

THE LORD'S PRAYER: A VISION FOR THE KINGDOM

Matthew 6:5-15

We're starting a series on the Lord's Prayer. When asked by his disciples how they should pray, Jesus gave us these words. I used to think this was just a small prayer, a sample of what kind of stuff we could bring to God. Surely, there must be bigger, better prayers. But after studying this for a while, I realized- no, this is THE PRAYER! It encompasses all of life. I could spend the rest of my preaching ministry fleshing out the implications of this prayer. But, just in case you're getting nervous, we're just going to do 8 weeks.

You and I need to pray better- not just more, but better. This series is more than a bit selfish. I've been asking myself, why I don't pray like I play? If I weren't a pastor, would I pray at all? Maybe you are asking those same questions, too.

As an introduction, we're going to notice three aspects about this prayer: it's short, it's simple, and it's guaranteed.

It is short

The Lord's prayer is exactly 57 Greek words (just 52 English words). Men have written huge volumes on prayer; lectured for hours. Jesus took about 40 seconds. Some have tried to say that Jesus' point is: don't pray long. But it would be curious if he taught it, because he sure didn't live it. We know that Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness fasting and praying, and that He spent all night in prayer in Gethsemane.

So, how much should we pray? Some of us have this knee-jerk reaction to spiritual disciplines, "Don't get too deep on me, just tell me what I need to do; give me the standard and I'll do it."

In verses 7-8 here, Jesus warns us against praying many words *thinking you'll impress God by your many words*, as the pagans do. There's something more important than words, and that is your heart. Don't pray to impress God or others (v.5-6), real prayer can be simple and straightforward.

Ok, you say, so my prayer should be short and I should do it in my closet, right? Well, not necessarily. The Biblical example is to labor in prayer, and Paul instructs us, "Pray continually." Some of Jesus' most fascinating parables are about working hard in prayer: the widow who wears out the unjust judge with her requests for mercy, the man who knocks on his friend's door at midnight. There's also a great saying of Jesus, that "men of violence take the kingdom by force." I don't think He's referring to some religious jihad, rather to strong men who labor in faith, work, and prayer.

The key is motivation, not length. There is no quota for length of prayer! Pray as much as you need, it's for your benefit and about your relationship. Asking how much you should pray is like asking how much should I talk to my wife? There's no extra righteousness to be won by long prayers, and no righteousness to lose by short prayers.

This is what I don't like about some programs for spiritual disciplines- they can reduce a prayer life to a 30-minute quiet time. I've heard stories of people who come to faith and start praying all the time until they get disciplined by some well-meaning person who tells them they need to have a structured 30-minute quiet time in the morning. So, the active imagination of faith gets whittled down to a timeclock duty and they end up hardly praying at all!

There is a freedom in prayer that is dictated by love, not by length.

It is simple

The beauty of the Lord's Prayer is that in its simplicity is its majesty. It mentions only a few things, but it pertains to everything. It's like the old saying, "It's shallow enough for a child to wade in, and deep enough to drown an elephant in."

The Christian faith is both the easiest thing in the world to grasp, but also the most difficult. It's all about putting your trust in someone else!! Prayer is the same, both the easiest and hardest, because it involves us putting our trust in someone else. In one sense prayer is talking to God without having to look in His face, but when you realize that all of your life is lived *coram deo*, before the face of God, you realize you are before His face!

Experiencing the Lord's Prayer is a little bit like an experience I recently had with maps. Rachel and I recently went to British Columbia. Now, I thought it was just a small place north of Oregon. See, the map in my office has the United States in the center of it and then just a small bit of Canada at the top of the map and a little of Mexico at the bottom. But I saw a Canadian map while I was in BC. On that map, Canada is huge and the US is just a sliver of land at the bottom. I also realize that from the US/Canada border up to the Yukon is as long as the US/Canada border all the way down to Mexico. And the diversity of scenery and the people we met in Vancouver! The kingdom of God is a greater concept that we ever imagined. Our maps tend to have the kingdom of man in the center with God's kingdom on the periphery. The Lord's Prayer helps reorient our spiritual geography.

Now, the vision for the kingdom of God has to be huge to sustain 2,000 years (actually all of human history). One of the insights of the recent hit business book *Good to Great* is that an effective company has an easy mission statement but is committed to it. That's the vision we get here, simple but powerful and transformative.

It is guaranteed

Here's something to chew on: Everything in this prayer is going to happen, whether you pray it or not. God is going to be praised- by His children or by the rocks. His kingdom is going to come. His will is going to be done- He's the unstoppable force. He's going to provide for His children. He's going to forgive all those for whom Christ died. He's going to keep His people from [ultimate] harm. It's going to happen.

The most popular view of Christianity is that we're losing. Can't you see? The culture war is being lost. Look at television, look at the teen pregnancy rate... we're fighting a losing battle. But let's be good sports about it. NO! Jesus says in Revelation, "To him who overcomes I'll give the manna/ the right to the tree of life..."

As my old seminary professor once said, "You don't get the good sportsmanship award if you're a follower of Jesus. You get the trophy of victory. You get the right to rule on the throne of Jesus like He rules on His Father's throne today." [Richard Pratt, Sermon on The Kingdom]

Do you know what the meaning of the Ascension is? It's not that Jesus is reigning for the first time, as the 2nd person of the Trinity He has always reigned with the Father and the Spirit. The significance is that at the ascension He began to reign as a man on the throne. He has fulfilled the original command to Adam to rule the earth.

This goal of God's kingdom is the highest goal you can have. It puts all your other goals in perspective, it gives all of your pursuits and struggles meaning. The Lord's Prayer orients us to the kingdom of God, which is coming and is here. Too often, we forget and only focus on the kingdom of man.

But the kingdom of God will endure forever, eventually on earth as it does in heaven. Isaiah 9:6-7 is a familiar passage which talks about the 1st & 2nd Comings of Christ.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
And the government shall be upon his shoulder,
And his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it
With justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”

Friends, do you want to see Jesus reign? Then pray His prayer. It's a prayer He loves to answer. These are the areas He cares deeply about. These aren't the only words you can pray. But, they're the focal point for how we think about God's kingdom and priorities.

Some of the resources used to prepare messages in this series are Steve Brown "Approaching God," Sinclair Ferguson "The Sermon on the Mount," Thomas Watson "The Lord's Prayer," Derek Thomas "Praying the Saviour's Way" and other random books and Tim Keller, CS Lewis, and Peter Leithart quotes and illustrations stuck in my brain. The reader should assume that very little, if any, of this material is original.