



Matthew 6:5-13

"How to Pray - Part 1"

By Mike Clark

Matthew 6:5-13

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.

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.

INTRODUCTION –

This morning we are beginning a two-part series on prayer. This first part is going to be very practical. And then next week we'll go through these verses in detail in Matthew, chapter 6.

So, what is prayer? How do we define prayer?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote - "Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God"

J. Oswald Sanders adds this lofty view of prayer -

"No spiritual exercise is such a blending of complexity and simplicity. It is as appropriate to the aged philosopher as to the little child. It is the expression of the rest of faith and of the fight of faith. In the one moment it lays hold of God and binds the devil."

The essence of prayer is simply talking to God as you would to a beloved friend—without pretense or flippancy.

For Christians, prayer is like breathing. You don't have to think to breathe because the atmosphere exerts pressure on your lungs and forces you to breathe.



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That's why it is more difficult to hold your breath than it is to breathe. And in a similar way, when you're born into the family of God, you enter into a spiritual atmosphere where God's presence and grace exert pressure, or influence, on your life.

Prayer is the normal response to that pressure. As believers we have all entered the divine atmosphere to breathe the air of prayer.

WHY PRAY?

Some may question as to why we should pray. And many who would quickly ascribe that God is sovereign over all, would say that prayer is not necessary.

And they would quote Scriptures like Ephesians 1:11 – Everything works according to His perfect will and plan and Isaiah 46:10-11 – that says, "I am God and there is no other, I am God and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done saying 'My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose.'"

And so, the argument is that if God is has ordained everything that comes to pass and he is going to do what he wills, why then do we need to pray?

And many Christians who don't believe in God's sovereignty in salvation say that if the doctrine of election is true then what's the point of praying for anyone's salvation if he has already planned who he will chose for salvation.

And the answer is that God has ordained not only the end, but the means to the end. And it is his design that the prayers of His people should be the means by which He is moved to act.

James 5 says the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

So, a strong and confident view of the sovereignty of God should not cause us to neglect prayer but it should do the opposite.

It should motivate us to prayer since God has graciously chosen to use us to accomplish all his good purposes.

Now with that said, the Bible gives us several reason that we should pray.

First – Prayer is actually commanded. Maybe some of you didn't realize that, but prayer is a command.



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Ephesians 6:18 says to pray with all prayer and supplication and 1 Thessalonians says to pray without ceasing. Even though we don't know how our prayers fit into God's plan, we are to pray.

And since prayer is a command, to not pray is actually a sin.

1 Samuel 12:19-23 - ¹⁹ And all the people said to Samuel, "Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king." ²⁰ And Samuel said to the people, "Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹ And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. ²² For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. ²³ Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you."

So, Samuel acknowledged his responsibility to pray for them even though he already knew how God would answer his prayers.

Prayer also aligns us with God's purposes.

A great example of this is found with Daniel's prayer. Daniel understood from Jeremiah's prophecy that the Babylonian Captivity would last seventy years.

Yet that didn't stop him from asking God to restore Israel from the captivity. Daniel's prayer was the cry of his heart for the will of God to be accomplished.

STUMBLING BLOCKS TO PRAYER –

Sin and indifference are some hinderances to prayer. We fight against the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Romans 7:15, 19, 22-23 - ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Withholding forgiveness will affect your prayer life.



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Matthew 5:23-24 - ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

So, there is a prerequisite to prayer. Before God will hear your prayers, you need to forgive anyone who has offended you.

We can't truly worship God or expect him to answer our prayers if we harbor resentment or bitterness for someone.

How can we ask God to pour out all of his love, mercy, and grace on us if we won't forgive and be reconciled to another person?

Conflict in the home can also be a hinderance to prayer. Discord in the home or conflict in family relationships, especially between husbands and wives and parents and children will affect your prayer life.

Doubt is another stumbling block and can affect whether or not the Lord answers your prayers.

James 1:6-7 - ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Often times we doubt God's power or concern or provision. We may feel like we are undeserving or that our needs are not worth God's attention.

But we should be trusting in God's character, purposes, and promises when we pray.

Hebrews 11:6 - ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

MOTIVATIONS TO PRAY –

Pray with the glory of God in mind.

For example, when you pray for something and the Lord answers that prayer, God gets glory. When you pray for someone's salvation and the Lord graciously saves them, who gets the glory? – God does.



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Daniel 9:18-19 - ¹⁸ O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."

We should have the attitude that wants to get involved in prayer often so that we can see God display his divine power.

Prayer is also fellowship with the Lord.

Psalm 42:1-2 - As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

¹ John 1:3 - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

We all have needs and so we should pray for our needs every day. Even though we have far more abundant resources than other countries, we still need to rely on the Lord for our needs and ask the Lord for them.

We should pray for wisdom.

James 1:5 - ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

We should be thankful in prayer.

¹ Thessalonians 1:2-3 - ² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We should pray for those in authority and the salvation of the lost.

¹ Timothy 2:1-4 - First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.



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Romans 10:1 - *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*

2 Peter 3:9 - *⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

We should pray for our spiritual growth.

Colossians 1:9-12 - *⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

HOW TO PRAY –

In the name of Christ – **John 14:13-14 - *¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.***

This means praying consistent with who Jesus is, His person, His will, and His purposes.

So, there are limitations on how we can pray. If someone is sick, we don't know if it's the Lord's will for them to be immediately healed.

We can ask the Lord to heal them, but we should pray that they would be comforted and to grow and honor the Lord in the midst of the trial. At the end of the day, we have to pray not my will, but your will be done.

We are to pray asking in faith – **Matthew 21:22 - *²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.***

We need to believe in God's wisdom and power. He wants us to trust him. When we trust him, he rewards us by answering those prayers and we can then praise and glorify his name. Abraham believed God's promises.



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***Romans 4:20-21** - No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

PERSISTENT PRAYER –

***Luke 11:5-10** - ⁵ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷ and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'? ⁸ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence^[c] he will rise and give him whatever he needs. ⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.*

So be persistent in your prayers. And don't give up just because you don't see an answer right away. Sometimes God answers prayers after many years of praying for something, especially someone's salvation.

And God may answer that prayer after you are long gone to heaven so don't give up. As long as the Lord gives you breathe on this earth pray persistently.

And while we're being persistent, we need to keep our eyes open and be alert to the needs of others. As we become sensitive to what is happening around us, we learn what to pray for.

What is going on in the lives of those around you? When someone shares a need with you, do you say I'll be praying for you or do you stop right there and pray for them?

PRATICAL TIPS ON PRAYER –

PLACE – find a place where you can get alone with the Lord for a while, where you are less likely to be bothered or interrupted. Somewhere you can pray until you are done.

Maybe that's somewhere in your house or somewhere outside, maybe you go to the park, or maybe you go to your car.



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Somewhere you can just focus and be quiet and pray. Now finding those kinds of places can be challenging, I understand that, especially for mothers. It may seem impossible to you.

Maybe you get up a little earlier than you do before the kids wake up. Or maybe you lock yourself in the bathroom.

But just do your best to find a quiet place, even if it's just for a little bit. And it may not always be possible but turn any devices off or at least on vibrate.

Because inevitably someone will try to call you or text you or email you when you go to pray.

Sometimes it's a good idea just to turn off notifications in general so that you aren't as distracted and glued to your device. Turn the dings off so that you're not tempted to look.

Realize that you are talking to God almighty and he deserves your full attention.

TIMING – Often times the best time to pray is the time that you read your Bibles.

You will find that as you're reading the Scriptures, you'll read things that will cause you to want to stop and pray about that.

You may see parallels in your life in what you're reading, or you'll see things that you need to pray for others. You may read about promises, or warnings, or commands to be obeyed and just begin to pray about that.

But try to have a dedicated time to pray. For a lot of us, praying early in the morning works best for us. And we see Jesus doing this.

Mark 1:35 - And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

But maybe for others, late at night is best when everyone else is in bed and it is quiet. Jesus prayed at night as well.

Luke 6:12 - ¹² In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

And if you haven't figured out what time is best for you, just start trying different times and see what works best for you.



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And like we talked about with joy a few weeks ago, you have to fight to pray, it's a struggle.

When you aren't getting a consistent and dedicated time in prayer, you will feel it on your soul as you will struggle with sin and sadness.

To get a dedicated time, you may have to make certain adjustments to your schedule or your priorities.

Maybe you cut out some things in your schedule, maybe you cut out some leisure time that you have and dedicate that to prayer. This may require you making some sacrifices.

POSTURE – Posture can make a big difference. The scriptures talk about numerous postures for prayer and none of them is commanded as the one right way.

There's kneeling. **Luke 22:41** - ⁴¹ *And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed.*

There's sitting. **1 Chronicles 17:16** - ¹⁶ *Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, "Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?"*

There is standing. **Mark 11:25** - ²⁵ *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."*

There is walking. **2 Kings 4:32-35** - ³² *When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. ³³ So he went in and shut the door behind the two of them and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴ Then he went up and lay on the child, putting his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. And as he stretched himself upon him, the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵ Then he got up again and walked once back and forth in the house, and went up and stretched himself upon him. The child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.*

There is folding your hands or lifting your hands. **1 Timothy 2:8** - ⁸ *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands.*

What matters is that your posture enhances your reverence for the Lord and your focus on the Lord. That's the issue. What will help you reverence and focus on the Lord.



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Sometimes you'll find that sitting or walking will be too much of a distraction and you need to kneel. For those of you that can. 😊

That's why sometimes we bow our heads and close our eyes. In doing that we are turning our hearts toward the Lord in reverence and focus.

So, pray in whatever posture helps you most to have the right heart attitude.

HOW LONG – Let me say at the beginning that the length of time you spend in prayer is not a measure of your spirituality.

If you're just starting out or you are restarting, I would suggest you start with 10 minutes. Then after a while try bumping that up to 15.

And you may find that when you do that, you can actually pray a little longer than 10-15 minutes. But sometimes the best prayers are short and passionate.

Some of the most powerful prayers are when they are to the point and full of heart.

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING – Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5. Now that may be a really discouraging verse for some of you. Maybe you have feelings of guilt because you don't pray without ceasing.

Well let me help you with that and explain what that means because I think some of us think that means that we are just praying all day long, all the time.

Praying without ceasing is really a posture of the heart. It means that you're operating on more than one level.

On one level, you're thinking, you're discussing things with people, you're at work doing your job or you're with your kids and you're busy doing things that are part of your normal day.

But on another level, behind the scenes you're also in prayer, expressing gratitude or adoration to God and being receptive to God's blessings.

For example, maybe you're talking with someone who is telling you about a difficult circumstance or severe trial and within your spirit you are praying "Lord please help this person with this trial."



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"Lord help me know what I can do for them or what I can say to encourage them."

You are praying that as they are talking to you.

Or maybe you're counseling or disciplining your kids and in the middle of talking with them, you pray to the Lord asking him to give you wisdom.....

....that your child would be obedient and respond with repentance and that the Lord would give your child the gift of faith in Christ if they don't yet know him as Lord and Savior.

Or maybe you're looking at your finances and you see what's not there and you pray in your spirit, Lord please provide for me, please give me wisdom with the resources you've given me.

Or maybe you are in a difficult and stressful job and inside you cry out to the Lord to give you strength and wisdom to handle the situation wisely so that the situation can be resolved well.

Praying without ceasing is keeping that posture of heart where prayer can happen spontaneously in the moment. That's what praying without ceasing is.

It refers to recurring prayer, not nonstop talking. So, it's to be our way of life—we're to be continually in an attitude of prayer.

Famous nineteenth-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon offers this vivid picture of what praying without ceasing means:

A Christian should carry the weapon of all-prayer like a drawn sword in his hand. We should never sheathe our supplications. Never may our hearts be like an unlimbered gun, with everything to be done to it before it can thunder on the foe, but it should be like a piece of cannon, loaded and primed, only requiring the fire that it may be discharged. The soul should be not always in the exercise of prayer, but always in the energy of prayer; not always actually praying, but always intentionally praying. And that's how the Holy Spirit inside of us works in order to teach us how to pray.

In the moment, the Holy Spirit will invade your life, your mind and prompt you to pray things, specific things in the moment.

This is what it means to walk with God. Enoch walked with God and Paul says to walk worthy in a manner pleasing to Him.



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And as you do this and as you grow in this it will become more and more natural to you. This is God's will for every one of us. You can do this – young or old, new Christian or seasoned believer.

So next week, we'll take a detailed look at the Lord's prayer and towards the end of the sermon, we'll see a video that Pastor Jody has prepared that will encourage on how we can begin praying for Highlands Community Church in 2021.

But my prayer is that the Lord would teach us to pray and that we would be a praying people, Amen? Let's pray.