

Are you Devoted?

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[0 : 00] Well, prayer is a religious practice and so people of faith will pray. Every Christian worship! service includes prayer. We've been praying this afternoon. You, I'm sure, have been praying at some point today.

This past week, Muslims celebrated the end of Ramadan by offering their Eid prayers, but it's not just those of a religious faith who practice prayer.

This was one of the fascinating discoveries during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, when COVID went global, Google searches on prayer skyrocketed.

And one lecturer from the University of Copenhagen, Jeanette Sinding Benson, she wrote a paper and it was called In Crisis We Pray, Religiosity and the COVID-19 Pandemic. And her thesis was basically this.

She said that in times of crisis, human beings tend to turn to religion. Hence the Google searches for prayer. And humans, when they are in crisis, they turn to religion for comfort and for explanation.

[1 : 12] And therefore, they turn to prayer as a way of finding some kind of help, something to help them through the crisis. And so whether we would call ourselves a Christian believer or not, whether we would say we were religious or not, we are aware of this desire that people have, in fact, that everyone has to pray, whether it's for ourselves or whether it's for our loved ones or whether it's for people in need.

We're conscious that when crisis comes, instinctively, we want to pray. But the question is, well, how do you pray? And more importantly, who do you pray to?

Jesus teaches us this in the Sermon on the Mount. And at the very center of the Sermon on the Mount, he gives us what we know as the Lord's Prayer.

And so it's interesting in those days when teachers would teach, the center of what they were teaching would be the main and important part. It's not like today when we build up towards a conclusion and the point comes at the end.

And so it's interesting how the Lord's Prayer is right there at the heart and at the center of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Because basically, knowing that we can pray to God as our Father is crucial for understanding prayer.

[2 : 36] And indeed, crucial for understanding and living life itself. And so I'd like us to think about three points this afternoon as we look at the Lord's Prayer. However, when you pray, who you pray to, and then how you pray.

So first of all, when you pray. Jesus here assumes that people will pray. Let's look at verse 7 and 8 again. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. So Jesus doesn't say, if you pray, but He says, when you pray.

And when you do, He says, don't keep on babbling like the pagans. The word babbling refers to the heaping up of empty phrases, of repeating the same words over and over and over and over again. And we might say, just prattling on and on and on and on. And that's the sense here of this word babbling. And Jesus, of course, doesn't mean that we shouldn't use set words for prayer or phrases when we pray.

[3 : 47] And nor is He talking about repeating our prayers. It's good to keep praying. And the Lord's Prayer, indeed, is meant to be repeated. No, what Jesus is condemning is the kind of repetition that is trying to somehow manipulate God by believing that, well, the more words we give God or the longer we pray, then the more chance we have of getting God to do what we want Him to do.

Where God will more likely respond through the sheer volume of the words that we use. And Jesus is saying, that's what the pagans do who don't know God. They think their prayers will be effective because they're long and full of lots of words.

But all of it is just vain repetition, Jesus is saying. And so Jesus is warning against the kind of prayer that's no more than an unthinking or a disengaged or a heaping up of the same words.

A bit like feeding coins in a slot machine where you just keep putting them in and piling them in again and again and again. And you think that, well, hopefully, the more coins you put in, then, well, you will get the jackpot eventually.

And it's a purely mechanical approach to prayer. But it won't work because Jesus is saying prayer is not about the vast quantity of words. It's not about the sheer length of the prayers themselves that makes praying effective.

[5 : 09] Prayer doesn't work because of your technique. Jesus says your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. And so when it comes to prayer, Jesus says, let's keep it simple.

And He does this by reminding us that the whole basis of prayer is, in fact, a relationship with God. And because Jesus tells us God can become our Father and we enter into a relationship with Him, then, well, God knows exactly what we need.

Because prayer is relational, it's not mechanical. That basically sums up our first point. When you pray, remember that prayer is relational, it is not mechanical.

Jesus is telling us we relate to God as our Father in prayer. And that is absolutely fundamental to all prayer. And every prayer we say, we need to know the one that we're praying to.

And trusting that He knows everything we need will make all the difference to our praying. And so whether you're familiar with prayer or whether you're new or unsure about prayer, whether you're strong in prayer or whether you struggle with prayer, Jesus doesn't complicate or confuse prayer here.

[6 : 33] He keeps it simple by teaching us when you pray, you're talking to the God of the universe who you can know as your Father.

Prayer is simply speaking to Him, which is how the Lord's Prayer begins. And in that verse 9, our Father in heaven.

And so that's our first point, when you pray. Secondly, let's think more about our Father in heaven, who you pray to. Because when Jesus teaches us how to pray, He begins with this phrase, our Father in heaven, which really is the foundation of all of prayer.

Because Jesus has been teaching us about how we relate to God as our Father. And we mentioned this last week, if you were here, that in chapter 6 of the Sermon on the Mount, from verse 1 through to verse 18, Jesus uses the word Father 10 times.

And it's because He is emphasizing to us that we relate to God as our Father. We can come into a relationship with Him. And this was astonishing at the time for those who are listening to Jesus.

[7 : 43] It was radical for Jews to be told, you can address God as your Father. They would never have thought that they could know God in such an intimate way and on such intimate terms.

But it's just as radical today. Because, in fact, this is what differentiates Christianity from every other religion and every other philosophy or worldview.

Christianity is different because Christianity says you can know the one that you're praying to. You can enter into a relationship with Him. He will be your Father and you will be His child.

Only Christianity says you can relate to God in a personal way. You can call Him your Father. And so in the Sermon on the Mount, what Jesus is doing is changing the way that we can approach God.

And, of course, Jesus called God Father because Jesus was the eternal Son of God. He always knew God and called God Father.

[8 : 47] And what Jesus is doing here is He is inviting us, His people, to call God Father. And we can because those who receive Jesus and believe in Jesus are given the right to become children of God.

In other words, we are adopted into God's family and we receive the rights and privileges of being children of God. And that's basically what it means to be a Christian.

To be adopted into God's family, to know Him as Father and to be His child. That's why we can call Him our Father in Heaven. So we can approach Him with the confidence of a child because He's our Father.

I love it when our children run up to their parents and jump into their arms because they're their parent. And so they go with confidence. There's no standing back. But we also approach God with reverence because, well, He reigns in Heaven.

And what an immense privilege that is to be able to address the powerful God in such a personal way. Which means we don't pray to a God who is too remote to be interested in us.

[10 : 03] And we don't pray to a God who is just too weak and small to be able to help us. Instead, we pray to the mighty God who is simultaneously our Father who can help us and who wants to help us.

And so the secret to grasping what prayer is and how to pray is knowing who we pray to. Knowing God as our Father makes all the difference to our praying.

And that's the first fundamental lesson Jesus teaches us here in the Lord's Prayer. And if we don't grasp it, then we'll always be confused about prayer. What it is, why it matters, what it achieves, and how we do it.

And I suspect most people struggle with prayer as Christians because they don't really understand the privilege of this relationship that we can have with God as our Father.

Because if you're not sure whether God exists or whether God is sovereign, if you're confused about his power, love, goodness, care, compassion, forgiveness, then prayer will often seem like a royal waste of time.

[11 : 15] Like, what is the point of this exercise? And the point is, we have a God who relates to us in a personal way.

So we'll never be convinced of the need for prayer unless we relate to the one who is the reason for prayer. And so while these days, many people, I think, are into mindfulness and meditation and attempting various prayer-like techniques as they search for a deep experience of the soul, well, it's only ever going to be a poor substitute for praying to the one true God.

What the human nature yearns for and longs for, that experience, that void that is there, is only ever going to be met by God, not absent from God.

And so we actually find no help just looking inwards. Jesus is saying to us, we need to look upwards to the one who he calls, he tells us to call our Father in heaven.

And so the void that people have, well, they will try and fill it with all kinds of other things. But it can only be filled with God, our maker, who wants to relate to us in a personal way.

[12 : 34] And through Jesus, God enters into a relationship with us. You would have heard on the news recently the release of the JFK assassination documents.

And when I heard that, it reminded me of a photo I'd seen of President John F. Kennedy. And he was in his Oval Office in the White House, and he's at his desk, and he's looking at some papers. And in this photo, underneath his desk, at his feet, is his son, his little boy, John F. Kennedy Jr. And he's just playing away without a care in the world.

Now, nobody could get close to the president, and yet his son could waltz in and out of his office and sit next to him and play with him and be in his presence whenever he wanted.

Why? Well, despite the fact that he was the president of the United States of America, this boy was his son and could call him Daddy and enjoy intimacy and access that was impossible for anyone else.

[13 : 39] And incredibly, what Jesus is saying here is, you can enter into a relationship with my father so that he can become your father, and you can pray to him as our father because your status changes and you're now a child of God.

And so in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ, the holy and the unapproachable God becomes our open-armed and welcoming father.

And so we can enter his presence at any time. And we don't need to perform any kind of special rituals in order to talk to him if he's our father.

And so that's the secret of prayer that Jesus is giving to us here. It's knowing our father in heaven. So first, when you pray, second, who you pray to, and then third, how you pray.

Jesus said, this then is how you should pray. And then he gives us the prayer that we know as the Lord's Prayer. And of course, it is what we should pray, but Jesus also gives it to us as a model prayer to help us in how to pray.

[14 : 49] Because Jesus teaches something here that is profoundly simple and yet comprehensive at the same time. And you'll notice that, that the Lord's Prayer is so simple, it's short, and it can be

easily memorized.

And you know that when you hear the children who are two or three or four can repeat it and know every word of the Lord's Prayer. It's because it's so simple. And yet it's also comprehensive because you notice that the Lord's Prayer encompasses God and his work, God and his kingdom, and then it moves on to ourselves and our every need.

And so Jesus teaches us here in these six petitions what it means to pray. In fact, we did a series on each one of these petitions back in 2020.

I think it was online during COVID where we had a sermon on each petition. So I thought I would give you those six sermons now just so we can go on till about eight o'clock at night. No.

Seriously, you can listen to those online if you want more information or more detail in each of these petitions. But notice how the first three petitions focus on God and his kingdom.

[16:00] Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And then the final three petitions focus on ourselves and our needs. give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

And so Jesus is saying here in this model prayer, prayer first of all should be directed towards God. Our focus should be him before our focus is on ourselves.

So it's his name, his kingdom, his will before it's our daily food, our sins and our temptations. So let's just look briefly at each of these.

First, hallowed be your name. Hallowed is not a word that we use much these days. Who here used hallowed in a conversation in the past week? Nobody.

It might be used in a sporting context when we talk about the hallowed turf of say Murrayfield where Scotland used to be England but no longer are able or the hallowed turf of Ibrox or Parkhead or Furhill or wherever.

[17:09] Hallowed has this sense of it's special, it's important, it's significant. And so when Jesus teaches us to pray hallowed be your name, what he's saying is God is of supreme importance.

He is special. And so this word translated hallowed is where we get our English word holy from because it means to make holy, literally to set apart or to sanctify.

And so to hallow God's name doesn't mean to make his name holy because it already is holy but to set apart his name in worship and adoration because of who he is.

And so we want his name to be treated as holy. And that's why we don't like it when people blaspheme or misuse God's name. It's offensive to us. Why? Because God is our Father whom we love.

So hallowed be your name. Next, your kingdom come in verse 10. So God rules over everything with absolute power and authority. And so the whole story of the Bible is the story of God establishing his kingdom.

[18:26] At the beginning of the Bible God created perfect world but the rejection of his rule meant there were disastrous consequences for everything. And yet, what did God do?

Well, he had a plan whereby he would restore his rule on earth and one day bring in his new perfected kingdom which is what we're waiting for.

And so God's kingdom has arrived in Jesus when he was on this earth his first coming and God's kingdom will be consummated or it will come in all its fullness when Jesus returns for his second coming.

And that's why we pray your kingdom come. And when we do we're saying that our allegiance is with the king and we long for his kingdom to advance and spread and grow across this world.

And so in praying this prayer what we're saying is we're going to invest our lives as his people as his church to see more people becoming his loyal subjects by trusting in Jesus and becoming Christians.

[19:32] And we keep doing this. We keep praying it and we keep doing it until as Revelation says the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever.

And then the third petition your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is teaching us to pray for God's will to be done.

Now there are two aspects to God's one will. So firstly there's what God has planned for all eternity what God in his sovereignty has decided will happen.

And secondly there's God's will in the sense of what God wants us to do. The will of God that we can either obey or disobey. And so why pray for God's will to be done?

Well in one sense God's will is always being done as God does everything according to his sovereign purposes. But in another sense we are to pray that God's will would be done on earth just as it is in heaven in our own lives.

[20 : 46] For our lives on earth would in a sense be heavenly because we seek to obey our heavenly father and live our lives according to his will.

And so by praying this prayer we're really saying God I'm with you and I want to do what you want me to do. So as we pray it our desire is to bring our will in line with his will so we fit in with what he says we should do and be.

Then the fourth petition is give us today our daily bread and we switch to the second half of the prayer now when Jesus teaches us to pray for ourselves and our needs.

So first of all God and his kingdom then ourselves and our needs. And so when we pray give us today our daily bread we're acknowledging that God is our provider.

And so praying for bread reminds us that the basics in life are a gift from God. They come from him and so we daily depend upon God to give us what we need.

[21 : 56] And that's surely why the focus on our needs only comes after the focus on our father because we're acknowledging that what we have comes to us from him.

And so we can pray with confidence knowing that God our father will take care of us and he will give us what we need. And so we're not asking for what we want. Bread of course is a daily necessity isn't it?

It's not an extravagant luxury. Rather we're asking for what we need recognizing that we just can't live daily unless our father provides for us.

And then fifthly forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. When Jesus says forgive us our debts he's referring to sin as a debt and we all know a debt is something that you owe someone.

You've got to pay them back. And so we have to pay the penalty for our sins and either Jesus pays for them at the cross or we pay the debt of our sins in hell for all eternity.

[23 : 05] And that's why Jesus came to pay for our sins so that God can pardon us and forgive us. And so when we trust Jesus as our saviour then it means our debts have been cancelled they've been wiped out.

And that's why Jesus tells us to ask for forgiveness from God for ourselves forgive us our debts but he also asks us to offer forgiveness to others as we also have forgiven our debtors.

So Jesus is not saying that well God forgives us because we forgive other people. What he is saying is that we should forgive others in response to the fact that God has already forgiven us. But why do we need to keep on praying for forgiveness? The reason is because we keep on continuing to sin. and because God is our heavenly father then we continue to seek forgiveness because we become aware that our sin grieves him.

It offends the one who is our father. And then sixthly this final petition and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.

[24 : 22] So Jesus tells us to pray for protection because when we're faced with temptation when we need it or we'll fall into sin. And we need it daily whether we've been a Christian for seven months or for 70 years.

We need protection from falling into sin. And we might wonder whether God would lead us into temptation. Well, Jesus was led into temptation in the desert.

Martin Luther, who was the German reformer, said in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, he said, temptation can be avoided by no one. You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the air over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair.

Basically saying you can't stop temptation, but praying for God's protection means two things. It means that we are well aware of our weakness and need for protection, but it also means we're well aware that we have a loving Father who wants to protect his children and who is able to protect his children.

And so that's why Jesus tells us to pray it. And so it's this relationship with God as our Father that is fundamental to prayer, isn't it?

[25 : 43] But it's not just fundamental to prayer, it's fundamental to life itself because we've got a Father who's brought us into relationship with himself, who loves us and who longs to hear us speak with him.

And he is the perfect Father. You know, when we lived in Edinburgh, there was a place called Leith Water World. It's kind of like one of those great water parks that you go to abroad on holiday where it's sunny with flumes and rides and everything else.

Yet it was in Leith and Edinburgh. But when we turned up to go to Leith Water World, they wouldn't let us in. They said the council rule, and we turned up, two adults, Shona, me, Joshua, Matthew, and Rebecca, all who were under five at the time.

But the council said, they said at the desk, the council rule is that you need to have one adult for every child under five. And so you've got three children, that means you need three adults.

And we said, well, you know, we're their parents, mum and a dad. We can kind of look after our children, you know, we've had them for a few years now. And he said, oh no, the rule is you need one adult for every child.

[26 : 57] And so we couldn't get in to Leith Water World. I went away sad and went to some other swimming pool that was quite boring really. But anyway, I decided not to give up on Leith Water World.

So I took my father-in-law and we left Rebecca at home and we took the two boys, so two adults and two children under five. And we got in okay, it was fine.

We went to the changing village and went into the changing room, kind of family cubicle. And grandpa and Joshua got changed.

I helped Matthew get into his swimming nappy and then swimming trunks. I never do understand how swimming nappies work other than just stay away from a small child in water with a swimming nappy.

But anyway, I got Matthew's trunks on and then I decided I would get dressed and then I thought we were all ready. Grandpa was ready, Joshua was ready, I was ready and then Matthew was nowhere to be seen. He disappeared.

[27 : 58] And what had happened was he'd gone underneath the changing room door and just went off into this crazy water park with flumes and rapids and all the rest of it.

And I shouted for him, looked for him, tried to see if I could see him, couldn't see him anywhere until I saw him way up high at the biggest flume in the whole place standing at the front of the queue with the lifeguard wagging his finger at Matthew saying, no, you can't go down this ride.

And the point of my story is, well, we often fail as human fathers, don't we? We fail as human parents. When it comes to our children, we're often not the father that we need to be or should be. And yet what Jesus does here in the Lord's Prayer is teaches us just how fantastic, how brilliant our father in heaven really is. He's perfect. He's powerful.

He's personal. He's purposeful. He provides. He pardons. He protects. He is the father that we all need. Because it's in knowing God as our father that we discover our deepest longings in life are satisfied and our greatest needs are met.

[29 : 15] And so the question is, do you know God as your father? Because in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that we can.

Because God welcomes us into his family through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because by faith in Jesus we receive this new identity as a beloved child of God.

Where the father gives us every spiritual blessing in his son. And he gives us his Holy Spirit to dwell in our lives. family. become members of what is basically the ultimate royal family.

And to a kingdom that lasts forever. So there is nothing in life that matters more than knowing the God who made you as your father.

Knowing him as your father in heaven. God is going to love you as your father. And you will forever be under his powerful care but also his personal love.

[30 : 24] That's the best news that any of us could ever hear. Let's pray together.