

Prayer Luke Thompson

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[0 : 00] We live in a culture, in a world, that judges things by appearance. We do that all the time, I think. I always judge a book by its cover, or a movie poster, or a person even.

We do it so often. We judge things by their appearance. And I think one of the great proofs of this in our culture is in advertising. If you ever watch much TV at all, and you haven't quite converted to Netflix yet, then you will know that every second ad on TV is basically helping you shape your image.

Every ad is trying to give you something that will affect the way that people see you. Now, there are the classic things, like makeup and fashion items and hair transplants, that, yeah, they're very clear about shaping your image and how people perceive you.

But then we get told that the car that you drive will greatly affect the way people view you and think about you. It will show off the things that you value in life.

The type of beer that you drink says a lot about you, apparently, and what people might think of you. We live in a culture that judges by appearances all the time.

[1 : 21] And we are so often concerned with shaping how people perceive us. That we might put it on the appearance so that people will see what we want them to see.

We do that in our culture all the time. And we would be really, really foolish if we didn't also believe that we did it in church.

In fact, this is exactly what Jesus confronts in our passage this evening. If you've got a Bible open, that'd be super helpful. I want to take you back a few verses from before where Nick read to chapter 6, verse 1, where Jesus shapes this whole chapter in what he's talking about.

Here's what he says in chapter 6, verse 1. He says, So straight away, Jesus is concerned about the way that we might seek to shape the appearances we put on that affect how people view us.

And he spells out here in this chapter three particular areas. The way that we give, the way that we fast, and prayer. And we're going to particularly just focus on the prayer issue tonight.

[2 : 46] So I want to say three lessons I think we learn from this passage. And there are hundreds of them because there's such a richness to this teaching from Jesus.

I want to highlight three for you tonight. The first one is this. Prayer is not about our actions, but our hearts.

Prayer is not about our action, but our hearts. We see this as Jesus begins by teaching us how not to pray. Have a look with me from verse 5.

Jesus says, And down to verse 7.

He says again, Prayer is not about our actions, but about our hearts.

[3 : 55] Have you ever noticed that people are far more patient in a church car park than they are at the Chatswood Chase car park?

I have never in my life heard anyone beeping their horn in a church car park. It just doesn't happen, does it? Ironically, I said that this morning, and someone had an accident in the car park, and I thought they probably should have beeped their horn in the car park.

But isn't it amazing that we think it's really important that we look a particular way, calm and collected and not angry when we're in the church car park.

But it's so easy to throw all that out the window at the shops. And to get really angry that somebody took your spot. Have you ever been angry someone took your spot at church?

Seems a bit weird, doesn't it? But we love to play the appearance game, don't we? And on Sundays, when you come to church, it's actually really easy to do.

[5 : 01] To come to church and for an hour or so, you can hide your sin. And you can put on a nice smile and say, yeah, life's pretty good, I'm going alright.

You might brag about your kids and how good they were at daylight savings. You can do a lot to look quite impressive in an hour, hour and a half on a Sunday night. It's actually not that hard. But when we do that, when we put on this appearance that our life is okay, our hearts are so far from God.

And that's the problem. A friend of mine has a, his two-year-old daughter, Georgia, is learning how to pray. And loves to pray and gets praise, as is appropriate when you're a parent, to praise your kids for doing good things.

But it's got to the point now where Georgia will pray. And when she's finished saying, she says, amen. And then she turns to her dad and says, daddy, say good girl.

[6 : 05] Daddy, say good girl, tell me I did a good job. And he says to me, it's so great she's praying. But I'm really worried that she's actually just praying to get my praise.

He says, I'm worried my daughter's turning into a Pharisee. A two-year-old's really easy to read. We are so much better at hiding what's going on in here.

We don't come out and ask for praise, do we? We just kind of hope it comes. It's so easy for us to do things because we want to be seen doing them.

We want to appear that we are godly rather than actually be godly. Let me ask you this. Do you pray so that people might think that you sound holy and righteous?

Do you pray and try and use big words or throw in a couple of Bible verses that people might be impressed? Do you end up just praying to other people instead of to God?

[7 : 12] Do you pray because you have to? Because you're on the roster at church or you're at Bible study and it's kind of expected of you. Are you saying grace before a meal and someone's got to do it? Maybe you do the reverse.

Maybe you don't pray because you're worried about what people will think. Maybe you think, I don't have the right words. I'm not very eloquent. I've got a bit of a stutter and I just, I can't really string a sentence together.

Are you so worried about how people will think of you when they see you that you don't pray? Now, should we wait till our hearts are right and pure 100% before we pray?

Well, no. That would be kind of silly because we would never pray if we had to wait till our hearts were pure. And when Jesus says in this passage, in verse 6, he says, 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, Jesus here is not saying that we shouldn't pray publicly. That you should always pray in a closet.

[8 : 29] No, rather he's saying, as we come back to verse 1, Do not pray so that your righteousness will be seen by others. Don't pray to be seen.

Just pray and you might actually be seen. And in fact, it's really, really important and helpful for us to pray publicly. It's a great encouragement to hear others praying and to be prayed for.

Of course, our kids will only learn how to pray by hearing us pray. And by hearing other members of our church praying.

There's something really edifying and encouraging being in a group where you get to pray with and for each other. It is better to pray with a conflicted heart than to not pray at all.

There's our first lesson.

[9 : 47] A kind of what not to do. Prayer is not about our actions. It's about our hearts in here. Here's the second thing we learn as we move on to what Jesus teaches us about prayer.

Come with me to verse 9. Jesus then says, Here's our second lesson.

Prayer is an overflow of relationship. Prayer is an overflow of our relationship with God. Emily, my almost three-year-old daughter, is learning that mum and dad have many ways in which they could be called.

Other than just mum and dad. Like, we have first names. She's also recently learned that dad is a man and mum is a woman. And all of this is right and appropriate. But because she's not quite three years old, she can still sometimes use correct words but in the really wrong context.

So the other day she was having breakfast with her mother. And she got to a point where she often loves, halfway through the food, someone helping her.

[11 : 07] She just kind of gets lazy and someone else can feed me and I'll just sit here. And she got to the point and she said, Come and feed me, woman. Which was kind of technically true, but that's not really the right way to say it, is it?

Come and feed me, mum would have been better. Come and feed me, woman doesn't quite work. Even though mummy's a woman and she knew what she meant. Now there are lots of words and names that God has.

There are plenty in the Bible. And some of them are more suitable and appropriate than others when it comes to addressing God in prayer. And here in this great prayer that Jesus teaches us, he instructs us to call God Father.

It's not the only name we can use for God in prayer, but it's a significant one. Because Father is a relational word. That we are his children.

And prayer is supposed to be this deep conversation we have, like we might have with a spouse or a great friend of ours. And you know when you have that great conversation with someone, you feel better and you feel closer to that person.

[12 : 26] And prayer is supposed to do that too. Now if you're anything like me, you very quickly forget that prayer is about an overflow of relationship.

Prayer really easily becomes just a chance to give God a bit of a pat on the back and give him my list of requests for the week. So a prayer might sound like this.

God, thank you for helping me pass my exam. Thanks for making me healthy again. And thanks for this food I'm about to eat. Please help Caitlin to get better. Please help Matt find a job.

And please somehow get Kirsten either out of my life or just stop her from just annoying me generally. Can you imagine if you spoke to a spouse or a friend like that?

Is that going to end well? No, it's not. Please don't speak to a spouse or a friend like that. Imagine if I went to my wife Jennifer and I said, come home after work, open the door and say, hey Jen, thanks for feeding the kids today, thanks for reading them, thanks for training them and for putting them to bed.

[13 : 33] Could you please wash these clothes, clean up these dishes, put the rubbish out, call my mum for me because I don't really want to talk to her and let me know when you've got some spare time, you can come fix my neck for me. I'll see you tomorrow. That's not going to end well for me.

That's not the way to speak to a spouse. Because my relationship with Jen is much more significant than that. And our relationship with God is also much more significant than that.

And prayer should be an overflow of that relationship. See, we pray for the things that we believe will make us happy.

We ask God to remove the bad things, get them out. And we pray for the good desires or outcomes that we hope will make us happy. But it might be that we're actually just treating God like our own personal genie.

That he'll just grant us the wishes that we ask for. But God is not our personal genie. He is our father in heaven.

[14 : 44] He is king of an everlasting kingdom. And he invites you and I to pray to him.

Not because he can do things for us, although of course he can. But he invites us to pray to him. Because he wants you and I to enjoy our relationship with him.

To see that he is a good father. That he loves to listen to us. That he wants us to hand over the stresses and burdens in our life.

He wants to carry those for us. He wants us to see how much he loves us. He wants us to trust him with the things that concern us.

And he does that because he loves us. He's in relationship with us. He is our heavenly father. See, prayer is an overflow of relationship.

[15 : 46] Here's our third lesson from the end of this prayer. Prayer reminds us that life is about God and not about us.

Prayer reminds us that life is about God and not about us. So Jesus teaches this prayer, not because these words have special kind of power in being recited.

But because these words are a model for how we should pray. Did you notice in the first half of this prayer, it's all about praising God for his name.

Praying that his will might happen on earth. And the prayer is already half over before we even get to thinking about ourselves.

I think this prayer models for us and reminds us that instead of prayer being about giving God a list of, here's God, here's my request for the week. Instead, we should first reflect on the things that delight God.

[17 : 12] We should reflect on the things that grieve God. We should reflect on what it is that God wants for this world. And let those things shape our prayers.

Then we get to the second half of this prayer. And you might be thinking for a second, now I can talk about myself.

Except it doesn't quite work like that either. Do you notice that all of this second half of the Lord's Prayer is actually really, really humbling? Have a look with me from verse 11.

The first thing is, give us today our daily bread. Not riches, not status, not desires. Just what I need today.

It's a prayer for our needs, not for our greed. And then verse 12, we go on. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[18 : 15] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. That is, we acknowledge our sin. And we acknowledge our struggle with sin, with temptation.

And when you pray this, it's just an acknowledgement to say that you are not good. That you actually need forgiveness. And if you pray this prayer out loud, if you list your sins, people are not going to hear you and think, wow, you're an awesome person.

You've done some amazing things. You are so holy and righteous. They're not going to think that at all, because you've just told them all the things that are wrong with you.

And then we would avoid the problem of the hypocrites. In verse 5, where Jesus said, No one wants to air all of their sins to the world.

And yet we are invited to confess. To acknowledge our need for forgiveness. It's very humbling. That we are not people who have it all together.

[19 : 41] We are broken and in such great need. Prayer is such a wonderful privilege.

It's such a wonderful opportunity that there is a God in the universe who spoke everything to existence. And he actually wants us to speak to him.

He longs for it. Jesus came to teach us how to speak to him. To praise God for who he is and how amazing he is.

To realise our own fallen position before him. Our need for forgiveness and grace and mercy. What a wonderful privilege we get to speak to that God.

Who loves to show mercy and grace. And so I want to encourage you tonight. To enjoy the wonderful gift that is of prayer.

[20 : 48] To enjoy praying in a closet if that's your thing. But also to enjoy praying together. Pray in your homes as families.

Pray as Bible study groups. Pray as a church. Pray wherever you are. What a wonderful gift to encourage each other with our words of prayer.

As we entrust all that we are concerned with to God. As we praise God for all the wonderful blessings he pours on us. Prayer is such a wonderful gift.

And whether you have great words that sound amazing and someone should write a book with your prayers. Or that no one's going to remember your prayer 30 seconds after you said it.

It doesn't actually matter. Prayer is not about using great words. It's about enjoying the wonderful relationship with our Father in heaven. About enjoying the fact that God sees our hearts in the deepest, darkest places of them.

[21 : 51] And he still longs for us to be in relationship with him. And so we should do that. What a wonderful privilege. And let's do that now.

Let's pray. And thank God. Father, we thank you so much. That you're a God who knows each and every one of us in this room.

You know the good things about us and the bad. You know the things we try and keep hidden. You know the things that we try and get praised for.

God, you know it all. And you still invite us to be in relationship with you. You invite us to pray to you. And you promise to listen to us. God, thank you that you are our Father in heaven.

Please help us to see the great joy it is to pray to you. Help us to love prayer. And to love encouraging each other.

[23 : 01] As we enjoy together our relationship with you. Amen. Amen.