

**HOW TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY**  
**Christ's Keys for Successful Living**  
**Matthew 6:5-15**  
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Turn now in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6. Today we will share together verses 5-15. This particular segment in the Sermon on the Mount is one in which Jesus talks to us about spiritual disciplines. Here are three in particular that he speaks of. Last week we looked at two of them giving and fasting. Today we look at the subject of prayer and what Jesus teaches us about prayer.

When you think of the word “prayer” do you feel guilty? Many feel guilty when it comes to the subject of prayer. We either are not praying at all and we feel guilty about that. Or whatever praying we do we somehow feel it is not enough and we feel guilty about that. Jesus here teaches us show to pray effectively. In learning to pray effectively we learn how to do away with guilt in respect to our prayer life.

Jesus teaches us how *not* to pray. He says don't let your prayers be something which you wear as a badge of external spirituality. Don't let your prayers be judged by the quantity rather than their quality. He said the heathen are always babbling one phrase after another. Then he gives us a very tightly constructed, meaningful prayer to pray. He also is recognizing a practical thing about any discipline that when you begin it you should not overextend yourself and take on more than you can handle. He gives us if we are not praying a very brief prayer to pray. It takes about twenty seconds to pray the Lord's prayer so if you're not praying at all, begin with something very realistic. Begin praying as Jesus taught us to pray. Build on from there.

But another thing that the Lord is obviously doing in giving us this prayer to pray, the Lord's prayer, is that he is giving us a pattern for all praying. It is an outline by which all of our prayers are to be formed whether they are twenty seconds in length or hours in length. In fact, if we understand praying rightly we will know that a whole life is a prayer lived out before God. The Lord's prayer is really not only a pattern by which we pray a set prayer. It is a pattern by which we live a life.

The prayer itself is divided into three major parts. The address of prayer, the petitions of prayer, and the praise in prayer.

The address is this: Our Father who art in heaven. Jesus teaches us that the minute we open prayer we should be conscious that we are coming to a personal God. “Our Father.” We don't simply throw something up there hoping that there is man upstairs that is listening. Jesus teaches us differently than the self realization movement or the mind consciousness people which have a lot to say about prayer. But their concept of prayer is that prayer is a catharsis, a cleansing of the soul. It doesn't matter if anybody's listening. It matters that you're talking it out. You're talking within yourself. Jesus says that when we open our hearts to pray we speak to a real God. Our Father.

He is Father. Maybe that word “father” doesn't have meaning for you because you may have grown up without a father or the father you had was perhaps an imperfect model of what fathering is like. Jesus therefore says that we must understand the Father as the Father of our

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Lord Jesus Christ. The perfect Father. The father who says, You are my beloved son or daughter. In you I am well pleased.

When we therefore come to the Lord in prayer we immediately are to open our lives consciously to the God who hears us. Not only is he "Our Father," but he is "Our Father who art in heaven." The word "father" speaks of his nearness to us. The words "art in heaven" speaks of his otherness. He is in heaven, worshipped by myriad of angels and saints. He is good. Our father. But he is great in heaven.

Therefore although we approach him in relationship as father, we do not approach him from a kind of sloppy agape viewpoint of just treating him like any other person. He is in heaven.

We therefore merge together that childhood prayer that we have perhaps around mealtime: God is great and God is good. He is great in heaven. He is good, our Father. And he is *our* Father.

The Lord therefore teaches us as we begin prayer to not just begin sitting up a trip hammer and saying a bunch of words and not be conscious of what we're saying. But he's saying as you open prayer be aware of whose presence you're stepping into. And consciously reflect upon the living of that prayer "Our Father who art in heaven." As we still ourselves in his presence and realize whom it is that we speak to we then begin to open our hearts. Jesus teaches us the petitions of prayer.

He gives us six petitions in prayer. Three of them related to God's concerns. Three of them related specifically to our concerns. The Lord's concerns come first in the prayer.

The first concern of the Lord that we pray is this "Hallowed be thy name." What in the world does that mean? What does "hallowed" mean?

To hallow something, it's an old English word, it means to set apart. To sanctify. To make holy. Whatever is set apart in that fashion is treated as an object or a person that is different from all others. It has been set apart. Therefore to hallow the name of the Lord is to think consciously about treating the name of God differently from all others. In the Bible, a name is more than a tag that you put on something. A name represents the character and the nature of the person who stands behind the name.

To hallow the name of the Lord means we understand something about his nature and his character and we're seeking to reverence him in our life. Luther said, How is the name of God hallowed? When our life and doctrine are truly Christian. When what we believe and how we behave is Christian. Is lived in the realm of activity that the Lord wants for us. To hallow his name therefore means to want to life that is reverent before God, that takes him seriously – his honor and his character.

The second request that the Lord asks us to pray that relates to his glory is "thy kingdom come." How does the kingdom of God come? What is the kingdom of God? Some people pray this prayer as only something relating to the future. The kingdom is coming in the future but Jesus teaches us that the kingdom is right now. Therefore to pray for the kingdom to come is to ask God's kingdom to move into our lives. It's really to ask two things. That the kingdom come in intensively. And the kingdom come in extensively. What do I mean by these terms?

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Intensively, each of us can think probably of areas of our life where God's kingdom is not yet fully come. Kind of fortresses, hold out areas where we yet have not turned over to him and said, Lord in that particular area I still want to have the key to the door. Praying, "Thy kingdom come" intensively is to ask the Lord to move into that arena of our life and take over lordship so that we would hold nothing of our life from him. Our ideas, our mindset, our philosophy, our action. Nothing is held as restricted to ourselves. The whole key is turned over to the Lord. Lord, you come in intensively into my life and be the King and have your way.

To pray, Thy kingdom come extensively means that we become concerned about our family members, about our neighbors, about other people who do not know the Lord. We ask the kingdom of God to move into them. Therefore it is the cry of evangelism. We begin by reverencing God and then we next turn to evangelism and the extension of his kingdom.

The Lord thirdly teaches us to pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This phrase has been butchered by some people in the body of Christ today. Perverted to mean something it never was meant to mean. There are those in the body of Christ who are saying, when we pray we ought to look at what is done in heaven and we ought to know that whatever is done in heaven is therefore God's will to do on earth. There is no pain in heaven. There is no sickness in heaven. There is no suffering in heaven. There is no hardship in heaven. Therefore we always know God's will is not to have these things on earth. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The fallacy of that argument can be very well illustrated by the fact that there is no night in heaven. If we really want to pray that way then we ought to go all the way and ask God to cause the earth to quit rotating so that we can have 24 hours of sunlight all the time. To pray "Thy will be done on earth *as it is done* in heaven," is not to pray that the will be done in the same way but that it be responded to with the same obedience on earth as it is in heaven. There are no Gethsemane's in heaven yet Jesus faced one on earth. There are no crucifixions in heaven yet Jesus faced a crucifixion on earth. There are no cups to be removed in heaven yet Jesus prayed, "remove this cup from me."

We need to remember I think the tremendous words of Polycarp who was the disciple of John, an early second century Christian who was bishop of Smyrna, who in his mid nineties was brought into the arena before the Roman pro counsel of Asia on trial of his faith. He was told to recant, to deny Christ. As he looked at the sticks that had been assembled and the post he would be tied to and where he'd be burned up he turned to the proconsul and said "Eighty and six years have I served my Lord and he has done me no wrong." I think somehow those words need to be revived in the body of Christ today. "And he has done me no wrong."

There are people today who are telling us we ought never to pray "Thy will be done." That to pray that is a cop out. It's to say to God, I don't know what I want so it's not to have faith. They twist this scripture as they do the other scriptures. Because it is the height of faith to be able to commit ourselves to the lap of the Lord. I'm not saying go passive in prayer. I'm not saying don't ask specific things in faith. I am saying the ultimate expression of faith is to receive God's will for our life even if it is a cup, even if it is a cross, to say nevertheless thy will be done. Jesus never tells us to begin praying for ourselves until we have first prayed this prayer. "Your name be revered. Your kingdom come. Your will be done."

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As we have begun to focus upon “thy” we now focus upon “our” and me and my. What a pattern for praying! Too often I, probably like you, rush into prayer with my laundry list, things I want God to do for me. God says, “Get all that in second place. Start focusing upon my concerns and my purposes and my meaning for your life might be. Then you’ll know how to pray rightly for yourself.”

The first petition the Lord teaches us to pray for ourselves is simply this, “Give us this day, our daily bread.” Nothing really dramatic. Maybe you’ve got enough money in the bank and you’re not thinking lately of your need to pray that. But it’s a frank recognition that all that we have really comes from God’s hand. Jesus is telling us in this first prayer for ourselves that after we pray about the great things we come down to the God who is personally concerned that we have enough to eat. He’s concerned with the minutiae of our life. The first prayer that we pray for ourselves might even surprise us because it’s a prayer related to the body. We might have a tendency to tack it in as last or as a P.S., to the prayer. But Jesus puts it first as a prayer for ourselves. Lord, keep me going. Give me physical life. Sustain my life. It’s a super prayer for someone who is depressed and thinking about suicide because this is a prayer for such a person. It’s a prayer to keep alive. Give me this day my daily bread! It’s a prayer that can be prayed when we’re young and full of vitality and it’s a prayer that can be prayed when we’re old and dull of years. We need to pray, “God give me strength for this day. Don’t let me give up on what you’re doing in me.”

We have more than physical hunger. We have spiritual hunger so the Lord teaches us next to pray, “forgive us.” What? When we pray this prayer in a group we get tripped up. Is it debts? Or is it transgressions? The reason for the difference is in Matthew it is debts. In Luke the word is transgressions. There’s two separate occasions where Jesus gave the disciples this prayer. One time he said “debts” the other time “transgressions.” Debt is an obligation we owe but cannot pay. Transgression is a decision we’ve made which has been the wrong one. We’ve missed the mark. The Lord is saying whether it’s a sin of omission – a debt you own you do not pay. Or whether it’s a sin of commission – a transgression you have done. Bring those to me and ask for forgiveness and you can be forgiven.

But there is a condition. And it’s the only petition in the prayer that has a condition. “Forgive me as also you let others be forgiven for their transgressions or debts against you.” The person who is forgiven by God truly forgiven, knows what it is like to extend forgiveness. If you do not extend forgiveness you bear witness to the fact that you yourself have never been forgiven. Who do you need to forgive? Of what do you need forgiving? Jesus tells us to pray to forgive.

Then Jesus tells us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” We again look at that and say, Lord this seems somewhat confusing. James 1 tells us that God tempts no one to evil. So what should we even pray to not be led into temptation. You wouldn’t lead us into temptation. Yet Genesis 22 tells us “The Lord God did tempt Abraham.” So what is this dichotomy. What is this paradox between the Lord saying he doesn’t tempt anyone and then he tempts Abraham and then Jesus tells us “lead us not into temptation.” What’s going on?”

There are two meanings the word “temptation.” One is to seduce one to sin. To cause them to fall. The other meaning is to test, so as to prove character and develop strength. When a basketball team plays another opponent they are being tested. They are not being seduced to evil. Hopefully they’re going into the game with the attitude this is going to show us how much

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strength we have and the end will reveal how good we are and how we survived and passed the test. No one ever develops good character and strength without going through tests. It's that later kind here which the scriptures mean when they say, "The Lord God did test Abraham." From the devil's point of view it is always the seducement to evil. From God's point of view it's always the chance for us to develop character. To resist the devil and he will flee from us. To develop strength out of the test. The Lord is saying to us Pray that you would avoid the place of testing. "Lead us not into temptation."

We recognize that periodically we find ourselves in a place of temptation. Mark 1 says that the Spirit drove him into the wilderness where he was tested by the devil. Jesus was led by the Spirit to the place of testing.

So what does it mean to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." We think of occasions in our lives where we have foolishly, blindly stumbled into temptation and testing. If we have been attune with the Lord we'd never encountered that at all. We brought it upon ourselves. If however we stay sensitive to praying this prayer, Lead us not into the place of testing, when we get into the place of testing we can have the confidence to say, since I've been praying not to get here and seeing as how I'm here maybe it is that the spirit has put this to test my life. Therefore the backup prayer, the second part of the petition comes into focus. "Deliver us from the evil one." Jesus went to the cross. He faced the test of the cross but he was delivered from the evil one.

That always should be theme and motive of our praying. A motif of our praying. That we recognize although we are in the place of testing God can deliver us and will deliver us from the evil one.

The prayer closes with a word of praise. "Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." Notice in the modern translation of the Bible this is found in the footnote and it will say, "Later manuscripts add these words." The better Greek manuscript do not actually contain this. However as I look at this I would say that nevertheless this praise which ends the prayer is a right response and even a scriptural response to petitions. All that ending of the prayer is a condensation of what David himself prays in 1 Chronicles 29:11 where he says, "Yours O Lord is the greatness and the power, the glory and the majesty and the splendor. Everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours O Lord is the kingdom. You're exalted as head over all." It's appropriate to close all prayer with praise.

As we take a moment to look at this prayer in review we ask ourselves, am I conscious of coming into the Lord's presence when I begin prayer? Is my life conscious when it is being lived out conscious that it is being lived out in the presence of the Father who is in heaven as I bring my petitions, as I bring my life to him, am I seeking first his concerns for my life. Or am I blindly and foolishly plunging ahead with my own agenda for living? The Lord is saying, Lay that agenda aside and seek first my agenda for your life.

Then when you begin praying for yourself the Lord marvelously teaches us that he is with us in our present and past and future. He is with us in the present – give us this day our daily bread. He is over our past – forgive us. We only need forgiveness for the things that are gone. He is over the past. And he is in the future – led us not into temptation.

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Jesus eloquently is here speaking of the ministry of God the Father, Christ the Son and God the Holy Spirit because it is the Father who is the sustainer of life and gives us the bread of life. It is the Son who gives us forgiveness through his redemption on the cross. It is the Spirit who by his work within us is leading us into successful conflict with the evil one. So we ask God to be present with us and the past, present and future. Is my life lived out as a symphony of praise to his name? Thine O Lord is the kingdom, power and glory.

Our Father, we thank you for this prayer which your Son, our Lord, has taught us to pray. Perhaps there are some persons here today who are so busy seeking their own agenda in life have been so busy locating their own priorities, dreaming their own dreams that the thought of seeking you has slipped away from them. Your agenda, your orders for their life have been lost. This age Lord is an age of assertiveness. It is an age, which keeps telling us to seek number one. There are among us the need to not simply be stepped on. But at the same time you want to have your will in our lives. You want us to lay aside our mad clamor for fulfillment and quest for identity in order to seek something greater – what your will might be for us. What your identity might be for us. What your plan might be for our life personally and or our family. Lord we pray that your name would be revered. That your kingdom would come. That your will would be done. Key decisions can only be made successfully if your will and your name is sought. Let them call upon the Lord. Let them hear the words you spoke to Jeremiah “Call unto me and I will show you great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.” We ask your blessing and favor upon us. Be with us in this time of worship and communion. Reveal your presence to us Lord. We ask in your name. The name of Christ. Amen.