

Building a Beach House in 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, here we are at the end of the first full week of 2021. How's it gone for you so far? I got one thumbs up.

Got a couple nods of, okay, it's gone good for some. That's good. How are the New Year's resolutions holding up? So, you got a couple nods and thumbs up.

That's good. I know for myself, it's felt like a bit of a battle. And not because anything's really changed in our circumstances, but because the change that I long to see happen in my own life and in my own heart isn't coming easy.

Old habits die hard, as they say. And new habits sure take a lot of work and effort to get set in and established. At least for me, they do.

Last Sunday, I encouraged us to watch daily at Wisdom's Door and to make it one of our daily habits this year to spend quality time in the Word of God, listening to Him.

[1 : 12] He's given us countless promises in His Word that if we do this, we will find such great benefit and blessing. And we need that in this year ahead.

Well, this morning, I want to encourage us with one more daily habit before we move next week back into our series in John. One more daily habit which can and will make all the difference in this new year ahead.

And that's the habit of prayer. Every single one of us knows just how important prayer is. Not a one of us would ever say that we don't need to spend time in prayer every day.

And yet it's something that is so easily choked out and pushed to the side by everything else. Hopefully, many of you have had some great minutes and moments already in this new year in prayer.

For others of you, maybe you can't even remember the last time that you felt as if you really connected with God in prayer. So what we want to do this morning is to just take a few minutes to listen to what Jesus had to say about prayer.

[2 : 25] Not all of it, just one occasion. Who better to learn from about prayer than the Son of God sent from the Father? And so if you have your Bible with you this morning, please open it up to Matthew 6, verse 5.

Matthew 6, verse 5. As we come to this passage, Jesus is teaching his disciples and the crowds that have gathered as well up on a hillside.

This is kind of the famous Sermon on the Mount. And in this sermon, Jesus teaches his disciples about how they should live in a whole variety of areas of life. First, he talks about the law of Moses. And he talks about the way that the religious leaders are keeping the law. What God really desires when it comes to relationships with other people and marital faithfulness and oaths or promises that we make.

How to treat those who wrong us or treat us poorly. And then here in chapter 6, he comes to talk about a number of good works or righteous deeds that we should do.

[3 : 36] And how we should go about doing them. And specifically, he talks about giving to the needy and fasting and prayer. Let's read what Jesus has to say, starting in Matthew 6, verse 5.

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. And 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.

[4 : 51] 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. Jesus begins by telling His disciples how not to pray.

He speaks again of the Jewish religious leaders. And He calls them what they are. He says, do not be like the hypocrites. People who lack integrity.

People whose outward behaviors do not match what's really going on in their hearts. And in their thoughts. The religious leaders, He says, they love to pray standing in public places.

[6 : 05] Why? They love to pray in those places because it gives them the opportunity to be seen by others. It gives other people the chance to see just how eloquent.

How righteous. How devoted to God they are. How much they know about God. Jesus says, when it comes to prayer, don't pray like that.

Don't be like them. Truly, I tell you. They have received their reward in full. Of course, one of the reasons that we come to God in prayer is for the reward.

It's for the benefit. It's for the blessing. It's for His favor in our lives. Jesus says that these hypocrites, these people who pray like that, their reward for their prayer is just what they're looking for.

And nothing more. The praise and attention of other people. That's all they get when they pray like that. They're not getting the blessing and favor that God gives to those who seek Him.

[7 : 12] Because the truth is, they're not really seeking Him. They're seeking glory and honor for themselves. And then Jesus gives His disciples some instruction about how they should pray.

He says, but when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen.

There's one sure way to strip away all of the desire to be praised by other people. And that's to strip away all the people from what you're doing. Would that Pharisee really pray like that if there wasn't a large crowd gathered to listen?

If he was just sitting in the quiet of his own home by himself, would he pray like that? Would he pray at all? I love what John Wooden said.

He was a Christian man and an NCAA basketball coach. He said this, Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Because your character is what you really are.

[8 : 23] While your reputation is merely what others think you are. And then this is the words he's most famous for. The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching.

I love those words. The true test of a man's character is what he does when no one is watching. That's when the real you comes out.

When there's nobody to impress. No one to pass judgment. Nobody watching. It's then when you are alone that your faith in God. That your relationship with God will be seen for what it really is. How will you act in those moments? Will you pray at all? How will you pray? Generally we don't go through the motions or try to put on a show just for ourselves.

Unless we're trying to fool ourselves. But when you pray, go into your room. Close the door. And pray to your father who is unseen.

[9 : 27] Jesus says first get alone. And then talk to God. That will strip away all the pretense. All the acting. All the desire to impress.

And leave just you and God. And then here's the promise. He says then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Do you want the reward that comes from God? Do you want the benefit and blessing of God in your life? Then seek God in secret.

In a place where you have nothing to gain from anyone or anything else. Now one thing that we should notice here are the very careful words of Jesus.

Two things really. I'll put them on the screen so you can see them. The first is that word reward. Let's consider that word. We need to be careful with this word. In English it usually refers to something positive.

[10 : 31] But in the original language that the Bible was written in. This word can go either way. Recompense is probably a more accurate word.

But it's one that we don't really use in English. It basically means to give a suitable return for something. Whether good or bad.

You could think of a positive reward or a negative reward or consequence. But whatever you get fits with what you did.

Or perhaps with what you failed to do. The second thing to notice is this little phrase. What is done. Your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Now in the original the words what is done are not there. It's literally your father who sees in secret will reward you. But all the translations have added in that phrase because it's implied.

[11 : 33] Who sees what? Who sees what you do. We don't receive a reward from the father just for sitting alone in private and doing nothing.

And so the question is what does God see you doing in that moment where you go into the room. And you're on your own.

And you shut the door. What does God see you doing in private? It's what you do in secret or private that determines what a suitable reward.

Or perhaps even consequence from God will be. So for example if you go into a room and shut the door. And then watch things on a screen of some sort that you should not be watching.

You don't get the reward or the benefit that God is talking about here. Or if you go into your room and you shut the door to pray.

[12 : 34] But then you crank on the television or the music. Or you get another book to help you stay focused. And you know in that time you kind of say a few words here and there to God.

Please help me with this. Please help me with that. Amen. Then you will get the reward or the return from God that fits that kind of prayer.

The reward comes for what is done. And it fits what is done in secret. Think of it in terms of having a conversation with someone.

Probably all of you have had this kind of a moment. When you are sitting at a table across from someone. Trying to talk with them. How does it make you feel when that person just sits there. And kind of pulls out their phone and scrolls through Facebook. And you are sitting there at the table. And you are waiting for their attention to speak to them. And they just keep scrolling.

[13 : 35] Maybe you even ask them a question and they just kind of say. Oh yeah, yeah, good, good. And they just keep scrolling. Don't even look up at you.

You can tell that their attention is not on you. It's on their device. Nobody likes to be on the receiving end of that. How do you think God feels about when we pray to him like that?

Or worse, perhaps you've tried to continue a conversation with someone. After they've pulled out their phone. And they're doing a similar kind of thing. But they're actually pretending to listen to you. You know, they keep glancing back. But they're, you know, and they maybe ask a question or two just to keep you talking. But you can just tell that what they really care about in that moment. Is what they're holding in their hand.

And not what you're saying. They're just kind of saying the conversational things to give the impression that they're listening. Again, how much more does God see through our own attempts to pray when our hearts aren't really in it?

[14 : 49] Or when we're not willing to just stop and really give him our attention. So just going to a private space or finding a moment in which you're alone isn't by itself the silver bullet.

It's what we do in those moments. The reward comes for what is done. And it fits with what is done in that secret moment. That private place.

If we desire God to reward us. To bless us. To give us more of what we long to have. What we're seeking from him. Then we have to sincerely give our hearts and our minds to him.

When we talk with him. In prayer. Seeking God like this is what brings the fullest reward. The best return from God.

That we desire in prayer. Jesus goes on. Verse 7. And when you pray. Says Jesus. Do not keep on babbling.

[15 : 51] Like pagans. Or like the 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 is such an interesting word of instruction. Maybe a little bit counterintuitive to some of us. The reward for seeking God in prayer.

Is not somehow increased. If we pray longer about that same thing. Or if we pray with more words. Jesus reminds them.

God is not ignorant of your needs. He already knows them. But we should be careful here too.

Some might take these words. To mean that.

God likes bare minimum prayers. You know. Like God. Please give me this thing. Amen. Now that's not a bad prayer.

[16:50] But it's not somehow better. Simply because it's short. And to the point. There's a bit of a balance that we need to find here. On the one hand. We need to remember.

Just who we're talking to. We're talking to God. Saying the same thing over and over again. And asking for the same thing. In ten different wordings.

Isn't going to increase the reward of our prayer. Or the chance that we will get what we're asking for. But on the other hand. I don't think God just wants us to treat him.

Like we might treat the person at the bank. As if we're just here to make a transaction. Dear God.

I'm just here to make a withdrawal from my account. Is there anything else you need today?

My child. No. That's it. Thank you. And go on our way. This is about more than just a transactional. Or business kind of relationship.

[17:49] What does Jesus say? He says. Pray to your father. Your father. This is to be like a close.

Warm. Intimate. Father to child relationship. Let's not forget how David prays in countless psalms.

He just pours out his heart to God.

And he does use at times a lot of words. He tells God how he's feeling. And he even encourages us to do the same. Psalm 62 verse 8.

Trust in him at all times you people. Pour out your hearts to him. For God is our refuge. So yes. We should pour out our hearts in prayer.

Which may mean that we use a lot of words. But not because more words will get us a better reward. Or get us what we want. But because in those moments our hearts are just full.

[18:49] And we long to express all of that to God. That's good. That's right too. Jesus goes on to give us an example prayer.

We all know and have heard of the Lord's prayer. And his prayer is short and to the point. But his prayer in Gethsemane was long.

And he asked the same thing multiple times. Because it kept rising to the surface of his heart in those moments. Let's talk briefly about the example prayer that Jesus gives here.

The Lord's prayer. I'm not going to unpack every line here. We could do a whole series of messages on each. Going through each line of this prayer. But my guess is that you've probably heard at least a half dozen sermon series on that already.

So I'm just going to draw out the kinds of things that Jesus says should be in our prayers. When we go into the room and shut the door. Based on this example prayer.

[19:59] Our prayers in secret should acknowledge who God is. In our prayers we should seek not just for ourselves. But for God.

For his glory. For his name. In our prayers we should express our longings for what he has told us is coming. And what will truly be the solution to the problems that we see in our world.

In our prayers we should not only think about what we want to happen. But also what God wants or wills to happen. We should pray and ask God for what we need for each day.

We should ask God regularly to forgive us of our sins. And even go beyond that to ask him to keep us from sin.

To keep us from temptation. And to save us from the schemes of the devil. These are the kinds of things that can and should be part of our prayers. When we get alone.

[21:01] When we go into the room and shut the door. To talk to God. And I think it follows. You know we can keep all of this together.

What Jesus is saying here. That when we pray from our hearts with these kinds of words. These kinds of things. We can generally expect to receive the reward.

That Jesus is talking about. The blessing of God. The answer to prayer. Last week we talked about.

When it came to reading our Bibles. How often we should read our Bibles. Let's take a minute to talk about how often we should pray. We all know the answer.

What is it? How often? Every day. Paul said to the Thessalonians.

[22 : 00] One of the shortest verses in the Bible. Pray continually. Not unceasingly. As in never stopping. But continually.

Repeatedly. Regularly. Often. Jesus prayed. Early in the morning. He prayed sometimes late at night. He gave thanks before meals.

He prayed before he did things. And said things. Paul. Another example of prayer. Said that he prayed night and day. Which is figurative. All the time.

For other people. All throughout the day. And he told us that we should follow his example. There's even a bit of a marker here in this prayer that Jesus gives to his disciples as an example of how often we should pray.

Give us today. Give us today. Our daily bread. Think about that. He could have said give us this week. Our weekly provisions.

[23 : 01] But the kind of unstated suggestion I think here is that we ask for today's bread today. And we ask for tomorrow's bread tomorrow. And we ask for Wednesday's bread on Wednesday.

I would suggest to you that a mature believer makes time to go into the room and close the door and talk to God at least once a day.

Maybe it's not your room in your house. Maybe it's a different spot. Maybe it's in your vehicle for a little while you are waiting for your work shift to start.

Some of you who live out on an acreage might find a nice spot across the yard to put a little bench for those beautiful summer days and just take a little walk out there. But think about this.

Jesus could have easily said just pray secretly in your head or in your heart all throughout the day.

[24 : 01] He could have said that. But he said very specifically go into your room and close the door. The sense here is that this is going to be more than just one sentence or two sentences of prayer.

The sense here is that we should all make a quiet place and space for a little bit longer time of prayer with God each day.

And so that's my encouragement to you this morning. Some of you may already have that as a habit. But if not, I encourage you to make it your habit for this new year to get alone with God and spend time in prayer talking to him every single day.

Pray before you open his word. Pray after you close it about what you read. Pray mixed in with it as you read it. Talking to God about what you're reading.

What he's saying. This will make all the difference in this new year ahead. Last Sunday I said that being in God's word daily would make the difference in, I use the analogy of bull riding.

[25 : 08] In being able to stay on the bull. Many of us feel like we got bucked off at a few times last year. This Sunday I'm going to point you to Jesus' own illustration. And say that a daily time of prayer will make all the difference between whether your year ends up looking like this or not.

Most of you can already see where I'm going with this. There are basically two ways to respond to Jesus' words here. Flip ahead to Matthew chapter 7 verse 24.

This is at the end of the same sermon after Jesus has just said these things about prayer. He says, It says, Here in this picture, this is somebody who literally built a nice beach house right by the sea in Britain.

And along came the worst storm that this little coastal neighborhood had seen in over 60 years. And as you can see, this home is absolutely destroyed.

The first way that we can respond to Jesus' words about prayer that we just heard is to say, It sounds good to me.

[27 : 02] I agree with that. Pray every day. Yeah. And then carry on with our lives and let daily prayer just fall by the wayside and get choked out. If that's what you do, Jesus says you're a foolish man or woman.

When the storms, the difficulties of 2021 come, this will be your 2021. A beach house smashed and destroyed by the storms of the year.

Listen to it in Jesus' own words. But everyone who hears these words of mine, including the ones he just spoke about prayer, and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain, I'm going to add, just for emphasis, of 2021 came down. The streams of 2021 rose, and the winds of 2021 blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

That's one way we can respond. We can choose not to make what Jesus said about daily prayer, going into the room and closing the door, a big priority, and just let it fall by the wayside.

[28 : 22] Or the second way that we can respond to Jesus' words, the other way is to take them deep into our hearts. And no matter what comes this year, to fight that battle, to be on our knees with God every single day, talking to him about what's going on, asking for help, for grace, for strength, for his blessing.

If that's what you do as a result of hearing this, Jesus says, you're a wise man. You're a wise woman. When the storms, the difficulties of 2021 come, your house will stand.

The streams of 2021 will rise, the winds of 2021 will blow and beat against you, but you'll stand because you built your life on the words of Christ.

You're anchored, you're secure. And so what kind of house are you going to start building with your prayer life in 2021? Father in heaven, thank you for these words.

Oh, I pray that you would give us grace and help and strength and courage and faith to really take them in and hear them and put them into practice.

[29 : 59] Lord, I know from my own life that as much as I have sought to have this habit, there have been times where it just gets shoved to the side.

Something comes along, something so important, but nothing is as important as spending time with you each day, seeking you, asking, seeking, knocking, as you said earlier.

So I pray that you would put that desire in all of our hearts, that commitment, and that you would help us to see it through and reap the benefit and the blessing that comes through prayer for each one of us.

Help us also to instill this into our children as well so that they know and can live with that sense of security because they know that you are with them.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.