

The Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6:5-15
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
Sunday, November 15, 2009

This morning we're going to start a short sermon series on prayer, and we're going to begin with the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:5-15. I'm excited about this study on prayer because I desire to grow in my own understanding and experience of prayer. I want to grow in this specific area of my Christian life. I want to be a man who is fervent in prayer, who prays according to the will of God, who prays passionately and in a God-centered way. I want to be like the person that James writes of when he says, "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16). Don't you want to be like that? Don't you want to grow in the practice of prayer? No matter how long you've been a Christian, no matter how mature you are in the faith, no matter how devoted you may already be to prayer, we all have a long way to go. We all have a lot to learn, and I want us to learn together about how we ought to pray and the kinds of things we should be praying about. I want us to be a praying congregation. My hope is that we will each be growing personally in our experience of prayer, and that we will pray together in small groups and large groups, pouring out our hearts before the Lord asking Him to bless us and bless others through us, praying for His Name to be magnified, praying for the advancement of His Kingdom, praying for our daily needs, confessing sin and repenting of sin, praying for grace in the fight of faith.

It's exciting to me to see God stirring this desire for prayer in my own heart, and also seeing this desire in many others. God is pleased to work powerfully through our prayers. Isn't that amazing! He moves mightily as we pray to Him. He changes us as we pray. He builds up the church. He convicts unbelievers of sin and draws them to Himself. He causes the Word to go forth with power and effectiveness.

I've been very encouraged lately, not only in the opportunities I have to pray with others in this congregation, but also the opportunities I've had to pray with other pastors in the area. And I see God doing some exciting things in the city. There are some wonderful brothers in the Pittsburgh area who are serving in churches, or planting churches, and there is a real passion and hunger to see revival in this place. There is a longing to see Christ's Name exalted in this city where, for the most part, He is despised. And it's so exciting to me to think that as God pours out His blessings on a church, on a city, on a region, it will involve a growing movement of prayer among His people. I want to see that happening in my own prayer life, and in the times of corporate

prayer in our church, in our small groups, in our Sunday School classes, in prayer gatherings. And I would love to see a growing prayer movement throughout this region that would include many Gospel-preaching churches, all united in the desire to pray for a sovereign and powerful outpouring of the Spirit in our day. I hope these things stir your heart as well. I hope God will bless us as we consider this matter of prayer.

In verses 5 and 7 Jesus tells us how *not* to pray. Don't be like the hypocrites, who pray in order to glorify themselves rather than God. And don't be like the Gentiles who pray mindlessly. In each case, these prayers are misguided because there is a misconception of who God is. If a person is praying like this, then they're not praying to the God of the Bible. If a person's love for prayer is really just the love of being seen and admired, then they are not praying to the true and living God. They have made a god out of self. And if a person is praying mindless, repetitious prayers, thinking that they will be heard for their many words, then they are praying to a god who is more like an ornery boss than a loving Father.

The model that Jesus gives us here for how we ought to pray begins with a recognition of who God really is. He is our Father in heaven. And if we understand who this God is, and if we accurately understand our relationship to Him, then we will not pray self-serving, prideful prayers like the hypocrites, and we will not pray mindless, repetitious prayers like the pagans. Instead we will talk to our Father. We will talk to Him reverently and joyfully and humbly and honestly. This is a beautiful thing, and it is a tremendous privilege.

Praying to the Father

We'll look at this prayer in three parts. First there is the invocation, where we see that we are praying to the Father. Secondly, there are requests concerning God's glory. And then finally there are requests concerning our needs.

Jesus says, "Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven." There are a few things to notice in these opening words. First, we see that Jesus is giving this prayer to us not only to use in this form, but also as a model for what our prayers ought to be like. Jesus says, "Pray then like this." In the parallel passage in Luke 11, Jesus says, "When you pray, say . . ." John Stott writes, "We are not obliged to choose, however, for we can both use the prayer as it stands and also model our own praying upon it."¹ The way we would misuse this prayer, though, would be to turn it into empty phrases, like the pagan practice that Jesus was just

¹ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978), pg. 145.

condemning in verse 7. Don't think that you'll be heard for your many words by repeating this prayer over and over. That's not why Jesus is giving us this prayer. There's nothing magical about this combination of words that is going to unlock a heavenly treasure chest. It's the spirit of these words that must grip us and change us so that we pray as we ought.

Next, we notice that we have the privilege of addressing God as Father, which points to the glorious reality that we are His children. We are sons and daughters who have been adopted into God's family. As I say this it's also important to be clear that not every person is a child of God. Many people would like to think that everyone is part of the family of God, but that's not what the Bible says. John 1:11-13, says, "[Jesus] came to his own, but his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Being born of God refers to the sovereign work of God called regeneration, being born-again. God gives us new life, and then we believe in Christ—we receive Him. And to those who receive him, who believe in his name, they become the children of God. He adopts us and makes us His own. So as we look at the beginning of the Lord's prayer, I want to ask you, are you a child of God? Can you truly call Him Father? I'm sure there are many people who voice the words of this prayer, but without any meaning and without any real relationship with God, because they have not received the Son. They have not believed in Jesus Christ, and therefore they are not children of God. If this doesn't make sense, I would love to talk to you more after the service about what it means to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ. Have you been adopted by God? Is God your Father? That is the most important question you can consider.

November is national adoption month, and I've listened to a couple of programs and sermons on adoption that highlight the wonder of what has happened for those of us who have been adopted into God's family. Russ Moore, who is a professor at Southern Seminary and was recently on the Family Life radio program, makes some profound points about adoption that apply not only to the story of how he and his wife adopted two boys from Russia, but also apply to the great spiritual reality of how God adopted us into His family.² He shares about the day when they

² See his message, *Ex-Orphans Unleashed: What an Adoption Culture Can Teach Us about the Mission of Christ, and Vice-Versa (Gal 3:27-4:9)*, which can be found here: <http://www.russellmoore.com/2009/05/13/ex-orphans-unleashed/>

Also see his book, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

were finally able to take the boys out of the orphanage, and even though they were each a year old, they had never been outside before. So they were terrified by the shadows and the sunlight and the car and the car doors closing. And as the Moores drove away from the orphanage, the two boys were screaming and reaching back toward the orphanage. And Russ was trying to say to them, even though they didn't yet understand English, I'm taking you to a place that is so much better than that dirty, broken down place where you were neglected and miserable, lying in your own waste. And Russ Moore shares that he saw a picture of himself in that situation, and a picture of all of us, reaching back toward the world because we can't comprehend the joy and delight of the home we're going to have with our Father.

He also shares how people will often ask him, are they brothers? And, of course they mean, are they biologically from the same mother (which they're not)? But he will say, yes they're brothers. And they'll say, but are they really brothers. And he will say, yes they're really brothers. And his point is that once we're adopted, we're part of the family. As Christians, we have been adopted into the family of God, which means that we are really brothers and sisters in Christ. We are family. We may look different, talk different, come from different places, but we are family. And God is our loving Father. We were once children of wrath and sons of disobedience, as Paul writes about in Ephesians 2. But God came and rescued us from that miserable and dark existence, and He adopted us. He made us His children, and now we have the amazing privileges that come from being His children.

And one of the great privileges we have as God's children is the privilege of talking to our Father. It should absolutely astound us that Jesus instructs us to pray, "Our Father." This is not a privilege we deserve. As sinful human beings, we do not deserve an audience with God. We deserve to be cast out of His presence forever because of our rebellion against Him. But by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and His resurrection, and through repentance of sin and faith in Him, we are brought into this relationship with God in which He is now our Father!

As I'm rejoicing in this beautiful picture of fatherhood I realize that many of you may have a very negative impression of fatherhood. Maybe you never had a dad, or you had a dad who was aloof or unloving or abusive. And maybe that has left such a deep scar in your heart that you can't imagine what there is to be excited about in the words "Our Father." I would say, don't judge your heavenly Father according to the shortcomings of your earthly father. If you have trouble rejoicing in the Fatherhood of God because you have been so hurt by your earthly father, you need to realize that God is a perfect Father, and every father in this

world is an imperfect father. And because we live in a fallen world, there are unfortunately many very wicked fathers. But that does not negate the fact that God is a perfect and loving and caring and compassionate Father. And therefore it is an unspeakable joy to be able to come to Him and say, “Our Father.”

Finally, in this phrase, we should also notice that it says, “Our Father *in heaven*.” There is the intimacy of approaching God as Father, but there is also the realization that He is in heaven and that He is holy and righteous and transcendent. Therefore as we approach God in prayer we must realize both that He is our loving Father and also that He is the sovereign King who rules on high. We can call Him Father, yes, but that should not diminish our reverence for Him. Hebrews 12:28-29, “let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” Don’t think that just because God is our Father that we can treat Him casually or irreverently. On the other hand, neither should we think that because God is so transcendent and so high above us that we can never talk to Him. We need to perceive both of these emphases. He is our Father, and He is in heaven. We have access to Him. We can talk to Him anytime, anywhere, about anything. And in the way that we speak to Him we must never forget who we’re speaking to. He is a consuming fire, so we must come to him with reverence and awe.

Requests Concerning God’s Glory

Now let’s look at the first three petitions in this prayer, which are requests concerning God’s glory. First, “hallowed be your name.” Hallowed is the word for sanctify, to make holy, to set apart. When we pray for God to sanctify us, we are asking Him to make us holy, to purify us. But when we ask that His Name be sanctified, hallowed, we are asking that He will be seen as He is. He doesn’t need to be purified. He doesn’t need to be made holy. He *is* holy. And this is a prayer that He will be honored as holy, that He will be revered. 1 Peter 3:15 uses the same word when it says, “in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.” Honor as holy is the same word used here in the Lord’s prayer. Hallowed be your name.

It’s also important to realize here that this is an imperative verb, not an indicative verb. It is not simply a statement that the Father’s name is hallowed. It is request. It is a plea to the Father that His name would be hallowed. We are asking Him. We are praying to Him. Please, Father, glorify Your Name. Reveal Your glory so that more people will honor You as holy. May Your Name be hallowed, far more than it is now. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “It means a burning desire that the whole world may bow

before God in adoration, in reverence, in praise, in worship, in honour and in thanksgiving.”³

Prayer is God-centered. And the more we pray like Jesus taught us to pray, the more our hearts will be drawn into conformity with the things that God is passionate about. What is God most passionate about? His Name! His glory. God does everything He does ultimately to bring praise and honor to His Name. His purpose in all of His sovereign plans is to show what a great and glorious God He is. Therefore this is such an exciting prayer to pray, because we know that God is going to answer it. We know that He is sovereign and He is orchestrating all the events of history in order to cause His Name to be hallowed.

One of the great blessings of prayer is that as we pray these things it changes us. As we pray that God’s Name be hallowed, and as God answers that prayer, it will result in us hallowing God’s Name. This is something I want us to observe about each of these petitions. We are not merely asking God to do something out there, disconnected from what is happening in my own spiritual life. We should be saying to God, glorify Yourself, and start right here in my life. Cause me to honor You as holy, and may my life testify to Your greatness and Your grace so that others may see You for who You are.

The next two requests are also requests concerning God’s glory, and they are very closely related to this first one. “Your kingdom come.” This is a cry to God to advance His kingdom, to save sinners from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. It’s a missionary prayer. It’s a prayer for the Great Commission to be fulfilled, and for Christ to return and usher in God’s kingdom in all of its fullness. It’s the cry of the early church, Maranatha (1 Corinthians 16:22), Come Lord Jesus (Revelation 22:20). And again, we can’t pray this without being affected by it ourselves. As we earnestly yearn for God’s kingdom to expand and impact more and more lives, it’s going to change us. We will desire for God to use us as a means of accomplishing His great kingdom purposes.

The third request further explains this petition. We want God’s kingdom to come, and part of what that means is that we want God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. To understand this, it’s helpful to distinguish between God’s secret will and His revealed will. Because God’s secret will, His sovereign will, is already being done. Even in the sin and evil of the world, God is completely sovereign. God’s secret will encompasses even those things in the universe that directly oppose the commands that He has given. But God’s revealed will is expressed in the commands of Scripture that call us to live holy lives rather than sinful, rebellious lives. And it’s the request of this

³ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (vol. 2), pg. 61.

prayer that God's revealed will be done. It's our prayer that God's commands would be obeyed here on earth just as they are obeyed in heaven. It's our desire that there would be no sin on earth, just as there is no sin in heaven.

And so it is really saying the same thing as the previous petition. It's praying that God's kingdom would come in all of its fullness and eradicate sin from the earth and cause everyone to love God and fear Him and obey Him and worship Him.

Praying this prayer that our Lord has given to us will be a revolutionary experience if we really consider the meaning of these requests. It will be revolutionary for our lives because it's not just voicing words. It's not heaping up empty phrases. And it's not just praying for things to happen in other places and in other lives, entirely disconnected from my own life. When we truly pray these things, by God's grace, we will be changed. As God responds to these requests, the impact will be felt in powerful ways by those who have made the requests. So brothers and sisters I encourage you to meditate on these petitions that Jesus instructs us to make. Pray this prayer, not as empty words, but as passionate requests for God to be glorified. And each time we pray concerning these things we ought to examine our own lives and our own hearts. As we pray "hallowed be your name," we should ask ourselves, whose name am I living to magnify? God's, or my own? And as we pray "your kingdom come," we should ask ourselves, whose kingdom am I seeking to build? God's, or my own? And as we pray "your will be done," we should ask ourselves, whose will am I seeking to fulfill? God's, or my own? These are convicting questions, and we should be confronted with them every time we pray.

Requests Concerning Our Needs

Moving to the second half of the prayer, the Lord instructs us also to make requests concerning our needs. The prayer begins with these God-centered petitions concerning God's glory. But then there are also these requests that directly concern us and our needs. "Give us this day our daily bread." Isn't it amazing that the sovereign God of the universe cares about this? He cares about the seemingly small detail of my daily bread! He is our Father. He cares about these things. Some people might think that we're just bothering God with requests like this. When we come to Him asking for the daily necessities of life, this is too trivial for God. He has bigger things to take care of. Why bother Him with the mundane issues of food and clothing and shelter and employment and schooling and transportation and finances? But the thing we have to remember about this prayer is the way it begins, "Our Father." He's our Father! And He wants us to go to Him with all of our daily needs.

Now there's a balance here, because our personal daily needs should not be the sum total of our prayers. It's easy to go in that direction and treat God like the genie in the sky who gives us whatever we ask for. We need to remember the context of the prayer, that this request for daily bread comes after three passionate petitions concerning God's glory. But on the other hand, we shouldn't shy away from talking to our Father about the personal tangible needs that concern us. He's our Father. He wants us to talk to Him about these things.

One of the profound things that this demonstrates is God's all-sufficiency and our utter dependency upon Him. It's not that God is unaware of our needs, and therefore we need to tell Him. Verse 8 says, "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." And we might say, Well then, why are we instructed here to ask Him? If He already knows, why doesn't He just respond to those needs? It would be more efficient that way. But that misses a vital aspect of prayer. Prayer is us as children coming to our Father. And we tell Him what we need, and He helps us. And through this we are reminded again and again that God is all-sufficient and we are completely dependent on Him. We are reminded how small we are and how big God is. We are reminded that we are needy and helpless, and God is the One who can help us in our need.

This is why prayer, true prayer, is a humbling activity. As with the hypocrites whom Jesus warned of, prayer can be twisted into a self-glorifying activity. But true prayer is a humbling activity. It is God-centered, and in it we acknowledge our dependence on God by asking for things like daily bread.

Next, we also ask for forgiveness. "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Our sin is spoken of here in terms of debt. We have rebelled against God and therefore we owe a very serious debt, an eternal debt, an infinite debt, to a Holy God. The wonderful news of the Gospel is that for those who repent of sin and trust in Christ, God has "forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Jesus paid our debt on the cross. He died in our place to pay the infinite debt incurred by our sin. When we pray we should talk to our Father about our daily sins. We talk to Him about our daily bread, and we talk to Him about our daily sins. We should confess our sins and repent of those sins and seek forgiveness and rejoice in what Christ accomplished on the cross.

This petition has an interesting statement added on the end of it. We ask "forgive us our debts," and then Jesus instructs us to say along with that, "as we also have forgiven our debtors." This point is expanded in the two verses following the prayer. In verses

14-15 Jesus says, “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.” The point here is not to say that we earn forgiveness by forgiving others. Rather, the point is that the person who is truly forgiven will be changed by that forgiveness into a person who forgives others. And therefore it is also the case that the person who does not forgive others is not a person who is truly forgiven. The parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 is a vivid illustration of this. This man who had been forgiven so much was unwilling to forgive the small debt that was owed to him. D. A. Carson says, “His unforgiving spirit bears strong witness to the fact that he has never repented.”⁴ This is a warning to us. If we remain bitter and resentful toward someone who has hurt us, if we feel justified in holding a grudge toward someone and refuse to forgive, we should question whether we have really been forgiven. We should question whether God has really worked a heart change within us.

So as we pray for God to forgive our debts, we are also reminded of how that forgiveness should manifest itself in our lives, namely, by our willingness to quickly forgive our debtors.

The final petition of the prayer is in verse 13. “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The last phrase could be translated simply “deliver us from evil,” or “deliver us from the evil one,” speaking of Satan. And, of course, we need deliverance from both. We need God to protect us from the attacks of Satan, and we also need protection from the evil that is present in the world and in our own flesh.

Let me exhort you, brothers and sisters, as I exhort myself as well, to pray this fervently, and then to act on it. How foolish it would be to ask God not to lead us into temptation, and then walk right into a situation where we know we’re going to be tempted. If we know ourselves with even a small amount of perception, we know something about the kinds of places, or people, or thoughts that often present us with temptations. Do you struggle with bitterness, and you find that conversations with certain people adds fuel to the fire of your bitterness and resentment and cynicism? Avoid conversations with those people. Avoid meditating on those things that often stir up resentment in your heart. And as God gives you grace to do that, it will be an answer to this prayer. Do you struggle with lust, and you know that certain places, or certain movies, or songs, or websites are not helpful to you in that struggle? Avoid those things. Do you struggle with vanity or greed or discontentment? Maybe you need to avoid the mall, or

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), pg. 69.

avoid the magazines and advertisements that try to convince you that there are so many things you “need” that you don’t yet have. Apply this to your own life and the besetting sins that plague you. Pray for God to keep you from temptation, and pray that He will deliver you from evil. And then fight against temptation! Fight for holiness in your daily walk.

And if you’re asking why this is so important, it’s because the fight against evil, the fight for holiness, is a struggle to be freed from empty deceptive pleasures and to be satisfied in the only eternal pleasure. Let’s pray this and live this, not in order to be seen by others, not because we are people-pleasers who want to appear holy in the eyes of man. But because we are pleasure-seekers. We don’t want to throw away our existence on the two-cent thrills of this world. We want to fight temptation and resist evil so that we can enjoy forever the infinite beauty of God Almighty.

Just like the first three petitions will have an impact on us and even involve us in the fulfillment of them, also these last three petitions will change us and involve us. It’s not that we pray these things and expect that God is going to respond in a way that is entirely disconnected from our lives.

We ask for Him to give us our daily bread, and He will often do this by allowing us to work and earn the money we need to pay for the necessities of life. And when he blesses us beyond our need, He will use us to answer this prayer in the lives of those who do not have the necessities of life. We ask God to forgive us, and as that happens it makes us into forgiving people. We ask God to keep us away from temptation and deliver us from evil. And as God answers this prayer He will transform our desires so that we have a greater desire for Him and a decreasing desire for the things of the world.

My hope for us as a church is that we will grow in our experience of prayer. I hope that we will pray like Jesus taught us to pray, and that as we pray we will be truly changed.