

Learning the Language of Our Father Matthew 6:5-8

Prayer is like a foreign language. We don't instinctively know how to speak with God, but deep inside us we need to, and we long to, communicate with our heavenly Father. For this reason, one of Jesus' highest priorities in transforming His followers into His image is to teach us to pray. Are you ready to learn?

Have you ever spoken with a baby? Communication with babies is hard. One syllable ("Ma"); two syllables; short sentences ("me no like"). We all start out that way! Grow as we imitate, practice and as we learn from instruction; Learn to communicate effectively. Not born knowing how to speak to other human beings. Long to. Need to.

Similarly, we instinctively call out to God; God welcomes our inarticulate sounds, but He doesn't want us to remain inarticulate.

How does that happen? Instruction and imitation; we learn and we practice

Core group of 12 followers. Heard Him teach, do miracles. Didn't ask Him, "Lord, teach us to teach, heal, cast out demons." "Teach us to pray." No one has ever asked me!

Surprising that they would ask. Unlike ours, they had grown up in a praying culture. Parents said prayers, had been taught prayers at home, heard prayers offered by priests and Levites, scribes, Pharisees, in synagogue and temple; to be Jewish was to pray.

Something different about Jesus' prayer life – intimate and powerful.

- Jesus prayed a lot
- Prayed in public, with a few friends; in private; His highest priority.
- Primary objective in forming His followers was that He teach them to pray.

When I want to refresh my desire to pray and the direction of my prayer life, I turn to re-read the most famous prayer from Sermon on Mount; Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5

Jesus assumed his listeners were praying; "When you pray..."

Didn't assume they were praying well

I. Don't pray this way (Prayer DON'Ts)

A. Don't pray for show (improper motive) – 6:5

- It is possible to pray wrong. Sin while praying We think of sin in extreme terms – murder, adultery, stuff the other guy does. Sin follows us everywhere we go
- Street corner – prominent; Praying for show; praying to impress others; can't wait to arrive in order to start praying

- Hypocrite = Actor wearing mask; façade of prayer
- Appears to be talking with God but talking for people
- Motive of such prayer is the approval of people
- Context: Middle of Sermon on the Mount, exposition of the Law
 - Genuine righteousness is NOT simply following rules
 - Not simply what others see! Matthew 6:1
 - Transformed life, heart, character – mercy, kindness, compassion
 - 5:48 – becoming just like God
 - 3 illustrations from 3 most common religious practices: giving, prayer and fasting. Matthew 6:2, 5, 16
 - What matters to God is the heart

B. Don't pray erroneously/mistakenly (improper theology) – Matthew 6:7-8

1. Meaningless repetition – Matt 6:7-8

- βατταλογέω – to speak without thinking
- Prayer that engages our mind; thinking rightly about God as Father

2. Many words. High volume, but empty of thought.

- Surrounding nations had low view of their gods. Just like men and women, but more powerful. Prayers had to win attention of gods; sleeping, vacationing; Elijah/Baal (using restroom) never knew when god was available, so hope that one prayer slips through the crack when he is available. Volume and quantity of words important

Admonition reflects concern that we not misunderstand nature of prayer

- It is relationship; what if spouse said same thing all the time? What's to eat? What's to eat? What's to eat? Badgering
- Not saying that praying same thing frequently is bad. Jesus prayed same thing 3X in the garden of Gethsemane. We are exhorted: Knock and keep knocking.
- Loud volume is not always bad. David cried out.
- Prayer = communication between two people who love one another

Concerned that we not misunderstand of the nature of prayer and the God to whom we are praying

- Sovereign of universe; all-knowing, all wise
- God is not deaf; God is not oblivious; can't be tricked or cajoled

God is a good Father

- Matthew 7:11– you being evil know how to give good gifts

TRANSITION: *There's a better way to pray*

II. Instead, pray this way (Prayer DOs) – Matthew 6:5-6

A. Pray sincerely – 6:5

- Opposite of hypocrisy is sincerity
- sincere – latin *sine cera* = Without wax
- Greek – judged by the sun
- Nothing we tell God surprises Him; be honest

“...the human family all has the same secrets, which are both very telling and very important to tell. They are telling in the sense that they tell what is perhaps the central paradox of our condition – that what we hunger for perhaps more than anything else is to be known in our full humanness, and yet that is often just what we also fear more than anything else. It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are – even if we tell it only to ourselves – because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are and little by little come to accept instead the highly edited version which we put forth in hope that the world will find it more acceptable than the real thing.”

Telling Secrets, Fredrick Buechner, pp. 2-3

B. Pray humbly – 6:5

- Hypocrites stand – Luke 18:9-13
 - Humble posture = bowed head, on knees, on face; Ps. 5:5a, 7; 95:6
- God is Holy. We cannot stand in His presence. We need someone who can talk to God on our behalf. Plead our case. “God, accept Brian. Listen to him.” That one is Jesus.
- 1 Tim. 2:5
 - If you don’t go through Christ you are wasting your time; one God and one mediator
 - Never be worthy on our own to be in God’s presence
- When we bow before God, what does God do? Raises us up

C. Pray Secretly – 6:6

- Not ruling out public prayer or praying with others. Jesus offered up loud, public prayers at times; prayed with His disciples frequently
- Prayer fundamentally between you and God. He wants time with you.

III. Prayer WHYs – Matthew 6:7-8 (cf. Isaiah 65:24. Before they call, I will answer)

A. Prayer is rewarded – 6:6

- 10 times in Mt 6 Jesus talks about reward/treasure
- God longs to give good gifts; Matthew 7:9-11
- Needs supplied now; intimacy now; approval in heaven (“well done”)

B. Prayer moves God – James 5:16b-18

- “Prayer moves the hand that moves the world.” J.A. Wallace
- Sometimes God does the miraculous
 - Ex – little girl whose tumor disappeared
 - Don’t always get what we ask for. More later.
- Sometimes the miraculous is a change within us

C. Prayer changes us

- Deepest relationships have an impact on our lives
- Not so much about bending God to our will, but our will to His

Application: two times this week, for 30 minutes...

1. Find a quiet place
2. Re-read “Lord’s Prayer”; look for principles
3. Pray specifically and boldly
4. Write down what you have prayed

As we close...

- Take a moment to ask God to use these next few weeks to teach us to pray