

Developing a Prayerful Heart

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Our message today comes from the gospel of Matthew chapter 6, and I invite you to turn to this well-known passage of Scripture, perhaps not deeply understood passage of Scripture, known as the Lord's Prayer, by some's preference, the Disciples' Prayer, found in verses 9 through 13. Obviously, it's called the Lord's Prayer because it's the prayer that the Lord gave to his disciples as a pattern by which they could learn to pray. The disciples in the days of his flesh on earth said, "Lord, teach us to pray." They heard Jesus pray, and they realized that there was a different realm that he was operating in than what they knew. It was beyond formality. There was an intimacy and a power to the prayer that they longed after, but they didn't know how to attain to; and I know it's often expressed here within our walls, people wondering, "How can I pray better? What's the secret to prayer?" What we're going to see here, beloved, is it's not tied up to mysticism that's promoted by some, even many writers on prayer, of looking for some mystical experience in prayer, we're going to see from the Lord Jesus is a cultivation of heart attitudes, conscious heart attitudes before the Lord in his presence that are the reflective of a developing and a heart that is being sanctified. And we'll spend a few messages, maybe a few weeks on this text, but today what we're going to do is read it and kind of deal with it in an overview, satellite sort of fashion. What I want to do today is just plant seeds in your heart that will grow and bear fruit later on as we get into the more specific teaching in days to come. Matthew chapter 6 beginning in verse 9, we read this,

9 Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 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.

And some versions go on to say, "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Now, beloved, just by way of an overview, by way of establishing and remembering the context here of today's text, Jesus had just been teaching his disciples not to pray like the Pharisees who were hypocrites, not to pray like the Gentiles who just babbled a bunch of words without any thought for their significance. He told them, "Don't pray like that." He had given a couple of negative examples, and now he shows them how to pray, and I

would frame what we're going to look at today with this question that kind of establishes the goal and also asks how we get to that goal. How do you develop a prayerful heart? What does a heart that is being sanctified, what are the attitudes that are percolating in the inner man of a heart that is praying according to the pattern that Jesus set here? Now, in messages to come, we'll see how the Lord kind of breaks out, how this prayer divides up in vertical and horizontal dimensions. We'll see the priority of prayer and that there's three requests in the first half, three requests in the second half, and go through the words and all of that, and that's a necessary part of understanding the text. But Beloved, starting out here and kind of framing what the study is that we're going to be doing in coming days, I want you to see something beyond that, that is evident in what the Lord teaches us to pray; this is all right on the surface or just scratching a little bit below the surface. All of this is right there on the surface but we have a problem, especially in Western culture, especially in our hurried American approach and in the hurried evangelical church, so-called, we're too quick to want to hear the mechanics. "Give me the words that I need to pray," or, "Tell me what time I'm supposed to pray and what the pattern is and help me get to that. Let's cut to the chase so that I can go through the motions and do what Jesus told me to do."

Beloved, the whole spirit of that, even if you technically get your interpretation of the passage right, the whole spirit of that is utterly contrary to what Christ is teaching throughout the Sermon on the Mount because as I've told you many times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is cultivating in us the inner heart righteousness that is the fruit of being born again, the fruit of true repentance. Over and over again, he's cultivating in us heart attitudes that reflect the righteousness that God requires. We saw that in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." There's this inner dimension to it. There's this emphasis on righteousness in verse 20, "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." And then from that statement and declaration of the necessity of true righteousness, he goes in and talks about the spiritual application of the moral law and deals with matters of anger, and lust, and a proper approach to marriage, and how we take oaths, and retaliation and revenge, and loving your enemies and on it goes. In chapter 6, verse 1, he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." He couldn't be more clear that he's not talking about something external that is observed and quantified. Couldn't be more clear about that. In verse 33 of chapter 6, you look at it and he says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." In the more immediate context of chapter 6, verses 1 through 18, he's teaching against hypocrisy. "Don't give, don't pray, don't fast so that others will see you and congratulate you on how godly you appear to them." He says, "practice these things in secret, where God alone sees and where God alone will reward and honor your obedience to him." Everything is focused on the heart, on matters that God sees, and so it has to be, as we come to this prayer in light of the surrounding context, it has to be that Jesus is teaching us certainly something more than a prayer that we rotely recite, just word for word recite during liturgical services. It has to be more than that. It has to be more than just a pattern that tells you what themes to be sure to cover when you pray. It does that for us, but there has to be more to it than that in light of the fullness of the

context, in light of the fact that God is a God who looks on the heart and doesn't see as man sees. So then what should we be seeing? What is it that this prayer teaches us about the heart that we cultivate before the Lord in prayer?

Stating it just one other way, people want to know the secret to prayer so that they can get what they want. "How can I get my health back? How can I get my wealth back? How can I get stuff for here on earth by praying in the proper way? Give me the key that unlocks that," all the while bypassing every consideration of heart righteousness that we've been seeing over the past 30 messages from this Sermon on the Mount. It can't be that. [baby sounds] I'll take that as an amen. That was just echoed by infant voices. And so what is it, then, that the Lord is teaching us? Well, in this prayer, we find that there are six spiritual virtues that we cultivate over time in prayer. Over the course of a lifetime, as we are pursuing sanctification, as we are growing in the Lord, as we are going through the different seasons of life, there are certain enduring virtues, vertical virtues, between you alone in the presence of God that you develop in response to him that this prayer is teaching us to cultivate, and what we need to do here today, beloved, is to consider not only the words of the Lord's Prayer, but to consider what those words signify. The words are meant to be rooted, watch this, the words are meant to be rooted in a heart reality that is voicing them. You cannot bypass the heart reality and practice true prayer because prayer is meant to be, as everything else in the Sermon on the Mount teaches us, it's meant to be an expression of a heart that is bringing forth the fruit of true repentance, as we've said so many times. And so, this message today, what I'm preaching here today, presupposes that you are converted to Christ, that you have an earnest desire to grow in him, and what we see in what the Lord has given us is the path forward to grow in a spiritual way, not using prayer to get what we want, not using prayer to check off our spiritual box, not to feel good about ourselves, but to come before God and to become the person that he intends us to do. So we're developing a prayerful heart in what we see here in this overview manner. All of these verses that we'll look at today will be things that we'll consider in greater depth. in messages to come.

Six virtues. You can write these down, and I'm going to do my level-headed best to keep this simple, keep it plain, keep it obvious. We'll look at a verse, we'll look at a cross-reference, we'll summarize, and we'll move on. Notice, then, the opening word of this prayer, the opening frame of this prayer, Jesus says, "Pray then like this, 'Our Father in heaven.'" More specifically for this point, "Our Father." The first spiritual virtue that you develop in a prayerful heart is trust. Is trust. The opening word of this prayer frames everything else. The word "Father" is the word by which we invoke the presence of God, it makes plain who it is that we're addressing and who we're talking to and how we regard him, and Scripture says, Jesus says, "Pray like this, 'Our Father.'" That word comes out of a mouth that knows something about trusting God as you approach him. God is a father. He is a wise father to his children. He is a loving father to his children. Jesus had just said at the end of verse 8, look at it there with me, Jesus says, "your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Your Father who has, in a sense, given birth to you in the new birth, the one who is the author of the source of your spiritual life, is a Father who loves you and who knows you and who knows what you need even before you ask him. So aware is he of everything that surrounds you and concerns you, everything that is behind

you and ahead of you, so aware is he of all of those details that you don't need to recite a single thing to him to inform him about your circumstances. He already knows. And so we trust him.

Now, when we say we trust him, what do we mean by that word trust? You know, we have to deal with words. We have to deal with the meaning of words and not presuppose them, but to bring them out, to discuss them, to understand what it is saying, what a word signifies. Father expresses trust, first and foremost, and trust, here's a definition for trust, biblical trust for you: trust is a firm belief, a firm confidence, you might say, in the love and reliability of God. Trust is a firm confidence in the love and reliability of God. So when we come and say, "Our Father," we're expressing a statement. Remember, I'm speaking to Christians here. If you're not a Christian, you can't call God your Father because Satan is your father. Only Christians know God as Father in this sense, and so when we address him as Father, we are using a term that is shorthand for a recognition of the love that he has bestowed upon us in Christ, the fact that he is a Father who is reliable, a Father who can be trusted, a Father who receives me when I come to him in prayer.

"Our Father, my Father, my dear Father," is the sense of it. And beloved, that may sound like it's something to be assumed, but it's more than that. Scripture places this element of trust at the very beginning, the very center of meaningful prayer, of praying to please God. You cannot please God with any praying that is simultaneously rooted in doubt and resentment or anything like that. This goes to the very core of who we are. In Hebrews 11, verse 6, listen to this as I read, Hebrews 11 verse 6, it says, "without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Jesus says, you know, "You have no reward with your Father who's in heaven if you pray in this wrong way, so pray in a way that brings the reward. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Well, beloved, when we go to prayer, to the presence of God, we need to be conscious of the fact that we are addressing one who loves us and who knows us, and we come with a heart informed by Scripture that says, "God, I take you at your word. I believe you. I trust you. I depend upon you. I rely upon you and I am convinced that you will receive me and reward me for approaching you in a spirit of faith." You start there, "Our Father."

You see, prayer, think about it this way, one of the things about praying is that we are praying in response to God, not in our autonomous seeking of him. We are praying in response to him, in response to his multifaceted revelation to us. We are responding to what God has revealed about himself in the skies, where his eternal power and his divine wisdom are put on display. We are responding to the things that he has revealed about himself in Scripture, and all of the revelation about the nature of his attributes and his faithfulness and his love and his holiness, all of those things. The skies, the Scripture, and we're also responding to the way that God has revealed himself in our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. "God, I see your power displayed in the skies. I see the way of salvation and your character revealed in the Scriptures. And I look to Christ and I see, as Christ said, he who sees me has seen the Father." In the love and the mercy and the self-sacrifice and the seeking nature of Christ, we see who God is. And so before we start babbling off our

tongues in prayer, we have to step back over the course of time and develop in our hearts, say, "This is what God has revealed, and by his grace, I believe it. I believe that God is great. I believe that he is good. I believe that he is gracious. And I trust that. I depend upon that. I firmly believe that so much that I'll put my soul and everything about me into his hands and trust him for the outcome of it."

There's that sense of trust and so, In light of the revelation of God, and in light of what Jesus says to pray, "Our Father," you come to prayer with an attitude that in essence expresses this, "Father, I trust you no matter what. I trust you no matter what. No matter what the future holds in my life, no matter what the future holds in our country, no matter what the doctor says next, whether I get healthy or it continues to decline, whether you deliver me or not, whether there's cattle in the stalls or not, whether the fruit of the field fails or not, no matter what," that's an allusion to Habakkuk 3, by the way, "No matter what, God, I trust you. I rejoice in the God of my salvation. I exalt in you." All of that indicated by the word Father, the Father who sees over me, who gave life to me, who guides my paths and steps. "Father, I trust you and I believe, according to your word, that you will reward me for seeking you in prayer, because you said that you would." And so the first attitude of a heart that's developing an attitude of prayer is trust. You start there. "I believe your revelation." And so, stepping back for just a moment and speaking sympathetically to every one of you, is to just simply recognize that in a single word, the Lord has given us a theme, has given us a spirit by which we can deal with, repent of our distrusting, discontented, unbelieving hearts. "Lord, I have not trusted you. I have doubted you. I have complained about this or that. Lord, I repent of all of that. I set all of that aside and I come to you in the simple trust of a child and say, 'Father, hear what I have to say.'" So trust starts there, as indicated by the word Father.

Now secondly, the second attitude that a prayerful heart is developing is reverence. It is reverence. Look at chapter 6, verse 9 again. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name." This addition to the way that we address God in prayer delivers us from a flippant, presumptuous, casual, if that's a word. It guards us against a casual, flippant approach to prayer. "Oh, God loves me, so I'll just say whatever I want." Well, hold on here before we go down that road too far because this Father whom we trust, that we address, is a Father who is above heaven and earth, dwelling in his throne room in heaven. When I say he's above heaven and earth, above the skies that we see above us, he's beyond that, he's above that, and not only does he dwell beyond our reach, distinct from his creation, far transcendent to everything about us, he is to be hallowed. He is to be revered. This Father that we address, who so graciously loves us, he is holy. He is high and exalted above us and we have to keep these things both in mind. "Father, hallowed be your name." He is the Lord before whom we bow. He is the Lord before whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. All of the universe will bow before this God to whom we pray. He is the Judge before whom we will all give an account of our lives, even as Christians.

Beloved, when Scripture, when Jesus calls us to pray in this way, "Our Father in heaven. You're someplace I can't get to on my own power. Hallowed be your name. You're separate, distinct, lofty, exalted far beyond me, O God." And here's the point, here's the

point, my dear friends: as we are praying, we are simultaneously aware that we trust God, but we are also simultaneously aware of an attitude of respect and reverence for him. Reverence, here's a little definition of reverence for you. It is an attitude of deep respect and worship toward God. Deep respect and worship toward God so that we trust him and yet in the sense that he is near and we fear no evil as a result of that, Psalm 23 verse 4, but at the same time, there is this profound respect and worship that we bring to him that does not tread lightly or speak lightly in his presence. Biblically speaking, we're talking about the fear of God and again, we're talking about preliminary matters that inform the way that we pray and live, and just as we saw with trust that the one who approaches him must believe that he exists and he's a rewarder of those who seek him, that's a starting point, there is no true prayer apart from trust, at the same time, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, there is no true prayer without a healthy fear of God because, and we say that because Scripture says. For example, in Proverbs 1 verse 7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." It's the starting point from which everything else flows. A person cannot rightly pray to God if there's not a healthy sense of respect and reverence and worship in his heart and so there's this trust and this simultaneous reverence.

True prayer, we can put it this way, beloved, true prayer recalls that God is holy, holy, holy as you come to him, and you respond in a way that's something like this, that says, "Lord, as I come to you in prayer, I humble myself before you. I adopt a posture of humility before you. How could I do anything else, dear Father, in light of your great transcendence? Who is a God like you? You are an infinite spirit. You had no beginning. You'll have no end. You're self-existent. You're omnipotent. You're omnipresent. You're omniscient. You're everything in holiness that I am not. And I revere that. I respect that. I fear that. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. I ascribe glory to your name. My desire is that others would ascribe glory to your name. Your name is hallowed. I pray that I and those around me would hallow it more and more in our worship and in our approach to life." Trust and reverence expressed in the simplicity of those words, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

So that's two of six, trust and reverence, and also, let me just back up and just try to keep some consistency of approach in these points. Trust, the idea of trust exposes a discontented heart. The idea of reverence exposes what we could call an irreverent heart, a heart that does not know God for who he is approaches him without much consideration or thought or meditation beforehand. In this reverence, we consciously bow before him in worship. So thirdly, let's go to another point here which I have labeled anticipation. Anticipation, in verse 10, "Your kingdom come. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." Now listen, just on the simplest observation of what those words mean, those words tell us that early in the scheme of priorities that inform the way that we pray to God, there is a sense of looking forward to things that come, looking beyond the here and now of circumstances, looking beyond that which tends to absorb us in our earthbound ways, Jesus teaches us to look beyond that, to set those things aside and to set our heart affections and our desires for the things that God says he is going to do in the future.

"Your kingdom come. It's a sense of anticipation. "Lord, I see in Scripture that there's another kingdom coming." We'll talk in future days about what that kingdom is, what that means in the greater context. For now, I just want you to see that by calling us to pray, "Your kingdom come," Jesus is calling us away from our love of this world, calling us away from our affection for our circumstances and the things that affect us. Rather than immediately rushing in and laying before God in a complaining spirit the problems of the day, over time, as the Spirit of God works these things out in our heart, over time, this prayer, "Your kingdom come," teaches us to wean ourselves away from our love of this passing life. True prayer has this sense of anticipation built into it that is looking forward to what God will do in the future. "I'm looking ahead. I'm not so wrapped up in the now."

In the sense of, "Your kingdom come, your kingdom come," we're saying, "God, I prefer you and your plans to everything in this life. I prefer you to the relationships and activities and responsibilities of this earth. The sooner your kingdom breaks in and introduces the next stage of your plan, Lord, the happier I will be, the fuller I will be." The sense of anticipation, beloved, in prayer, we could state it like this: this kind of prayer confidently looks forward to the work of God in the ages. It confidently looks forward to the work of God in the ages to come and there's so many passages that we could look at, but just to keep you engaged with the pages of your Bible, turn to the gospel of John chapter 14, that I could remind you of something basic. John chapter 14. There is this future dimension to true prayer and an anticipation of living in light of those future realities that shapes the developing heart of prayer. John 14, verse 1 said, "Let not your hearts be troubled," Jesus said. "Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" And look at verse 3, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." That fundamental statement of our Lord about this time and this age in which we live, is that it is a time of preparation that will yield to a return of Christ in which he changes the order of things around his glory and will call us, call his true disciples to be a part of it, to be with him where he is. Now look, beloved, what that means is is that this life that we're living now is temporary, it is transitory, it is not the final and ultimate reality, and therefore the way that we pray, the way that we think, where we set our heart affections should not be set on the things that are tied and passing with this world and with this age. That's not what Christ calls us to do. There is a reality of anticipation that says, "Lord, I believe your promise that you will come again. I believe your promise that you'll take me to yourself. I believe that that will be far better, far more glorious than anything I can imagine with my puny little mind. I know it will be great, and I can't wait to see it, and so your kingdom come."

True prayer remembers, calls to mind that God is working out a sovereign plan. True prayer responds to that in a spirit that says, "Your kingdom come." The idea, the spirit of it, to put it in the same theme in different words is that there is a heart attitude in true prayer, watch this, there is a heart attitude in true prayer, watch this, there is a heart attitude in true prayer, watch this, that says, "God, I forsake the world for the sake of your coming glory. I repudiate my love of this world and I look forward and I embrace as the highest aspiration of my heart what you will do when you introduce your righteousness

into this age and change things forever. That's what I look forward to, Lord." "Do not love the world or the things of this world," 1 John says.

What the prayer that Jesus has given us here shows us how to express that heart as we talk to God. Trust, "Father." Reverence, "hallowed be your name." Anticipation, "Your kingdom come." Now, if you're like me and you hear these things, in one sense, it's really exhilarating to realize the dynamic that true prayer actually expresses and how different it is from mechanically going through a list, how different it is from a brief time of prayer at the table, "God is great and God is good and we thank him for our food." That wears out pretty quick. What we see Jesus unleashing before us here is an understanding of the person and the purpose of God in a way that there's no touching the bottom of it. There's no plunging the depth of it. Just in the three things we've seen so far as we go through life, to master this would be like trying to swim across the ocean.

Trust, reverence, anticipation. Fourthly, submission. Submission. The volition of man, the volition of a Christian is brought into subjection to God in true prayer so that we do away with our autonomy, we do away with our acts and attitudes of rebellion, and in a sweet act of surrender, we lay it all before the Lord in the simple words found there in verse 10, "your will be done." Your will be done. Remember, if you will, that when Christ was in Gethsemane and he was facing the horrors of the cross, he said, "Father, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me," but he submitted. He said, "but nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. Father, I shrink from what is coming, but if this is what you have for me in your plan for me, I accept it. I embrace it. I submit to it without resistance and without resentment."

"Your will be done," that is a prayer of submission. Now, what is submission? Submission, again, I'm just trying to make this as clear and plain as I possibly know how. Submission is an attitude of yielding to God. Submission is an attitude of yielding to God. "I don't insist on my way, God, I would rather have your way and I ask you to work out your will." Submission, my friends, takes the position of one who will obey. If God has revealed in his word how he would have us to live, how he would have us to think, he's revealed his authority to us, the one who submits says, "I yield to that. I don't assert my will over against God. I take my will and I submit it to him. I lay it on the altar before him. I sacrifice my volition, my will, my desires, I sacrifice it all to his blood. I sacrifice it all to his better wisdom."

In 2 Corinthians 12, verse 10, we read this from the Apostle Paul. He says, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." This attitude of submission says, "Lord, whatever you work out in the providence of my life, I accept it and I'm content with it. I do away with grumbling because if I'm grumbling against providence, then I'm not really yielded to it, am I? I do away with the self-pity." Oh, if the modern church could just rid people of that sinful attitude of self-pity and the clamoring for people to feel sorry for us, we would be miles ahead of where we are right now. You see, beloved, and you know, there's really two aspects of it, there's submission to circumstances, there's submission to the law of God, the moral law of God that says, "Lord, I adopt a position of

obedience before your law, and I adopt the position of one who accepts the circumstances that you have given to me in my life." True prayer recalls that God is the author of your circumstances and you respond, beloved, "I yield my all to you, come what may. I yield my all to you in everything around me, come what may of it all. Lord, I trust you, I revere you, I anticipate you, therefore I submit to you. I yield everything about my life and heart before you, come what may." What else can it mean to say "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," what else is that other than a declaration of submission of the subject to his sovereign? What else could it be? And on what possible grounds could we argue that it should be any other way? We, the creature, the sinful creature at that, in the presence of our holy Creator, we, the redeemed child of God in the presence of the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, how could we do anything else than have this attitude fundamental in our developing approach to prayer, one of submission?

Beloved, I encourage you to think these things through and to set aside a time in prayer where you're consciously saying, "Lord, I'm not going to ask for anything to change about my circumstances. I am just going to practice this attitude of submission before you and ask you to help me develop that into a living reality that endures and takes deep root in my heart." Look, I realize I realize that we're talking about things that sift everything about our inner man. Well, of course, of course. That's what you would expect from a sovereign wise Lord teaching his disciples to pray, to become and grow in the image of Christ. This is exactly what we would expect.

So trust, reverence, anticipation, submission. Fifthly, dependence. Dependence. Everything about this prayer is humbling, and this principle is no different. Jesus calls us, commands us, yea, invites us to acknowledge our need before God in prayer and to ask for his provision. It's what a child does from his father, right? "Give us this day our daily bread," verse 11. Give us this day our daily bread. Now, you know, in a relatively prosperous and stable society like we live in, whatever the problems may be compared to prior times in church history, we live in days of prosperity and stability. We're not worried about Scottish soldiers who ride horses bursting into our room here today and dragging off the pastor and, you know, planning to kill him, as was the case with the Scottish Covenanters back in the 17th century. Beloved, those people had to hide just to worship. They had to gather together in the cold of night, in the severity of winter weather, just to gather together around the word of God like we're doing in great comfort here today, and there are multiple well-attested stories of how the government authorities who were trying to crush true Christianity burst in on them and tortured and mutilated and killed their leaders. We're not in any position like that whatsoever and as a result of that, we tend to neglect this aspect of prayer and the spirit of this prayer. If you do nothing else, take it by faith, that Jesus said, "Without me, you can do nothing," John 15, verse 6. God, beloved, intends for you to depend upon him and to ask you for his help. We need to do away with that stupid saying, "God helps those who help themselves," and come and realize that Jesus teaches us to pray in the humble dependent spirit, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Dependence is a conscious reliance on God for his assistance. Dependence is a conscious reliance on God for his assistance and so, beloved, those of you that are suffering so

greatly for different reasons in this season of your life, weak and trembling, as it were, before the overwhelming power of your circumstances, understand that Jesus opens up the doors like doors opening for a bride to come down and come to her groom, Jesus opens up the doors for you to come and to know that God invites this, God wants you to come and depend upon him and you respond in prayer with the simplicity of words along these lines that say, "God, I simply ask you for the grace and the provision to persevere. Give me the grace and provision to persevere today because, God, I don't have the ability in myself to do it." That kind of praying pleases God. Not the boastful arrogance of the Pharisee, "God, I thank you that I'm not like others." No, what God honors is those who come in weakness and say, "I recognize that you're my Father. I trust you. I need you. I depend upon you."

If you'll look at chapter 7 for just a moment, Jesus gives us a perspective on the Father's response to us. Matthew 7 verses 9 through 11, "which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?" Will he give bad things when you're asking in legitimate need for his help and blessing? Out on the thought! Unthinkable! God forbid! If sinful men know how to respond to questions from their children and requests for assistance, Jesus says in verse 11, look at it there with me, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father," there's that word again, that term of trust, "how much will your Father who is in heaven," that term of reverence, "how much more will he give good things to those who ask him!"

So we cultivate this spirit of dependence and maybe it's as simple as starting and saying, "Lord, I've never even thought this way. I'm so independent. I'm so proud of my abilities. I'm so strong in this stage of my life. I'm sure I don't even recognize how I violate this God, but I at least acknowledge the principle that everything in life must come from you. I don't count on tomorrow." And so there's this attitude of dependence, asking God for the grace and the provision to persevere day by day.

Finally, sixthly, repentance. Repentance. In this prayer, Jesus cultivates a humble confession of sin. Look at verses 12 and 13, kind of a past and future dimension that we're collapsing into one principle for purposes of today. Verse 12, "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Jesus says, seek grace, seek forgiveness for your past wrongs, and then he simultaneously teaches us to continue our dependence on God in a spiritual realm by asking God to keep us and prevent us from entering into temptation in which we might fall and sin against him.

Repentance is a mournful turning from sin with a sincere intent to pursue righteousness. Let me say that again. Repentance is a mournful turning from sin with a sincere intent to pursue righteousness. Beloved, everything about this prayer cultivates humility and one of the aspects of humility that it cultivates is that it reminds us here, the full teaching of Scripture, that the Christian man, the Christian woman, is someone who knows that he or she stumbles in many ways. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not within us." Every one of us gathered together here whether we realize it or

not, are dealing with the remnants of sin in our hearts. And so, beloved, what Christ teaches us here as he's cultivated trust and reverence and anticipation, submission and dependence, he's cultivating this sense of repentance that responds like this, if I can just kind of wrap things up with the echoes of a familiar hymn, an enduring attitude of prayer that says, "Lord, I've wandered and I am prone to wander. Here's my heart, Oh, take and seal it. Seal it for thy courts above. Wash me in that precious blood of the Lamb from all of my prior wrongdoing of this day or deep into my past that I've never confessed. And Lord, take my feet and cause them to walk in the path of righteousness for your name's sake." That's the spirit of repentance.

And so you see, beloved, in the overarching sense of Matthew 5 through 7, Jesus is calling us to true righteousness. An aspect of that true righteousness is cultivating these attitudes in our heart as we respond to God in prayer and you develop that lifelong virtue in trusting, reverent, anticipatory, submissive, trusting, repentant prayer, and by the grace of God, beloved, it will be our joy to pursue these things together in the days to come.

Let's pray.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be your 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 also have forgiven our debtors. And gracious God, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours and yours alone is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

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