I want to obey the Bible; I submitted my life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ" – that means that you need to take your prayer life seriously and not let it disintegrate, or better yet, maybe dissipate, simply because you don't pay attention to it, because you are assuming things about yourself that are not really true, about what a good pray-er you are. Beloved, the fact that you know about the call to prayer does not mean you are fulfilling it – can we agree on that? The fact that you know it doesn't mean that you are doing it.

Answer these questions in your heart: When is it that you pray? How much do you pray? Are your prayers routine or passionate? See the Bible emphasizes all of this far too much for us to simply assume that we are meeting our obligation – “Prayer is fundamental, preacher, move on to something else. Move on to something more theological.” No. No.

No, I’m going to stand here and say, “This is a football.” This is basic, and I don’t want to assume the basic as you sit before me here today. Let every man, let every woman, let every child examine himself in light of what the Bible says about the clear call to prayer. Take stock; be honest before Christ as you do.

Now, with that said, with the call to prayer firmly in your mind, I want to consider a second point with you:

2. The Example of Prayer

Having seen the call to prayer laid out before us, I want to look at the examples of prayer to see people actually praying in the Bible to have this make an effect on us. Turn in the Bibles to Matthew chapter 14. I’m going to kind of run you through some scriptures here as we look at the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in prayer.

A. Jesus in prayer

It is a provocative topic – Jesus in prayer. I don’t claim to understand it at all. The Son of God communing in prayer with the Father – what a great mystery! So Matthew 14, verse 22 – Jesus had just fed 5,000 people with a few loaves – and verse 22 says:

Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away – verse 23 – After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

He was on the mountain, praying after a long day of work, a long day of ministry; the Lord Jesus slipped away by Himself to pray.

Turn to the book of Mark, chapter 1. I want you to see these verses and so you can nimble your fingers – if I can turn nimble into a verb; I think I can do that – Mark chapter 1, verse 35. I still hear some pages rustling – that’s okay. In verse 35 it says:

In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.

Once again, you see the Lord getting away by Himself to pray. This is the pattern of the one you call Lord, the pattern of the one that you call Savior.

In Luke chapter 5 – now we are going to look at a few verses in Luke that will make it a little easier to follow along with me – Luke 5:16; it’s striking how the gospel writers focused on this aspect of the life of Christ:

Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

Luke chapter 6, verse 12 – I’m just reading the Bible to you; I’m not even commenting on it – Luke 6, verse 12:

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

Luke 9:28 – I’m skipping over others – as we look at some examples of prayer in the Bible, Dr. Luke tells us:

Some eight days after these things, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray.

You recall beloved, that when He was in Gethsemane, on the verge of being crucified, He prayed three times, “Lord, if it is possible, take this cup away from Me…” Praying repeatedly, praying fervently, the Bible says – so much so that His sweat became like drops of blood.

On the cross our Lord prayed; look at Luke 23 – by the way, if you are jotting these down, the Gethsemane passage you can read about in Matthew 26 beginning in verse 36 – Luke 23, verse 34. Nailed to a cross to die for your sins, Jesus says in verse 34 about those who were killing Him:

But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

He prayed, even on the cross. Let’s look down to verse 46. This is the last one from the life of Jesus that I want to show you. At the moment of death, in verse 46:

Jesus cried out with a loud voice and said, “Father, into your hands, I commit My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last.

What a great way for us to go out of this world – with a prayer on our lips, a prayer of dependence, a prayer of trust: “Father, into Thy hands, I commit my spirit.”

But here is the point of all of that, beloved – and I debated on whether to just read those verses to you or not, but I know the impact that they had on my own heart as I went through them – there are other examples we could look at, but here is what I want you to see: In addition to the general call to prayer that you see in the epistles to you, the gospel writers emphasize the Lord’s prayer life.

And as we look at those and as you go back and read through these verses again when you have a little more time, you will see that the Lord Jesus Christ had a diversity in His prayer life, and I really want you to think about this. There was diversity in His prayer life. We tend to get some narrow focus if we say, “Well, this time in the morning is my prayer time,” or whatever it is. And we narrow prayer down to a particular time and a particular place and we say, “That’s where I pray,” and you kind of forget about it elsewhere.

Understand that in the Lord Jesus, we see prayer permeating His life – a diversity of the way He prayed. He prayed in the morning and He prayed in the evening. He prayed long prayers; He prayed short prayers. He rejoiced in prayer and He groaned in prayer. He prayed alone and He prayed with others. He prayed in life and He prayed again in death. He prayed things once; He prayed things multiple times. And throughout that example, we see the inner compulsion that the sinless Son of God felt to pray.

The question has been asked, by better men than me, “If Jesus needed to pray, wanted to pray – the sinless Son of God devoted Himself to prayer – then how much more us, and you?” How much more? And yet, if truth be told, it is completely reversed around, isn’t it? So we see Jesus in prayer as the example of prayer.

Just a little bit more here on this – and I’m really just setting up what I really want to say, believe it or not. The other example of prayer that I want to show you is:

B. The early church in prayer

And for the sake of time, I’ll limit this to four passages, although again there are many more than we could look at; I’m being suggestive here, not exhaustive. But Acts 2:42 – I won’t ask you to turn there – Acts 2:42 said that:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Secondly, in 2 Corinthians 12, verse 8, the apostle Paul, singularly speaking on his own prayers – he reports that when he was under affliction, he said this:

I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

The apostle urgently, fervently praying, “Lord, deliver me from this.” We see him praying under affliction. We see him praying for the lost in Romans 10, verse 1. Out of a godly heart, burdened by the impending doom coming down upon the lost Jews, Paul reported this about his prayer life – he said:

Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

And finally, in his intercession for believers, Paul can say:

I do not cease giving thanks for you while making mention of you in my prayers.

That's in Ephesians 1:16 and Colossians 1:9.

Now beloved, really, really, pay attention. Follow me in what I am about to say: Through these biblical passages that we have looked at all too quickly, which emphasize the call to prayer and the example of prayer, you have to agree – there is nothing else that you can do but agree – that God intends for prayer to be a vital part of your daily life as a believer, as central to your spiritual life as breathing is to your physical life. That seems to me as absolutely undeniable and I would assume that most of you would agree with me on that – it is hard to argue against so much biblical teaching and still say, “I believe the Bible.”

Now, if you are like me, you feel the conviction that these kinds of passages bring upon you. You know that your prayer life falls short of the example that the Lord and the apostle Paul set forth. You know that the multiplied exhortations to pray, that are found throughout the New Testament, might not necessarily be reflected in your life at all times, and you know that prayer life falls short. I know a preacher who says his most frequent prayer is, “Lord, forgive me of my prayerlessness.”

And here is my question to you, beloved, if you recognize that about yourself, if that is true of you, and you realize that the pattern of your life is that “I just don't add up here” – let me ask you this question: Aren't you tired of being that way? “I'm tired of being that way, tired of groveling around, gnawing on a few husks of prayer, in the light of such biblical teaching.

I would venture to say that in one manner or another; to one degree or another, we are all exposed before God once again, before the searchlight of His word. Some of you may be even despair to the point of saying, “Even my best righteousness, even my best praying, is just rags before Him.”

Here is where, beloved, you have to trust Christ immensely. Instead of trying to deny that conviction, instead of arguing against it, instead of making excuses – “Well, if you only knew how busy I was” – forget all of that. Do away with all of the excuses and just put them to death. Don't run from that conviction, beloved, because it is a blessed point of change.

It is the blessed point of God's blessing on your prayer life if that conviction would drive you to put away all pride and self-importance and come to the living God and say in a fundamental basic way – even after all of your years of living the Christian life – to say in a fundamental way, “God, I am a beggar before You. God, I have not loved You as I should. God, I have not prayed as I should and it grieves me. God, when I think of the Lord Jesus Christ dying for my sins willingly, His love keeping Him on the cross for me, all I can say, God, is that You are worth so much more than I bring to You. God, I am so *sorry!*”

Now, when you get to that point beloved – hear me on this – when you get to that point – it is where you have to do your most careful thinking and diagnosis about how you got to this point – you have to think very carefully because the immediate temptation, probably formed by different sermons that you have heard on prayer, the immediate temptation is to say, “Okay, here is what I need to do: I need to pray more. I need to get up earlier to have time to pray.” And you go right to an external solution to the problem.

And those things may be good for you to do, but ultimately, beloved, the thing that is really going to change your prayer life, the thing that is really going to cause you to grow and change the fundamental dynamic, is what Jesus brings to us here in Matthew chapter 6. You have to go further back than just checking your watch to see what time you start and what time you finish. That couldn’t possibly be the right answer to this problem that we all have with prayer – that could not possibly be it!

Think about it this way. For you folks that are married, say that your relationship with your spouse has gotten off track a bit – there is a coldness in your relationship and you are just kind of going through the motions with each other. You say, “Here’s what we’re going to do: we’re going to spend one hour together a day, starting at six... Okay, go!” And you start fumbling around and you are not really dealing with any issues or anything. And seven o’clock comes and your TV show is on – “Good, we got our hour in; we punched the clock.” That doesn’t solve anything in a relationship – does it? That’s meaningless – if you don’t bring your heart to the table when you do that – that’s absolutely meaningless!

And if that is true, and it is, on a human relational level, then we have to think more deeply about what the problem is in prayer than simply saying, “Okay, I’ve got my stop watch going; I’m going to punch in my 30 minutes today.” That’s meaningless if it is not accompanied by something more than that. It is not just about putting the time in. Some people pray better in five minutes than a lot of people pray in an hour – and I’ll prove that to you in a little while.

But you have to start and when you recognize the problem, you have to step back and think. And your sensitivity to your sin and your prayerlessness drives you to confession – as I was saying earlier: “God, I’m a beggar before You.” It drives you to the Lord Jesus Christ. You despair of your own righteousness and you cling to the Lord Jesus Christ who died to give you a righteousness that is not your own. You cry out, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” And at that blessed point of brokenness, your heart is prepared to receive the words from scripture – God’s hand on the shoulder as it were: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners.

What a marvelous point, a marvelous illustration of the grace of God that your consciousness of inadequacy in prayer becomes the very opportunity, perhaps the entrance point, to you drawing closer to Him and appreciating more deeply the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not a perfect pray-er, but Jesus was. And it is His righteousness that is credited to your account when you put your faith in Him. You are accepted in the beloved and now a loving Father awaits you to bless you in prayer and bid you to come.

That is completely different – when you are thinking along those lines and saying, “I’m such a wretch, but Christ is such a great Savior” – that is completely different, a completely different way to approach, when you approach God in the merits of Christ and trusting His mercy, than saying, “God, I’m going to put in 45 minutes today. Bet you’re going to like that, huh?” Let’s not insult the Spirit of grace with such trivialities! It is about the realities that are going on in your heart that we are after here, which brings me to my third point here, my final point for today.

3. The Opportunity of Prayer

When you plow this ground in your heart, you are ready to receive some really good seed from the scriptures to stimulate your prayer life. Matthew chapter 6, verse 5 – turn there with me; I’ll cover this passage in greater depth next week. And as we read this passage, may God give wings to this word in your heart. Jesus said, “And when you pray...” He is talking about the righteousness that should mark that of a truly repentant one; now He’s going to focus on the aspect of prayer. He says:

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

But you – sharp contrast here: you, singular, speaking to each one of you individually in this room today, Jesus says – but you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Beloved, I want you to notice this right from the start: Here in His first public teaching about prayer, Jesus does not say anything remotely like setting a schedule or a minimum timeframe for you to pray – that is not His emphasis here. That is not what He is talking about at all. Notice what He says – look at how the verse starts out in verse 5: “When you pray...”

Whatever quality you bring to the table of your past in your prayer life, He says, “Whatever you do, I am going to meet you right where you are at and tell you here is what I want you to do. This is what should mark your prayer.” And beloved, having heard so many sermons that tell me that I have to get up at four in the morning if I really want to pray, I want you to see that what Jesus does here is He gives great freedom and latitude to what the actual form of your prayer life is going to look like.

You pray at eight, great; you pray at noon, great; you are a night person, you pray at midnight, great – time is not the issue. Let’s start with that point of liberating from the shackles the bad teaching has put on us in the past. *The timeframe is not the issue.* I

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know, Jesus got up early in the morning and prayed – He also prayed late at night just in the passages that we looked at. And He doesn't say, "You must pray 30 minutes; you must pray 60; you must be like Luther and pray two, three, four hours." He is not talking about that here beloved; let that encourage your heart.

You don't have to jump up from where you are at to some unattainable standard before your prayer starts to be acceptable to God. Because Jesus – get this, write this down: *Jesus is not talking about a quantity of prayer here in this passage. He is talking about a quality of prayer.* Whether you pray for five minutes or you pray for three hours, here are the qualities that should mark your prayer life.

What that means for this is that – and what we are going to look at in the rest of our time here this morning and next week – is that you, no matter where you are at in prayer if you are a born-again believer in Christ, you can take this teaching and immediately apply it, no matter how weak and shallow your prayers have been up until now.

And I want to suggest this to you, beloved, just by way of a quick overview of the passage and we will flesh out the details next week – get this: *Good praying, right praying, starts with remembering who you are speaking to. You are speaking to a person. You are speaking to the person of Almighty God.* You are not just simply coming to recite a laundry list of prayer requests – that's secondary.

The fundamental starting point is to remember who you are talking to and the fact that you are talking to an intelligent person who understands and who sees and immediately passes pretense. And you call to mind, even as you are beginning in prayer, you call to mind the attributes of this glorious God. Just in this passage, just sticking to these two verses here – verses 6 and 8 – you see in this passage His omniscience and His willingness to hear your humble prayers. Look at the end of verse 6: "Your Father sees in secret..." – that's glorious. "When I go to prayer, God sees; He knows, He understands" – that immediately changes things.

In this passage, you see His fatherly love and His willingness to bless you. Let me say that again: *His willingness to bless you.* Look at the end of verse 6. The love of God is seen in the fact that Jesus says, "Your Father will reward you." He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him – that is the essence of faith, that you believe that when you see His fatherly care about every detail of your life. Look at the end of verse 8: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" – His care, His omniscience, His love, the perfection of His knowledge.

And beloved, what I want to say to you is this: The place to start the improvement of your prayer life is not to make another resolution about when you are going to wake up or how much time you are going to spend praying. Jesus does not even begin to allude to those kinds of superficialities – you heard me right: *superficialities* – in this passage.

No, the place where you start the improvement to your prayer life is that you lay hold of the great realities of the character of God to whom you are praying. Remember the

person to whom you are praying before anything else comes off of your lips, before anything else comes out of your heart. Remember the person and then *run* after this gracious and omnipotent God. *Run* to this One who bids you to pour out your heart to Him. *Run* to this God who promises to hear and bless.

If you believe that to be true about God the Father based on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have all the motivation you need to pray, and the details and the mechanics will take care of themselves depending on how God has ordered your life in His providence.

But if your commitment to prayer is based on, “I know who I’m praying to, and this God is good, and He knows all about it and He sees me and He will reward me for praying to Him,” then your heart has all of the positive motivation it needs to say, “When can I pray?”

Beloved, when you are carried away with the knowledge of this glorious Father in heaven who hears and who rewards you when you pray, those mechanics take care of themselves. One writer puts it this way:

When I realized that prayer was having an audience with God, actually coming into His presence and asking and getting things from Him, that fact transformed my prayer life.

Listen to what he says here, because I’m not the only one in this room who can identify with it, I know. He says:

Before that time, prayer had been a mere duty, and sometimes a very irksome duty. But after that time, prayer has not merely been a duty, but one of the most highly esteemed privileges of life. Before I understood this, the thought that I had was, “How much time must I spend in prayer?” Now the thought that possesses me is, “How much time may I spend in prayer without neglecting the other privileges and duties of life?”

That’s a great quote – that is the heart of what Jesus is talking about here. Beloved, when you think about prayer, go beyond the sense of obligation and duty. See this glorious God who calls you into His presence, who gives you an audience in the throne room of the universe and says, “I know all about you; I love you; I know every need that you have – come.” And know as you do that, beloved, that He will keep His promise: “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

Let’s pray:

Father, we would do two things as we close here today: First of all, we would confess just how far short we fall of Your glory, and we just see afresh and anew, Father, even now, our need for a Savior. We thank You for the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; His blood cleanses us from every sin. We thank You, Father, that in the midst of our

“Righteous Praying, #1”

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lack-a-daisical approach to spiritual life, that You see and still nevertheless have removed our sins as far as the east is from the west, and all of the barriers to intimate fellowship have been removed because Jesus, as it were, nailed them to the cross. We thank You for that, Father.

And now in the days to come and even today, Father, we would pray that You would lead us into the kind of intimate fellowship that Jesus describes here – one where we are not watching the clock and checking another item off of our task list, Father, but one that is relational; one that is consumed with Your glory; one that is where we bring a heart that is engaged and passionate and loving You in response to the way that You first loved us.

Father, we trust You for Your promise, spoken on the lips of the Lord Jesus, that when we do these things in secret, You will reward us. O Father, God in heaven, lead us in such a way that we would taste those rewards, that we would see those rewards that come out of the secret place of prayer. Father, let us give hearts to You that are so consumed with who You are that the mechanics of how this works fade into the background because it is just the natural overflow of everything in life. Father, with the disciples, we would pray, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

In Jesus name, amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.