

Series: Pray20

Sermon 2: Praying to God our Father

Text: Matthew 6.5-13

Introduction

Thank you CAMDEN FOSTER!!! (Keys)

We are in a series of sermons called PRAY20. And this series is an invitation to you. There is a really wonderful awakening to the power of prayer happening in our church. And see prayer is God's invitation to us to come and know him. To step into his presence and experience his power. We've said make your goal 20 minutes of prayer every day in 2020. And that really isn't a challenge so much as an invitation. What you are seeing in these stories we are sharing before the sermon is how enjoyable and rewarding prayer is. It's drawing close to a God who...as Camden said...who gets you. Even more than a parent could.

So in this series we want to take a step, all together here in 2020, towards being a church that is desperate for God. That wants the power & presence of God that scripture promises we can have. We want to be a church where anyone and everyone can have hope here because this people called Mercy Church...we meet with God. And we said we want ALL of God. We don't want to settle for just dinner and bedtime prayers because we want more than just a dinner and bedtime God. WE want ALL of God we can have. His presence and power with us.

To help prepare us to receive the message today I want you to stand up on your feet. Both Campuses Stand up. This is an old practice that has been done in the church for centuries as a way to show honor to God's word. And as I read this passage that we are going to focus our attention on, I want your physical posture to draw your mind & heart to focus in on this word.

[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.

[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. [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. (ESV)

PRAY

Intro (keys stop)

So I've told you several times over the winter about how I am coaching my son's basketball team. Actually we just finished up. And the thing about coaching 10 & 11 year olds is that you cannot assume any basketball knowledge or anything. You gotta be crystal clear. If I say "Hey you pop up to the elbow then hit him on the baseline and roll to the opposite block." Kid is just looking at his own elbow like WHAT? He doesn't know anything.

But what is so fun about that is basketball becomes this game of discovery. Light bulbs go off over and over because they do what you tell them & it works and they are like...WHOA! Let's do it again!

Like layups. These guys were running full speed and sling the ball at the rim and we weren't hitting anything. And I'm like ok guys. Do you want to score points? YES! Are you? NO. Ok there are some things we gotta stop doing and some things we gotta start doing if you want to score points. STOP: Running wildly out of control and hurling the ball at the rim as you pass by at full speed. START: Running under control and aiming the ball. There is a white square on every backboard we play on. You haven't had geometry yet but if you will aim the ball at the top right corner of that white square it will bounce into the goal and you'll score points. And then we practiced it and they were like SWEET. THIS IS AWESOME! Let's do it again! Teachable moment. Same thing

happened with screens, with rebounding, and over the year we got better and better. It was awesome.

Especially awesome for me was watching my sons learn. Because I've seen them grow their whole lives. I saw them learn to walk, and run, and now helping them learn basketball brings ME more joy than it brings them I think.

Here's the thing, **I feel like that dad loving to show his child something that will increase his joy in basketball is just a little shadow of what God feels in showing us how to pray.** The passage we are looking at today, The LORD's prayer, is God taking his disciples aside and saying do you want to come closer to me? They say yes. And he says ok there are some things we gotta stop and some things we gotta start. And if you just try to follow me here, you will discover a closeness to me you were made for.

What you are going to see today is not only does God invite you to experience his presence and encounter his power...he shows you how to get there. This is huge. He doesn't just tell you to do the layup, he shows you how. And as you saw evidence of with Camden, its so simple a child could do it.

Because the setup is so important and the prayer itself is so rich, we'll only get halfway through it today.

There are two parts to today.

1. Why we pray – What is our motivation? What is our aim? Before we just launch into words, what are we

trying to get out of prayer? We gotta get our hearts right.

2. How we pray – With our hearts set right...how do we practice prayer?

I'm really excited today because today should feel almost like a training session. If last week was "get amped up to pray" this week is...ok here's the playbook.

Let's start with **Why we pray**

before we actually open our mouths to talk with God, Jesus talks about what's going on in our hearts. He talks about our motivations. That's what he's doing the whole 1st half of Matthew 6.

[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

Practicing Righteousness – That means doing the things God calls us to do. Living a life that is obedient to the commands of God. He says if you do them IN FRONT OF other people **in order to be seen by other people**...IF THAT'S WHY you do what you do...to gain the approval of people...you will miss God himself.

He then talks about giving away your money, prayer, and fasting. In fact the Lord's prayer is inside this whole section on hypocrisy. And he says with all 3 of these you can have the RIGHT action...with the wrong motivation. And it will not be a gain for you. It will be to your detriment.

[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.

To do the right thing the wrong way will actually distance you from God, not draw you close. And Jesus warns here...**don't try and use God to get the approval of people**. That's not what prayer is about! Prayer is about encountering the power and presence of God! It's holy and powerful. And the purpose is to know God. Jesus is stepping into the heart motivation for why we pray. The reward...the thing we should long to receive in prayer...is God himself. Knowing him is our chief aim. Listen – why would they want to be seen by others? So that others will be impressed right? So that they will measure up. I'm telling you what...NOTHING will rob you of closeness to God like the comparison game will. Comparison is the thief of Joy. Instead of concerning myself with drawing close to God, I concern myself with how I compare to how others draw close to God.

And trust me pastors are the chief of sinners here. I got together with a group of AWESOME pastors recently. I mean guys I really love and respect. And there was a temptation...one asks "hey man how many you running?" He wasn't asking about how many miles I run each day. He's asking about attendance. How many people come through the doors. And then he compares it to his church...and somehow we connect our value to the world with how many people are in our church. It's awful! Not only is that a poor success metric, but COMPARISON ROBS US OF JOY! We can't

encourage one another in Christ when we are too consumed with measuring up to one another!

Jesus is saying if you USE prayer as a means to GET something else...then you will get the fruit of that and it will not be good fruit. In fact let me say it this way. Since this warning is repeated throughout this section about giving money, about prayer, and about fasting...we can summarize it this way:

If your obedience to God is motivated by peer approval your reward will never be more than peer approval.

YOU GOTTA PURSUE GOD SO THAT YOU CAN GET MORE OF GOD! NOT ANYTHING ELSE! Where are you comparing yourself to someone else? Moms compare themselves to other moms, Dads to other dads, parents are looking at that video of Camden and they are like...OH MAN I'm A TERRIBLE PARENT MY KID DOESN'T PRAY LIKE THAT. And What happens...Do you feel joyful and content? NO. Because comparison is the thief of joy. So when it comes to following God...stop looking around. Go get alone with God.

God says when it comes to prayer especially, you gotta get alone with God.

[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.

So let me ask you this. In the space where no one is watching...what is your prayer life like in there? Are you even

in there? Listen I have GREAT, GREAT news. The power and presence of God are waiting for you THERE.

We run from stillness & quietness in our culture. We fill it with Netflix or spotify or something. We run from isolation. We want to be busy, to be seen with people. Because that creates value. So we check social media constantly in hopes of a feeling of connection with others. IF you think "no I crave time alone" but your time alone is busied with tasks or scrolling or entertainment...that's not time alone. We push against silence and solitude because the last place on earth we want to be is alone with our thoughts.

BUT what Jesus seems to say is in the stillness of time and space, alone with no one and nothing to distract us, that is where God is wanting to meet with us.

What if we saw a still quiet space as the café table where we get to sit down and meet with God? This is why I'm telling you to pray 20 minutes each day... But listen, that's not the ceiling. That's the floor. THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE is at this table. He INVITES YOU to sit down & talk with him. To get to know him.

Ex: got invited once to take a rather well known older pastor out to lunch after he preached at the church I was serving at. Huge honor and I soaked up every minute of it. Asking questions, etc. If I could meet up with him daily, I wouldn't think twice about it. I'd never be distracted by my phone in that setting. And that's just an older pastor. GOD...who has ALL wisdom & love and knowledge is inviting us to meet with him!

And when we are there with God...we are warned against trying to impress God. Which is actually harder than it sounds.

Now I know why some of us don't go there sometimes – It's actually because we know God is there. And he knows us. He knows what we did. He knows us better than our parents. Some of us think God is like the parent who got a call from the principal and is now at home waiting on us to get home from school. This is why you don't want to go to prayer. Listen though, that's when you need to hear Jesus right here.

[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.

Jesus wants us to be without pretense when we come to him in prayer. Instead, we often try to be something we aren't. Something more than we really are. We try to put on a front for God. but...that's the exact opposite of what Jesus says to do.

The difficulty of coming just as we are is that we are messy. And prayer makes it worse. When we slow down to pray, we are immediately confronted with how unspiritual we are, with how difficult it is to concentrate on God. We don't know how bad we are until we try to be good...¹

¹ Miller, Paul. *A Praying Life* (NavPress Colorado Springs, CO 2009) 30-31

And instead of being like that, he's about to tell us how to pray. But first he reminds us of the nature of our relationship to God. It's a child talking to his or her father. And there is something very freeing and I think *activating* in God being our father. It means we are his children. **And little children never get frozen by their selfishness.** they come just as they are, totally self-absorbed. They seldom get it right. And their parents still love them.

Jesus does not say "come to me, all you who have learned how to concentrate in prayer, whose minds no longer wander, and I will give you rest." NO, Jesus opens up his arms to his needy children and says Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. The criteria for coming to Jesus is weariness. Come overwhelmed with life. Come with your wandering mind. Come messy.²

Can you take a second and receive that? It's ok that you are hot mess. You might have pulled yourself together today to be here...or maybe you are listening to this on podcast because you just can't pull yourself together. Can you receive Jesus' invitation to just come to him with your overwhelmed life?

When we come without pretense like this...we are coming to God only for God. Not for something else. But for God himself. And that's the point of prayer. In fact, that's the whole point of Christianity. **The point of Christianity isn't to learn a lot of truths so you don't need God anymore.** The point is to draw us closer to GOD!

² Miller, 39.

This God who is holy, who is the creator, who is merciful and abounding in steadfast love, who is great and magnificent, whose sovereign and king holding the world in his hands...This God is inviting you to sit down at the table with him. To know him.

God is our reward in prayer. His presence Acts 2 tells us will bring refreshing to our soul.

Now let's talk about **how to pray**. Gonna walk through the first 3 requests in the Lord's prayer and I just want to pause on each request so we can see all we are praying for in this. I told you everything you need to meet with God is in this prayer. So let's see.

[9] Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven,

FATHER – To pray this is to step into a relationship Jesus has made for us. Think about the names he could have given us. He is after all the King. He is the Creator. He could rightly tell us to call on him as judge. But instead he made a way for us to call him father.

Jesus models this prayer for us. This one word prayer, father, is uniquely Jesus' prayer. His first recorded sentence at age twelve is about his father: "did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? Luke 2:49. Abba is the first word the prodigal son utters when he returned home. It is the first word of the Lord's prayer, and it is the first word Jesus prays in Gethsemane. It is his first word on the cross – Father, forgive them – and it is one of his last – Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

And God says that in Christ we are not only forgiven of sin, we are adopted as God's children. The privilege of being a child of God belongs exclusively to Christians. If you have not yet received Christ's forgiveness for your sins, you are created by God yes, but you are not yet a child.

[12] But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, John 1:12

So what I want to tell you here: RECEIVE HIM AS YOUR SAVIOR! If you want closeness to God...it comes through Jesus. That's why Jesus says I'm the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. DO NOT DELAY!! In a minute I'm going to give you the chance to say YES I want to believe I want to know God I need God in my life. And I'm going to walk you through that and you need to receive him.

Christian, think about who you are talking to when you pray. I recognize the label "father" comes with a lot of emotional weight. Some of us had good dads, but some of us had bad dads. And the way God presents the role of an earthly father in scripture is that his role is to help prepare you for this communion with your heavenly father. So if your earthly father did a bad job, that doesn't invalidate your heavenly father. So come to him. With a messy, open heart. And say **FATHER** in HEAVEN.

hallowed be your name.

What are we praying for here? Hallowed isn't a word we use anymore but Hallowed is a combination of Holy & sacred &

revered. To which you might say...Isn't God's name already hallowed?

Martin Luther said this has two meanings. FIRST, this is the prayer of each christian who claims to be wearing, and to be covered by, the name of Christ. As name bearers we represent a good and holy God. So we are praying God keep us from dishonoring your name, and empower us to walk in the world in a manner consistent with your character. So that your name will be given the honor it is due.

Luther said the second meaning is an evangelistic meaning. That as God is glorified among us Christians, he would be glorified among the nations. It's a prayer for more people to call on the name of God and be saved. What if we thought about the work of taking the gospel around the world as advancing the holy name of God into the hearts and minds of those who don't know him! HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME GOD! It's a call to help ME live what I profess and it's a call to save the world.

[10] Your kingdom come,

To ask God for his kingdom to come is asking his royal power and authority over every aspect of our lives. It is to profess a desire to be truly a servant of God. God my actions, my thoughts, even my emotions...you rule over all of it. And in praying this, I am praying for THAT DAY when your kingdom will come in full. Because my hope is not in this day, my hope is in Christ. Who is preparing me for THAT day.

your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Now there is a reason this follows AFTER calling God 'Father.' Because unless we are settled...deeply settled that God is our

father, we will never trust him enough to say 'your will be done.' How can you trust him? Well you take comfort first that this is the one part of the Lord's prayer Jesus prayed in the garden of gethsemane.

He's faced with dying for the sins of the world and he says let this cup pass from me...yet not my will but YOUR WILL be done.

It is here in this prayer that we can find rest for our souls. When we can fully say 'your will be done' ...there and only there will we ever know true peace.

And to pray this is to submit our feelings to him too. So we don't become bitter by whatever comes to us. Instead we can be grateful.

See this whole first half of the prayer is God-centered. And that's because God-centeredness heals us from self-centeredness. Focusing our prayers on God helps focus our lives on God and that helps set me free from...ME.

Here's how we are going to close this down. We are going to pray through the first half of the Lord's prayer together. I told you I want to help you learn how to pray. And to help you we are training you here at Mercy over these few weeks. So today here's what we are going to do...we are going to group up into groups of 2-3.

Now, last week I made a caveat. I said if you are new and this is too uncomfortable for you, then when I say "get your prayer buddy"...you immediately drop your head and we'll all know you want to pray alone. Well, that remains today ok. And will for this whole series. BUT, I also don't want you to hide behind

that when you need to trust God and pray with some people.
SO, I want to challenge you today that if you prayed alone last week, take a step and pray with some other people today.

Here's the prayer points

1. **Go to God for God.** Help me come to you for you. Set me free from the need to be approved of by others. I have all the approval I need in Christ.

2. **"Our Father in Heaven"** - Thank your Heavenly Father for adopting you through Christ

3. **"Hallowed be your name"** - Ask that his name would be glorified in your life and among the nations

4. **"Your kingdom come, your will be done"** - Surrender your kingdom to his, and your will to his.