

## **Intro**

Father's Day brings mixed emotions to us. Some of us are so thankful for our fathers. We're flooded with fond memories. Some of us were disappointed by our fathers. For some of us, tragedy cut short our time with dad. Some of us delight in being a dad today. Others of us are worn out by the challenges of fatherhood. Some of us are celebrating with our fathers. Others are reminded that dad's gone. Some of us never got to be a dad. So Father's Day brings mixed emotions.

As we reflect on Father's Day, we're reminded of our heavenly Father. After all, earthly fathers are a reflection of the heavenly Father. When God designed the family unit, earthly fathers were intended to reflect the care of God the Father. Earthly fathers provide, protect, instruct, answer questions, discipline, and relate to their children as individuals. When an earthly father cares for their children, they reflect the heavenly Father. As we consider our heavenly Father, we learn this about prayer:

**BIG IDEA: Prayer exists because we need the Father, not because we need man's approval**

## **READ PASSAGE**

## **PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

Jesus moves from correcting the scribes and Pharisees' misapplication of the law to their wrong motives in spiritual disciplines.

**Prayer insight 1: Practice your spiritual disciplines for the Father, not for man's applause (6:1-6)**

### **Explanation**

Jesus tells us what not to do: "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." And then he tells us why: "for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." The problem is practicing our righteousness for wrong reasons: in order to draw attention to ourselves. So people will think much of us. When we practice "righteousness" in this way, we won't receive any reward from God.

Then Jesus illustrates the right way, and the wrong way. First, how to give to the needy. In Jesus' day, the synagogues had an organized system where contributions were taken for the relief of the poor. Similar to our modern welfare system. "When you give to the needy" indicates that Jesus assumes his disciples would give to the synagogue fund. Now he gets to the important part: the manner in which we give. The hypocrites, a term meaning an actor on a stage, someone pretending to be something they're not, would sound a trumpet whenever they gave, "that they may be praised by others." To get people to notice them. There is no evidence that people actually sounded trumpets when they gave. This is a metaphor for people who give to call attention to themselves. When a person gives in this way, "they have received their reward." The praise of men is all they'll get. God won't honor this sort of giving.

On the other hand, God-honoring giving is done in secret. The left hand/right hand comment was an idiom for secrecy. No one should know about it. When giving is done secretly, "your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Second, Jesus shows how to pray. The hypocrites love to pray publicly “that they may be seen by others.” Again, their motive is public recognition and the praise of men. God won’t honor this type of prayer: “they have received their reward.” Assuming that his disciples will pray, “But when you pray,” Jesus tells them how to pray: “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.” Pray to God alone, not to be praised by men.

## **Application**

The issue is our motives. Why do we do what we do? Do we give because we see ourselves as stewards of all God has entrusted to us? Do we give because we value and believe in the mission of the church? Do we give because we have compassion for those in need? Or do we give because we want people to think we’re good? Jesus is getting at our desires. What is it we really want? Do we want God’s approval or man’s praise? Jesus says it’s one or the other. You can’t have both. The problem is our selfish focus. Our longing for recognition. What we ought to desire is the simple approval of our heavenly Father.

Let’s consider public prayer. The issue isn’t forbidding public prayer. The issue is self-motivated prayer. I’m sure all of us have struggled at some point with fear of praying publicly.

Personal: new groups...sophisticated believers

What are we so afraid of? How people will perceive us. Will they think I’m godly? How foolish we’ll sound. Will I stumble in my speech? We’re so focused on what people will think, but we’re not even thinking about God, the person we’re praying to. How backwards. How odd. If this is a struggle, we need to confess our sinful preoccupation with ourselves, ask for God to help us focus on his glory, his mission, and the good of others, and we need to remember the purpose of prayer: to relate to God and to call on him to do the impossible. Yes, at times we pray for God to help us pray with the right motivations.

Danny Akin asks two diagnostic questions to see if we’re on the right track:

- 1) “do you pray longer in public than you do in private?”
- 2) “do you pray differently in public than you do in private?”

Since the nature of God’s reward is unspecified, we should take it as both present and future. When we give and pray rightly, God blesses us in this life and the life to come. We don’t only seek reward in doing good, we want to honor God and care for people too, but we do seek God’s reward because we believe his blessing is infinitely more valuable than man’s praise.

## **Prayer insight 2: Saying a lot doesn’t get the Father’s ear (6:7-8)**

### **Explanation**

Before telling us how to pray, Jesus first tells us how not to pray: “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.” “Empty phrases” describes the person who says the same thing over and over again without thinking. Why do the Gentiles pray to their false gods like this? Because “they think that they will be heard for their many words.” Their gods will respond only if badgered repeatedly. But we don’t have to harass our heavenly Father because “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” God already knows. The Gentiles thought quantity would produce results. But prayer doesn’t work that way.

## **Application**

Maybe you've wondered, if God already knows what we need, why do we need to ask? R. T. France answers:

“Christian spirituality has traditionally found the answer in a concept of prayer not as the communication of information, still less as a technique for getting things from God (the more words you put in the more results you get out), but as the expression of the relationship of trust which follows from knowing God as ‘Father.’”

Before tackling what to pray, let's first consider what the Lord's prayer is and what it says about God. The Lord's prayer isn't intended to be repeated verbatim. There's nothing wrong with that, but that's not Jesus' intent. Jesus is giving us a model of how to pray: “Pray then like this.” When we come before God daily, we should pray about these things. These aren't the only things we're allowed to pray for, actual prayers recorded in Scripture include many items not found in the Lord's prayer, but the Lord's prayer is a good starting point.

And what does the Lord's prayer say about God? God cares. He is watching over us and sees everything we need before we ask. God listens. He wants to hear our concerns. God acts. He responds to our prayers by providing the help we need. God is relational. He wants to have routine fellowship with us and he wants us to share our deepest concerns with him.

### **Prayer insight 3: Pray for the Father to be honored (6:9-10)**

#### **Explanation**

We begin with God as the starting point. Before addressing personal concerns, we should first consider God's glory and his will. 6:9-10 gets our desires right: God first, then me. Note this is the prayer of a congregation, not an individual: “Our Father” not my Father. So we can pray like this publicly and privately.

We begin by addressing God as Father. Like human fathers, God is someone who we're intimately related to, someone who protects us, someone who provides for us, and someone who instructs us. He's not distant and he's not unconcerned. But God is not exactly like a human father. He must be hallowed. Hallowed is the same word for “to make holy” or “to set apart” so when used of God it means to be treated as holy. As the holy one, God's name must be honored.

After relating to God as our caring Father and the holy one, we desire what he desires: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We desire that all creation would be subjected to God's rule and that God's ways would flourish in our land. This won't happen until Jesus returns to set up the Father's kingdom. So in once sense we pray for the return of Christ, because we long for a “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13).” In another sense, we long for God's kingdom to flourish, and for God's will to be done, right now.

#### **Application**

There's a lot going on in our nation today. The Coronavirus death count is at 120,000 right now. We long for death to be defeated and no more. The Coronavirus is devastating the economy. Businesses are closing for good. Jobs are being terminated. We're asking, how long? Will the economy recover? We long for stability. Racism and police brutality are the topic today. A black man in Georgia killed without reason and the murderers let off. A black man in Minnesota killed by a police officer on video. Videos contradicting police reports. Here's what a Christian rapper and author had to say about his fearful experience as a black man in America:

“It’s about being handcuffed and thrown into the back of a police car while walking down the street during college, and then waiting for a white couple to come identify whether or not I was the one who’d committed a crime against them, knowing that if they said I was the one, I would be immediately taken to jail, no questions asked...It’s about taking a road trip with my sons to visit [my wife’s] family in Michigan—and my greatest fear being getting pulled over for no reason other than driving while black, told to get out of the car, cuffed, and sat down on the side of the road, utterly emasculated and humiliated with my young boys looking out the window, terrified, which is exactly what happened to a good friend of mine when he took his family on a road trip.”  
(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/george-floyd-and-me>)

We long for justice. Riots have erupted across the nation. Police precincts burned down. Monuments destroyed. Businesses looted and destroyed. Police departments replaced with community-based public safety programs. Calls to defund the police. Defund the police? How will that work? We long for peace and order. The Supreme Court just ruled that protections against gender discrimination now protect discrimination against one’s gender identity and transgender status. Questions abound. Will my girl have to share locker rooms and showers with boys that identify as women? Will my son have to room with a girl at college who identifies as a man? We long for God’s design for sexuality to be honored. So we pray for God’s kingdom to come, and for his will to be done. We want it now. We want God to act. We want God and his law to be honored. We want a world where righteousness reigns. But we acknowledge this world is fallen and will never be some sort of utopia. Recognizing that this world is profoundly broken, we long for God’s truth to have influence in our land. Recognizing that this world is profoundly broken, we long for Christ to return and make all things right.

Applied personally, we long for God’s rule in our own life. In our home. In our church. In our local community. When we approach the Father in prayer, we call on him to invade our hearts, our church, and our land. 6:9-10 orders our desires. 6:11-15 reveals our need for the Father.

#### **Prayer insight 4: Pray for the Father’s provision (6:11)**

##### **Explanation**

This is as simple as it sounds: daily pray to God to provide for your needs. In Jesus’ day laborers were paid day to day so subtle changes in one’s life could be catastrophic. The point is depending on God to provide for us one day at a time.

##### **Application**

The point is trusting that ultimately God is the one who ensures our needs are met. Because God cares, and because nothing can hinder God, daily call on God to provide for your needs. As we pray this frequently, we are reminded of God’s care, his ability to provide, and our dependence on him. We don’t need to fret because our heavenly Father is looking out for us. Uncertainties surround us whether we acknowledge them or not (e.g., Coronavirus). We need God’s provision more than we realize, so regularly call on God to provide.

#### **Prayer insight 5: Pray for the Father’s forgiveness (6:12, 14-15)**

##### **Explanation**

We’re addressing the Father, so the debt we owe is to him. What we owe to God is perfect obedience. The assumption is that disciples will regularly stumble and fail to keep God’s law, so we owe God a debt. Because of this debt, we regularly call on God for forgiveness as we confess our sins. As we saw last week, the Father’s perfection is something we strive towards, not something we can actually attain. Another is that believers are a forgiving people.

In 6:14-15, Jesus says that the Father's forgiveness is conditional on our forgiveness of others. Jesus isn't teaching salvation comes through forgiving others. He's commenting on the nature of saving faith. When we believe we experience God's forgiveness. We trust that our sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus. We trust he took the wrath we deserved on the cross. Having experienced the Father's forgiveness, we extend forgiveness to those who sin against us. In that manner, forgiveness is a consequence of salvation rather than the cause of our salvation.

### **Application**

Why do we need to be forgiven when, if we're a believer, our sins (past, present, and future) are already pardoned since there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1)? In this situation we are coming before God as our Father, not as our judge. The issue is relational. It's not about escaping judgment. We confess our sins to the Father because we have a relationship. Because we love the Father. We are grieved that we've failed to honor him when he's showered us with mercy and blessing. And regular confession prevents us from becoming casual in our faith. Confession keeps our heart tender and prevents hardness.

### **Prayer insight 6: Pray for the Father's help against sin (6:13)**

#### **Explanation**

When we pray, "lead us not into temptation" we're praying, "Father, help me not to be tempted to sin." At the point of being tested we have not sinned, but when we begin to desire something unlawful we've committed sin. Eve sinned when she desired the forbidden fruit, before she actually ate of it. A man sins when he lusts. So the battle is located in our desires, but sin reaches its climax when we follow through on unlawful desires and act them out. When we pray, "deliver us from evil" we're praying rescue us from giving into evil. We want to avoid sin, so we call out to the Father to help us in our weakness and susceptibility to sin. We recognize we need the Father's help. Given that we're lured into sin by our own desires (Jas 1:14-15), we're saying: help to me to desire what I should. Put another way, "Father, help me to will what you will."

#### **Application**

Our susceptibility to sin and the fact that Satan is seeking to ruin us demands we pray this on a regular basis. We must avoid arrogance: "I'm fine on my own, I don't need God's help." And we must avoid despair: "I could never overcome this, God won't help me." Because the Father wants to help us when we're tested, Jesus tells us: "Bring your temptations to the Father. Seek his help. He will help you battle sin."

What does this look like? Daily share with the Father the areas where you are tempted to sin. And pray for his help to desire what you should so that Satan is thwarted.

#### **Conclusion**

In prayer we align our hearts with God. We begin by approaching God as the holy one. We ponder God's will, we desire his will, and we call out for God to work his will in us, in our homes, in our church, and in our community. And we long for Christ's return when all will be made right.

In prayer we acknowledge how desperately we need the Father. We need him to provide for our basic needs. We need his forgiveness when we act as disobedient children. We need his help to overcome temptations.

Isn't it obvious? Prayer isn't designed for gaining human approval. No, prayer is designed for accessing the Father's help. Let's pray as needy people who know how desperately we need the Father's help, not as self-centered people who long to show how great we are. **Prayer exists because we need the Father, not because we need man's approval.**