



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 6.5-15 | May 28, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series *They Will Know Us by Our Fruit*, looking at the eight marks of discipleship we are aiming for as a church, as we invite all people into a Christ-centered life in God's family. Today we'll examine the fruit of Praying Earnestly.

II. Connecting with One Another

What is your first memory of prayer as a child? What is one way of praying that you find meaningful today?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Matthew 6.5-8. Jesus assumes his followers will pray, but in these verses he tells them how *not* to pray. What instructions does he give?
- b. In the non-Jewish world there existed many formulas with long, complicated "magic" words that were to be repeated over and over to persuade some god or goddess to be favorable.

Do we today pray "to be seen by others"? What "reward" do we receive? How might we "babble" our prayers? Apply the criticisms of Jesus to the church today.
- c. What are the benefits of the instructions Jesus gives in verse 6? What "rewards" from God might be experienced as a result of approaching prayer in this way?
- d. The "babbling" of verse 7 can also apply to lengthy, over-verbose prayers. Jesus reminds us that God already intimately knows us and our needs (verse 8). How can this reminder inform the way in which we pray?
- e. Read Matthew 6.9-13. In contrast to the complicated, ritualistic formulas, and unfocused "babbling" Jesus provides a framework for prayer. What are the key elements in the structure he provides?
- f. What do the first half (vv. 9-10) and the second half (vv. 11-13) of the prayer focus upon? What does this tell us about how we should pray?
- g. What does it mean to you to address God, the infinite creator and ruler of the cosmos as "Father"? What does it suggest about our relationship with God? What does it mean to "hallow" God's name?
- h. In verse 10 we ask that the sovereign and saving rule of God would be birthed "on earth as it is in heaven." We pray for the glory and beauty of heaven to be turned into earthly reality. What role does the Church have in that?
- i. The first half of this framework for prayer that Jesus presents (vv. 9-10) are all about God. Is it important to start our prayers with a focus on God? Why? What can happen if we don't?
- j. The second half of the prayer focuses on us. Because the God we address is a loving "Father" we can be confident to approach with our needs. William Barclay writes this:

[The second half of the prayer] deals with the three essential needs of man, and the three spheres of time within which man moves. First, it asks for bread, for that which is necessary for the maintenance of life, and thereby brings the needs of the present to the throne of God. Second, it asks for forgiveness and thereby brings the past into the presence of God. Third, it asks for help in temptation and thereby commits all the future into the hands of God. In these three brief petitions, we are taught to lay the present, the past, and the future before the footstool of the grace of God.

Which of these—past, present, or future—is most difficult for you to lay at God’s feet in prayer? Which is easiest?

- k. That the need for forgiveness is built into this framework of prayer is a reminder of our human brokenness. We will sin, hurting others and ourselves on a regular basis. Forgiveness is freely ours, but there is a condition. N.T. Wright explains:

We ourselves must be forgiving people. Jesus takes an extra moment afterwards to explain why (vv.14-15). The heart that will not open to forgive others will remain closed when God’s own forgiveness is offered.

How readily do you forgive others when they hurt you? Do you sense a connection between your forgiveness of others and your own ability to receive God’s grace?

IV. Reflecting on Praying Earnestly

- a. One definition of prayer is “loving attention to God”. Prayer is at least as much about listening to God as it is about speaking to God. How does this impact your thinking about prayer?
- b. I Thessalonians 5.17-18: *Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* These verses indicate that there is more to prayer than a dedicated “quiet time”, important as that is. How can we integrate prayer *into* our busy lives—prayer in the midst of life, not in spite of life? How can we attempt to “pray without ceasing”?
- c. C.S. Lewis wrote: *I must often be glad that certain past prayers of my own were not granted.* What do you think he is trying to say? What does this say about our knowledge of what is best versus God’s knowledge? How might this influence the requests we make of God in prayer?

V. Prayer Ideas

- a. Prayer Walks. Slow, contemplative walks are good for noticing creation around you and turning your heart to God. Write a verse on a piece of paper to meditate upon as you walk. (Note: fast walks are good for intercessory prayer)
- b. Breath Prayer. Find a phrase to say in your mind while breathing. Perhaps as you inhale: “More of You” and as your exhale: “Less of me”. This can be done throughout the day, orienting your attention toward God.
- c. Gathering, Holding, Blessing, Releasing. This is an imaginative prayer. For each person or situation that you are concerned about 1) Gather them in 2) Hold them close 3) Bless them in the name of Jesus 4) Release them to God’s care.
- d. Prayer Triggers. Wear a bracelet, keep a cross in your pocket, put a sticky note on your bathroom mirror or steering wheel of your car. Give each trigger a prayer focus. When you notice a trigger pray for that focus.
- e. Daily Examen. From St. Ignatius, often used before going to bed. 1) Become aware of God’s presence with you 2) Review your day with gratitude, paying attention to the emotions you experienced, positive and negative. Consider your feelings. Are they indicative of bigger issues in your life? 3) Pick one or two strong feeling from the day and pray from them. Did these feelings draw you closer to God or not? Made you feel more whole, alive and generous, or more anxious, fearful and self-centered? Did they hurt or build up relationships? 5) Look toward tomorrow. How do you feel about the day? Why? Pray on these feelings as well.

VI. Pray

- a. Using the model Jesus gives in Matthew 6.9-13, use your own words to connect with your Father in heaven. If you are in a small group, take five minutes to do this exercise on your own. Close your time by praying together the Lord’s Prayer.