

## Prayer in Focus Matthew 6:9-15

### Introduction:

This morning Jesus directs our attention to prayer. His instructions are simple, "Pray then like this..." By showing us how to pray, Jesus also teaches us about the importance of prayer.

Jesus recognizes the very thing that we so often do not. God's work is accomplished through God's means which celebrate his power instead of our self-important plans, illustrated by our misdirected focus. So often church plants start off full of dreams as big as the Kingdom of God, yet those same hopes fade as lesser objectives overwhelm a God-centered vision. John Smed, church planter in Vancouver writes, "We sell our inheritance to the lowest bidder—we settle for Sunday morning Christianity! We count attendees and we count offerings. *Nickels and noses* win out. The result is pedestrian and tame. We want the Lion of Judah to roar. Instead, the number crunchers bicker. The difference can be traced to prayer. Our heartless prayers have led to gutless strategies."

We all have to know that prayer is one of the bedrock commitments of a vibrant and growing church. Such a commitment is clearly seen when we consider the early church who gathered regularly and often for prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:2-4). Prayer is always the unseen, yet vital way we engage and enlist the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Prayer is the means by which we engage the powerful working of God among his people.

### 1) But what propels this kind of prayer?

By this point in our study of the Sermon on the Mount, God's demands should have so stripped us of all pretensions of our righteousness that our only response can be one of prayer. Far from using prayer as some sort of super-spiritual litmus test like that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the prayer that Jesus calls us to is that of a desperate, yet hopeful disciple.

**God's demands** should make us desperate or "poor in our spirit" and "meek." We are impoverished over our own abilities and ashamed of our self-seeking. We realize that when we approach God we have nothing in our hands to bring. Before other people we have no claim upon them, nor no right to pretend that we stand above them. God's righteous demands have driven us to despair of our own claims of goodness.

At the same time, however, **God's character** has made us hopeful. God has revealed himself as Father, who invites and welcomes the desperate. Far from disqualifying us from his presence our lowliness is the only thing that God receives. Prayer is the cry of **the desperate, yet hopeful disciple**.

#### Reasons why we don't pray:

A prayerless Christian is neither desperate nor hopeful.

##### ➤ Self-righteous pride

We learned last week that a self-righteous, and self-important Christian who prays with a view towards their own exaltation might as well be prayerless because Jesus says their prayers are not heard. There is *no desperation* about them, only false humility/spirituality which masks self-seeking pride. (Cf. 2 Corinthians 11) They have not yet come to the end of themselves so they are not ready to come to the living God. It is still all about them—their gifts, abilities, talents, resources, strengths, wisdom, strategy, etc.

##### ➤ Hopeless despair

Nevertheless, there is a despairing of self that does not lead to prayer but to hopelessness. One of you reminded me of the words of Thoreau recently, "*The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.*" Many of us are prayerless because we simply do not believe that the Lord is engaged and desires to meet us. We are prayerless because we lack faith in our Father.

### 2) How do arrive at this desperate, yet hopeful place?

What is the answer? The answer is to submit oneself to the wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount. This is the purpose of the SOM. Jesus has brought us to a desperate and hopeful place. And this prepares for a lesson on prayer. **This desperate, yet hopeful place is the raw material of a passionate and regular life.**

### 3) How do we pray?

Jesus answers that question in the words of what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.” It is the model prayer for disciples who have let go of their agenda and grabbed hold of God’s kingdom.

## Jesus’ Prayer Focuses Our Prayers

- **The First Priority—God First!**

The first thing that should concern us when we pray is not what needs we have, but rather to whom is it we are praying. When we come to God with our needs first, it is as if God becomes “Santa Claus,” who exists to make our lives happy. One thing is certain; God is no Santa Claus. Therefore, **our lists take a back seat to God’s priorities.**

What are the right concerns?

- **God’s Person: Our Father,**

The Greek *pater*, which translates to “father” in the English is most likely a translation of the Aramaic, *Abba*, which is almost an equivalent to our word, “Daddy”. This would have been virtually unheard of in the ancient world. God has chosen to reveal himself, indeed call himself, by the most intimate of names—daddy.

It is the despairing person who has not grasped God is their father. One of the main things I want to get across to you this weekend is reason why our prayers lives are so weak is because we largely think of God in ways that handicap relationship.

- ✓ Cosmic idea orchestrating the universe
- ✓ Angry policeman out to get us and demand from us greater obedience
- ✓ Abusive parent without self-control

In the words of J.B. Phillips who wrote Your God is Too Small all of these ways are really “unreal Gods.” As a result, God is not someone who compels me or draws me out into relationship. Rather he is someone who either does not interest me or he positively repels me.

- **God’s Fame: Hallowed by thy name.**

Yet this understanding of God as father does not mean God is like a “grand ‘ole man” who has no capacity to really engage our lives. God is in heaven and so he dwells in “unapproachable light” (c.f. 1 Tim. 6:16). God’s fatherly love is balanced by his transcendent otherness. **God is holy and he means for his name to be held above every other name. Especially our own.**

“If the pursuit of God’s glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man’s good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served and God will not be duly honored...When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God’s true worth, the light of missions will shine to the remotest peoples on earth” (John Piper).

Why do we not pray for God’s fame? Why do we acknowledge his might and his power?

- **God’s Mission: Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

John Piper writes, “We have taken a wartime walkie-talkie and tried to turn it into a civilian intercom to call the servants for another cushion in the den...prayer is a walkie-talkie for warfare, not a domestic intercom for increasing our conveniences.”

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t” (John Piper). What fuels mission we may ask. Is it not the prayers of God’s people captivated by what has captivated their Father?

### Application:

If God is the most important reality in life then it stands to reason that all of our priorities should be ordered according to him. His Kingdom comes first. We start with **The First Priority.**