

## Our Model for Prayer Matthew 6:5-15

There is a fundamental, life saving principle that all scuba divers must learn in the event they become disoriented while in the water. If they ever find themselves uncertain about which way is up, all they need to do is follow the bubbles. Bubbles rise to the surface and show the diver the direction to safety and survival.

There are times when we feel disoriented by events in our lives when wonder which way is up. Life seems to spin us around in circles making us feel like being in deep waters. Prayer becomes the bubbles that help to reorient us to the safety and survival we find in God.

Our first message on prayer was about Jesus's command to pray in order that we not faint. Prayer is something that we are to commit to, something that God invites us to do boldly.

Last week we considered the importance of abiding in Christ and His Word abiding in us, two conditions by which Jesus says prayers will be answered. That doesn't mean when those conditions are met we will get anything we want, but that when we abide in Christ and His Word abides in us, we know better the mind and will of God so that His will becomes our will and that's what we desire when we pray. Our will is in alignment with Him. Our abiding in Christ shapes how we pray.

Today I would like us to consider what Jesus had to say about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. We might call it primer on prayer or the how to of prayer. **Matthew 6:5-15** is where we find our text.

In its parallel passage found in **Luke 11** we read **“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’” (Luke 11:1)**

Notice what the disciple didn't ask Jesus. He didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to expound the Scriptures so that they could be great expositors. He didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to tell

binding stories as gifted public speakers so that their messages would have people sitting on the edge of their seats, clamoring them to do seminars.

He didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to conduct giving campaigns that would raise a lot of money to help the poor.

He didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to do astounding miracles that would have people coming from the corners of Judea to be healed.

He didn't ask Jesus to teach them how to write so that their books would be the most sought after in Christian literature.

It was a simple request. **“Teach us to pray.”**

Growing up in the religious culture of Judaism, they had observed how the Pharisees prayed.

With Roman occupation of Judea, they had also observed how the Gentiles prayed as well.

A couple of them had been followers of John the Baptist before Jesus came along and invited them to follow Him. John had taught his disciples to pray.

“Lord, we have watched others pray. We have watched and listened to You pray and there's a real difference. Teach us to pray.”

Throughout His ministry, Jesus demonstrated the importance of praying for all things, at all times, and in different ways.

Let's ask the same question this disciple asked and invite Jesus to teach us to pray. Let's turn to **Matthew 6** and learn from Jesus how to pray. He begins with a word that assumes we are praying. It's the word “when.” We say we pray, but how do we pray? Jesus helps us understand a couple of ways not to pray. The first is the pretender's prayer.

### I. THE PRETENDER'S PRAYER – vs. 5-6

In **verse 5** we notice the pretender's person.

#### A. The Pretender's Person – v. 5a

Some may remember back to 1955 bee bopping to the Platters hit single *The Great Pretender*.

Oh yes, I'm the great pretender (Woo-woo)

Pretending I'm doing well (Woo-woo)

My need is such I pretend too much

I'm lonely but no one can tell

Oh yes, I'm the great pretender (woo-woo)  
 Adrift in a world of my own (woo-woo)  
 I play the game but to my real shame  
 You've left me to dream all alone

Jesus says **“when you pray, don’t be like the pretenders, the hypocrites.”**

The Phillips translation calls them **“play-actors”**.  
 The Message reads: **“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either.”**

The word for actor was hypocrite. An actor wore a mask as a disguise while pretending their role on stage. Sometimes the mask had a mechanical device that would alter the voice of the actor.

We understand a hypocrite to be someone who pretends to be what he or she is not. They merely pretend to be someone else. The dictionary says they pretend to be better than they are, pretending to be pious when they are not.

I think we are all astute enough to understand the difference between pretending for fun and pretending to impress. A child pretends to be a cowboy or Indian or princess or superhero. In a world of make believe, whether as a child or as a parent with a child, we pretended to be different people or live in a different time for fun.

This April David will pretend to be a bully in the school play *“The Thread That Runs So True.”* While the play is based on a real-life event, he is an actor pretending to be one of the real characters from that early 20<sup>th</sup> century school setting. He is not really a bully in life, but he will play one. In the usage of the term, he will be a hypocrite.

In real life there are those who pretend to be someone they are not to impress others. Those are the people Jesus is condemning here. These pretenders are hypocrites, and we see it in their performance.

## **B. The Pretenders Performance – v. 5b**

These pretenders give a pretense of piety, making it seem as if they were religious, when in fact it was

just a show, or as the Message describes it as a theatrical production.

Jews prayed three times a day – at 9:00, 12:00 and 3:00. We read in **Acts 3:1** that **“One day Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon.”**

William Barclay in his commentary on Matthew states that they had 18 different prayers. They had prayers for light, darkness, fire, rain, new moon, traveling, good news, bad news and so on. Devout Jews prayed all 18 prayers each time.

It didn't matter where they were or what they were doing. When it was time to pray, they stopped everything. The original intent of prayer at those times was commendable. It kept them near God throughout the day. Barclay notes that over time their prayers became corrupted by formality and ritualization. It lost its sincerity as religious leaders made it routine, just going through the motions.

Jesus condemned their performance. As I said, it didn't matter where you were or what you were doing, everything stopped so you could pray. They loved to pray standing, which was the normal position for prayer, and they loved to pray on street corners. There are two words for street. One refers to a narrow street. The other to a wide street. That's what Jesus is referring to here. These pretenders timed it just right so they would be at a busy street corner with lots of people at the time of prayer so that they could give their theatrical performance. Jesus says it was only an act to be seen by men.

Let's be clear that Jesus is not condemning public prayer. He prayed publicly before feeding the 5,000. The early church prayed publicly in Acts 2 and Paul prayed on the ship before it crashed into the rocks. The prayer Jesus condemns here are those that are an act to try and impress others with false piety. It wasn't to be heard by God. It was to be seen by men. At the end of the day, or at the end of the prayer, that is the pretender's prize.

## **C. The Pretender's Prize – v. 5c**

**“They have received their reward in full.”**

Last week we saw that answered prayer comes when we abide in Christ and His Word abides in us. How unfortunate to think that the shortsighted intent of these pretenders was meant only to impress others and get their applause. In essence, Jesus is saying that these prayers will never receive an answer from God. If all they wanted was the praise of men, that's what they would get and they would get it to the full. Their motivation was a heart of pride, devoid of any humility or sincerity.

It seems to me that Jesus is saying that before we pray in public, we should examine our heart, our motive, and our words to make sure we're not just pretenders wanting to be seen by others.

Jesus concludes by giving these pretenders a precedent.

#### **D. The Pretender's Precedent – v. 6**

If you want a real reward that comes from God rather than the false reward of the empty, fleeting applause of men, then follow this guideline. A real test for a heart that prays with the right motive and right words is to see when and how and what you pray for in private.

Jesus says we should go into our room and close the door. The word actually refers to a small room, like a closet, something hidden or out of the way. It's a place free of distraction. Some homes had a secret room where they hid valuables. That's the kind of room you should enter to pray.

You might have such a place in your home that is designated as your prayer closet.

It could be a walk-in closet.

It could be a workshop.

It could be a den or study.

It could be a garden shed.

It could be your kitchen sink.

It could be your laundry room.

It could be in your fishing boat or hunting blind.

It could be in your car driving to or from work or to or from an appointment.

The gospel tell us that Jesus went into solitary places where He could pray.

But the point to make is that the room doesn't necessarily need to be just one room. Your small room can be anywhere you can escape for prayer. Some people can be in a large crowd and close everything and everyone else out for a time while they pray.

It could be in a sports stadium.

It could be in your cubicle at work.

It could be standing in line at the checkout.

**Do you have such a place to get alone with God?**

**Do you take advantage of it?**

John MacArthur writes "When God is genuinely the audience of our prayer, we will have the reward only He can give...God will faithfully and unfailingly bless those who come to Him in sincerity."

Jesus shows us the pretender's prayer and tells us how to avoid being like them.

He then points out the problematic prayer.

#### **II. THE PROBLEMATIC PRAYER – vs. 7-8**

**"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans."**

There is a problem with wordy prayers.

#### **A. The Problem with Wordy Prayers**

Let me make clear that repeated prayers are not repetitious or babbling prayers. Paul wrote to churches saying he didn't stop praying for them.

**Till the time of his death, George Mueller prayed 52 years for three friends to be saved. Two were saved before he died, the third not until after his passing.**

Some people believe that praying for something should be one and done. We pray about it once and since God knows everything, we don't need to pray about it again. We'll see in a moment that we are to pray for our needs **"daily"**. That means every day.

Jesus has in mind the blind, repetitious words that are said over and over. Gentiles repeated the names of their gods or some mantra hoping that it would catch the ear of their deity so he would answer. That

was the case when Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to see who the real god was.

### I Kings 18:25-29

Buddhists spin prayer wheels with written prayers on them believing each spin of the wheel sends a prayer to Buddha.

Catholics light prayer candles believing that as long as the candle is light, the prayer will go up to God. They use a Rosary to count off repeated prayers of Hail Mary's and Our Father.

Jesus has in mind here idle, thoughtless chatter. Some people have a lot to say when they pray, while saying nothing at all. There's a difference between praying prayers that are wordy and praying prayers that have a lot of words because we are praying a long time about a lot of things. Great saints spent hours each day in prayer. James the brother of Jesus was called old camel knees because he spent so much time on them while praying.

Jesus points out the problem with wordy prayers as well as the problem with wearying prayers.

### B. The Problem with Wearying Prayers

Was it wrong for Jesus to pray three times in the Garden to have His cup removed?  
Was it wrong for Paul to pray three times to have his thorn taken away?

The pagans believed that their many words would wear out their god so that he would give them what they wanted. They thought their endless words would inform their deity of their need because he didn't know. Ancient Rabbis believed that the longer the prayer, the more likely it would be heard by God and answered.

Jesus says that we shouldn't pray like that because our Father already knows our needs before we ask Him. Notice the personal nature of our prayer compared to the impersonal prayer of the pagan. The word Father insinuates a personal relationship with the One to whom we pray. Even though He already knows our need, He still invites us to pray.

Martin Luther once said "By our praying we are instructing ourselves more than we are God."

John Stott writes that "The purpose of prayer isn't to inform God or persuade Him, but to come to Him sincerely, purposely, consciously, and devotedly."

Prayer acknowledges our dependence on God for all that we need. It is as necessary to our spiritual life as breathing is to our physical life.

Don't pray like the pretenders.

Don't pray problematic prayers.

**So how should we pray?**

In **verses 9-15** Jesus gives us the pattern for prayer.

### III. THE PATTERN FOR PRAYER – vs. 9-15

This is called the Lord's prayer, but should more accurately be referred to as the disciples prayer. In essence, Jesus says forget the prayers you have observed from others, here is how you should pray and what you should include in your prayer. This model is all about praying for things that will bring glory to God and good to those who sincerely pray.

Notice that it begins with God's purpose.

#### A. God's Purpose – vs. 9-10

It speaks about God's person, who God is to us.

##### 1. God's person – "Our Father"

Prayer isn't about getting what we want. Prayer is about worshipping God. It acknowledges who He is in relationship with us.

Walvoord/Zuck write "worship is the essence of prayer. Only those who have true inner righteousness can address God in that way in worship" referring to God as Father. While it is a term of affection, it is also one of reverence. It is not a casual title, but one of respect as we recognize God is our Father, He has begotten us, He is the patriarch of the family, He is the authority over the family, He is the One to whom we come with our requests because only He can answer them. This name shows that we are His children.

**John 1:12-13**

**Galatians 4:6**



John MacArthur notes that when we use the term Father in addressing God, it should end our fear and give us hope as our provider, protector and peace-giver. He is eager to lend a listening ear and a helping hand. The Father gives us what is good and what will help us in our journey as a believer.

**Ephesians 1:3 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.”**

When we address God as Father we acknowledge a desire to live as obedient children because we desire to delight Him, to bring Him glory through our life.

More than just an identifying name, Father depicts for us His character, His plan and His will. It speaks of His compassion, graciousness, slowness to anger, abounding love, forgiveness and fairness (justice).

We see God’s person in the term **“Our Father”**. Next, we see God’s place.

## 2. God’s place – “in heaven”

Heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool.  
**Psalm 115:3 “Our God is in heaven. He does as He pleases.”**  
**I Chronicles 29:10-11**

As Stephen was being stoned to death, he exclaimed in **Acts 7:56 “‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”**

Heaven is the place where He displays His sovereign rule over the universe. It is from there that He metes out His grace and justice. His plan unfolds without any interference or barrier. Heaven is the place where He lives, inviting us to be a part of His forever family by joining Him there one day.

This model prayer then shows us God’s purity.

## 3. God’s purity – “hallowed be Your name”

Another way to put it is holy is Your name. It speaks of our need to reverence God, to treat Him with the highest honor because of His holiness. It is in speaking of His holiness that we come into His presence through prayer as a worshipper. Just like

calling God Father speaks to our obedience, referring to Him as holy speaks to our desire to conform to His will and to pursue after godliness in our own life – to be holy because He is holy.

## Revelation 4:8

God’s purity is followed by His program. What God wants to do is revealed here.

## 4. God’s priority – “Your kingdom come”

One author said **“Christians are called to pray and work for the continual advance of God’s kingdom on earth. The presence of God’s kingdom in this age refers to the reign of Christ in the hearts and lives of believers, and to the reigning presence of Christ in His body, the church – so that they increasingly reflect His love, obey His laws, honor Him, do good for all people, and proclaim the good news of the kingdom.”**

We aren’t to hunker down in our spiritual fox holes and ride it out until the Lord returns. We are to be actively engaged in the culture doing what we can to advance His kingdom in our hearts as we mature in our faith all the while telling others about the coming kingdom of Christ. When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we are praying for Him to fulfill His promise. It acknowledges that He is the sovereign ruler, and we are His subjects looking for His kingdom to be established in our hearts and here on earth.

If God has a program, then He must have a plan, which we see next.

## 5. God’s plan – “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

Just as God’s will is expressly done in heaven, so we pray that His will might be done here on earth referring to His revealed will.

**Ephesians 5:17 “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”**

This is not speaking about His hidden or secret will, but His will as it relates to His guidance in our every day lives as Christians. We call this His revealed will, His will as it is revealed in His Word.

**Ephesians 5:10** exhorts us to do what pleases the Lord.

**Deut. 29:29** “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of the law.”

When we pray for God’s will to be done, we acknowledge God as our Master and that we are His servants desiring to carry out what He wants us to do, willingly obedient to His will.

John MacArthur writes “when we pray for God’s will to be done, we are praying first that His will becomes our will and second we pray His will prevails all over the world as it does in heaven... To pray His will is to rebel against the worldly idea that sin is normal and inevitable and should therefore be acquiesced to or at least tolerated. It is to rebel against the world system of ungodliness, the dishonoring and rejecting of Christ and also the disobedience of believers.”

When we pray for God’s will, we are praying that we obey His Word and we pray that the world will also humble itself and repent.

In the first part of this prayer, we pray for God’s glory. In the second part of this prayer, we pray for our good through what God provides.

## B. God’s Provision – v. 11

### 1. Our supplication – “give us”

This is an acknowledgement that we have needs and that we are dependent on God who can meet them. Coming back to our verse from last week, we are to ask what we will and it will be given to us so long as we meet those two conditions of abiding in Him and His Word abiding in us (**John 15:7**). The word “give” doesn’t mean we can demand anything we want from God as if we were some bratty child throwing a temper tantrum in the store. The word doesn’t mean that we are entitled to something. It is rather requesting something from God who already knows what we need as we saw back in **verse 8**. Later in this chapter (**vs. 25-27**), Jesus tells us not to worry about what we need. He said that if God

provides for the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field, won’t He provide for us, who are of more value than birds and flowers? God invites us through supplication to ask.

### 2. Our source

The source, the One to whom we pray is the Father. He is the One from whom all blessings flow. He delights to meet our needs as a Father delights to supply his children with good things. So we go to God in prayer about what we need, our substance.

### 3. Our substance – “bread”

This isn’t just asking for food to eat each day. It’s an all-inclusive term. It literally means sufficient for the day. Bread is symbolic of all our physical needs. Martin Luther says it is “anything necessary for preservation of this life is bread, including food, a healthy body, good weather, house, home, children, good government and peace.”

But Warren Wiersbe warns “we have no right to ask for anything that will dishonor His name, delay His kingdom, or disturb His will on earth.”

When the Israelites clamored for meat in the wilderness, the psalmist stated that God gave them what they wanted but sent leanness to their soul. (**Psalms 106:15**) As you have heard said “God will give us our needs but not our greeds.”

When we ask, we acknowledge our dependence as beneficiaries on God as our gracious benefactor.

And when we ask God to give us our daily bread we are given the schedule of our supplications.

### 4. Our schedule – “daily”

Daily simply means today. It’s too late to pray about my needs yesterday and we aren’t to worry about tomorrow because that isn’t guaranteed. All we have is today, so pray today, the implication being that every day we are given that is a day we are to pray. The invitation is to pray today, throughout the day for what we need in the day.

Someone has said that “Christians offer their prayers like sailors use their pump – only when the ship leaks.”

Pray for daily needs. But **Psalms 66:18** indicates a catch to our prayers. **“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.”**

**So if there is sin in my that is hindering God from answering my need for daily bread what do we do?**

That’s why we need to include the next part in our daily prayers. We need God’s pardon.

### C. God’s Pardon – v. 12

Asking forgiveness assumes there is a problem and the problem is sin. There are five New Testament words for sin.

**Sin** – means to miss the mark.

**Trespass** – means a slipping or falling from carelessness.

**Transgression** – means to step across the line, going beyond God’s prescribed limits. It is more conscious and intentional.

**Lawlessness** – refers to sin that is more flagrant and intentional.

**Debts** – the word used here, refers to moral or spiritual debt.

Arthur Pink describes it as **“a defilement, a dishonor, and a reproach to us as a violation of God’s Law. It is for this that we implore divine pardon.”**

We are all guilty of sin every day and therefore every day, throughout the day we should plead for forgiveness. **I John 1:9** gives us the confidence that if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleans us from all evil. Asking for forgiveness implies confession and repentance. Asking forgiveness or having the assurance of being forgiven is not a license to sin. It does not mean we can abuse God’s love and grace, knowing He has promised to forgive. On the contrary, it should be our desire to strive to be holy, to live in a way that pleases God, but when we do sin, we have the assurance that we will be forgiven. The repentant person sees God’s forgiveness as a way to grow spiritually. And then we thank God for His love and willingness to forgive us. This does not mean that unless I forgive others I won’t receive forgiveness.

Instead it means that when I forgive others, I am recognizing that I have also been forgiven.

**Ephesians 4:32** and **Colossians 3:13** both speak of our need to forgive others in the same way God has forgiven us. Or to put it this way, experiencing God’s forgiveness makes us ready to forgive others.

Peter once asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone. Is seven times the right number? The Jews believed that six times was sufficient after which you could hold a grudge. Jesus said 70 times 7, but He didn’t mean that on the 491<sup>st</sup> time you could stop forgiving. He meant that as many times as you were wronged, that’s the number of times you should forgive. That’s the assumption **in I John 1:9**, that God will forgive us as many times as we sin against Him.

**Is there anyone that you need to forgive?**

Then in **verse 13** we see God’s protection.

### D. God’s Protection – v. 13

**James 1:13** tells us that God doesn’t lead us to sin, but **James 1:2** tells us that God uses trials to test and strengthen our faith. **I Corinthians 10:13** states that temptation is common, but God is faithful in that He won’t allow the temptations we face to be more than we can bear so that we give into it.

John MacArthur puts it this way **“Don’t lead us into a trial that presents such a temptation that we can’t resist it.”**

Jesus prayed in **John 17:15** that God the Father would protect His followers from the evil one. It is a prayer that brings us into obedience.

Jesus concludes in **verses 14-15** with a postscript pointing back to **verse 12**. Forgive literally means haul away. Forgive in the same way we have been forgiven. We can’t walk in fellowship with God if we are unwilling to forgive others.

When life seems like a raging sea that disorients you, this model prayer will point you to God.