

The Sermon on the Mount
The Lord's Prayer, Part 1
Matthew 6:9-15
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Today it is my privilege to begin a multi-week journey through what we call the Lord's Prayer. Nearly twenty years ago now, the largest survey I know of, was taken of Christians regarding this issue of prayer. Seventeen thousand members of a major denomination had gathered, attending their major conference. And while they were there, they were surveyed about their spiritual habits. One of the questions that was asked was how much time do you spend in prayer each day. Seventeen thousand committed evangelicals--and their answer was, on average, that they prayed less than five minutes each day. At the same conference, two thousand pastors and their wives were in attendance and they were asked the same question. And on average, they prayed less than seven minutes a day. It's been twenty years almost, but I don't think things have changed much. In fact, if anything, I think, likely, the circumstances have gotten worse, because we live in the middle of a Christian culture that has become increasingly man-centered and shallow. And that doesn't encourage an attitude or spirit of prayer. Those numbers unfortunately probably represent pretty well us who are assembled here this morning.

We need to start our study on prayer by being honest with ourselves. It's obvious that, as the people of God, we don't pray like we should, but the question is, why? If you were to ask Christians why they don't pray, you would get a variety of answers. But the number one answer would be, I don't pray because I don't have enough time. I'd like to pray more, but I'm just too busy. A second common answer (and I've heard this answer myself from people) is that, you know, I just never feel like praying. I'm waiting to have the desire to pray and I just don't have that desire. Many Christians live their Christian lives by their feelings. Let me tell you. If you wait to pray, to when you feel like praying, you will only pray in the middle of life's crises. Others say, You know, I've tried to pray, but my mind wanders so much. For many Christians, they don't pray or they don't pray very long because they just can't stay focused. We live in a world of fast food, and ten second sound bites, and a hundred and forty character tweets, and fifteen second commercials. And it's very hard for us to keep our minds focused for more than a couple of minutes. Other Christians neglect prayer because they just don't sense any results to their prayers: I've tried prayer and it doesn't work. Now not that most Christians would say that out loud, but that's their thinking. I think this is a much greater problem than most of us are willing to admit and let me prove it to you this way. If you really believed in your heart of hearts that every prayer you prayed would see a visible verifiable answer within five minutes of your

prayer, how would that affect your prayer life? You'd become a prayer warrior, wouldn't you? You see, the real issue, what it really comes down to, is that we doubt that anything will happen when we pray.

Now those issues are hurdles, without question--hurdles that have to be overcome. And we'll address them in the coming weeks. But in reality none of those is the real reason that we don't pray. Rather they are excuses. They are feeble attempts to justify ourselves for our lack of conformity to the will of God. So if those are merely excuses, what are the real reasons for the flabby prayer lives that characterize so many Christians? I thought about that, and three reasons sort of jumped forward in my own mind as the real reasons Christians don't pray. First of all, there is a lack of understanding about its importance. Honestly, I think many Christians have yet to come to grips with how important prayer is in their own spiritual existence. From creation, we have an unbroken record of man talking to God. Think about it. Before the fall, Adam and Eve walked and talked with the second person of the Trinity in the Garden of Eden. And after the fall, that pattern continues throughout the Old Testament. The hearts of all of those who knew God beat with a passion for speaking to God. When you come to the New Testament, it's no different. Prayer continues to be absolutely foundational to man's relationship with God. A devotion to prayer was the consistent practice of the early church believers. In Acts 2:42, we learn that the three thousand who came to faith at Pentecost "devoted themselves continually to prayer."

Throughout church history, saints have underscored the importance of prayer. Augustine writes: "Prayer is the protection of holy souls. It is the best and most perfect praise, the greatest honor and glory, the preserver of spiritual health. It is the column of all virtues, a ladder to God, the foundation of faith." Martin Luther wrote: "As it is the business of tailors to make clothes, and of cobblers to mend shoes, it is the business of Christians to pray." Thomas Watson, the English Puritan, said: "Prayer is the soul's breathing." Think about that for a moment. He said prayer is to your spiritual life and well-being what breathing is to your physical life. It's absolutely essential and you can't exist without it. Nothing is more foundational to your faith than the place and priority of prayer. But there are many Christians who don't understand that. There are many of us who do; in fact, the reason we feel guilty for not praying more is because we do understand that. But there are many who don't.

A second reason comes to my mind as to why Christians don't pray and that is a lack of diligence, a lack of diligence to plan to pray. We're going to talk about that more this morning and in the coming weeks. Prayer doesn't just happen. It's like any other discipline in your life. You have to plan for it and often times Christians fail because they don't. But also, I think, a lack of diligence to study and meditate on the Scripture. I think sometimes our prayer lives are the way they are because our study and meditation are the way they are. Because when you look at the scripture, for example Psalm 19, David begins to meditate on and to reflect on the person of God and on the Word of God. And when you get to verse 11 of Psalm 19, he just breaks out in prayer. He can't help himself. The same thing is a consistent pattern throughout the Scripture.

You see it in Psalm 119. The psalmist reflects on the Word of God and as he reflects on the Word of God, he writes the longest psalm in our Psalter and one that just pours out prayer to God. A lack of diligence.

But I think a third issue and maybe the largest is a simple lack of obedience. You see, we are commanded to pray. In Colossians 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer...” 1 Thessalonians 5:17. “pray without ceasing;” In corporate worship, 1 Timothy 2:8 says, “. . . I want the men in every place to pray...” In our private lives, Philippians 4:6 – “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” We’re commanded to pray. It’s an issue of obedience. And James reminds us that the one who knows the right thing to do and doesn’t do it, to him it is (what?) sin. As Christians, we must understand the importance of prayer, yes. We must pursue diligence in planning to pray as well as in study and meditation on the Scripture. We must ultimately, however, obey our Lord by devoting ourselves to what He’s commanded us.

But that raises another issue and one that’s really a key issue, and that is, Okay, I understand I’m supposed to, but how? How should we pray? For many people, they just feel completely inadequate in this area. Well, the answer to that comes in Matthew chapter 6. Look at Matthew 6:9. Jesus says to His disciples and to us,

Pray then in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.’

We’re going to spend the coming weeks learning from our Lord how to pray. And of course, nowhere does He teach us more about how to pray than here in what has traditionally been called the Lord’s Prayer. Now let me just say at the outset that I understand this is probably better called the Disciple’s Prayer because it’s intended for us to pray. And John 17, the Lord’s High Priestly Prayer the night before His crucifixion, is probably more appropriately called the Lord’s Prayer and this the Disciple’s Prayer. But let’s be realistic. We’re not going to overturn two thousand years of church history of calling this the Lord’s Prayer, so that’s what I’m going to call it as well.

Now there are two versions of the Lord’s Prayer that have been preserved for us through divine inspiration - the one I just read for you here in Matthew chapter 6; the second one is in Luke 11: 1-4. But they’re not strictly speaking parallel passages. In other words, they’re not recounting the same sermon or what Jesus said at the same time. When you put the gospels and lay them on top of each other, you create a harmony of the gospel records. Jesus probably preached the sermon in

Matthew 6 that I just read to you in the summer of the year prior to His crucifixion the following spring. If the timing I believe, is correct, this would have been in the summer of 29 A.D. That's Matthew 6. Luke 11 however comes a few months later in the record of our Lord in the fall of 29 A.D., just a few months before His crucifixion in the spring in April of 30 A.D. So these are two different times. This prayer was something Jesus repeated on at least two occasions. And in all likelihood, He used it as a pattern for prayer a number of times throughout His ministry here on earth.

Now next week, we're going to begin to examine Matthew's version, which is the longer and more complete of the two versions. But in the few minutes that we have today, I want us to turn to the second record over in Luke chapter 11. Look at Luke 11. And the reason I want to turn here is because the circumstances in which Jesus gives this version of the Lord's Prayer are extremely insightful into the whole issue of praying and prayer, as we'll study it together. Luke 11:1.

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.' And He said to them, 'When you pray, say, 'Father, hallowed be Your name (*and so forth*)...'

And here He gives the second New Testament version of the Lord's Prayer. But here in this verse--in just the first verse of Luke 11, I want us to see four compelling implications for us when it comes to this issue of prayer as it sets the stage for our study of how to pray in the coming weeks. The first implication that we find in this verse is, that prayer was a crucial part of our Lord's life. Look at verse 1 again: "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place..." Now the Greek word that Luke uses for *praying* here is part of the family of words that is the most common word for prayer and praying in the New Testament. A hundred and twenty-two times the New Testament uses this family of words to describe this activity, as compared with the second most common family of words, which is the word for *ask* which occurs in connection with praying about seventy times in the New Testament. So this is the word for praying. What does it mean? Well in secular Greek, this word simply means to speak to a deity and that's what it means for us as well. It means to speak to the one living and true God. It is used of man's approach to God.

And here our Lord, as man, speaks to God as all godly men have done and continue to do. Perhaps nowhere do we see firsthand the importance of prayer that we do in the life of our Lord. His life was a life characterized by prayer. Now why was that? You ever ask yourself that question? I think for some Christians, they think that the reason Jesus wanted to spend so much time in prayer is that as the divine Son, He missed the communion that He had always enjoyed with His Father when He was in heaven before He came to earth. That's not the reason Jesus prayed. We know biblically (we know theologically) that when Jesus took on humanity, His divine nature didn't change. The creeds make that very clear as well. This is what the Scriptures

teach. He continued unchanged in His divine nature. Although in His human nature, He was bound to a body and He had to be in one place at one time, His divine nature, even through His earthly life and ministry, continued to fill the universe. In other words, the communion that the Son had enjoyed with the Father from all eternity continued unabated unbroken during His earthly life except for those six dark hours on the cross. So Jesus didn't pray because He missed that communion as the divine Son with His Father. Understand this. Jesus' prayer life was a reflection not of His divine nature, but of His human nature.

Luke wrote his gospel to present Jesus as the perfect man so it shouldn't surprise us that Luke stresses Jesus praying, as every righteous and godly man should do. Jesus often prayed. Nine times Luke tells us that Jesus prayed. Seven of those are recorded in Luke alone. Let's look at them together. I want you to see them in their context. Look at Luke chapter 3. Jesus begins His ministry by praying at His baptism. Luke 3:21.

Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'"

Jesus began His earthly ministry officially with prayer at His baptism. This continued to be His consistent practice. Look at Luke 5:16. Verse 15 says:

The news about Him was spreading (*this is when His ministry was growing in popularity*). . . and large crowds were gathering to hear Him preach and (*people were coming*) to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.

The tense of the Greek verbs, here caught by the English – this was His consistent practice. He consistently both withdrew and prayed. This is what He did. This was His life. At strategic moments of decision in His life, Jesus prayed. In fact, on one occasion, He prayed all night. Look at 6:12:

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God (*why? Because*) when day came, He called His disciples to Him and He chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles (*as His official representatives, His proxies*)

So He prayed, at that strategic moment in His life, He prayed all night about the making of the decision in the choice of the twelve. According to 9:28, it was while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured on the mountain before the disciples. When you put the rest of Luke in its context, you see who Jesus prayed for. Jesus prayed for His own. He prayed for Peter in chapter 22. He prayed for Himself in the Garden. He prayed for His enemies on the cross. Jesus died

praying. You ever thought about that? His last words were a prayer of faithful trust in His Father: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”

While posture in prayer isn’t the most important thing, as we were reminded of last week, at the same time the New Testament records for us that Jesus prayed standing, He prayed kneeling and He prayed falling on His face before God. J. Oswald Sanders writes: “If the Son of God got down upon His knees, yes, upon His face before God, what attitude should we ordinary mortals assume as we go into His presence? Posture is not everything, but it is something.”

When did Jesus pray? Look at Mark 1. Jesus, according to Mark, prayed in the morning before the day began. Mark 1:35. This was after a really busy Sabbath day in which Jesus taught and healed and people showed up after dark in huge numbers. “The whole city (*verse 33*) gathered at the door...” The next day, *verse 35*—“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place and was praying there.” And He prayed long enough that Peter and some of the other disciples were looking for Him. Where’d Jesus go? This was what Jesus did. But not only did He pray in the morning; notice chapter 6 of Mark. Mark 6:45. Mark records one of the longest days of Jesus’ ministry – very busy, active day. And at the end of that day, after the feeding of the five thousand and other things that happened, *verse 45* of Mark 6 says:

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.

Jesus not only prayed in the morning before the day’s work began. He prayed in the evening after the day’s work was done.

Jesus modeled prayer in every way, for us, except for one. There was only one way Jesus didn’t model our prayers and that was in confession, because He never had to confess His sin, because He never sinned. Other than that, Jesus’ life was a life of prayer. He often taught His followers about prayer. In Matthew 6 and in Luke 11, we have the Lord’s Prayer where He taught them how to pray. In Luke 11:5ff, He teaches the right attitude in prayer. He talks about the reluctant neighbor who won’t give his neighbor what he needs, but because of the persistence he responds. In chapter 18, Luke records the parable of the unjust judge who again responds to the widow’s cries because of her importunity, because she won’t let up.

Jesus often commanded His disciples to pray. In Luke 6:28, He says “pray for those who mistreat you”; in 11:2. “Pray in this way...” In 22:40-46, in the Garden, He tells Peter, James and John: “Pray that you do not enter into temptation.” He commands His followers to pray. And of course throughout the rest of the New Testament, again and again we’re commanded to pray.

You know, even though the disciples, like us, were pretty dense, they eventually got the priority of prayer. You come to Acts 6:4 and they tell the church there in Jerusalem: Listen. We can't serve the widows the food they need. We can't care for them (why?) "because we must devote ourselves to the ministry of the word and to prayer."

Think for a moment about the number one reason Christians offer why they don't pray: I just don't have enough time. And I want you to put that in context - imagine yourself standing before the Lord at the judgment and saying, Lord, you know, I, I didn't pray because I was just too busy. Really? Busier than our Lord was during His earthly ministry? What you have to do is more important than what He had to do? You really want to tell Him that? If it was so important for God's Son to pray while He was here on the earth with a ministry of only three and a half years, how much more important is it for us to pray? We claim to be followers of Jesus Christ, His disciples. We need to each ask ourselves how much do we resemble Him in this way.

If we're honest with ourselves, I think most of us have to say that our lives don't look much like His at all in this way. Now why is that? Well, I think we can see why in a second implication that we can draw from Luke 11:1. Not only was prayer a crucial part of our Lord's life but, secondly, we learn from Him that prayer takes deliberate time. Look at verse 1 again. Luke 11:1 - "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished..." One clear implication of this verse is that the disciples had to wait until Jesus finished praying. It took time for Him to pray. What is implied here is stated overtly in other places. Our Lord often spent deliberate, considerable time in prayer. As we've already seen, He often withdrew to a lonely place to pray. And obviously, you wouldn't make that effort if you intended just to pray a short prayer. On one occasion, He prayed all night.

I think we get some insight into the prayer life of Jesus by looking at that window of time that the most is revealed to us about, and that is the period surrounding His death. Just take the period from sunset--around 5 or 6 on that Thursday night until midnight--let's say six hours. What happens in those six hours in terms of Jesus praying? Well, Luke tells us that He told Peter He'd been praying for Him that his faith would not fail. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that He gave thanks for the bread and the cup as part of the Passover meal. After the supper was over, John 17 records the longest prayer that we have in the scriptures from our Lord; He prayed it after the supper was over, the High Priestly Prayer. Then they go to the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prays for at least an hour because He uses that expression. He prays for three separate times so that each time He comes back, the disciples have had time to fall asleep. So think about it. Just in that one portion of a day, one evening, about six hours, all that praying occurred. Now I understand that that was also an unusual period of our Lord's life, but what I want you to see is His commitment to prayer. There's no question but that Jesus devoted deliberate time to praying.

Now what do we do? We read a passage like 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “pray without ceasing”, and we sort of use that passage in a way I don’t think Paul intended - to salve our consciences. We say, Well, *pray without ceasing*. You can’t be praying all the time so that means really I just need to be occasionally-- praying on the run – you know, sending a sort of text message to God occasionally. It’s true. We are to live our lives in a spirit of prayer. Our hearts should rise to God every time they aren’t forced to be focused on something else, just like a balloon rises when it’s not held down. But the same apostle who wrote “pray without ceasing” also wrote Colossians 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer...” 1Thessalonians 3:10 – “night and day, we keep praying most earnestly...” 2 Timothy 1:3 – “I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day...”

There was a consistency to the prayers of the apostle Paul and to all the lives of the saints. When you look at their lives, you invariably see a pattern of time deliberately set aside for prayer. They didn’t wait to feel like praying. They planned to pray. Consider David for example. In Psalm 55:17, he said, “Lord, in the morning and at noon and in the evening, You will hear my voice.” Daniel 6:10 – when Daniel heard the decree of the king, three times a day he continued to bow and to pray and to give thanks, as had been his custom, it says. When you come to the New Testament, that pattern doesn’t go away. Look at the life of Peter in the book of Acts. We find him in chapter 10 in the sixth hour, about lunchtime, he finds himself on the roof and he goes there to pray. In Acts 3:1, we find him going to the temple to pray in the ninth hour, about three o’clock. There was a consistency.

Now I don’t know what times work best for you in your day, but my question to you is, do you follow the pattern of both the Scripture and godly men down through the years? Do you deliberately set aside time to pray? I’m not talking about five hours a day. I’m talking about a consistent times during the day when you intend to turn your heart toward God. Maybe you need to follow the pattern that John Calvin suggests in *The Institutes* where he says, Look, if you need a pattern to follow, do this: Pray when you first wake up in the morning while you’re still lying there in your bed or when you find yourself able to have a clear enough head to do so. Pray before you begin work. Pray before your meals. And pray as the last thing before you go to sleep at night. Maybe that pattern works for you. The point isn’t when. The point is do you have a deliberate pattern of prayer? Do you determine to obey the Lord in what He’s commanded? Because prayer takes deliberate time.

The third implication that comes out of Luke 11:1 is this: prayer does not come naturally. Look at verse 1 again. In that context of His praying, when He had finished: “one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples...’” Remember now, the disciples grew up in Jewish homes where they had heard prayers and offered prayers their entire lives. By the time this incident occurs here in Luke 17, they have been with Christ off and on as His disciples, and now they have actually been with Him day and night for a period of time. They’ve heard Him pray many times. In addition, it was just a few months before that He preached the Sermon on the Mount (that we’re studying primarily) and taught them a pattern of

prayer. And now here again a few months later, one of the disciples is acknowledging, I still don't get it. I still haven't mastered the skill of praying. Do you get the point? Praying obviously does not come naturally. This makes sense, doesn't it? We were born with no skills except sinful ones. You didn't have to be taught, you didn't have to teach your children how to lie, how to be selfish, all of those things - but no redeeming skills. Every worthwhile skill that you and I have ever received we have learned through difficult work. Prayer is no different.

In fact, a fourth implication takes it one step further. Prayer is a skill you can learn. Look again at verse 1: "Lord, teach us to pray..." *Teach* is the common Greek verb for oral instruction. They knew in their hearts that their prayer still needed help – teach us. And they weren't the only ones who had an inadequacy in this area. Notice: "as John the Baptist taught his disciples..." We don't have any record of John's prayers. We don't have any record of his instruction about praying, but obviously John's ministry of prayer was well-known at the time. I don't know about for you, but for me this is very comforting. If you have to acknowledge this morning that your prayers need help, you aren't the only one. Just get in line. Get in line behind the disciples of John. Get in line behind the disciples of Jesus. Get in line behind every Christian who's ever lived. "Lord, teach us to pray..." But it also means that prayer is a skill you can learn. And without question, the best one to teach us how to pray is the perfect prayer, Jesus Himself. In Luke 11:2, He said to them: "When you pray, say..." In Matthew 6:9, He says, "Pray then, in this way..." Let that, sink into your soul. By the grace and wisdom of God, he has provided us with an inspired account of exactly what our Lord taught His disciples about how to pray. Over the next few weeks, it'll be our privilege to examine it together and, as it were, sit at His feet and let Him teach us how to pray. And when we're done, none of us will have any valid reasons left for failing to grow in the spiritual skill of praying. "Lord, teach us to pray..." Let's pray together.

Our Father, that is our prayer. We acknowledge our complete inadequacy in this area. And Father, we ask that You would help us to truly sit at our Lord's feet over the coming weeks and learn how to pray. We love You and we long to praise You with both our lips and our lives. Father, enable us to do so. Enable us to do it even in our praying. May we pray as an expression of our love and dependence and gratitude for what You have accomplished. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.