

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

June 30, 2024

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 6:7–15**, “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. [8] So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. [9] Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’ [14] For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”
- B. This teaching about prayer and forgiveness is sandwiched between Jesus’ warning against using prayer and using fasting to gain people’s praise and admiration.
- C. Pray

II. Thoughts on prayer

- A. [7] And when you are praying, **do not** use meaningless repetition (*empty babbling*) as the Gentiles do (*when praying to their gods/idols*), for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. [8] So **do not** be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.
 - 1. **Do not** use meaningless repetition, that is, do not say the same thing over and over, or use mindless repetition, for it is not what moves God to act on our behalf, and therefore will not accomplish its intended purpose.
 - 2. An example of meaningless repetition in comparison to the kind of prayers God answers is found in **1 Kings 18:20-40**, where Elijah challenged Baal’s prophets to a test to see whose God was real.
 - a. We read in **1 Kings 18:28–29** that the prophets of Baal cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. And they ranted and raved until the time of the evening sacrifice – but there was no voice, no answer, and no fire to burn the sacrifice laid out on the alter to Baal.

- b. In contrast, Elijah prayed, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” **Then** the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench (**1 Kings 18:36–38**).
3. The point is, meaningless repetition, ranting and raving, using prayer beads, or even mindlessly repeating the Lord’s Prayer are ineffective. Why? These forms of prayer lack faith that God is good, that He loves His children, that He knows what we need even before we ask, and that He will take care of those who belong to Him far better than He takes care of the plants and the animals.
4. You may be wondering, if God knows what we need before we ask, why pray? I can think of several reasons.
5. **First**, though God knows what we need, He also responds to our wants. It is through prayer that we present our wants to God.
 - a. Jesus was passionately expressing a want when He prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will” (**Matthew 26:39**).
 - b. Another example of expressing a “want” comes from the believers who were asking God to free Peter from Herod’s prison – and God did (**Acts 12:1-19**).
 - c. It is likely you have wants for your family, our church, your friends and neighbors, our nation, our missionaries, yourself – and the list can go on and on. Like Jesus, tell your wants to God and let Him decide what He will do with them.
6. **Second**, prayer affirms our faith in God’s goodness, provision, and protection – in the same way saying “I love you, and I don’t want to be married to anyone else” affirms your love for your spouse. Though God doesn’t need affirmation, I suspect He enjoys it just like you do.
7. **Third**, prayer acknowledges our dependence on God for needs and wants, which in turn feeds a humble dependence on Him for the universal good, our provision and protection, our spiritual development, and for His help in dealing with the daily challenges of life.
8. **Fourth**, prayer is a way to intentionally engage God in the affairs and activities of our lives. Talking to Him often about many things strengthens our faith and develops a settled conviction that God is present and active in the daily activities of our lives.

9. **Finally**, prayer nurtures an interactive and intimate communion with God which can lead to a deep and meaningful relationship with God.
- B. [9a] Pray, then, in this way – **NOT** pray this prayer, but use this as a format, or direction for your praying. This prayer teaches us that:
1. Prayer does not need to be complex or said with beautiful sounding words. This example of prayer is simple and to the point.
 2. This prayer also places God’s interests above our interests. This does not mean our interests don’t matter, but rather that our interests are subservient to God’s interests, and that life is best when God’s interests are being fulfilled/accomplished.
 3. The prayer also reminds us of the life-transforming spiritual things we ought to want for God, for the world around us, and for ourselves.
 4. There are many good teachings on this prayer. My goal today is to simply comment on each phrase.
- C. [9b] ‘Our Father who is in heaven,
1. Jesus begins by showing us that we are talking to our heavenly Father, which makes prayer intimate, and makes it safe for us to express needs, wants, questions, and opinions.
 2. Yet, let us never be disrespectful or treat our heavenly Father as anything less than the supreme, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly holy being that He is.
 3. Therefore, let us pray honestly, yet humbly; boldly, yet respectfully.
- D. [9c] Hallowed be **Your** name.
1. This is a **want** that sets the honor of God above our honor, and the universal good above our personal good.
 2. God’s name represents God, himself. Therefore, to hallow God’s name is to hallow God, and to hallow God is treat Him with the reverence and submission He deserves.
 3. We should want God treated with the reverence and submission He deserves – in our lives and in the world, because this is the only way for us and the rest of humanity to live together in a safe and secure, happy and fulfilling, just and loving world.
 4. Of course, those who pray this ought to be committed to living this.
- E. [10] **Your** kingdom come. **Your** will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
1. Hallowing God comes first, because it is only as we value God enough to revere Him and submit to Him that we will freely and willingly

- give allegiance to His kingdom and do His will. If we are unwilling to revere and submit to God, we won't want God's kingdom to come and or His will to be done in our life or in the world around us.
2. If heaven is as good as we imagine it to be, and if hell is as bad as it seems to be, and if life on earth leaves a lot to be desired, then the only way for a better life for everyone – today and for eternity – is for God's kingdom to come and will to be done on the earth, now and for eternity.
 3. What do you want for God and the world around you? What kind of world do you want for your children and grand-children, for the rest of the world, and for the generations to come?

F. [11] Give us this day our daily bread.

1. This request has been and continues to be commonly understood as referring to the daily provisions needed to sustain human life.
 - a. However, because it is the only material request in a prayer filled with spiritual requests, there are some who understand it as a request for spiritual food.
 - b. Either way, it expresses a true need that we are dependent on God to meet – even though in either case we must be actively involved in obtaining what is needed if the need is to be met.
 - c. For example, though a farmer does the sowing, weeding, and reaping, he is totally dependent on God to make the seeds do what they are intended to do, to provide the needed sunshine and rain during the growing season, and to provide weather that makes harvesting possible.
 - d. The point is, you need God and His activity in order to have your daily material and spiritual needs meet. Therefore, I encourage you to think this way, and pray this way.

G. [12] And forgive us our **debts**, as we also have forgiven our **debtors**.

1. A debtor is someone who cannot pay his debts and needs forgiveness in order to avoid the consequences of non-payment.
2. We know from **vs 14-15**, that the word “**debt**” refers to sin, that is, the failure to do what we know is right.
3. Therefore, this request is asking God to forgive us our sins – which we need if we are to be in right relation to Him and enjoy His presence and blessings – now and throughout eternity.
4. However, getting God's forgiveness has a condition attached to it. We must forgive those who have sinned against us.

5. Forgiveness of those who have sinned against us requires humility, compassion, and grace on our part. But it also requires placing the same value on relationships that God does – because the ultimate purpose of forgiving those who have sinned against us is to restore a damaged or broken relationship, just as it is God’s purpose in forgiving us.
 6. Therefore, it is meeting these conditions that opens the door to receiving forgiveness from God, and the rejection of these conditions that closes the door to God’s forgiveness (**Matthew 18:32-35**).
 7. When you seek God’s forgiveness, are you seeking freedom from the consequences, or the restoring of the relationship? May we value the restoring of the relationship over freedom from the consequences.
- H. [13] And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil (*or the evil one*).
1. This request presents some difficulty, though it need not deter us from praying for help with temptation. For example, **James 1:13** says that God does not tempt anyone. Yet Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (**Matthew 4:1**). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to pray that they may not enter into temptation (**Luke 22:40**). And consider Job. Was he not tempted and tried because of the challenge God set before the devil?
 2. How do we make sense of all this? I am not sure. Therefore, it seems best to leave the debate to others, and look to **1 Corinthians 10:13** where God says He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that we will be able to endure it.
 3. Therefore, let us pray to recognize what tempts us, for help in being prepared to face our temptations, for strength and wisdom to persevere in the face of temptation, and to grow spiritually so that strong temptations become minor temptations, or no longer tempting.
- I. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’
1. It is possible this ending is inspired by **1 Chronicles 29:11-12**.
 2. Regardless, this prayer begins with a focus on God and ends in the same way. The middle part shows that God wants to hear about our personal needs. But let us remain balanced, so that neither we nor our needs and wants become more important to us than God. In other words, let us make God’s interests at least equal to our interests, and let us keep our interests within the boundaries of God’s interests.

III. Forgiveness – God’s conditions

- A. [14] For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”
1. As already stated, the ultimate purpose of forgiveness is to restore a damaged or broken relationship.
 - a. Therefore, true forgiveness can only take place when the offending person seeks forgiveness **by (1) confessing, (2) making things right, and (3) committing to a change of behavior so as **not** to re-damage the relationship.**
 - b. This is true between God and us, and between us and others.
 - c. Of course, given the weakness of our humanity, we may need to forgive a repeat of the same offense by the same person just as we seek God’s forgiveness for the same offense.
 - d. And we may need to forgive someone for numerous offenses over a long period of time just as God forgives us for our many sins.
 2. Forgiveness means letting go. This means the one forgiving is willing to let go of the offense committed against him. It means letting go of all the feelings and thoughts which promote resentment, revenge, and alienation. It means letting go of any desire or act of control whereby we try to protect ourselves from future hurt by selfishly controlling the offender’s future behavior.
 3. And forgiveness means opening the door for trust to be restored along with the relationship. This means the one forgiving must be **willing to risk** trusting again, and the one being forgiven must be **willing to change** so as to show his worthiness to be trusted again.
- B. Some treat forgiveness as a way to free themselves from bitterness, consuming thoughts, ill-will, and/or revenge. Though many use forgiveness this way, it is not its purpose. The scriptures point us to the way we are to deal with such ungodly feelings and thoughts. For example, **Ephesians 4:31-5:2** and **Philippians 4:8** provide God’s way of replacing and transforming our ungodly thoughts and feelings toward the person who has sinned against us.

IV. Conclusion

- A. In review, prayer is best when it is simple and direct. It is good to begin and end with a focus on God. It ought to place God and His interests above or before our needs and wants. And it ought to represent how we, ourselves, are living, and what we are doing in relation to those around us.