

January 12, 2020

Our Father
The Lord's Prayer
Matthew 6:5-13

Opening words: The Lord's Prayer has been called "The Greatest Prayer" and the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It has been recited by millions of believers through the ages and is cherished by everyone, regardless of theology or tradition. We recite the words regularly at Western Reserve. It is safe to say we recite the Lord's Prayer about 200 times a year, including Sunday morning worship services, Lenten vesper services, Holy Week services, as well as weddings and funerals. We know the words, but do we understand the meaning behind these words? In this sermon series, *The Lord's Prayer*, your understanding is my goal.

The Lord's Prayer is a model prayer. Some have called it the Disciple's Prayer because it was meant to help the disciples pray correctly. It can be broken down into five distinct sections. Our public and private prayers should contain these five elements. Beginning today and ending on February 9, I am going to look at each section of the Lord's Prayer. So what are the sections of the Lord's Prayer? They are:

Praise
Purpose
Physical Needs
Spiritual Needs
Protection

Today, we look at the first section, praise. Our scripture reading for this series will remain the same each week. Matthew 6:6-13. Let me call the message *Our Father*.

Matthew 6:5-13 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

"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 today 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 the evil one.

M.R. DeHaan (1891-1965) was a devout Christian doctor, who was co-editor of Our Daily Bread. He once said, *"If we would talk more about the Lord and praise Him, we would have less time to talk about ourselves."* That is painfully true. If you agree with that quote say, **"Amen!"**

For the next five weeks we are going to be in the Gospel of Matthew, so it is important you get some background. The early church believed it was written by the the former tax collector, then disciple, then Apostle Matthew, between the years AD 50 and 70. The original recipients were Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. That is why Matthew quotes more Old Testament verses than Mark, Luke or John. It was written for one reason. He wanted to proclaim Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. That is helpful but what is equally helpful is the outline of the Gospel. Matthew contains five great discourses. Our reading for today comes from the first.

It is found in the sixth chapter of Matthew. Many call it the Sermon on the Mount. It covers chapters five through seven. Several years ago, I was in Israel and part of our tour was the location of the Sermon on the Mount. I was surprised. It was more of a hill than a mountain. Jesus must have had strong lungs for all to hear. Many believe, it didn't happen on a single occasion. They believe it is a collection of Jesus's teaching from various times and locations. They may be right. I don't know. However, what I do know is the Sermon on the Mount is rich in divine truth found in three different kinds of literature. The first are the beatitudes, the blessings. The second are the ethical teachings. The third is the contrast between Jesus's teaching and the teachings of the orthodox faith. The Sermon on the Mount ends with a short parable about practicing what Jesus taught. Our reading for today, Matthew 6:5-13, is considered an ethical teaching.

In our reading for today, Jesus teaches us about prayer. He begins by saying that prayer must be sincere. Pray is not about religion, it is about a relationship. Do not pray to show off your piety to impress others. Pray to build a relationship with God. Please don't misunderstand the scripture. There are times we pray in public. The faith is lived out in a community. For example, I utter a Pastoral Prayer three times each Sunday. I pray before each meeting and meal. It is important we pray together as a church. There are times we pray with fellow believers. For example, I pray with people who are hospitalized. People expect me to pray before their surgery. There are times we pray alone. Those are the times we can be completely honest with God and share our greatest concerns with Him. That is when I pray for my wife, children, and granddaughter. That is where I confess my great shortcomings, disappointments and fears. The location and the company do not matter. The only thing that matters is our prayers are sincere. Let me state the obvious. Jesus understood the value of pray!

According to the Lord's Prayer the first thing every prayer must contain is praise. How much time do you spend praising God in prayer? If that question makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

The Duke of Wellington (1769-1852) was one of the leading military and political figures of Britain in the 19th century. He was the one who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. History remembers him as a demanding leader. He rarely showered his subordinates with compliments. Yet, even Wellington realized that his methods left something to be desired. In his old age a young lady asked him what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. Wellington thought for a moment, then replied. "I'd give more praise," he said. I hope that isn't your story. I hope you praise the people in your life because people need encouragement. Life is hard. I hope you praise God because that is what He expects. If you don't believe me, then look at the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's prayer begins with praise. How does the prayer begin?

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Don't just recite the words. Slow down and think about them. The word *OUR* reminds us we are not living out the faith alone. The word *OUR* means we are part of a community. There are 2.4 billion Christians in the world today and you stand with them. The faith was not meant to be lived out in isolation. The faith was meant to be lived out in community. That is why church is so important. The word *FATHER* in Greek in the prayer is close to the English word for *DADDY*. God is not a harsh distant father, always correcting. God is an intimate loving father, always encouraging and loving. The words *HEAVEN* and *HALLOWED* remind us God is an all-powerful and pure God. There is no way you can compare your imperfect life to our perfect God. With that understanding, look at that verse again. *Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name*, it is a praise. The Lord's Prayer is a model praise. That means Jesus expects you to include praises to God in each one of our prayers. Do your prayers contain praise? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"** Here is a question you must answer. Why is it so important that our prayers contain praise? There are two correct answers. First, God expects us to praise him. Second, our praise to God is beneficial to us.

Debbie McDaniel, along with her husband, have been in the ministry for years. She is a blogger for crosswalk. Many have found them beneficial. She wrote a blog called: What the Power of Praise Can Do. In the blog, she says there are five benefits to praising God. I cannot disagree with any one of them. She hit the nail on the head. Here is her list:

Praise gets the focus off yourself, and back on God. When we praise God, we stop thinking about ourselves. Let me tell you something you already know. Life is not all about you. We know that in our heads, but we all tend to be selfish. God expects us to keep our eyes on Him, because He is our true hope. Psalm 150:2 says, *"Praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him for his excellent greatness."*

Praise brings us to a place of humility. When we praise God, we admit our dependency on God. God is in control, not us. Psalm 95:3 says, *For the Lord is a great God, a great king above all Gods.*”

Praise leaves no time for complaining and negativity. When we praise God, there is no time left for negativity or complaining. Some people believe it is their role in the life of the church to complain. Do you know of anyone who complains all the time? How much time do you spend encouraging? How much time do you spend complaining? Psalm 103:2 says, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”*

Praise makes room for God’s blessings in our lives. When we praise God, we identify our blessings more easily. Ephesians 1:3 says, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.”*

Praise invites God’s presence. When you praise God, you invite him into your presence. Psalm 22:3 says, *“He inhabits the praise of His people.”*

I would encourage you to write those five things down. You will need them the next time you discover your prayers are void of praise. If you promise to praise God the next time you pray say, **“Amen!”** The first line of the Lord’s Prayer reminds us our prayers must contain praise.

Years ago, I was involved in a pulpit exchange in another community. I arrived early to meet the people and to settle before I preached. A woman holding a purse met me at the door and I identified myself. She didn’t know what to do with me, so she ask if I wanted to go to an adult Sunday school class. To be honest, I didn’t, but it was expected, so I said, “Sure.” I was escorted to a room down the hall and was introduced to a man wearing an old brown suit and tie. He welcomed me and encouraged me to take a seat at the end of the table. When the other six class members showed up, the lesson began. It was a lesson from the Old Testament, but the group seemed more interested in olden times. For about fifty minutes, they reminisced and cursed our modern world. Everything was better when they were young. As the hour came to an end, the man in the old brown suit and tie encouraged the group to bow their heads for prayer. He pulled a piece of paper out of his suit coat pocket and prayed. In his prayer he prayed for the people on his list. His prayer was close to this:

God, we prayer for Mildred who is struggling with shingles. We pray for Ed who is struggling with kidney stones. We pray for Betty who is having hip surgery and Dave who is having knee surgery. We pray for Ernie whose dog ran away and we pray for my granddaughter, Melissa, who wants a date with a guy named Steve. We prayer for Sue’s grandson who is back in rehab.

The pray went on for about five minutes and he closed with an Amen.

It was an odd prayer. As a rule, I am not critical of other people's prayers and I have no doubt his prayer was sincere. However, his prayer seemed incomplete. His prayer seemed out of balance. He wanted the best for the people in his life, but that didn't seem like enough. He wasn't praying to God. He was informing God. Ok, I will say it. To my ears, his prayer seemed selfish. Can I ask you an uncomfortable question? To God, do our prayers sound selfish? There is more to prayer than informing God about our needs and wants. There must be praise. Our praise is important because it forces us to get our attention off ourselves and on God. M.R. DeHaan wasn't wrong. He once said, *"If we would talk more about the Lord and praise Him, we would have less time to talk about ourselves."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**