

The Sermon on the Mount | A New Kind of Obedience
Part 4¹ | Matthew 6.1, 5-15
Sermon Title: **How to Pray**

Introduction

EASTER - Bumper Video - Getting Started

Hey I'm not sure if you are aware but Easter is 6 weeks from today! Right around the time I get this cast off. If you dunk too hard, bad things can happen. But here's how we are approaching Easter this year - we are going to begin a series on that Sunday called "getting started." And the idea is that for the month of April we are going to do an introduction to Christianity. We are going to explain the core message and the basics of the faith. I want to challenge you to begin praying for your one. The person you hope will come to saving faith in Christ this year. Here's the idea: We are creating a guide you could use to start your own 5 week group, like a community group, with people you know who don't have a church home. And you'll have the chance to explain the gospel to them each week and discuss the Christian life with them. You can invite them here on Sundays to join you and serve as their guide into the faith. That's how people are going to come to faith yall! I'm excited about it! Big baptism service at end of series. Should be awesome.

That starts Easter Sunday.

Today we are talking about prayer. Which is gonna be fun because man we need some help when it comes to prayer. You know I'm right. Ya'll I was a community groups pastor for 10 years before this gig and I taught and coached hundreds of groups on how to pray which means I also got to see some pretty odd patterns in how we condition ourselves to pray. Here are some I've seen:

- **Rehearsed Dinner Prayers** - God is Great , God is Good...Courtney "Line?"
- **What are we praying for prayers?** - John Crist - Somebody in his community group asked for prayer for his son's karate tournament on Saturday. What am I praying for? God help Connor's foot to land right on that kid's face. And great physician help him to go unconscious.²
- **Passive Aggressive Prayer** - Where you say can I pray for you and then tell God everything you think is wrong with the person you are praying for. "God help gary to stop being a jerk to his friends and convict him of all the ways he is wrong and give him a heart to ask for forgiveness right now to those of us he's wronged. Help us to love and forgive him." - Gary is like WHOA BRO, thought we were praying for my chem final!?
- **Filler Prayer** - this is using words that sound spiritual but you actually have no idea what you are saying. ... "God I Just..." "heavenlyfatherGod"... I think we all know the best example of this is Ben Stiller in meet the parents. You guys

¹ *Part 3 of this series was preached by Rashard Barnes on 2.18.2018.

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlyXhKDGpVo>

remember that? Oh dear sweet lord. Thank you for this...shomrgasborg. Day by day by day three things we pray...Awesome.

Even if those are all a little too exaggerated for you, the reality I've found is we need help when it comes to prayer. The bible talks about prayer as powerful. As our way to tap into the power of God and bring it to bear on the circumstances and situations in our lives. And we see that in the Old & New testaments. God's people prayed and in response God did some stuff.

Prayer is the means by which we access his power & it's the way we develop a relationship with God (we'll see that today), and it's the way we sustain that relationship. It's a big deal and most Christians when asked "is your prayer life where you want it to be" will say of course not. I think one of the main reasons we don't pray that we don't know how.

- We sit down to pray and its like...where do I get started? Introductions? Hey God its me. Been a while. How ya doing? I'm God...I'm good. So if we pray its awkward & pretty much a grocery list of our needs
- Get distracted - God I want to pray for the missionaries in kenya. Those bobsledders from Nigeria were cool. I love the Olympics. I need to work out more. Maybe I'll have a smoothie for lunch. AMEN.

We need help! Well, today as we continue through the sermon on the mount in the gospel of Matthew Jesus is going to train his disciples on how to pray. And in doing so he is going to teach us how to pray.

Two parts to this teaching. First, Jesus teaches us how NOT to pray and then how TO pray. So the best thing I think is not really to have a sermon outline here but instead just let the passage be the outline. I'll give you some points along the way to drive home what this means for us.

How NOT TO PRAY

Remember, the sermon on the mount is Jesus rebuking empty ritualistic religion and calling for a new kind of obedience to God. One that flows from the heart. So not surprisingly he approaches prayer that way. Two errors in praying he calls out. **Empty Praises & Empty Phrases.**

[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.

First error he's talking about is the error committed by worshippers of the one true God. He's going to talk about those outside the faith next but he's starting with God's people. And while there are plenty of problems he could have brought up he's

bringing this one up because it represents the core of everything wrong with their worship of God. It's empty praises searching for the approval of others. If your prayer (or any religious behavior) is motivated by peer approval your reward will never be more than peer approval.

He calls them hypocrites because they act like they are talking to God but they are really talking to people. In fact Matthew 6.1 is actually the key to this whole thing

[1] "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.
Matthew 6:1

He then talks about financial generosity, prayer, & fasting. And says you can do those things for SHOW, & that's all you'll get. And they may very well get what they want, but they will MISS a relationship with God in heaven. **If your prayer (or any religious behavior) is motivated by peer approval your reward will never be more than peer approval.** So we can't approach prayer, or any discipline in the Christian life, as a thing we do to impress others. That is just empty praises. We must be in it to know God and if we are the reward will be far better than peer approval...which will not satisfy. Our reward will be God. Next he says:

[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.

Ok now he's calling out the gentiles or, those people who do not believe in the God of the bible. And this is big. After all every faith teaches its people to pray. And what you are seeing here is there is a distinct way followers of Jesus are supposed to pray. Most religions will teach you some form of prayer will get you right with God. So if you say 5 hail mary's or if you pray to a certain god or if you pray facing east or whatever, then God will hear you. Jesus is saying all those things are empty phrases. God isn't some cosmic vault you are trying to unlock with the right prayer code. He isn't a distant power you have to appease, Jesus says he is a loving father. And this is the distinction between Christianity and every other religion. It comes out in prayer. Don't pray like you are trying to convince and uninformed stranger, Pray like a child appealing to a father. Using a bunch of empty phrases you don't really even understand or mean. The dad knows what his kids need. Listen this gets right into how we pray so let's go there. Don't pray to impress people & don't pray just to get the stuff you want from God. Instead of empty praises and empty phrases, Jesus is talks about prayer like the words spoken inside a relationship. This incredible prayer, the Lord's prayer, its prayed by people who *know* God.

Hey quick thought before I jump into the first two words...he has already said twice "when you pray." Not "if you ever consider praying." When you pray. It is unthinkable to Jesus & it is totally foreign to biblical Christianity to NOT pray. Prayer is that

fundamental to the Christian life. You cannot have true intimacy, true closeness to God without prayer.

Here's how to pray [9] Pray then like this:

There is a way to pray just like there was a way not to pray. Which means you need to learn how to pray. Submit your own understanding of how you THINK prayer should look and conform it to how Jesus says it should look. That might challenge you. Good.

“Our Father”

First word...look at it. Then look at the rest of the prayer if you have it open in your bible. Look at the pronouns. NO WHERE in this prayer do you see the first person singular “I.” Pretty wild hu. Cause he's just said go pray in private. And in private we are to use corporate language. That's because Christianity isn't a ‘me’ faith its an ‘us’ faith. When God saves you from your sin he saves you into his community, into the church. Even when we pray by ourselves we pray with an eye towards and a love for the church.³ Ya'll that goes against the grain of American Individualism and that's a good thing. Because a lot of that individualism has seeped into the church and created attitudes that the church is about me not we. I need programs for me & I need I need. Which creates consumer church. We gotta die to the I and rebuild our prayer lives around we.

G.K. Chesterton - major newspaper in Victorian era England sent a prompt to a group of respected intellectuals asking “what is the problem with the world?” Bunch of thinkers sent back long essays talking about the complexities of the world's problems. Chesterton wrote back ‘I Am. Sincerely yours, Chesterton.’ I think that same thing is true in the church. Need a we oriented prayer life

Doesn't mean you don't pray for the things you personally need. Not at all. But there is, even in these words, a reminder of the family of God you are a part of.

“Our Father”

Jesus Already briefly mentioned this fatherly relationship God has with his people but now its here very much as the proper way to address God.

God has chosen to reveal himself to his creation as a father. He is not some impersonal diety, he is not the force. **He is a father to all who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ.** In fact the beautiful image he gives is that he is a father who has adopted us into his family

[14] For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. [15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” Romans 8:14-15

³ Mohler, Albert Jr. *The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down* (Harper Collins, Nashville TN 2018) 45. Much of the commentary on the Lord's prayer in this sermon (all cited accordingly) comes from or is inspired by Mohler's book. I found it fresh and helpful!

This is why we love adoption around here. It images the gospel about as well as anything can. Now here's what that means: It means we approach God in a childlike boldness. Children have NO SHAME asking their parents for absurdly expensive & impossible things. The other day my four year old in all seriousness asked me for a unicorn. Because in her mind if it exists, dad can get it. That's the boldness & audacity we are to approach God with in prayer because he is our father.

And I've said this before but it needs to be said again: Some of you didn't grow up with great dads. In fact, even if you did they still had flaws. I'm not asking you to impose your view of your dad onto God. Instead I'm telling you that your earthly father was supposed to show you what your heavenly father is like. See he is "our father in heaven"

Your earthly father could never possibly capture the fullness and glory of your heavenly father. So now look to scripture, not to your past, to know God as father. He's in heaven. The one who rules over the world is our father. He actually does have the power to do anything. This is who you are praying to. Almighty God is the father we cry out to in prayer. No other religion takes a God so transcendent and makes it so personal. It would be very irreverent, and it is offensive to many faiths, but this is how God has called us to know him.

Prayer Starts NOT WITH REQUEST - catch that?

hallowed be your name.

Look at the word hallowed. It's not a praise to God but a request. He's telling us the FIRST thing we are to do is request that God's name BE hallowed. This isn't a word we really use anymore but the verb "hallow" simply means to make holy or consider as holy. He's saying we are to ask God to demonstrate his own holiness and glory. SPECIFICALLY we are to ask that the NAME of God be hallowed.

The order of this prayer is not accidental. Our instinct is to come to God hoping for provision of our needs and Jesus is saying WHOA WHOA. What you need MOST is God himself. Here is what we are asking for when we pray hallowed be your name:

We are asking God to make his name most valuable in our hearts. We aren't praying hallowed be MY NAME...no we are praying hallowed be God the Father. We are asking God to re-order our hearts to where he is most valuable. Which means when we pray God be hallowed we are asking God to be better to us than anything else. Which is a prayer he is ready to answer and it is the reality of what is best for us! We were made to worship God above all other things and this prayer is saying God, take that top spot!

At the same time, when we pray this We are asking God to make his name most visible in our lives. Hallowed be your name isn't just in our hearts. What happens in our hearts starts to overflow because all of our actions are based on our desires. We

desire food, we eat. We desire love, we seek out relationships. Actions always flow from desire. We desire God's glory, our actions will show that too. We must especially pray that corporately. That God's name, not mercy, not any one of us, but GOD's name and GOD's glory would be known. That's humbling. It means especially me, your pastor, I have to evaluate our church on what will give GOD glory. Nobody needs to care about spence's name getting glory. But my pride creeps in and its tempting ya'll. We must pray this for our community groups, our ministry teams, our outreach in the city...hallowed be YOUR NAME.

heartcheck: If I asked you to order what you love, based on how you spend your time, money, and energy, **Where is our heavenly father right now on the list?** Now let that sink for a second...and let me ask the follow up...**what is your prayer life like?** Now the purpose of those two questions isn't to beat you down, but to show you that you will prioritize what you love. And to challenge you to start praying this prayer and see what God then does with your life

leads us right into next prayer

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

Ok this is a continuation of the prayer for God's name to be hallowed. It's saying **your** kingdom come and **your** will be done here on earth like it is in heaven. It's saying that I am putting down my kingdom and my agenda and picking up God's kingdom and God's agenda.

Quick way to understand this: One of the greatest Christian theologians of all time was the African bishop St. Augustine. St. Augustine said Christians are citizens of two kingdoms. The city of man and the city of God. Our first allegiance is to the city of God. But we aren't there yet. Right now we live in the city of man. So we are to introduce the city of man to the ways of the people of the city of God.

So practically in prayer here's how you can do this...pray using the words of scripture. scripture is the information source that lets us know what God most wants to do in the world.⁴ Very practically as you sit down for your time with God...(and you should sit down for your time with God. If you tell me your time with God is running outdoors while listening to Oceans that's the same as me saying I'm dieting by eating McDonalds Big Macs & drinking *diet* coke. We are both kidding ourselves.)

Anyways, when you sit down with God to pray...keep your bible open. Read your bible first. Get the notes from our "how to read your bible" equip forum. Read the bible & highlight those things that stand out to you and go back and pray through them. Memorize scripture and pray it. Start in the psalms...or even start with the sermon on the mount. I heard the other day about a group of guys at a church in TN who workout

⁴ J.D. Greear, "my old pastor" just recently preached on some of this idea in his sermon from Luke 11 called "how to pray."

together who are memorizing the sermon on the mount. 2 verses a week. Written on their board. Somebody get after that. I promise God will begin to show you how that applies in your life.

Praying his words puts you in touch with his character and his desires for his kingdom. And that's who we represent here on earth.

Next [11] Give us this day our daily bread,

Ok I think the main take-away here is that Jesus loves bread. Its so good he singles it out for us to pray for. Doesn't pray for our daily kale. It's no wonder low-carb diets make people angry. We are denying ourselves the blessing of God.

Ok actually this is Jesus saying now that our hearts are properly set first on God and his glory, we can lean into him for daily provision. Which I love because it shows the heart of a father who says...pray for me to give you the physical provisions you need today. Now I know we live in a setting where most of us in here have never woken up wondering where our meals today are coming from. But plenty do. And we need to guard against a hyper-spiritualized understanding of this prayer. Jesus cares about every one of our needs, down to the most basic as the bread on our plate.

This is a posture of dependence and it is also a way to fight the way sin tries to create a wedge between us and God. Prayer makes us dependent on God, sin makes us independent from God. So what's going on in your life? Doesn't have to be spiritual. Bread isn't. Just pray! If you make it to this part of the prayer, you have God's name & kingdom already filtering your prayer...now ASK. MOST ASSUREDLY the greatest problem with our prayer lives is that they don't exist. Just pray! I hope that's one of your big takeaways today. JUST PRAY!

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

Ok, if "give us our daily bread" represents dependence on God for our most urgent physical needs, "forgive us our debts" represents dependence on God for our most urgent spiritual need.⁵ Debts = sins. They are the ways we've betrayed God and thereby entered into his debt. Jesus is teaching sinners to have the audacity to approach God's throne seeking forgiveness for their rebellion against him. That's what sin is. It's rebellion against God.

So what is this? Well, when we pray this prayer thoughtfully it is a prayer of confession and repentance. It's something I, in my sin nature, want to avoid. I want to pray this other stuff but I don't want to own up to God that I'm a sinner. And that's exactly why Jesus is saying every time you pray...pray this way. But you can't just say the line without thinking about it. That's empty religion. To pray this prayer is to say God...here is my sin today...Forgive me for being a jerk to my roommate, for taking the shortcut at work, for choosing work over family & everything else. God I know I have your forgiveness in Christ and I need it again today.

⁵ Mohler, 123.

And watch what happens...as we receive God's love...as we stand in overwhelmed awe that this father once again today offers forgiveness to us...today that informs my approach to everyone else. The pain that person has caused me...I find strength to forgive...I find a softness in my heart to forgive...because I've experienced forgiveness. Listen to me: Hard hearts have no place in the kingdom of God. Which means we will be a people who shed tears, who seek forgiveness, who offer forgiveness. The people of God are the people of Mercy. We have received Mercy and so we forgive in undeserved ways.

I don't want to under-estimate your pain in any way or underscore what someone did to you. But I believe if you will go back to the cross you will find greater forgiveness offered to you than what is being asked of you.

Gospel - Have you received the forgiveness God offers? Maybe you've never truly understood it. Maybe you grew up around it. But the gospel is not a set of ethics, its news. It's eternity changing news. God loves us so much, us wicked sinners, that he offers us forgiveness from our sin. He's a God that WANTS to forgive! So much he offered his son as a debt payment for us. He set us free from our debts. Have you ever received that?

See the prayer ends in verse 13 but then Jesus reiterates this forgiveness point [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.

He's not saying salvation is conditional on forgiving others, but that it IS a necessary sign of the forgiveness you've found in Christ. The forgiven will forgive. It's not easy, but he is clear. So go to work on

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

The prayer ends with probably the thing we FEEL we need the most. I pray this all the time for myself and my family and the mercy church family. This prayer owns the reality that inside of each one of us is the desire to run away from God and towards our sin. We know it won't satisfy but we have that urge still there. And the most dangerous thing a Christian can do is believe that he or she is somehow immune to temptation. When we get to that point we have overestimated our spiritual strength and grossly underestimated our need for grace.

And he doesn't say "give us strength" he says "DELIVER US!" God help! Hear the dependence in this prayer? And by the way the better translation is not from evil, but "from the evil one." Jesus is acknowledging what 1 Peter 5:8 says

[8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Welcome to the true world friends. There is an enemy out for you and he is stronger than you. And you need the full armor of God from Ephesians 6 and you need the deliverance of God in the battle against him. Some of you can't get out of the cycle of sin and God promises he will deliver you. The question is: are you asking God for strength to fight evil or for deliverance from evil? In one you are fighting the battle and in the other he is.

Closing - How to get started applying all this:

Try praying this prayer each day. I'm doing this right now. All good prayers are really remixes of this prayer. Just use the prayer as an outline to pray through your day ahead of you in the morning and the day you just finished. You can't go wrong. Jesus said pray this way.