Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Purpose of Prayer
Scripture: Matthew 6:5
Code: 2233

Take your Bible if you will this morning and look with me at Matthew chapter 6. We're going to be beginning a study of the disciples' prayer in Matthew 6:9-15. Really the prayer it goes through verse 13, and verse 14 and 15 are an addendum to the prayer to explain an element of it. But this is going to be our study for weeks to come. You cannot study this, the disciples' prayer, commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, in a hurry. You can't possibly deal with it in one week, and I'll try this morning to tell you why.

For many people, this prayer is simply something that they have recited, and in limiting it to that, you miss the whole point because it is infinitely more than that. Normally, in a sermon we would take a text of Scripture, and develop an outline, and preach that text. But this morning I want to give you an overview of this the disciples' prayer. The reason I want to do that is because I think it is so absolutely essential. I really believe that by the time we're done studying this in several weeks it will be a life-changing experience for all of us. It'll do in our prayer life what I believe the beatitudes do in the area of our commitment and consecration. It is monumental in terms of its instructive capability.

Now as we begin the series on the disciples' prayer, I think we need to have it in mind. So let me read, if I may, through verse 13. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heave. Give us this day 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: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Now we face in facing this tremendous portion of Scripture one of the most vital subjects in all of the Christian life. We face the subject of prayer. Much discussed, much talked about, much taught about, and yet nonetheless vital for all that's been said and perhaps much misunderstood. The believer must learn how to pray. In order to experience the fullness of communion with God, in order to open the flood gates of heaven, and to know the fullness of blessing from God, we must know how to pray.

This marvelous pattern of prayer will teach us that. And, of course, I think we're all aware of how important prayer is. The apostle Paul said, "Pray without ceasing." Pray without ceasing. Pray and never stop praying. Now, anything that is so consuming in Christian experience must be understood. If we do not know how to pray, if we do not know for what to pray, then it does us little good to keep on praying. If however, we do know for what to pray and how to pray, then praying without ceasing

has tremendous import.

Now, remember that in this particular section of the sermon on the mount, Matthew is presenting the king, as in all of this gospel. Here in chapters 5 to 7 the king is giving the standards of his kingdom. Now, he gives the standard of his kingdom in contrast to the supposed of the standards of the day. The Jews of Jesus' day had developed a system they thought was adequate to get them in the kingdom, but it wasn't. And particularly, Jesus is zeroing in chapter 6 on their religious activities. Chapter 5, he said their theology wasn't adequate. Later on in chapter 6, their view of the material world isn't adequate. And here he says their religious life isn't adequate, and he picks out three illustrations: their giving, their praying and their fasting. Your giving is not proper. Your praying is not proper. And your fasting is not proper.

And he uses that as the backdrop to then reaffirm what is God's true standard. So really, these are the standards of the kingdom. These are the conditions of being a child of the king. This is the way a true son of the king lives, not like the Jews of that time, but as Jesus points out here, the affirming of God's standard. Now, let me just say of the three that he uses here discussing their religious activity: Giving, praying and fasting; the greater emphasis is placed on praying, because prayer is more important.

Giving is important, but you're going to give properly only when give out of constant communion with God, only when you're responding to God, only when your heart if filled with gratitude, only when you are giving out of the living vitality of a personal life communion with God. And fasting is meaningless apart from prayer.

So the concept of prayer, then, is very, very basic to all giving and all fasting. And that's why when the Lord picks out three areas of religious life: Praying, giving, and fasting; he concentrates most of the things he says on the subject of praying.

It is a very essential thing. In fact, Martin Lloyd Jones has put it into these words. "Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God." And that is true. Jesus, then, is challenging the religion of his day, and he is saying in effect, "Your prayers, just like your giving and just like your fasting, are substandard."

Now you say, "Well, that's the Old Testament people. That's the Jews of Jesus' day. What message does this have to us?" Listen. In the case of today, our religion in many, many cases is just as substandard and inadequate as it was that of the Jews of Jesus' day. There is plenty of giving going on for self glory. There is plenty of fasting going on to call attention to our supposed holiness. And there is plenty of praying going on that is a pretense, plenty of praying that doesn't recognize the basic biblical, divine standards for true prayer.

In fact, the apostle Paul said in Romans 8:26 - and he said this about the church, he said this about people on that side of the cross, the side we live on. He said, “We know not what to prayer for as we ought.” He said two things there: We don’t know what to pray for, and we don’t know how we ought to pray for what we don’t know to pray for. We don’t know how or what in our prayers. Therefore, “the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us.” In other words, God is ever and always aiding our prayers because we don’t know how to pray, or for what to pray.

So we have the same problem. Many who aren’t even Christians pray. That kind of praying is no different than that of the Pharisees and the Scribes, inadequate and substandard prayer. So our Lord then in his corrective to giving, in his corrective to fasting, hits very specific religious activities. But never does he hit so hard as he does in his category of prayer. The most verses in this section are given to the theme of prayer. And what our Lord is doing affirming the need for a proper prayer. He says regarding giving, “Don’t do it this way. Don’t do it this way. Don’t do it this way.” Regarding fasting, “Don’t do it this way. Don’t do it this way. And don’t do it this way.” But regarding prayer, he says, “Don’t do it this way. Don’t do it this way. But do it this way.” This is the only one where he gives a detailed description of how we are to pray.

There’s not a lot of discussion about how we’re to give in this chapter. There’s not a lot of discussion about how we are too fast, just lightly touched. But how we are to pray - listen to me - is totally, generally, specifically, and comprehensively covered in this one simple prayer of 66 brief words. It is an absolute masterpiece of the infinite mind of an all-wise God who could somehow encompass the totality of every conceivable element in prayer and reduce it to one simple pattern for prayer. It is the economy of words that only God himself, with his infinite mind could ever have come up with.

This particular pattern for prayer absolutely staggers my mind, and the longer I studied this week, the more frustrated I became. Usually when I get to a passage I’ll pick out a little outline out of there and just go with it. But I studied this one way, and then I studied it another way, and then another way, and then another way, and it seemed to me that there were infinite numbers of possibilities of ways to view this incredible pattern for prayer. It is an absolute tragedy that people in the church know this only as something you stick on the end of a prayer in a worship service. That’s a far cry from its intention.

Now, I want to go another step in just kind of introducing this thing. I believe there are two ultimate tests of true spirituality. There are two ultimate tests of true spirituality. One is the study of the Word of God and two is prayer. Those are the two ultimate tests of true spirituality, and I personally believe - and I think the Bible supports this - that the study of the Word of God comes first. Why? Because we will not even know how to pray unless we know what the Bible teaches about God, about God’s will, about our lives, and our problems.

Therefore, it is the study of the Word of God that gives birth to a meaningful prayer life. You can't pray in a vacuum. It is not virtuous to say, "Well, so-and-so never studies the Bible, but prays all the time." Well, if he'd study the Bible a little bit, he could probably cut down the time he needs to pray, because he'd eliminate a lot of superfluous stuff. When Jesus gave a pattern for prayer he gave it very, very brief. It isn't how long your prayer is, it's whether your prayer touches on the vital and necessary elements. And frankly, you can do it in 66 words, or you can do it all night long, as long as it intersects with these elements.

But the study of the Word of God comes first. Let me show you what I mean. There are people who plead with God to give them the Holy Spirit. They already have the Holy Spirit. There are people who plead with Christ for strength. The Bible says you can "do all things through Christ who strengthens you." I have heard people stand up and say, "Lord, be with us." And the Bible says, "Lo, I'm with you always." There are people who plead for love for someone. The Bible says, "The love of Christ is shed abroad in your heart." You don't need it. You just need to let it out.

What I'm saying is that unless we understand the truth of the Word of God, we don't really know how to pray. So that the two ultimate tests for spiritual maturity or spirituality are the study of the Word of God and as a corollary prayer, prayer that is guided by a comprehension of God's truth. And when we study God's Word and discover God's truth, we discover also the real condition of our own hearts, the real condition of our own spiritual lives, and that drives us into a private, personal prayer, where we open up our hearts to God.

In my life, nothing drives me to commune with God as much as the opening up of his Word. Now, our Lord knew the place of prayer. The Bible says that Jesus very often would rise a great while before dawn and go into the mountain to pray. The Bible indicates that in the evenings, he would go down the slope of the backside of Jerusalem, cross the Kedron Brook, ascend the small slope of the Mount of Olives, and there he would take his place to commune with the Father, and often pray with the Father all night long.

The disciples saw in Jesus a tremendous commitment to prayer. And probably that's what prompted some to say in Luke 11:1, "Lord teach us to pray." And when that question is asked in Luke 11:1, Jesus repeats to them this very same pattern for prayer that's here in Matthew 6. But that's a different incident, but he gives them basically the same pattern. And maybe right here as Jesus is speaking and he says, "I don't want you to pray like the Pharisees do, to do it before men, and I don't want you to pray vain repetition like the pagans, and I don't want you to pray thinking you're informing God - " God, I've got to tell you some things you really need to know. "I don't want you to pray like that."

Jesus knows in their minds they're going to be saying, "Well, then, teach us how to pray. If we're not to do it like that, how are we to do it?" So the Lord then says to them, almost presupposing the

question, verse 9, “After this manner therefore pray ye.” Here’s the way I want you to pray, not like that, but like this. And so the Lord touches the great need for proper prayer.

Beloved, this comes at a marvelous time in the midst of the manifesto of the king, at a great time in the heart of the sermon on the mount, setting for us for all time the understanding that prayer is vital to a kingdom citizen. For those who follow the king, prayer is a very essential part. Now, I believe this must have hit them very hard, because the Jews had given a priority place to prayer. But in the process of time, they had abandoned the purity of genuine prayer, and they had forsaken real prayer for the routine and the ritual of their religious exercises. They have their little formulas, their little “set prayers” that they prayed at set times, and all of this had supplanted by Jesus’ day the reality of genuine prayer.

But, that’s a reality they once knew. God had given them that. Let me share with you, then, something of the historic Jewish prayer perspective. People say, “Well, this prayer is something brand new.” Not really. Not in total, it isn’t. It’s simply a reaffirmation of something very old. And that fits the sermon on the mount, doesn’t it? Because in sermon on the mount 5:17, when Jesus first got started in this whole discussion here in 5, 6, and 7, he said, “Look, I didn’t come to take anything away from the Old Testament. I’m not coming to add anything to the Old Testament. I am coming to affirm the Old Testament. In fact, not one jot or tittle shall be removed from that law. I’m here just to remind you of the purity of God wants.” And when it comes to prayer, he affirms to them things they well should have known and should have been incorporating in their prayers.

Let me just give you some historic Jewish prayer perspective. The Jews believed that they had a right to pray. The Old Testament Jews believed that they had right to come to God. This was a major part of their life experience. They continually desired to come to God – listen - because they believed God wanted them there. They didn’t come to God like pagans do, in fear and trembling. They didn’t come to God panicking. They came because they really believed God wanted them to come.

In fact, the rabbi said this. “The Holy One yearns for the prayers of the righteous.” Psalm 145:18 said, “The Lord *is* near to all who call upon him.” Psalm 91:15 said, “When he calls to me, I will answer him, says the Lord.” In other words, the Word of God revealed that God wanted to hear their prayers, that God wanted to hear their hearts’ cry. No Jew, not true Jew with a right spirit, ever doubted God’s priority for prayer.

The rabbis believed that prayer was not just communication, but that it was a mighty weapon, that in a way it released God’s power. In Psalm 65:2 we find an interesting verse. It says, “O thou that hearest prayer, - ” and then it goes on to say “ - unto thee shall all flesh come.” But the idea there is that the Jews said, “O thou that hearest prayer.” They believed God heard their prayers. Now I’m not sure the people that worship Baal believed that, are you?

I mean, they would have kept screaming to Baal and nothing ever happened with Elijah, and Elijah kept saying to them, “Well, I think he’s asleep. Yell louder. No, I know, he’s on a vacation.” And they got out stuff, and were ripping their clothes, and cutting their bodies, and bleeding all over the place. I don’t think they really thought their god was that interested, and that’s why they had their endless repetition. That’s why they had their constant badgering, because they really irritated their gods into a response. But the Jews didn’t believe that, “O thou that hearest prayer.”

The Midrash is a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament’s subsections, and the Midrash, the Jewish commentary on that verse in Psalm 65 says this, “A human king can harken to two or three people at one time, but he cannot not harken to more. God is not so, for all men may pray to him and he harkens to them all simultaneously. Men’s ears become satisfied with hearing, but God’s ears are never satisfied. He is never wearied by men’s prayers.” Now that’s their comment on that very verse. God wants you to come, it doesn’t matter how many come. He can filter you all out and he never gets tired. He eagerly waits for you to come.

Now the Jewish teachers went even a step further. They taught that prayer should be constant, constant, constant. They were trying to teach the people to avoid praying only when you get desperate, like the people who think prayer is a parachute. You’re glad it’s there, you hope you never have to use it. They wanted people to pray all the time. And so the Talmud says this. Listen. This is the Jewish teachings.

“Honor the physician before you have need of him.” It’s a good word. It says, “The Holy One says, Just as it is my office to cause the rain and the dew to fall, and make the plants to grow and sustain man, so are thou bound to pray before me, and to praise me I accordance with my works. Thou shalt not say, I am in prosperity, wherefore shall I pray? But when misfortune befalls me then will I come and supplicate. No, before misfortune comes anticipate and pray.” So the Jews are saying prayer is not some kind of an emergency appeal. Prayer is an unbroken conversation built around a living, loving fellowship with God.

They were right on, you see? They were right on the money. They had the right perspective. Prayer was communion, fellowship, unbroken. Prayer was to a God who really wanted to hear them, who really cared, and whose mind was uncluttered by the multitude of prayers. And that’s true.

Further, let me tell you some more about the historic perspective on Jewish prayers. They believed that prayer should incorporate certain elements. Number one - and I’ll give you a list of about eight of these. Number one, they thought prayer should incorporate love and praise, that when you go to God there ought to be a sense of his worthiness and a loving adoration and praise.

And they got this out of the Psalms. The Psalmist says in Psalm 34:2, “I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Unceasingly will I offer praise, the loving adoration of God. In Psalm 51:17, “O Lord - ” it says “ - open my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.” They believed that love and praise was a part of their expression of prayer.

Secondly, they felt that prayer should incorporate gratitude or thanksgiving. In Jonah, for example, Jonah says, “I will offer sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving.” Part of prayer was the offering of thanks, of deep gratitude. In fact, there are many verses on this in the Old Testament. But the rabbis summed them up with the most lovely thought. They said this. “All prayers will someday be discontinued, except the prayers of thanksgiving.” They were right, weren’t they? When the day comes that we have no more to ask for, we will have everything to be thankful for. And so their prayers incorporated thanksgiving.

Thirdly, the Jewish people believed that their prayers should incorporate a sense of God’s holiness, a sense of awe, a sense of reverence. They did not rush into the presence of God flippantly. They did not treat God as if he were a man. They went very reverently. They realized that when they entered into prayer, they came face to face with God. I see it with Isaiah in chapter 6 as he comes from the view of God that he has seen, the tremendous picture of God high and lifted up on his throne, and his train fills the temple, and the angels, the seraphim, gathered about him, and he comes into the presence of God in a holy awe. And all he can say is, “I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips, and I have seen the Lord.” A sense of awe, a sense of holiness.

You find this in many of David’s prayers, that before he can ever come to the place of request, he affirms the nature, and the character, and the majesty, and the holiness of God. So it was a part of Jewish prayers that this take place. In fact, Rabbi Simon used to teach that in prayer a man must see himself face to face with the Shekinah.

Another thing, the Jews felt that in their prayers there should be a patent desire to obey God, that you didn’t pray unless your heart was really right. You didn’t go to God in some ritualistic form, in some superficial, shallow approach, where you really weren’t committed to respond to that communion with obedience. The whole of Psalm 119 affirms this over and over in all those verses. It just keeps saying things like “My tongue will sing of thy word, for thy commandments are right.”

In other words, there was this affirmation that the respond to God was proper. You didn’t go rushing into God and say, “Well, God, I’m talking to you, and if it turns out the way I think, I’m going to follow you.” There were no conditions. In the heart of a true Jew, he went with a spirit of obedience, desiring to please God, desiring to say, “Oh, God, whatever it is that you will in this situation, I respond.”

And so love, and praise, gratitude, and thanksgiving, a recognition of God’s holiness, a desire to please and obey God, all of these were elements of true Jewish prayers. Further, and tying into the

concept of holiness, Jewish prayers incorporated a sense of confession of sin. Confession of sin. When they went to God, they knew that they were unclean, and there was this pure purging. There is a sense of going into God's presence as an unclean person like Isaiah said. David so many times had to get his sins straightened out before he could ever get into God's presence.

In Psalm 26:6 a wonderful verse, "I will wash my hands in innocence: - " listen " - and then go about thine altar, O Lord." I'm not coming into your presence until I've cleaned up my life, until I've dealt with my sin. And that's how prayer is to be. That's right. Who shall ascend to the presence of the Lord? Who shall ascend into his holy hill? He that has clean hands and a what? Pure heart. Who has a right to enter his presence, but he who is purged, he who has faced his sin? And the rabbi said, "When you weep over your sin, God hears your prayer." The rabbi said, "The gate of tears is never shut." The rabbi says, "If you can bring but nothing else to God, bring him your tears and he will hear."

The Jews believed that the prayer of the righteous would turn the heart of God. And James said it, James said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a - " what? " - righteous man availeth much." The Jews used to say that the prayer of a pure heart overturns the wrath of God as a rake overturns the grain. They believed that you could literally turn wrath into mercy with a pure heart. And so confession of sin was part of their prayer.

Further, they believed that prayer was to be unselfish. The Jews had a sense of community that I don't think that we really understand. They had a sense of the national. They were a theocracy ruled by God, and the nation was essential. I think the very fact that Israel still exists as a nation and that there are still pure Jewish people today shows you how vitally they have clung to the preservation of that national identity. But they believed in the community. Theirs were prayers that encompassed the whole. They were not isolated out to the individual.

For example, the rabbis had a very interesting prayer. This is what they prayed. "Hear not, O Lord, the prayer of the traveler." Now that's interesting. "Hear not, O Lord, the prayer of the traveler." Now what is the one thing you pray for when you go on vacation? Good weather, right?

"Lord, I'm going, so don't let it rain, or snow, or whatever. Just give us good weather. I'm on a journey." And in those days they went on foot, and when they go on a journey, the traveler would pray for good weather, accommodating skies, an easy journey. The rabbi said, "Lord, don't hear that prayer," because that's one guy on one trip. He may be praying for a fair day and everybody in that part of the world knows their crops need rain. "Lord, don't do something for somebody that messes up what needs to be done for the majority."

Now that's a great perspective in prayer because most of us come to the Lord with a whole lot of personal pronouns: I, I, I, me, me, me, my, my, my. And we pray these isolated prayers, "Lord do this for me. Lord, I have to have this. Lord, my needs are such. Lord, I'm having this problem." And we

don’t know what it is to encompass the whole thing. And God is in heaven, and he’s got a master plan for his kingdom, and everything fits together. And sometimes folks we have to sacrifice what might, in our own minds seem best for us, because God has a greater plan for the whole, right? We don’t always have that perspective. And so when the Jews go to pray, a true believing Jew in the Old Testament, he would say, “Lord, you do what advances your cause among your people, not what I want personally.”

We have developed a self-centeredness in prayer even today in the church that is unbiblical, where we are really preoccupied with ourselves. We have isolated ourselves out. We don’t communicate. We don’t bear each other burdens. We don’t share the way we should. And consequently, our prayers run down this very narrow track. And we need to learn to pray as they prayed in an unselfish manner. Do what is best for the whole. And I’ll tell you, folks, that’s why you find no singular personal pronouns in this prayer in Matthew 6. It always says, “Our Father, our daily bread, our debts, our debtors.” Why? Because true prayer encompasses the community of faith. It never isolates one individual out to have their needs met, no matter how it affects everybody else. Prayer was to be unselfish.

Another thought, the Jews believed that elements of their prayer included love and praise, gratitude and thanksgiving, recognition of God’s holiness, a desire to please and obey God, confession of sin and a pure heart, unselfishness, and then perseverance. They believed that you were just continue to pray. Don’t give up. Just hang in there. The apostle Paul prayed for Lord to remove a thorn in the flesh. He didn’t do it, so he prayed again. He didn’t do it, so he prayed again a third time. Perseverance.

After the sin of the golden calf, Moses, bless his heart, after the people had worshiped the golden calf, the Bible tells us - I think it’s the 9th chapter of Deuteronomy - that Moses got down and prayed for his people, Israel’s sin, 40 days in a row. That’s perseverance. The Jews believed that.

Finally, an element of their prayers was humility. Humility. A true Jew was coming into prayer - watch this - to submit himself to the will of God. The greatest illustration of this from the heart of the truest Jew that ever lived is the very prayer the Lord Jesus in the garden, when he set aside what seemed to him to be the most comfortable thing and said, “Nevertheless, not my will, but - ” what? “ - thy will be done.”

That is the heart of the truest prayer. “Lord, I’m here to say do your will. I want to align myself up with that.” Listen, prayer is not asking God to do my will. It is bringing myself into conformity with his will. It is asking him to do his will and give me the grace to enjoy it.

Now all of those elements, people, were part of the traditional prayer life of a true Jew. And they were serious about their prayer, in fact the Jews used to describe prayer, they had a word, the word is

kawanna, K-A-W-A-N-N-A or something like that in transliterating it. But kawanna, and this particular word in the Hebrew is a word that is hard to translate. It has to do with the idea of intensity, or the idea of great emotion, or the idea of great devotion. It's the idea of commitment. It is the pure heart that is totally committed to heart-rending prayer. And the Jews said all of these elements belong in prayer, but not superficially. Oh, no, with a great commitment, and a great intensity, and a great concentration, and a great devotion.

In fact, Rabbi Ammi said that man cannot come into the presence of God unless he brings his heart in his hands. And so they prayed, and they had a great heritage of prayer. That is the history of the Jewish prayer perspective.

But something went wrong, and we come secondly to the hypocrisy of the Jewish prayer perspective. It became hypocritical, and in verse 5 our Lord said they prayed to be seen by men. They're phonies. They're not talking to me anymore. And they're selfish, and they're trying to gain things for their own ends, and they're trying to make a public display, and they go on with these vain babblings, and vain repetitions like pagan people, thinking that I'm going to do something just because I'm so sick of hearing them I'm going to do it to shut them up.

And then they had this unimaginable pride, verse 8, to think they need to inform me about things. Their prayers got all fouled up. And so our Lord, then, comes in verse 9 and says, "Let me reaffirm what right praying is." And so what you have in verses 9 to 13 is really Jesus reiterating the ingredients of prayer that I just gave you from the Jewish tradition. He doesn't say anything totally new, although he gives new richness to everything he says. He takes it further than it had ever gone, but it's the basic, same, sustained truth. And we need this today, beloved, because we don't know how to pray in many cases any better than they did. And so studying this marvelous model of prayer is going to be a great experience.

Let me just add another footnote here. We miss the point. You know, even though the Lord gives us the instruction how to pray here, we goof up on so many obvious things. Instead of taking this prayer and using it to learn to pray, we just say it. And I can remember in my life, and you can, too, just saying this prayer. That is not the point.

People say, "Well, we believe it's a prayer to be recited." No, I don't believe that. I think it's fine to recite it, just as it's fine to read any part of the Bible. But I don't think it is a prayer to be recited. I'll give you several reasons. Number one, this prayer is recorded twice in the Scripture; once in Matthew 6, once in Luke 11, and it differs in both places. It is substantially the same, but the words are different. If the Lord was giving us a prayer to be memorized and recited, he wouldn't have given us different words the two times he gave it, right? In one he says, "forgive us our debts," and in the other he says, "forgive us our trespasses," for an example. In other words, if it was a rote, routine prayer to be recited, at least he would have given it the same way.

Secondly, in Luke 11 they said, “Teach us to pray.” They didn’t say, “Teach us a prayer.” It’s one thing to have a prayer book, and open it, and read a prayer. It’s something else to know how to pray. The Lord was not giving them a prayer, he was teaching them to pray. By the way, wouldn’t it seem a little silly if verse 7 says, “And when you pray, use not vain repetition as the pagan,” and then immediately follow it by giving us a prayer we’re supposed to repeat? That would totally ridiculous. It is vain repetition he is trying to avoid.

Further, let me say this, there is no occasion in the entire New Testament: Gospels, acts or epistles; where this prayer is ever repeated by anybody. It is not a prayer to be made a ritual. It is a model for every prayer you ever pray about whatever your pray about. It is a skeleton on which you are to put meat, and bones, and flesh. For example, I have in front of me some sermon notes. Now, that’s not a sermon, that’s just some notes. If I came in here and just read you the notes, we’d be done in ten minutes, and you wouldn’t know much. That isn’t the point. It’s a skeleton. I’ve got to put flesh and bones on it. I’ve got to make it live. And what Jesus is giving here is prayer outline, that’s all. Here are the basic elements of prayer. It’s just like an outline. You have to develop this into its meaningful expression in every different situation.

And, beloved, this prayer covers everything. It is staggering. The more I studied this, the more frustrated I got. I came back here on Saturday because there was so much of this going in my head, and I usually try to finish by Friday so that I can have Saturday to mull it over. I was here on Saturday. I went home on Saturday night. I started to get into bed and I went back to this thing, and it just kept flooding into my brain. I got up this morning and again I was at it. I feel like so much is in my head because there’s so many ways to see this prayer. It just bigger, and bigger, and more encompassing, and more encompassing, the more I studied it. It teaches us so much about prayer.

Let me just give you some approaches, and what I’m going to do is just like looking at diamond. I’m going to hit one facet and another, and another, and another, and another real quick. So hang in there. This is a model for every prayer ever prayed. This is the skeleton on which you can hang every prayer you ever pray. This is the pattern for all praying. If you will memorize this prayer, get it in your head, and just work your way through its outline no matter what it is you’re praying about, you’ll have the confidence of your praying the way Jesus taught you to pray. Tremendous.

For example, one way to look at this prayer it unfolds the relationship that we have with God, and it hits it so many ways it’s just staggering. For example, it says, “Our Father.” That means that we have a father-child relationship with God. It says, “Hallowed be thy name.” We have a deity and worshiper relationship with God. It says, “thy kingdom come.” We have a sovereign and a subject relationship with God. It say, “thy will be done.” We have a master and a servant relationship with God. It says, “give us our daily bread.” We have a benefactor and a beneficiary relationship with God. It says, “forgive us our trespasses or our debts.” We have a savior-sinner relationship with God. It says, “lead

us not into temptation." We have a guide and a pilgrim relationship with God. We could study this prayer in just that way. How does it show our relationship to God?

Let me look at it another way. It defines the spirit in which we're to pray. What is to be our attitude as we pray? First of all, it says, "our." That's an unselfish spirit. Then it says, "Father," that's a family spirit. Then it says, "hallowed be thy name," a reverent spirit. "Thy kingdom come," a loyal spirit. "Thy will be done," a submissive spirit. "Give us our daily bread," a dependent spirit. "Forgive us our trespasses," a penitent spirit. "Lead us not into temptation," a humble spirit. "Thine is the kingdom," a confident spirit. "And the power," a triumphant spirit. "And the glory," an exultant spirit.

This prayer could be divided simply into three elements, and then three more elements. The first three deal with God, the second three with man. The first three, God's glory; the second three, man's need. The first three, the glory of God, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done," that's the glory of God. The second three, man's need; "give us our daily bread, forgive us our debts, and lead us not into temptation." You see, the point is this. First, when you pray you set God in his rightful place, do you see it? Then everything else flows out of it. All prayer is to begin with the character of God: Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. And then what follows? God is in his supreme place, and when God is first, prayer makes sense.

Another way to look at it, the first three show the purpose in prayer. What is the purpose? Number one, to hallow the name of God; number two, to bring in his kingdom; number three, to do his will. That's the purpose of prayer. "Oh God, I'm coming to you in order that your name might be hallowed, in order that your kingdom might come, in order that your will might be done." And what is the means? What does it mean by which his name is hallowed, his kingdom is lifted up, and his will is done? First, by giving us our daily bread, that's provision. Second, by pardoning our sins, that's pardon. Third, by leading us not into temptation, that's protection. As God provides, pardons, and protects he consequently is exulted in his glory, in his kingdom and in his will.

Another way to look at it. First of all, God is a father, "Our Father, hallowed be thy name." Then he is a king, "Thy kingdom come." Then he is a master, "thy will be done." As a father, verse 11, he gives us our daily bread. He is the source. As a king, he forgives our debts and pardons us. As a master, he leads us not into temptation.

The elements, the wonders, the beauties of this particular model of prayer are almost infinite. Only the mind of God could have conceived such far reaching, incredible thoughts to be compressed into this little tiny section of Scripture. No man could ever have done it. Listen, beloved, prayer is never an attempt to bend the will of God to my desire. Prayer is to bend me to fit the will of God. When I acknowledge God as sovereign, and when I say, "God, give me my daily bread only if it gives you your hallowed name; God, may my sins be pardoned only if that exalts your kingdom; and God, lead me not into temptation if that lets you be the master in my life." For in all things when it's said and

done the purpose of all prayer is at the end of verse 13, “for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.” That’s the point.

Look just at the last three elements: The bread, provision; the forgiveness, pardon; and the leading not into temptation, protection; and you’ll find the three time dimensions of life. “Our daily bread,” present. “Our debts,” sins from the past. “And lead us not,” that’s the future. This little prayer encompasses the past, the present, and the future provision sustenance of God. Bread, that’s physical; forgiveness, that’s mental, it relieves the anguish of guilt; and leading not into temptation is spiritual, that’s the maintenance of spiritual life. Whether you’re talking about past, present, future; whether you’re talking about physical, mental, spiritual; whatever it is you’re talking about, it’s here. It’s here.

By the way, all of the petitions in this verse are in the imperative mode in the Greek, which means there’s an intensity to them, a tremendous intensity. There’s a fantastic brevity in every phrase, but it’s an intense thing; “thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” There are no qualifying elements. Everything in this prayer, beloved, seeks to glorify God, seeks to lift up his name, seeks to exalt his holiness.

And I would just tell you right now that’s the purpose of all prayer. If you think prayer is for you, you’ve missed the point. You’ve missed the point. That’s why we get so messed up. We’re praying for ourselves. We don’t take into account the whole community of faith, and we don’t take into account the whole will of God in the parameters of his own kingdom. Samuel Zwemmer writes about this prayer, this word, “Every possible desire of the praying heart is contained in this. It contains a whole world of spiritual requirements. It combines in simple language every divine promise, every human sorrow and want, and every Christian longing for the good of others.”

The prayer focuses on God. Listen. In John 14 Jesus said, “Ask anything in my name and I will do it in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” The reason you pray and the reason God answers is to put himself on display, to put his glory on display. That’s it. When you pray for someone who’s not saved and they come to Jesus Christ, it isn’t for your sake you did it. It’s to show you the power of salvation. When you have a physical need and you pray and God gives the meeting of that need, it isn’t so you can have what you want, it is so that you will know that God meets needs.

His glory is the issue. So when you pray get it in mind you’re not informing God, he already knows everything. You’re not forcing God, you’re not badgering God, you’re not irritating him, you’re not conning him. What you’re doing is submitting to his sovereignty.

And that’s the affirmation of the disciples’ prayer. That’s the way we want to look at it. It begins with, “Our Father who art in heaven,” adoring God. It ends with, “For thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory forever,” adoring God again. In the middle, everything in it is about God.

“Our Father who art in heaven,” that’s God’s paternity. “Hallowed be thy name,” that’s God’s priority. “Thy kingdom come,” that’s God’s program. “Thy will be done,” that’s God’s purpose. “Give us this day our daily bread,” that’s God’s provision. And, “forgive us our debts,” that’s God’s pardon. “And lead us not into temptation,” that’s God’s protection. And, “thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever,” that’s God’s preeminence. And all prayer, Jesus is saying, is not to stand in the streets, and the corners of the streets to pray to be heard by men, to get glory for yourself, but all prayer is by absolute contrast to bring glory to God.

Now, beloved, if you don’t get anything more out of this message than that you’ve got enough to change your prayer life. If you didn’t even get that, you weren’t listening because I said it about 50 ways. So let’s pray together.

Father, we didn’t have time maybe to get as far as we thought today, but we trust we got as far as your thoughts wanted. Lord, we submit to you, oh, bless your holy name, Father. So glorious to dwell with you in your kingdom, and to know that someday we’ll know the fullness of that kingdom when we enter your blessed presence forever. Father, we thank you that our prayer life can be unselfish, that it can be humble, that it can be what it ought to be, and that in so doing we can give you the glory you deserve.

And we know the Bible has told us that if we glorify you, you fill our hearts with joy, that our greatest joy is not in gaining things for ourself, but in glorifying you. May we know the heart of David who said, “I have set the Lord always before me, therefore my heart is glad.” Give us the gladness of heart that knows all our prayers have been for your glory. May we condition everything we ask in that regard. Do it for your own glory. Do it for the advance of your kingdom. Do it as an expression of your own will, that yours may be the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.

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