

When We Pray

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Preacher: Lindon Nairn

[0:00] Good morning, church. The scripture reading for today is taken from Matthew chapter 6, verses 5 through 15.

! And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father, who is in secret.

And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray like this. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[1:01] 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 also have forgiven our debtors.

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

Hear us, the scripture reading. Good morning.

Good morning. Please pray with me. O Lord, how we need you in this moment to speak to our hearts.

Father, we confess our inadequacy to deliver this message. Lord, we pray, O Lord, that by your Holy Spirit, you would speak through us.

[2:16] Lord, we pray that this would be a time of enlightenment, enrichment for your people.

We pray, O Lord, that Jesus Christ would be revealed in this message in increasing measure.

We pray, O Lord, that we will grow in our appetite and in our desire to pray and to do so in the right way.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Brothers and sisters, we come to a text in our sermon series on hypocrisy that all of us can relate to.

Either we have found ourselves guilty occasionally of being hypocrites, when it comes to prayer, or we know someone who is hypocritical in that area, or perhaps even both.

[3:37] Last week, we have found ourselves guilty of giving. Last week, we considered the signs of a hypocrite as it relates to giving. Now we turn to another critical area of our spiritual lives, prayer, which is deeply personal, but can turn into a stage show.

So, you will agree with me that it is beyond reasoning. There is no way one can reason. There is no way one can reason how it is that an almighty or powerful God, self-existing, holy as he is, would incline his heirs to hear our feeble prayers.

Thank you. Thank you.

repeatedly that he does just that. And even more than that, even as indeed as we consider one of the most profound axologies in scripture, Ephesians 3, 20, 21, we see that we lack even the capacity to conceive of things, to pray to him about that he cannot and will not do.

This is what Paul writes in Ephesians 3. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, abundantly more than we can even ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and

ever.

[5:54] Paul writes these words to us to help us to see that we cannot even conceive of what to pray for, of what to ask God about that he cannot do.

Among my primary tasks today is to encourage us to grow in prayer. At the outset, I want to ask you to ponder these questions in your heart.

Have you ever prayed and caught yourself wondering if your words sounded good enough for others to hear?

Let me ask that again. Have you ever prayed and pondered in your own heart whether your words were good enough for others to hear?

Here's the second question. Have you ever hesitated to pray aloud because you felt unworthy or inadequate?

[7:18] Well, if you're like me, your answer to the both of those questions will perhaps be sometime and perhaps for some of you, it's all the time.

Well, I hope that at the end of this message, your answer will be not anymore. In the scripture before us, Jesus gives instructions to his disciples on how to pray.

This is how I believe this text might be summarized. Believers pray to an audience of one worshiping God and humbly petitioning him for the needs of others and themselves.

Believers pray to an audience of one worshiping God and humbly petitioning him for the needs of others and themselves. as a master teacher, Jesus first illustrates in the text how one ought not to pray.

Then he sets out how believers should pray. And so we're going to use those two sections to help us navigate through the text.

[9:01] the first point we're going to consider is the wrong way to pray. And then we're going to consider the right way to pray.

I don't want to lose you. So what I'm saying simply is that Jesus in the text that we've read points out to his disciples two things.

The wrong way to pray and the right way to pray. this text in Matthew chapter 6 is of great importance.

It's of great importance. And much indeed can be said about it. And as I went through the text I found myself saying well perhaps even if we had weeks to consider this text we could not get through it fully.

However to ensure that we cover the main points I'll try to be focused and direct. But I'm sure there'll be lots of questions at some point.

[10:22] But we got to start at the beginning and ask ourselves what is prayer and why do we pray? What is prayer and why do we pray?

Prayer is worship of God. It's a form of worship. It is communication with him that flows from our relationship with him.

That's what it is. prayer and we pray for several reasons. I'll give you just a few of them. Adoration to praise and to glorify God for who he is.

We pray for thanksgiving to express gratitude to God for his many blessings. things. We pray to petition him, to ask him to do things on our behalf.

We pray for growth to deepen our relationship with God. We pray because it is commanded in Scripture.

[11:37] So we pray as an act of obedience. God will pray. Now let's turn to point number one, the wrong way to pray.

Last week we considered the first of three kinds of hypocrites that Jesus spoke about in Matthew chapter 6.

you will recall that the first type of hypocrite he talked about was the one who gives to the poor merely to be sane.

Now we turn to the hypocrite whose true colors are sane in the exercise of prayer.

you remember that a hypocrite is an actor. A hypocrite is not the real McCoy as it were.

[12:45] Hypocrite's external display of piety hides a heart that is far away from God.

And Jesus here says brothers and sisters we need to hear this. We need to hear this not only for ourselves but we need to hear this as we consider others as well.

Not in a judgmental way but so that we might be wise. We need to hear that one can display an act of piety while being a hypocrite at heart.

Jesus says beginning in verse nine that when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners why?

That they may be seen by others. That they may be seen by others. He writes further Jesus says further truly I say to you they have received their reward.

[14:13] Jesus describes the hypocrite here as someone who loves to pray publicly while just simply to be seen by others.

I'm sure we have observed people like that. Hypocrite Jesus spoke about prayed loudly the church and the street corners not to honor God not to worship God but to receive the admiration of others to be seen by others.

Jesus said such people have their reward the fleeting praise of men not the favor of God.

But let me ask you is Jesus saying that corporate prayer is inappropriate? Is he saying that when we come together as a community that we ought not pray?

Not at all. We know this because scripture is filled with examples of public and corporate prayer from Moses praying for the Israelites to the early church praying together in Acts.

[15:43] What Jesus condemns is the motive. Hypocrites pray for show not for genuine communication with God.

In the verses that immediately follow the ones we just read Jesus mourns! against vain repetition. This doesn't mean that repetition in prayer is inherently wrong. After all, Jesus himself prayed repeatedly just before his crucifixion.

prayer said instead he cautions against meaningless mechanical prayers, prayers spoken without thought or genuine faith.

Can I say something to you? Can I say to you that even repeating the Lord's prayer or saying grace before a meal can fall into this category of being mechanical and being spoken without thought.

[17:10] God what's Jesus teaching us here? Jesus is teaching us that when we pray we are not called to impress others brothers and sisters.

We're not called to impress! Others when we pray. We're called to pray to an audience of one. We should not use empty words that lack heart and meaning when we pray.

Jesus is teaching us that we must avoid fake emotions or theatrics in our prayers.

Jesus is teaching us that we should not use prayers to convey messages to others rather than talking to God.

Remember brothers and sisters God is not can I say this to us those of us who are not willing to pray publicly corporately can I say to you that God is not impressed with the eloquence of the person who is next to you who is praying all the time.

[18:44] And let me say to the person who prays all the time that God is not impressed with your eloquence. Imagine the one who knows all things, who has heard everything, being impressed with your words.

There's no logic behind that. God's not impressed with our eloquence. He's not impressed with our speech. He's not impressed with your ability to quote scripture.

He's not impressed with it. The one enthroned in heaven cannot be moved by flowery language.

Only a sincere heart.

Only a sincere heart. Indeed, can I tell you, some of the most effective prayers recorded in scripture were the shortest.

Peter cried out to the Lord, Lord, save me. Remember that? When he was sinking and the Lord saved him.

[19:50] The tax collectors simply prayed, God, be merciful to me. I am a sinner. The Lord had mercy on him. Isaiah responded, here am I, Lord, send me.

the thief on the cross. He simply said, Lord, remember me. Simple prayers.

Samuel, remember him. He prayed, Lord, speak for your servant hear it.

Brothers and sisters, our prayers need not be long. Our prayers need not be flowery. When we pray, we don't pray to impress anyone.

We don't pray to impress the people around us. We don't pray to impress God. Whatever the words are in our hearts.

[21:01] But Jesus continued Jesus says to his disciples, when you pray, do not heap a panty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need even before you ask. pray then like this. Pray then like this. Jesus gives us these words, and he provides for us a blueprint of how we ought to pray.

He didn't give us a prayer to pray, but a blueprint of how we ought to pray. And there is a difference. Prayer is not a formula to recite. it's a blueprint that reflects the priorities, faith, and relationship we should have with God.

[22:33] Jesus begins this blueprint, and he says when we come to pray, that we ought to start this way. our father in heaven.

Brothers and sisters, if we had a thousand days to expand on these words, we could not plumb its depth.

Our father, Jesus says, in heaven. heaven. heaven. This is deeply significant.

Jesus says we ought to pray this way. It reflects intimacy and relationship. We, as we pray, we should not quickly move past this point as there is so much richness here.

to call God father firstly is to call ourselves his children.

[23:48] It places a burden on us to obey him. Perhaps you will better understand this when you consider how you feel when your child disobeys you.

and perhaps carries your name the wrong way. Jesus says to us we ought to say our father in heaven making us obviously his children obligated to carrying his name in the right way.

Jesus does not invite us a command that we pray to a judge who hears evidence of what we might or might not have done so that he might adjudicate our case and determine whether we have a right to something or not.

Jesus does not invite us to go to a judge. Jesus does not invite us to or command us to pray to a politician who perhaps is seeking to get something maybe a vote from us in the next general election.

Nor does he invite us or command us to pray to a supervisor or an employer to justify our activities.

[25:38] No, he invites us, he commands us to pray to God as father, as loving father. And those of you who have children, you know the depth of your love for your children.

You know that you would, listen, I tell my children all the time, they are different places in different continents, and I tell them that I walk on the water to come to them.

And that's the truth. I do whatever I can to get to one of them. And that sinful old me who gets upset with them, sometimes for no good reason, imagine God our father.

But what is truly striking is that Jesus is God's only begotten son. And we only become sons, we become sons, daughters through adoption.

God's God's God's God's God's God. The one who won our adoption, Jesus, through his sacrifice, he directs us to call his father our father.

[27:11] He paved the way. The one who paved the way says, listen, I've paved the way of now, paved the way for you to be righteous, for you to be children of God.

And so when you pray to my father, I want you to say, our father. Brothers and sisters, when you and I pray to God, we are praying to our father.

We are praying to the father of every believer. We pray to one, our father.

But lest we approach him with anything but awe and respect, Jesus reminds us that he is our father in heaven.

He is no ordinary father. He is our father in heaven. He is transcendent. He is sovereign. He's lifted up.

[28:25] He's not our equal. Though he is our father, we are not to approach him casually.

to pray. Jesus sets out clearly the audience, brothers and sisters, of our prayer. When we pray, when you and I pray, we're not praying to one another.

We're not praying to please one another. We're praying to our father in heaven.

Now that Jesus has set out the audience of our prayer, he now turns to the substance of our prayer. And here we see that the Lord's prayer can be divided into two broad categories.

[29:39] The first is I will petition to God to be God to us. And I will put secondly and I will petition to God to be good to us.

In my preparation for this message, I found those two categories. I still have not been able to determine who first wrote it, but I thought it would be useful for us to consider today.

Petition to God to be God to us. If you look at this, I want us to look at it very carefully. If you look at the prayer, Jesus writes, Jesus says, our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Petition to God for God to be God to us.

to us. And then he says, give us this day 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 evil.

[31:25] Petition to God to be good to us. Jesus starts here after saying that we ought to pray to God our Father in heaven.

Jesus says, hallowed be your name. Now, there are several ways one might consider these words, hallowed be thy name, as it relates to the Lord's prayer.

And I believe my personal view is that one can hold on to two of such views at the same time, without there being a conflict.

First of all, let's establish that hallowed means to set apart as holy, to be revered, and to be honored. Jesus invites believers to recognize and respond to God's holiness as we pray.

As you and I pray, Jesus invites us, commands us, to recognize and respond to God's holiness, and he says, we should pray that his name be hallowed.

[33:11] So he says two things, is what I believe. Let's examine both briefly. When we pray to God, our Father, we acknowledge that he is holy.

Pray to God, it evokes a greater degree of awe and adoration as we consider his purity, as we consider his holiness, as we consider that there is none like him.

as we pray to him, get a sense of our own inadequacy, and declare with the angels, the Old Testament prophet, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

when we pray to God, when we stand in his presence, aware that he has inclined his ears to our feeble lips, the holy one.

Words become fewer. But undoubtedly, undoubtedly, Jesus presents this as one of several petitions when he says we ought to pray, a father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

[35:14] God that his name will be hallowed to petition God that his name will be hallowed throughout the world.

We ought to pray that his name will be known and revered, not abused, not taken in vain, not used as a cursed word.

God to pray, Lord, Lord, we pray that your name will be hallowed in every corner of the world.

We pray that your name will not be abused. We pray that you would bring to the consciousness of those who know you and those who don't know you, Lord, that you are supreme, that you are holy, that there is none like you.

We are to pray that he will be worshipped. We are to pray that the eyes of the elect will be opened.

[36:42] We are to pray that believers who do not hallow his name will be convicted.

Jesus continues the second petition in this section. God, God, be God to us.

Cause your name, oh Lord, to be hallowed in the four corners of the earth. Cause your kingdom to come. Cause your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Combine all of those. prayer is not just about asking for what we want.

It's about aligning our desires with God's will. And here Jesus commands that we pray that God's kingdom will come to earth, that his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[38:13] Both in our lives and in the world generally. He is the sovereign one. Lord, we pray that your kingdom will come and your will be done in places where there are conflict, in places where people are being abused,

where sin is paraded as righteousness.

and that which is righteous is seen as harmful. Where men and women are in darkness.

Lord, we pray that your kingdom will come. we pray, Lord, that we are believers and are free to worship, where they are penalized and face even imprisonment or death.

We pray, Lord, that your kingdom will come in those places. We pray that your will will be done. God, be God to us.

God, cause your kingdom to come in the high places of our country. Cause your kingdom to come in parliament.

[39:35] Cause your kingdom to come in government. Cause your will to be done in our school system. Lord, cause your kingdom to come.

Cause your will to be done. call for this to happen both now and in the future. Notice that Jesus commands that our prayers focus on God's will and his kingdom before attention is given to our good.

Jesus says, this is the right way to pray. The right way to pray, he says.

He commands. You ought to pray, God, our Father, give us this day our daily bread.

give us this day our daily bread. Here, Jesus tells us to pray to God for our daily needs. We ought to ask him to grant us what we need to survive.

[41:04] This is a prayer of dependence. Jesus helps us to see that we don't look, brothers and sisters, can I say this to you soberly?

We don't look to our jobs. We don't look to the government. We don't look to the state of the economy or our own wisdom for our daily bread.

Jesus says, we pray to God our Father and we do so in faith. We don't look to these other things because we know they're fleeting.

We know that they can be here today and gone tomorrow. Ultimately, we look to God for our daily bread.

So whether you have little, whether you have much, your prayer should be the same. Lord, give us our daily bread.

[42:17] Perhaps I'm speaking to someone now. And you don't feel that this is something you ought to pray to God about.

God. But I want to remind you of the uncertainty of life. Not only must we seek thanks for our physical needs, but our spiritual needs as well.

Yes, we should ask the one who is the bread of life. to nourish our souls daily. Jesus commands we ought to pray.

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Here, Jesus commands that we ought to confess our sins and seek God's forgiveness.

commandments. Brothers and sisters, this command, and we ought to see this for what it is, because it reflects the truth about us, that we are imperfect beings, all of us.

[44:04] It's a recognition of God's perfection, recognition, and it's a recognition of his call for us to be holy as he is holy. Jesus commands that we admit our failures and pray like the psalmist did in Psalm 51.

After we sin, have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Let out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin, for I know my transgressions and my sin is before me.

Our prayers for forgiveness should not be done without feeling, should not be simply words, should be heartfelt.

We pray and we ask God to forgive us. Should be done knowing that what we've done does not represent him.

Psalm is right in the same psalm. He says, hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquities. Create in me, O Lord, a clean heart and renew a right spirit in me.

[45:45] When you and I sin, we know that we do not please our God and Savior. Brothers and sisters, you and I, we need ongoing forgiveness forgiveness.

For both sins, known and unknown. Sins of commission and omission. Sins of the heart and sins of the flesh.

We are a sinful people. And we need forgiveness. You and I need daily forgiveness. In fact, we need minute by minute forgiveness.

Our hearts are wicked. But we can be sure of one thing.

That he who judges, that he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[46:52] But there is a condition, there is a condition. We must forgive those who sin against us. And I know, I know both from experience and observation, that oftentimes it is hard to forgive those who have sinned against us.

us. We often need the Lord's strength to do so. Brothers and sisters, the word says, the Bible is clear, we forgive, otherwise we will not be forgiven.

So I want to encourage us, as hard as it is, not to take this lightly. If you need to talk to someone, if you need to say, listen, how do I make it through this period of unforgiveness, then do that.

Pray to the Lord, Lord, have mercy on me. I can't seem to shake it. I can't seem to get over this. Help me, Lord.

Help me, Lord. Help me to genuinely forgive. Now, Jesus does not say through this that you put yourself in a similar situation that would cause someone to use or to abuse you.

[48:20] We should have the heart to forgive because how many of you know that there is no comparison between the sin that we commit and God's holiness and the sin that one commits against us and us and ourselves.

There is no comparison for he is altogether holy and we are sinful people. And then Jesus concludes and he says we ought to pray this way.

Lead us not into temptation temptation. But deliver us from evil. Here we are called to acknowledge our need for God's guidance and protection in a world filled with trials and sin.

Jesus says lead us not into temptation. temptation. I'd like that to sink in for a moment. Lead us not into temptation.

How often do we stop to pray this way? Lord, lead me not into temptation. Lord, don't even Lord, I pray that by your grace you would cause there not even to be such and such.

[50:12] Lead me not into temptation, Lord. Cause it not to even come across my path. Lead me not into temptation.

let us not find the light in temptation. Lord, lead me not into temptation.

Cause me not, O Lord, even to be tempted. Cause it not even to come into my circle, into my path.

Lead me not into temptation. Lead us away, Lord, from situations that would be tempting to us.

And deliver us from evil. Deliver us from moral evil. Deliver us from personal evil. Deliver us from spiritual evil. evil. Lord, deliver us from evil.

[51:25] This petition is an acknowledgement that we have feet of clay. And that not only do we need the Lord to forgive us when we sin, but we also need him to cause our walk to be such that we don't encounter things that may lead us to sin.

Encourage you, brothers and sisters. Encourage us. Encourage us to pray this prayer often. Lord, not only do I ask you to make sin, to cause sin to be bitter to me, I ask you also, Lord, to not allow me to even be tempted by such and such.

As we move to close, what are the practical applications? How might we grow in prayer?

First thing we can do, we can be intentional. We can be intentional about when we pray. And set aside specific times to pray.

Next thing we can do, we can pray with sincerity of heart. When we pray, focus on your heart, not on the words.

[53:21] And remember, forget about the empty words. Forget about trying to impress the people around you. pray corporately and privately.

Both are vital to spiritual life. Examine your motive when you pray. What's your motive as you pray?

Am I praying to connect with God or am I praying to impress others? Remember to whom you pray.

Praying to our Father in heaven. Pray without ceasing. Always pray. in faith.

Nothing is too hard for God. prayer. Brothers and sisters, this week, let us approach prayer as a privilege, a sacred privilege, a time to draw near to our Father who loves us deeply.

[54:43] Let us set aside hypocrisy and embrace the simplicity, sincerity, and power of heartfelt prayer.

we lift up the name of Jesus, whose perfect life and sacrificial death paved the way for our adoption. He is the one who made it possible for us to pray to our Father. And he is the one who yet intercedes for us even as we pray.

Let us pray. O Lord, Lord, Lord, how we need you today and every day.

Lord, cause the word, cause the truth of your word to burn deeply in our hearts.

[56:11] Cause us, what do you as we look to you for wisdom and help.

Lord, cause us to place priority on the things that concern you. Lord, what a privilege we have to pray to you, to bring every need to you.

Father, we thank you for that. You didn't have to do it that way, but you did. You didn't leave us to ourselves.

We are grateful, oh Lord. That we can stand in the presence of the Holy One.

We are grateful, oh Lord, that the curtain was torn asunder. And Lord, we can stand before you.

[57:33] We're grateful, oh Lord. Father, we pray, oh Lord, that each one will grow in prayer.

Oh Father, we pray that none will take for granted this gift that you've given to your people. in the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.