

Our Father (8/2/26 – Introductory sermon to the Lord's Prayer series)

Text: Matthew 6:9

Big Idea: The practice of prayer makes us prepared.

If you're new to Christianity, there's a phrase I want to teach you. If you're a veteran, you already know how valuable this phrase is. This phrase will make you sound more spiritual. It will allow you to avoid conflict. It will give you permission to avoid responsibility. It will keep you from doing things in church that you don't want to do. The phrase is simple: "I have to pray about it."

As people in the Christian subculture, we use this phrase to avoid answering a direct question. Someone asks you, "Will you volunteer in the nursery?" What you want to say is, "No! I will not. Those kids push me around!" But you can't say that because it's church. So, instead, you say, "I have to pray about it."

The beauty of this phrase is that it buys you time. It frames your future response of, "I don't feel the Lord calling into this particular ministry right now." (Aka "No") As a deeply spiritual decision...when in reality you got in the car and said, "Lord, I will NOT volunteer in the nursery."

Now listen, there are definitely times in life when we need to pray. Difficult decisions require careful thought and attentive prayer - something we can't rush.

I do sometimes wonder if we could be a little more prepared in life through a regular practice of prayer. The truth is the practice of prayer makes us prepared.

The more we practice praying, the deeper we dig our spiritual wells. The clearer we hear God's voice. It can be a very rewarding experience, so the question is, "Why don't we do it more?" The answer is simple...

I. Prayer is difficult and requires practice.

- A. Henri Nouwen was a Catholic thinker and spiritualist. He was considered a giant in devotional thinking. He confessed to struggling with "distractions, inner restlessness, sleepiness, confusion, and boredom," while praying!
- B. If Nouwen struggled with prayer, what are we to do? The disciples asked Jesus this question. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives this prayer in response to a question, "Lord, teach us to pray." In response, Jesus gives the Lord's Prayer.
 1. This is a prayer many of you have memorized. If not, I suspect you all will by the end of this series! It's a simple prayer that Jesus taught the disciples as a model for praying.
 2. Fast-forward to about 100 AD, and you'll find a collection of apostolic-era teachings called the Didache, which directs Christians to pray the Lord's Prayer three times a day and every time they gather for worship.
 3. If you zoom forward to the Protestant Reformation, you see that Luther used it as a guide for his prayer life.

4. Throughout church history, there has been a sense that praying the Lord's Prayer individually and communally was a good way to connect with God through prayer. The practice of prayer makes us prepared.
- C. In a world that values self-expression, saying what we mean, talking from our hearts, this prayer can feel antiquated or second best to telling God what you really feel...but the question is: what do you really feel? Do you know how to express that?
 1. How many times have you heard a song come on and it struck you in a way that surprised you? It made you realize you were sad or happy or angry over something you weren't even thinking about?
 2. How about when we pray scripted prayers? Or read through the Psalms? A word or phrase will seem especially relevant for a reason that only comes to mind later?
 3. The Lord's Prayer is beautiful and complete in its own right, but it is so much more!

II. The Lord's Prayer is both a good practice and an essential building block.

- A. In Matthew, Jesus says, "Pray then in this way," or "Pray like this." Jesus gives us a model prayer we can pray over and over again.
- B. We can pray it as written, or riff off it like a skilled musician performing live. In some ways, I think spontaneous prayer is like jazz. It's improvisation of something we've already learned and know.
- C. Music is built on basic building blocks like scales, chords, and their inversions. We can mix things up and put them in different orders, but it's the same ingredients.
 1. In some ways, the Lord's Prayer is like a musical scale. [Play G scale with right hand] It is beautiful in its own right...a lot prettier than hitting all the notes at the same time!
 2. As you learn it, depth develops [Play G scale with both hands] as you find, and even add, meaning to what you're praying and as you build history with it.
 3. You might learn to pray with it, allowing it to inspire new prayers. Sort of like Bach did with his "Minuet in G." It's essentially the G scale broken up and played with its different pieces. [Play Minuet in G]
 4. This is beautiful, but after a few hundred years, a band called The Toys picked up on this song and really just added a little swing to it and made their "Lover's Concerto."

5. As you pray, you add your own words and flavor, and sometimes they're not all happy. If you simply take **"Lover's Concerto"** and **play it in the minor chord [Eb, Ab, Bb]**, then it has a whole different feel.
 6. It's sort of like praying "The Lord's Prayer" during worship [C scale & chord], versus at a funeral [C minor scale & chord]. It's the same words, but a completely different feel.
 7. Yet, it's the same scale [play C major scale, then C minor scale].
- D. Mastering the basics lets us build new sounds with new rhythms and new combinations of notes. But it starts with the basics!
1. We start with the Lord's Prayer, and if we never move beyond it, then we are still praying the very words Jesus told us to pray!
 2. Many people use this prayer as we did at the beginning of the service. You can use the Lord's Prayer as a prompt.
 - You start with "Our Father" and address God.
 - Then, as you move through it, you pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." It reminds you to pray for your needs.
 - "Forgive us our trespasses." Another prompt asks God for forgiveness for the things troubling your conscience.
 - "As we forgive those who trespass against us." This prompt challenges us to examine our feelings and identify anyone we're angry with or holding a grudge against.
 - You can do this with every word and phrase of the prayer. It is an excellent way to begin to pray if you are new.
- E. If we start to improvise and add, then we will experience new shades and colors and depth in our prayer life.
1. The important part, though, is that we pray, because the practice of prayer makes us prepared.
 2. It prepares us because it aligns our hearts, minds, and souls with our Heavenly Father.

III. The Lord's Prayer reminds us that devotion begins by placing "Our Father" first in our hearts.

- A. This is what is most important! How each of us does this will differ, just as each of my children relates to me differently; so too will each of us, as unique children of God, relate to Our Father differently.
1. What unites us is that we acknowledge and call on Our Father as His children.

2. This is why the prayer begins with a relational statement.
 3. We pray to "Our Father." We call on the God who has revealed himself to us in a relational way!
 4. Our Father is "in Heaven"
 - God has an otherness that our relationship transcends.
 - Heaven is our home, and this prayer reminds us of that.
 5. Our Father is exalted in us when we pray to him.
 - That God would be "hallowed" (or "honored," NiRV) in our hearts is the start of honoring him in our lives.
 - It is difficult to ask for his kingdom to come into our world if we haven't first honored him in our hearts.
 - We can't even get to the next line, inviting God's kingdom to come into this world and his will to be done, if we haven't first invited God's kingdom to come to us and his will to be done in us.
- B. I have been on a quest to improve my prayer life. It has had ups and downs through the years! I went through a season where I met with an Orthodox Priest and then a Catholic Priest for spiritual direction and guidance.
1. They convinced me that prayer, daily prayer, morning and evening prayer, are the two hinges on which the door of our spiritual lives pivots.
 2. Even if all you do is pray the Lord's Prayer in the morning when you wake up and at night when you go to bed, you are bookending your day, calling on Our Father!
- C. Everything else springs from a relationship with our Father. Every other act of spirituality comes from exalting God first in our lives.
1. Think about this: for about the first 1700 years of Christianity, people could not engage in personal Bible study because there were no personal Bibles!
 2. Yet, the church flourished - how? They were committed to each other and to God, and joined together in prayer.
 3. Let me tell you: the only wrong way to pray is not to pray.

This week, and really throughout this series, I invite you to pray the Lord's Prayer every day. If you already do, mission accomplished. If you already have a prayer life, add it to it...close it out with the Lord's Prayer. If you don't have a prayer life, start here! This is how Jesus told the disciples to start, and I don't think that advice has changed.