

Praying God's Way

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:2-4

Reading from Matthew 6:5-15

⁵ “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. ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Introduction

How many times in our lives do we struggle with prayer or see unanswered prayer? Since I was young, my parents would make me go to the altar at church with them. We used to have Sunday night services when we would go to the altar just to pray, even if there weren't problems in our lives. We would go just to commune with God. That's what prayer should be like. It should not be a laundry list of needs. It should not be a show of our spirituality. It should just be talking to God, wanting to be in His presence.

Background

We find this teaching on prayer in the midst of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Right before our reading is a teaching on giving to the needy. After this teaching, Jesus talks about fasting. Giving to the needy, prayer and fasting are all central disciplines of the Christian life.

Jesus expects us to do these things, and offers us a God-pleasing method for doing them better. He does not say, “And IF you pray...” He says, “And WHEN you pray...” Every Christian is expected to pray and give to the needy and fast. There are certain methods that don't work in prayer, and others that do, and we are all guilty of using ineffective prayer methods. Let's look first at ineffective methods.

How Not to Pray

Praying For Public Show (vv. 5-6)

Prayer is not about others. Prayer is about God and you. There are some people who think that their prayers are impressive, like a public speech. They think they are eloquent and gifted

speakers. They think that the power of prayer lies in the spoken word rather than the demonstration of obedience to God. So they like to pray in public.

Jesus calls them hypocrites because they are praying to God, for God's benefit, but they do it before others so that they will be noticed. The prayer is no longer about God or His glory. It becomes a selfish exercise in showing off talent in speech. It becomes about them and their own abilities rather than God's power. And the prayer will go unanswered.

Prayer is not about how good of a speaker you are. It is not about showing off. It is about seeking God. It is about my walk with God. That is why Jesus tells us to pray in private. Those who pray to glorify themselves receive that glory right now. Those who pray for God's glory in private see God in His glory. You can pray to be noticed, or you can pray to see God. It doesn't mean you can't pray in public. It means that our motives must be godly when we pray in public.

Praying For Word Count (vv. 7-8)

Another problem with praying might be our desire to hear ourselves talk rather than listen for God's voice. They make a mountain of words and a flood of lists of things they need. They like to ask God for stuff, but they don't know how to do anything else in God's presence.

Prayers of petition tend to be our addiction these days. I believe it's partly taught by our American consumerism and materialism. We have no trouble shopping or getting things with our own resources, and so we have no trouble asking God for a ton of things.

Prayers of petition should be about seeing God do great miracles and respond to people's needs, not about getting more stuff out of God. We also have the disease of talking too much in our culture. And this also influences our prayers. There is a false sense that the more words I say, the more God will listen.

Or maybe we have too many conditions to our petitions. Perhaps we have too many specifics. There is much teaching today on specific prayers, knowing the person's name, praying for specific methods of healing, praying for specific diseases, and the like. It almost becomes a gateway to gossip. We tend to forget that God knows exactly what is wrong, and He also knows better than us how to fix it. He knows what I'm talking about because He knows me and He is king of the universe.

It's important to use our words wisely even in prayer, but God is unconcerned with what we think He should do and how we think He should do it. Prayer is not about us informing God of what is needed. Prayer is about us connecting with God. It is about us being informed by God. We have it backwards. Sharing our needs with God is about coming to Him instead of someone else to have them met. Prayer is about relationship, not getting God to do things.

How to Pray

Praying for Praise (v. 9)

So how then should we pray? Many call this the “Lord’s Prayer.” But it should be called the “Model Prayer” for it lays out a plan of prayer. Even an advanced prayer warrior can use this model in effective prayer. The way Jesus taught us how to pray does not start with our needs. It starts with recognizing who our God is and how big our God is.

The first principle of powerful prayer is praise. When we open with praising God, we are reminding ourselves that we are speaking with the Lord of the Universe. We are reminding ourselves that no matter what our troubles or needs, God can do anything! Of course God could answer our prayers with great power. He holds the power of the universe in the palm of His hand! This gives us faith to trust in Him to do what we need.

When you begin your prayers, speak of God’s greatness. Use Scriptures that affirm God’s character and attributes. Set your mind on the understanding that God is all-powerful. Let the truth of who God is and what He is capable of seep into your heart and permeate your understanding. Realize the greatness of God through praising Him for His power!

Praying for God’s Kingdom (v. 10)

The second principle of powerful prayer is position. We will often see our trials and needs as larger than life, but not see God as powerful to more than meet them. While most ineffective prayer time is spent telling God how big our problems are, the effective prayer tells our problems how big our God is!

In praying for God’s kingdom rather than our needs immediately, we are pushed into the bigger picture of what God is doing. We see His will more clearly rather than our own. We become part of His story, rather than Him becoming our sugar daddy who gives us our heart’s desire. We learn to ask for true needs of His Kingdom rather than every little thing that is actually a want rather than a need. We become a team player rather than the star of the show. We learn how to cooperate with God rather than manipulate God into doing what we want Him to do.

After reminding yourself through praise of God’s power, next realize your position in God’s plan. Through proclaiming and asking God to bring His Kingdom, we align ourselves to God’s agenda rather than our own agenda. We become more aware of more pressing needs than our own desires. We gain a passion for God’s Kingdom rather than trying to build our own kingdoms.

Praying for God's Provision (vv. 11-12, 14-15)

Now we come to the petition part of prayer. The next principle of powerful prayer is to ask God to provide for our needs. We have needs, and we have a God who provides. But the key to praying for our needs is not to complain to God or to demand from God these things. The key to praying for our needs is to trust that God will fulfill them!

The prayer of petition is about God's power and willingness to fulfill our needs. We go first to God because only He has the power and resources to fulfill our needs. We learn how to humbly and unselfishly ask God for things because we have learned that only He can fulfill our needs. So even in the part that could be the most selfish in prayer, we are still learning to lean on God for our very lives.

When I pray for my daily bread, I take it both physically and spiritually. I can ask God for the physical needs I have, such as food and shelter and clothing and financial needs. I know that He is Jehovah Jireh, my Provider. So in asking for these things, I'm coming to the one from whom all things originate and asking for what I need from His hand. And He wants to take care of me because He made me and loves me.

I also pray for my spiritual bread. We usually have no trouble praying for our physical needs, almost unashamedly demanding in some prayers, for God to do things for us and our benefit. But rarely do we remember that we are physical AND spiritual creatures, and we have spiritual needs as well as physical needs. When I pray for my daily bread, I am reminded that Jesus quoted the Old Testament and said, "Humans don't live on bread alone, but on the very words of God." And I am reminded that Jesus in the book of John tells us, "I AM the Bread of Life."

So when I pray for my daily bread, I'm also praying for my spiritual needs that day. I'm asking the God of Provision to provide my fresh dose of Jesus. I'm asking God to minister not just to my body, but to my soul as well. I'm asking for spiritual wellbeing, not just physical. I'm asking for God's Spirit to speak into my life His words of life.

Perhaps I need for my spiritual wellbeing to forgive someone so that the poison of unforgiveness does not destroy my soul. Perhaps I have sin in my heart that must be eradicated or an attitude that doesn't glorify God. If I neglect to pray for these spiritual needs, I will not be whole. I may have all physical needs met, and yet be spiritually bankrupt and dead! Don't neglect to pray for all of your needs, not just the physical needs you think are more important.

Praying for God's Guidance (v. 13)

The last principle for powerful prayer is to pray for God's guidance. The word for temptation here is interesting, because in the original language, the word can mean temptation (negative) or trial (negative or positive). James teaches us that God does not tempt us by evil means, so I

would suggest that it might be better to understand the request of not bringing trials into our lives that will not strengthen us.

To deliver us from evil is to keep us from the harm that evil causes and the influence of evil in our world. We need God's guidance in our lives, and God guides our steps. When we seek Him and His will, we are being guided by Him. When we seek his leadership in our lives, we are asking Him to go before us and order our steps. We are asking God to continue to redeem and bless our lives with good things.

There are times when He will not keep us from the trials of life, and when He will use those trials to make us stronger. A trial that God can use to make you stronger is not evil, because the product of that trial will be stronger, more trusting, and more patient. No matter what trials we come against, we know beyond doubt that God will walk with us through those trials, and if we would listen to Him and follow His lead, we will be stronger on the other side.

Conclusion

The Model Prayer helps us to see our place in God rather than demanding things of Him. It teaches us to seek God for all things, to trust in His greatness and to see Him as bigger than our problems. It is unselfish communion with God. Prayer becomes more about God than us, and we maintain our service in God's plan, rather than doing our own thing. This kind of prayer places God as King over our circumstances and brings us peace because we trust in the mighty God. This kind of model leads to effective prayer that produces the power of God for our lives today! Let us endeavor to pray like Jesus, and we will see God's hand move in our lives, our churches and our world!