

The pursuit of happiness

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[0 : 0 0] now can we turn together in our bibles to the book of matthew matthew chapter 6 and we'll read from verse 5 to verse 13 and hear what jesus says about prayer here and when you pray do not be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others truly i tell you they have received their reward in full but when you pray go into your room close the door and pray to your father who is unseen then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you now when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans for they think they will be heard because of their many words do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him this then is how you should pray our father in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one amen it is fair to say that most people at some point in their lives will pray even if that is somewhat vague and it's kind of a new age spirituality kind of thing most people will still at certain points in life praying um and what jesus does for us is he reveals to us the difference between sort of a vague spirituality that's sort of not sure what a person is connecting with and jesus shows how different that is from the christian way of prayer because the new reality that jesus brings is that when he came he always prayed to his father and he invites his followers after him to pray calling god our father so he's inviting us into a relationship through prayer which is personal which is living which is direct this is a whole other level of connection than anything sort of vague and impersonal to read the gospels we discovered that the way jesus prayed often shocked the people around him it shocked the pharisees who thought he was so presumptuous to dare to call god father this kind of praying christian praying often shocks people of other faiths as well and not used to this familiar kind of language it makes me think of one biography of a muslim convert with the title i dared to call him father so the radical change of coming to be a follower of jesus j.i packer a significant theologian from the last century says what we think about the fatherhood of god it reveals much about our grasp of christianity how we understand god as father it will shape our worship and our prayer and our way of life so our focus today and there's so much that we could say about prayer so much we could say about how to pray our focus today is just to to bed ourselves into this privilege and that we are invited by faith in jesus to pray to our father that that our goal today would be to remind those of us who are christians simply of the joy and the

privilege that we have in being known by god as father in being able to call him father so that we would enjoy our prayer life because we're enjoying our life with god and so the flip side of that if if you're here today and you're not a christian um that you would see the beauty of the invitation of christianity not to to know some impersonal a disconnected deity but to know god in a living personal way as father how to pray but we're going to begin actually part part one today we're going to think about how not to pray because that's how jesus begins in verses five to eight if you have your bibles perhaps you can look at that section there when you pray jesus says do not be like the hypocrites when you pray do not keep on babbling like pagans notice that jesus assumes that people pray and we see this in our culture we see it when when a crisis comes or a tragedy comes even if people are not of faith we will see a praying emojis and people talking about prayer but jesus assumes yes people will pray but also that people may often go wrong in prayer because we either miss or forget the character of god if we forget god is father if we don't know god as father then then there'll be something lacking in our prayers and jesus points out two different ways there's the way of the the hypocrite or the pharisee and jesus makes the point to those who are listening don't try to use god so the pharisees did so so the example that that jesus gives here is of a person who is doing their private prayer in public now let me find the busiest place of the city the synagogue or or the meeting point of two streets and let me pray privately but publicly why jesus says because what they're looking for is not to connect with god but to gain reputation and standing in other words their religion is a means to an end their audience is people and not the living god so jesus identifies this problem that we can easily use prayer as a means to an end jesus says there's no reward in that well some people in this case might give them a well done for being very religious but they wouldn't know god any better they wouldn't have enjoyed time with him what does jesus say when you pray pray in secret then your father who sees what's done in secret will reward you why does he talk about praying in secret praying before the audience of one when we pray in secret when we want to spend time alone with god we have this wonderful promise that jesus meets his children there the reward of making time alone with god the reward is that we get more of god it doesn't enhance our reputation or standing we're not doing it simply to get stuff we want to know god better there's reward in that and so there's a reminder for us at the beginning that we must meet god in secret we must meet god personally perhaps if we've been brought up in a christian family or we're used to going to church we can we can almost sort of gain our our prayer by by extension but god wants it to be personal and living for each one of us in a sense there is a such a difference in jesus and the bible will say there's a difference between knowing about god and pharisees and the hypocrites knew plenty about god and knowing god in a living way in a direct way perhaps it reminds us to to be careful about the way that we pray the balance of our prayers you know it could be easy i suspect for us to think about god as the sort of cosmic vending machine you know i i bring my prayer i put it in the

slot and i expect god to deliver god is personal god is living and we pray to enjoy him as father so we don't pray like the hypocrites we also don't pray like the pagans what did the pagans do they kept on babbling and why did they do that they're trying to force god to conform to their plans and purposes so so the pagan thinking about god was the gods there many got the gods must be persuaded so so there needed to be cared about the volume of prayer the length of prayer the type of words that we use the location that a person pray the sacrifices that were brought and perhaps the best place in the bible to see this is in the old testament story of elijah and the prophets of baal elijah sets up the test for the sake of israel let's let's build two altars two sacrifices and the god who answers by fire is the one true god and what do we see from the prophets of baal we see them shouting and screaming and dancing and cutting themselves with knives all trying to get the attention of their god and then elijah comes and prays personally directly and god answers because god alone is living but the pagan way of thinking and perhaps in our own hearts we recognize this some of us maybe because of our background or our circumstances our natural thought about god is that his instinct is to be in the first place against us and what i need to do is earn god's attention earn god's favor and sometimes that means prayer can be used in a way to try and twist god's arm because we presume he is naturally not for us what does jesus say he says don't be like them just stop stop and remember we pray to a father verse 8 do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him he is father he loves us he is father he welcomes us he's the perfect father he already knows what we need and if you've got your bible and you turn over to chapter 7 he gives that wonderful picture which of you if your son asks for bread will give him a stone hopefully nobody or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake again no one would do that and then jesus says if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him we come to a god who is generous who is gracious who is for his children so we don't need to be like the pagans we don't need fancy language we don't need repeating phrases and we don't need a mindset that says i need to prove myself to earn god's attention our father in heaven is not like a busy politician or a busy work manager where we need to harass him with constant calls and emails to persuade him that we could get a minute of his time actually our father is much more like those zoom calls that you've maybe been on i was on one this week and it made me think of this maybe a work call lots of responsible responsible people in the room and especially this happened a lot during lockdown i think you'd be in the middle of a meeting important things being discussed and maybe there's a dad on the call and all of a sudden the screen goes blank and the next second he's back and he's got a kid on his knee and there's another kid in the background and coming in and getting attention and that's what our father is like he's not too busy for us where we do not distract him he wants to know us he wants us to spend time with him and to trust his character

to know that we're free to burst into the room to approach with confidence so we don't pray to force god and also we don't pray to try and impress god when we know the gospel we know that jesus in his perfect obedience in his sacrificing himself for the sins of his people has impressed god and has earned favor for us earned the grace of god for us so we pray trusting the gospel and we pray trusting our good father so just before we move to the lord's prayer how do you today view your life with god perhaps you have read some of those heartbreaking stories that gets reported in the news or perhaps in biographies of children who are adopted by a loving stable family but they never managed to adapt to that new surrounding perhaps they never had a mum and dad and so they continue to act like orphans the lying continues manipulating continues perhaps hoarding food continues love is there in the house but but some for a whole number of sad reasons just can't receive it perhaps thinking

I'm not worthy of this love perhaps instinctively distrustful of another would that describe our life with god remember that trusting in jesus trusting his death on the cross to pay the price for our sin changes our relationship god is no longer our judge he becomes our father and the way is open through jesus to know and enjoy life with our father in heaven to pray to him to walk with him that love is ours and fellowship is ours and security is ours and peace is found in our father so it's an invitation for us to hear jesus words not to live as spiritual orphans not to live at a distance from god but to enjoy the privilege of being adopted by our father in heaven and pray to him as father so if the first part of jesus teaching is about how not to pray he turns in verse 9 to 13 to teach us how to pray so from verse 9 to verse 13 whenever we're learning anything a new skill it will typically be the case that we are taught certain key concepts foundations are laid upon which we then build you need to learn the piano well you probably get scales coming fairly early you need to learn a new language you will get taught the rules of grammar and so on and what jesus is doing in the lord's prayer is he's giving us a model here is a pattern here is a set of concepts that we can pray and use and build on to give shape to our prayer lives so yes we can use them as they are but also we can take the ideas and we can expand them and we can begin to pray them personally and that's actually what we're going to do in our community groups on Wednesday to think about how we can take the lord's prayer as a pattern and to allow personal prayer to flow from that but just before we get into the details a few things to say first of all that the lord's prayer gives the priority of jesus for us for prayer in the sense that what comes first is the glory of god and the kingdom of god probably runs counter to the natural instincts of our hearts especially if we're our tendency is to pray when we need something we want to rush straight to you know give us today our bonhoeffer said if we were left to ourselves we'd always pray give us today our daily bread probably not much else now jesus reminds us to begin focusing on the glory of god and pursuing the kingdom of god and this prayer also is really helpful for setting balance for us it's a really short model prayer but what it takes in is wonderful it takes in praise and worship it takes in kingdom and mission it takes in the needs of ourselves and the needs of others it brings us to forgiveness and our need of god's grace it reminds us of the reality of spiritual warfare and the need to resist temptation and find help in temptation and notice too and just to remind ourselves the our and the us language that when jesus wants us to pray he wants us to pray not just for ourselves and when we're praying for ourselves to also be praying for others when something in god's word hits our hearts that's food for our souls but we can also pray that that same truth would be reality for others as well so prayer sets priority and it sets balance but again just to remind ourselves

[17 : 30] that when jesus teaches us to pray he reminds us prayer is personal because we pray to our father just to keep us on this key truth that who we pray to makes all the difference while having sort of set some introductions let's look at this prayer it breaks down into two sections verses 9 and 10 we can think about jesus teaching us to worship our father our father in heaven hallowed be your name so the first concept is worship but remember those first words are about intimacy and about access and access and intimacy that we share if we are children of god then we pray to god who is our shared father creates a sense of unity and fellowship within a church he sets the tone we pray to our father and that reality we're praying to our father should follow through the whole of the prayer and we pray to our father who is in heaven our father is on the throne of the universe he is great he is above us and he is our father and he is for us and he is personal and we have access so there is cause to praise god from the very beginning and there is also cause for confidence as we pray because he is for us and not against us the word hallowed is not a word that we hear apart from in the lord's prayer most likely we can think of the idea of jesus teaching us to pray that we would see god as greater than anyone and anything else see god as more worthy of praise and honor and obedience and sacrifice than anyone or anything else and that we would glorify god as holy and unique and so far above us perfect in all his ways it's really significant isn't it that where does jesus begin he begins with a focus on the glory of god that the father is on the throne and not us and it's a wonderful truth for being able to settle our hearts for allowing us to be able to rest and trust if we know our god and our god's in heaven and god's on the throne and this pattern for prayer just to remind ourselves that it's not just for prayer it's also the ideal pattern for life jesus is teaching us that at the beginning there's nothing greater than knowing god as father than glorifying god in our lives enjoying him as father do we have that is that our reality that we can worship god as father well moving from there verse 10 the second concept the second building block for prayer is about kingdom jesus teaches your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven i think important for us to recognize that to pray this prayer is to submit to god's kingship and to god's rule rather than insisting on ours this isn't asking god to build my little empire this is asking our hearts to be turned that we would seek the father's kingdom and that naturally flows doesn't it from loving god as father if we love him as father then we're going to seek his honor we're going to want to obey him we're going to be glad to live under his rule because we understand that he is good and his ways are good and jesus is teaching us

don't pray my will be done but pray your will be done maybe that sounds familiar to us we hear jesus pray that in the garden of gethsemane as he agonizes facing the prospect of becoming the sin bearer of the world going under the curse going under the wrath of god taking the sins of his people and the punishment that we deserve and jesus prays if there's any other way but not my will but yours be done and so jesus teaches his followers to understand that the plans of heaven are better than our plans the will of heaven is better than our will again it struck me this week thinking about this prayer you know sometimes if we're familiar with it we just kind of breeze on through it but when he prays your will be done he could have said your will be done on earth that's a valid prayer but your will be done on earth as it is in heaven think about heaven for a moment what's life like in heaven well from the little glimpses we get into the bible we can at least say heaven is a place of perfect joyful worship it's a place of absolute obedience it's a place of perfect love and so as we pray this we're praying that the pattern of jesus and the pattern of heaven would be ours on earth in my life in my family in my church putting the worship of god the obedience to god letting the love of god shape our day to day and maybe some ideas for praying this way that we would pray that we would submit humbly to the father's purposes and plans sometimes his plans feel good to us other times they're really hard that we'd be ready to submit and trust in his father that we'd pray and seek more loyalty and obedience to our father not just in the parts that are convenient for us but the parts where it hurts and it's going to cost us to pray this prayer also is to commit ourselves to seeking the spread of the gospel your kingdom come is why we've got mission sunday next week to remind ourselves and to commit ourselves to work for global and local mission to pray for our mission that more people men women boys and girls would know god as father through trusting jesus his son to pray your will be done is also going to mean work for us committing ourselves to search god's words to know our father's will we need to know our bibles because here is where the revealed will of god is found last week we thought about the priority of the bible in the christian life ties up with our our prayer lives we we read our bibles and perhaps some things we're comforted sometimes we're challenged we we talk to god about that and then we seek to obey the first half of the prayer and jesus reminds us we pray to worship our father and that's good for us it's good to remember i'm not king and it's good to have confidence i pray to this father this father and so that's the first part of the prayer worship your father then he moves in verse 11 to 13 to ask your father so there's three things that we are invited to to consider here first provision verse 11 give us today our daily bread and remember we pray to our father a father who knows and a father who is generous perhaps for the the jewish people listening as jesus first taught this they'd be thinking back to the old testament thinking back to the exodus thinking back to them being in the wilderness and god providing

manna from heaven every day daily the people of god had to trust god to provide for us to pray this prayer because of the times that we live in i think in part is asking god to teach us and to show us that we are needy we have real deep needs because i think one of the challenges of this for us like for lots of people in the world they have to pray for their daily bread because there's starvation and there's drought and there's famine but for us with supermarkets and full fridges and cupboards it's harder we can feel comfortable we've got many resources and so we need to think deeply when it says give us today our daily bread what are we asking and we're asking for those things that we need in order to do the will of god and that's going to involve more than just food it includes food but it involves more but it's good for us to stop and remind ourselves that my physical life my health my being alive is a gift of god he needs to sustain me second by second we're that dependent on our god for our moral choices for living to the glory of god we need god to help us moment by moment otherwise we will not do the father's will it is good for us to pray this and to remind ourselves do you know if i'm going to please god then i need god's help in my family in those relationships to have patience and wisdom in my workplace i need god to know how to work hard and work well and to please him because sometimes there's complexities jesus reminds us to pray to god for the things we need perhaps to help us pray this one thing that certainly i find helpful you might find helpful is at the beginning of each day just think about what's going on in that day any meetings you have any conversations you expect any activities commit them to god before you're about to go to your classroom pray for that time to live understanding that god is present with us and that he asks us to ask him for help because this is much more than food our needs are so many we need the wisdom of god to navigate life well and we need patience we need compassion we need energy in january especially we need energy and motivation to live to please god to serve others well so we pray for provision give us today our daily bread and then in verse 12 jesus reminds us how important forgiveness is to the christian life and to our prayer life forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors remember when we pray this prayer we are praying to a father who has poured out his wrath on his son jesus that jesus was condemned so that we might never know condemnation and so as we pray we remember that by grace we are welcomed by our father but this prayer so helpfully keeps in view for us the grace of forgiveness forgiveness that our sins they are many but his mercy is more we see that the cross is good for us to reflect for day to day life my massive debt to god

has been cancelled by god's grace didn't deserve that forgiveness received it by grace so that our hearts would be soft that we would pay that forgiveness forward to others compared to the offenses we commit against the holy god the offenses of others are small if we find ourselves struggling to forgive and sometimes in relationships there's there's breakdown and there's a real struggle and we can find ourselves fighting and battling or perhaps giving someone the cold shoulder that's the time when we need to preach the gospel to ourselves father you have forgiven me an unworthy sinner father you move towards me in love in the sending of jesus help me move towards the other person help me to show grace and forgiveness to that other person jesus in this prayer also is reminding the church of the reality of ongoing sin this is something to pray regularly daily forgive us our debts people used to speak about keeping short accounts with god when we are conscious aware of sinning against god what should we do not not run away from god not try and minimize it or justify it or try and blame someone else but rather knowing in the gospel we've been freely forgiven we confess it we bring our sins into the light so we are forgiven so those barriers that can stop us knowing god's smile and experiencing god's presence will be removed and then the last concept is in verse 13 rather lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one here's another building block for our prayer lives to pray for god's protection and again who are we praying to we're praying to our father so we're asking our father to help us and to give us strength just as children in weakness or struggling doing something that's hard if their parents are around will ask for help what's the reality that this prayer this part of the prayer is pointing to is pointing to the fact that that christians are weak that we give in to sin there is still that battle of sin that rages in our hearts and all too often we give in to those sinful desires it's also reminding us of the reality that that christians are vulnerable to the attacks of our enemy the devil he's described as our adversary and the father of lies who wants to persuade us that life apart from god is better that not listening to god's word is better wants to steal our joy we'd love to to rip us out of god's hand but praise god by god's grace he cannot but to pray this prayer is to remind ourselves about how serious sin is so that we wouldn't get complacent especially when it comes to temptation that we wouldn't think well i dealt with this temptation really well the last time so i've got this sorted so i don't need to lean on god's word i don't need to trust in him to help me i don't need to pray about this jesus wants us to distrust ourselves but to trust our father in heaven to never move away from that posture of being dependent of finding refuge and shelter in and under god and this is something that really matters because perhaps you have

seen what happens when people have that sort of attitude of pride towards sin and temptation and think you know it will never happen to me we we have seen ministries and churches and families and lives be wrecked by sin by the devastation of sin and so in the heat of the battle against sinful desires when the devil would come and tempt us to unbelief or to disobedience we need to remember that we are children we need to cry out to our father and recognize he's a powerful father he's a gracious father he's the king he is strong to save he will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist in his mercy he will always provide a way of escape for us so we pray to him and we trust him so Jesus says to his followers to the church pray to your father returning to where we started there is no greater privilege on this earth than knowing God as father in heaven and this reminds us that we need to know God personally not just to know about him but to know him to have this direct living personal relationship with our creator our king our savior now what Jesus doesn't teach here is this he doesn't teach us how do we get to enjoy this relationship he doesn't teach us here how can people like us be children of God and perhaps that's our question it's amazing to think how can people like us sinful people be children of God and well again the answer lies in the work of Jesus Jesus the eternal son the father loves who came into this world to live praying your kingdom come your will be done who came to die giving his life to atone for sin Jesus the son who is cut off so that we could come home Jesus who in love shares with his people the joy of knowing God as father if we trust him put our faith in him so as we close do we have that joy today if that's not our joy then pray to God for it and if we do have that joy pray to God from that joy so that we would enjoy relationship with our great father in heaven let's turn again to pray and after I've prayed we can pray together the Lord's prayer Lord God we thank you for the teaching of Jesus thank you for these words that remind us of the great privilege that we have by your grace of calling you our father Lord may we know more and more of your love and your power of your wisdom of your goodness of your truth and your compassion in our lives may it shape how we think about ourselves may it shape our priorities may it lead us to a concern for mission may it help us to seek to be reconciled to people may it make us dependent on you for life and breath and everything else Lord that we

[37 : 32] would seek to praise and glorify you that as we read your words it would lead us to praise or to confess sin or to seek your help and to pray for others Lord we ask that you would make us as individuals make us as a church a people of prayer Lord as we pray for ourselves we also want to pray for the city we find ourselves in we thank you for it Lord as we think about this wonderful invitation to living relationship we pray for those who are lonely for those who are hurting for those who feel forgotten we also pray for those who are desperately seeking you but seeking you in the wrong places Lord may you in your mercy reveal yourself in truth and power and love revealing

Jesus as the only way of salvation lord we pray that many people in this city would seek you and find you and have that joy of knowing you as father lord we pray for our students today as many of them will begin again college and university lord we pray that as there is more in person times that that would really help with learning we pray that you would give them that desire to know you in your word and in prayer so that they might be able to live for you in their classes among their friends lord that you would guard their hearts that you would protect them help us as a church as we seek to disciple lord we pray for the work of the christian union and we ask that you would continue to to build faith and as the good news of jesus reaches out into the different campuses that that many would turn and put their trust in the lord jesus lord we also pray for nations that have been in the news this week we we think of the continued unrest in kazakhstan and the tensions in ukraine and russia and lord we pray that you would have mercy and we pray for the light of the gospel to dawn and to spread and we pray for churches and for ministers and for christians in those countries and lord we pray for the islands of australia and tonga and surrounding and lord very different places with very different cultures but ultimately biblically we understand that the need of each person is the same people need to know the living god through jesus for themselves and so we pray for churches and ministries and mission in australia and tonga and other parts of the world around there lord that it would be your pleasure to take glory for yourself by causing men and women and boys and girls to turn and trust in jesus and now we can use the words of the lord's prayer together our father who is in heaven hallowed be your name your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for yours is the kingdom the power and the glory forever amen and now as we close and we'll sing together the hymn how deep the father's love for us how deep the who who who