

The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer and the Manner of a Disciple's Prayer

by Dick Woodward

Prayer is a spiritual discipline that proves God's existence and should be a vertical, private, and meaningful communication with God.

Duration: 30:58

Scripture: Matthew 6:6-15, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prayer and the need for various things in our lives. The term 'bread' is used to encompass all our needs, and the speaker encourages daily prayer for these needs. The sermon also highlights the concept of forgiveness, acknowledging that we are sinners and in constant need of God's forgiveness. The speaker then discusses the personal petitions in the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the requests for daily provision, forgiveness, guidance, and deliverance from evil. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit in delivering us from evil.

Transcript

Welcome to the Mini Bible College. We are glad that you have chosen to spend this time with us, and in today's lesson we will focus on what is often called the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus Christ the Lord taught his disciples how to pray. Our prayer is that these lessons are helping you to grow closer to our Lord and to become a better disciple.

Now listen carefully to today's lesson. And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Assuredly I say to you, they have their reward.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathens do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask him.

In this manner, therefore pray, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we

forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. I have read from Matthew chapter 6 beginning at verse 5 through verse 15.

In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is telling us to look upward. In the early part of the teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount, he told us to look inward. That is when he taught us the Beatitudes.

Then in all of the rest of that long chapter, Matthew chapter 5, all the way from verse 11 through verse 48, Jesus is saying, now look around and work out in all the relationships of your life these wonderful things that you find going on in your inward look. Because the miracle of regeneration, the miracle of the new birth, is taking place in you. Here we have Jesus teaching on the great spiritual grace of prayer.

Your praying should be vertical, not horizontal. The great teaching of Jesus on prayer tells us to go alone into the closet or the room. But the point is you are to be in private.

Close the door so there is nobody there but you and God. And you see your Father in heaven is in that secret place. He really is.

And the Father who really is there, unseen in the secret place, will reward you when you close yourself up in the secret place and communicate with him through the discipline of prayer. To pray literally means to ask. If you look it up in a dictionary, to pray means to petition or to ask.

What did that Pharisee ask for in Luke chapter 18? Not one thing. He wanted everybody in the temple to know how righteous he was, that he fasted twice a week, that he tithed, and that he was not like other men, especially like a publican. Remember, the publican would not stand at a conspicuous place.

He beat upon his breast, which was a symbol, an expression of contrition and humility, being exceedingly sorry for sin. And he did ask for something. He prayed, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

What is prayer? Prayer is petitioning. But the essence of prayer, as Jesus outlines it here in Matthew 6, is that prayer, like giving, it is a spiritual discipline that proves that God really is. So when you pray, the most effective way to pray is not public prayer.

It doesn't rule out public prayer, but it tells us that the true essence of prayer is the kind of prayer that takes place in your room when the door is shut, and it's just you and God. Pray to your Heavenly Father who is unseen. The most meaningful prayer, in other words, is when you are alone, when there's no one else to address.

There is no one else to impress. And then the great promise is, since this is a spiritual discipline, your Father, who really is in that secret place, will reward you. It is promised in Hebrews chapter 11, he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

In giving this instruction about the discipline of prayer, Jesus said that you do not have to keep on uttering vain repetitions. It's not wrong to repeat. The emphasis is upon the word vain.

It is wrong to have vain repetitions in your prayer. Meaningless repetitions are like little prayer notes attached to a wheel, and then the wheel is turned, thinking that every time those prayers go around on the wheel, somehow God is impressed. Jesus said that's not necessary to do.

The premise upon which Jesus gives his great teaching on prayer, which we might call the disciples' prayer, is found in verse 8. For your Father knows the things that you have need of before you ask him. But our problem is we don't know what the will of God is. We have not a clue.

And then so many of us don't pray much of the time. Now Paul says in Romans chapter 8, do not let that keep you from praying. Ask anyway.

If your heart is right, the Holy Spirit, who does know the will of God, will make intercession for you according to the will of God, and then you will have the thing for which you are petitioning, the throne of God, in prayer. In other words, Paul seems to say, pray anyway. If you don't know the will of God, if you do not know what it is to pray for, well, pray anyway.

If your heart is right, when you ask for the wrong thing, the Holy Spirit will make intercession according to the will of God, and God will give you the right thing. I believe that this is the basis of the teaching that Jesus gives here about prayer. We call it the Lord's Prayer.

Actually, it shouldn't be called the Lord's Prayer because the Lord never prayed this prayer. The Lord's Prayer was that prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done.

The Lord's Prayer is that great prayer he prayed in John chapter 17. This should be more accurately called the Disciple's Prayer. Jesus said, when you pray, you pray this way.

Some say this is a prayer that should be prayed. Some say, no, it's a teaching about prayer. It's more like a manner of praying.

Pray after this manner. Some would also say the pronouns in this teaching are plural, and therefore it was to be prayed as a prayer in a group. It is not give me today my daily bread, forgive me, lead me, deliver me.

The pronouns are plural. Give us, forgive us, lead us, and deliver us. So some say it was meant to be prayed in a group setting.

I personally think it's not either or, it's both and. I believe it is a prayer, and I believe it is a prayer for us to pray, especially if we understand it, and if it is not a vain repetition. I don't think it hurts to repeat this prayer over and over, as long as we are in the spirit of this prayer as we pray it.

I think we could be saying wonderful things to God and petitioning the throne of God in a wonderful way. Notice there are seven petitions in this prayer. Some suggest that it is an index for a model prayer.

The old rabbis like to give index prayers in order to teach people how to pray. They would give them a little prayer and say, now as you pray, pray around this prayer. Pray something like this.

So it may be that is what Jesus was doing, but as he shows us how to pray, giving us an index prayer, notice that there are three providential petitions, and then there are four personal petitions. Before you pray, give us, in verse 11, which was the first of the personal petitions, you have three providential

petitions. Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

I like the thought that we are praying that the will of the father might be done in our earthen vessel, like it is done in the heavenly places. But notice the providential petitions. We address God as father, a heavenly father, a perfect heavenly father, and then the petitions are your name, your kingdom, your will.

Again and again we say that the teaching of the scripture comes down to these two words, God first. Reginald Thomas, a great Presbyterian pastor in Philadelphia, used to say, when you go into your prayer room, do not go into your prayer room with a shopping list and send God on errands. Rather, go into your prayer room with a blank sheet of paper and report for duty.

Ask God to send you on errands. Notice that before you pray the personal petitions that begin with, give us, what you are saying is your name, father, your kingdom, your will. I want your name to be hallowed.

That means reverence, held in awe by the whole world. I want to see your kingdom come, which means I want your will to be done in my earthen vessel, like it is done in the heavenly or spiritual dimension. You see, this is God first.

This is saying, heavenly father, what I really want is for your name to be hallowed. The name of God means the essence of his being, the essence of who and what he is. I want everybody to reverence you for what you are and for who you are.

And then I want to see your kingdom come. I want to see you plant the white flag of surrender in the hearts of people so that your will might be done in the earthen vessels of people, just as it is willed and done in heaven. Now, having set the perspective by putting God first and having prayed these providential petitions, then there are four personal petitions.

Give us, forgive us, lead us, and deliver us. Give us this day, our daily bread. Notice the emphasis upon one day at a time.

Acknowledging God is the source of all our sustenance. That's the point here. We're saying to God, God, I am looking to you to meet all my needs.

And this is not only bread in the literal sense. Here, bread is used in a general sense, meaning everything that I need, food, rest, love, everything. We are acknowledging that our needs are met by God.

And so we are saying to God, and we are talking to him now in our room with the door shut, nobody else there to impress. Give us today, only today, our daily bread. Meet our needs today, one day at a time.

That is the first personal petition. And then forgive us. We all sin, and so we all need forgiveness.

The proof, however, that we are a forgiven people is that we are forgiving people. And so this petition is, forgive us as we forgive others. And the next personal petition is, lead us.

We all need the divine guidance of God. Do not lead us into temptation. I think the emphasis is that he leads us, and then we will not have to confront temptation.

And then perhaps in this way, deliver us from the evil one. Those are the four personal petitions. And then the end of the prayer, yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen. What we are saying here is, father, the power is going to come from you. And so father, the glory will always go to you.

And father, the result will always belong to you. Yours is the kingdom. What that means is that I'm not building my own kingdom.

If you answer these personal petitions, if you give me, forgive me, lead me and deliver me, whatever results in the sense of a kingdom of a work of a ministry will belong to God, because the power to put it in place will have come from God. And so what we are really saying at the end of this prayer is, father, the result will always belong to you because the power will always come from you. And so the glory will always belong to you.

It will always go to you. That's an outline for prayer. That is a manner of prayer.

Perhaps it is a prayer also, but it is a manner of praying. You see, having looked inward and having looked around and having realized how impossible it all is without God, without the grace of God, having looked in and looked around in chapter six, Jesus is saying, now, this is how you look upward. Unless you learn the spiritual disciplines involved in looking up, you will never be what you are supposed to be when you look inward, and you will never be what you're supposed to be when you look around.

Now I want to go back and study more closely this prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. Here we have Jesus's instruction to his disciples about the manner of the disciples prayer. In the opening paragraphs, as we have already seen, he is contrasting the prayer of his disciples with the prayer habits of the religious establishment.

And here again, you see this righteousness of the disciples compared to the righteousness of the religious establishment. Their righteousness was horizontal. His disciples' righteousness was to be vertical.

Their righteousness was external. The righteousness of his disciples was to be internal. Their righteousness, you might say, based upon this paragraph was temporal.

But the righteousness of the disciple was to be eternal. Then it comes out in other places that the righteousness of the religious establishment was largely traditional, whereas the righteousness of the disciples of Jesus was to be biblical or scriptural. And then you might sum it all up by saying the righteousness of the religious establishment, the scribes and the Pharisees was hypocritical.

The righteousness of the disciples of Jesus was to be real. This comes out in the teaching Jesus gives here at the beginning of Matthew 6 on the subject of giving. It will also be found in his righteousness that is profiled for us in the paragraph that has to do with fasting.

And you will find it here in his teaching about prayer. The righteousness of his disciple is to be real and not hypocritical. In the teaching of our Lord about prayer, first of all, he says it should be vertical.

It should not be horizontal. It should not be to be seen of men or to be heard by men. Prayer should never be addressed to men.

Once there was a large convention. The following day, the convention was reported in the paper. The reporter, not realizing what he was saying, said that a bishop prayed a prayer at the beginning of the convention that the reporter said was the most beautiful prayer ever addressed to the people of that city.

Well, sometimes prayers are addressed to the audience and not God. And Jesus would say that's not really prayer. But then sometimes in a smaller kind of setting without realizing it, we're not really talking to God when we pray.

I heard about a woman who was praying in a small prayer meeting and she kept quoting scriptures, giving the chapter and verse. After the prayer meeting, her pastor said, Madam, do you not think the Lord knows where all those scriptures are located? And she said, Oh, sure, the Lord knows, but the people don't. I think we should be challenged with this when we pray, especially with corporate prayer and when other people are present or when we lead a public prayer.

To whom is that prayer addressed? Are we talking to God, perhaps leading people to the throne of grace through our prayer? Or are we really addressing the people? Many times pastors will find themselves preaching when they are leading the prayer, the public prayer, the pastoral prayer. That's a great challenge, I think, for us. And that is one of the most important things we receive out of this teaching of Jesus on prayer as we look at the opening paragraph.

You might also notice that Jesus says that you do not have to keep repeating yourself. How many times do you have to tell God before he's told? The emphasis is especially upon vain repetition. It's pretty hard to come up with an original prayer at the table three times a day, and this does not mean that it always has to be an original prayer in order to be real.

It's not wrong to repeat the same prayer. This teaching here about prayer, the part we call the disciples prayer, is that it can be repeated with great meaning. The important thing is that it not be a vain repetition, that we be mindful of the words we are praying as we pray this prayer.

Then it would not be meaningless. And then remember we said that the teaching of the disciples prayer is based upon two propositions. Based upon verse 8 of Matthew chapter 6 when we pray, remember these two things.

Your father knows what you need and you don't really know what you need. You may think you know, but you really don't know what you need the way your father knows what you need. In this manner therefore pray.

Here's a manner of prayer, and the manner of this prayer is based upon these two propositions. You don't know what you need, but your heavenly father does know what you need. We have seen that this is the basis of all this instruction.

Your heavenly father knows, but you don't know. But if we pray this way, then we can't miss because if what we are asking for is not his will, then we don't want it. I think that's a marvelous manner of praying.

We don't come into the prayer room with a shopping list as we said and send God on errands, and we are not issuing directives to the almighty God. We're coming into his presence with a blank sheet of paper and we're reporting for duty. We're asking him to send us on errands when we pray in this manner.

Now let us look at these seven petitions a little more closely. Hallowed be your name. I think that's a wonderful petition.

The names of God in the scripture are a fascinating study. There are many names of God given in the scripture, and they all tell us something about the essence of who and what he is and what he's like. Some

of them tell us that he is the God of peace, or that he is the God of healing, or that he is the almighty God, and that he is the ever-present God.

All of these names of God, if you research them, are telling us something about God, the God who was, the God who is, the God who always shall be, Jehovah God. If you study the names of God, you will realize that they give us a revelation of his essence, the essence of his character and his being. The character of God is not limited to only one thing.

It's like the colors of a rainbow. There's a whole spectrum of attributes of God that tell us something of the essence of God's being and God's character. He is love, but that's not all he is.

He is also perfect justice. There's such a thing as the wrath of God. God is a loving God.

That is the way we are told to address him in our prayers. And this is a wonderful thought. God is personal.

God is not a force like gravity. In the Old Testament, he is the shepherd, the great shepherd. If you study sheep management and know something of the relationship between a shepherd and the sheep, you know this is saying to us that God is very personal.

Jesus has told us that even the number of hairs on our head are known to God. We are very important to God and all the little intricate details of our lives are important to him. He is to be addressed as father.

When some people address God as father, they have a difficult time in prayer because their earthly father was not what a father is supposed to be. Consequently, when they address God as father, they associate God with the father they have had on earth. And that is why it's so important to notice he is to be addressed as our father in heaven.

He is a perfect heavenly father. He is everything you ever wished your father would be or could be and so much more. So we address him as our father in heaven.

And then our first petition is that his name might be revered or hallowed. Then your kingdom come. The kingdom of God is really not a complicated concept.

It's easier for people who live in a monarchy to appreciate this than people who live in the democracies of the world. Where there is a king, there's always a realm over which that king reigns or rules. The realm over which a king rules is his kingdom.

The concept that God has a kingdom simply means God is like a king and as a king of kings and the Lord of Lords, he rules over all that is in this world. In the Old Testament, there was a time when God wanted that to be a national rule and a geographical rule. It concerned the nation of Israel.

Do you know the story in the Old Testament that the nation of Israel didn't want that in the days of Samuel? They came to Samuel and said, we don't like that arrangement. We don't want to have God for a king. Now God wanted to be their king.

It's called a theocracy. God over the people. All he needed in order to manage that was to have men like Moses who would come up on Mount Sinai into the presence of God and intercede with God for the people and then go down from the mountain with the word from God for the people.

When he came up on the mountain, he was a priest. When he went down off the mountain, he was a prophet. That prophet priest provided the kind of leadership God needed to manage this kingdom of God on earth that was national and geographical.

But the people wanted kings of their own, so God gave them kings and those kings gave them all kinds of trouble. After captivities and 400 silent years when God did not speak to his people through his prophets, the silence is broken with Jesus and John the Baptist preaching the good news that God is willing to be their king again. Jesus and John the Baptist come preaching the kingdom of God, but they explain when we say the kingdom of God, do not look here or over there as if it was going to be this group or that group, this nation or that nation.

It's on an individual basis. Now the kingdom of God is within you. It's within every individual.

Will you allow God to plant the white flag of surrender in your heart? Will you become one of his subjects? When you become subject and you crown Jesus king of your life, now you are part of the realm over which he rules and you have become part of his kingdom. When we pray this petition, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. I choose to translate it in earth as it is in heaven because of the teaching of scripture elsewhere that teaches we are earthen vessels.

Within our earthen vessels, we have a great treasure. We have the Christ who is God and he lives in us and Christ in our heart is our only hope of doing his will. I believe that teaching, which is found especially in second Corinthians chapter four and five, I think that parallels this teaching with this petition, your kingdom come, your will be done in my earthen vessel as it is done in heaven.

Then having prayed the providential petitions, we can pray the personal petitions. Give us this day our daily bread. Notice the emphasis upon this day and daily.

Addicts like alcoholics or drug addicts who are recovering tell us as they cope with their addiction and then found victory over their addiction, they realized this was such an important concept to them. They could not entertain the thought of being sober for a year and so they were taught to simply ask God to keep them sober for today, only one day at a time. Well, that's the emphasis in this prayer.

Give us this day our daily bread. This represents, as we said, not only our bread, our physical sustenance, but all the things we need. We are a grand central station of needs.

We need love. We need acceptance. We need approval and we need so many other things besides bread.

And I think this term bread encompasses all the things we need. So the petition is, give us this day our daily bread and then forgive us. Oh, how we need forgiveness if we understand the gospel of the Bible.

The Bible tells us from Genesis to Revelation that we are sinners. That is our big problem. A dog barks because it's a dog.

We sin because we are sinners. Because we are sinners and because we sin, because we have a sin nature and because we commit acts of sin, we always need to pray, forgive us. I believe the Lord meant for us to pray this way at least every day.

Frankly, I think he meant all day, every day. And this is the way we should pray. Forgive us.

Now notice that Jesus uses the word debts. When this prayer is prayed in worship services, very often it is prayed, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespassed against us. Again, the two places this teaching is found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, it is never said that way in the scriptures.

In both places, it's debts and debtors. So it is correct then when we pray in public worship services to pray, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. The next petition is lead us not into temptation.

The first chapter of James says God is not tempted with evil, neither does he tempt any man. Don't say when you are tempted, you're being tempted of God. Why then would we address God and say, lead us not into temptation? I personally feel that there should be a break between the word us and the word not in verse 13 of Matthew chapter six.

It should be prayed this way. Lead us not into temptation. I believe that if God is leading us, we will not find ourselves confronting temptation.

Notice the Bible's practical teaching about temptation. It is consistently something like this. You're not a pillar of strength.

So don't get yourself into all kinds of temptation and then ask God to provide a way of escape. Many people misunderstand first Corinthians 10 13. At this point, no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.

Remember that verse, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape. Now read the next verse there in first Corinthians chapter 10. Do you know what the next verse says? Therefore, flee is what it says.

The Bible is always saying to us, you are not a pillar of strength. You should pray every day that you not be tempted. When Jesus was praying in the garden and tried to get the apostles to pray with him, remember he couldn't even get them to stay awake for an hour.

He was having an all night prayer vigil. And as he found them asleep, he said to them on more than one occasion, you should be up praying that you enter not into temptation. If you only knew what the temptations are and how strong they are, you would pray this way all the time.

Lead us not into temptation. I believe it is the will of God that we avoid the confrontations of temptation in recognizing and confessing our weaknesses. I believe we should build fences to protect ourselves from temptation, even thick concrete walls to protect ourselves from temptation.

As we saw in chapter five, when Jesus talked about, if your eye is causing you to sin, pluck it out. If your hand is causing you to sin, cut it off. And in another place, he said, if your foot is causing you to sin, cut it off.

We said that what he was saying there was whatever it is that is leading you to the temptation, what you're seeing with your eye, what you're doing with your hand, where you're going with your feet. If these things are leading you to sin, then don't look. Don't do these things with your hand.

Don't go to places where you're going to be tempted. Perhaps that is the sense in which the final petition should be understood. Deliver us from evil.

How does God deliver us from evil? Well, of course, it's through the power of the Holy Spirit. He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. But there are some practical things about God's deliverance.

Perhaps his formula for deliverance from sin and the temptation to sin is found right here. God, if you are leading us, then we will not find ourselves being tempted. And in that way, you will deliver us from evil or from the evil one, as some translations have it.

Well, there you have seven petitions which form a manner of prayer. Pray after this manner, Father in heaven, your name, your kingdom, your will, and then give us, forgive us, lead us, deliver us. And then finally conclude by praying this way.

The glory will always go to you because the power will always come from you. And so the result will always go to you. Yours is the kingdom.

That is the way we conclude our prayer when we are praying in the manner taught by our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you until next time. Our prayer is that you will be more committed and available to be used by God as a faithful disciple and to be a blessing to your family, community, and church.

Now until we meet next time, may our God who gives encouragement and peace give you his spirit of courage as you follow Christ Jesus so that all you say and do will glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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