

Approaching the King
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Allen Power

Matthew 6:5-18

We continue this week in a very familiar part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

- How can you tell whether something is either optional or very important in someone's life? (Examples: Bathing; brushing; eating; sleeping.)
- In Matthew 6:5 Jesus begins by saying, "And when you pray..." Not, "if you pray," or "when you get around to praying," or "in an emergency."
- How did followers of Christ ever get the idea that prayer was optional?
- "Perish the thought," you might say. "What a ridiculous thing to say," you might think. "Everyone knows that prayer is fundamental to being a follower of Christ," you might respond. And you would be right. But, the teacher is convicted by the question: Do we sometimes treat prayer as optional and not fundamental?
- Lack of prayer isn't as noticeable as lack of hygiene, but it WILL show up!
- Jesus said, "...when you pray." In the first four words of the first verse of our text, Jesus makes it clear that He expects His followers to have regular communication with our Heavenly Father.
- The question: Is prayer a fundamental part of my daily life?
- If Jesus went to the trouble of giving us a "pattern" by which to pray, He must have expected us to do it. So, let's take a fresh look at this familiar teaching. Jesus begins by telling us how NOT to pray.

Matthew 6:5–18 (ESV)

The Lord's Prayer

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. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ 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.

- What makes someone a hypocrite? Did Jesus just ban public prayer?
- Jews prayed three times a day at set times. Hypocrites “timed” where they would be when the time to pray came. It was all about being “seen.”
- Praying in public is good; praying for “show” is wrong; praying in secret is BEST!
- When we pray in public it implies that we’re doing more of it in private.
- One writer compares it to an iceberg. One ninth of an iceberg is visible above the water line. Eight ninths is out of sight.¹ Our public prayer should just be the “tip of the iceberg” of our prayer life.
- Here’s another way NOT to pray. Jesus said...

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

- Don’t use “empty phrases.” Ladies, what if your husband came home tomorrow night, and he came in the door with something like:

*“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day’s
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use” [An so on...]*²

- Ladies, what would you think? What if he did that every night?
- A little extra “sweet talk” once in a while, maybe. But day to day just “I love you” with some real emotion works.

- Jesus wasn't saying don't repeat your requests in prayer. "... both Jesus and Paul repeated their petitions (Matt. 26:36–46; 2 Cor. 12:7–8)³
- Back to our illustration. Our spouse would like us to persist in saying I love you, just not with "empty words." Same with our Heavenly Father.
- "Vain repetition" is piling up empty words. Our Heavenly Father doesn't respond on a "per word" basis. It's not about flowery words over and over again. It's about SINCERELY seeking God's presence and His will.
- Verse eight: **If God knows our needs why pray? What do you think?**
- John Calvin said: *"the Lord taught us to pray...not so much for God's good, as it was for our good."*⁴
- Ray Pritchard gives several good responses to "why pray?" including:
 - o To reinforce our dependence on Him (Illustration: a child and a jigsaw puzzle.)
 - o Because God is honored by our persistent faith (Luke 18:1-8)
 - o Because "He's God and we're not!"⁵
- So, Jesus, how SHOULD we pray?

⁹ Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

- Verse nine: When did scripture begin referring to God as Father?

One Bible dictionary tells us...

Throughout the Bible we find God portrayed as a Father. This portrayal, however, is surprisingly rare in the Old Testament. There God is specifically called the Father of the nation of Israel...or the Father of certain people...only fifteen times.

The teaching of the Fatherhood of God takes a decided turn with Jesus, for "Father" was his favorite term for addressing God. It appears on his lips some sixty-five times in the Synoptic Gospels and over one hundred times in John.⁶

- 165 times Jesus refers to God as "Father." **Why the metaphor of father?**
- **What is important about the words "in Heaven?"**
- Hallowed means holy. God is completely holy so His name is holy.
- The Jews in Old Testament times had certainly approached our Holy God with fearful reverence. Jesus' introduced a new concept for them and us: God is just as Holy; but He wants a personal, parental relationship with us.
- Verse ten: **Before we ask for anything for ourselves, what did Jesus teach us to ask for? If I begin by praying for God's will to be done, how does that change the nature of my requests?**
- You can't pray "thy will be done" then ask Him to violate His will!
- Verse eleven: **Why do you think Jesus didn't just say, "ask for your needs to be met?" Why bread? Why DAILY bread?**
- Verse twelve: Forgive our sins as we forgive others. Jesus explains this in verses fourteen and fifteen. This doesn't mean you lose your salvation if you refuse to forgive someone! That would violate other scripture
- If you are a follower of Christ you have been justified forever. Your sins are forgiven forever and you're headed for heaven. The daily forgiveness we need from God is to clean up the "dirt" of the world that gets on us when we sin. That "world dirt" makes us stinky. God still loves us just as much and we're just as saved. However, if we want a good hug from our Heavenly Father we need to go wash off that "world dirt."

- If we refuse to forgive others, the Father says “no bath for you and no hugs for you.” Go to your room, “stinky” and think about it! Come back when your heart’s right and I’ll clean you up and give you a big HUG!
- Bottom line: If you don’t forgive others the way God forgave you, you won’t enjoy close fellowship with Him.
- Verse thirteen doesn’t mean God tempts us to do evil. James 1:13 (ESV) *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.*
- In one sense, we all pray that God would keep us from situations that might tempt us to sin. There’s another part to this verse...
- This verse also refers to being tested by a trial. God allows trials (Job, Peter.) This says: *“Lord, I know you are going to allow some things in my life to test me. When you do, help me not to commit a sin in response.”*
- In the last three verses Jesus teaches about fasting. Fasting isn’t just doing without food or things, it’s doing without specifically so we can focus more deeply on Him. We don’t have time for a seminar on Biblical fasting. There are many great resources on that. For us, this morning, Jesus is simply reiterating: Don’t practice spiritual disciplines for show.

Fasting

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

C.S. Lewis wrote: *“God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other.”*⁷
 [Prayer is our re-fueling stop!]

- I have the simplest “takeaway” I’ve ever given. Are you ready?

1. Just PRAY! Jesus expects it and scripture commands it.⁸
 2. Pray “in this way.” WHEN you pray, follow Jesus’ example.
- May God convict us all, as He has your teacher: Prayer is not optional; it’s crucial to our lives as followers of Christ. With that in mind, let’s pray.

¹ Evelyn Christenson, *A Journey Into Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 24.

² *How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43)* Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1806 - 1861

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 25–26). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/if-god-sovereign-why-pray/>

⁵ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2012-06-21-If-God-is-Sovereign-Why-Pray>

⁶ Baker's Evangelical Dictionary Copyright © 1996 by Walter A. Elwell. Published by Baker Books, a division of Baker Book House Company, PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516-6287 <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/fatherhood-of-god.html>

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), Book II, Chapter 3, "The Shocking Alternative."

⁸ <http://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/faith-in-life/prayer/prayer-has-its-reasons>