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Matthew 6:5-13  
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## **Pray Like Jesus**

A strange event happened in a small Kentucky town some years ago. It seems that there were two very conservative churches in the town and one distillery, owned by an atheist.

The churches were always doing battle with the atheist owner of the distillery. They had even tried several times to get it closed down to no avail.

Finally, they had a prayer meeting with both congregations present. In a lengthy, fervent meeting, they poured out their hearts to God. They asked that God would do a supernatural work and put an end to the evil pouring forth from the distillery. They prayed in faith.

While they were praying, a storm blew up and lightning struck the distillery and burned it to the ground.

The people shouted, "Hallelujah!" Their prayers had been answered.

The atheist owner of the distillery was duly disturbed by the events of the day. And soon after, determined to rebuild his distillery, he filed an insurance claim.

But the insurance company refused his request for payment saying that this was an ACT OF GOD.

After some thought, the atheist decided to sue the two churches. He contended that they had conspired with God to burn his distillery, and they should pay for the damages.

When the case came to court, the churches denied responsibility for the burning of the distillery.

The judge made this telling comment: "This is a perplexing situation. Here we have an atheist owner who seems to now believe in prayer and two churches who now deny it."

Is that you? When you actually get an answer to prayer – you can't believe it's true?

This morning we are going to talk about prayer – and more specifically, what has become known as "The Lord's Prayer."

My guess is that nobody who has ever lived knew more about praying than Jesus.

In our Gospel text from Matthew he tells us how we can make sure we connect with God. But first, did you notice that he takes for granted that his people will pray?

In verse 5 He said, "when you pray," not "if you pray." Again He says in verse 6, "when you pray," not "if you pray." He says again in verse 7, "when you pray," not "if you pray."

The issue with the Jesus is not whether you will pray, but where you will pray, what you will pray, and why you will pray.

The first bit of advice Jesus gives us is this: "When you pray, pray secretly. Don't be like those who love to stand up and be seen and admired. That's not what prayer's about." Clear enough.

Then he goes a step further in telling us not only where to pray, but what to pray, or more accurately, what not to pray. "Don't use vain repetitions. It's not about how many words you use or how big they are."

Here, I think, he is talking about rote praying. Just going by the numbers, using the same old worn-out clichés and phrases, saying the things you have heard other people say, without really putting any heart into your prayer.

Jesus says that is not the kind of prayer that gets God's attention.

It reminds me of the story of the little girl who goes over to her grandmother's house to spend the night. The next morning, they are talking at the breakfast table, and the grandmother asks her little grandchild if she had said her prayers the night before she went to sleep.

The little girl replies, "No, Granny, I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Well, I got down on my knees to pray, but I got to thinking that God's probably tired of hearing the same old prayer every night, so I just crawled into bed and told him about *Little Red Riding Hood*."

Sometimes, I think God would prefer Little Red Riding Hood to some of what we pray, without thinking.

As we continue to read in our text, it seems that Jesus' disciples also have a problem with prayer.

Maybe, they had seen Jesus pray so often and noticed the confidence and fervor with which he prayed.

Maybe, they wanted to know what they had to do to ensure that their prayers were answered.

Maybe, they wondered if there was a special way of speaking. A special way of pleading your case.

Sometimes, they saw Jesus kneeling, other times looking up to heaven. Maybe there was there a special posture that helped in saying the right prayer and getting the right answer.

And so they come to Jesus with the request, “Lord, teach us to pray”. If I am being perfectly honest, the request only shows up in Luke’s gospel account, but I am sure the question is implied in Matthew’s version.

It’s interesting to note that Jesus doesn’t teach the disciples any special skills.

He doesn’t say if you fold your hands or hold them palms up toward heaven, or rest them on the particular person you are praying for, or kneel or stand or sit, or use a special style of language ... you are more likely to have your prayers answered.

Instead, he gives them what we all know as “The Lord’s Prayer.”

To this day, we continue to recite the Lord’s Prayer, much as I imagine the disciples did in Jesus’ day, and as other Christians have done through the ages.

I think it’s incredibly ironic that the very prayer that Jesus gave us right after he said, “Do NOT use meaningless repetition” has in fact become for many a meaningless repetition because they pray these exact words over and over.

It is hard to pray anything verbatim and repeatedly without it becoming a meaningless repetition, unless you really focus on what you are saying.

And notice that Jesus does NOT say: “Pray this”, but “pray IN THIS WAY.” In other words, we are not only to pray these exact same words back to God, but rather these are a MODEL of the kind of prayer that Jesus invites us to pray, containing the elements that he wants us to talk with God about when we pray.

The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples is very brief. Prayer does not demand a lot of wearisome words. In fact, a lot of words can be off-putting. Sometimes it is better to relax in God’s presence with very few words. Jesus models a prayer that is brief and yet contains everything that is important.

That being said, I am not suggesting we never pray the Lord’s prayer ... just that when we do, we think about the words we say ... and MEAN THEM!

Jesus starts out by addressing God as “Our Father.” Father is a relationship word. On at least one occasion in the Bible, this word is listed in its original Aramaic, **“Abba.”**

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek, but neither of those were the language of the people of Jesus’ day. Jesus probably knew all three languages, but he spoke in Aramaic.

“Abba” is a word that sounds a lot like our English words, “Daddy” and “Poppa.” They are words that are easy for children to say.

I think it is interesting that we do not have a single example of God being addressed as Abba in Judaism, but Jesus always addressed God in this way in his prayers.

It is remarkable that the Old Testament has such an emphasis on the holiness of God, the otherness of God. But when Jesus was born, they called him Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Jesus brought God close to us, as close as a loving parent.

When we talk to God as Father (or Dad or Poppa), there is an intimacy attached to it. That intimacy is like a loving, caring parent who is interested in everything about us. Isn’t that a great image?

Often, I will start my personal prayers with “Hey Dad, it’s me, your son” and it actually brings into my prayer a really different experience. This is a wonderful image that can make our prayers more significant to us.

In Jesus' day, "father" also included the concepts of care, love, responsibility, discipline, hopes and dreams for one's children, respect, authority, and blessing.

In the West, fathers have nowhere near the life-long patriarchal authority that fathers have in the Middle East and Far East.

Something of the Middle Eastern father is depicted in Jesus' parable of the Father and the Prodigal Son to illustrate the loving, searching, longing quality of our Heavenly Father.

So, we start our prayer addressing someone we know loves us, cares for us, and is interested in us.

The next thing Jesus does is make sure we understand that when we pray, we should make sure to understand that God, our Father, our Poppa, is Holy. “Hallowed” is the Greek “hagiosthyto” — it means “to make holy.”

When we pray we acknowledge that God is not only a personal, father figure, but also the Lord of the Universe. So we give God praise and thanksgiving.

The Apostle Paul in many of his letters affirmed this and so should we.

What comes next? Only the most important part of the whole prayer, in my opinion. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” This is where we ask for God’s direction for our lives.

This is significant, because this is just the OPPOSITE of what many of us do, isn’t it? We want God to do our bidding, not the other way around.

But that is just the opposite of what Jesus actually teaches us here. He does NOT teach us to pray, “God bless our will.” He teaches us to pray, “THY WILL be done.”

We need to remember that God is not our little “genie” up in heaven who exists to bless our plans.

We need to pray that we would do God’s will in the day ahead of us. Jesus modeled that for us in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is

clear that he recoiled at the thought of facing the horror of the cross.

But in perhaps THE climactic moment of all history, in the end, he called out to the Father, “Not my will, but Thine be done.”

There is a sense in which Jesus is calling us here to a “Daily Gethsemane” — a point in which every day we say to God, “Not MY will, but YOURS be done today.”

But even in doing God’s will, we do get to make our requests. God DOES want us to bring our requests to Him, and that is what we should pray for during this next segment. Ask him for the needs that are on your heart.

But notice that even our requests are not “MY ... MY ... MY ...” They are plural: “OUR”!

That means that we are not only to pray for our own needs, but for those of others as well.

So we ask “Give us this day OUR daily bread.” Now bread in Jesus' day represented survival. It represented needs. You had to have bread in order to survive. So we are to go to God with all of our needs.

Where many people get off track with prayer is this: They think prayer is to get what they want, when actually it is to get what they need.

James 4:3 says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Jesus said we are to ask for bread, not apple pie.



The Bible says, "God shall supply all of your needs." It does not say, "He will supply all of your wants."

A wise father is not a father that gives his children all that they want, but gives the children all that they need. Still, whatever your needs are, bring those needs to the Lord.

Next comes forgiveness. I could spend an entire summer series on forgiveness, but let me say this: Jesus teaches us to ask God to forgive us "as" we forgive others.

In other words, if we forgive others only a little and hold grudges, we are asking God to forgive us only a little and bear a grudge against us.

Jesus is making a point in this prayer, a point which he explains in more detail just after the prayer:

"For if you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

How could it be plainer? Jesus had just told his disciples not to seek retribution. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons and daughters of your Father in heaven."

Now he makes it clear that we must forgive, if we are to be considered sons and daughters of the Father. Otherwise he will not forgive us.

It may be a hard saying, but it is God's way.

Now we move beyond asking for forgiveness, to asking for help in our times of trial and temptation so that we do not sin and as a result have to ask for forgiveness all over again!

On its face it is hard to imagine God leading us into temptation at all.

And I don't believe he does. Again we read from James, chapter one: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."

Sometimes we flirt with temptation. We don't exactly seek temptation, but we are attracted to sinful things and so we sort of wink at them.

Our resistance is low; we are being "dragged away and enticed" by our "own evil desire," as James puts it.

Maybe what Jesus is suggesting here is akin to the old proverb: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Twice Jesus told His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Pray, that you may not enter into temptation." Hence there must be temptation that can be avoided if we will pray in advance — and that is what Jesus teaches us to do here.

That's the Lord's Prayer. The benediction piece (For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever) is thought by most historians, to have been added later.

I like the way someone put the following:

The things, good Lord, we pray for, give us the courage to work for.

If I pray for my daily bread, let me find the courage to see that others are fed.

If I pray for forgiveness, let me discover the grace to forgive.

If I pray for the Kingdom of God to come, let me learn to live by Kingdom values.

If I pray for peace, let me be a peace maker.

If I ask to be shielded from temptation, let me not play around with it on my own.

The Lord's Prayer is deceptively simple. We may pray it often and by rote. We may take its words for granted.

But this week -- especially this week, at the very least -- may the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray fill your thoughts and meditations. And may its vocabulary become yours.

As we've examined the Lord's Prayer, you can see it isn't a prayer for everyone. It's not for those who hunger for God to rubber-stamp their selfish plans, for it begins with "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Nor is it for those who feel self-righteous, for it leads us to ask forgiveness.

Nor is it for the vindictive, for it bids us leave our hatred at the altar if we would be forgiven.

Nor is it for the self-made man who shuns dependence, for it teaches us to ask God for bread daily.

It is a prayer for the obedient disciple who desires to know God as he is and for his will for their lives.

And even though we don't always get the words right and our motives are mixed, Jesus is asking us to get out of our own way and make prayer an integral part of our lives, for our sakes, and the sake of the world.

May we be able to do just that!

Amen...