

What is Prayer? Matthew 6:9-13

We begin a series of talks on prayer by considering the pattern of prayer Jesus used to instruct his disciples on how to pray. So what is prayer? we are going to discover its not what you say, not what you do but comes from what your heart thinks.

James Montgomery (1818) wrote a hymn that puts it this way

“Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
Uttered or unexpressed
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast
Prayer is the burden of a sigh
The falling of a tear
The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near”

His poem finishes with

O Thou by whom we come to God,
the Life, the Truth, the Way,
the path of prayer thyself hast trod:
Lord, teach us how to pray!

Which brings us to our Bible passage for today.

One of the daftest bits of the rituals of parliament is PMQs or Prime Ministers Questions. For half an hour each week, MPs are able , if they catch the Speaker’s eye, to ask questions of the Prime Minister. It’s a ritual with very little meaning and the least meaningful is the part of it at the beginning. The first questioner nearly always to ask the prime minister ‘if he will list

his official engagements' for the day. And his/her reply is to mention some notable events and then say, something like ' I have had meetings with ministers and will have further meetings as well as spending time in the House'. Parliament likes its rituals, so do religious people. Most religions have a set of prayers which are said formally on specified occasions. Christians have followed this trend and some services church services repeat prayers which date back to the early centuries of the church. So what did Jesus teach on the subject of *how you should pray?*

READ Matthew 6:9-13

I do not believe Jesus intended us to say the Lord's Prayer as some sort of Mantra that is acceptable. It is a salutary reminder, however, that prayer is simplicity itself. It is recorded in Luke with different words and the traditional 1666 Prayer Book has 'trespasses' instead of 'debts' or 'sins'.

What I believe Jesus is saying at heart is "Keep it simple" . Before we go looking at the content, lets reflect a little on what else he said about prayer.

Don't Parade your prayer in public. v5. In fact, much of your prayer should be in secret, known only to God.v6 This is the only reference to formal prayer. 'When you pray , do it in secret' implies a conscious effort to set aside time with God. Jesus' own choice was a desert place. Yours might be your own bedroom or someplace else where you can get privacy. I When you pray, don't heap up words as if God is impressed by your vocabulary v7. Say what you mean. There is no special vocabulary, or language. Prayers in the Bible range from whole psalms to 'Lord I believe, help my unbelief' Its not the words

that matter but what your heart and mind are filled with. Finally, *remember your Father knows what you need before you ask him* v8. That I believe is important, because we are often tempted to explain the detail of what we are asking and sometimes put our spin on the expected answer. What is more it reminds us that God is paying attention to us and our prayers. We are not hoping God is listening, we know he knows everything about us and the situations we pray about, he cares and he will answer with our best interests at heart. So use the so-called Lord's Prayer as a pattern for understanding what God is interested in.

In this sample prayer, Jesus is warning against a hypocritical form of worship where people focus on repeating words rather than engaging with God in spirit. Jesus wants people to pray with sincerity and thoughtfulness, rather than just going through the motions. However, using it as a reminder to what to pray seems a good idea to me.

The prayer is brief and straight forward. At most there are only 9 phrases. It takes only 30 seconds to say them. However, it is only the beginning. The whole of this morning service is part of this prayer. And if you take seriously the call to 'pray without ceasing' then it takes all your day.

1. " *'Our Father in heaven,*
2. *hallowed be your name,*
3. *your kingdom come,*
4. *your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*
5. *Give us today our daily bread.*
6. *Forgive us our debts,*
7. *as we also have forgiven our debtors.*
8. *And lead us not into temptation,*
9. *but deliver us from the evil one.'*

It begins with reverence.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
On screen you have two translations of the text. The second was written simple to express what a group of Christians thought it meant. First we recognize who we are prayer to. Second we set him apart from everything else.

He is Our Father. Not some distant God, but Ours. He has chosen you to be his son or daughter. He sent his son to die on the cross to make it possible for you to become part of his family. He is our Father in Heaven which reminds us he is high above everything we know seated in heaven, surrounded by angels and others and the vast crowd of saints who have gone before. It is impossible for us to hold those two things together. He is the God of creation and yet he knows and cares for us intimately.

Second we set him apart from everything else. , *hallowed be your name,*

If you detect some resemblance to the 10 commandments in Exodus 20:2-6 that is not surprising. They come from the same source, God himself.

Prayer recognises who God is. But we must take care to respect his divine nature and his holiness.

Next we have a couplet, two phrases that say the same thing in different ways to emphasise the full meaning.

your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus talked a great deal about the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. At the heart of our understanding of Jesus is that he is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the boss. To be obeyed as a response to his great love for us. Our prayer becomes our life

here because we both accept his rule over every thought and action in our lives and the desire to see his kingdom and will to be extended into everybody's life. So this is a prayer for taking captive every thought to Jesus and finding opportunities to share that experience of a relationship with our Saviour to everyone around us.

Jesus instructs us to pray for his Kingdom to come. And that applies to our personal life, our family life, our church life our employment, our nation and our world.

Heaven is where God is. And we ask no less than God to come down to dwell among us and lead our thoughts and our actions. The following phrase

Give us today our daily bread.

Is probably what most people think prayer is about. Asking God to feed, clothe, house and heal us. What Jesus is saying to our materialistic minds is yes it is part of prayer but only one part. we must keep in mind who he is as God and Father and see our request in the light of his Kingdom and will. What is more Jesus said in Luke 11:11-13 And that is in the context of this prayer, so maybe we need to get used to the idea that the Holy Spirit is the bread and butter of life and essential ingredient for daily living.

*Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

Or

and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.
as Luke 11:4 puts it.

And just in case you think this is just a line of the prayer, Jesus adds

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.

at the end of the prayer. Now there's a challenge. At the heart of our prayer life we vocalize our need to forgive others just as we are forgiven. And this comes from a work of God in our lives. The Holy Spirit convinces us of sin and only he can move our spirit to forgive others as we have been forgiven. You see prayer is not one way. You should come away from your time with God, changed by the very prayer you have prayed.

You have prayed God's will be done, so align your life with the will of God. You have said may your name be kept holy, so keep it holy in your heart and on your lips. You have declared God is your Father, accept his love and forgiveness, enjoy being family.

Finally we have another couplet:

*And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

Jeremiah 17:9

James 1:13

CEV: Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others.

So we are asking God to guide us away from temptation. That may mean avoiding tempting place, tempting literature, tempting websites. There is a constant battle for our minds and here we pray to the one who can transform our minds to think pure thoughts

READ Romans 12:2

We need our God to defend us from the enemy within and the evil that is all around us.

That is what prayer is, engaging with God in his business and passions. He loves you and just wants to hear you tell him you love him in return. Seeking his Holy Spirit to so transform our lives that his rule in our lives is complete.

I will let Paul have the final word!

Writing to the Thessalonians he said: READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

Don't give up praying, you are taught to pray Your will be done and it is God's will that you "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances;*"