

Norris Ferry Community Church
Matthew 6:7-15 Prayer
December 31, 2017

Intro

Happy New Year! Today is New Year's Eve and it is that time of year many people make new year's resolutions. I have one I hope all of us will make today. I would like to encourage all of us to make a resolution to pray more authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayers in 2018. I think most of us would almost always say we would like a better prayer life so this is a great resolution and this is why I decided to teach on prayer this morning.

Let us begin with a test to see something. Join with me if you can. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy 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, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen."

Ok, that's what I thought. Most of us have some version of the Lord's prayer memorized. I would guess it is the most popular prayer ever. That is what we are going to look at today.

Review - hypocrites motive in prayer

We've been jumping around in the sermon on the mount over the last month with the holidays so let me review where the Lord's prayer is in the sermon on the mount. It comes in Matthew 6 right after Jesus said this.

Matt. 6:5 "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. So before Jesus gives us the

model prayer Jesus was teaching us not to pray like the hypocrites who pray in order to be heard and seen by others in order to receive glory for themselves, in hopes that people will think they are religious and righteous. They wanted to look like they were praising God when in fact they were only trying to bring praise upon themselves - don't be a hypocrite when you pray. Instead, Jesus says we are to pray with an authentic and sincere desire to meet with our heavenly Father. The issue dealt with was our motive in prayer.

Today - don't pray like unbelieving Gentiles

Today, Jesus teaches us more on prayer only now he is teaching us not to pray like the unbelieving Gentiles pray. Look at v7-9.

Matt. 6:7 “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:

A model prayer to help

Now Jesus tells us not to pray like the unbelieving Gentiles who were heaping up empty phrases (probably loudly) thinking that their gods would hear them because of their many words. Kind of like badgering their god to do something. Instead, our prayers are to be thoughtful and meaningful. So when we consider the contrast with the hypocrites and the unbelieving Gentiles we see that the Lord gives us this model prayer to help have authentic, meaningful, thoughtful prayer.

It is ironic that we turn the Lord's prayer into a heap of empty phrases

What's interesting though is that many people take the Lord's prayer and turn it into empty phrases - which is exactly what the Lord was trying to teach us not to do. We've already shown most of us can recite it without any practice or warning. But Jesus didn't give us the prayer to memorize and recite mindlessly. In v9 Jesus didn't say Pray this...Our Father. Jesus

said **9 Pray then like this...** The Lord's prayer is a model prayer, a sample prayer, pattern or outline which is designed to help us have authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayer.

Pray - Lord, help us to have authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayer in 2018.

Transition - ok, let's work through the prayer line by line looking for principles and patterns to help us have authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayer in 2018.

v9 "Our Father in heaven,

The first thing we notice is that Jesus says we are to pray to our **Father** in heaven. And in the previous verse, v8 Jesus said, **8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.** So the first key to authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayer is your view of the God to whom you pray. Your approach to prayer will be drastically affected by your view of the God to whom you pray. Here we see the Lord teaches us that we are praying to our father in heaven. The basis of our approach in prayer is our personal relationship with God as our heavenly father which we enjoy by faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that by faith in Jesus we approach the Father with bold innocence, having been cleansed of sin and declared righteous by His Son Jesus. The Scriptures teach us that those who trust in Jesus Christ are adopted and made sons of God. The Son of God makes us sons of God. We are part of His family and God is our loving Father (Cf Ro 8:15ff). Prayer is personal communication with your heavenly father.

Transition - Let's take a minute to think about a three attributes of our Heavenly Father which should help us have authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayer. Let's consider His Love, His Omniscience, and His Power.

His Love

Since we are praying to our heavenly father we are assured that we are loved perfectly by Him. We must know that God loves us perfectly and unconditionally in Christ and that God loves to spend time with us just like I love to spend time with my children.

Illustration - My children are older now and I can not tell you how much joy and how much Danna and I love love love spending time with our two girls. So much it is painful. We have overflowing joy and love this Christmas season with them.

This is how our heavenly father feels about spending time with us - only so much more. His love is perfect love. It's not tainted with sin. When we pray to God we are not coming to a God who is some mean spirited tyrant who doesn't want to be bothered, or an irresponsible father, or a jerk father, or a selfish father; instead, we are coming to our perfectly loving Father who overflows with infinite joy in being with us and hearing from us and answering us and spending time with us. We approach God in prayer as the perfectly Father who has perfect love for us.

His Omniscience

In v8 we also see God's Omniscience. Jesus says, "**for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**" God is Omniscient, which means that he has complete of all things at all times (or Grudem would say, God fully knows himself and all things actual and possible in one simple and eternal act). Here Jesus says that when we approach God we can approach Him with the understanding that He already knows what you need before you ask him. This is a profound truth to consider. I think it is so interesting that Jesus would bring this point up. If you are teaching someone to pray why do you tell them that God already knows what you need before you ask! Thinking about that profoundly impacts our understanding of this prayer as you will see.

This means we don't have to carry the burden of filling him in

First of all, isn't it a really good thing that God is omniscient?! It may disturb us a bit at first but it really is a good thing if we think about it. I am glad to know that God's grasp of my matter of prayer doesn't depend on my ability to think of what to say and how to say it. What if I don't think of something? What if I don't say it just right? What if I get something wrong or forget something? What if I don't know what I need in a situation or if I have misunderstood or misdiagnosed the problem? I can see how I would certainly be heaping up a lot of words if God is not omniscient. If God didn't already know everything then I would go on babbling and babbling and praying and praying and stressing out over the need to get it all out on the table to help God figure it all out. But Jesus says, God already knows what you need before you ask him.

Why pray - because that's what children naturally do

This raises the question, "Why pray then if God already knows what you need." Well, this obviously indicates that there is some reason for prayer other than just catching God up on the situation. R. T. France say "We pray because prayer is the natural expression of the relationship of trust we have with God as 'Father' (R. T. France p.241)." So we are not praying to fill God in on things. We are praying because it is what children naturally do in a trusting relationship with a loving father. Prayer should be authentic, thoughtful meaningful conversations with God.

Finally, we should consider God's power.

His Power - humility, reverence and awe

In v9 we see that God is **our Father in Heaven**. John Stott says this could more literally be translated, "our Father in the heavens" and he says, "*the words 'in the heavens' denote not the place of his abode so much as the authority and power at his command as the creator and ruler of all things. Thus he combines fatherly love with heavenly power, and what his love directs his power is able to perform.*" (Stott p146). It certainly should make

our prayer much more meaningful and thoughtful to know that we are talking to the all-powerful Creator who is able to do whatever His love for us directs his power to do! This also should create within us a sense of humility, reverence and awe as we pray - a humility, reverence and awe that stands alongside the personal loving relationship of child/father.

Summary

So, the primary difference between our approach and the unbelievers approach in prayer is the difference in our view of our God. The more we grasp the fact that our God is our all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful Father who loves to be with us and interact with us and to help us the more authentic, thoughtful and meaningful our prayer will be.

Transition

Now let's look at the content of the prayer. We can break the content into two parts and the order is important. First, we see the prayer starts with what concerns God and then we pray for that which concerns us.

In verses 9-10 we see the prayer begins with three concerns of God.

9b hallowed be your name.

**10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done**

These three phrases are all in the indicative mood which makes them come across as praise petitions. So we begin our prayer time with praise and worship. Also notice that three are concerns of God which the Scriptures say are things God has promised to do and is already doing. God is glorious and God is passionately committed to hallow his own name. God is passionately committed to the establishment of his kingdom which was inaugurated with the first coming of Christ and will be fully consummated when Christ returns. And as God grows his kingdom on earth he is bringing about his will on earth as it is in heaven until one day when Jesus returns to eradicate sin and establish God's final kingdom on earth His will

will be fully done on earth as it is in heaven. So all three of these concerns are the concerns of God and are guaranteed promises of God. So what we see then is that this first part of the prayer is a time of praise and petitions for the concerns of God which God has promised He will do and is passionately committed to doing. ***So what we learn from this is that to a large extent praying like this serves to reorient our hearts and minds toward the concerns of God. Daily prayer, beginning with a time of praise petitions for God's glory, God's rule and God's will is a very important time of reorienting our own hearts and minds toward the concerns of God.***

Transition - Let's look at the content line by line

9 Hallowed be your name

To “*hallow*” is to treat as holy and in Hebrew the name of God stands for God himself. So when we pray, **hallowed by your name**, we are praising God for His glory. We are recognizing God's holiness. *We should begin our time of prayer each day honestly and sincerely honoring God for who He is and expressing our hearts desire to see God treated as holy by more and more people. We can do this by praying through the various attributes of God or praying through various psalms. However we do it we should begin with praising God for his glory and reorienting our own hearts toward his glory.*

10 Your kingdom come

Next we see we are to be concerned with the coming of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is the rule of God. When Jesus came he announced that he was ushering in a new era of God's kingly rule. Whoever trusts in and submits to Jesus as king is a member of God's kingdom. *So when we pray that God's kingdom will come we are praying that more and more people will come to faith and submit to king Jesus through our witness and through the witness of the church and we are reorienting our own hearts and minds, bringing them under submission of the reign and rule of God*

and we are reinvigorating our hope and confidence in the return of Christ who will one day finally establish God's kingdom on this earth.

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

On a related note we pray that God's perfect will be done on earth more and more like it is done in heaven. So when we praise and petition God for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven we are aligning ourselves with God's plan to bring our lives into submission to his revealed will in the Bible and we are reminded to evangelize and disciple others so that God's will is increasing done as lives are being transformed.

Summary - Reorientation, Realigning

So, the main point I want you to see in this first half of the prayer is that it is a time of reorienting or realigning our own hearts and minds toward the concerns of God: His name, His rule, and His purposes. We need to do this each and every day because each and every day we are tempted to become obsessed with our own names, our own rule and our own purposes. So for 2018, let's commit to beginning each and every day with a time of sincere, prayerful worship and petitions of God for the things that concern him - His name, His rule, and His purposes.

Transition - finally we see the second half of prayer has to do with making petitions to God for all our needs. After reorienting and realigning our hearts to God's concerns we are ready to make personal petitions for our concerns. In this model prayer we basically see three petitions.

- 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.

Covers all our concerns - material, spiritual and moral - remember we desperately need God

Notice how the grammar has changed from “your” to “our”. Now the focus changes from God’s concerns to our concerns. It is right and good to bring our concerns to our heavenly father but it should be done AFTER we have reoriented our hearts and minds toward God and his concerns. These three concerns cover all our human needs: our material needs (daily bread), our spiritual needs (forgiveness), and our moral needs (deliver us from evil). The point we need to see here is that God wants us to bring all of our needs to him in prayer. Each and every day we need to humbly recognize and remember our desperate need for God to provide our physically, spiritually and morally.

11 Give us this day our daily bread

When we pray give us this day our daily bread we need to notice the focus is on *today*, our immediate needs - indicated by “**this day**” and “**daily**” bread. This is a prayer for God to provide food and water and other physical or material needs for that day. *Now God, our loving heavenly father, promises to provide for us every day he has planned for us to live on this earth. So when we pray we are not praying as if it is in doubt; rather, we are acknowledging our complete dependence upon God to provide our needs each and every day. We get up and go to work to provide for our families or we stay home and provide for our kids each and every day so each and every day we must reorient our hearts and minds to remember that ultimately we are desperately depending upon God to provide for our needs. This portion of the prayer is a great reminder of daily dependence upon God all things physical.*

12 Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors

When we pray “**forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors**”, we are reorienting our thoughts about sin and forgiveness. If we go down to vv14-15 we read, “**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.” *This does not mean that God is waiting for us to forgive others before he forgives us; instead, it means that the person God has forgiven will also be a forgiving person.* When we have truly been forgiven by God’s grace through Jesus Christ we know that our huge sin debt has been forgiven by God so we certainly need to be willing to forgive others when they sin against us. We need to be reminded of this each and every day for we tend to become overly offended by others sin against us and our heart tends to harden and grow bitter and hold grudges. Jesus instructs us to remember daily that we are to forgive as we have been forgiven. It is a reorientation of our hearts and minds about our own need to forgive others.

13 And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

In this final petition we are reorienting our hearts and minds regarding temptation and evil. In the Scriptures we learn that God never tempts us or leads us to do evil and we also learn that God uses trials and temptations for good. *Scholars explain that what this prayer really means is that we are praying that God will not let us be overcome by the temptation or the evil one. So once again this is a reminder of our complete and utter dependence upon God in our battle against sin.* Each and every day we must ask God to help us in our spiritual battle against the the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Conclusion

So what we see in the Lord’s prayer is that God wants us to come to him and relate with Him as a dependent child does his or her father. Prayer is the be personal, authentic, thoughtful and meaningful. We come to our loving father who is the all loving, all knowing, all powerful father. We begin by praising him and worshiping him and reorienting our hearts toward his concerns: his name, his rule and his purposes. Then we talk to him about our concerns: our material needs, our spiritual needs and our moral needs; all of which serves as a daily reminder of our desperate need for our all loving, all knowing and all powerful father to help us.

I hope this helps us pray much more authentic, thoughtful, meaningful prayers in 2018.