

PRAYER

Matthew 6:5-13
Our Model of Prayer

Introduction

In this our fourth week of our "Prayer" series, Darrell Johnson leads us in returning to the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6. Whereas, a few weeks ago, Paul Stevens asked the question, "Why pray when God already knows what we need?", Johnson turns the focus in a different light, emphasizing in particular the key phrase that lies syntactically at the centre of the prayer: "on earth as it is in heaven."

This study remains largely a copy of the commentary notes and discussion questions of last month's version, acknowledging that a Connection Group never has enough time to address all the material written for any given week. But first, let us begin with a few *key review questions in relation to Johnson's preaching*:

- a) *How is praying the Lord's prayer a revolutionary practice for disciples of Jesus?*
- b) *Why is Jesus uniquely equipped to teach us this prayer?*
- c) *How does Johnson encourage us by the "embrace" of the prayer?*
- d) *Which sense of "hallowed" spoke most strongly to you, and in what way: "to treat," "to include," or "to eliminate"?*

Connection Group Study

COMMENTARY STUDY

vv. 5-6. Jesus begins his teaching on prayer offering a warning against the

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

vv. 5-6. Study: Do you know the literary context of our passage on prayer? If not,

ostentatious prayer of the hypocrites. These hypocrites have a particular purpose in mind—that they might be seen before men.

The Greek here for “seen” is actually the verb φαίνω (*phaino*), which not only can mean “appear,” but which also can mean “to shine” as in the sense of “being bright” or “coming to light.” Such is the desire of the hypocrites who want to have their spot in the spotlight, and who, in the words of the second-century church Father Origen in his work *Prayer*, evidence the deadly malady that is the human love of glory.

v. 7. Jesus follows his first warning regarding prayer with a related second warning: do not *battologeō* (βαττολογέω); *battologeō*, which occurs only here in the New Testament, is a compound word comprised of *batto*, “to stammer,” and *logeō*,

get a sense of where we are in Matthew by reading Matthew 5:1-12, so as to recognize our literary context of the Sermon on the Mount.

Study: This is not the first time in this chapter that Matthew has quoted Jesus speaking a warning against life as “hypocrites” (ὑποκριτής, *hypokrites*). Read Matthew 6:1-4, the verses just above our passage on prayer, to get a sense of the previous warning in terms of “doing righteousness” and “charity”. What are the similarities between that warning and this one on prayer?

Confess: Search your own heart: Are there ways that you have practiced prayer with the kind of Spirit that desires to “be seen by others”? If so, confess to one another, and receive His great mercy.

Discuss: In our FBC teaching on missional living, we have described missional living as opening “the doors” of the church so that the life of the church spills out onto “the street” and is visible there. In this sense, do you think there might be a proper theological rationale for prayer that is in some way visible to the community?

v. 7. *Study:* Do you remember the story of the prophets of Baal in the days of Elijah? Such would be a quintessential Old Testament example of the meaningless repetitive prayer of the Gentiles. Read 1 Kings 18:25-29 to review the story.

Confess: Has your prayer in anyway been an attempt at “many words”? If so, confess to one

“word.” In this sense, we are to be on guard against any kind of prayer where we find ourselves stammering on, babbling on meaninglessly.

v. 8. The warning against meaningless repetitive prayer babble is rooted in the Father’s omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness. Why vainly speak “many words” when our loving Father already knows our needs before we utter them?

v. 9. Jesus moves from words of prohibitive warning to words of affirmative instruction, providing the model of prayer that has become in the history of the church the Lord’s Prayer. As we well know, this prayer begins with profound statements about the identity of our God. Of these verses, Karl Barth—that most profound 20th century theologian—writes in his *Prayer*:

‘Our Father’, thou who has made thyself responsible for our whole existence, temporal and eternal; God the Father, thou whose glory

another, and receive His great mercy.

Discuss: How do we ensure that our liturgical prayers, our prayers that follow certain historical traditions and formats, do not become meaningless word babble? How do we ensure that our extemporaneous prayers also do not become *battologeo* (see commentary note)?

v. 8. *Meditate:* Is your prayer life sustained by the life-giving knowledge that our Triune God knows what you need and so good and powerful as to act in response, according to his perfect will? Ask yourself this question, and search your own heart.

Reflect: What are your deepest needs today, this week, and this month? Share with one another, if comfortable.

v. 9. *Discuss:* How do Karl Barth’s reflections on prayer, here in the commentary notes, encourage you?

Discern: How is God calling you deeper into the trust of the Father-daughter/Father-son relationship?

Pray: Pray that our triune God be lifted up as holy through all the life and ministries of our church, so that God might be lifted up as holy throughout the city of Vancouver.

is our heritage and to whom we have free access as children to their father, thou who by nature are ready simply to listen to us, to answer us, but we forget it always.”

v. 10. If ever there were a safeguard to ensure that the prayers of the people of God do not remain focused solely on our own lives, solely on the life of the church, it is this: the petition that God’s kingdom, his reign of reconciliation and restoration that has already come in Christ, be made known in its fullest expression as heaven penetrates into and permeates through this earth.

v. 11. Halfway through the prayer, we turn from prayer exalting God’s name, his kingdom, and his will, to our personal needs: our needs, our forgiveness, and our deliverance. Of this petition for daily bread, the reformer Calvin writes in his Matthew commentary: O Lord, since our life needs every day new supplies, may it please thee to grant them to us.

v. 12. We are not just in physical and emotional need of daily bread; we are in spiritual need—of forgiveness that begets forgiveness. Of note, the Aramaic word for “debt” (hoba), which Jesus most likely used, is often used to mean “sin” or transgression.

v. 13. Of this final verse, Calvin helpfully explains the syntax, “That we may not be led into temptation, deliver us from evil.”

v. 10. *Discern*: How is God calling your Connection Group this month to participate in the kingdom of God in your corner of Vancouver?

Pray: Pray that the peace and power of God be made known in your neighbourhood as his kingdom increasingly comes through your collective life as a Connection Group.

v. 11. *Reflect*: How is this petition for daily bread speaking good news to you today?

v. 12. *Confess*: Are there any to whom you are harbouring a lack of forgiveness?

Pray: Pray that the forgiveness you have experienced in Christ would continually renew a forgiving heart within you.

v. 13. *Pray*: Pray that the life of Christ will squelch any work of the evil one would have no place in our FBC life and ministries.

Listen: Conclude listening meditatively to the “Lord’s Prayer” by Hillsong (YouTube).