

When You Pray

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[0:00] Let's go to the next verse 5 to verse 8 in this chapter together this evening. So Matthew 6 at verse 5.

Do you struggle to pray or do you find it easy to pray? Maybe we go through both the experiences. Sometimes we find it easier to pray.

And at other times, sometimes we find it a real struggle to pray. But would you ever go to someone and ask them, will you help me in my prayer life? Would you help me to pray?

Or would you be too embarrassed and thinking, well, everybody should know how to pray. Well, listen to what it says in Luke chapter 11, verse 1 to 2. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place. And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, when you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name.

[1:24] Your kingdom come. And so it goes on as Jesus there teaches the Lord's Prayer. And it's what we see here in Matthew chapter 6 as well.

But it's just how the disciples come to Jesus there we want to think of. Teach us to pray as John taught his disciples to pray.

So there was a culture there of learning how to pray. And Jesus taught them how to pray. And that's what we see in this chapter as well with the Lord's Prayer.

We are always learning in the faith. And prayer is just part of that life of faith. And we learn how to pray as we're going on.

We don't have the same prayer as when we were a child, where we maybe repeated the same prayer every evening. We should come to the Lord with our prayer that's based on the Lord's Prayer.

[2:20] But we can pray in a different way every time we come. And before we just come into this section on the Lord's Prayer, we want to see the setting of where Jesus is here with his people.

This is the section in Matthew's Gospel known as the Sermon on the Mount. And when you go back to chapter 5, verse 1, it says there, Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain.

And when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying. And that's the beginning of this Sermon on the Mount.

He taught them, saying. So there's a lot of teaching going on in this section. And it was really a teaching on what it meant to be a disciple, a follower of Jesus.

And it covers so many aspects of our Christian life. And part of that is our prayer life, where he teaches to pray. And prayer is not something we're not familiar with.

[3:21] It's not a shock to us that there's a challenge for us here to pray. But the question behind it is, do we pray? Do we pray as we should? And what can we learn from this section on the Lord's Prayer?

And hopefully, over a period of time going forward, we'll look at the Lord's Prayer just bit by bit. But we want to look this evening at the start of this section, an introduction to prayer, where Jesus is saying this is how not to pray.

So he begins by saying this is how not to pray, before he then goes on to say this then is how you are to pray. Because we are dependent on prayer. We need prayer.

We need prayer individually, collectively, and for all things going on around us. So do we pray as we should? Charles Spurgeon has a book entitled Only a Prayer Meeting.

And in it he makes two remarks in the first chapter that are a challenge to us when it comes to prayer. He says, first, how could we expect a blessing if we are too idle to ask for it?

[4:26] So are we asking God for blessing? The second thing he says, how could we look for a Pentecost if we never met, with one accord and one place to wait upon the Lord?

In other words, are we gathered together for prayer as well? It's that our desire to be gathered together as they were on Pentecost when God poured out his Spirit. They were gathered together in one accord, in one place, waiting upon the Lord.

So it's good for us to pray individually, and it's good for us to come together and pray collectively as well. But it can be one of the things that we can struggle with and maybe are most anxious about, especially when it comes to being called upon to pray in public.

It's something that maybe leaves us afraid. But this passage just helps us to see how we are to pray, who we are praying to and who we are not praying to as well.

And these verses, verse 5 to verse 8, begins by saying, when you pray, and three times it uses that phrase, when you pray.

[5:37] That's the first thing we want to note about this. It says, when you pray. First glance, these words might not seem to be important. But as Jesus is teaching them here, He's teaching them, you are to pray, when you pray.

He's not saying to them, when others pray, or when some of you pray. It's a collective teaching. He's saying to them all, when you pray.

And so there's a challenge there for them from the start. The disciples, the Christians, is to make sure that they are a prayerful people, that they recognize that there is a dependence on God as we come in prayer, and that we are to come in faith, and that we are to come knowing who God is. So there's this behind it, when you pray. If you go to Psalm 5, it's a Psalm of David, and David there is talking about prayer, and he's talking in it about his morning time of prayer.

He commits his day to God in prayer, but he uses the phrase, and then he's waiting expectantly.

And so it's not just that he prays, but he's waiting on the Lord, and waiting with expectation that the Lord will answer prayer, that the Lord will show him an answer to his prayer.

[7:05] And so when we think, are we praying as we ought, it's not just, are we coming and making that point of prayer, but how are we coming in prayer? Are we coming with a sense of faith, and a sense of expectation, and excitement of what God can do for us?

We learn that from David in many of his prayers in the Psalms, that he has a sense of that joy coming into the presence of God, that delight in worshipping as he comes in prayer, and bringing his requests to him in prayer.

So when he prays, he is teaching us how to pray as well, to come with that sense of expectation. And when we think of hear as well, when you pray, it also challenges to ask, what's our motive in praying?

And it's interesting how in each of these three sections that we've read, we've got three aspects of the Christian life, not just prayer, but in the first part, verse 1 to 4, you've got giving to the needy, and then in verse 16 to 18, you've got fasting.

And as you read through them, you see there's a lot of commonality in them, there's a lot of things that are repeated in them. How you are to fast, how you are to give, how you are to pray, there's common factors in them.

[8:29] There's the same words used about doing it in secret, not being like the hypocrites. It's a repeated theme in each of these three.

And so you also see that each of it ends, that when you do it in secret, your father who is seasoned secret will reward you. So it's true for each of them, giving, prayer, and fasting.

And so tonight isn't about saying, put your hands up if you're giving, put your hands up if you're praying, and put your hands up if you're fasting. It's not that kind of who's doing it, but we're learning here how we are doing it.

And we are doing all of these three things. We should be doing them in secret. Part of it should be in secret, knowing that your father sees you in secret, and will reward you.

So it's a sense of our own personal prayer life as well. And what motivates us in prayer? What motivates us in giving?

[9:29] What motivates us in fasting? If we do fast, all of these things, what is our motivation? What kind of attitude are we coming with?

Are we coming so that we might just satisfy our own conscience? Are we offering up a prayer just to make us feel better?

Well, I've done that. Are we praying because it's ticking the box for that day? I've prayed to God. Are we praying because maybe it makes us feel better?

A sense of relief that we've got our prayer time in. Or are we recognizing the motivation in prayer is when you pray, you see who you are coming to.

We see that as you go into the Lord's prayer. When he says in verse 9, pray then like this, our father in heaven. This is where we are coming. It's not a tick box exercise.

[10:30] It's not just to appease our conscience. It's recognizing that we are coming to commune with the living God. That we are approaching God through his son, Jesus Christ.

That that is how we are to come. Prayer is first and foremost a recognition of a dependence on God. Acknowledging that he is able to do what we cannot do.

So do we get the point of prayer? Do we recognize who it is that we are coming to? A minister told about a time when he was reading a Bible story to his young daughter.

And it was from one of these picture story Bibles. And the story is about King Nebuchadnezzar. So there was a picture of what they thought King Nebuchadnezzar looked like.

And the story behind him. And as the father was reading the story to his daughter, and he thought she was listening attentively, and then he started discussing it with her after.

[11:40] And she said, well, the king was a very mean man. So she was getting the gist of it. But then she said, but he had nice shoes. Because she'd looked at the picture, and she'd seen the shoes that he was wearing in the picture.

And that's what caught her attention. And the innocence of a child can be the way we come to God in prayer. We recognize the majesty of God in some ways.

And yet we maybe start to think about our own conscience. Well, I'm glad I prayed. Or just not what's important. Because we miss out on who God is.

And so when he's saying here three times he repeats, when you pray, it's important for us to realize it's something we are to do. Not just of habit.

Not just for our conscience. But to recognize who it is that we are praying to. And so that's how he begins. When you pray.

[12:37] But then in these next verses, he goes into how we are not to pray. So it's quite interesting. He starts not just, this is how you are to pray, but this is how not to pray.

Because remember what it said in the Gospel of Luke. Teach us to pray. Just as John taught his disciples to pray. And so there was a lot of different people praying.

And they were praying in different ways. And what Jesus says first is, well, this is how you are not to pray. And he's challenging where motives were wrong.

And the first is that you are not to be like the hypocrites. It says there in the middle of verse 5. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

So he's saying this is how not to pray. Have you ever felt like a hypocrite? I'm sure as we approach this theme of prayer, I can stand here and say, well, I'm a bit of a hypocrite myself.

[13:47] I'm here telling you how to pray. I have to ask, how do I pray? And you can feel a hypocrite. And there's many different ways we can feel a hypocrite. It's saying one thing, but meaning or doing something very different.

And how easy it is for that to creep into a life of prayer. Do not be like the hypocrite, Jesus says here. What were they like?

Why mention them in each of the sections when it comes to giving and fasting and praying? Don't be like the hypocrites. Well, he's saying this is how important your Christian life is, that people are watching.

But what the difference was with hypocrites, they were doing it to be seen. Those who were praying in Jesus' day should have been approaching God, recognizing it was to God they were in coming. But instead, they're on the street corners, they're in the synagogues, that they may be seen by others. And these were very public places.

[14:52] The street corners and the synagogues, these were where people gathered. And so the hypocrites would be there, but they're there to get praise from man. But look at what Jesus says to them, that they may be seen by others.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. There's no answer to their prayer. But they have received their reward just by if they get praise from those who are around them.

And so they received the reward, that was their praise from man. There's no answer from God. And so, how do we approach God in prayer?

Well, as Jesus goes on to say, he says, when you pray, in verse 6, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.

So we are to make sure that wherever we are coming, our focus is that we are praying to the Father. Now does this just mean that we go into a quiet place?

[15:58] Well, yes, there is that sense of taking time away. But even if we are called to pray in public, it's a reminder to us that we are coming into our own room where we are asked to pray.

We are not standing wherever we are asked to pray to be praying to those around us. To be trying to impress the people sitting beside us or in our hearing, that's not what it is about.

We are approaching our Father who is in heaven. Somebody once put it like this, it's not wrong to be seen praying, but it is wrong to be praying to be seen.

And that's the difference. It's not wrong to be seen praying because we have to ask people to publicly pray, but it's wrong to be praying to be seen.

Because if we're praying to be seen, we are not praying as we should to God. And so as his disciples, as his followers, we are to pray, and we are to pray in secret in that sense of it being between us and God.

[17:12] And one of the fears of public praying is, what will others think? And maybe that's what puts people off coming to a prayer meeting.

I'm afraid I'll be asked to pray. But it's not to see it as about impressing others around us, but to see that you are leading in that prayer for all around you and that all around you shouldn't be listening, what's he saying, or how did he say it, or did he say that right or wrong, but praying with you.

That we are praying together. Because our prayer is offered up to God as we meet together. Like the book of the day of Pentecost, they were in one accord.

There was a unity. There was a togetherness. There was a oneness in that. They were praying to God together. So we come to meet God.

We meet him collectively together, remembering we are praying to him. And we come to God in our own time as well. It's not about being seen by others.

[18:23] It's not about going through that process just to get it done, but to recognize we are not to be hypocrites, but that we are to approach God who hears and will reward in secret.

So don't be like the hypocrites. Then you also have in verse 7, And when you pray again, Do not heap up empty 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. So there's great comfort in these words, isn't there, when you think of what it says, your Father knows what you need before you ask.

He just wants you to come. So our prayers are not focused on how long they are. He calls them here, Do not heap up empty phrases like the Gentiles do.

Another word that's used for them here is the babblers do. They're just babbling away to God. Just trying to fill in the time with the length of their prayers and the words that they are offering up.

[19:44] And so in Jesus' day, this was another problem. Not just that people were praying to be seen, but that people were praying just to go on and on and on.

Thinking the greater the length their prayers were, the more likely God is to answer. And I guess we have that thought as well at times, that we feel we have to keep on going on and on and on in prayer.

It's not the sense of the length of prayer. When it says elsewhere, you know, we are always to pray and not to give up. It's not just to be keeping on praying and praying and praying, but just to keep coming back to God, to keep coming back day by day, time by time, recognizing we are just to keep coming to God and he hears and is able to answer.

So it's not about, well, I must pray for 20 minutes. I must pray for half an hour. Otherwise, it's not going to be good enough. That's not what it's saying. That's not how we are to approach God at all. Martin Luther put it like this. He said, the fewer the words, the better the prayer. To have prayed well is to have studied well. And so what he was saying there is to make sure that as we come to prayer, it's based on God's word.

[21:03] We can pray, and that's, you know, when we say the Lord's Prayer, we can often repeat it now because we hear it so often. But even the Lord's Prayer itself, if you pray that prayer and just think about it as you're going through it, how many words are in the Lord's Prayer?

There's not that many. And yet this is the answer to Jesus when he gets, Jesus gives when he asks the question, teach us to pray. So it's not a long prayer. But as we see, as we go through it, it's going to say so much to us about how he taught to pray.

So it's not the length. It's not the kind of words that we use. But that we just come and see that he knows our needs even before we ask.

And it's not a great encouragement to us in our prayers. That our prayers, they don't have to be eloquently structured. They don't have to have a particular set of words used.

But that we just approach him with the words that he puts in our hearts. Knowing that even before we speak them, they are known unto him. And so it's not about comparing ourselves to how others pray.

[22:20] It's not about looking at how long they prayed. But just coming with that genuineness. That dependence upon him. But it's not to say that we shouldn't learn to pray as we're going on.

And when we look at the Lord's Prayer itself, you see that it does have order to it. It does have structure to it.

And so as we're praying and as we're learning as we go on, we realize that prayer is something that we are working on all the time. So it's not about empty phrases or being babblers, but just about coming to him.

And so that's how we are to approach him. Expectantly. With a prayer of faith. Many people would say in various church circles nowadays that God doesn't hear our prayers because our faith isn't what it should be.

But is it really based on how our faith feels to ourselves? It's not. It's about who our faith is in. And our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23:39] Christ. And we come through him to God. And he is the one who is able to help us in our prayers. That even if all we have to pray is the Lord's prayer, it's the way we have been taught.

And even just to use that as our prayer is enough. Because that's how he taught us to pray. But the more you pray it, the more you realize you can add on to it.

The more you realize that it teaches us again and again how to pray more and more. But it's about having confidence. Confidence in God as we come to him.

We are to come to him with confidence. That's what Hebrews 4 verse 16 says for us. So that as we are learning to pray, one of the things we are to have is that confidence to draw near to the throne of grace.

That we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And look at what it says here, your father knows what you need before you ask.

[24:51] So it's about having that confidence to draw near the throne of grace. To recognize we're not going to be like the hypocrites. We're not doing it to be seen. We're not doing it like the babblers who are going to come with many words.

But that we are just to come with a dependence on him. Jesus isn't condemning public prayer here. He's not condemning long prayers here. What he's doing is saying it's what the motivation is behind it. So when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites.

When you pray, don't be like the Gentiles who use empty phrases or being heard by many words.

But when you pray, come seeing it is to our Father who art in heaven.

And don't give up in praying. For we depend upon it for all things. And that's what we'll see as we go on into the Lord's prayer itself and go through the different sections of it.

[26:04] And we learn where he says pray then like this. Prayer is a great privilege. And what a delight it is to have that throne of grace to go to.

And so then let us have confidence to draw near to that throne of grace that we might find grace and mercy to help in time of need.

Well let us come to God in prayer. Let us pray. Lord our gracious God, we do thank you that you have your people in the scriptures who ask the very question that we so often have ourselves.

Teach us to pray. And we thank you that you answered it in such a beautiful and such a simple way.

And yet with a depth to it that we can hardly recognize.

even we think of the words our Father who art in heaven. Even to appreciate who it is that we come to. What you are to your people. What you give to us on a daily basis.

[27:10] And so Lord we pray that through the teaching around the Lord's pray that you would indeed teach us to pray. Not to be like the hypocrites who do it to be seen or the Gentiles who do it with empty phrases or many words that they would feel that they would be heard in that way.

But that we would recognize that you already know every need that we have before we ask. Help us Lord that we would then have that confidence to draw near to the throne of grace.

That place where prayer is made. Where it's offered up to you in and through the name of your Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Lord hear our prayers.

Unite us in prayer. May we have that one accord that it speaks of in the book of Acts. And that unity and that purpose in prayer. That together we would offer up our prayers in the quietness of our hearts.

And saying Amen Lord your will be done. So continue with us Lord bless us go before us. We ask all in Jesus precious name. Amen.

[28:19] Thank you.