

Prayer: Walking With God
The Center of the Message
Matthew 6:1,5-8

Matthew 6:1,5-8~ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven ...
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. ⁶But 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. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

I. Introduction

We are continuing on our petition to prayer, calling and asking the Church to start praying this year ... both personally and publically. And I know that some of us are taking that challenge this past week. **And I thank God for you!** Our church family is praying with each other, using currently technology to come together and pray for one another and for the Church. We are sending prayer texts and prayer messages to each other. What a blessing it is!

It is like what we looked at last week in the Bible. Devoting ourselves to praying for one another is an act of love. I was sick this past week, trying to recover from this cold, and behold, I received a prayer message from Tiffany, praying for my speedy recover among other things. I felt loved. She remembered and took the time to pray for me. I also had a prayer text from a few brothers this week. It is beautiful ... a sincere praying Church is beautiful.

Also, last week I asked that if you could start praying for the pastors and their wife. Before your meal and as you are giving thanks, if you could say a quick prayer for the Pastors. It does not have to be a long prayer, just a sentence or two will do. Has anyone taking up that call and challenge?

I know that my sister has. I overheard her teaching Justin when we took our Mom out for her birthday, my sister reminded Justin to pray for the pastors and their wife during grace time. I appreciate that very much. You are never too young to learn to pray.

This past week, I had lunch with a few brothers and we prayed for the pastors and their wife as we give thanks for our bountiful blessing before we dine. I also appreciate that very much. So I really hope that you would start praying for us daily, because, quite frankly, we desperately need it. Start there, and eventually, we want to pray for the whole Church.

You know, this past week I was reading through the Pauline epistles, the letters that are written by the Apostle Paul. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is amazing and astonishing to me. I stand breathless and marvel at his work:

- the impact that he has
- the influence that he imprints
- the lives that he saves through the preaching of the gospel

It is absolutely amazing. As I was reading through his letters, I began to think that the reason for Paul's impact on the Church and on the world is the direct result of his ability to elicit prayers for himself and his ministry. Everywhere he goes, every people he meets, every church he ministers to, he always requests that they pray for him and his ministry.

In writing to the Church in Rome, he urges them to pray for him.

Romans 15:30~³⁰ Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me (NASB)

Paul is saying, "If you belong to the Lord Jesus and if you have the love of the Spirit flowing in you, then strive ... work hard ... (in what?) ... in your prayer and pray for me. A true Christian who belongs to Jesus is a praying Christian. A loving Christian is a praying Christian. And as you pray, pray for me.

Paul writing to the Corinthians requests the same thing.

2 Corinthians 1:11~¹¹ You also must help us by prayer ...

The NKJV adds ... by "prayer for us". Paul is pleading for help ... "you MUST help us." How? By praying for us. Paul is saying, "You want to help me? Do you really want to help me? Help me by praying for me."

I may do things that you may not agree. Well, don't patronize me, pray for me. I may do things that you may not like. Well, don't criticize me, call out to God for me. You want to help, start by praying for me. I love it.

Look at his letter to the Ephesians. Teaching the Church about spiritual warfare, he instructs them to:

Ephesians 6:18~¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

And before the ink could dry, Paul quickly pens in verse 19 ...

Ephesians 6:19~¹⁹ and also for me ...

"Keep alert" ... literally, "keep watch", that is, "stay awake and pray" ... pray for "all the saints". Oh yeah, and do not forget to pray for me.

He says the same thing to the Colossians.

Colossians 4:2~ ² Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving*; ³ praying at the same time **for us** as well ... (NASB)

At the end of his letter to the Thessalonians right before he reminds them to "greet all the brothers with a holy kiss, he asks them in verse 25 ...

1 Thessalonians 5:25~ ²⁵ Brothers, pray **for us**.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians ... same thing.

2 Thessalonians 3:1~ ¹ Finally, brothers, pray **for us**, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored ...

So I ask a thoughtful question, "Could the reason for such an impressive service to God is Paul's ability to get people to pray for him?" We need to pray. And we need to pray for each other. And I request that you start praying for us.

D.A. Carson notes that:

Many Christians thank God in good times, pray urgently in hard times, and forget to pray in busy times.

I hope that is not Forgiven Life. I hope we will be a praying Church.

II. Setting the Standard of Prayer

Can you please turn in your Bible to the book of Matthew chapter 6? When we talk about prayer, there will not be anything spoken today that will "wow" you. There will be no new information that you have not heard before nor have not known. When there is a message on prayer, it is really a reminder for us to "devote ourselves to prayer" as the Apostle Paul exhorts us in both Romans 15 and Colossians 4. The message is to stir us back to prayer.

While the Bible is replete with many teaching on prayer throughout its pages, I believe that Matthew 6 is the central place where we get a deep devotion on prayer. It is Jesus himself who teaches about prayer in this wonderful section of his great sermon, known as the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is about the Kingdom of God ... the Kingdom of Righteousness. And prayer seems to be the center of this great sermon. One author observes that:

In the Sermon, the number of lines and verses preceding and succeeding the Lord's Prayer are almost identical. This is itself a suggestion that prayer lies at the heart of righteousness ...¹

¹ Kethoser (Aniu) Kevichusa, "Sermon on the Mount". <http://rzimindia.in/>

Prayer lies at the heart of the Kingdom of God. While there are some Christians who do not believe in prayer (an oxymoron for sure), Jesus believes in prayer. He tells his disciples in Luke 18 that:

Luke 18:1~¹ ... men always ought to pray and not lose heart.

Jesus believes in prayer. And again, here in Matthew 6, Jesus tells his disciples to pray.

Matthew 6:5~⁵ “And when you pray ...

Not "if" you pray, but "when" you pray. Here, he instructs his disciples how to pray and not to pray in the wrong way. Please allow me to give you just three thoughts to set the standard and setting of prayer.

1. First, prayer is in Secret. (Matthew 6:5-6)

Matthew 6:5-6~⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

We must note that this statement by Jesus is more of a hyperbole than literally. For sure, the Bible records many occasions where Jesus rises up early in the morning to seek a secluded and solitary place to pray.

Mark 1:35~³⁵ And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

But we also see that Jesus prays in public and in a large crowd.

John 11:41-42~⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

When we get to the books of Acts, we read of the disciples praying publically as well. So Jesus and the disciples do not think that it is wrong to pray publically, and that it is not wrong to pray with other people. What Jesus warns against here in this sermon is the hypocrisy of public prayer.

Public prayer flows from private prayer. E.M. Bounds notes that what makes short public prayer effective and efficient is because of private prayers that precede it.² We need public prayers to encourage one another. We need public prayers so that we can

² E.M. Bounds, "Power Through Prayer" (Springdale; Whitaker House, 1982), 43.

agree with each other. But the fact that we can and should pray publically is an offspring of the hours we spend praying privately.

There are some who only pray publically to be seen by men, to get accolades from men for his acts of public prayers. These types of prayers (prayers that are public prayers void of private petitions) tend to be a form of formality.

- We pray to start a meeting.
- We pray to close a meeting.
- We pray as a form of transition between praise songs or order of worship

These prayers can be forms of formality. They may not be sincere, wanting to be heard by God or really believing that God will answer these prayers. These types of public prayers are prayers that are not to be heard by God but to be seen by men.

We must have a secret place ... a solitary place to pray where it is secluded, away from noise and distractions. Only then when we pray publically, do we know that our public prayers are sincere and genuine because they are bathed in private, secret prayers.

We are to pray with the intention of being heard by God and not with the intention of being heard by others. This is why we pray in secret, without neglecting to pray in our society.

One writer says that, "We are thus taught by Jesus to seek the privacy of prayer more than the publicity of prayer.

Do you have a secret place to pray? Do you have a place that is free from noise and distraction? If not, you should designate one. Mine is my home office.

2. Second, prayer is Simple. (Matthew 6:7-8)

Matthew 6:7-8~⁷“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. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Our prayers should be simple. We are not to pray like the hypocrites ... the Jewish hypocrites in verse 5. And we are not to pray like the Gentiles in verse 7.

These pagan Gentiles were worshipping idols. They did not know that these idols were made of wood and were not even alive. So they would pray and chant over and over and over to bring it into reality. They would psyche themselves out doing all kinds of crazy stuff. But that is not how God wants us to pray.

I was at a church one time ... where people shaking. You do not need that stuff. Just pray simply.

When I read this passage, I think of Elijah and the 450 priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18. It was a test on Mount Carmel to see which god is alive and true. So the 450 priests of Baal made an altar. Elijah also made an altar. The test was to see which god would set the offering on fire. The one who answered the prayers of his worshipper(s) would be the true and living God. All morning and into the evening, the 450 priests of Baal prayed and threw themselves in a frenzy with no avail. They cried out. They chanted. They cut themselves to show the earnestly of the prayers. They did this four hours. Yet, no one answered their prayers.

During the evening sacrifice, Elijah came to the altar and prayed two sentences ... only two sentences, and God answered his prayer by sending fire from heaven and consumed the sacrifice.

1 Kings 18:36-38~ ³⁶ And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. ³⁷ Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." ³⁸ Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

All it took was two sentences and God answered Elijah's prayer. Prayer needs to be simple. There is no need to use complex and impressive language. There is no need to chant or constantly repeating words thinking that would impress God. We do not need to shake or psychic ourselves out. We just need to pray using simple words. And if I may inject, simple prayers tend to be one of the most beautiful prayers because it is sincere.

3. Third, prayer is Short. (Matthew 6:7)

Matthew 6:7~ ⁷ "... they think that they will be heard for their many words.

We just saw this in the story of Elijah. He just offered two sentences and God answered his prayer. Some people think that God only answers prayers if we pray for hours and hours. But that is not true. God's answer to our prayers is not based on how long we pray.

Right after Jesus makes this statement about "many words" ... i.e. prayers are short and need not to be long, Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer. He teaches us how to pray. And the Lord's Prayer takes less than 20 seconds to pray. The longest prayer recorded in the New Testament is Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. That prayer takes less than 5 minutes to pray. Prayers are not long and do not have to be long.

Some of us do not like to pray because we think we have to pray for hours on end before God will hear us.

E.M. Bounds notes:

Many private prayers must be short. Public prayers, as a rule, ought to be short and condensed. And there is often need for spontaneous, exclamatory prayer.³

However, there are times in our private prayers where we need long hours. Jesus went to a seclude place and prayed all night. Jacob wrestled with God all night. Paul told the Thessalonians that he prayed night and day exceedingly (1 Thessalonians 3:10).

So there are times for long extended prayers. But in general, prayers tend to be short.

I hope this will encourage some of us to start praying, especially those who feel that they cannot pray for long hours or time.

D.A. Carson said that one reason why we pray is because "our prayers reveal what we believe about God and what we really value and desire." Prayer reveals to us who we are.

III. Conclusion

So as we journey into prayer, keep in mind three things:

1. Prayer is done in secret
2. Prayer is simple
3. And prayer is short.

IV. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

V. Forgiven Life

Today's message is the starting point of prayer. One thing to note about prayer is that there is only so much we can study about prayer. But the best way to learn about prayer is to start praying. Let's recall what we learn today.

1. First, prayer is in S_____.

Do you have this place in mind? Where is this place? _____

2. Second, prayer is S_____.

³ Bound, 43.

For me, I divide up my prayer week into the following categories to help me keep my prayers simple.

- a. Monday: pray for the church
- b. Tuesday: pray for your family
- c. Wednesday: pray for your friends
- d. Thursday: pray for ministries and the gospel
- e. Friday: pray for your work and business
- f. Saturday: pray for your church and country.

3. Third, prayer is S_____.

Write a short prayer each day for the following categories.

- a. Monday: pray for the church

- b. Tuesday: pray for your family

- c. Wednesday: pray for your friends

- d. Thursday: pray for ministries and the gospel

- e. Friday: pray for your work and business

- f. Saturday: pray for your church and country.
