

"Gospel Prayer" Matthew 6:24-34

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Date: 06 September 2026

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[0:00] So I recently read an article, I was reading a book, or glancing through a book by Timothy Keller! on prayer, and it refers to this statistic about spiritual tourism. And what this article! talks about is it's from the UN of tourism, the UN tourism which is a branch of the UN.

They did a research on how many people travel for spiritual experiences, and the statistic came back saying around 170 million, over 170 million people travel, travel the world for how these experiences, and most of these people are from Western countries. And they travel most of the time to Asia Pacific region. Now if you're anything like me, I'm not the greatest at geography, I have to look up where this is, where this area is. And this area is in the area of India, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, Nepal, and the countries that surround that area on the map. And the thing is, over 60% of these people who travel for these experiences, they do it because they want to go meditating, they want to meditate at an ashram, they want to practice yoga, they want to go to these places to have an experience. This is a lot of people.

This is more than the population of Canada. This is a lot of people who travel every year. And it's interesting, because you would think when you look around, you would think that our culture is becoming more and more secular. But it's actually becoming more and more deeply religious. They just wouldn't call it religious. They would call it something else. Similarly, within Christianity, we are rightfully told that we need to pray. You read it in the Bible, we need to pray.

But interestingly, the books that are written about prayer, the new and best way that you can pray, are the most purchased books within Christianity. Every year, there's new books on how we should pray, how we should have the right posture of prayer. And these books are constantly purchased. And the same goes with Christian retreats. These retreats promise that if you go here, you'll have an experience with God, you'll have a deeper experience with God, or you may learn something that would help you in your Christian walk. Most of the time, these retreats circle around prayer.

[2:32] But interestingly, a common thing that you hear within Christianity is that many people are either not praying, they either don't know how to pray, or they're unsatisfied with their prayer life.

See, there's clearly a deep longing worldwide to connect with some kind of higher power or God. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is best recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, which we're going to look at, addresses this topic of prayer. He addresses the topic of prayer. And he does this within a section that's focused on the motive behind giving, praying, fasting. Fasting is when you abstain from something to focus more on God.

Or a section relying on false securities. So like health, power, money, and those kind of things. But we don't have the time to focus on everything in this chapter. We're just going to hone in on the section on prayer.

And we're going to look at it. But the principles laid out here in this brief section, what can apply to all the topics that I just mentioned about giving, about fasting, about relying on false securities. So if you can turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6, verses 5 to 15, that would be very helpful. If you have it on your phone, look it up, because it's very helpful to have it in front of you, because you can see what's going on. And you can also glance at the rest of the chapter, because you can see how it applies to all the areas. Now this section, the prayer section, can easily be summarized in one sentence. A heart of praise leads to gospel change. But the thing is, this can be incredibly difficult to follow through on. So we're going to look at this section in three ways.

[4:33] Motive of prayer, act of prayer, and outcome of prayer. And again, that's motive of prayer, prayer, act of prayer, outcome of prayer. It's a motive of prayer. Look with me at verses 5 to 8.

And 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, 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. See, in this section, in this section, there's two people that we see here, the hypocrite and the Gentile. So we're going to focus on the first one first, the hypocrite. What's a hypocrite? Well, according to the dictionary, it's a person whose actions, feelings, or actual behavior contradict the moral standards. Virtues or belief may publicly state or expect others to follow. The origin of the word, as it's said in the dictionary, comes from the Greek word, hypocrites, which is, you take the C out and you put a K instead, which means stage actor or a mask wearer, which I think is a better definition. For Jewish people to stand and pray in a synagogue or at a street corner would have been a normal thing. A synagogue is the Jewish place of worship.

A street corner, what Jesus is talking about here, he's referring to just public places. For us, it could be saying grace at a restaurant. It may seem weird, but they did most of their praying out loud. It was a very common thing. That anything, when they pray, it would be out loud.

It wouldn't be this thing where you go off to a room to pray. It would just be out loud most of the time. Everything in daily life, they would thank God for. So what's the problem? Isn't that a good thing? The pray at the place of worship or in your daily life.

But you have to notice again what Jesus says in verse 5. And 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, that they may be seen by others. See, motive is everything.

[7:03] And this is what Jesus is going in at, is the motive behind praying. In a murder case, I watch a lot of murder mysteries on TV. What they mostly focus on is the motive of the murder. Why did the person murder this person? If you find the motive, it's easier to prove someone is guilty. And then it'll also show if the crime was deliberate or an act of passion. It's easy to look at religious leaders and point the finger at them. The Pharisees of Jesus' time practiced an outward religion. A Pharisee is a religious teacher. But their hearts were far from God. They would heap up the law of Moses, or daily rituals on people, but they would not follow them themselves. In our day, we could look around and we could look online and point fingers at pastors. Those who have preached one way to do something, but they live a completely different life. And when they're caught, the fall is huge.

But Jesus, we have to remember, is preaching the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples. He's not preaching this to religious leaders. He's preaching it to everyday people. So what is he doing? He wants to show that when you pray in public, he wants to know. He's trying to get this out of us to think about this. Are you praying to be heard for the eloquent words you're saying or how long your prayer is? Are you praying to be seen that you are a committed follower of him? Or are you praying to God because you want a relationship with him? This is what Jesus is trying to get at. He's trying to get at the motive behind the prayer itself. This is what the hypocrite does. They want to be seen. They want to be seen by how religious they are. In one sense, it's easy to pray in public in times where we're supposed to, when we're around others. When we say grace, it's easy to pray.

When we're in a Bible study, it's easy to pray. But what Jesus is talking about here, and verse 6 shows this, when he says, 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.

The question is, what is your heart doing? Is it praying? Are you praying to be seen? Or are you praying to have a relationship with the Lord? When he says sees in secret or is in secret, the thing is, he's not saying you cannot pray in public. Jesus prayed in public all the time.

[9:40] But it's what the motive is behind the prayer. When you pray, are you praying for a reward? What's the reward? Is it a deeper, lasting relationship with the father? Or is it temporary praise by others? Look at the character in this section, the Gentile, the other character.

We're going to look at verses 7 and 8. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they'll be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him. To a Jewish person, a Gentile will be someone who is not ethnically Jewish, one who is of a different race. Jesus is saying here, though, a Gentile is someone who is not a disciple of his, one who hasn't committed their life to him. When a city sports team does well and makes it to the final matches, people who have never been supporters of the team or never really been watching it, they jump on the bandwagon. And they become supporters because of the hype surrounding it. And if the team loses quickly, they disappear and are not present for the next season unless the team makes it again to the finals. They are not true

followers of the team.

The diehard fan who sticks with them through the bad seasons are the true follower of the team. See, God the Father is often treated like this. When things go well, it's easy to commit.

But when things don't go well, it's easy to leave. Prayer is similar. It's hard to pray when things aren't going well. We tend to heap up empty phrases, hoping we'll be heard. See, when he refers to the Gentiles here who heap up the empty phrases, he's referring to those who go to pagan temples and repeat the word constantly, constantly, constantly. In a sense, they badger God, the God of the temple, to be heard. God wants some sincere prayer, not just many words. He knows what you need before you ask him, as Jesus says here. So is this saying, then, should we not pray if God already knows what we want or what we need? No. What's being said here is that God wants sincere prayer. But how do we pray, then? That's the ultimate question we have to ask. Well, Jesus answers this in the next section.

Look with me at verses 9 to 12. So how do we pray? Pray then like this, Jesus says, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done as it is in heaven.

[12:31] I'm so used to saying the liturgy one. 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.

This is likely the most well-known part of scripture worldwide. And that's with Christians and non-Christians. I should have gone around, I was thinking about this when I was writing this sermon, I should have gone around asking people, do you know a part of the Lord's Prayer? Do you even know what the Lord's Prayer is? I've done a couple non-Christian funerals, and all of them said to me, we don't want anything religious. But then they asked for the Lord's Prayer. And then when I said the Lord's Prayer during the funeral, everyone in the room, or most, knew what the Lord's Prayer was and said it. They would say it with everybody else. Obviously, to a non-Christian, this holds no significance. It's something that's just said in a moment of grief, a liturgy that holds no meaning.

But to a Christian, the significance of the Lord's Prayer is massive. It's something that can bring comfort, just like Psalm 23 does. It's also something we can say in community together. We say it here every Sunday, the Lord's Prayer, before we leave. We say the Lord's Prayer together. But it's also something that gives a framework on how to pray. Jesus lays this out here.

And it's very important for us to look at it. It helps us in seasons. It's a guide in seasons when we're lost for words. When we feel like we're going through something that's too hard, and we have no idea what to say.

This gives the framework on how we should pray. But it also gives the framework, when seasons are going well, on how we should pray. Because it's easy for our eyes and our hearts to go astray, as one of the songs said.

[14:29] So let's look at it. See, it opens with an address. Our Father in Heaven. Like any conversation, you must first address the person you're talking to.

You can't just walk up beside someone and start talking. They'll have no idea if you're even talking to them, unless you're giving them eye contact. See, you have to open the, you have to address who you're talking to.

And the address is to the Heavenly Father. Notice how Jesus says, Our Father. It's not a distant God, but a Father. It's one of deep intimacy, of closeness.

This is the only God that you could attribute this to, of deep intimacy and closeness. Notice in the first group. See, the Lord's Prayer has the address, and then it has six petitions.

After it. And you can list these petitions in two groups, in two segments. So the first set of, the first group of petitions, they're directed towards God. Hallowed be your name.

[15:33] To hallow something is to show a deep reverence. Because God is completely holy, we must treat him with deep, deep reverence. The first petition is worship.

Before anything else, God is worshipped for who he is. He is not worshipped for what he does. He is worshipped for who he is.

For his holiness. His perfect. There is, everything about God is pure and holy. Perfect. And we are called to worship him for that before anything else.

Your kingdom come. Prayer for continual advancements of his kingdom. Societal, personal, creational. What this means is that we are to pray that more and more people would become followers of Jesus.

Would experience his kingdom. And for society and our personal lives and for the environment to look more like God's kingdom until Jesus returns. God's kingdom is a big theme in the gospel of Matthew.

[16:38] You see it in chapter 4, verse 17. Jesus said this, from that time Jesus began to preach saying, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. This idea of that God's kingdom is eminent is a huge theme in the gospel.

And it's a huge theme through the whole Bible. That Jesus could return at any time and we are to pray for his kingdom to come. Right now, on earth, within things that we interact with, then also for him to return and for the new kingdom to come.

The new heaven and the new earth. Your kingdom come. And then he continues on. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

God's will as it has been revealed in scripture. And what is that? For those who don't know him to come to a saving faith through Jesus Christ, his son. And for those who do know him to become more like his son and follow him to be committed followers of Jesus to give up their lives and serve him out of deep love for him.

See, these petitions have everything to do with God. For God to be more and more glorified and for us to be less and less inward focused on ourselves. Notice how the next section of petitions are directed towards basic personal needs and communal needs.

[18:00] give us our daily bread. Very simple prayer. This is to give the mindset of daily dependence on God and to teach us not to take it for granted.

For us in our western world, this feels extremely remote. We have grocery stores and food banks everywhere. It's actually very hard to truly go hungry.

This gives the illusion of self-sufficiency. Most of us need to pray for God to teach us to not take it for granted and to be more generous. That we are to pray, give us our daily bread.

We have so much of it, we are called to bless others. Many in the world have no idea when or where their next meal is coming from and how they're going to feed their children. For them, this prayer would be way more pressing and on their minds.

And then he continues, and forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors. Interestingly, this is the only part of this prayer that Jesus singles out and talks about immediately after this section of the prayer.

[19:12] He ends it talking about it and we're going to look at it in a moment. But in the meantime, debt means sin. See, when we sin, before we know God, before we've committed ourselves to Jesus, when we sin, we owe God for that.

And that is the whole gospel there in a nutshell, that Jesus came to pay that debt. That is what debt means here. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We are to ask God to not allow situations that lead us to temptation.

God never tempts us, but he allows situations where temptations can happen. If he didn't, he would be a tyrant over our lives and free will wouldn't exist. Now, the Lord's Prayer, as I've just gone through very quickly, the Lord's Prayer that can be made to fit any situation, it's a very profound thing, what Jesus gives here to his disciples and those listening.

It's an amazing compass for our prayer lives and the focus is never on ourselves, truly. Did you notice how everything is in the plural? But the focus is on God, and mostly on others.

The whole prayer is written in plural. It's a prayer of community rather than an act of deep devotion. We are to pray to God, to worship him, to ask for his will to happen, and for him to bless others as well as ourselves.

[20:41] It's an act of prayer within a community. But look with me at the last section. Look with me at what Jesus does here after he gives this idea of prayer, how he shows them.

Look with me at verses 14 and 15. 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. This is a stark warning, and it's a warning because it shows how a disciple's heart can be not truly changed.

To be a follower of Jesus is to be living radically different the way our hearts tend to lead. We are called to forgive. See, when we are wronged, when someone commits something against us, we instantly want revenge.

But Jesus commands us to forgive. Now, I want to acknowledge that there is people sitting here in the room, or there could be someone listening online, who's had horrible things done to them by somebody or many people.

[21:57] And this idea of forgiveness can feel unfathomable. And for me to be up here saying to forgive could be unsettling.

I want to acknowledge that. Because forgiveness is something that is extremely hard to do on our own. So how do we address this? How do we address this for those sitting in the room and for us as well?

How do we forgive? Did you notice how many times Jesus says, your father, our father, in this? He says it six times within this section focused on prayer.

But in the whole chapter of chapter six, it's said eleven times. See, this is a very important thing.

When things are repeated in the Bible, we need to take note of it.

Because that means there's a deep meaning behind it. Jesus is saying our standing with the father is the same as his. But how does this happen?

[22:59] It happens when we look to the cross. When Jesus went to the cross, for you and for me, he took our place and gave us a standing with the father. When you put your faith and trust in Jesus, you become a follower of fellow heirs and inheritors of righteousness with him.

When this is truly fully grasped, our hearts begin to change through the work of the spirit. It's not out of our own doing that we can forgive or our hearts change.

See, through this, through the cross, we can look at this and see how a heart of praise leads to gospel change. See, only through the gospel can forgiveness truly happen.

And forgiveness doesn't mean reconciliation with the person. It doesn't mean you have to have a relationship with the person. That's not what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is allowing you to let go and for the gospel to continually change you deeper and deeper into a child of God.

That is what forgiveness is about. Forgiveness is not about making a new relationship with that person. It's about what God can do with you and through you as you forgive through the work of his spirit.

[24:15] Only through praise and adoration in our prayer lives can we be disciples of Jesus. And it starts with looking at the cross. Looking at the great sacrifice Jesus did for us, for you and for me, and how much we have been forgiven through grace alone.

That is where change happens. And that is where the praise happens. And that is when gospel change happens. And that is when we can say the Lord's Prayer not as an act of just monotonous liturgy, but as an act of deep devotion and community and communal prayer.

This deep longing to connect with a higher power that's worldwide, it's a worldwide longing, is only satisfied in the one true living God. God. It's only satisfied in that.

People flock around the world to have a religious experience, a spiritual experience. But we see here, Jesus lists it out, what is a true religious experience.

And that is a relationship with the Father, praising him, asking for his will, for his kingdom to come, praising him for the cross, telling people about the cross, spreading that message, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

[25:29] Thank you.