

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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Small Prayers. Great, Big God
Matthew 6:5-13

Well, it's a New Year. That means we likely have a room full of New Year's resolutions. While I'm not someone who makes a list of resolutions, I appreciate the idea of a new beginning and a fresh start. I believe it's good for us to think through what is important. It's good to consider how we can better align the way we live with the most important things. And nothing is more important than our relationship with God.

That's why our pastors set aside one of the first weeks each year to focus on prayer. We also plan 21 days of churchwide prayer leading up to Easter and another season of prayer during our Fall Mission Emphasis. Prayer is a critical part of cultivating our relationship with God, so we want to align the way we live with what Jesus says about prayer.

And that's what brings us to Matthew 6. Every couple of years, we revisit this passage for prayer week because it contains the most comprehensive teaching from Jesus on prayer. Some things I'll say may be old reminders for some of you and brand-new insights for others. But, when it comes to prayer, no one provides a better foundation than Jesus.

So, let's walk through this very familiar passage of Scripture and see what Jesus has to say about the way we should pray.

Matthew 6:5–13

***“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.*”**

As I was preparing for this morning, one of the things that stood out to me in a new way is just how brief the Lord's prayer is. It takes me about 25 seconds to say this prayer. This is a small prayer. It's not the sweet hour of prayer we used to sing about. It's not even a sweet, full minute of prayer. Jesus says, “Pray like this...” and then leads us in a 25-second prayer. Now, don't misinterpret what I'm saying. I'm not saying we shouldn't labor in extended times of prayer. We certainly see Jesus praying for extended periods of time during His earthly ministry and it seems the early church prayed together for extended times, as well. So, I don't believe at all that Jesus is saying a healthy prayer life looks like 25 seconds a day.

What I am saying is that when Jesus gives us a class on powerful and effective prayer, He doesn't focus on how much time we should spend praying. He focuses on the truths that should be foundational to our prayers.

You see, I believe the Lord's Prayer is more a framework for how we should be praying more than something we are to use as a ritual prayer. That's why you can study the rest of the New Testament and you never again find someone praying the actual Lord's Prayer word for word (not that that's wrong, I personally do that). However, every prayer you do find can be traced to one or more components of the Lord's Prayer. So, this coming week, we are going to divide the Lord's Prayer into 6 sections and focus our praying on one section a day. Monday, we will focus on God as our Father. Tuesday, we will focus on praying for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done. And so on and so forth. Those daily prayer guides will be available on our website and posted on our social media and churchwide emails.

This week, we want to pray through the framework of the Lord's Prayer. But, this morning, I want us to see that before Jesus gives us a framework for prayer, He lays a foundation of truth about God. He says how we pray is determined by how we see God.

Let me show you what I mean. Matthew 6:5-6...

"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.

Jesus says we shouldn't pray like the religious hypocrites. Their prayers aren't powerful even though they put on quite a show. And what does Jesus say is missing from their prayers? Primarily, they had the wrong motives. They wanted to be seen by people because they wanted glory (which is why we need to ask for God's name to be hallowed and glorified). And Jesus also says they weren't praying in light of who God is.

Jesus says God sees the unseen and sees what no one else sees (God sees you even when no one else does). He says God rewards those who seek Him in prayer. Those are truths about God that are foundational to powerful prayer.

Jesus does a similar thing in verses 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. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Notice why the Gentiles pray by heaping up empty phrases...they think their gods will hear them because of their many words. They have a terrible view of what God is like, so they don't pray the right way.

In verse 8, Jesus corrects that wrong approach to prayer by giving us a proper view of God. He says, "Here's the truth about God: He already knows what you need before you ask." When Jesus lays a foundation for prayer in verses 5-8, the biggest truths He teaches are about God even more than prayer.

Basically, Jesus is saying, "Here's what you really need to know about prayer: You need to know God. If you know who God is, then you're going to pray the right way. You can't build a good framework for prayer to God unless you have a good foundation of truth about who God is. The Lord's prayer isn't a magical incantation that we mindlessly repeat. It's a guide that helps us pray in light of who God is.

And that gives us our big idea for today:

Big Idea: Powerful prayer is motivated by faith in who God is.

If you want to experience the power of God in your prayer life, then saturate your heart in the truth about God found in Scripture. God's power is poured out on those who pray as a faith response to Who He is and What He says in His Word. That's why you can't separate effective prayer from diligent study of God's Word.

So, as we prepare our hearts for a week of praying through the Lord's prayer, let's look to the Word of God and see what Jesus teaches us about our great, big God.

1. God is Our Father

V. 6 – "Pray to your Father"

V. 6 – "And your Father who sees in secret will reward you"

V. 8 – "for your Father knows what you need"

V. 9 – (First 2 words of the Lord's Prayer) "Our Father in heaven"

It's clear that the first thing Jesus emphasizes about God is that He is our Father. And that might not sound out of place for you because we live in a culture that sees everyone is a child of God. But the Jews who were listening to Jesus lost their minds when He spoke like this. It's actually one of the reasons the religious leaders had Jesus killed.

John 5:18

This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father...

The religious leaders knew that God is sinless and holy. They knew that people are sinful and that our sin has separated us from God. That means we aren't able to enter God's presence, let alone be His children.

But Jesus came into this world as God in the flesh on a mission to make us children of God. We talked about this during our Advent series. At the cross, Jesus died as the representative for every person who would trust in Him. Our sin was placed on Jesus, and His death paid the penalty for our sin.

Since our sin was punished at the cross of Jesus, it's been taken out of the way. It is forgiven. It no longer separates us from God.

Ephesians 1:4 says that in Christ we are "holy and blameless before God."

John 1:12

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

When you believe that Jesus lived, died and rose again to provide forgiveness of sin and to make you right with God, you are given the right to be a child of God. You are God's child. You belong in His presence. He wants you there. The Creator of this Universe who has all power and authority over everything in existence wants you to feel His embrace as His child.

Now, take that back to the Lord's prayer. That's why the first words of the Lord's prayer are "Our Father." Jesus says we begin our prayer by focusing on the truth of our relationship with God as our Father – by being mindful that we are in the presence of Almighty God who loves us and receives us as His children through faith in Jesus.

And, when you do that, the next parts of the Lord's prayer flow naturally.

- You pray for His name to be hallowed as people see the glory of His grace in Jesus.
- You pray for His kingdom to grow and expand into more and more hearts as people bow before His throne of grace.
- You can pray with confidence for the forgiveness of sin because you know that Jesus has provided forgiveness through His death at the cross.

That brings us to the second thing Jesus tells us about God.

2. God is a Giving Father

Second part of verse 6 ... ***And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

Jesus says the Father will reward us as we come to Him in prayer. I find that to be amazing. God wants to give His children good gifts. He wants you to come to Him. He wants you to ask from Him. He wants to reward you for trusting in Him.

In the next chapter, Matthew 7 verse 11, Jesus says it this way:

11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

We just celebrated Christmas. Like many of you, Emily and I gave presents to our kids. In all honesty, Emily does the vast majority of our Christmas shopping. And I've got to tell you that one of my favorite parts of Christmas is seeing how excited Emily gets when our kids open up their presents. She celebrates along with them because she loves to give good gifts to our kids.

Let me ask you this. What if you believed that God is way better than our earthly parents? He is. What if you believed God is thrilled to give good gifts, the very best gifts, to His children? He does.

How would you pray if you believed God is eager to give the very best gifts to His children? He doesn't withhold any good thing from those who ask Him. This God is the One who so loved you that He gave up His Son to die for you. He will not withhold any good thing.

Now, take that over to the Lord's Prayer. That's why we can ask Him for daily bread and have confidence that what He chooses to give is best. He's a giving Father who gives the very best gifts to those who ask him.

Ultimately, the greatest gift God gives us is Himself...and He stands ready for us to encounter Him in prayer.

God is a good Father who gives good gifts to His children.

3. God is a Caring Father

v8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

God already knows what you need. And you might think that's just because God knows everything, which He does. But I believe Jesus is referring to something more than the fact that God knows everything. I think He is referring to the fact that God is attentive to the needs of His children because

He cares about them and is watching over them. Listen to the way Jesus connects God's knowledge to His care for us as His children in Matthew 10.

Matthew 10:29–31

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

God knows what you need not just because He knows everything but because God is intimately watching over you each moment of every day. He is standing ready to care for you as you come to Him because He cares about you.

It almost always reminds me of Mia and her little princess dress. When my daughter, Mia, was just a few years old, she would get up every morning and put on a blue Cinderella dress over her pajamas. She loved that little dress. I'd often ask her if she wanted help putting it on and her reply was always the same..."no, I do it myself." She was a self-reliant, independent little girl. One morning, I saw her putting on that little dress and I noticed that one of the sleeves had gotten twisted inside out in a way that she was never going to figure out on her own. So, I asked her, "Mia, do you want me to help you?" You can guess her reply, "No, I do it myself." So, there I stood, knowing what needed done and having all the ability to fix her problem...but I knew she needed something even more than she needed that dress fixed. She needed to know that she can't do everything herself. She needed to learn to ask for help. So, I stood by and waited until she finally looked up and said, "Daddy, will you help me?" I answered, "No, it serves you right for not accepting my help in the first place." Of course, I didn't do that. I knelt down beside her and helped one of my little women get ready for the royal ball.

And that's similar to what God is doing in prayer. When we live prayerless lives, we are effectively telling God, "I do it myself." Prayer is our confession that we need God.

And prayer is our confession that we trust God. Here's what I mean by that. If you really believe God knows everything, then you believe He knows what is best for you. And, when you trust that He not only knows what is best but wants to give you what is best, you can pray verse 10, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Mia didn't get my help because she told me what to do. She was helped when she handed me the dress and said, "Daddy, you do it." That's how we pray when we believe God is a caring Father who knows what is best and wants to give us what is best...Your will be done.

What does that look like for you today? What are you most struggling to lay down before the Lord? Do you believe He knows what you need? Will you lay it down? God is our Father. He is Giving and Caring. And, when you really believe that, you pray like you believe that.

And that brings me to the last thing we learn in our text about God that affects how we pray...

4. God is OUR Father

Now, I know I said that was the first thing we learn about God, but I'm not just talking about God as Father. I'm talking about God as our Father. I want you to notice how Jesus phrases the Lord's Prayer.

- Our Father...
- Give us our daily bread...
- Forgive us as we have forgiven...

- Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us...

Those are all plural. We are part of a family of faith and Jesus intends for us to pray with and for each other.

When Jesus says we shouldn't be like the hypocrites who pray to be seen by men but should enter into our rooms, He isn't saying we have to enter those rooms alone. Jesus isn't saying we shouldn't pray with other people, He's saying we shouldn't pray to other people. When you study the life of Christ and the life of the early church, you constantly find people praying to God with each other. I believe that's why Jesus words this prayer the way He does. He uses "us" and "we" language because He intends for us to pray with and for each other.

There's a phrase God has placed on our hearts as pastors for 2024. That phrase is "make church small." That's not an anti-church-growth strategy. It's a strategy for how we believe Jesus wants to live as His church. As God has been growing us numerically, we believe He wants us to be more than just a big group of people who meet together once a week. We believe He wants us to be a family of Christ-followers who live in relationships with each other.

- A family who loves one another as we love Christ first.
- A family who really sees each another because we are present with one another.
- A family who hears one another and bears each others burdens in prayer.

And we can't do that with everyone in this room. So, we have to make church smaller. In the coming weeks, we will be sharing more about one of our strategies to help you form those connections, but what if we just began with small times of prayer to our great, big Father God?

- What if the next time someone in your small group tells you about something going on in their life, instead of telling them you will pray for them, what if you actually stopped for a moment there in the hall to pray together to our Father?
- What if you got together once a week with two or three brothers or sisters in Christ and made it a point to pray with and for one another?
- What if you sent a text message each day to a couple of people God might bring to your mind and just let them know you are praying the Lord's prayer for them?

That's a culture of prayer. That's making church small by embracing the relationships we have as the family of God the Father. That's a foundation for powerful and effective prayer.

God is our Father, our giving and caring Father. So, may this year be filled with prayer to our great, big God.