

How to Pray

Matthew 6:5-15

Tim Saco July 9, 2017

Introduction

This summer we are at the corner of *Same Old Street and Change Boulevard*.

- We have a choice, will we turn toward change or keep doing what we are doing today.
- Same old street is familiar. We know where the pot holes are, even though there may be many holes we want to keep to it.
- Same old street may cause us stress but as they say, “better the devil you know than the one you don’t”
- Same old street may seem like the only option for you...
- But on change boulevard things can me so different...
- You may just discover a new lease on life.



This booklet is meant to help you discover a new path, a way to make some changes in your life this summer. We want to help you become more like Jesus. (Discuss booklet)

Let's start thinking about prayer...

CS Lewis was the author of the widely read children's books, *The Narnia Chronicles*, as well as many novels for grown-ups and books on issues surrounding the Christian faith. The movie *Shadowlands* (directed by Richard Attenborough and produced in 1993) tells Lewis' story, focusing in particular on his relationship with his wife, Joy Gresham. Gresham and Lewis meet while Lewis is a don at Oxford University.

After Joy is diagnosed with cancer the couple marry. The movie invites us to witness their love, their pain, their grief, their struggles with faith and God. Eventually Joy dies.

At one point in the story a friend says to Lewis, "Christopher can scoff, Jack, but I know how hard you've been praying; and now God is answering your prayers."

Lewis replies "That's not why I pray, Harry. I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me."

Video Clip (*Shadowlands*, 1993)

To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. (Foster, Celebration of Discipline, p.33)

We need to see that prayer is not about us, it is not about what we want, it about us growing closer to God and therefore...



In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God's thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view. (Foster, Celebration of Discipline, p.33-34)

This is the kind of prayer Jesus spoke of and in fact he instructs us in.

First let look at **Matthew 6:1** (MSG) which is a preface to this whole chapter.

Be especially careful when you are trying to be good so that you don't make a performance out of it. It might be good theater, but the God who made you won't be applauding.

- This is not about acting right or acknowledgment from people it is about growing closer to God.

Let's read **Matthew 6:5-8** (MSG)

“And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?

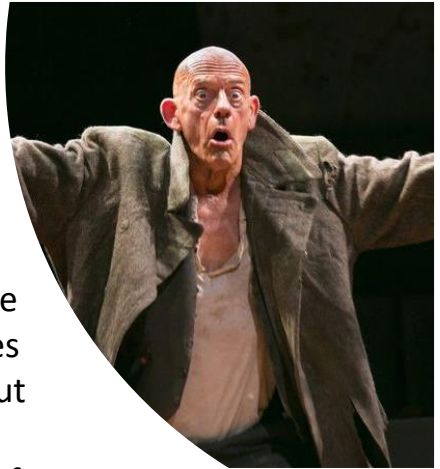
“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.

“The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply.

Don't Make Prayer an Act

1. Hypocrites—

- a. They love to be recognized for the fact that they pray.
- b. In the Jewish culture there were set times of prayer throughout the day.
- c. When these times of prayer came, every person would stop what they were doing and pray.
- d. The hypocrites would find a very public place to pray so everyone could see them praying.
- e. They are performing—pretending to care about God.
- f. They wanted a short cut to please God
- g. **There is no short cut, be real with God!**



2. **The NIV says don't pray like pagans**

- a. The pagans were babblers.
- b. They believed that the more they asked for something the more likely they were to get it.
- c. They just kept on repeating the same words over and over without thinking.

- d. The important words being **without thinking.**
- e. **Two Examples—**
- i. In First Kings the priest of Baal cried out from morning till noon “Baal answer us”
 - ii. In Acts 19:34 the Ephesians shouted “great is Artemis of the Ephesians””

f. **God can't be manipulated,** that is what this kind of ritualistic or mindless prayer is meant to achieve.



- g. It is like a child...
- i. My kids think that if that just keep asking they will get what they want.
 - ii. But as their parent I often know better.
 - iii. Recently one of my sons wanted to buy a cheap drone that was only 20 dollars. He was convinced that it was exactly what he wanted.

- iv. It was a piece of junk that would have lasted 10 minutes...but he could not see that.
 - v. So, he begged me and it became clear that he did not believe that I knew what I was talking about.
 - h. It is the same with us...we are sometimes convinced of something and God says no because he knows better.
 - i. Pagans, Jesus says, are like that.
 - 3. **Don't be like the world.**
 - a. They are motivated to pray by their desire to get what they want.
 - b. This is not the prayer God desires.
 - c. **In contrast to all of this Jesus instructs His disciples to pray in a way that is about God**
 - d. This will cause us to...
 - i. Think like God
 - ii. Desire to pray to God alone
 - iii. And turn us from superficial prayers to the deep heartfelt prayers God desires.
 - 4. **Prayer from the heart, is the kind of prayer that come from deep within us.**
 - a. Our prayers need to come not from the surface, not things that we don't truly desire.

- b. If we pray “God lead me” but intend to do as we please, that is not from the heart.
- c. Instead we pray and live...*Lord, lead me, open my eyes to your direction for my life, help me to be strong enough to follow your lead.*

Jesus wanted us to know how to pray and so he offered us an example...

Let's read on in **Matthew 6:9-15 (MSG)**

Our Father in heaven,

Reveal who you are.

Set the world right;

Do what's best—

as above, so below.

Keep us alive with three square meals.

Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.

Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You're in charge!

You can do anything you want!

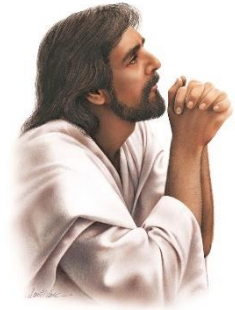
You're ablaze in beauty!

Yes. Yes. Yes.

The Lord's Prayer is an excellent model, but it was never intended to be a magical incantation to get God's attention. Jesus gave this prayer as a pattern to suggest the variety of elements that should be included when we pray. ~Bill Hybels

Do pray like Jesus!

1. **He is “our” father**...we must claim Him as our father...in word but also in action.
 - a. **We also acknowledge that he is the God of Heaven**...not a pagan god but the creator God.
2. **Show us who you are**...show us your love, compassion, justice, truth, commitment and persistence to us.
 - a. We are praying that this be revealed to all people.
3. **We want it to be like heaven on earth**
 - a. Not a warm summer day or anything else we think about with that statement, but instead that God will is done on earth.
 - b. God’s will that people love him and each other.
 - c. Even when that love is messy.
4. **Then we ask for our needs**
 - a. our daily bread
 - b. The Israelites and the Manna. (Exodus 16)
 - i. We should note the way this is done, **one day at a time**.
 1. In **Exodus** after the Israelites were brought out of Egypt they needed something to



eat so God provided for them
Manna and quail.

2. However, God told them only to keep enough for one day at a time.
 3. God said he would test His people in this way.
 4. When some people tried to keep some for the next day it was full of maggots the next morning.
 5. God wanted them to rely on Him and trust Him to provide for them.
 - ii. Much the same way with us God wants us to rely on Him each day for all of our needs.
5. **Then we ask God to forgive us...**
- a. We all need his forgiveness and that is easy enough to accept but...
 - b. We also need to forgive others.
 - c. When we fail to forgive others, we fail to understand God's forgiveness for us.
6. **Then we ask for God's protection** and help to overcome our weakness to the evil in our world.

Verses 14 and 15 show us the importance of forgiveness, it was important enough to use as an example.

7. But they also show us the importance of our prayers being sincere.
8. Prayer is not about our words, it is about our hearts. Therefore, if we say that we forgive and we don't then our prayers become meaningless.

Instead we want a life defined by prayer.

An Empty Chair

A man's daughter had asked the local pastor to come and pray with her father. When the pastor arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The priest assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said.



"No, who are you?"

"I'm the new associate at your local church," the pastor replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?"

Puzzled, the pastor shut the door.

“I’ve never told anyone this, not even my daughter,” said the man. “But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head..”

“I abandoned any attempt at prayer,” the old man continued, “until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, ‘Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here’s what I suggest. Sit down on a chair, place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It’s not spooky because he promised, ‘I’ll be with you always.’ Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you’re doing with me right now.”

“So, I tried it and I’ve liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I’m careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she’d either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm.”

The pastor was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old guy to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church.

Two nights later the daughter called to tell the pastor that her daddy had died that afternoon.

“Did he seem to die in peace?” he asked.

“Yes, when I left the house around two o’clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange. In fact, beyond strange-kind of weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed.”

We want a life defined by simple prayer...

So, let me offer you three quick and practical tips for making prayer part of your daily life...

First we need to...

Pick a time and place.

- You should pick a time and a place that you can **use every day**.
- As I already mentioned it needs to be a place and time that you will **not be interrupted**. **“a solitary place”** as Jesus did.

- As far as the time of day goes we should **do it at a time when we are at our best.**
- I know we are all busy but we need to make time for this and we need to be stringent about it. No matter what comes up **this is an appointment that cannot be reschedule.**

Start small

- Start your prayer time at round **5 to 10 minutes.**
- Start small on **who and what** you are praying for.
- We don't have to become expert prayers overnight or at all!
- When we try to pray for longer then we can we just get discouraged and quit.
- Like all habits it takes time to get into a regular routine.
- **Don't play games and bargain with yourself.**
I'll do double tomorrow!

Be fully present

- **We need to slow ourselves** as we have said previously.
- It is really important that **God is the center of our attention.**

- **My wife often says I am not listening;** it is usually because I am reading or watching something else. I am not giving her my undivided attention and therefore have missed something.
- She usually speaks louder and I catch on that she wants me to listen up.
- The difference is God does not speak up and so we must listen for him.

Listening to God

- As we begin to pray we need to quiet our souls. We need to hear what God has for us.
- Soren Kierkegaard once wrote: **“A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. He became more and more quiet until he realized that prayer is listening.”**
 - Do you ever listen for God?
- We need to center ourselves on God! This cannot happen unless we are still.
- Not just the sounds of the world but **the sound of our thoughts.**



- I don't know if you are like me, but I am all most always thing about something.
- It is even these thoughts that we must quiet if we are to hear God.
- How do we quiet our world and our mind
 - Physical surroundings
 - Find a quiet place.
 - Eliminate interruptions
 - Mental surroundings
 - Breathing exercises
 - Visualization

Conclusion

Well as I bring all of this together we come back to Same old Street and Change Boulevard. We come back to you making a choice about the direction you want to go.



But as you consider that I want to introduce you to my little friend...

- A few years back I was diagnosed with sleep apnea.

- Therefore, I got a new friend my CPAP machine.
- When I first got this thing, it was really bad. I hated it.
- Tubes hanging off my head
- Air blowing up my nose
- Ears getting plugged.
- The first two weeks I didn't sleep.
- I kept feeling like I couldn't breathe.
- But I knew I had to push through because my life depended on it.
- Sleep Apnea when untreated can be fatal.
- As I pushed through two things happened
 1. I began to sleep better and my health improved.
 2. I became accustomed to this machine. So much that I almost can't live without it.



For some of you prayer might be a little like this, but I can tell you that over time prayer will become a part of your life and you will not be able to live without it!

Prayer Resource:

Question: "How to pray? What is the proper way to pray?"

Answer: Is it best to pray standing up, sitting down, kneeling, or bowing down? Should our hands be open, closed, or lifted up to God? Do our eyes need to be closed when we pray? Is it better to pray in a church building or out in nature? Should we pray in the morning when we get up or at night before we go to bed? Are there certain words we need to say in our prayers? How do we begin our prayers? What is the proper way to close a prayer? These questions, and others, are common questions asked about prayer. What is the proper way to pray? Do any of the above things even matter?

Far too often, prayer is viewed as a "magic formula." Some believe that if we do not say exactly the right things, or pray in the right position, God will not hear and answer our prayer. This is completely unbiblical. God does not answer our prayers based on when we pray, where we are, what position our body is in, or in what order we word our prayers. We are told in 1 John 5:14-15 to have confidence when we come to God in prayer,

knowing He hears us and will grant whatever we ask as long as it is in His will. Similarly, John 14:13-14 declares, “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” According to these and many other Scriptures, God answers prayer requests based on whether they are asked according to His will and in the name of Jesus (to bring glory to Jesus).

So, what is the proper way to pray? Philippians 4:6-7 tells us to pray without being anxious, to pray about everything, and to pray with thankful hearts. God will answer all such prayers with the gift of His peace in our hearts. The proper way to pray is to pour out our hearts to God, being honest and open with God, as He already knows us better than we know ourselves. We are to present our requests to God, keeping in mind that God knows what is best and will not grant a request that is not His will for us. We are to express our love, gratitude, and worship to God in prayer without worrying about having just the right words to say. God is more interested in the content of our hearts than the eloquence of our words.

The closest the Bible comes to giving a “pattern” for prayer is the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. Please understand that the Lord’s Prayer is not a prayer we are to memorize and recite to God. It is an example of the things that should go into a prayer—worship, trust in God, requests, confession, and submission. We are to pray for the things the Lord’s Prayer talks about, using our own words and “customizing” it to our own journey with God. The proper way to pray is to express our hearts to God. Sitting, standing, or kneeling; hands open or closed; eyes opened or closed; in a church, at home, or outside; in the morning or at night—these are all side issues, subject to personal preference, conviction, and appropriateness. God’s desire is for prayer to be a real and personal connection between Himself and us.

How to Pray

Matthew 6:10-13

P

PRAISE for who He is.
for what He has done.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED
BE THY NAME.

R

REPENT of sins I have committed.
of commands I have neglected.

AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE
FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS.

A

ASK for the needs of others.
for my needs.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT
DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

Y

YIELD my will to God's will.
my agenda to God's agenda for me.

THY KINGDOM COME. THY WILL BE DONE ON
EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER,
AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER. AMEN.