

The Praying That God Rewards

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Bible Verse: Matthew 6:5-8
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For our time in Scripture this evening, I invite you to turn to Matthew chapter 6 verses 5 through 8, which is a very foundational text of instruction to us in the matter of right praying, and on Sunday I hope to preach a message titled "Unpretentious Praying," simple praying, which is what the Lord teaches and what he calls us to. There is no doubt in my mind that much of the teaching that we've been accustomed to on prayer over the years and the decades have had a wrong focus in terms of teaching us about prayer lists, teaching us about how long you need to pray, and a bunch of other superficial things. What you're going to find when you look carefully at the spirit of what Jesus teaches about prayer, it leads us in an entirely different direction than what most of us are used to, or what most of us were trained on, you might say. So let's look at verses 5 through 8, which will function as a bit of an introduction into the Lord's Prayer in verses 9 through 15 that follows, 9 through 13. For tonight, we look at verses 5 through 8. Jesus said,

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. 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.

Now, in verses 1 through 18 of Matthew 6, the primary thing that Jesus is teaching us, what he's commanding us, is to don't be a hypocrite. Saying, don't be a hypocrite. You can see that in verse 2, for example, he says, "sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues." He said, "Don't be like the hypocrites." Verse 5, "when you pray, don't be like the hypocrites." Verse 16, "when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites." And so this first half of Matthew 6 is primarily teaching against hypocrisy and how to make a right practice of righteousness before God, how to walk with God in a way that is pleasing to him, and so that's the primary teaching that he is doing here. In verses 9 through 13, maybe on to 15, you could say, he kind of does a parenthesis to give specific instruction on praying, which we all need, but that's kind of an aside to the primary thing that he's teaching about, don't be a hypocrite. And that would make perfect sense with the way the Sermon on the Mount opened as it talked in

the Beatitudes about many different kinds of heart attitudes and he goes on and he talks about heart matters in chapter 5 verses 21 through 48, and so Jesus is getting at our hearts here in what he says. So the last possible thing that he would be doing would be prescribing certain outward forms of prayer that rather tend to take up our preoccupation and our desire to perform and rather than to enter into the heart spirit of the teaching of Christ.

So Jesus is ultimately going to be teaching us about simple, unpretentious praying in the things that follows and James Montgomery Boice, in his work on the Sermon on the Mount, tells a story, I've told it before, I'll tell it again. He tells the following story to illustrate the point that that Christ is making here in this text that's before us here today, verses 5 through 8. So I'm going to quote at length on the story, because I can't retell it in the same eloquence with which Boice told it originally. He says, "George Whitefield, the Calvinistic evangelist, and John Wesley, the Arminian evangelist, were preaching together in the daytime and rooming together in the same boarding house each night. One evening after a particularly strenuous day, the two of them returned to the boarding house exhausted, and prepared for bed. When they were ready, each knelt beside the bed to pray. Whitefield, the Calvinist," Calvinism, of course, that which exalts the sovereignty of God, "Whitfield, the Calvinist, prayed like this," and he quotes, "Lord, we thank thee for all of those with whom we spoke today, and we rejoice that their lives and destinies are entirely in your hand. Honor our efforts according to thy perfect will. Amen." So Whitfield is ready for bed. He'd prayed and was ready for bed. So the story goes on, Whitfield "rose from his knees and got into bed. Wesley, who had hardly gotten past the invocation of his prayer in this length of time, looked up from his side of the bed and said, 'Mr. Whitefield, is this where your Calvinism leads you?'" Implying, "How can you pray so briefly? Is that what your Calvinism does for you?" Then Wesley "put his head down and went on praying. Whitefield stayed in bed and went to sleep. About two hours later Whitefield woke up, and there was Wesley still on his knees beside the bed. Whitefield got up and went around the bed to where Wesley was kneeling. He found Wesley asleep. He shook him by the shoulder and said to him, 'Mr. Wesley, is this where your Arminianism leads you?'" End of story. The desire for pretension and rebuking a man of simple prayer led to the embarrassing situation that he had fallen asleep while he was praying. What does that kind of praying mean and what's the significance of it if you can fall asleep in the middle of it? Why not admit the fatigue and get on with your rest?

And so there's a priority of simple, unpretentious praying that we're wanting to direct you to and I just want to lay all of my thoughts out on the table to begin with here, is that I am not a fan of prescribing set times at which people have to pray, set amounts of time for which people must pray. You're never going to hear me tell someone that you need to get up at 5 a.m. and pray for an hour or you're not really praying. I'm not a great fan of prayer lists even, if they are just slavishly held to and there's just a lot of repetition day after day of the same things over and over again; I think we'll see from the text that that's not the direction that Jesus points us into. All of those outward things are a substitute, and a poor substitute at that, for the reality of prayer that Christ is going to teach us in the Lord's Prayer. And even the Lord's Prayer, as at the risk of getting ahead of myself here, even the Lord's Prayer was not meant to be something that was recited in a rote manner as the

full fulfillment of our duties in prayer. It's not like that at all. There are themes in the Lord's Prayer that we learn from, and as you study it more deeply and as you meditate on it over years and even decades, you start to see things in the Lord's Prayer that come out that are really dealing with heart matters, heart issues, and I'm going to borrow a bit from my Sunday message to just point this out to you so that you can kind of see the spirit in which things are going.

What's the Lord's Prayer teaching us? There's six things that it's teaching us, and I'm not talking about the specific six requests that are taught in it. There are heart attitudes consistent with the hard attitudes of the Beatitudes, and the heart attitudes of the last half of Matthew 5, the heart attitudes in the first 18 verses of chapter 6 that the Lord is teaching us, and these things are evident when they're simply pointed out to you with the words that Jesus teaches us. What does true prayer look like? What does unpretentious praying look like? Well, first of all, there's a matter of trust. Trust in God. Verse 9, Jesus says, "Pray like this, 'Our Father.'" Our Father. It's a term of endearment, a term of faith, a term of trust, indicating that I am approaching a God that I have confidence in. I have confidence in God as my Father that he will deal with me in a kind, fatherly, wise way, and I trust him as I come into him. Trust being the first key heart attitude that marks true prayer.

Secondly, true prayer is marked by reverence. By reverence. "Hallowed be your name. God, I recognize that you are high and lofty above me and even as I worship and adore you as my Father and as I trust you, there is a recognition that you are in heaven and I am on earth. You are great and exalted, I am small and on earth. I reverence you. I fear your name. I ascribe glory to you."

Verse 10, there's a sense of anticipation and looking beyond the present day, looking beyond present life, "Your kingdom come." Anticipation. "Lord, I'm looking forward to a day where Christ returns. I'm looking for the establishment of your kingdom. Here I have no lasting city. I'm seeking the city to come. There's anticipation in this and the whole Bible ends on this note of anticipation at the end of the book of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus." And so there's anticipation built in.

There's a sense of submission to God in true prayer, "Your will be done. Father, I come and I submit to you. I submit to the sovereign way that you are working out your purposes on the earth. And I submit to your moral will, your revealed will. I want to conform myself to what your word requires."

And so as you look at those verses, and I encourage you to put your eyes on verses 9 and 10 there and just see these things, "Our Father," trust, "in heaven, hallowed be your name," reverence, "Your kingdom come," anticipation, submission, "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Go on, fifth principle there, dependence, "Give us this day our daily bread. Lord, I look to you to provide for what I need here on earth in every material aspect. I just look to your hand to supply my need in every physical, material way, give us this day our daily bread, that which is necessary to sustain me." Dependence.

In verses 12 and 13, you could put it under a label of repentance, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Father, I have sinned, forgive me my debts, forgive us our debts. And Father, I am prone to sin again. I am aware of this principle of evil within me. I am aware of the provocation that comes from my flesh and so I ask you to lead me not into temptation, but to deliver me from evil." A spirit of repentance.

And so, assuming that I don't think that I've already exhausted the topic, this is what I intend to talk about on Sunday, it's just this spirit of true prayer, this spirit of trust, of reverence, of anticipation, of submission, of dependence and repentance. All of these things that go into a mature development of the Christian life and of the Christian heart are things that Christ lays out for us in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer. These are the things that matter in prayer. These principles of worship and trust and repentance, those are the things that matter and when you put the true spirit of prayer, the true spirit of unpretentious praying alongside the things that we tend to go toward that are because we want to measure things, "I got through my prayer list today. I prayed for X amount of minutes today. I got up at this time in order to pray today and I successfully posted my picture on Facebook to show that I did." You know, those things become rather ugly by comparison to the real heart attitudes that Christ is teaching us. God is a Spirit. God is an omniscient, omnipresent Spirit, and that's a big part of what's behind the text for us here in verses 5 and 8, and so what God is seeking to cultivate in us through this teaching on prayer is a certain kind of heart that is responding to him in the proper way rather than simply multiplying words and going through outward forms that really do us no good whatsoever. And when you think about the sobriety, the earnestness, the sincerity of those heart attitudes that I described, trust and reverence and anticipation and dependence and repentance and submission, you realize that those are things that you don't put on display for men to see. They're too sacred, they're too holy, they're too private before God in order to just make them a matter of display, and so to make prayer a matter of display could only pervert the true purpose of prayer.

And so what we're going to see here in the text here tonight, verses 5 through 8, I might as well get to the text that I read before the night is over, we just want to consider the motives in prayer and the practice of prayer. The motives in prayer and the practice of prayer. Let's begin in verse 5 with the motives of prayer. Jesus says, "And when you pray." When you pray. Notice that it's a very broad and general description of prayer. He assumes you pray, but he leaves open the details. You know, the time of prayer is of your choosing. The length of prayer is of your choosing. There is a great liberty in this, which is a great contrast to the stifling, suffocating way that some people would try to bind your conscience and say, "If you're going to truly pray, you have to do it in the way that I lay out before you." The teaching of Christ is much different and, beloved, that is perfectly consistent with what we would expect from our Lord. Our Lord said that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." If prayer has become to you a heavy burden, and as one writer put it, I believe it was R.A. Torrey, prayer had become an irksome duty that says, "Oh, I've got to do this again, and I've got to pull out the list again, and I've got to go through this again." If that's at all ever infected the nature of your praying, you can know the spirit of that's not coming from the Lord at all. That's not what the Lord is looking for

at all. He doesn't need your multiplied words. He doesn't want your multiplied words as he makes plain a little later in the text that we'll see this evening.

So he says, when you pray, very broad and very general, and then as he starts to instruct us in prayer, he goes once again to our motives and he tells us what not to do, what not to do, and he tells us do not pray to please men. Just as he said don't give in order to please men, in order to impress men, he says do not pray in an effort to please men. Put men out of your mind. Put any motivation to impress others out of your mind and focus on what Christ says. Verse 5, look at it there with me, "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," that. That word "that," that is the key word in the passage here because Jesus is using that to introduce the motive, the reason why you pray. These hypocrites like to pray in a place, like to pray out loud in a verbal way to call attention to themselves from the men and women around them. Jesus said they love to stand and pray in public places so "that they may be seen by others." They wanted others to see them praying. They wanted the reputation of godliness, they wanted the reputation of being a praying man, but they were indifferent to the reality of it, and when Christ introduces you to the reality of trust and reverence and anticipation and submission and dependence and repentance, you want to disassociate yourself from those false reasons to pray, and your heart is drawn toward pleasing your heavenly Father and praying as he would have you to pray.

As I pointed out on Sunday, and it's true still today, nothing's changed in the past 48 hours, the term hypocrites was used for stage actors, people who were playing a role. They put on a mask and they hid their true identity behind the mask and then they put on a performance for the audience. That's what actors and actresses do. You don't know who they really are behind the scenes. You just know the character that they want to portray. And Jesus says, "We don't need stage actors in the kingdom of God. I don't want," Jesus would say, "I don't want stage actors in the kingdom. They don't have any place in the kingdom. They're not a part of the kingdom. We're looking for the reality, we're looking for earnestness here." And so Jesus is describing a man in verse 5, and if you think about the Orthodox, the Russian or Greek Orthodox, they go through and they have their big long robes and their big hats and all of that, and they just look outwardly like such holy men, just realize that there's this externality that is actually condemned by Christ. The man praying in verse 5 that Jesus describes, he might look godly, he might sound godly, he might have all kinds of pious phrases that far exceed anything that you could say in the simplicity of your humble mind, but his private life is not consistent with the mask he wears before men. He's putting on a show and Jesus wouldn't have you go to that theater to watch a play like that, and he certainly wouldn't have you go and be a part of the theatrics that are being described here.

These men, including the Pharisees, they chose religious gatherings and public streets. so that the most people possible would see them praying. They wanted men to see them. You know, Christ, by contrast, think about it this way, you know, Christ would often get up early in the morning, he'd go away and pray alone with his Father. You know, Christ didn't make a big display of his own devotion, and his would have been totally righteous, his praying would have been perfect praying, but yet he went away. Where Christ was

publicly displayed at the height of his work here on earth was on the cross where he was crucified at a public intersection and many people went by and saw him in disgrace, outwardly speaking, just the reverse of what these hypocrites do. And so, beloved, this text asks the question: shall you and I pray simply to get praise from men? Would we advertise the fact that we pray so that people would congratulate us on that? Think about it this way, you know, you can imagine a man who gives public displays of affection to his wife but ignores her in private, has nothing to do with her in private. You would be appalled at that kind of hypocrisy because the reality is different from the public display and so it is with men with a godly name, but not the private reality. And so it's incumbent upon each one of us, whether we're in a leadership capacity or just privately bearing the name of Christian, it is far more important for you to aim at the reality of prayer rather than the outward form as men define it. Jesus says when you do it to be noticed by men, and they notice, then you have your reward in full. You get your stamped receipt. Somebody said, "You did a great job. You must be a godly man." And Jesus says when that's what you're after and you get it, there's nothing more to it. It's purely a human transaction with no vertical, godly reality of the Spirit. There's nothing of Christ in that whatsoever. He does not own that kind of approach to praying. He says if you pursue it like that, then you've received your reward.

Rather than praying to be noticed by men, Jesus says, make it your aim to pray to please God, to honor God, to do what he wants in a way that only he sees. Verse 6, look at it here with me. He clarifies the motive. He exposes a false motive in praying, and he introduces the right motive for praying, just like he did in the matter of giving in the prior section, verses 2 through 4. Look at what he says there in verse 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." The way to deal with spiritual hypocrisy, to put it to death in your life, is to put yourself in a position where no one can observe you practicing the spiritual devotions, the means of godliness, to put yourself in a position where no one can possibly see you if that's attainable. I realize for, you know, a mother with three or four or five kids, privacy is going to be at a premium and not very likely, but there's ways to deal with that, to pray in your heart, to lead your children in prayer and model prayer for them as, you know, in those days of their toddler days. But Jesus is really addressing the general principle, those of us that have a little bit more control over our schedule and our situation and our circumstances. He says, if it's within your ability to do so, go somewhere private and pray to God in private, where no one can see you, where no one can hear you, and pour out your heart before God and make your request known to him there.

It's a very pointed contrast and what Jesus is saying, the word "But" there at the beginning of verse 6, "But," he's contrasting motives. He'd exposed the false motives in verse 5, but now he's giving a contrast with the introduction of the word "But," he's introducing a contrast to show what the real motive should be. What the true motive should be. What you should sanctify your heart and seek after. And when your motives are different, a different kind of praying comes out from you. You know, when you're trying to impress people with your prayer, you know, there's verbal fireworks and people can sound so good when they're praying and wanting others to hear them, but whether it

crosses over and that's actually the way they pray in private, that's something that only you could answer for yourself, but what Jesus is describing here is the pursuit, watch this, Jesus is describing a pursuit of private intimacy with God. There's a humbleness about this. There is an exclusive audience to this where wherever you're praying, there's this sense that I am alone with God and I am pouring out my heart before him. In contrast to finding the most public place to pray, Jesus says, find the most private place that is available to you and pray there. Don't make a display of yourself. This isn't about putting yourself on display. This is about coming to God with a profound sense of humility and I'm going to keep repeating these themes because I really want them to be embedded in your mind, this humble sense of trust, of reverence, of anticipation and submission, of dependence and repentance. These are the heart qualities that the Spirit of God produces in a true disciple and they are produced in the disciple for that to become the spirit in which he engages the God who saved him, the spirit in which he engages the Lord who saved him. And so much of those matters are, you know, they're at a premium these days.

And so, what should you and I be satisfied with? What is it that we should be aiming after in prayer? It's a simple spirit that deep in your heart says it is enough for me that God sees and God hears me and that he promises to reward my praying. That's all I care about. I don't care if I have a reputation of being a man of prayer. I don't care if anybody sees or knows. I don't care about any of those things. I just want to have this private communion with God, this private audience with God, knowing that he hears, that he's pleased when I pray to him in a private, humble, reverential way, and that's all that I'm after. I don't have to have what I want in prayer. I don't have to prescribe what God should do in response to my prayer. This "name it and claim it" theology that has poisoned the church for so many decades now, it's all contrary to the spirit of prayer that Jesus teaches here. "God, I want this, I name it, and I claim it as fulfilled." Well, that's the exact opposite. Look at verse 10. It's the exact opposite of the spirit that says, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Father, I submit to you. You give me what you deem necessary, and I will be content. I will trust you for that. I won't tell you what you must do. I come as a humble, submissive disciple, not as the one calling the shots." It's a completely different way of praying.

And so, you settle it in your heart that you're praying to please God, you're praying with a desire, and look, to cultivate those six attitudes of prayer that we went through, the trust, the reverence, the anticipation, the submission, the dependence, the repentance, these are things that you develop over a lifetime. These are things that take time as the Spirit works within us, as we pray in private and we develop these things and we learn at the feet of Christ, we learn at the throne of God more and more how to pray in the Spirit. You don't turn this on like a light switch. These are the things that God works into our hearts over time and we express them back to him in prayer and so the whole idea, as we said, is to consider the motives of which we pray. It's not, "God, I want this." It's not, "I want others to see me." It's, "God, I want to be a pleasing disciple to you. I want to have a heart that is submitted to you and content in you no matter what's happening around me." Those are the motives that animate true prayer.

Well, Jesus goes on now in the second part of our message here tonight to address the practice of prayer. The practice of prayer. He's clarified our motives in verses 5 and 6, and now he goes into the practice of prayer and the first thing that he says, the first principle that he teaches in the practice of prayer is to avoid meaningless repetition. Avoid meaningless repetition. Look at verse 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." The word here about empty phrases comes from a verb that means to babble, yab, yab, yab, yab, yab, to speak without thinking. It has the idea of idle talk, of just speaking with your lips, with your tongue, without your mind being engaged. The tongue is to be informed by the mind when we pray.

And so Jesus condemns a mechanical approach to prayer that is characterized by thoughtless speech and mindless repetition. People think that long prayers will goad God into responding to them favorably, and if they just drone on and on, maybe God will be more likely to hear them. I sure hope that's not the case, and it's not the case, because, beloved, just think with me. Just think with me. The favor of God is brought to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. The favor of God was brought to us in Christ when he reconciled us through his shed blood on the cross and the Spirit drew us to Christ and imparted new life to us and we were born again and became a son of God, a daughter of God in the family of God, adopted into his family. That's where the favor of God is won. It's in the work of Christ, in the work of the Spirit. And it's given to us freely and abundantly and generously and without cost. To have a mindset that a lot of words from us is the lever that pulls forth the blessing of God is a wrong way to think, and I'm very sympathetic to those that are conditioned that way by prior religious instruction because it's very hard to purge that out of your system. That's why it's so important, that's why it is so important for us to go through this section on prayer in a careful, methodical way with many, many words – that was a joke; just an ironic contrast there. We want to go through this carefully because you don't learn this on the first time or the second time through if it's new to you.

Now look, the matter of repetition in prayer, repetition per se, repetition in and of itself is not bad. Jesus repeated his prayers three times in Gethsemane. He said, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me." Paul repeated prayers. He had a thorn in his flesh in 2 Corinthians 12. Three times he says, "I asked the Lord to remove it from me." That's not the matter. And those of you that know the heart of a parent, whether with young children or adult children, of course you pray for them repeatedly. Of course you pray the same sort of thing for them, "God, bless them spiritually. God, bring them to yourself. God, open their eyes. God, help them to grow. God, keep them in the path that they're walking." Of course you repeat those prayers, but notice that the repetition comes from vibrant spiritual realities in your heart, that there's a living reality to those prayers, for example. It's different from just a rote recitation of the same prescribed prayers perhaps that have been given to you in liturgical churches, or just the repetition of a prayer list over and over again. That gets wearying, at least it does to me. Those are the kinds of things that Jesus is warning against. He's warning us against speaking words of prayer, allegedly of prayer, while your mind is thinking about something else. And you know, I think we, you know, if we were all honest, we would say, we would have to acknowledge

that at times, if not often, you find yourself doing that. On one hand, you're speaking one thing and then you call yourself up short and say, "I'm thinking about work. I'm thinking about the yard work that needs to be done while I'm standing here talking about other things to God." That's what Christ is telling us to be careful about, that your heart would be engaged with the words that you are saying and that you would be actively involved in the spirit of prayer when you approach God.

And so what we see here in what Christ teaches us, you know, beginning in the Lord's Prayer and what he's warning us against in the contrary example, is the sense of just babbling, of just speaking without thinking, because prayer involves thoughtful words addressed to God in the sincerity of the moment, the need of the day, and not the same words time after time, day after day. In the past, I put it this way and I think this illustration really does help clarify it for us. Remember what Jesus is saying is don't use meaningless repetition in the presence of God and think that that is praying. That's the principle that he's teaching us. Well, and it's hard sometimes to break through prior conditioning and prior way that you've done things to see that in the right perspective, but can you imagine a human relationship where someone every time they saw you said the same things with monotonous repetition. "Hi Tim, how are you? Fine day. Goodbye." Next day you see him. "Hi Tim, how are you? Fine day. Goodbye." Third day, "Hi Tim, how are you? Fine day. Goodbye." That would annoy the daylight out of you in a hurry. You would look at a person like that and say, "What is wrong with you? This is not the way humans relate to one another. There's something, you have many screws loose in your head. Something is not plugged into the outlet of your mind." Multiply that by infinity and imagine a rote, mechanical, repetitious way of praying to the God of the universe who knows our hearts, who created us, who formed us to have fellowship with him and you see how unacceptable, to use a pretty neutral word, that must be to a holy God, that in the name of prayer, in the name of approaching him, to have that kind of mechanical approach.

And so, beloved, understand that many words do not guarantee that your prayers will be heard at all. The idea is not to aim for a longer prayer life. A longer prayer time day after day should not be the goal, not the primary goal at any rate, should not be the primary goal as you seek to grow as a Christian and to grow in prayer because Jesus makes plain that many words do not guarantee that you'll be heard at all. Look at it again, verse 7, "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." Beloved, Jesus sets up many words as a bad example, as something not to be done, and it's consistent with what God had previously said in the Old Testament in Ecclesiastes 5 verse 2. Scripture tells us, "Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God for God is in heaven and you are on the earth, therefore let your words be few." Let your words be few, the Old Testament says. Jesus says, don't be like those who heap up empty phrases. This is the practice of prayer to avoid meaningless repetition, to avoid going through the motions. What is it then that Christ is saying? God does not call us to long prayers, long meaning in measurement of time, God does not want long prayers as if length itself carried power with him. Length in and of itself carries no power with God whatsoever. That's not the point. If it was, Jesus would have said something radically different.

And so what is it then, having seen the negative practice, don't do this? Well, what is it that Christ points us to, what he calls us to? And I love this about his teaching, and I hope that for some, if not many who come under the sound of my voice on this matter will find themselves greatly liberated and encouraged with as if a fresh spring of water was now bubbling through your soul to replace the stagnant algae-covered pond that had come into existence because of a wrong approach. What is the fresh spring that refreshes your prayer life based on the teaching of Christ here? Simply this: aim for simplicity. Pray with simple words and go from there. Look at verse 8. Jesus says, "Do not be like them." Again, he's making a contrast. You have these Gentiles multiplying repetitious phrases; those of you from Catholic backgrounds won't need a moment of instruction to know what that looks like and sounds like. Jesus says, "Don't be like that." You don't have to be like that. You shouldn't be like that. Why? "For," because, "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." He says, "Don't follow the example of pagans who pray repetitious prayer," and he lays the groundwork, he kind of makes a transition here in verse 8. He transitions from the teaching against hypocrisy. Verse 8 kind of functions as a bridge, as a transition to lead you into verse 9 and the right way to pray. He says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask him," verse 9, "Pray then like this, 'Our Father in heaven.'" You see the link between the two? Your Father knows what you need, therefore pray like this, "Our Father who art in heaven."

And the whole foundation is built on the most precious and tender and appealing, gracious, good aspects of the God of our salvation. To true Christians, beloved, and remember this, write it down, do what's ever necessary to embed this in your mind because this is the pivot point that transcends or that transforms everything. To his people, God is a loving Father. When you pray to God, you're not praying to a box. You're not praying to a statue. You're not praying to a dead, lifeless God. You're not praying to a God who is difficult to please. You're praying to a loving Father who knows your needs, who, as we have said many times over the years, you're praying to a God, you who are true Christians, you're praying to a God who is favorably disposed to you. He cares for you. He knows about your situations. He knows about your broken heart. He knows about your sinful past. He knows all of those things and yet, due to the work and the intercession and the mediation of his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, you are now reconciled to him and he cares for you as a member of the family knowing what you need before you ask him, knowing the hairs on your head, knowing when a sparrow falls to the ground, and all points in between. Beloved, he knows and he cares and that means, watch this, because God truly knows, because he truly loves, because he truly cares, and he truly hears, that means that you are completely liberated from all of the stuff that creates pretense, you're completely liberated from having to try to conform to an external format that someone else has imposed upon you, and you can enter into his presence like a trusting child bursting into the study room of his father, saying, "Dear Dad, Dear Father, Dada," I'm speaking on the human terms with these words. I'm not suggesting we address God like that. I'm just getting to the spirit that knows that there is free and open access in Christ to the Father, and you enter in and you take advantage of that without pretense, without an outward form. You simply speak with the simplicity of a child to a father who loves you. You show him love, you show him respect, and you lay your heart out before

him in natural words, in accordance with your own vocabulary, with the working of your own mind, informed by Scripture, you pour those things out before him with utter and complete simplicity, and you trust God to bless you as a result of that.

Now, I want to address a potential objection. I can easily picture someone maybe watching over the live stream, hearing this on subsequent media, maybe some of you in the room who have been conditioned in a completely different way. I can almost hear you saying, "No way. It cannot possibly be that simple, that direct. It can't possibly be that easy, that earnest and forthcoming. It can't possibly be that way," you say. Well, all I can do is encourage you to read your Bible and if you do, you'll find that many of the great prayers in Scripture were short prayers. Yes, there are long prayers. Solomon, when he dedicated the temple, prayed for an extended period of time, you know, and Scripture talks about long days of praying and fasting, but those were kind of extraordinary. It's certainly not, those extraordinary times and extraordinary events and extraordinary occurrences are not the pattern that Jesus sets forth as the prevailing way that we approach God in prayer here when he's specifically instructing us on prayer. Beloved, many of the great prayers in the Bible were short, 78 of the 150 Psalms are 12 verses or less. What was the prayer of the dying thief on the cross? "Jesus. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Simple, direct, full of repentance, full of anticipation, full of dependence, full of reverence, expressed in Spirit-taught short words like that and of such consequence that this man condemned to die for his criminal acts on earth, Jesus responds to him and says, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." I'd say that was a pretty effective prayer. As I pointed out earlier, the Bible ends with, "Come, Lord Jesus." Anticipation, reverence, expectation, all of these things.

Yes, my friend. Yes, actually it is that simple. It is this direct. It is this liberating. And I just invite you, I promise you based on what Christ is teaching us about prayer here and in obedience to the way that he tells us to pray, if you will accept these simple principles that we've seen from verses 5 through 8, it will change your entire Christian life. If you have been stagnant, overburdened, these things have transforming power because they are spoken to us by the Lord of our souls. So all I can do is encourage you, invite you, don't make prayer so complicated. God is good. God is a Father. Can you imagine? Can you imagine a father of a four-year-old son and the son comes in and just kind of bursts forth in childlike language the simplicity of what's on his mind, can you imagine any earthly dad of any merit whatsoever of scolding, mocking, and rejecting that? The very simplicity is what's so endearing to him and he picks that one up and brings him into his arms and blesses him and says, "Of course I'll go out with you, of course I'll get what you need. Of course, of course, of course, I love you so much and I love the simplicity with which you address me." It's unfeigned, it's unpretentious. God is good. God is far better than any earthly father has ever been or ever will be and, beloved, he will bless you in your simple, trusting prayer.

Let's pray together.

Gracious God, help us to pray in a manner worthy of the Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us. Help us to pray as if we truly believe that you know what we need

before we ask; we don't have to enter into long explanations with you. Father, to address you with trust, knowing that if we come to you, we must believe that you are and that you're a rewarder of those who seek you. To approach you with reverence, with anticipation, with submission, with dependence, with repentance. Father, cultivate in the people of Truth Community Church that kind of heart in prayer and we will thank you in advance for your kindness to lead us in the way that Christ taught us to pray. In his blessed name we ask. Amen.

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