

Matthew 6:5–15 and Private Prayer

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- Describe your practice of *private prayer*, whether it is planned and/or spontaneous.
- In what ways do you want your prayer life to change?

Introduction

In Matthew 6:5–15, Jesus teaches his listeners about prayer—both how to pray and how *not* to pray. He teaches us a model prayer known as “The Lord’s Prayer,” which can guide us when we pray *privately* (cf. Matt. 6:6 below and the emphasis on praying in secret) and when we pray *together*. Jesus’s main concern is that we align ourselves to God and his will for our lives, not that God aligns himself to our will.

What is prayer? It is expressing our desires, thoughts, and emotions to God—calling on his name to deliver on his promises that he has outlined in Scripture, and expressing our praise and thanksgiving to him (Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord*):

1. **We express our desires, thoughts, and emotions to God:** “25 Who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, my portion forever” (Ps. 73:25–26).
2. **We call on the name of the Lord:** “26 A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4:26).
3. **We ask God to deliver on his promises:** “5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5–6; cf. Isa. 40:28–31; 1 John 1:9).
4. **We pray according to God’s will in Scripture:** “14 This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14–15).
5. **We express praise and thanksgiving to God:** “3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints 5 because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel” (Col. 1:3–5).

We organize Matthew 6:5–15 into three sections: (1) Problems and Solutions in Prayer (vv. 5–8), (2) The Lord’s Model Prayer (vv. 9–13), and (3) The Necessity of Forgiveness (vv. 14–15). We conclude this lesson by outlining a framework for prayer.

1. Problems and Solutions in Prayer

- “1 Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 6:1)
- “5 Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matt. 6:5–6)
- “7 When you pray, don’t babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they’ll be heard for their many words. 8 Don’t be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him.” (Matt. 6:7–8)

Jesus began this section of his Sermon on the Mount by warning people not to draw attention to themselves when giving (6:1–4), praying (6:5–15), or fasting (6:16–18) (v. 1). Problem #1 in prayer is drawing attention to ourselves; the solution is private prayer to the Father, who will reward us (vv. 5–6). Problem #2 is long-winded, babbling prayer; the solution is avoiding such behavior with God, for he knows our needs (vv. 7–8) (Osborne, *Matthew*, 218, 224).

- Why is it so tempting to draw attention to ourselves? What is the remedy?
- What problems do you face when you pray? What are the solutions?

2. The Lord’s Model Prayer

“9 Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not bring us into temptation [testing], but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matt. 6:9–13)

In Matthew 6:9–13, Jesus outlines a prayer for us to follow. God is uniquely the Father of his Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 5:18). But he is also the Father of all who trust in Jesus (John 1:12). Jesus begins this prayer by acknowledging God as Father, the one who guides, provides, and disciplines us for our well-being (v. 9). He dwells transcendentally in heaven, ready and willing to fulfill our God-centered, Word-centered requests. What requests do we make?

1. **We pray for God to cause people to honor his name (v. 9).** God’s name is synonymous with his very being and character. To pray that God’s name would be honored as holy is to pray that God would be treated as holy in our thoughts, words, and deeds.
2. **We pray for God’s kingdom to come (v. 10a).** God is the King and he rules over all, whether people submit to his rule or not (Ps. 103:19; Isa. 43:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). He has delegated his sovereign rule to Jesus (Ps. 2:6; Matt. 28:18). To pray that God’s kingdom would come is to request that God would manifest his rule and reign to a greater extent, even as we long for the fullness of God’s kingdom in the future (Osborne, *ibid.*, 228).

3. **We pray for God's will to be done (v. 10b).** A major gap exists between how God's revealed will is perfectly obeyed in heaven and how it is resisted (or achieved incompletely) on earth. This prayer cries out to God that he would bring to pass his revealed will in the lives of those on earth, both now and at the end of the age.
4. **We pray for God to supply our daily needs (v. 11).** This request acknowledges God as the ultimate provider and asks that God would supply each day's need. Here, the request is for food, but God meets all our daily needs (Matt. 6:25–34; Acts 14:15–17).
5. **We pray for God to forgive our sins (v. 12).** Each sin we commit creates a debt to God, which was paid through Jesus's death (Col. 2:13–14). We ask God to forgive our debts (to not bring justice for what we have done). When we grasp the depth of our sin and the forgiveness God offers, we are all the more willing to offer forgiveness to others.
6. **We pray for God to deliver us (v. 13).** God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13), but he does test (or assess) our faith. Therefore, we ask that God would spare us from severe trials when our faith is tested (Carson, *Matthew*, 207–208). In those situations, we are all the more vulnerable to sin. We also pray that he would deliver us from the efforts of Satan, the evil one.

- What does Jesus value in this prayer? “Jesus values _____.”
- After studying Jesus's prayer, how do you want to modify your prayers?

3. The Necessity of Forgiveness

“14 For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well.
15 But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses.” (Matt. 6:14–15)

Jesus taught that *God forgiving us* is directly related to *our willingness to forgive others*. If we forgive others, then God will forgive us (v. 14). And if we don't forgive others, the Father will not forgive us (v. 15). Forgiving others does not earn us salvation; instead, forgiving others demonstrates that we have truly received God's forgiveness through faith. It is often difficult to forgive, and it takes time to heal from others' offenses. But if we persistently refuse to forgive others, it may indicate we have not received God's grace in our own lives. Those who have been forgiven countless sins by God can, with God's help, forgive others their sins.

- What makes it so difficult to forgive others?
- What advice would you have for someone who is struggling to forgive?

Jesus's Model for Prayer

The chart below begins with bible intake and uses The Lord's Prayer as a framework for prayer.

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| <p>“Still other seed [the Word] fell on good ground and it grew up, producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty, and a hundred times.” Mark 4:8</p> | <p>Bible Intake</p> <p>What did my Bible reading teach me about: God the Father? / Jesus Christ? / the Holy Spirit? how each person of the Trinity relates to the others? myself and others? / how I relate to God? how to obey in my thoughts, words, & actions?</p> |
| <p>“Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy.” Matt. 6:9</p> | <p>Worship</p> <p>“I express my devotion to you in these ways:” I trust you / I hope in you / I love you I worship you / I glorify you / I magnify you I desire you / I enjoy you</p> |
| <p>“Your kingdom come.” Matt. 6:10a</p> | <p>Desire for God's Kingdom</p> <p>“May your kingdom come in:” me / my family / my church my neighborhood / my workplace / the world</p> |
| <p>“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Matt. 6:10b</p> | <p>Prayer for Yourself & Others</p> <p>“I desire your will to be done in:” my character / my family members my church and its leaders / my neighbors my coworkers / my financial decisions local, state, national, & international leaders my evangelism / my discipleship</p> |
| <p>“Give us today our daily bread.” Matt. 6:11</p> | <p>Prayer for Yourself & Others (cont.)</p> <p>“Please care and provide for us:” physically / financially / socially / spiritually</p> |
| <p>“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Matt. 6:12</p> | <p>Confession</p> <p>“I turn away from:” sins of commission (pride, vanity, lust, greed, etc.) sins of omission (<i>lack of faith, lack of hope</i>, etc.)</p> |
| <p>“And do not bring us into trials/testing, but deliver us from the evil one.” Matt. 6:13</p> | <p>Protection, Guidance, & Obedience</p> <p>“Deliver us from severe trials, the world's influence, sinful desires, & demons.”</p> <p>“Draw us to you, your Word, & one another.”</p> <p>By his strength, what does God want me: to stop doing? / to start doing? to change how I do it? / to keep doing?</p> |