

**THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM, PART 10: “PRACTICING RIGHTEOUSNESS”
MATTHEW 6:1-18**

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone!

If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor here, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 10 of our sermon series called “The King and His Kingdom,” where we're going through the Gospel of Matthew together.

And today's sermon is titled: “Practicing Righteousness.”

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

“I do not know what the heart of a bad man is like, but I do know what the heart of a good man is like, and it is terrible.”

– Ivan Turgenev, 19th-century Russian novelist¹

Unfortunately, many know the truth of this statement all too well.

We've seen hypocrisy in churches, scandal among pastors, and ungodliness in so-called Christian homes.

But this statement hits closer to our own hearts than we realize, for any honest person would admit that this is true of themselves as well.

We all know that we're not as righteous as we appear to be.

If people heard all our thoughts and words throughout the day, how confident would we be that they'd still be friends with us by the end of it?

<pause>

At the same time, through faith in Christ, God *has* declared us righteous in his sight and he *is* progressively making us more righteous throughout our lives.

As *sinners*, our hearts are terrible—but as *repentant* and *redeemed* sinners, any righteousness in us is God's work in us, and he alone deserves the glory for it.

And yet, the temptation we all face is to *act* as if our hearts are *not* terrible and as if any righteousness in us is because *we're* such great people.

And that's what today's passage is all about.

The One Thing

Beware of making your righteousness about you rather than your Father in heaven.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Matthew 6:1-18.

¹ Quoted in Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open and follow along with the verses as they come up throughout the sermon. It will help you follow much more easily.

I'd highly recommend using a physical Bible, but if you don't have one, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

We're currently in the middle of what's known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which spans from chapters 5-7, where he carefully *clarifies* what it *truly* means to *follow* him—to be his *disciple*, to be a citizen in his *kingdom*.²

So far in chapter 5...

- Jesus began with the beatitudes, which are eight marks of what it means to be his disciple (vv. 1-12);
- he gave two metaphors—salt and light—for the *effects* that his disciples are to have on the world (vv. 13-16);
- and then, with six examples, he described how their righteousness is to *exceed* that of the religious leaders—with genuine *heart*-obedience to God's law (vv. 17-48).

And here in chapter 6, Jesus *continues* with that theme—focusing now on the *motivations* for obedience.

And so, he warns his disciples to beware of practicing righteousness with the wrong heart, or to be careful about doing the right things for the wrong reasons.³

And that's where we are as we dive into today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Matthew 6:1-18.

¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to

² R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The theme of this, Matthew's longest and most wide-ranging collection of Jesus' teaching, is indicated by the stated audience (see on 5:1–2); it deals with the character, duties, attitudes and dangers of the Christian disciple. It is a manifesto setting out the nature of life in the kingdom of heaven. The Sermon thus makes no claim to present an ethic for all men; indeed much of it would make no sense as a universal code. It is concerned not with ethics in general, but with discipleship, with man in his obedience and devotion to God, not with a pattern for society. To interpret it legalistically as a set of rules is to miss the point; it represents a demand more radical than any legislator could conceive, going far beyond what human nature can meet, a demand for perfection (5:48). And central to it is the person of Jesus himself: for his sake the disciples are to be persecuted (5:11); he sets before them his own interpretation of the will of God (5:17–48: ‘I say to you ...’); their eternal destiny depends on their relation to him (7:21–23) and their response to his teaching (7:24–27). The Sermon is thus far from being just a collection of moral precepts. It presents the radical demand of Jesus the Messiah on all who respond to his preaching of God's kingdom. ‘The Sermon on the Mount compels us, in the first place, to ask who he is who utters these words.’”

³ Jesus also weaves in a new theme and motivation that permeates this entire chapter—that Christians are to live their whole lives in relationship with and under the sight of their heavenly Father. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:9) writes: “We come now to quite a new section, and it runs right through this sixth chapter. Here we have what we may well call a picture of the Christian living his life in this world in the presence of God, in active submission to God, and in entire dependence upon Him. Read this sixth chapter and you will find that this reference to God the Father keeps on recurring. We have been looking at this Christian man who has been told something of his characteristics, who has been told how he is to behave in society, and who has been reminded of what it is that God expects of him and demands from him. Here we have a picture of him going on to live that life in this world; and the great thing that is ever emphasized is that he does it all in the presence of God. That is something of which he should constantly be reminded. Or, to put it in another way, this section presents a picture of the children in relationship to their Father as they wend their way on this pilgrimage called life.

you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

This is God’s Word.

Overview

We’ll look at this passage in *three* parts, where we’ll see Jesus give...

Three examples of practicing righteousness *wrongly*:

- I. Giving (vv. 1-4)
- II. Fasting (vv. 16-18)
- III. Prayer (vv. 5-15)

In terms of the sheer *content*, Jesus expands the *most* on prayer.

And in terms of *structure*, prayer is at the *center* of the three examples—and to a Jewish audience, that would have signaled that it was the most important.

So we’ll move more briskly through giving and fasting, then devote the most time to prayer.

I. Giving (vv. 1-4)

Look at verse 1.

[¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.]

Before the first example, Jesus gives a general principle for this entire section.

At a glance, it seems to *contradict* what he said earlier in chapter 5, verse 16: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

So are people supposed to see our good works or not?

Context is key.

What Jesus says in chapter 5 is addressed to those tempted with *fear*—they are to *show* their good works.

And what he says here is addressed to those tempted with *pride*—they are to *hide* their good works.

In short, “show when tempted to hide” and “hide when tempted to show.”⁴

And the *motive* for both instructions is the same—the glory of our Father who is in heaven.

This requires discernment of our own hearts to know *which* applies in a given situation, but there is no contradiction.

We’re called to let others see our good works so they will glorify God, but we must not to do those good works *in order to be seen*—so that people *wrongfully* glorify us rather than God.⁵

We must not be glory thieves.⁶

<pause>

Jesus chooses giving, prayer, and fasting *not* because they are the *only* or the *most* important good works, but because they were the most important to the *Jewish* religious leaders.⁷

But the general principle applies to *every* good work we do.

<pause>

⁴ A. B. Bruce, “Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicholl (Hodder, 1897), 116, quoted in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 127.

⁵ John R. W. Stott (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 127) writes: “Jesus is speaking against different sins. It is our human cowardice which made him say ‘Let your light shine before men’, and our human vanity which made him tell us to beware of practising our piety before men. A. B. Bruce sums it up well when he writes that we are to ‘show when tempted to hide’ and ‘hide when tempted to show’.”¹ Our good works must be public so that our light shines; our religious devotions must be secret lest we boast about them. Besides, the end of both instructions of Jesus is the same, namely the glory of God. Why are we to keep our piety secret? It is in order that glory may be given to God, rather than men. Why are we to let our light shine and do good works in the open? It is that men may glorify our heavenly Father.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:13) writes: “[T]here is no contradiction here, but we are called to do both these things at one and the same time. The Christian is to live in such a way that men looking at him, and seeing the quality of his life, will glorify God. He must always remember at the same time that he is not to do things in order that he may attract attention to himself. He must not desire to be seen of men, he is never to be self-conscious. But, clearly, this balance is a fine and delicate one; so often we tend to go to one extreme or the other. Christian people tend either to be guilty of great ostentation or else to become monks and hermits. As you look at the long story of the Christian Church throughout the centuries you will find this great conflict has been going on. They have either been ostentatious, or else they have been so afraid of self and self-glorification that they have segregated themselves from the world. But here we are called to avoid both extremes. It is a delicate life, it is a sensitive life; but if we approach it in the right way, and under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the balance can be maintained. Of course, if we just take these things as rules which we have to put into operation we shall go wrong on the one side or the other. But if we realize that what matters is the great principle, the spirit, then we shall be saved from the error on the right hand and on the left. Let us never forget this, the Christian at one and the same time is to be attracting attention to himself, and yet not attracting attention to himself. That will be seen more clearly as we proceed.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 162) writes: “There is no contradiction with 5:14–16, where disciples are told to let their light shine before men so that they may see their good deeds; there the motive is for men to praise the heavenly Father. Righteous conduct under kingdom norms must be visible so that God may be glorified. Yet it must never be visible in order to win man’s acclaim. Better by far to hide any righteous deed that may lead to ostentation. To trade the goal of pleasing the Father for the trivial and idolatrous goal of pleasing man will never do.”

⁶ Garrett Kell, “Stop Photobombing Jesus,” April 29, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/stop-photobombing-jesus>.

⁷ Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “Jesus doesn’t use these three examples because they are the most important good works, but rather because they were the most important to the scribes and Pharisees.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 162) writes: “This verse introduces the three chief acts of Jewish piety (cf. vv. 2–18)—almsgiving, prayer, fasting (C.G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology* [London: Macmillan, 1938], pp. 412–39; Moore, *Judaism*, 2:162–79).” Daniel M. Dorani (“Matthew” in *Matthew-Luke*, ESVEC, vol. 8 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: “Pious Jews labored to be righteous. Tobit, an influential intertestamental writing, said, ‘Prayer is good when [it is] accompanied by fasting, almsgiving, and righteousness’ (Tob. 12:8 RSV). Matthew 6 mentions the same terms but makes righteousness the leading principle: righteousness shows itself in alms, prayer, and fasting.”

Now, the first example: giving.⁸

Look at verses 2-4.

[² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.]

In verse 2, the word “hypocrite” (*hypokrites*) literally means “actor”—someone *performing a role* before an audience.⁹

In the Gospel accounts, Jesus almost *exclusively* uses it to describe the Jewish religious leaders.¹⁰

They were merely playing the *role* of the righteous person—caring and generous to those in need.

But Jesus exposes their true motivation.

To “sound a trumpet” before giving was probably hyperbole (or exaggeration). They didn’t *literally* do that, but they were effectively announcing themselves and calling attention to their generosity.¹¹

Their giving wasn’t *really* for God or for those in need—it was so “that they may be praised by others.”

And for such people, Jesus says that they will get what they want. Others *will* praise them.

But that’s *all* they’ll get. They’ll receive *nothing* from God.

<pause>

⁸ Jesus follows the same *pattern* in discussing each example. First, he states the good work: “when you give” (v. 2), “when you pray” (v. 5), “when you fast” (v. 16). Second, he tells them *not* to do it for the praise of men because that’s *all* they will get. Third, he tells them to do it in *secret* because their Father in heaven who sees in secret will *reward* them.

⁹ R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “*Hypocrite* is a favourite word in Matthew, used particularly, as here and in vv. 5, 16, to characterize the Pharisees in their ostentatious piety. In chapter 23, it has become a stereotyped epithet for the scribes and Pharisees. The Greek word means originally an ‘actor’, and here that sense is not far from the surface: they are performing to an audience. It is this rather than any conscious insincerity which is the point of the word here, though elsewhere insincerity (22:18), or at least inconsistency between words and deeds (7:5; 15:7), is in view.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 164) writes: “In older Greek a *hypokritēs* (‘hypocrite’) was an actor, but by the first century the term came to be used for those who play roles and see the world as their stage.... [T]here are different kinds of hypocrisy. In one the hypocrite feigns goodness but is actually evil and knows he is being deceptive (e.g., 22:15–18). In another the hypocrite is carried away by his own acting and deceives himself. Such pious hypocrites (as in 7:1–5), though unaware of their own deceit, do not fool most onlookers; and this may be the meaning here. A third kind of hypocrite deceives himself into thinking he is acting for the best interests of God and man and also deceives onlookers. The needy are unlikely to complain when they receive large gifts, and their gratitude may flatter and thus bolster the giver’s self-delusion (cf. D.A. Spieler, “Hypocrisy: An Exploration of a Third Type,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 [1975]: 273–79). Perhaps it is best to identify the hypocrisy in 6:2 with this third type.

¹⁰ The only exception is in Matthew 7:5 (cf. Luke 6:42).

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:18) writes: “The wrong way to do this is to announce it. ‘Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee.’ Of course they did not actually do that; our Lord is painting a picture. In effect they are engaging a trumpeter to go before them to say: ‘Look at what this man is doing.’ The wrong way to do these things is to proclaim them, and to draw attention to them.” However, D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 164) writes: “[U]nless the trumpet is a metaphorical caricature (like ‘tooting your own horn’)—a poorly attested suggestion—the solution of A. Buchler (‘St. Matthew vi 1–6 and Other Allied Passages,’ *JTS* 10 [1909]: 266–70) still seems best: public fasts were proclaimed by the sounding of trumpets. At such times prayers for rain were recited in the streets (cf. v. 5), and it was widely thought that alms-giving insured the efficacy of the fasts and prayers (e.g., b *Sanhedrin* 35a; P. *Tannith* 2:6; *Leviticus R* 34:14). But these occasions afforded golden opportunities for ostentation.” Not choosing one or the other, Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “The wrong way to give is to blow your own horn, which is precisely what Jesus was saying if he was using symbolic language. If he was speaking of a literal practice, he was probably describing the sound of the temple trumpets that called citizens to come and give. What a great opportunity to show off! The trumpets would blare, and people would be seen scurrying along the streets toward the temple with pious looks on their faces. ‘Hey, folks, look at *my* zeal! Big giver on the way to the temple here!’” Also undecided, Daniel M. Doriani (“Matthew” in *Matthew-Luke*, ESVEC, vol. 8 [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021]) writes: “Sounding trumpets in the streets (v. 2) sounds like hyperbole, but Greco-Roman patrons did seek recognition for their donations. Benefactors had their names carved into the public roads and buildings they erected. They also gave during festivals, when trumpets might sound.”

Interestingly, in verse 3, Jesus doesn't just tell his disciples to avoid calling attention to themselves before *others*—he tells them not to even announce it to *themselves*: “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

The idea is that you are to give to those in need and then immediately move on. Don't keep a record of your good works. Don't pat yourself on the back for being such a generous person. Don't dwell on it at all.¹²

<pause>

Whether we do things in order to receive praise from others or to congratulate ourselves, it all comes back to the same fundamental issue: the desiring to please *ourselves*.¹³

Do you ever find yourself thinking repeatedly about that great thing you did for someone else?

We are so sinful that we can make even our righteous acts all about *us*.¹⁴

We can deceive ourselves into thinking that we're so *selfless* in our giving—while our very dwelling on our “selfless” acts only reveals how *selfish* we really are.¹⁵

<pause>

But verse 4 calls us to focus not on pleasing ourselves but on pleasing our Father in heaven.

He's the one who sees us in secret. He's the only audience we care about—not what others think of us, not even what we think of ourselves.

The reality is that we live our entire lives under the sight of our heavenly Father.

We are never truly alone. There is perhaps *much* we would stop doing, thinking, and saying if we were only constantly aware of that.

¹² Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “Our Lord uses an extreme, absurd illustration to emphasize the intense privacy that should be present when we give to help others. The right hand is the one we normally use in giving because most of us are right-handed. Thus when we give, our giving must be so hidden that the left hand does not even see what is happening. The idea is, not only are we not to tell others of our giving—we are not to make a big deal of it to ourselves. We are so subtly sinful that we will refrain from an outward show in giving and then pat ourselves on the back for our profound humility. We must guard against this. Do not keep a diary in which you jot down your good deeds, assuming that is so spiritual because you did it privately. Do not keep track. Do not give yourself merit marks. Forget your goodness. Follow God. Do it, and forget it.” It's like a habitual driver who drives home without thinking. Or a trained athlete or practiced musician who has such muscle memory that playing is just second nature. Later in Matthew 25, Jesus talks about his second coming and the final judgment, when he will separate the sheep from the goats—those who *are* his people from those who are *not*. And he will *commend* his people for feeding him when he was hungry, welcoming him when he was a stranger, clothing him when he was naked, and visiting him when he was sick and imprisoned. And how do his people respond to him? They basically say, “Lord, when did we do that?” They don't seem to remember. And King Jesus will reply that what they did for the least of these, his brothers, they did unto him (Matt. 25:31-40).

¹³ *Why* do we want praise from others? Because we want them to think better of us, which comes back to pleasing ourselves. And even when our giving is done in secret, if we dwell on how good we are for doing it, we've made it all about pleasing ourselves.

¹⁴ The solution is not to do good for its own sake, for that's really just another version of pleasing ourselves. After all, who determines what is good? The standard of goodness and righteousness is established by God; therefore, what is good and righteous is always oriented toward God himself. There is no such thing as doing good for goodness's sake. When good is stripped of any orientation toward God, it is really done for our own sake—to see ourselves as good and righteous people—which brings us back to pleasing ourselves rather than God.

¹⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:14) writes: “[T]he ultimate choice is the choice between pleasing self and pleasing God, and that is where the subtlety of this matter comes in. Ultimately our only reason for pleasing men around us is that we may please ourselves. Our real desire is not to please others as such; we want to please them because we know that, if we do, they will think better of us. In other words, we are pleasing ourselves and are merely concerned about self-gratification. That is where the insidious character of sin is seen. What appears to be so selfless may be just a very subtle form of selfishness. According to our Lord it comes to this: man by nature desires the praise of man more than the praise of God. In desiring the praise of man, what he is really concerned about is his good opinion of himself. In the last analysis it always comes to this, we are either pleasing ourselves or else we are pleasing God. It is a very solemnizing thought, but the moment we begin to analyse ourselves and see the motives of our conduct we shall agree that it comes to that.”

What difference would it make in your life if you woke up every morning reminding yourself of this truth?¹⁶

<pause>

Our Father also promises to *reward* us.

Some of us may be uncomfortable with the idea of doing things for God's reward, but that's exactly what Jesus teaches.¹⁷

When we live for *God's* reward, it shows that we trust his gracious and good character to give us what is best. We forego what is temporary for what is eternal. We live not to please ourselves but to please our Father in heaven. And *that* glorifies him.

<pause>

Notice that verse 2 *assumes* that Christ's disciples *will* give—"when you give."

In context, this concerns giving to the *needy*, but it also applies broadly, including giving to the church.¹⁸

God commands believers to give to the church (1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

We're called to give intentionally (2 Cor. 9:7), regularly (1 Cor. 16:2), proportionately (2 Cor. 8:12), generously (2 Cor. 9:6, 13), and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7).

But our Father is not only concerned *that* we give—he's concerned *why* we give.

We give because our treasures follow our hearts, and our hearts are fixed on our Father in heaven (Matt. 6:21).

We give because we trust that investing our temporary resources in good spiritual investments will bear a heavenly, eternal return (Matt. 6:20).

¹⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:15) writes: "When we wake up in the morning we should immediately remind ourselves and recollect that we are in the presence of God. It is not a bad thing to say to ourselves before we go any further: 'Throughout the whole of this day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; He sees everything; He knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all. "Thou God seest me".' It would revolutionize our lives if we always did that."

¹⁷ Here are a couple things to keep in mind when thinking about God's reward. First, God does not *have* to reward us. He is our Creator God and we are his creation; he owes us nothing. We *ought* to obey him, period, regardless of rewards. He would be perfectly just to give *no* rewards for simply doing our duty. And yet, our God *graciously* rewards us for our faithfulness, not because he *must* but because he *desires* to pour out his blessings on his people. Parents don't reward their kids because they *must* but because they *love* their children and they're *proud* of them for doing the right things. Second, God does not tell us *exactly* what the reward is. If he told us, perhaps many of us would do a cost-benefit analysis to determine whether his reward is worth our obedience. And if we didn't think the reward was good enough, we wouldn't obey. But when we *don't* know exactly what his reward is, and yet we still choose to obey, it is a powerful testimony of our trust that he really is a good Father—and whatever his reward is, we trust that it will be worth anything we may endure in this life to obey him. We trust that God's reward is far better than the fleeting reward of man's praise and other ways we may try to please ourselves. C. S. Lewis (*They Asked for a Paper* [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962], 198, quoted in John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7): Christian Counter-Culture*, The Bible Speaks Today [Leicester; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985], 131–132) gives further explanation in his essay, "The Weight of Glory": "We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it.... The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation."

¹⁸ Biblically, these things are not necessarily separate. In Acts 2 and 4, people sold their possessions and entrusted the proceeds to the apostles in order to give to those in need within the church. In Matthew 25, when Jesus is commending his people for feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned, he refers to those they helped as "my brothers"—that is, other brothers and sisters in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, giving towards the relief of believers in Jerusalem amidst a famine was done through local churches. In Galatians 6, churches are called to do good to everyone as they have opportunity, especially to those of the household of faith. As a church, we've given much through our benevolence fund to help with the needs of members in our church and neighbors in our community.

We give because we desire to glorify our Father, and every act of faithful giving declares that *he* is better than anything else we could have done with those resources (Heb. 11:6).¹⁹

That's the heart of giving that Jesus says ought to mark all his disciples.

<pause>

So first, giving; and second...

II. Fasting (vv. 16-18)

Look at verses 16-18.

[¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.]

In verse 16, fasting is “abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.”²⁰

Jesus doesn't have in mind fasting for health reasons like intermittent fasting. Biblical fasting always a *spiritual* purpose.

Now, the Law only commanded fasting once a year, on the Day of Atonement, but the religious leaders fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12).²¹

And just like their giving, they called attention to it by looking gloomy and unsightly, perhaps covering their heads or smearing their faces with ash.²²

They wanted their fasting to be “seen by others,” so they would be *praised* as such devoted followers of God. And Jesus says again that they'll get what they want—but nothing more. They'll receive *nothing* from God.

¹⁹ For further elaboration, see Jamie Dunlop, *Why Should I Give to My Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), and Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2001).

²⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (London: IVP, 1972), 2:37. Donald Whitney (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991], 160) defines it very similarly as “a Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.” However, Lloyd-Jones's definition encompasses fasting more broadly to include how a Jew would have understood it. As slightly adapted examples from Donald Whitney (*Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991], 164-178.), fasting might be done to give urgency to prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh. 1:4; Dan. 9:3; Joel 2:12; Acts 13:3); to seek God's guidance (Judg. 20:26, 28; Acts 14:23); to express grief (Judg. 20:26; 1 Sam. 20:34; 31:13; 2 Sam. 1:11-12); to seek deliverance or protection (2 Chron. 20:3-4; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16; Ps. 109:24); to express repentance (1 Sam. 7:6; Joel 2:12; Jonah 3:5-8); to humble yourself before God (1 Kings 21:27-29; Ps. 35:13); to express concern for the work of God (Neh. 1:3-4; Dan. 9:3); to minister to the needs of others (Isa. 58:6-7); to overcome temptation (Matt. 4:1-11); or to express love and worship to God (Luke 2:37; cf. Phil 3:19).

²¹ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 175) writes: “Under Mosaic legislation, fasting was commanded only on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29–31; 23:27–32; Num 29:7); but during the Exile regular fasts of remembrance were instituted (Zech 7:3–5; 8:19). In addition to these national fasts, both OT and NT describe personal or group fasts with a variety of purposes, especially to indicate and foster self-humiliation before God, often in connection with the confession of sins (e.g., Neh 9:1–2; Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 5; Dan 9:2–20; 10:2–3; Jonah 3:5; Acts 9:9) or to lay some special petition before the Lord, sometimes out of anguish, danger, or desperation (Exod 24:18; Judg 20:26; 2 Sam 1:12; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21–23; Esth 4:16; Matt 4:1–2; Acts 13:1–3; 14:23). It may belong to the realm of normal Christian self-discipline (1 Cor 9:24–27; cf. Philippians 3:19; 1 Peter 4:3); but already in the OT it is bitterly excoriated when it is purely formal and largely hypocritical (Isa 58:3–7; Jer 14:12; Zech 7:5–6)—when, for instance, men fasted but did not share their food with the hungry (Isa 58:1–7). In Jesus' day the Pharisees fasted twice a week (Luke 18:12; cf. SBK, 2:242ff.), probably Monday and Thursday (M *Taanith* 1:4–7). Some devout people, like Anna, fasted often (Luke 2:37). But such voluntary fasts provided marvelous opportunities for religious showmanship to gain a reputation for piety.”

²² NET translates “disfigure” as “make their faces unattractive,” adding a footnote for Matthew 6:16 to explain: “Here the term “disfigure” (employed in a number of translations) was not used because it could convey to the modern reader the notion of physical mutilation. L&N 79.17 states, “to make unsightly, to disfigure, to make ugly.” ἀφανίζουσιν γὰρ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ‘for they make their faces unsightly’ Mt 6:16.” R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “*Disfigure* (*aphanizō*) is literally ‘make invisible’ (it is translated ‘consume’ in vv. 19–20), a vivid expression for making unrecognizable, either by covering the head or by smearing with ash and dirt.”

They are again “hypocrites”—actors playing the part of being devoted to *God*, when they’re really just devoted to *themselves*.

<pause>

In verses 17-18, Jesus calls his disciples to fast in a way that draws no attention. Anointing the head with oil and washing the face were simply ordinary parts of daily hygiene.²³

So if you normally comb your hair and shower before going out, then do that as usual.

You don’t talk about how hungry or tired you are. You don’t use fasting as an excuse for shoddy work. You don’t constantly dwell on how difficult it is.

Just like *giving* isn’t about you, *fasting* isn’t about you either. In *all* its spiritual purposes, fasting centers on our *relationship* with our Father in heaven.

All fasting is an expression of Psalm 73:25-26: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

To be clear, fasting does not *earn* rewards from God, but our Father promises to reward true fasting by his *grace* alone.²⁴

True fasting glorifies him because it expresses our hunger for *him* above even physical necessities. It declares that he is more desirable than anything this world offers.

Even if nobody else sees us, our *Father* sees—and he is pleased to reward such expressions of faith in him (Heb. 11:6).

<pause>

²³ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 176) writes: “Washing and anointing with oil (v. 17) were merely normal steps in hygiene. Oil does not here symbolize extravagant joy but normal body care (cf. Ruth 3:3; 2 Sam 12:20; Pss 23:5; 104:15; 133:2; Eccl 9:8; Luke 7:46; cf. DNTT, 1:120). The point of Mt 6:18 is not to draw attention to oneself, whether by somber mien or extravagant joy. Jesus desires reticence, not deception. And the Father, who sees in secret, will provide the reward (see on v. 4).”

²⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:39-40) writes: “There are some people who fast because they expect direct and immediate results from it. In other words they have a kind of mechanical view of fasting; they have what I have sometimes called, for lack of a better illustration, the ‘penny in the slot’ view of it. You put your penny in the slot, then you pull out the drawer, and there you have your result. That is their view of fasting. If you want certain benefits, they say, fast; if you fast you will get the results. This attitude is not confined to the question of fasting. We saw earlier in dealing with prayer that there are many people who regard prayer in that way. They read accounts of how certain people at one time decided to have an all-night prayer meeting, how they went on praying right through the night, and how, as a result of that, a revival broke out. So they decide that they will have an all-night prayer meeting, and they expect a revival to follow. ‘Because we pray, revival must come.’ Or you can find it in connection with holiness teaching. Certain people say that if you only obey certain conditions you will get a blessing, that there will be an immediate and direct result. Now I never find that anywhere in the Bible, in connection with fasting or anything else. We must never fast for the sake of direct results. Let me put it even more pointedly like this. There are people who advocate fasting as one of the best ways and methods of obtaining blessings from God. Some of this recent literature to which I have referred, I regret to say, seems to be guilty of that. People write an account of their life and they say, ‘You know, my Christian life was one which always seemed to be “bound in shallows and in miseries”; I was never truly happy. My life seemed to be a series of ups and downs. I was a Christian but I did not seem to have what certain other people whom I knew seemed to possess. I was like that for years. I had gone the round of all the Conventions, I had read the prescribed books on this subject, but I never seemed to get the blessing. Then I happened to come across teaching which emphasized the importance of fasting, and I fasted and I received the blessing.’ Then the exhortation is: ‘If you want a blessing, fast!’ That seems to me to be a most dangerous doctrine. We must never speak like that about anything in the spiritual life. These blessings are never automatic. The moment we begin to say, ‘Because I do this, I get that’, it means that we are controlling the blessing. That is to insult God and to violate the great doctrine of His final and ultimate sovereignty. No, we must never advocate fasting as a means of blessing. Let us consider another illustration of this point. Take the question of tithing. Here we have another subject that is coming back again into prominence. Now there is very good scriptural basis for tithing; but there are many who tend to teach the question of tithing like this. A man writes an account of his life. Again he says that his Christian life was unsatisfactory. Things did not go well with him; indeed he was having financial troubles in his business. Then he came across the teaching of tithing and he began to tithe. At once great joy flooded his life. Not only that, but his business also began to be successful. I have read books which actually go so far as to say this: ‘If you really want to be prosperous, begin tithing’. In other words, ‘You do the tithing, and the result is bound to follow; if you want the blessing—tithe’. It is exactly the same as with fasting. All such teaching is quite unscriptural. Indeed it is worse than that; it derogates from the glory and the majesty of God Himself. Therefore we should never advocate, indulge in, or practice fasting as a method or a means of obtaining direct blessing. The value of fasting is indirect, not direct.”

Again, verses 16-17 assume that Christ's disciples *will* fast—"when you fast" appears *twice* (cf. Matt. 9:15).²⁵

The New Testament doesn't *prescribe* a set time to fast, but Jesus *assumes* that all his disciples will *voluntarily* fast for spiritual purposes.²⁶

Our church used to have a corporate fast called "One Desire Fast" at the beginning of every year, and we used to ask the leaders in our church to fast every Thursday.

But over the years, I noticed that, when fasting is publicly prescribed or expected, it can inadvertently create exactly the environment Jesus condemns—where people measure one another's devotion based on *how* or *whether* they're fasting.

And so, what was meant to make us hunger for *God* ends up calling attention to *ourselves*.

I'm not against corporate or regular fasts in principle, but I'd want us to the *voluntary* nature of Christian fasting and resist prescribing what Scripture doesn't prescribe.

What I'd want instead is for each of us to be *personally* convicted to fast for spiritual purposes.

- Perhaps there's an important decision you need to make, and you fast to seek God's guidance.
- Perhaps God convicts you of a particular sin, and you fast to express grief and repentance.
- Perhaps you're burdened for the many people groups in our nation and around the world who have little to no access to the gospel, and you fast as you pray for more laborers.
- Or perhaps you simply want to stop nibbling at the tables of this world and drink deeply of God in his word and prayer—so you fast as an expression of love and worship to him.²⁷

Christ's disciples don't *have* to fast, but they *will* fast—because it's one of the means of grace our Father has given us to draw near to him.

<pause>

So first, giving; second, fasting; and third...

III. Prayer (vv. 5-15)

Look at verses 5-6.

[⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.]

In verse 5, there's nothing wrong with the religious leaders' posture or location of prayer. What's wrong is their desire to be *seen*—to be *praised* by others.²⁸

²⁵ D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 175) writes: "Jesus, far from banning fasting, assumes his disciples will fast, even as he assumes they will give alms and pray (vv. 3, 6). His disciples may not fast at the moment, for the messianic bridegroom is with them; and it is the time for Joy (9:14–17). But the time will come when they will fast (9:15). (Observe in passing that here Jesus assumes the continued existence of his disciples after his departure.)"

²⁶ Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: "In the Old Testament there was only one time per year when God's people were called to fast—the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34; cf. Acts 27:9). Since that Day has been fulfilled in Christ's death (Colossians 2:14), there is no longer any command for us to fast. You won't find one in all the New Testament.... Jesus doesn't command us to fast, but he assumes—with this "when"—that after his death and resurrection, his disciples will fast. He says so in 9:15b: "The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.""

²⁷ For more information on Christian fasting, see John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997).

²⁸ D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 165) writes: "In synagogue worship someone from the congregation might be asked to pray publicly, standing in front of the ark. And at certain times prayers could be offered in the streets (M *Taanith* 2:1–2;

Jesus calls them “hypocrites” again and affirms they’ll get exactly what they want: the praise of men. But they’ll receive *nothing* from God.

They forget that *God* sees the heart, and he is not fooled by their performance.

<pause>

Before moving on, notice one particularly sobering principle here: sin follows us even into the very presence of God.

When we think of the corruption of sin, we might picture a murderer, an adulterer, or a drunkard. But remember what Jesus said earlier in his sermon about obeying the Law—it’s not just about actions, but it’s about the heart.

And the sinful heart is often far more subtle.

To truly understand how sin corrupts, don’t look at the murderer. Look at the man on his knees in prayer. Even there—prostrate before God, in one of the most intimate forms of worship—the temptation remains to worship *ourselves* rather than God. To think and ask only for what will please *us*.

Sin mars *every* part of our lives.²⁹

<pause>

In verse 6, Jesus tells his disciples to pray in private, where only their Father in heaven can see.

But since Jesus himself prayed in public (Matt. 14:19) and the early church prayed together (Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24-30), he is not banning public prayer. He’s warning against the desire to be *seen* praying in public.³⁰

see on v. 2). But the location was not the critical factor. Neither is the “standing” posture in itself significant. In the Bible people pray prostrate (Num 16:22; Josh 5:14; Dan 8:17; Matt 26:39; Rev 11:16), kneeling (2 Chronicles 6:13; Dan 6:10; Luke 22:41, Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5), sitting (2 Sam 7:18), and standing (1 Sam 1:26; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13). Again it is the motive that is crucial: “to be seen by men.” And again there is the same reward (cf. Mt 6:2 and 5).”

²⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:39-40) writes: “The essence of the biblical teaching on sin is that it is essentially a disposition. It is a state of heart. I suppose we can sum it up by saying that sin is ultimately self-worship and self-adulation; and our Lord shows (what to me is an alarming and terrifying thing) that this tendency on our part to self-adulation is something that follows us even into the very presence of God. It sometimes produces this result; that even when we try to persuade ourselves that we are worshipping God, we are actually worshipping ourselves and doing nothing more. That is the terrible nature of His teaching at this point. This thing that has entered into our very nature and constitution as human beings, is something that is so polluting our whole being that when man is engaged in his highest form of activity he still has a battle to wage with it. It has always been agreed, I think, that the highest picture that you can ever have of man is to look at him on his knees waiting upon God. That is the highest achievement of man, it is his noblest activity. Man is never greater than when he is there in communion and contact with God. Now, according to our Lord, sin is something which affects us so profoundly that even at that point it is with us and assailing us. Indeed, we must surely agree on the basis of New Testament teaching that it is only there we really begin to understand sin. We tend to think of sin as we see it in its rags and in the gutters of life. We look at a drunkard, poor fellow, and we say: There is sin; that is sin. But that is not the essence of sin. To have a real picture and a true understanding of it, you must look at some great saint, some unusually devout and devoted man. Look at him there upon his knees in the very presence of God. Even there self is intruding itself, and the temptation is for him to think about himself, to think pleasantly and pleasurably about himself, and really to be worshipping himself rather than God. That, not the other, is the true picture of sin. The other is sin, of course, but there you do not see it at its acme; you do not see it in its essence. Or, to put it in another form, if you really want to understand something about the nature of Satan and his activities, the thing to do is not to go to the dregs or the gutters of life; if you really want to know something about Satan, go away to that wilderness where our Lord spent forty days and forty nights. That is the true picture of Satan where you see him tempting the very Son of God. All that comes out in this statement. Sin is something that follows us even into the very presence of God.”

³⁰ Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “[I]t is not as though Jesus is opposed to public prayer. He himself prayed publicly (see John 11:41, 42; Matthew 14:19), as did Solomon (2 Chronicles 6:1-42), the Levites (Nehemiah 9:5-38), and many other notable figures in the Bible. Rather, being acutely aware of the human tendency to pray in order to gain the praise of others, our Lord provides a helpful remedy: find a room and lock the door. Find even a storeroom (which Jesus is possibly referring to here), the least sanctified place in the house—where food, tools, and other supplies were stored, but where privacy is most likely assured. Of course, a locked room does not guarantee sincerity and humility before God, but it is a safe solution against insincerity and pride—against hypocrisy.” D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 165) writes: “If Jesus were forbidding all public prayer, then clearly the early

Beware if you pray more in public than in private.

Beware if you're more focused on how your prayers sound than on your Father whom you're praying to.

Beware if you avoid praying in public because you don't think you pray well enough.

All of these signal that prayer has become a performance before others rather than worship to God. It may not be *intentional* hypocrisy, but if the heart is focused on performance, then you're just playing a role—and that's exactly what hypocrisy is.

There is something important about the discipline of private prayer. I know it can be difficult at times, especially when living with others.

Susanna Wesley, the mother of the well-known 18th century pastors John and Charles Wesley, had 19 children (though nine died as infants). As you can imagine, privacy was basically impossible. So she would pull her apron over her head in the middle of the kitchen, which was like a "Do Not Disturb" sign that the children came to recognize—and *that* was her time alone with God amidst all the noise around her.³¹

If private prayer is a non-negotiable priority for us, we'll somehow find a way—even if we have to pull an apron over our heads.

<pause>

Now, look at verses 7-8.

[⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.]

For the first time in this passage, Jesus introduces a *second* way his disciples are *not* to pray. Not only are they not to be like the "hypocrites," but they are also not to be like the "Gentiles"—or those who don't truly know God.

The Gentiles "heap up empty phrases" and use "many words." There's nothing wrong with repeated requests or long prayers—Jesus did both (Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 6:12).³²

What he rebukes here is a kind of *mindless, mechanical* praying—wrongly believing that the more we repeat ourselves, or the longer we pray, the more likely God is to hear and answer us.³³

church did not understand him (e.g., 18:19–20; Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24–30). The public versus private antithesis is a good test of one's motives; the person who prays more in public than in private reveals that he is less interested in God's approval than in human praise. Not piety but a reputation for piety is his concern. Far better to deal radically with this hypocrisy (cf. Mt 5:29–30) and pray in a private "room"; the word *tameion* can refer to a storeroom (Luke 12:24), some other inner room (Matt 12:26; 24:26; Luke 12:3, 24), or even a bedroom (Isa 26:20 LXX, with which this verse has several common elements; cf. also 2 Kings 4:33). The Father, who sees in secret, will reward the disciple who prays in secret (see on v. 4)."

³¹ "Susanna's Apron: Six Tips for Prayer as a Mom," May 1, 2027, <https://www.risenmotherhood.com/articles/susanna-apron-six-tips-for-prayer-as-a-mom>.

³² "Pagans repeated the names of their gods or the same words over and over without thinking (cf. 1 Kings 18:26; Acts 19:34). Jesus is prohibiting mindless, mechanical repetition, not the earnest repetition that flows from the imploring heart (Mark 14:39; 2 Cor. 12:8; cf. Psalm 136; Isa. 6:3)" (Study note on Matthew 6:7-8, in *ESV Study Bible* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008]).

³³ R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: "*Heap up empty phrases* translates the Greek *battalogeō*, a word otherwise unknown in contemporary literature, and perhaps coined as an onomatopoeic term for empty 'babbling'; its resemblance to the Hebrew *bāṭel* ('vain, idle') would sharpen the point. The stress is apparently on the quality rather than the quantity of the utterance. This is not a prohibition either of repetition in prayer (AV 'vain repetitions' is unwarranted; Jesus repeated himself, Matt. 26:44) or of set forms of prayer (vv. 9–13 go on to give one!), but of thoughtless, mechanical prayer. It is not *many words* that God responds to, but an attitude of prayerful dependence." D. A. Carson ("Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 166) writes: "The verb *battalogeō* ('keep on babbling') is very rare, apart from writings dependent on the NT (BAGD, p. 137b). It may derive from the Aramaic *baṭṭal* ('idle,' 'useless') or some other Semitic word; or it may be onomatopoeic: if so, 'babble' is a fine English equivalent."

In 1 Kings 18, the prophets of Baal cried out to him from morning to noon, repeating “O Baal, answer us!” over and over again. And when nothing happened, they began cutting themselves, trying everything they could to a response. But still nothing.

In contrast, the prophet Elijah offers a brief, confident prayer—and the LORD answered (1 Kings 18:20-40).

The way we pray reveals who we think God is.

If you think that you *must* say “In Jesus’ name” at the end of your prayer—otherwise, God won’t hear and answer your prayer—then your view of God has become more pagan than Christian, as if prayer requires the right magical words to work.

If you mindlessly repeat the same phrases, then your view of God is similarly more pagan—as if repetition compels his response.

Again, there’s nothing wrong with regularly praying for the same things.

But has prayer become just an autopilot exercise—something that seems *less* like pouring out your heart to your Father and *more* like a pagan ritual?

We can slip into this without even realizing it, but Jesus says that isn’t really prayer at all.

<pause>

Verse 8 brings the correction: our heavenly Father *knows* what we need before we ask him.

What makes our prayers effective is not the right formula, but it’s our *faith* in Jesus. It’s only through faith in Christ that we become children of God (John 1:12). God is our Father now, and whether or not we use particular phrases, we are always praying through faith in Christ.³⁴

And just as no father is ever honored by his children coming to him in mindless chants, neither is our Father in heaven. He desires for us to meaningfully engage him—with our minds and our hearts.³⁵

And that’s exactly what Jesus teaches next.

<pause>

Look at verses 9-15.

[⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

³⁴ Michael Reeves (*Authentic Ministry* [Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Greenhouse Publishing, 2022], 34) writes: “John Calvin said that we pray, as it were, through Jesus’ mouth. The Father has always longed to hear the prayers of his dear Son—and we pray in his name. The Son gives us his name to pray in, so that we pray as him. That relationship between the Father and the Son is what we have been brought in to enjoy, and in prayer that is what we do. And so, once again, prayer is exercising faith: believing his almost incredible promise that I can come to him, sinful as I am. I believe the Most High is my loving Father.”

³⁵ Sometimes, that might resemble a short phone call or brief texts throughout the day. Charles Spurgeon (quoted in Jordan Raynor, “How can you “pray without ceasing” at work?” August 1, 2022, <https://www.jordanraynor.com/blog/how-can-you-pray-without-ceasing-at-work>) said, “I rarely pray for more than 5 minutes, but I never go 5 minutes without praying.” Sometimes, that might resemble a longer sit-down conversation about something going on in our lives. But in all our speaking with God, we approach him as personally as our Father. That one controlling thought of our special relationship with him as our Father radically shapes how we approach him in prayer.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.]

Here and in Luke chapter 11 are the only *explicit* instructions on prayer in the entire Bible—and both come directly from Jesus' mouth (cf. Luke 11:1-4).³⁶

This is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, but it's more accurate to call it the Lord's *model* prayer for his *disciples* to pray.³⁷

In verse 9, Jesus says, "Pray then *like* this"—not "Pray *this*." He's not necessarily giving us a script; he's giving us a framework for *how* we should pray.

That said, there's nothing wrong with using these words as a prayer—we just did that earlier in our service—as long as it's not done *mindlessly*. Whenever we pray, we should be *conscious* of what we are actually saying—just as we would be in any meaningful conversation.³⁸

As a general outline, the Lord's Prayer consists of recollection (or remembrance) of God as our Father in heaven, three petitions for God's glory, and three petitions for personal needs.³⁹

<pause>

Before walking through it, let's make a few big picture observations.

First, notice the *order*.

- Recollection comes first, then petitions.
- God's glory comes first, then our personal needs.

And within our personal needs, *physical* comes before *spiritual* needs. Oftentimes, when we're anxious about *physical* needs, it's hard to focus on anything else. So God invites us to bring those needs first, trust that he will provide, and then continue asking him for our *spiritual* needs.

<pause>

Second, notice the *proportion*.

- Half the prayer consists of petitions for God's glory, meaning that it outweighs our personal needs.

³⁶ If this *section* on prayer is in the middle of the three *examples* of righteousness, the Lord's Prayer is in the middle of the *entire* Sermon on the Mount—and again, to a Jewish audience, that would have signaled that it was the most important. Douglas Sean O'Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: "At the center of the Sermon on the Mount (almost exactly the center, as there are 116 lines before and 114 after it) is a perfect masterpiece on prayer—the Lord's Prayer—which is perfect in both structure and substance."

³⁷ D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 61) writes: "Jesus himself gives us a wonderful example, usually referred to as 'The Lord's Prayer,' but more appropriately designated 'The Lord's Model Prayer,' since it is less the prayer he prayed than the prayer he gave his disciples as a paradigm for their own praying." He continues: "It is ironic that the context which forbids meaningless repetition in prayer serves in Matthew's Gospel as the location of the Lord's model prayer; for no prayer has been repeated more than this, very often without understanding."

³⁸ Refer to the Westminster Larger Catechism (<http://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-larger-catechism>): "Q. 187. How is the Lord's Prayer to be used? A. The Lord's Prayer is not only for direction, as a pattern, according to which we are to make other prayers; but may also be used as a prayer, so that it be done with understanding, faith, reverence, and other graces necessary to the right performance of the duty of prayer." The entire section from WLC 178-196 is an excellent brief exposition on prayer and specifically the Lord's Prayer. For a more thorough exposition, see Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009).

³⁹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:67) writes: "We have already considered whether there are three petitions here, or four. On the whole, and in spite of the interesting possibility from the standpoint of biblical numerics, I would say there are three, and these last three petitions have reference to ourselves and our own needs and desires. It seems to me that the words our Lord uses in verse 13 really determine this: 'And', He says—that is the word that introduces each new petition—'And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil'. If there were four petitions it would probably read like this: 'And lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil'. His use of 'but' seems to indicate that it is really one petition offered from two angles or two different sides."

- And two out of the three personal petitions are *spiritual*, meaning that they outweigh the physical.
- The prayer is weighted toward what matters most.

<pause>

Third, notice the *plural*.

The entire prayer is filled not with “my” and “me” but with “our” and “us.” Jesus expects that when we think about our relationship with him, we will always think of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We pray *with* one another and we pray *for* one another. The Christian life is not lived in isolation, but it’s lived as members of a local church—a spiritual family with real relationships and real responsibilities to each other.

Now, let’s look more closely at the Lord’s prayer.

<pause>

It begins with recollection of God as “our Father in heaven,” and all prayer must begin here.⁴⁰

We so often rush straight to our requests, but we must first remember who we are approaching.

This is *exclusively* a prayer that only *Christians* can pray because it is only through faith in Christ that we know God as our Father.

If you haven’t yet trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we’re glad that you’re here. But out of love for you, we want to be clear that, just like the Lord’s Supper is *only* for believers in Christ, so is the Lord’s Prayer.

We’re happy to have you *read* this prayer and note just how *different* it is for a Christian to pray than those from any other religion, but we wouldn’t want you to be confused into thinking that you are God’s child when you have not yet put your faith in Christ.⁴¹

⁴⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:51-52) writes: “People so often say, ‘You know, I prayed and prayed but nothing happened. I did not seem to find peace. I did not seem to get any satisfaction out of it.’ Most of their trouble is due to the fact that their approach to prayer has been wrong, that somehow or other they did not realize what they were doing. We tend to be so self-centred in our prayers that when we drop on our knees before God, we think only about ourselves and our troubles and perplexities. We start talking about them at once, and of course nothing happens. According to our Lord’s teaching here we should not expect anything to happen. That is not the way to approach God. We must pause before we speak in prayer. The great teachers of the spiritual life throughout the centuries, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, have been agreed about this, that the first step in prayer has always been what they call ‘Recollection’. There is a sense in which every man when he begins to pray to God should put his hand upon his mouth. That was the whole trouble with Job. In his wretchedness he had been talking a great deal. He felt that God had not been dealing kindly with him, and he, Job, had been expressing his feelings freely. But when, towards the end of the book, God began to deal with him at close quarters, when He began to reveal and manifest Himself to him, what did Job do? There was only one thing for him to do. He said, ‘Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.’ And, strange as it may seem to you, you start praying by saying nothing; you recollect what you are about to do. I know the difficulty in this. We are but human, and we are pressed by the urgency of our position, the cares, the anxieties, the troubles, the anguish of mind, the bleeding heart, whatever it is. And we are so full of this that, like children, we start speaking at once. But if you want to make contact with God, and if you want to feel His everlasting arms about you, put your hand upon your mouth for a moment. Recollection! Just stop for a moment and remind yourself of what you are about to do. We can put it in a phrase. Do you know that the essence of true prayer is found in the two words in verse 9, ‘Our Father’? I suggest that if you can say from your heart, whatever your condition, ‘My Father’, in a sense your prayer is already answered. It is just this realization of our relationship to God that we so sadly lack. Perhaps we can put it in another way like this. There are people who believe it is a good thing to pray because it always does us good. They adduce various psychological reasons. That of course is not prayer as the Bible understands it. Prayer means speaking to God, forgetting ourselves, and realizing His presence. Then again, there are others, and sometimes I think they would claim for themselves an unusual degree of spirituality, who rather think that the hallmark of true prayer life, of ease and facility in prayer, is that one’s prayer should be very brief and pointed, and one should just simply make a particular request. That is something which is not true of the teaching of the Bible concerning prayer. Take any of the great prayers which are recorded in the Old Testament or in the New. None of them is what we might call this ‘business-like’ kind of prayer which simply makes a petition known to God and then ends. Every prayer recorded in the Bible starts with invocation. It does not matter how desperate the circumstance; it does not matter what the particular quandary might be in which those who pray find themselves. Invariably they start with this worship, this adoration, this invocation.”

⁴¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:53-54) writes: “‘But,’ says someone, ‘what did Paul mean when he said, “we are also his offspring”? Does not that mean we are all His children and He is the

God's word says that we are all by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3) and "enemies" of God (Rom. 5:10). Because of our many sins against him, we all naturally stand before God as our Judge, not our Father.

But God the Son came as the person of Jesus Christ to stand in our place—to live the perfect life we were supposed to live, die on the cross to bear the punishment our sins deserved, and resurrect three days later to confirm his work of salvation.

So all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior are forgiven all their sins, adopted as children of God, and given new and eternal life in him.

Perhaps you came here today knowing God only as your Judge. But through faith in Christ, you can leave knowing him as your Father in heaven. I pray that you would respond with such faith in him today.

<pause>

For those who *already* know God as "our Father in heaven," the question we ought to ask ourselves before every prayer is: "Do I *really* believe that about him?"

To say that he is "our Father" means that I trust that he cares for me. There is absolutely nothing that ever happens to me that is not ultimately for my good. I may not *like* everything; I may not *understand* everything; but my Father cannot do evil towards me.

To say that he is "our Father *in heaven*" means that I trust that he is sovereign over all things. Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." He sovereignly rules over all his creation. And this is the foundation for believing that all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

So before you utter a single word in prayer, pause and reflect on who you are approaching. Remember how he is both sovereign and good, capable and compassionate, powerful and personal.

If we did this every time we prayed, we would never slip into hypocritical or mindless prayer. Rather, we'd come before him in humble confidence—in who he is, who we are in relation to him, and all he has done and promised in Christ.

So that's recollection.

<pause>

Next, there are three petitions for God's glory.

universal Father?' Well, if you analyse this passage, you will find that Paul is speaking there, in Acts xvii, of God as the Creator of all things and all people, that God in that sense has given life and being to everybody throughout the world. But that is not the meaning of God as Father in the sense in which Paul uses it elsewhere of believers, nor the sense in which, as we have seen, our Lord Himself uses it. The Bible draws a very sharp distinction between those who belong to God and those who do not. You notice it in the Lord's High Priestly prayer in John xvii. 9. He said, 'I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.' It is an utter, absolute distinction; it is only those who are in the Lord Jesus Christ who are truly the children of God. We become the children of God only by adoption. We are born 'the children of wrath', 'the children of the devil', 'the children of this world'; and we have to be taken out of that realm and translated into another realm before we become the children of God. But if we truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are adopted into God's family, and we receive 'the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father'. The man of the world does not like this doctrine. He says we are all the children of God; and yet in his heart he has a hatred towards God, and when, in desperation, he prays to God he has no confidence that he is speaking to his Father. He feels God is someone who has set Himself against him. He talks about the Fatherhood of God, but he has not received the Spirit of adoption. It is only the one who is in Christ who knows this. So when our Lord says, 'Our Father', He is obviously thinking of Christian people, and that is why I say that this is a Christian prayer. A man may say, 'Our Father', but the question is, is he conscious of it, does he believe and experience it? The ultimate test of every man's profession is that he can say with confidence and with assurance, 'My Father', 'My God'. Is God your God? Do you know Him really as your Father? And when you come to Him in prayer, have you that sense of coming to your Father? That is the way to start, says our Lord, to realize that you have become a child of God because of what He has done for you through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is implicit in this teaching of Christ. He suggests and anticipates all that He was going to do for us, all He was going to make possible for His own. They did not understand it yet. Nevertheless, He says, that is the way to pray, that is how I pray, and you are going to pray like this."

First, “hallowed be your name.”

It’s probably best to take “on earth as it is in heaven” as applying to all three petitions for God’s glory, not just the last one.⁴²

To “hallow” God’s name is to honor it as holy, so we’re praying that our Father’s name would be *honored* as holy throughout the earth, just as the angels cry out in heaven, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD” (Isa. 6:3).

This is a prayer that we help fulfill. In our baptism, God puts his name on all his children. As a church—when we’re gathered and scattered—we bear his name, and everything we do either honors or dishonors it.

Our desire is “that [others] may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). We care about our Father’s reputation, so we live in ways that accurately reflects his holy character. We don’t want our Father’s name to be distorted or defamed by us who bear his name.⁴³

<pause>

Second, “Your kingdom come.”

God’s kingdom is primarily “[his] redemptive rule, reign, and authority over those redeemed by Jesus.”⁴⁴ And in that sense, it is “already but not yet”—it’s *already* come because King Jesus has come and he reigns in the hearts of all who trust him, but it’s *not yet* fully here because there are still many people and people groups throughout the earth who have yet to know Jesus as their King and Savior.

There are still many who are under the kingdom of darkness and we long for them to be transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

So this petition is a missionary prayer—that the gospel of Jesus Christ would continue to go forth and that we would make disciples to the ends of the earth, until “the earth [is] filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14; cf. Isa. 11:9).

You cannot pray this petition and not care about evangelism and missions. We long for our Father to be glorified not just in *our* church and in *our* city but in *all* churches and among *all* the peoples of the earth.

⁴² R. T. France (*Matthew*, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008]) writes: “The three clauses are rounded off with the phrase *on earth as it is in heaven*, which, in view of the careful balance of the three preceding clauses, is probably to be taken with all of them rather than as an extension of the last. It too allows the double application of these clauses, which have a fulfillment not only in the worship and harmony of heaven but also on earth, progressively as the consummation approaches and completely when it comes. The prayer embraces the whole scope of this outworking of God’s purpose, but its focus is not on either present or future, but on God himself, whose glory must be the disciples’ first and deepest concern, before they consider their own needs.”

⁴³ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 170) writes: “God’s ‘name’ is a reflection of who he is (cf. DNTT, 2:648ff.). God’s ‘name’ is God himself as he is and has revealed himself, and so his name is already holy. Holiness, often thought of as ‘separateness,’ is less an attribute than what he is. It has to do with the very godhood of God. Therefore to pray that God’s ‘name’ be ‘hallowed’ (the verbal form of ‘holy,’ recurring in Matt only at 23:17, 19 [NIV, ‘makes sacred’]) is not to pray that God may become holy but that he may be treated as holy (cf. Exod 20:8; Lev 19:2, 32; Ezek 36:23; 1 Peter 1:15), that his name should not be despised (Mal 1:6) by the thoughts and conduct of those who have been created in his image.” This desire to protect our *own* name and reputation before others is almost instinctive, but for Christ’s disciples, our life’s controlling obsession is not what people think about *us*, but what they think about God *through us*.

⁴⁴ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 88. D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 65) writes: “This cannot be a request that God’s universal sovereignty will be exercised, for that is always in force. The reference is to God’s saving reign, which, as we have seen, is in one sense already present, but which awaits the future for its consummation. To pray, ‘Your kingdom come,’ is to pray that God’s saving reign will be expanded even now, and, much more, that God will usher in the consummated kingdom. When God’s kingdom fully comes, it will do so because it is inaugurated by Jesus’ return. If early Christians were eager for Jesus’ power and authority to be manifested through them in their ongoing witness (see Acts 4:28f.), they were even more eager for Jesus’ return, and prayed ‘*Marana tha!*’—‘Come, O Lord!’ (I Cor. 16:22). They were ‘looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness’ (II Peter 3:13). The last book of the Bible concludes with the prayer, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ (Rev. 22:20).”

And most of all, this petition longs for King Jesus to return to fully establish his kingdom reign in the new heavens and new earth.⁴⁵

<pause>

Third, “Your will be done.”⁴⁶

These three petitions all build on each other.

If we desire that God’s name be honored throughout the earth, then we’ll desire that he reign in the hearts of all the peoples—and *that* in turn means that we’ll desire that his will would be known, obeyed, and submitted to in all things, as the angels do in heaven.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Greg Gilbert (*What Is the Gospel?* [Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010], 92-93, 97) writes: “The fact is that we as human beings are not going to be able to bring about the establishment and consummation of God’s kingdom. Despite all our best—and genuinely good—efforts to make the world a better place, the kingdom promised in the Bible will only come about when King Jesus himself returns to make it happen. That’s a crucial thing to remember, for at least a couple of reasons. First, it protects us from a wrong and ultimately deceiving optimism about what we will be able to accomplish in this fallen world. Christians will certainly be able to bring about some changes in society... Christians have done and can still do massive good in the world—good that will commend God and Jesus Christ to the world. But I think the biblical story line forces us to recognize that until Christ returns, our social and cultural victories will always be tenuous, never permanent. Christians will never bring about the kingdom of God. Only God himself can do that. The heavenly Jerusalem *comes down from heaven*; it is not built from the ground up. Even more importantly, remembering that the kingdom will only be established when Jesus returns rightly centers out hopes, our affection, and our longing on Jesus himself. Instead of looking to some human power, some human action, some human authority, or even our own effort to set everything right, we look to heaven and cry out with the apostle John, ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus!’ Our longing for his return increases, our prayers to him grow more fervent, and our love for him deepens. In short, our desires and hopes center firmly—and rightly—not so much on the kingdom as on the kingdom’s King.... Until Christ returns, we his people continue to live in this sinful age, and our King calls us to live a life that is worthy of the kingdom to which he has called us (1 Thess. 2:12), to “shine like stars” in a crooked and depraved generation (Phil. 2:15 NIV). It’s not at all that living the life of the kingdom brings us into the kingdom. It’s that once we have been brought into the kingdom through faith in the King, we find ourselves with a new master, a new law, a new charter, a new life—and therefore we begin to *want* to live the life of the kingdom.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:63-64) writes: “We should have a great longing and desire that the kingdom of God and of Christ may come in the hearts of men. It should be our desire that this kingdom should be extended in our own hearts; for it is to the extent that we worship Him, and surrender our lives to Him, and are led by Him, that His kingdom comes in our hearts. We should also be anxious to see this kingdom extending in the lives and hearts of other men and women. So that when we pray, ‘Thy kingdom come’, we are praying for the success of the gospel, its sway and power; we are praying for the conversion of men and women; we are praying that the kingdom of God may come today in Britain, in Europe, in America, in Australia, everywhere in the world. ‘Thy kingdom come’ is an all-inclusive missionary prayer. But it goes even further than that. It is a prayer which indicates that we are ‘Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God’ (2 Peter iii. 12). It means that we should be anticipating the day when all sin and evil and wrong and everything that is opposed to God shall finally have been routed. It means that we should have longings in our hearts for the time when the Lord will come back again, when all that is opposed to Him shall be cast into the lake of burning, and the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.”

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 170-171) writes: “To pray that God’s will, which is “good, pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:2), be done on earth as in heaven is to use language broad enough to embrace three requests.

1. The first request is that God’s will be done now on earth as it is now accomplished in heaven. The word *thelēma* (“will”) includes both God’s righteous demands (7:21; 12:50; cf. Ps 40:8) and his determination to bring about certain events in salvation history (18:14; 26:42; cf. Acts 21:14). So for that will to be “done” includes both moral obedience and the bringing to pass of certain events, such as the Cross. This prayer corresponds to asking for the present extension of the messianic kingdom. 2. The second request is that God’s will may ultimately be as *fully accomplished* on earth as it is now accomplished in heaven. “Will” has the same range of meanings as before; and this prayer corresponds to asking for the consummation of the messianic kingdom. 3. The third request is that God’s will may ultimately be done on the earth *in the same way* as it is now accomplished in heaven. In the consummated kingdom it will not be necessary to discuss superior righteousness (5:20-48) as antithetical to lust, hate, retaliatory face-slapping, divorce, and the like; for then God’s will, construed now as his demands for righteousness, will be done as it is now done in heaven: freely, openly, spontaneously, and without the need to set it over against evil (Carson, *Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 66f.). These first three petitions, though they focus on God’s name, God’s kingdom, and God’s will, are nevertheless prayers that he may act in such a way that his people will hallow his name, submit to his reign, and do his will. It is therefore impossible to pray this prayer in sincerity without humbly committing oneself to such a course.”

⁴⁷ Refer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism (<https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-shorter-catechism>): “Q. 103. What do we pray for in the third petition? A. In the third petition, which is, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,” we pray, that God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:64-65) writes: “The third petition, ‘Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven’ needs no explanation. It is a kind of logical consequence and conclusion from the second, as that was a logical conclusion from the first. The result of the coming of the kingdom of God amongst men will be that the will of God will be done amongst men. In heaven the will of God is always being done perfectly. We have only some dim and faint figures of it in the Scriptures, but we have sufficient to know that what is characteristic of heaven is that everyone and everything is waiting upon God and anxious to glorify and magnify His name. The angels, as it were, are on the wing all ready and waiting to fly at His bidding. The supreme desire of all in heaven is to do the will of God, and thereby to praise and worship Him. And it should be the desire of every true Christian, says our Lord here, that all on earth should be the same. Here, again, we are looking forward to the coming of the kingdom, because this petition will never be fulfilled and granted until the kingdom

But this petition begins with asking ourselves, “Do I know, obey, and submit to God’s will in all things?” That is...

- Am I striving to *know* it by understanding his word?
- To *obey* it as my understanding grows?
- To *submit* to it, especially when it conflicts with my *own* will?

This is perhaps the hardest petition to pray because it’s where the internal struggle is most deeply felt.⁴⁸

We tend to think we know best. We want to control circumstances and enforce our *own* will.

And that’s why it matters so much that we truly trust that we’re praying to “our Father in heaven.” Otherwise, without that trust and view of God, we could never pray this petition with sincerity.

His ways are often not our ways, and we often cannot understand why God does what he does, especially in seasons of pain (Isa. 55:8-9). But as children who trust him as our Father in heaven, we entrust ourselves to his perfect care and wisdom, knowing that *his* will is far greater than anything we would choose for ourselves.

So those are the three petitions for God’s glory.

<pause>

Then, there are three petitions for personal needs.

First, “Give us this day our daily bread.”

“Bread” here represents all our *physical* needs.⁴⁹

Even though God uses the means of work and other people to provide, he is ultimately the one who gives us the abilities and circumstances to meet those needs.⁵⁰

So this petition is an expression of *dependence* on God for our daily sustenance and *gratitude* for his gracious provision of everything we have.

<pause>

Second, “and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

Since Jesus never sinned, this is a petition that he never needed to pray, but he instructs his *disciples* to. Just as we need daily *bread*, we need daily *forgiveness*. We continue to sin in thought, word, and

of God shall indeed be established here on earth amongst men. Then the will of God will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. There will be ‘new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’. Heaven and earth will become one, the world will be changed, evil will be burned out of it, and the glory of God will shine over all.”

⁴⁸ Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “So ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’ is an extraordinary thing to ask for. And its extraordinariness is why I think we don’t ordinarily ask for it. Of all the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, this one is the hardest for most of us to pray. It is hard because we fail to understand it or its full implications, but also hard because we are so concerned with ourselves and our little kingdoms. Further, we are concerned with our own name and reputation, more than with God’s name and reputation. But here Jesus corrects our self-centered prayers with his God-centered one, reminding us of what we ought to ask for first.”

⁴⁹ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 171) writes: “The first is ‘bread,’ a term used to cover all food (cf. Prov 30:8; Mark 3:20; Acts 6:1; 2 Thess 3:12; James 2:15).... The bread is real food, and it may further suggest all that we need in the physical realm (Luther).”

⁵⁰ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 171–172) writes: “The idea of God ‘giving’ the food in no way diminishes responsibility to work (see further on vv. 25–34) but presupposes not only that Jesus’ disciples live one day at a time (cf. v. 34) but that all good things, even our ability to work and earn our food, come from God’s hand (cf. Deut 8:18; 1 Cor 4:7; James 1:17). It is a lesson easily forgotten when wealth multiplies and absolute self-sufficiency is portrayed as a virtue.”

deed every day, and this petition continually reminds us that we never approach God on the basis of our own performance but on the basis of his forgiveness.⁵¹

Notice that Jesus links our relationship with *God* with our relationship with *others*—“And forgive us our debts, *as we also have forgiven our debtors.*”

He *assumes* that we, as forgiven people, have *already* forgiven those that have sinned against us.

In verses 14-15, this is the only petition that Jesus gives further commentary on after this prayer: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

The 17th century pastor Thomas Watson put it plainly: “A man can as well go to hell for not forgiving as for not believing.”⁵²

To be clear, forgiving others does not save us or merit our salvation. But one mark of a person who has truly received saving grace is that they are willing to extend it to others. Forgiving doesn’t *make* you a Christian, but Christians *do* forgive (Matt. 18:21-35).

So if you’re praying this prayer while there’s unresolved bitterness and unwillingness to reconcile with those who have wronged you, then you’re praying judgment upon yourself. You’re asking God to do to *you* as you’re doing to *others*. You’re asking God *not* to forgive you.⁵³

<pause>

Third, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

This is asking our Father for help to overcome every future temptation to sin.

Why would we pray this? Because we never want our fellowship with God to be hindered by sin. We don’t want anything to come between us and our enjoyment of life with our Father.⁵⁴

“Lead us not into temptation” does *not* mean that our Father will never allow us to be tempted (Matt. 4:1) or that he himself tempts us (James 1:13). Rather, we’re asking him to not let us *succumb* (or *give in*) to temptation—that he’d always provide a way for us to endure and escape (1 Cor. 10:13).⁵⁵

⁵¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:73) writes: “He is not talking about justification; He is not dealing here with the case of a sinner who has just awakened to the fact that he needs to have his sins forgiven and so comes to God and receives the gift of salvation and realizes his justification in Christ—that is not what we have here. Here, rather, is what our Lord speaks of in John xiii. You remember that as He washed the disciples’ feet, Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head’. ‘No,’ said Christ, ‘he that is washed needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.’ There is only one washing of the entire person—that is our justification. But having been justified, as we walk through this world we become soiled and tarnished by sin. That is true of every Christian. Though we know we have been forgiven, we need forgiveness still for particular sins and failures. It is all stated briefly in chapter i of John’s First Epistle, where we see that the Christian, though walking in the life of faith, may yet fall into sin. What are we to do about it? John tells us to ‘confess our sins’. And ‘if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’. John is not writing to unbelievers; it is a letter to believers. He is writing to Christians, and our Lord was speaking to believers here. Who is the man who can pray, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors’? He is the man who already has a right to say, ‘Our Father’. And the only man who has a right to say ‘Our Father’ is the one who is in Christ Jesus. It is ‘The Children’s Prayer’. It is not a prayer for anybody, but only for those who have become the children of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the relationship of the child to the Father, and the moment we realize we have offended, or grieved or sinned against the Father, we confess it and ask to be forgiven, and we are sure that we are forgiven.”

⁵² Thomas Watson, quoted in Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁵³ Confession of sin ought to be a regular part of our prayer lives. If we don’t see sin in our lives, then the grace of God will not mean much to us. But as we regularly confess our sins, we *hate* sin more as we verbalize it before our Father, we *love* him more as we recognize the magnitude of his love for us to forgive those sins, we *enjoy* him more as we experience unhindered communion with him, and we forgive *others* more as we realize the extent of sins that God has forgiven us.

⁵⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:77) writes: “Why should we ask that we may be kept from evil? For the great and wonderful reason that our fellowship with God may never be broken. If a man merely wants to be holy as such, there is something wrong with him. Our supreme desire should be to have a right relationship with God, to know Him, to have uninterrupted fellowship and communion with Him. That is why we pray this prayer, that nothing may come between us and the brightness and the radiance and the glory of our Father which is in heaven. ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”

⁵⁵ D. A. Carson gives interesting insights into this petition. He writes: “The NT tells us that this age will be characterized by wars and rumors of wars (see on 24:6) but does not find it incongruous to urge us to pray for those in authority so “that we may live

“But deliver us from evil.” Some translations say, “but deliver us from *the evil one*.” We’re not just fighting our *own* sinfulness. We have a real spiritual enemy that is using everything he can—deceit, accusations, and temptations—to steal our joy, kill our faith in Christ, and destroy us eternally.

And so, this final petition is a sober reminder of the spiritual battle we’re in. And we cannot overcome it by looking to ourselves. Rather, we must consciously depend on our Father—on his providence, his protection, and his power—to stand firm in our faith and followership of him.

It is a petition acknowledging *our* weakness and our need for *his* strength.⁵⁶

And that’s the end of the Lord’s model prayer.⁵⁷

Recollection, petitions for God’s glory, and petitions for personal needs.

<pause>

peaceful and quiet lives” (1 Tim 2:2). While Jesus told his disciples to rejoice when persecuted (Mt 5:10–12) he nevertheless exhorted them to flee from it (10:23) and even to pray that their flight should not be too severe (24:20). Similarly, a prayer requesting to be spared testings may not be incongruous when placed beside exhortations to consider such testings, when they come, as pure joy” (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 173). He also writes: “I think this is a *litotes*, a figure of speech which expresses something by negating the contrary. For example, “not a few” means “many”; by negating “a few” we have produced this *litotes*. In John 6:37, Jesus says, “All the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” Many people think the latter clause is a *litotes* meaning, “I will certainly receive all who come to me.” In fact, it is an even stronger *litotes* than that. As the succeeding verses clearly show, it means “I will certainly keep in all who come to me.” Thus, by negating “drive away,” a forceful and somewhat ironic expression for “keep in” is generated. It appears to me that “Lead us not into temptation” is a *litotes* akin to these examples. “Into temptation” is negated: Lead us, *not* into temptation, but away from it, into righteousness, into situations where, far from being tempted, we will be protected and therefore kept righteous. As the second clause of this petition expresses it, we will then be delivered from the evil one. This petition is a hefty reminder that, just as we ought consciously to depend on God for physical sustenance, so also ought we to sense our dependence on him for moral triumph and spiritual victory. Indeed, to fail in this regard is already to have fallen, for it is part of that ugly effort at independence which refuses to recognize our position as creatures before God. As Christians grow in holy living, they sense their own inherent moral weakness and rejoice that whatever virtue they possess flourishes as the fruit of the Spirit. More and more they recognize the deceptive subtleties of their own hearts, and the malicious cunning of the evil one, and fervently request of their heavenly Father, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (*The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 70-71).

⁵⁶ Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “The idea here is not, “Lord, please don’t bring us to the place of temptation,” or “don’t allow us to be tempted.” We know from 4:1 that God’s Spirit brought Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. So what is being asked here is rather, “Lord, don’t let us succumb to temptation,” or “don’t abandon us to temptation.” Here we find a petition for utter dependence on God’s providence, protection, and power. It is a prayer of a weak person to a strong God.”

⁵⁷ D. A. Carson (“Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984], 174) writes: “The doxology—“for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen”—is found in various forms in many MSS. The diversity of what parts are attested is itself suspicious (for full discussion, cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary* pp. 16–17; cf. Hendriksen, pp. 337f.); and the MS evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of omission—a point conceded by Davies (Setting, pp. 451–53), whose liturgical arguments for inclusion are not convincing. The doxology itself, of course, is theologically profound and contextually suitable and was no doubt judged especially suitable by those who saw in the last three petitions a veiled allusion to the Trinity: the Father’s creation and providence provides our bread, the Son’s atonement secures our forgiveness, and the Spirit’s indwelling power assures our safety and triumph.” Douglas Sean O’Donnell (*Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, PTW [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]) writes: “It ends quite abruptly and seemingly oddly, with the word “evil” or “evil one.” This abrupt and seemingly odd ending was what likely prodded a scribe somewhere down the line to tack on a doxology, “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” It is a beautiful doxology, and the words are Biblical, for similar words are found in 1 Chronicles 29:11. However, such words are not found in the earliest and most reliable Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Thus, the “evil” ending, if you will, is the original ending. And the purpose of that original ending may be to convey the grand contrast with the original opening. In Greek the first word of the Lord’s Prayer is “Father,” and the last words are “evil one.” The structural point then is something like: As children of Jesus’ Father, who live our daily lives between God and the devil, we must recognize the warning here and therefore offer up in this last petition a real and “raw cry for help”—“Help me, Lord, to remain faithful to you.”” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [London: IVP, 1972], 2:77) writes: “Then, you remember, there is a postscript: ‘For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.’ It is in some of the old versions; it is not in others. We do not know for certain whether our Lord did actually utter it at this point or not; but whether He did or not, it is very appropriate. What can one say after facing such a prayer, and such words? There must be a kind of final thanksgiving, there must be some sort of doxology. As we consider our needs, our dependence upon Him, our relationship to Him, we cannot stop by saying, ‘Deliver us from evil!’ We must end as we began, by praising Him. The measure of our spirituality is the amount of praise and of thanksgiving in our prayers. ‘Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.’ Our daily food is assured us, we have as our Father One who can keep us from hell, from Satan, from ourselves, from all. ‘Thine is the kingdom, and the power’—And Thine must be, and, as far as we are concerned, shall be, the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

In verses 5 and 7, the assumption in all this is that Christ's disciples *will* pray—"when you pray" is repeated twice.

So in your private prayers, I'd encourage you to pray through the Lord's Prayer as a framework.

When I find it hard to focus in prayer, I'll pray a line, expand on it more personally, then I'll pray another line, and then expand some more—until I pray through the entire Lord's Prayer.

And in terms of praying together as a church, an immediate way to apply this is to stay for our monthly Prayer Gathering right after today's Sunday service.

As Christ's disciples, we desire our Father's glory above all else, and we trust him for all of our needs—and all of our prayers ought to reflect that.

Conclusion

As we close, remember Jesus' warning to his disciples throughout this passage: Beware of making your righteousness about you rather than your Father in heaven.

We don't give, fast, and pray like the hypocrites or the pagans do, but the gospel of Jesus Christ has radically transformed how we practice our righteousness.

We give because God has given us himself in the person of Christ, and our giving reflects who he is and how much he's given to us in Christ.

We fast because we wait for Christ's return and hunger for *him* more than anything in this passing world.

We pray with the humble confidence that the sovereign God is forever "our Father" through faith in Christ.

When we see all that God has done for us in Christ, we can no longer make much of ourselves, but we live to make much of our Father in heaven.

Let's pray.