

Talking with God - Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] Well, amen. I want to thank the choir, the combined adult and youth choirs for that wonderful song, and that really should carry us forward as a church. God, we do believe. He can do the impossible. God can do whatever he wants with our church, and we are excited to see what that is in the future. Thanks, buddy. I might need that. Appreciate that. Brought me by Bible. Very good. Thank you, man. All right. We are going to take a turn from the last few months where we've been in the book of Ephesians, and I invite you to turn over to the gospel of Matthew. Matthew, if you would, chapter 6. Mentioned it a little bit at the end of the service last Sunday, I truly believe that God is leading our church into a season of prayer. That does not just represent a sermon series, though there will be sermon series themed on prayer, and we're beginning one today. But I truly believe that our church as a whole, individually and corporately together, is being called by God into an actual season where we need to commit ourselves personally and united as a church in the effort, the discipline of prayer.

So I ask that you would go home and you would search your own heart, and then you would search your calendar, and try to find moments where you can literally schedule dedicated prayer time.

We're going to be talking about that more in the weeks to come, and try to provide opportunities and pathways to do that, both individually and together as a church. But let's begin this season of prayer by diving into the pattern that God laid out for us to pray. So Matthew, chapter 6, we read about the Lord's Prayer. This series, this first series in our season of prayer, is called Talking with God. And we start off by talking about the Lord's Prayer. Would you go ahead and advance me to the next slide? This thing isn't cooperating yet this morning. There we go, thank you. A lot of it is done by the Bible exposition commentary, and then over the next few weeks, we will be covering Matthew, chapter 6, verses 5 through 15. Matthew 6, 5 through 15. Let me say this about the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is less of a prescription and more of a pattern. You understand what we mean by that? It wasn't God so much saying, this is how you have to pray, and if you pray these words, then you'll get to God. That wasn't at all what he was saying. Instead, he was giving us a pattern by which we can pray. There we go. It advanced this time, so I think we got it working.

Matthew 6, 5 through 8, is the first section of this passage that we'll cover this morning, and then we'll get into the actual content of the Lord's Prayer next week. So let's begin in Matthew, chapter 6, verse 5. If you're able to join us in standing as we read the Word of God, would you do that now? Matthew chapter 6, and verse 5. Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by people. Truly, I tell you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles, since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words. Don't be like them, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him. God, we know that you do know exactly what we need even before we ask. We know that you've called us to pray. You've called us to communicate with you, just to talk with you, God.

That is sometimes an intimidating thing. It's sometimes an uncertain thing. We thank you for your scriptures that enlighten how we can do that. I pray that you would speak to us by your Holy Spirit in this moment. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thanks for standing.

[4 : 36] I want to draw your attention back to verse 5. Back to verse 5. Whenever you pray, Jesus is teaching us, don't be like the hypocrites. Well, who was He talking about? He was talking about the Pharisees back in the day, the great religious leaders in the Jewish tradition. At that moment in time, the Pharisees kind of held the keys to the Jewish faith. And in public and in their synagogues or their types of churches, they would often pray loudly and proudly for everybody to hear.

So Jesus is using them as a direct example of how not to pray. Now, don't raise your hand and don't shout out anybody's name, but have you ever seen somebody who prayed and it just seemed like they were doing it to get attention? I have. I really hope I haven't been that guy before, but we've all seen that kind of person probably. It's like, are you doing this sincerely? Are you really talking to God right now? Or are you just talking in front of others? Well, it's interesting because, well, you know what? It was working and now it's not. So would you mind taking me to the next slide? Hippocrates, the word we get right here in Matthew 6 and verse 5, don't be like the hypocrites. Hippocrates is that Greek word there. And from that word, we get the idea of actor or stage player. Isn't that interesting?

How many times when you and I prayed, do we feel like maybe we're just acting? Maybe we're just playing on a stage. We're doing it. We're putting on a performance for the benefit of those around us.

And we're not really, truly communicating with God out of dependence on God. So that is what Jesus is warning against. Look over in Luke 18, if you would. Luke chapter 18.

I didn't put it on the screen. I figured we could just turn in our Bibles. Luke 18, verses 9 through 14. Just a couple of books over from Matthew.

[6 : 56] Luke chapter 18, beginning in verse 9. Jesus told this parable to some who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and looked down on everyone else. Know anybody like that?

Trusted in yourself that you're righteous and you look down on everybody else? So he tells this story to make this point. Two men, verse 10, went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee. The other was a tax collector.

Now pause for a minute. Anybody know a famous tax collector in the Bible? Yeah, what do you think? Matthew, that's right. Matthew was a tax collector. Now that doesn't mean that this story is based on Matthew's life.

However, we see from the life of Matthew, and we see from studying culture in that time, tax collector was a hated position. Now you had the protection of the government.

It was a powerful position. You probably accumulated wealth. However, the everyday people hated you because you were collecting the taxes from them. And more than likely, you were crooked.

[8 : 01] More than likely, you were a dishonest person. So this was not a good guy, okay? So we've got a Pharisee, the pinnacle of the religious world, and then we've got a tax collector, kind of the bottom of the non-religious world, right?

So two very distinct, different people. One a Pharisee, the other a tax collector, went up to the temple to pray.

Verse 11, the Pharisee was standing and praying like this about himself. God, I thank you that I'm not like these other people. Greedy, unrighteous, adulterers.

And then he even says it, right? You kind of knew who he was talking about, but then he says, or even like this tax collector over here. I fast twice a week.

I give a tenth of everything I get. And I imagine he goes on and on and pontificates about how great he is in his prayer, talking to God, right? Verse 13, however, the tax collector, standing far off, would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his chest and saying, God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

[9 : 22] I tell you, this one went down to his house justified, rather than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

You understand there's a difference here? One was putting on a show. He was a hypocrite, wasn't he? He was playing a part. He was a stage player in that moment. The other one knew the truth about himself.

He had humbled himself before God, and he couldn't even lift his eyes to heaven. The only difference between those two men is one knew the truth about himself, and the other one didn't.

But they were both rotten to the core. But one had the faith to humble himself before God and cry out to God for mercy.

Well, the Bible says he found mercy. He found justification in that moment. So, Hippocrates, do you pray? When you pray, do you pray more as an actor?

[10 : 28] Are you acting? Are you playing a part? Or are you crying out like that tax collector did? Let's go back to verse 6.

Matthew 6 and verse 6. When you pray, go into your private room. Shut your door. Pray to your father who is in secret. So, prayer is personal. Prayer is personal.

That's what we can glean from this. Now, this doesn't mean that the only time that it's appropriate to pray is when you're by yourself. If that were true, then Jesus would have done wrong, and many others throughout the New Testament would have done wrong when they prayed in public, prayed in front of people.

We see that time and time again. So, it's not exclusively that you must pray in private, but prayer is a private thing. It's a personal thing. We must understand that about prayer.

Luke chapter 5. Back in Luke again, but earlier in the book. Luke chapter 5 and verse 16. Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness to pray.

[11 : 32] So, we see Jesus actually modeling this. Jesus would often withdraw to deserted places or to the wilderness and pray. He would get away.

How many of you guys have watched The Chosen? Either up here at church, or maybe you've gone to the theater, you've watched it at home on one of the streaming apps. By the way, I can't recommend that show enough. Outstanding. Now, it is not a one-for-one account of the biblical narrative.

They took artistic license and added on some things to the story. It is simply meant to portray the life of Jesus and his dealings with his disciples as it may have happened in accordance with the scripture, and then adding on some extra details and backstories and that kind of thing.

And they make that clear. This is really meant to drive you to the text rather than see it as a replacement for the text. There is no replacement for the word of God.

However, The Chosen did an excellent job in portraying how often Jesus would just disappear. His disciples wouldn't know where he was.

[12 : 37] People might come asking, where's your master? Where's your rabbi? And they wouldn't know where he was. He's off praying somewhere. And the Bible teaches us that Jesus often did that.

Why? Because he needed to commune with his father. If the son of God needed to commune with his father privately by himself, how much more do you think you and I need to?

We're not God. We're not divine. All of our life source runs from him. We will be spiritually dead inside if we don't continually go back to that well of talking to God.

Prayer is a deeply personal thing. When it's not personal, it becomes impersonal. It becomes public.

It becomes a religious right. It becomes a tradition that we feel like we should do. But it's not personally meaningful to us. So prayer is personal.

[13 : 41] Back in verse 1 of Matthew 6, it gives us some admonishment about that. Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.

Otherwise, you have no reward with your father in heaven. Why would you have no reward? Because you were not doing it for heavenly gain. You weren't doing it for God.

You were simply doing it for the approval of man and you already got it. So that reward is done. There is no other reward left for you. So he says, be careful not to practice your righteousness.

And one of these chief ways would be prayer in front of others just to be seen by them. Now, should we live out a life of testimony and faith in God?

Absolutely. We should. But that should never be the motivation is to gain praise from others or to just be seen by them because prayer is a personal thing.

[14 : 41] Then, I want to remind you of this. The heart of the one praying is more important than the style of the prayer. We sang that song this morning, didn't we?

Heart of worship. I was back there getting ready for baptism, but I thought I heard it playing out here. I'm coming back to the heart of worship because it's all about him. Listen, the heart of the one praying is more important than the style of the prayer.

That tax collector, when he poured out his heart to God, he might not have gotten all the words right. He might have not gotten everything theologically and doctrinally straightened up and lined up just how it should be or how they would teach it in seminary.

But his heart was in the right place and God blessed it. Meanwhile, the Pharisee, who almost assuredly got everything in order as it should be theologically and according to the Old Testament that he had studied and knew practically by heart, he would have gotten all his ducks in a row, but his heart was so far from God.

Y'all, I'm afraid that that is a microcosm of our churches today and we might not be exempt from that. It's that we have long-time Christians who can tell you everything about the Bible, everything about God, but their hearts are so far removed from God.

[16 : 00] The heart of the one praying is more important than the style of the prayer. Why is that? Because in God's kingdom, you look through these parables where Jesus says the kingdom of God is like this.

A sower went out to sow seed. A kingdom of God is like this. It's the shepherd who left the 99 to go hunt down the one. Over and over again, in God's kingdom, relationship is greater than rules.

The word of God teaches us this life-changing, life-transforming difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Both are valuable.

Both reveal God to us. But something happened when Jesus died on the cross. The law died. God's law was no longer controlling over us.

The Bible says what the law could not do, Jesus did. The law could never bring us to God. So plug in all of your religious rules, all of your religious expectations, all the standards that you think you and everybody else should meet.

[17 : 19] That will never bring you to God. A relationship with Jesus Christ must bring you to God. It's when I get off sidetracked by all the rules that Christianity and church can start to implement on everybody else.

That's when I get farther away from God. Now it might look like I've got my act together. It might look like I'm doing really well, but I know inside there's a passage in Scripture that literally says you're full of dead men's bones.

You look like you're alive and doing great on the outside and inside you're dead. And I know when I start getting like that. And God's got to get back to me and say it's about prayer.

It's about me. It's about your relationship with me. It's about my love for you that I can see born in your heart and then you can show out and shine out to others around you.

That is what will change your life, your kid's life, your wife's life, your husband's life. That's what will do it every time.

[18 : 22] So relationship is far greater than the rules. You might have been following Jesus' rules. You might have been following the rules of the Bible most of your life. There's another one who did that.

His name was Nicodemus. But he couldn't seem to figure out that Jesus was the answer, not the rules. Now, let's go to verse 7.

When you pray, don't babble like the Gentiles. What's he talking about? Well, there were these Gentiles who would pray to their false god. What's a Gentile? Not a Jew, right? Everybody who's not a Jew.

So, if there's any Jews in the room, the rest of us are Gentiles, alright? So, often in that day, you would have these Gentiles who are worshiping their false gods and their MO, their modus operandi is that they would just try to use as many words as possible because the more they would pray, the more words, the more flowery language that they would use when they pray, they would feel like their false gods were honored by that and their lives would be blessed.

So, this is a direct reference to that. Well, that still happens today, doesn't it? That still happens today. And they feel like as long as they were using a bunch of words and praying as much as they could and as often as they could to their gods, then their gods would give them whatever they wanted.

[19 : 44] Prayer does not work like that. Now, I used to live in Nevada and we literally had slot machines everywhere, okay? Now, we didn't in our house, okay? But, but everywhere you went, I mean, you go to the gas station, there's a slot, a few slot machines right up there by the door.

You go to the grocery store, they're right over there by the checkout counter. I mean, everywhere you go, there were slot machines in the state of Nevada. When God brought us back home to Texas, I was so grateful to go to Brookshire's and not see a slot machine.

So, that was nice. Prayer is not a slot machine. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands of how many of you have played a slot machine before, okay? Look, if you go off and do that, it's your business between you and God, that's fine.

But listen, prayer does not work like that. You don't just put something in and expect to get something out. You don't just put in words and get out answers, okay?

Prayer is a meaningful communication with the God of the universe. The God who knows so much more than you do. The God who knows so much more than we do.

[20 : 55] We just bring our requests to Him and then we sit back in trust and faith believing He will act according to what He knows is best. We might get what we ask for or we might get something totally different than what we ask for because God knew that's what we needed.

We might ask for the trial, the struggle, to be over and God might want to take us through it a little bit more. There might be all kinds of ways that God intends to answer your prayer but it will never be like pulling a slot machine.

Okay God, I need a new truck. Give me a new truck. I prayed for it. Prayer doesn't work like that. And then in verse 8, don't be like them.

Your Father knows the things you need before you ask Him. Prayer releases the pressure. How great is that? Now I will ask you to raise your hand on this one.

How many of you felt pressure at some point this last week? How many felt some pressure? For those of you who didn't, I need you to like talk to me after the service because I felt a lot of pressure this last week at different moments.

[22 : 06] That is amazing. Y'all have cracked the code. Look, we are all under pressure, right? We are. Some of you were like, don't pressure me into raising my hand. I feel pressure right now.

Prayer releases the pressure. It's not up to you. It's up to God. It is simply up to you to take it to God because the good news is God already knows what you need before you ask.

He knows the solution before you bring Him the problem. But He still wants you to bring Him the problem. What kind of a relationship would I have with my two little boys down here if I just met all their needs and never wanted them to ask me for anything?

How one-sided of a relationship would that be? Why are you asking me for this? Like, I don't do enough for you?

Of course I want them to ask me for things. Now, I'm not always going to give them what they ask for. You want nacho cheese Doritos for breakfast?

[23 : 16] No, you can't have that. I mean, it sounds good to me too, but no. No. So, I'm going to give them what I know they should have and would be best for them, but I still want them to come keep asking me for things.

You want donuts this morning? No, we're not going to go get donuts. However, on Bo's birthday, which is today, we did go get donuts. It's a chocolate bar.

That's his thing. Thanks. But prayer releases the pressure. You don't have to ask just the right thing. You don't have to say just the right thing. Now, look, if you ask amiss, if you ask the wrong way, if you ask incorrectly, God's not going to just give you that.

Remember, prayer's not a slot machine. You don't just put in coins and get out reward. Just because you ask for it doesn't mean that God's, oh, you shouldn't have asked for that. Here it comes.

How many of you guys have seen the whole genie thing where you get three wishes, right? And if you say it the wrong way, you know, I want a million bucks.

[24 : 31] So you get a million deer bucks. I should have specified what kind of bucks you wanted. God knows what we need.

He knows what we're asking for. He knows our heart. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And he knows his will for us. He knows where he wants to take us. So that's the good news. Prayer releases the pressure.

God, I'm giving this to you. Now, James 4, 3, you ask and you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

There is this aspect of it. If you're asking not out of a motive to please God, not out of a motive to walk in God's will, not out of a motive to recognize that you might have been going the wrong way and you want to course correct and you want to get back on the following Jesus path, right?

If that's not the motive, then you don't receive what you're asking for because you're asking out of wrong motives. God, I want you to make me succeed at work so I can take the dream vacation that I always wanted and I can spend all my time and energy and money on myself and my pleasures.

[25 : 44] Well, God may not provide that for you. But you say, God, I really need a raise at work because the things that we could do with that extra money increase our giving to your work at the church and increase what we do for other people that don't have what they need.

God, I want you to take any additional income that I receive and do what you want with it. Maybe God will do that for you. That's up to Him.

But prayer releases the pressure if your motivations are in line with God. Ephesians 3 and verse 20. We just finished our study of Ephesians but back in the middle of the book, verse 20 of chapter 3, all glory to God who is able through His mighty power at work within us to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

You don't always have to ask for the right thing. I've heard people say, I'm not very good at praying. What does that mean? Who's good at praying? If you pray sincerely, you're good at praying.

I'm talking to God. There's no expectations or standard that you have to meet. He can accomplish so much more than you could ever ask or think. By the way, if there's any teenagers hanging in here, they're missing you in the back right now so y'all need to slip out if there's any that haven't done that yet.

[27 : 14] Finally, I might need you to take me to the next one. It's not working again. Y'all, we're going to get this thing figured out, all right?

Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. God's sovereignty does not change our need to pray. Have you ever thought this before? Well, if God is sovereign and God knows everything that's going to happen, then how does my prayer change things?

Anybody ever thought that? Can my prayer change God's will or God's mind? Does it make any difference at all? Let me remind you, God's sovereignty does not change our need to pray.

God still wants you to ask even though He already knows the outcome. That's just like when we put our faith in Jesus for salvation. The Bible teaches that God knows all the ones who are going to turn to Him and repent of their sin and be saved.

He already knows who's going to do that. But He goes ahead and wants us to make that decision. He calls us to do that. He draws us to Himself.

[28 : 23] And it's the same thing, it's the same principle as we continue through our life with Him in prayer. God already knows what's going to happen, but just like a good father with His children, He wants that child to go ahead and ask, am I going to supply your needs?

Absolutely I will. Am I going to supply your needs whether you ask or not? Yes, because I love you and I care for you. But I want you to go ahead and ask. If you don't ask, then you don't receive my full blessings of that relationship.

Do you understand? It's not God holding dangling blessings out in front of you. You better pray more so you can get these. It's having that relationship with Him that comes from constant communication.

If you and your wife never talk, you probably don't have a thriving relationship, right? You might have learned how to coexist with each other, but you probably don't have a thriving relationship. And it's the same way with God.

If we don't talk to Him, then we're just familiar with who He is. We might have filled our heads with a lot of facts about Him and information, but we don't personally get to call Him friend or personally get to call Him our dear close father because we don't have that kind of relationship with Him.

[29 : 42] But that's not His fault. He wants it. He wrote a love letter to you right here and He said, talk to me, pray, talk with me, communicate with me so He can accomplish so much more than you or I could ever ask or think.

I want to leave you with this quote. Prayer is not about changing God, but it's being willing to let God change us. Prayer is not about changing God.

Man, God's never going to change and I thank God for that. But prayer is being willing to let God change me. It's taking it to Him. Saying, God, I need you to work here.

I need you to work. Prayer drives us to God through a cycle of depending on Him and being grateful for Him. Dependence and gratitude over and over again.

It's not just asking Him for things and waiting for them to show up at your door like an Amazon package. That's not what prayer is. Prayer is a cycle of dependence on God for everything.

[30 : 48] Emotional dependence, material dependence, spiritual dependence, mental dependence, dependence for your health. In every way, holistically, across the board, we become dependent on God because He will always supply.

He will always be there. And then we get to send Him all the gratitude that comes from that. And then the last slide, if you would, what's our takeaway? Am I praying more for show or from personal dependence on God?

That's our takeaway today. Am I praying more for show or from personal dependence on God? Would you bow your heads with me?

Can we ask that question right now? Maybe don't close up the Bible and put everything away right in this moment, but just for about 60 seconds or so, just a moment of quietness, a moment of silence and stillness that says, God, do I talk with you more for the benefit of those around me or from personal dependence on you?

There's a song that says, Lord, I need you. Oh, I need you. Every hour, I need you. You're my one defense. You're my righteousness.

[32 : 13] Oh, God, how I need you. There's another song that says, every hour, I need thee. Oh, bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.

God desires us to come to him time and time again throughout the day. Never hang up the phone with our willing, always available, Lord Jesus Christ.

God, I ask that you would work in each heart this morning. Draw us to yourself. May the takeaway from today be that so many in this room go home and carve out more time to talk with you.

There's nothing the devil wants to do more than to distract us from our lifeline of prayer. There's nothing that our flesh resists more than the access to the Holy Spirit that we get when we pray.

I pray that you'd convict each heart and it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.