

Praying for Performance

Matthew 6:5-15
Doug Roman, Bible Baptist Church
Sunday AM, March 6, 2015
Part 3
Sermon Summary

Introduction

One theologian was stunned by the comprehensiveness of our Lord's model prayer. He likened the various facets of this prayer to colors of the spectrum into which light divides when it shines through a prism. The whole light of life is captured in the rainbow of these petitions, taking into account every need. "Great things and small things; spiritual things and material things, inward things and outward things—there is nothing that is not included in this prayer" (Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, 181).

Big Idea

Followers of Jesus pray to commune with God not to perform for others.

Exposition

Jesus offers a caution in v. 1. He goes on to illustrate it with giving (vv. 2-4), prayer (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18). We have already looked at the example of giving. We will take on final look at the example of praying. Remember that the sermon on the mount has 5:20 as a constant reference point. We will look at this prayer from four angles.

1. The expectation of prayer (v. 5, 6, 7) "when you pray"
Notice Jesus says "when" not "if." Christians pray: it's what they do.
2. The focus of prayer, (vv. 5-8) "when you pray...pray to your Father..." Prayer is communion with our Heavenly Father. It is warm. It is personal. It is relational. It is engaged. It is not disconnected. It is not loquacious or wordy. The NIV renders the first part of v. 7 this way, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans." It is not a matter of quantity ("for their many words") but quality. It is not wrong to use the same words provided that they are not mindlessly uttered. A few genuine words are worth more than prolonged insincere eloquence.

"Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (v. 8). If God knows what we need before we pray, why should we ask? Instead of taking this statement as a cold act of omniscience, we should see it as a warm act of personal interest. The God of Heaven known *your* needs. Like a parent knows what his child needs, the parent rejoices in hearing the child entrust him with her desires and wants and concerns.

3. The content of prayer, "Pray like this..." (vv. 9-13).
Learning to pray is a matter of discipleship (Luke 11:1). Martin Luther wrote a letter to his barber, Peter Beskendorf, in the Spring of 1535 when Peter asked Martin Luther about how to pray. It is titled "A Simple Way to Pray." What are the main characteristics of the Lord's Prayer that we can use in formulating our own prayers?
 - A. Relationship and Honor (v. 9a)
 - 1) "Our Father..." This describes our relationship to Him. God is an ever present Father who leads and disciplines; He loves faithfully and perfectly.

- 2) "...in heaven" This points us to the honor due our Father. The reference to God's dwelling in heaven is a reference to His transcendence, which means that God is in a category all by Himself, He is "wholly other." So don't think of this in terms of space but in terms of majesty. This transcendent God is *our* Father.

Prayer principle: Christian prayer reflects our filial (son/daughter) relationship with God who is wholly other and thus demands our honor.

B. Adoration (v. 9b)

- 1) "Hallowed be your name." The name of God is not comprised of the letters as it stands for the person who bears the name (Stott, 147). So this is a hallowing of or reverence for God's name, that is, His person.

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer expresses adoration toward God.

C. Sovereignty and Purposes (v. 10)

- 1) "Your kingdom come..." (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). This is God's sovereign rule. In a general sense, it refers to the rule of God. In a specific sense, it refers to the future earthly reign of God through His Son. This part of the Lord's Prayer answers the worldview question of destiny: where are we headed? When we become convinced of this, it changes everything (cf. 2 Peter 3:8-13). When we pray the Lord's prayer thoughtfully and intelligently, we commit to aligning our lives with this divine trajectory of history (cf. Carson, 170-1).

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer anticipates the future reign of God in the world.

- 2) "...your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Psalm 103:20-21; Daniel 4:35). This is the certain outworking of God's purposes. While God's will is done in the realm of heaven, the animal kingdom, and the natural world, God's will is not yet perfectly done in the hearts of men and women. We earnestly pray for God's kingdom to come, even if we will only experience foretastes for now.

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer is a humble commitment to the rule and purposes of God over our lives and all of history.

D. Dependence (v. 11)

"Give us this day our daily bread." This is an expression of dependence. The historical setting of Jesus' listeners is the worker who received daily wages (cf. Matthew 20:8). Compensation benefits such as PTO, disability, unemployment, and matching 401ks were not even on the radar. One's inability to work would be costly; extended illness could be catastrophic. The reference to bread is best understood as a reference to material needs that sustain human life (cf. Lloyd-Jones, 70). This is an urgent prayer for God to meet our daily physical needs.

George Mueller (1805-1898) founded an orphanage in Bristol, England that cared for over 10,000 orphans in his lifetime. In addition, he started 117 schools which offered education to over 120,000 poor children. Mueller was a great believer in prayer. Actually, Mueller didn't just believe in prayer, he actually prayed. And, after starting his orphanage, Mueller never asked anyone but God for financial support.

One morning before breakfast Mueller was informed that there was no food, nothing to feed the children that morning. Unfazed, Mueller asked that the children be assembled

and seated at the table in their usual places with the table fully set as though they were going to eat.

When all the children were assembled and seated, George Mueller asked them to bow their heads and began to thank God for their food for that day. As he prayed, the local baker knocked on the orphanage door. He had brought with him enough bread to feed the children that day. When George Mueller prayed for his daily bread, that's exactly what he got ([source](#))!

This is a prayer for needs, not greeds (Carson, 171); for necessities—bread, not dessert (Hughes, 182). As wealthy people (and comparatively speaking with the rest of the world we are wealthy), we have packaged the desserts with the bread; we have incorporated our greeds under our needs. Our first-world abundance has fleshed out the wisdom of Proverbs 30:9, when we are bellies are full we deny God and say, “Who is the Lord?” When is the last time you prayed dependently for physical provision? Let's take it one step further. When is the last time you prayed for spiritual provision? Are you dependent? Dependent people pray. Dependent churches pray. Are we a dependent church? It is seen most vividly in our prayer.

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer is a protest against independence and an expression of absolute dependence on God.

E. Forgiveness (v. 12)

Let's look at the prayer for forgiveness and the link between the forgiveness we receive and the forgiveness we extend.

- 1) “Forgive us our debts...” This is the forgiveness we receive. The meaning of the word here takes its lead from the literal meaning of the word found in Romans 4:4. In Romans 4:4, it means “that which is owed in a financial sense.” Here it means “obligation in a moral sense” (BDAG, 743). It is “the moral debt incurred as the result of sin” (LN, §88.299). We ask God to forgive our moral indebtedness to Him. Why? Because we do not have enough moral capital to pay off this debt. This prayer presupposes sin as part of the Christian's experience. Sins of commission (the vices we actively commit) and sins of omission (the virtues we omit; James 4:17) are part of our minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour part of our existence. The word “debts” is plural. We sin multiple times a day. Repentance and confession is an essential part of the Christian life.
- 2) “...as we have forgiven our debtors” This is the forgiveness we extend. “As we also have forgiven our debtors” It assumes that we have forgiven those who are our debtors. The Amplified Bible added this, “[letting go of both the wrong and the resentment].” The ability to forgive requires a right perspective. “Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offence against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offences of others, it proves that we have minimized our own” (Stott, 149-50). There is no sin, not one, that someone has committed against you for which you cannot forgive them.

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer is sets before us our desperate need of forgiveness and the extension of forgiveness to others.

F. Protection and Perseverance (v. 13)

This final part of the Lord's Prayer is a petition for protection from trials and perseverance through trials.

- 1) Protection from trials. The Greek word translated “temptation” is found 21 times in the Greek New Testament (ECGNT, §4280). It can mean temptation in the sense of an enticement to sin or trial in the sense of testing to prove character. We are told in James 1:13 that God does not tempt with evil. So should we pray something that will not happen? The meaning of trial to prove character then is probably the better option (as in 1 Peter 4:12). Our prayer then is to have God protect us from trials. I am not aware of any prayers in the Bible where an individual asked for trials. Indeed, we find the very Son of God asking to be delivered from His trial, if it was the Father’s will (Matthew 26:39).
- 2) Protection through trials. This aspect of the prayer focuses on God’s hedging us from the wiles and ways of the evil one against us. “Evil” can be rendered “the Evil One.” That is, the Devil. If this is the case, the prayer is directed to protection against the Devil’s temptation. James 4:7 says, “...resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” But the reality is that this is spiritual warfare and we fight with the strength that God provides.

Prayer Principle: Christian prayer beseeches God for protection from trials and perseverance through trials.

4. The application of prayer, (vv. 14-15).
Prayer is not some act that is unrelated to life or merely a religious duty that has no bearing on our day to day interactions. Prayer has a way of drawing out of us what we pray for. Forgiveness is one example. Christian mission is another example (Matthew 9:37-38). God’s forgiveness is somehow connected to our forgiveness of others. One who is truly repentant expresses that repentance to others. God does not withhold salvation but He will deal with us as we have dealt with others. The parable of the unforgiving servant corroborates this (Matthew 18:21-35). This is prayer in practice. Words are cheap. Prayer put in practice is powerful and an indication that a work of grace is at work in our hearts.

Conclusion

The *Didache* is an early Christian instruction manual. It is attributed to the twelve apostles, though it is not certain that they wrote it. Its origin goes back to the first century. It gives us a glimpse into discipleship in the early church. The document instructs follower of Jesus to pray the Lord’s Prayer three times a day. Three times a day? Remember when you were first dating your spouse. You could talk and talk and talk for hours. But as time passes hours turn into minutes and minutes into seconds. There is a parallel to this Christian life. As a young Christian very little may have obstructed your prayer. Now it seems that everything obstructs your prayer time. This is a beloved prayer and I hope we have seen how rich it is over these last three weeks. If we can pray it intelligently, devotionally, and sincerely then we ought to pray it often. At the same time, we have seen that we can discern prayer principles that allow us to form our own heart utterances to God. This is, it seems to me, what Jesus intended. Will you accept the invitation to pray?

Discussion Questions

1. If prayer is a matter of discipleship (cf. Luke 11:1), how would you teach someone to pray?
2. What are the benefits of regularly praying the Lord’s Prayer? What are the dangers of regularly praying the Lord’s Prayer?
3. Does Matthew 6:8 implicitly prohibit public prayer? Why or why not? Support your answer.
4. Read Matthew 6:8. If God knows what we need, why should we pray?
5. What does it mean to pray “your kingdom come”?
6. How does the forgiveness of God toward us inform our forgiveness toward others? Share a quality of God’s forgiveness and/or a verse (Psalm 103:12; John 19:30; Ephesians 1:17; 4:32; Colossians 1:14; 2:14).
7. How can you use the Lord’s Prayer to guide your prayer life?