



## **Prayer (Part 1) – A Call to Prayer**

Jonathan Woodlief – January 4, 2015

---

Hey, my name is Jonathan Woodlief. I'm one of the ministers here on staff, one of the Groups pastors. It's my privilege and honor to be with you here tonight. If you were expecting Matt Chandler and coming for that, I'm sorry. That's all I have for you.

Two and a half years ago, I had a kidney transplant. When I was 13 (that wasn't two and a half years ago, thank you very much), I got diagnosed with a disease called systemic lupus. Lupus is most common in African-American females in the childbearing age, so they were very confused by my diagnosis. It actually took a while for them to find my diagnosis. As a white 13-year-old male, it just didn't go well for me.

Lupus is an autoimmune disease. Your white blood cells become a little confused and don't just fight off infections and diseases, but in severe cases, those white blood cells turn on your own body and begin to attack your internal organs. That's what happened with me with my kidneys. I had one transplant in high school and another transplant two and a half years ago given from my wife, which was God's miracle mercy. It was an amazing gift of God that she was even a match.

We were talking the other night how there was a time... I get that at The Village we talk about how goofy it is to celebrate things or do things as adults that children would do, but there literally was a time where we were celebrating and clapping when I could go to the bathroom, when I could pee, just to put it bluntly. We were celebrating that. We were amazed by that. We were clapping about that.

It might sound strange. We were just filled with awe that that was a reality for me now. After years of not having a well-functioning kidney, now it was functioning, and it was just like "Hallelujah Chorus" around the Woodlief home when that happened. That sounds strange. Don't judge me. You would have done the same thing too. You know it. You should. Okay? We'll do that.

Caitlin and I were talking about this the other night and how crazy it is. Something has just clicked for us over the years. It has become so familiar. It has become something we're so used to, like that would be for most of you, that it's almost second nature. I don't even think about it anymore (I wish I did more), that I've been given a kidney. I have a functioning kidney. I'm not worried about some of the health issues I was two and a half years ago. It's the grace of God. It almost has become so familiar.

We all know this. There's a potential and a capacity in all sorts of areas of life for something to become so familiar to us it becomes routine. We're around the lingo. We're around the language. If something becomes really familiar and routine to us, then we kind of just cruise right by it and don't even stop and think about it anymore.

It makes me think of the first time I went to visit my wife and her brother in Boston. They lived in an area called Brookline where they were right by the "T," the public transportation system there in Boston, and I could not sleep that night. I had such a rough time. They're like, "What's the problem?" I'm like, "What's the problem? Are you kidding me? The 'T' is right outside your door." They said they had lived by it so often they became familiar with it. It was just second nature to them.

Or this past week my father-in-law came into town from New England as well, and he really wanted to see the JFK site. Just out of curiosity, how many people in this room have seen the JFK site? Okay, yes. Thank you, Dallas. That's like 95 percent. My father-in-law wanted to see the JFK site, so he had me get in that left-hand lane and make the left turn and go by the building and go over the two X's. We did that, and then he wanted us to loop. We made the left-hand turn again and went by the X's. Then he wanted us to do it again. We did it again.

If he listens to this, I loved it. I'm fine with it. It was fine. But he could not get over the fact how close it was. He kept saying, "I can't believe how close it is." The videos he had seen, the books he had read, but specifically the movies and videos he had seen about it... He kept saying, "They don't do justice. You have to see it. I can't believe how close it is, that building, to those two X's." He just kept saying it, almost to the fact where he kept muttering it under his breath. We've stopped talking. He's just saying it. "I can't believe how close it is. You just have to see it. You have to see it."

We're talking about a call to prayer this month, which I'm so excited about. We're a church that doesn't just talk about issues like right to life or racial reconciliation. There's such a tension about

that in our culture right now, but it's something we've been doing for years and years. The nations... When we're talking about a call to prayer, there's something that could be so familiar about that.

Whether you're in here and you're a believer in Christ or not, whether you've been in church a lot or not, even just the word *prayer* is so familiar for so many of us. We've heard it in the Bible Belt maybe all of our lives, or maybe we've just heard people talking about that word, or maybe we've been in church and been exhorted to do that over and over again. The potential is it could become really familiar to us, and that's a scary thing.

It could become the sound of the "T," once really, really loud, now just a fading buzz in the background. It could become the JFK site, now just a route we take to work and a route we drive by versus somewhere to wait around, ask questions, and wonder. It could become the gift of functioning organs, just one other thing we're not even thinking about, a beating heart right now, lungs going in and out right now, brain functioning right now, where we're not even thinking. It just becomes so familiar. It could become "yawnable," if we could say it that way. It could become just another thing. I'm praying that's not going to be true for us.

Here's how Reformer Martin Luther put that. He said, "We must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind." He's saying whether we're thinking about prayer or not thinking about prayer, there are a thousand other things we could be doing. Like a friend said to me about a year ago, "Why don't I just do it? Why do I have to pray about it? Just do something."

Continuing with what Martin Luther said, "Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer." Or Tony Evans, a phenomenal preacher here in Dallas in the Oak Cliff area. Got to love you some Tony Evans. He says prayer is the most misunderstood and neglected aspect of the Christian life.

We don't walk into this topic acting like we've got it. We don't walk into this romantically, hopefully, or naively. It has been said it's kind of like humility. If you think you're a humble person, you're not. If you're like, "Man, prayer, I'm just nailing it," then you're not. That's a concern for us tonight if that's where we are.

We're going to open up the Scriptures to Matthew, chapter 6. If you're here and you don't have a Bible with you or you don't own a Bible, there's a black one in the seat in front of you. That's our gift to you. If you're here today and you'd like one of these Bibles, take it. We would love that. Simply through this text we're going to see Jesus unfold two things about prayer that become two reasons why we pray. Then how we're going to end tonight is talking about the *how* of prayer and practicing prayer. Let's read this. Matthew, chapter 6, starting at verse 5:

**"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."**

Here's how we're going to talk about prayer tonight, just this general frame. We're going to talk about prayer as this unthinkable invitation to meet with God, this unthinkable invitation to connect with God, to commune with God, to have fellowship with God, to have a conversation with God. Prayer is just this unthinkable invitation to meet with God.

In a distinctly Christian way, it's praying to our Father in heaven because of the access we have because of Jesus Christ in the Spirit, the means of how we're praying. We're not going to get into all that today, but we're going to emphasize what Jesus emphasizes in this passage about calling him Father and how we can call him Father.

So this unthinkable invitation to connect with God. Let's see what's happening here first. First we want to talk about prayer and about the *what* or the *why* Jesus gives us. It's just that we get to pray to our Father. I don't think anyone is ripping out a pen and taking notes about that. I don't think that's jaw-dropping all of a sudden, but I want us to unpack that and think about the fact that we get to pray to our Father.

Three times Jesus is going to say that. First in verse 6. He says, **"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees..."** Verse 8: **"Do not be like them, for your Father knows..."** *Your Father*. Three times he's telling us about this Father. We have a Father who knows, a Father who sees, a Father.

I love that Jesus is inviting us to go to God Almighty and call him Father. Just think about it. He could have said a lot of other things. He could have said, "Call me Judge," which he is. He could have said, "Call me [fill in the blank]," one thing after another thing after another thing. He says, "Call me Father." I love that, because I don't know how to put my arms around *holy* and I don't know how to put my arms around *mercy* and I don't know how to put my arms around *great*, but I do know how to put my arms around a father.

Jesus is saying that all of those attributes are in the skin of a father. That's what he refers to God most as. He just calls him Father. I love that. How are we able to call him Father? We're able to call him Father because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. Think about that. When we pray and use the phrase we've heard around, "In Jesus' name..." Many times for me that has just been a tag I put on the end of my prayer. "If I say this, whatever I have prayed is going to happen now. But I forgot it, so go back around. In Jesus' name." It becomes a tag I add to my prayer.

Or maybe it's just the reminder to us that someone is about to finish praying. You're praying over the holidays, and someone says, "In Jesus' name," and you know it's over. Then sometimes they circle back up and start praying again, and you're like, "Wait a second. I thought you were done here." Then they say, "In Jesus' name" and close down the prayer. But it's not just this tagline. It's not just an ending. Praying in Jesus' name is we're praying with the authority and confidence of what Jesus has done for us.

We're saying the Scriptures are unfolding. We're preaching about this every week, that Jesus Christ on our behalf has done something so we could have access to God. We don't have to shrink if we have done some things this past weekend that have maybe debited from our account, or we're not coming all boastful with a puffed chest if we've done something to credit our account, if we think we've done something great before God and now we come a little bit stronger. No, we come every single time because of the grace that's ours in Jesus.

When I was asked to preach a few days ago, my first thought was, "Are you kidding me? I can't do that. I've just been like comfort city around the holidays, college football and candy." Not candy, probably. Anyway, college football. I was like, "Are you serious? I don't pray well. How can I preach about that? I'm not where I want to be with prayer." Because in God's grace a few of us have been studying a book by Tim Keller on prayer that I'd highly recommend (it has shaped a lot of what I'm going to say), Daniel 9:18 came to my mind.

Daniel is praying to God, and he says toward the end of his prayer, "God, we're praying these things not because we're righteous, but because you're merciful." That's amazing. Think about that for a second. That was such a relief to me, such an encouragement for me. That's an encouragement for us today through this month and through the year. Why are we praying as a believer? We're praying not because we're great. We're not coming to God because of what we've done. We're coming based on what he has done.

If we think the converse, that's why we don't come to God in prayer. That's why we run *from* him versus *to* him. That's why we think we have to clean ourselves up and then get to God. "If I just do these few things, then maybe I can talk to God again. Maybe I'll circle out of church for a while, but once these things get in line, then I'll come back to God."

The beautiful thing about that prayer that reflects Jesus' name is just saying it's based on his merit, not our merit. I love that. It's based on what he has done, not what I've done. It's based on what Jesus accomplished at the cross. So we come confidently based on what Jesus has done. That's what we're talking about when we're saying, "In Jesus' name," praying in his authority and the confidence of what Christ has done, his finished work.

But not just that. Wayne Grudem says there's a second thing it means to pray in Jesus' name. It also means to pray in alignment with his character. I love alliteration. I hope this is helpful. We're talking about his *cross* and his *character*. We're talking about his *work* and his *will*. We're talking about his *merit*, what he has done on our behalf, and his *mission*.

We're coming in the confidence of what Jesus has done, but then we're aligning ourselves with his character and his will and his work, what he has done and what he's doing. So just saying, "God, we want what you want. We want to be on board with what you're doing. We want your will. Not just bringing our list to you, but we want to get under what you're doing." We're calling him Father because of what Jesus has done, and that revolutionizes the way we pray.

In this passage, Jesus is going to say three times, "And when you pray..." It's this assumed idea that the believer in Christ is about prayer. This mini sermon here is part of a larger sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Some have called it the King's Sermon. I really love that. Some have called this the most majestic sermon ever.

King Jesus is preaching to his disciples. He's painting a picture back there that applies to 2015 here. Back in those rolling hills of Galilee, Jesus is painting this picture for us in 2015 of what a distinctly Christian life looks like. So all of a sudden, not only are we being reminded that we're called to prayer, but it's a good thing to be reminded this isn't the call for the super-spiritual life or the super-Christian life or the "people who have it all together" life.

This is just the normal Christian life, for the person who would say, "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ. This is what's true of me: communion, conversation, and relationship with my Father. How could it not be?" Five times throughout the New Testament there's going to be this admonition: "Be devoted to prayer. Be devoted to prayer. Be devoted to prayer."

Think about Jesus' life and how much he was marked by prayer. That in and of itself is an encouragement and an example for us. Tempted in the wilderness, life of prayer those 40 days. Selecting his 12 disciples, full night of prayer. This is probably one of my favorites. I don't know if you remember when Peter and Jesus are interacting and Jesus is saying to Peter, "You're about to be sifted like wheat." He's about to talk about the temptation and trials he's going to undergo.

Do you remember what Jesus says to him? You can probably guess based on where I'm going. Jesus just says, "Take heart. I've prayed for you." I don't know about you, but there's something in me that has thought in the past, "Is something lacking there?" I know I shouldn't say that, but if I'm just being honest, I'm like, "Can you give him like temptation 101 or something? Can you give him some steps of what you went through in the wilderness?" Jesus thinks it's enough to say, "Take heart. I've prayed for you." That's an encouragement for Peter, a warm blanket for Peter in this moment.

Think about the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' disposition of prayer there. Think about his last words on the cross, prayer. "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." We could go on and on with other examples. It's just this call to prayer. Hopefully, it's going to be a call to prayer that's not just duty and drudgery and not just one more thing on the list but actually delight.

One other thing about this passage that I think is helpful for us to zoom out about is when you think about this passage in light of the Old Testament. They were expecting a coming messiah. They were expecting a coming kingdom. They were expecting something new, someone to come on the scene and do something different, to bring a newness to what they had been experiencing. They're expecting this.

Part of what's happening and being fulfilled in their midst here is Jesus Christ coming not just to give a new list and not just to say, "Do these new actions," but actually to change hearts and desires. That's amazing, because that means for me it's not just about, "Okay, now here are all of the things I have to do for God," but the confidence that because of Jesus he's actually going to change and stir my desires so I wouldn't just do new deeds; I'd have new desires. I wouldn't just do new actions this year; I would have new affections. He would change what I love.

That's part of what he has come to do and wants to do in us this year, to not just give us a new list of, "Here's how you should be devoted to prayer." Yes, we should be devoted to prayer, but in his grace, he's actually going to give us the ability to do that by changing our hearts, by seeing him as more and more lovely as we commune with him in prayer. That's encouraging. That's hope filled.

It's not just me pulling myself up by my bootstraps or whatever it is, but me gazing on Jesus, gazing on Father, gazing on the Spirit, communion and prayer, and he stirs my heart and stirs my affections and changes me, changes all the disordered loves. My loves are all over the place, and he centers and aligns them around himself. So we're coming to our Father. We're praying to our Father.

Look at how the Pharisees see prayer to the Father. They see it as a way to coerce or manipulate God. Look again at verse 5. It says, "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites." Hypocrites have the form but not the substance. They have the style of what this life looks like but not the real substance of this life. **"For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners..."** Why? Here's motive. It's not just about what they do, but here's motive. **"...that they may be seen by others."**

Look down at verse 7. **"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do..."** Why are they doing that? Motive again, the why. **"...for they think that they will be heard for their many words."** The text is revealing the reason they do these things. They think prayer is not about meeting with God; it's about manipulating God. They think prayer is not communing with God; it's about coercing God. They've missed it here. It's about getting God.

If he really is God, if he really is the one who breathed out the stars and created everything we can see and he's the God of the universe and he's reigning and doing just fine today and he's on his throne, what else would we want? If all of those things are true, if all we talk about and preach about of what he has done in Jesus and the hope to come of a day where he's going to wipe away

every tear and this is his plan and this is his character, what else could we want but him? The Scriptures are going to point us to this. The mind that's cleared of illusions really wants God.

The way I've been thinking about that recently is we have a little six-month-old. Little Miah is pretty well natured and we love her and she seems pretty happy, but when she sees her bottle and she's hungry and she doesn't get her bottle or the bottle gets taken away, it's like Miah turns. It's like Dr. Jekyll or whatever Miah would be. It's scary. Miah turns into like scary baby that I don't want to claim as my own, though I love her. She's going to listen to this one day and need counseling. (That's not true.)

She just turns. I could say whatever I want to say in that moment, not just because she can't communicate. I could say, "Hey, don't worry. Grandmother just gave you \$50 to put in your savings account toward college," or I could say, "Don't worry. In like one week you're going to eat solids. Mashed bananas are coming your way," which is true. I could say any of those things, and Miah is just not going to get it, because her reality right there is bottle, bottle, bottle.

For us, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to clear away all other illusions that there's something better than God himself. The amnesia we have... We've forgotten that he's in Jesus. He has answered our greatest need by giving himself to us. This text is calling us to see prayer as prayer to our Father is communion with God, not just coercing God. It's getting God.

Another way to say it is when Caitlin and I were walking into that transplant moment, about a day before, a news team from Dallas came to interview us. They were asking some questions, and they began to hear that at the time we got married, because I needed a kidney and we didn't know Caitlin was a match at that time, my prospect was 10 to 15 years on dialysis. Because of some of the medicines I had taken, another prospect was some predisposition to diseases like cancer and other things like that. Like, "Hey, you have a propensity toward these because of the medicines you've been on."

So this lady is doing the interview, and she keeps stopping and being like, "Now why are you marrying him again?" I'm like, "Lady, I'm right here. This is awkward." "Why are you marrying him again?" I'm like, "Right here." "Why are you marrying him again?" I'm like, "Lady, look at the gun show." (There never was a gun show. I can promise you that.) This lady could not get it in her mind why in the world... "Why are you marrying this guy with this type of baggage, these types of things coming on?"

I think there's something for me about God. There's a disconnect about how we could want just God in and of himself and not just the things God gives, the things he would bring. Like, "What are you going to give me?" God becomes useful to us. Our Father becomes useful to us and not precious and beautiful, a reward like this passage talks about. He's the reward. We get him. That's what could happen.

Tim Keller says it like this from that book. He says when you look at Paul's epistles... The apostle Paul wrote most of the New Testament. When you look at those, his main and central prayer is, "I keep asking that you would know him better." There are no appeals for changes in the circumstances of his people, and their existence was a lot less secure than ours. That's pretty mind blowing.

What that doesn't mean is not to ask for changes of circumstances or to ask for things. That's clear. In the Lord's Prayer, we're about to ask for daily bread. First Timothy 2 says, "Make all types of requests for all types of things, even for the government in that context." But it's just striking that this is what Paul is asking for his closest friends.

He just keeps saying, "I want you to know God better. I want you to enjoy God. I want you to love God better this year. I want all of the illusions and obstacles cleared from what you think is most important this year, and I really want you to know and love God. That's how you were wired. You were wired to know God, created by God and for God. I want you to know God. I want your eyes to be enlightened, that you would see all that you have in God."

At age 62 in Philippians he's saying for himself, "I just want to know God." He hasn't gotten over it. Though he has been along this path for a while at that point in Philippians, he just keeps saying that same request. "I want to know him. I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. I want to know God." That was his plea. "I want to enjoy God. I want to be with God. I want to fellowship with God."

This is the call for us in prayer. Primarily, it's a call to get God. If we just talk about, "I want to be more of a person of prayer," and we stop from saying what prayer gets us to, which is God, we've gone too short. If it's just about we want to have confidence in prayer and not confidence in God, we have gone too short.

The family we're living with right now... We had some smoke damage in our apartment. This family has been really gracious to invite us in. We've been there too long now probably. This family has a little collie named Belle. Belle is spotted black and white, a really cute dog. They've had her for about nine years. Three years ago, something changed for Belle. Three years ago, Belle came in and just started staring at lights. They can't figure it out. It's really strange.

She just stares at lights all day. She looks at lights, and she continues to stare at lights. She probably does this 90 percent of her day. She just locks onto lights, and they can't figure it out. They tried to check with a doctor. Maybe she's having some eye issues. She's not. She still catches a ball amazingly. "Maybe Belle is trying to shepherd or protect," they said. "Maybe she's trying to show you that she's protecting and watching out by staring at lights." That's kind of weird. That was their best idea. It wasn't that. So now they just come to the fact Belle just stares at lights. It's amusing to people who come over.

This is so simplistic, but the point of a light is not to stare *at* the light; it's to see what the light illuminates. Maybe a better way of saying it is the point of a window is not to look *at* the window; it's to look *through* the window. This is our hope and prayer. Village Church, this is our hope this year, that we want more of God. We want to want God. We want to know God, be found in God.

Let's make that our request. Let's beg for that. Let's go to prayer in joy and the confidence we have in Jesus, wanting to know him and meet with him. But the text in the Sermon on the Mount doesn't stop there. It doesn't stop with prayer being an unthinkable invitation to pray to our Father. It moves on to it being an unthinkable invitation to partner with our Father. Look at Matthew 7:7-11:

**"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"**

Reiterating again the fact that you have this perfect heavenly Father, regardless of what our experience is with our earthly father. He's not just a reflection of that father. He's the perfection of that. He's perfect heavenly Father, good heavenly Father. He's just saying, "Ask, seek, knock," because the other unthinkable thing is that God moves as we seek his face. That's crazy. Somehow,

in the mystery of the Godhead, he's reigning over all things, he's in control, he knows the future, he's doing just fine, but he enlists us to be a part of his purposes.

God moves as we seek his face. Partnership. Not a partnership like he's Batman and you're Robin, and if he gets in an issue he's going to need you. Not like that. He doesn't need us. He loves us and he uses us like a good parent or a good older sibling or someone else who would be for us and invite us into what they're doing, even knowing it might go a little slower. He loves us, and he wants to involve us. For some crazy reason, when we pray, he moves. He moves as we pray. He moves as we seek his face.

We see this all throughout the Scriptures. Just think about Acts 9. The church is praying, and a girl gets up from the dead. Acts 12. The church is earnestly praying to God, and Peter is released from prison. Acts 13. Elders are appointed. Acts 16. Paul and Silas are busted out of prison, and the jailer's whole family comes to know Jesus. This is a miraculous thing. Acts 28. People are healed.

That's not just in the Scriptures. We could do this tonight. I won't go Steve Hardin on us tonight, though that would be amazing. But couldn't we just go around and share how God has been good and answered things? We could also mourn together. Let's be real. It's true of my life. We could talk about things we're having to trust him in, that, "You are good, and I'm going to submit myself to your will that you're not answering." We also could celebrate and just go around and talk about story after story after story of what he has done in our lives and how he has answered and what he has done on our behalf.

Just two quick things. I think about the Spanglers. I don't know if you know them. We were praying for them at elder-led prayer. They're an older couple in our church. They're probably in their 60s or 70s. They have gray hair. They're a little beyond most of us, which we love. We need more of that here. He had cancer. We prayed, and the Lord healed him. He's not dealing with that anymore. I saw him this morning at the 9:00. I was like, "What are you doing at the 9:00?" He's like, "Cowboys." I was like, "Okay, that's what you're doing."

I don't know if you know who Annabelle Roos is, but the Roos family has been in the community. People are talking about them. Little Annabelle was born with trisomy 18, this birth defect. Two heart chambers, small lungs, not supposed to live. All of the doctors were saying to abort her months ago. This family decided to keep her.

I'm never going to forget her aunt April Wade's face walking through the doors at Baylor six or so nights ago with tears streaming down her face, and we're not sure what those tears are, and her saying, "Annabelle is alive, and she's beautiful." The dignity and value of life. Now she's six days old. This is not normal. She's still going.

I just want to call you to pray for little Annabelle, to have her on your mind, to pray for her, to ask God to spare her life, to ask God to help her to eat, just little small things they are talking about being equated with our desperation and need for God. They're giving updates it feels like every 10 hours or so, and they're singing "Happy Birthday" to her every day, not taking one thing for granted.

Our God moves as we seek his face. It's this unthinkable invitation this year to pray to our Father, know our Father, love our Father, meet with our Father. It's also this unthinkable invitation to partner with our Father. God moves as we seek his face. Now for some of us here today... I don't know all of our stories, and I don't know what the rub with prayer would be. For some of us, it's not, "God is distant" or "God is removed" or "He doesn't care" or "Does he really exist?" Or "Does he really answer prayer?"

For some of us, it's just the practicality of, "What does it look like to pray?" So I just want us to walk through the Lord's Prayer in these closing moments. Then we're going to spend time together praying it. Look with me again at Matthew 6. We're going to read this last part together, starting in verse 9. Jesus says:

**"Pray then like this: 'Our Father 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 lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'"**

This prayer could be looked at in a variety of different ways. We could look at it in the *ACTS* acronym, as has been done at times: *adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication*. The way I want to look at it today is in the frame of *upward prayer*, seeing his greatness, acknowledging his greatness; *inward prayer*, confessing our need; and then *outward prayer*, asking him to move.

Just briefly, we start with, "Our Father in heaven." Jesus is telling us, "Don't jump right into talking with God, but remember your situation. Realize your standing with God." Luther says in all of our use of it, his name is to be kept holy and to ask God to implant in our hearts a comforting trust in his

fatherly love. Calvin says, "By the great sweetness of this name [Father] he frees us from all distrust."

"Hallowed be your name." We're just saying a heart of grateful joy, wanting his name to be seen as great everywhere. He is great. "God, show yourself to be great." He is holy. "God, show yourself to be holy." He is good. "God, show yourself to be good." "Your kingdom come." So yeah, he's reigning. Augustine says God is reigning now, but it's possible to refuse his rule. Just like light is absent to those who don't open their eyes, it's possible to refuse his rule even though he's reigning now.

The prayer is, "God, would you extend your rule over every part of our lives, over my life, over my family's life, over our neighborhood's life?" It's also just that call we talked about last time with this second advent, that Jesus came once as a lamb, and he's coming again as a lion. We're pleading for him to move, wanting to see him move, wanting to see his kingdom come in the fullness of every single aspect, the day we're going to celebrate, where there's no more war, no more death, no more tears, and we're fully known by God, fully knowing God.

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." If we can't say this in a certain reality of our lives, we won't have peace. We'll try to control environments and control people and we'll want to enact revenge and repay evil for evil, and we won't be able to have peace even with our feelings and our circumstances. We'll be trying to control, because we can't say, "Thy will be done" in a certain area. "Thy will be done." It's this prayer of Jesus, saying, "Father, not what I want, but what you want. Father, let this cup pass from me. I'm going to ask that, but at the end of the day, your will be done."

That's a summary of this upward prayer. We're beginning about God. We're looking to God and saying, "We're not going to let our own needs and issues dominate the prayer. We're not just coming to get something." What father or mother would want that from their children? We're not just coming to get something. We're letting the frame be who he is, what he has done, and us being on his agenda.

Then we go into inward prayer. Confess your need. He says, "Give us this day our daily bread." We're talking about necessities over luxuries. We've already talked about God as the true riches and reward, and this passage is the true end. This is just Jesus talking about our needs here. We're expecting him to answer, but we're grounded in the fact he's good and he knows what he's doing.

"Forgive us our debts as we've forgiven our debtors." There's something in us, this idea of revenge or enacting justice in our own means on people, this prideful type of idea that we're better than. Listen to what Martin Luther says about what this petition does. "If anyone insists on his own goodness and despises others...let him look into himself when this petition confronts him. He will find he is no better than others and that in the presence of God everyone must duck his head and come into the joy of forgiveness only through the low door of humility."

Finally, outward prayer. We're asking him to move. "Lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil." Throughout church history, that "Lead us not to temptation" was seen as the "jacked-upness" or the evil inside of us, but "Deliver us from evil" is the evil outside of us. So we're praying against our own besetting sin here. It's our own temptation. Yes, suffering happens. Yes, trials happen. But praying against us being led into that. Then we're praying for protection from evils outside of us.

This is how this prayer is structured. When I think about it ending that way, I can't help but think about the merciful Savior we sang about earlier. I can't help but think about his temptation, how he was tried, and I can't help but think about his moment on the cross. I want us to see Jesus and see his prayer unanswered. Isn't that crazy? To see his prayer unanswered, knowing with confidence we come before God and now have access to God. His prayer was unanswered, and we have access to God.

Jesus experienced darkness so we might know the light of our heavenly Father. Jesus experienced hostility and adversity there so we might have peace with God. Jesus gets what was due us so we might get what was due him. That's unthinkable. It's amazing. Then we come with confidence and joy before our Father in heaven.

When we're talking about outward prayer this month, when we're talking about racial reconciliation, just pleading for that in our city and our country, when we're talking about right to life and pleading for the unborn, when we're talking about the nations and the hope of Jesus being known there, because he's the joy of the nations...

When we think about those things, I can't help but think about this analogy that through the Holocaust, some churches...not all churches, but some churches...began to sing louder. They began to actually sing louder as the trains went by. It's a heartbreaking analogy. That we wouldn't be that. Oh, that we'd be a church that runs to our Father joyfully and expectantly this month, this year, and runs to prayer, believing he's going to move on our behalf and that we could actually have a place in

these issues, that we could actually have a place because of prayer and because of action in changing some of these things for the good.

Here's how we're going to close. I want us to spend a few minutes praying together. I'd love us to group up into groups of two or three. If you're here tonight and you're like, "Oh, are you serious? He's going to make us do that in groups?" let me give you a tip. All you have to do is drop your head and act like you're praying, and everyone is going to think, "Man, they're really spiritual," and they're not going to bother you. You're going to be good. You're going to be in your own little world. So do that. It's going to be fine. Don't everyone do that. That would be strange. But just do that. It's going to be totally cool. That's a little tip for these prayer things.

Groups of two or three. I want us to call on the Lord together for these needs. We're going to start with upward prayer, just acknowledging his greatness. So let's just go there. You don't have to say these words, per se, but let's just go there, praising him for being our Father, acknowledging his greatness, begging for his kingdom. Let's start there in upward prayer in your groups or just to yourself. Let's begin to pray together. Then I'll transition us in a minute.

Let's keep praying. We're going to transition to inward prayer, just confessing our need, putting that in your own words, just confessing our needs and our need before God. Let's transition to outward prayer, just asking him to move. You can put that in your own words. Ask him to move in your own heart, in your family, your city, your neighborhood, our world.

Father, we thank you for this time. We thank you that we can come to you as Father. You are a good Father. Perfect wisdom. You know what's best. You're good. You do what's best. You're great. You're able to do what's best. We just thank you. We thank you for a coming kingdom. We thank you for a long-awaited Messiah and a long-awaited kingdom, that it's true in Jesus Christ. The very things that intrinsically we hope and we need. We thank you that our needs are met in you. We confess we're more needy for you than we know. Our prayer life reflects that.

Lord, we confess the needs of our city. We think about things like poverty, leading the country with a 40 percent rate. I think about racial reconciliation. I think about sex trafficking. I think about the need for adoption. We could go on and on and on. The needs of our city. There are eternal realities at stake for our own souls, for our city. I just pray you'd wake us up to those things and there would be a joy in praying to you, Father, and a joy in partnering with you this year.

I just pray your will would be done, that we'd align ourselves with that, that we'd be like your Son and say, "What am I going to say? Am I going to say, 'Save me from this hour'? No, it's for this hour I came, so glorify your name." Your will be done, Father. We're thankful for you. We're thankful for Jesus. We do pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

© 2015 The Village Church