

PRAYING TO REACH THE HEART OF FATHER GOD - Matthew 6:5-15 - "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. [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.' [14] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

- 1) **PRAYER THAT WORKS AND PRAYER THAT DOESN'T - Matthew 6:5-8** "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."

First we face that strange awareness from Jesus that we are to ask for blessings we know God is already going to give us anyway. Somehow Jesus seems aware that unasked-for blessings are too easily seen as our own accomplishments or rights. Unasked-for blessings are commonly connected to the Divine Giver of every good and perfect gift.

Then we notice the divine *balance* in the prayer life. Jesus places before us both *alone* prayer and *community* prayer. First, Jesus talks about the closet of prayer. These words form what could be called the *foundation* to what prayer is all about.

Jesus is not saying prayer should never be offered in public. Rather, *whatever praying I do in public should be the overflow of a heart that prays much in secret*. Secret prayer is what keeps the motives of community prayer pure. Secret prayer protects prayer from *outward show* and *vain use of repetitious* and *flowery speech*. In other words, prayer will only stay genuine and meaty when praying with others to the extent I lovingly and directly communicate much with God when I'm alone.

We must work hard to make sure that our praying reflects *genuine conversation with God*. Any form of display is, in varying degrees, corrupted prayer. Prayer must not be used to summarize a sermon, display knowledge, spread gossip ("Lord, you know my heart goes out for so and so and the mess he's created...") or to offer correction to the ears of those listening. Prayer never has an earthly audience. Others may listen and pray with me as I pray out loud. *But my conversation is with God - honestly with God.*

- 2) **MAKING THE EFFORT TO GET ALONE AND KEEP HONEST - Matthew 6:6-8** - "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."

Jesus pictures a person going to *extreme lengths* to make sure his prayer life will be undistracted. Imagine a person going into a little, cramped, dark room. And then closing the door of the closet - from the inside! This is obviously a person who appreciates *where* and *how* prayer is developed and purified. This is why Jesus considers getting alone with God the antidote to vain, empty prayer.

These words show that a *casual desire* for time alone with God is not enough. Here is a person *anticipating* a battle for spiritual devotion. A deep, personal prayer life will be hard won in a busy world. Time will never be *found*. It will have to be *made*.

- 3) **OUR CORPORATE FATHER AND HIS HOLY NAME - Matthew 6:9** - "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'"

"*Our*" means I pray with the collective concerns of the family of God in mind. I am not absorbed exclusively with "*my*" needs (notice the words "*I*," "*me*," "*my*," and "*mine*" don't occur in the prayer at all). "*Father*" reflects the fact that God is to be considered as accessible as the most loving human parent. It also points to the reality of our spiritual *adoption* in Christ Jesus.

"*In heaven*" balances the closeness and intimacy of "Father" with the sovereignty and power of the creator of the heavens. "*Hallowed by your Name*" teaches that prayer's first concern is the honor of God and the glorifying of all that His Name stands for. My ego is instantly put in its proper place. All the other following forms of prayer - *petition, confession of sin* - are shaped and framed by starting all prayer centering on who our God is and what He is like.

4) **PRAYER AND THE RECOGNITION OF GOD'S WILL - Matthew 6:10 - "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."**

These words must be prayed with all honesty. Am I most desirous that God's will be done in this world and in my life just as fully, sacrificially and as instantly as His will is done in heaven right now? Certainly we begin to see how prayer begins to work in my own heart. It is a great *revealer*, and, if I continue diligently, a great *purifier* of the human heart.

My biggest problem is the habit of putting *my will* where *His will* should be. This is what hinders the entrance of God's Kingdom in my life. Only as my kingdom goes can His Kingdom come. Jesus' teaching prayer puts this great truth right in the starting gate of the prayer life.

This request also *focuses all my prayer on that inevitable, ultimate arrival of His Kingdom when Jesus comes again*. This, and this alone, will show how substantial my desires are. All prayer and all living must be offered up to the Lord with this hope and reminder firmly in place. Prayer reminds us of the eternal issues.

5) **PRAYER AND OUR MATERIAL NEEDS - Matthew 6:11 - "Give us this day our daily bread...."**

We all have real needs. According to Jesus, prayer is not relegated to some "*spiritual*" compartment of life. The daily grind, and the physical strength needed to complete it, matters to Father God. Jesus said the Father knew our needs *before we ask* (8). So this prayer reminder is given by Jesus for *us*, not for *God*. We are reminded that the sustenance of life comes from God's hand.

We are also taught to look at the physical needs of life in *manageable, bite-sized pieces*. It's *daily* needs that we bring to the throne. We are taught *not* to look too far down the road. Too much *long range thinking* makes us feel autonomous and independent.

See also James 4:13-15 - "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— [14] yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

6) **THIS PRAYER TEACHES DIVINE FORGIVENESS ISN'T AUTOMATIC - Matthew 6:12 - "....and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."**

What bread is to the body, *forgiveness is to the soul*. I can't live without God's forgiving grace. Jesus knows my desire to *receive* forgiveness outreaches my desire to *extend* it. Notice that my even *asking* for forgiveness must be predicated on the fact that I already have extended it. Jesus reminds us all how nervy prayer for forgiveness is when it comes from an unforgiving heart.

7) **WE NEED PRAYER TO KNOW WHERE LIFE'S TRUE DANGERS LIE - Matthew 6:13 - "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."**

These are tricky words. We know from the Scriptures that God doesn't tempt anyone with evil - James 1:13 - "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."

We also know that no Christian needs to *succumb* to any temptation - 1 Corinthians 10:13 - "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

So here's where this leaves us. This Lord's Prayer request is a request that our Father *help us to not be sleepy and careless in life - that we live life alert to our real enemies*. Jesus teaches us to remember that our own strength - our own religious background and experience - these are not adequate protection for staying spiritually strong and clean. "*Deliver us from the evil one*" focuses attention on our real enemy. We must remember his attacks and fortify our hearts through prayer for victory in *advance*. Prayer for strength that isn't offered until the temptation is upon us will be useless.

8) **WHAT PART OF THIS PRAYER WOULD YOU REPEAT IF YOU WERE JESUS TEACHING THE DISCIPLES? - Matthew 6:14-15 - "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."**

Here, the instructions are given more directly. The more generic "*our*" is changed to "*you*". Jesus is talking to *you* (and to *me*) in these words. Also, in these verses Jesus speaks more directly of the *consequences* of refusing to forgive from our hearts. Serious words indeed.