

February 2, 2025

"Praying Properly"
Lesson 1

Matthew 6:6-15

Intro

Jesus was a man of prayer. He would rise early to spend time alone in prayer, like in Mark 1:35. At least once as recorded in Scripture, he prayed all night (Luke 6:12). When He knew His death was close at hand, He spent a large portion of His final evening in prayer (Matt. 26:36-43).

The passage we are looking at today is often called "The Lord's Prayer", but that's a misleading title. We never see Jesus praying this anywhere in the Bible. Instead, this is intended as guidelines given by Jesus to others about how they should pray. Matthew's version of this teaching has a multi-part address to God, several petitions, and a concluding acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. Part of the value in this teaching is that it also includes ways one should *not* pray. That's where today's study begins.

Read Matthew 6:5-15

1. vs. 5: The word "hypocrite" at this time referred to actors playing a part on stage
 - They were pretending to be someone that they were not
 - This is Jesus' point as well
 - Some people are respected for their devotion to God, when they are not devoted at all
 - They are merely "acting" to gain others' attention and approval
 - In Matt. 6, Jesus gives three examples of wrong-hearted behavior
 - Matt. 6:2—giving of relief to the poor
 - Matt. 6:5—praying in public
 - Matt. 6:16—fasting
 - Jesus is not against giving relief, praying in public, or fasting
 - He's speaking against doing those things to gain approval and recognition
 - He says that people who do these things for recognition "have received their reward in full"
 - They've gotten their 15 minutes of fame, but not God's approval or recognition
 - This reason for praying is the wrong way to pray
2. vs. 6: Jesus contrasts the example in vs. 5 with what we should do in vs. 6
 - He stresses the need to retreat to a private place, to pray in private
 - This is not an issue of "private prayer" vs. "public prayer"
 - It's an issue of "private prayer" vs. "public performance"
 - The issue isn't really about where to pray, but *why* a person prays
 - A valid prayer is directed to God alone and doesn't care if anyone else notices or not
3. vs. 7: Here's another aspect of what *not* to do
 - Don't babble in prayer, and don't feel the need to say as much as it possible
 - Babbling here means repeating the same phrases over and over
 - In Jesus' time, the "gods" were often considered selfish and unpredictable
 - People thought if they used the right phrases repeatedly, they would be heard
 - Some thought that certain words or phrases had power to bend another's will

In I Kings 18, Elijah encourages the priests of Baal to pray more, to keep praying
He said maybe Baal was asleep, and their many words might wake him
This example shows that praying more words does not make the prayer will be heard

4. vs. 8: Here's the bottom line from Jesus about prayer
"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"
We don't have to beg God to hear us, or to answer us
He already knows what we need, and cares for us
We are called to have faith, to remember that God does listen to all we say
This indicates that prayer is more about relationship with God, than in begging favors

5. vs. 9: Here, Jesus begins to show His disciples the content that prayers should have
First, it is addressed to God; prayer is, by definition, a conversation with God
Jesus says to pray to God as "Our Father"
This is a description rarely used before, less than a dozen times in the OT
But Matthew's gospel uses "heavenly Father" and "Father in heaven" over 40 times
Using "Our Father" shows the close, intimate connection we are to have with God

Next, Jesus uses the term "in heaven"
This is to remind us of God's greatness; heaven is wherever God is
He is not part of the physical, created universe; we are
Even so, we mortals are privileged to speak with the God of Heaven

The last phrase moves from how to address God to how to think about Him
"hallowed by Your name"
Hallowed refers to holiness
When we say this phrase, we are saying "May your name be holy"
This is a commitment we are making to the 3rd Commandment to use His name reverently

6. vs. 10: The next phrase of how to think about God is "your kingdom come"
This phrase's origin uses a Greek verb that's an imperative
An imperative is a command or request that something must be done
It's like telling our kids, "Clean your room!"
Clean is the imperative; it's something that must be done
That's the sense of the language here—God's kingdom must come
It's not just a request, like "It would be nice if Your kingdom comes"
It's a pleading, a seeing the urgent need, for God's kingdom to come in its fullness
A kingdom with no temptation, no sin, no pain, no sadness, no death
God will rule over everything, and his followers will worship Him forever

Next is the phrase "Your will be done"
The phrase also includes an imperative verb in the Greek
Again, the request is that this needs to be done; it's not a gentle wish
God's will and His kingdom coming are connected

Finally, the last phrase is “on earth as it is in heaven”

Heaven is a place where there is no opposition to God’s will

Praying this is saying we desire God’s kingdom of heaven to be present on earth

This prayer recognizes God’s sovereignty in heaven will prevail in the present for us

We are praying that all opposition to God will cease

This is a prayer for ourselves, that any opposition to God in us will also cease

We are praying that our lives will be a perfect reflection of His will (see Matt. 26:39)

7. vs. 11: This request has two important parts to it

First, the word “give” has the broader sense of “provide” when connected to God

Second, “bread” refers to food in general, maybe even “things necessary for life”

Saying this prayer acknowledges that we rely on God

It’s not telling God something He doesn’t know that He needs to be made aware of

We are affirming our belief that He will take care of our every need

8. vs. 12: This request is unique because it’s conditional

As we ask for God’ forgiveness, we promise to be forgiving of others

This is the only petition that gets an extra comment from Jesus (see vs. 14-15)

9. vs. 13: This request contains a parallelism; the two halves mean essentially the same thing

“Lead us not into temptation” means the same as “deliver us from evil”

God does not cause temptation, but He may allow it for our testing and growth

Together, these two phrases suggest “give us power over evil”, which He does

(1 Cor. 10:13)

10. vs.14-15: Jesus here adds on to His comments in vs. 12 about how to pray

In vs. 12, He describes our debts and the others owing us as debtors

Here He uses the concept of sins and sinners

Debts could include other types of obligations

Sins refers specifically our moral behaviors and their standing before God

This is so important that Jesus shows us there is a conditional element to it

If we don’t forgive others, we will not be forgiven

Application: This teaching of Jesus about how to pray can guide us into remembering many things. It touches on when we pray, where we pray, and the types of things we should remember to pray for. Some might see using this exact prayer as a repetitious type that would lose its meaning from being recited. That’s a fair idea. Jesus warns against honoring God with your lips but not your heart. But if done intentionally, remembering what each aspect of this prayer calls us to be mindful of, it can be a helpful in guiding our prayers. The key seems to be mindfulness in its use.

Prayer: Father God, we honor You for being awesome, powerful, and caring. We pray for Your kingdom to come to our earth, beginning in each of us. Thank you for providing for us, for forgiving us, and for your promise of help and strength in temptations. In Jesus’ name, Amen.