

# Prayer – For All the Right Reasons

The Gospels

Matthew 6:7-10

## Introduction

Turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 6. We will begin where we left off in our last discussion when we uncovered the Oscar winning performances of the Pharisees in their giving, their praying, and their fasting. They did such a magnificent job in these areas that everyone said “ooh and ah” and the Pharisees received their reward in full. They wanted attention and they got it – and that was all the Pharisees got.

In their fasting, the Pharisees gave people the impression that, as was believed rather superstitiously in that day, if they did something to their bodies, they could gain the attention of God. They gave people the impression, in their praying, giving, and fasting, “We have the attention of God.”

The Pharisees thought they were very spiritual, yet Jesus Christ knew they were empty.

## Common Misconceptions about Prayer

Let us begin today by looking at Matthew 6:7-8.

*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.*

*So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

Let me give two misconceptions about prayer that were current in Jesus’ day and are very popular today. You may hold to one or both of them without realizing it.

1. Misconception number one: the more often we repeat our prayer, the more likely it will be answered by God.

Today, the Mohammedans sometimes pray repeating the expression, “God is God, God is God, God is God . . .” several thousand times. They think that in their repetition, they will be heard by God.

Catholic doctrine teaches that by going through the beads of the Rosary and repeating prayers, a person will be heard by God.

Buddhists attach written prayers to spokes on a wheel. A monk will sit and spin the wheel thinking that every time the prayers revolve, they ascend to Buddha, their god.

The men of Jesus’ day were evidently bringing this misconception into Judaism. In other words, they prayed the same thing repeatedly thinking that if they did it enough times, they would be heard by God.

God does not keep count. He does not say, “Okay, you’ve reached fifty times, so I’ll answer.”

Imagine that your child comes in and asks you for a drink of water. He asks, “Can I have a drink of water? Can I have a drink of water? Can I have a drink of water? Can I have a drink of water? . . .” until finally, he asks fifty times.

You then answer, “Okay, now I’ll give you a drink of water.”

This would be foolishness, would it not?

In fact, God, being the *perfect* parent, knows that you are thirsty without you even asking.

This is one misconception that is very popular.

Let me add a comment to this. Look at Matthew 6:7a again. It says,

*. . . do not use meaningless repetition . . .*

We could translate this phrase “thoughtless repetition”; that is, by rote. This is simply saying the same prayer over and over again. Thoughtless prayer is heartless prayer. It neither impresses God nor gets His attention.

Let us look at another misconception that is probably a little more popular in our day.

2. Misconception number two: the longer we make our prayer, the more likely we will be to get God’s attention.

It was the view of the Gentiles in Jesus’ day that many words would tire out their gods. They would

constantly bombard their gods so their gods would say, “Oh my goodness, get them off our backs – someone answer them.”

This idea crept into the church – if we could bombard God with enough words, we would obligate Him to answer.

The rabbis in Jesus’ day, in fact, taught these two things, and I quote:

- Whoever is long in prayer is heard.
- Whenever the righteous make their prayer long, their prayer is heard.

As a result, the pious Jew, three times per day, gave eighteen petitions – and they were *very* long and complicated.

We have the idea, although it may reside in our unconscious mind, that God is moved by length. In other words, when we pray, we think God says, “Gabriel, Brother So-and-So is about to pray, go get the stopwatch. If he makes it to five minutes, answer half of it. If he makes it to ten minutes, answer the whole thing. If he prays for an hour, unload the truck.”

Every once in a while, we think we have finally figured out how long we need to pray because we think, “Okay, let me see, last time I prayed for this long and said the prayer this many times and God answered, so now I must do the same thing.”

God then shocks our religious socks off by answering a prayer and we are thinking, “Wait a second – I only prayed that prayer one time and it was between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> floor in the elevator.”

The misconception that we have that leads to piety is that God is in some way obligated to answer only after He hears the prayer over and over again and the prayer is long.

I am not saying not to pray for an hour, but if we think we must spend that hour to get God’s attention, we are misinformed. We have His attention, as His children, before we even kneel. This is the meaning of the phrase,

*. . . your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

We are not praying, necessarily, to change His mind anyway; we are praying so that He can change our minds. We are not praying to coerce or change Him; we are praying to ultimately change ourselves.

Jesus destroyed the popular misconceptions of that religious day. It was obvious that the Pharisees

had it all mapped out and what they did was for show, for ritual, for tradition, for pietism. When they gave and prayed and fasted, it was to give the not so subtle message that they had the attention of God. However, we know that Jesus had the attention of God and yet, He did things so differently.

## **The Disciples’ Prayer – An Overview**

Is it any wonder that after the disciples saw Jesus feed the 5,000; after they saw Jesus heal the sick, they came to Jesus and said, in Luke 11:1,

*. . . “Lord, teach us to pray . . .”*

This was the only thing the disciples ever asked Jesus to teach them.

I would have liked to know how to do the feeding of the 5,000 trick myself. I would have asked, “Lord, teach me to do that . . .”.

The disciples saw the magnificent power of God and yet, they ultimately saw that Jesus had His Father’s total attention. This is what they wanted more than anything else, so they came to Him and said, “Lord, would you teach us how to gain the maximum attention of our Father God.”

Jesus teaches the disciples to pray in less than sixty words. Let us take a broad look at this prayer. It can be divided into two sections and each section contains three statements.

1. The first section of the disciples’ prayer is communicating praise to God and the focus is on God’s glory.

Notice in Matthew 6:9-10:

- Thy name – verse 9;
- Thy kingdom – verse 10a;
- Thy will – verse 10b.

2. The second section of the disciples’ prayer is conveying petitions and the focus is on man’s needs.

Note the phrases in Matthew 6:12-14:

- Give us – verse 12;
- Forgive us – verse 13;
- Lead us – verse 14.

## The Disciples' Prayer – An Exposition

Let us take a closer look at the first section of the disciples' prayer today.

### Our Father

Look at Matthew 6:9.

... *Our Father* ...

We will stop at this point because these are probably the most precious two words in the prayer. These two words automatically give us the understanding that:

*This prayer is based upon a relationship.*

In other words, we must have the ability to call God, "Our Father".

How can we have the ability to call God "Our Father"? We can call Him "Our Father" when His Son is our Savior.

Some may be praying today, but are not being heard. The reason is that do not have a relationship with God as Father because they have never received His Son as their Savior.

Those who have received the gift of eternal life from Jesus Christ have the foundation upon which they can say, "Our Father". They have stopped being their own Savior because they are impressive or they are good or they are in church or this or that and have come to the point of realizing that apart from anything in themselves, Jesus Christ alone can save. As we read,

*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God... (John 1:12)*

The two words that are probably the most precious to the believer are the words "Our Father". We, as believers, can call Him "Our Father," which means He calls us, "His child".

Perhaps, if you have children, you have played the game in which you have clutched in one hand a piece of candy. You ask your children, "What's in my hand?"

They do not know the answer, but they are surely going to try to find out. Ultimately, you let them pry your fingers loose, one at a time. Then, they squeal with delight as they find the candy.

What did you enjoy? You enjoyed your children being near; you enjoyed their presence; you enjoyed their laughter. Hopefully they will grow up and one day, come and sit beside you, not because of what is in your hand, but because of who you are. One day, they will hopefully, not come to seek anything other than communion with you.

One of marks of maturity, as we pray to our Father, is that we are far less interested in His gifts than we are in Him. Prayer is not as much seeking to get something from God as it is seeking to be with God.

One writer said, however, that spiritual lust makes us demand an answer from God rather than seek God, who may or may not give an answer.

I think that our joylessness or our boredom in prayer may perhaps be because we are far too focused on our needs rather than on God's character and attributes. We are far more overwhelmed with what He can give us than in Him – period.

The disciples' prayer begins with the fact of who God is, and He is "Our Father". Because He is God, He is a perfect, unfailing, loving, nurturing, caring Father. He may be, for some, the only Father like that they will ever have.

We come to God, having bent in our hearts in adoration of Him, and begin this prayer with the most precious words of all, "Our Father".

### Who art in heaven

The disciples' prayer continues in Matthew 6:9 to say,

... *who is in heaven* ...

Your translation may read, "... who art in heaven ...".

This is a perfect blend of intimacy and awe. God is our Father, yet His throne is above the heavens. He is not, "the Big Man upstairs". I have heard Him referred to as, "J. C.". You have probably heard a lot of different names.

There is the attitude that He is loving and nurturing and yet, He is awesome, and sovereign, and holy.

... *Our Father who is in heaven* ...

W. H. Holmes said that one time he saw India worshippers walking around tapping on trees and

stones, saying, “Are you there? Are you there? Are you there? . . .” hoping to find one of their many gods.

Let us face it though, for us, as believers, it is difficult to deal with an invisible God, is it not? We have gotten used to it, but it is difficult.

It reminds me of a time a couple of weeks ago when my three-and-a-half year old daughter asked me to jump on the trampoline with her.

I said, “Honey, I am busy right now, but maybe I will be able to a little later.”

Her brothers were not around, so my daughter said again, “Come on, Dad, jump on the trampoline with me.”

I said, “I’ll be out in just a little bit.”

She said, “Well, I’ll be out there all alone.”

Being the good dad that I am, I thought this was a great opportunity for a theological lesson. I said, “Honey, you’re not alone, are you? Who is out there with you?”

She answered, “God is.”

I thought, “Have I done a good job, or what?!”

Then my daughter added, “But He is not jumping with me.”

In August of 1961, the Russian cosmonaut Gherman Titov orbited the earth. He came back and said to the world, “In my travels around the earth, I looked around and I did not see God . . .”

What does “in heaven” mean?

It does not mean that by going high enough, you will see God.

*“In heaven” is not a reference to God’s mailing address, but to His majesty.*

It refers to the fact that He is above the created universe; that His throne ascends in glory. “Our Father who is in heaven . . .” refers to His elevation, His attributes, not His address.

When we come to God then, we come with intimacy, with confidence, with boldness. He is “Our Father,” but He is majestic.

We properly combine these two, not that we must always, when we say, “Heavenly Father”. We are, in effect, saying, “Majestic Father,” “Glorified Father,” “Great, awesome Father”. This is a perfect blend of what we are to Him and who He is in the universe.

## **Hallowed be Thy name**

The disciples’ prayer continues in Matthew 6:9.

. . . *hallowed be Your name.*

What does this mean? Let me give a definition.

This means, “to make His name holy and cause us to keep it holy”.

The Muslim turns toward his mosque several times a day and prays, “God is great. God is great.”

Should we, who know the true God, do any less? In whatever we do, whether we eat or drink; in everything our hands touch, we do it to glorify the name of God (I Corinthians 10:31). We ask, “Cause us to keep Your name holy on earth by the way that we live.”

The word “hollowed” comes from the Greek word “hagiozo,” and means:

*To set apart as sacred; to treat as sacred; to glorify; to honor.*

I remember growing up, and you may have experienced the same thing, I would go out with the guys or whoever, and my mother would look at me and say, “You remember what your last name is.”

That comment was always a spoiler! “Remember what your name is.”

There is something special about a name that has not been drug through the mud. My mother was saying, “Don’t you do it.”

You live in this state of North Carolina, so you are a North Carolinian. For some of you who are from New Jersey, that may be hard to hear. What does it mean? It means that you reside in North Carolina; you are a part of North Carolina – even if you do not sound like it!

When you have the name Christian, what does that mean? It means you reside in Christ; you are part of Christ; you represent Christ. So, as we live as a Christian, we represent Christ. We tell the world that we live in Him; we are part of Him.

Do we sound like it? Do we live like it? If we do, we are hollowing the name of God; we are treating it as sacred; we are remembering what our name is and living like it.

## **Thy kingdom come**

Let us continue in the disciples’ prayer to Matthew 6:10a.

### ***Your kingdom come. . . .***

Note two aspects about this phrase:

- *This is the reign of the King now in our lives.*
- *This is the future reign of the King in the millennial kingdom.*

This phrase encompasses these two thoughts. We can pray with either one in mind.

We can pray with the desire that God establishes His kingdom on earth. This is where we will reign with Him in glory. And what a shared glory and experience it will be!

We can also pray “Your kingdom come,” meaning, “I want You to reign right now in my life.”

I am going to make a few admissions about the coming kingdom.

When I was fifteen years of age, I did not want the kingdom to come – I wanted to learn how to drive.

When I was twenty years of age, I did not want the kingdom to come – I wanted to marry my fiancée; I wanted to marry that sweet Georgia peach. I thought, “Lord, hold back the kingdom for a while.”

When I was twenty-six, I did not really want the kingdom to come – I wanted to experience being a father to our soon-to-arrive twin boys. I figured that would be an exciting experience. It has been an experience!

The question is, “What in our lives takes precedence over the reign of Jesus Christ and the coming kingdom? What would cause us to say, ‘Wait a while.’?”

What is holding the reign of Christ back in your life now? Can you pray, “Thy kingdom come – You reign *now*?”

### **Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**

Let us look at the next phrase in Matthew 6:10b.

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

This is a little tougher. In other words, while we are waiting for the kingdom to come, we want His will to be done now.

My wife is really good at getting me to do an undesirable task. She gives me multiple choice questions. She says, “Sweetheart,” which is when I should learn to hide, “what would you rather do – load the dishwasher or vacuum the floor?”

I do not remember wanting to do either one!

Have you ever had a multiple choice question in which none of the answers looked good and you just had to guess?

Well, if you must know, I would rather vacuum.

We do this with God. We say, “Lord, I have a couple of options for You – You pick which one You would rather do. Plan A is . . .; Plan B is . . . – these are the options, so take Your pick.”

It is okay for my wife to do this with me. It is not okay for us to do this with God.

Note:

*We do not pray to get our will done in heaven, we pray to get His will done on earth in our lives.*

This verse means that we know the Lord is the arranger; the coordinator; the creator; the ruler of the ordered universe, and in heaven, the angels do His bidding – He says something and it is done. We are to want the same thing on earth in our lives – He says something and it is done; His will is accomplished in our lives.

We cloak our overall prayer with this overall philosophy, “Your will be done, Father.” Why? As our heavenly, majestic Father, He is caring and holy and loves us.

I can say, “Your will be done” because God’s kingdom reign is rightfully His in my life now and forever. I can say, “Your will be done” because I know God’s will is good and acceptable and perfect.

So we go to God as a Father, boldly and with awe, and we give Him the right to reign now in our lives.

Let us stop at this point and continue in our next discussion.