

AUTHENTIC PRAYER Matthew 6:5-15

INTRODUCTION:

I'd like for you to stand and recite the Lord's Prayer with me:

⁹ ... *Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.* ¹⁰ *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* ¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread.* ¹² *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* ¹³ *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Thank you. You may be seated.

Is there any more familiar prayer in the English language? Is there any prayer that has been prayed more often than that prayer?

That prayer appears in the sixth chapter of Matthew starting in verse nine and finishing in verse twelve.

Do you know what immediately precedes that prayer in Matthew chapter six? Just before Jesus gave us a model for prayer, he gave us some warnings about prayer.

- ✓ He told us to pray with authenticity and not to pray just for the purpose of being seen and heard by other people. Don't raise your hands but I wonder how many of you stood and recited that prayer, not because you were really praying but rather because you didn't want to be embarrassed by sitting quietly while others stood and recited. (That would be a little like not putting your hand over your heart during the Pledge of Allegiance.)
- ✓ Just before Jesus gave us this model for how to pray, he told us to pray with authenticity and not to keep on babbling like the pagans do because they believe their many words will cause God to hear them better. The familiar King James Version of the Bible uses the phrase "vain repetition" instead of babbling. Are there any words that have been more vainly and thoughtlessly repeated than the model that Jesus gave to show us a better way to pray?

Let's look Jesus' model for prayer in its wider context. I'll be reading from Matthew 6:5-14 in the New International Version of the Bible. That is found on page 960 in the pew Bible in front of you.

⁵ *"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 men. I tell you the truth, 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 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.’*

¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Our theme for 2008 is “Authentic Christianity”. Would anyone dispute the statement that authentic Christians pray authentically?

I’ve been preaching for almost 35 years and I will tell you that I am pretty comfortable preparing and delivering sermons.

I’ve been studying the Bible longer than that and I feel like I can do an acceptable job of researching God’s Word.

And I’ve been saying prayers since I was a toddler but I must tell you that I’m still pretty inept at praying. Hear what I said. I did not say that I feel pretty inept at praying, I said I am inept at praying. I pray but I don’t do it well. I want to pray well but I know I don’t really have the hang of it.

How about you? Are you any good at praying?

Jesus told us, “Do not pray like the hypocrites.” I doubt that any of us have ever set out to pray like the hypocrites. But we might be. So how can we tell if we are praying like the hypocrites? To know if our prayer is authentic instead of artificial, we must answer three questions.

I. TO WHOM DO WE PRAY? (6:5-6)

The first question we must answer is “to whom are we praying?” Jesus gives us two choices:

A. Some people pray simply to be heard by men.

Jesus said that people who are praying to be heard by other people can be identified by certain characteristics in their praying.

1. **They rely on formal words.** You can tell people who are praying to be heard by other people because of the flowery words they use. Instead of authentic prayer expressed in authentic language, they offer artificial prayers intoned in an artificial language.

“Oh Thou merciful, munificent and majestic Father. Thou who hast formed the firmament, fashioned its fullness and filled the fields with flora and fauna. Oh Thou omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent Deity, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst incline Thine ear to our petitions this day.”

I heard about a man who was spouting off like this during a worship service and a fellow in the pew behind him tapped him on the shoulder and said, “Just call Him God and say what you’ve got to say.”

Sometimes our artificial words betray artificial prayers.

2. People who pray to be heard by other people **rely on formal occasions.** They may not pray at other times but when Mom comes over for Mothers’ Day, there will be a prayer before the meal.

You may have heard about the mother who was trying to impress the preacher. She had invited him and his wife over for Sunday lunch. After everyone was seated at the table, she called on her daughter to say a prayer for the meal. The daughter said, “But I don’t know what to say.” And the Mother said, “Just say what you hear Mommy say before a meal like this.” The little girl bowed her head and said, “Good Lord, why on earth did I invite these people for dinner?”

People who pray to be heard by other people often pray only for formalized occasions.

3. And they often **rely on formal places.** For instance, they will pray at church but not at home. Don’t you suppose we’ve had some Presidents and Governors who have felt out of place at an annual formal prayer breakfast? Because they are not accustomed to praying and therefore only do it in formal places for the purpose of being seen by other people, they are uncomfortable.
4. Jesus said that those who pray to be seen by other people also **rely on a formal length to their prayers.** They hope to impress other people their long prayers.

Jesus warned that prayer like that is ineffective. Those prayers do not accomplish anything. Here's the principle: vanity in the pray-er produces vain prayer.

B. Some People pray to be heard by God.

The contrast to praying to be seen and heard by other people is praying to be heard by God. The prayers of those who pray to other men are characterized by being formal. The prayers of those who are praying to God are characterized by being informal. They pray always (or without ceasing). They pray everywhere. Their prayers are to the point. They are simple prayers. They are humble prayers and they are personal prayers.

People whose prayers are heard by God are people whose desire is to communicate with their Father. And here is the principle: sincerity in the pray-er produces sincere prayers.

II. WHAT DO WE SAY? (6:7-13)

Well, if we have decided that we want to pray to God and not to other people, then how do we know what to say? Again, there are two choices.

A. Meaningless repetition?

Jesus said, "do not keep on babbling" when you pray. Babbling is the use of meaningless words and phrases. Such words may be words that actually have no meaning but they are most likely words that we have not thought out.

Have you ever heard someone pray and ask the Lord to "guide, guard and direct us"? Now those words have meaning but the person praying may not have ever thought them through to actually know what he is praying.

Or people who pray that God will "give us travel mercies as we go our separate ways." Just what do we mean by "travel mercies"? Is that the same as asking God to keep us safe while we are on the road?

One of my favorites is when people ask God to be with us. "Father, I pray that you will be with us throughout this day." Does that imply that if we don't ask Him, He may get busy doing something else and forget to accompany us? It might actually be more appropriate for us to pray that we will be with God rather than that He will be with us.

Meaningless repetition can be saying words we're not sure if we even mean. Or it can also be praying the same prayer over and over without thinking about it...just out of habit **or** because we've decided to

try to pester God and wear Him down like a spoiled child in the check-out line of the grocery store.

B. **Meaningful petition?**

In contrast to meaningless repetition, Jesus taught us to pray with meaningful petition.

In Jesus' model of prayer, He offered three petitions for God. He prayed that God's Name would be treated as holy, that God's Kingdom would come and that God's will would be obeyed.

Jesus modeled three petitions for ourselves. He taught us to pray for the fulfillment of our daily needs, forgiveness for our spiritual failings and freedom from future temptations.

And, although it is not demonstrated here, Jesus often prayed for others. Throughout his life, Jesus modeled intercessory prayer for others who had need.

III. **WILL SIN GO AWAY? (6:14-15)**

Perhaps the most serious and even chilling section of this portion of Scripture is the next part where Jesus taught us about forgiveness. Jesus said, *"¹² 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.' ¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

Now, if you think about praying like that, it will make you stop and consider! If you do not forgive others, God will not forgive you.

A. **Be forgiving so you will be forgiven.**

Jesus said that we are to ask God to forgive us in the same manner and to the same degree that we forgive others. First off, that means we must acknowledge that we need to be forgiven. If we somehow believe that we have never sinned, then we will not care too much if God is forgiving of us.

I'm sure you have noticed that some people, reciting the Model Prayer, say, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" and others say, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Do you know what that's about?

Luke's gospel also contains a form of this prayer in Luke 11:9-13. Matthew's account uses the terms debts and debtors. Luke's account uses the terms trespasses and trespassers.

Debts are obligations that have not been discharged. These may very well be the sins of omission: the sins we have committed by not doing something for someone that we ought to have done for them.

To trespass is to make unauthorized entry onto another's property. It is an intrusion. These most likely are the sins we commit by doing things to people that they would not have wished to be done to them.

And then in Matthew 6:14, Jesus also says, "¹⁴ *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* ¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" The word "sins" refers to vices or wrong conduct.

Between "debts," "trespasses," and "sins," Jesus has pretty well covered all the ways people can offend us...and that we can offend others. And his point is, if we are gracious toward those who have offended us, we can anticipate that God will be gracious toward us.

B. Be unforgiving and you will be unforgiven.

But likewise, if we are not forgiving of others, we will not be forgiven by God.

Jesus gave six examples of petition in his model prayer. Then he turned the spotlight on one of them: "*forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" It is almost as if he had read the minds of his audience and heard them say, "Do you mean that...?" And he said, "Yes. That's exactly what I mean: anyone who would follow after me must learn to understand, to forgive and to love his fellow man."

CONCLUSION:

Where did you learn to pray? Was it in Sunday School, at VBS, in youth group or in church camp? If you were raised in the home of parents who went to church, you probably learned to pray at home.

Where do you suppose Jesus learned to pray? I suspect he learned to pray at home, too. He probably learned to pray at the knee of a mother who modeled prayer for him.

We only have a record of one prayer that Mary prayed...but, oh what a prayer! In Luke 1:38, after she had been told that she would be pregnant with the Son of God, knowing that no one would believe her story and that everyone would think she was an immoral woman, she prayed. Listen to what she prayed:

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."

I suspect that the prayer life of Jesus' mother had a profound impact on him as she modeled surrender and obedience to God.

What Jesus' mother modeled for him, he modeled for us so that we would learn to pray meaningful prayers to God and do so from a heart emptied of all hatred, grudges and bitterness.

Can you pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven? Will you pray that God's will be done in your own life as it is in heaven? Can you pray Mary's prayer, "may it be to me as you have said..."? Will you pray for God to have His own way in your life?

INVITATION: #591 – *"Have Thine Own Way"*