

Women's Bible Study – Winter/Spring 2010
The Heart's Cry: A Look at Heartfelt Prayer
February 24, 2010
The Heart's Cry to a Loving Father Part 1
Matthew 6: 5-13
Jann Wright



As a little girl, I grew up attending a small Presbyterian Church in Kentucky founded in 1806. When I say small, I mean small; high attendance Sunday for us was 50 people. The average age of those attending was about 60. As a result there were very few children in the church; however, this worked mightily to my advantage because in my early teens I got to attend adult Sunday School classes and interact with lots of adults.

One of my favorite memories from that dear place where I first met Jesus was the consistent practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer every Sunday. The pastor would pray for the various needs of the congregation and then he would always end by inviting us to pray as Jesus taught his disciples to pray. As the years went by and our family faced difficult trials, we were held up in public prayer by those dear members. I remember thinking, the entire world may be crashing down around me, but God is still dependable. The Lord's Prayer recited in that way every Sunday, through joy and sadness, was part of how I learned about the love and faithfulness of my Heavenly Father.

Our passage this morning is from the book of Matthew. Matthew 6:9-13 is the Lord's Prayer. This passage is part of a larger segment that we recognize as the Sermon on the Mount. Actually most of this information scholars believe was probably repeated at various times in Jesus' Ministry because it was central to his teachings. The instructions given in the Sermon on the Mount including these instructions on prayer were targeted to believers, note that Jesus described them by saying, "You are the Salt of the Earth" and "You are the Light of the World". These instructions were for those who had already made a commitment to follow God and lead a life consistent with His commands.

Scripture Passage

Let's begin our study of the Lord's Prayer by first looking at the verses which immediately precede it because here we are given some basic instructions by Jesus on prayer. Matthew 6:5-8. ⁵ "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Corruptions of Prayer

Prayer had been a part of Jewish life for centuries. God had entrusted His chosen people with His very words. He had spoken directly to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob. We have the Biblical record of the prayers of the prophets like Daniel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. We have prayers from Kings like David, Solomon, and Hezekiah. We have prayers by faithful women like: Hannah and Mary the Mother of Jesus. Yet, despite the presence of specific examples and a lengthy history of communication with God, much of the prayer life of the Jewish people over time had been corrupted. They didn't plan it that way, they set up some customs and practices that were intended for good, but gradually the authenticity of their prayer life was eroded. Their prayers had been corrupted in two basic ways:

First, their attitudes and motivation toward prayer had become corrupt. They had exchanged an audience with God for an audience with men. That is why the hypocrites, as Jesus charged them, were praying standing in the synagogues and on the street corners. You see it wasn't just that they happened to be in these places and prayer flowed naturally from their respective ministries, it was that they orchestrated the circumstances so that they would have an audience for their piety.

Consider the example of praying at the street corner. There is nothing wrong with stopping to pray at a street corner. The Jews, in fact, at specific times of the day were to stop and pray regardless of their location. The problem is that the word used for street here is not the common narrow street, but the word for a wide, major street, an intersection actually. That was a place where a crowd was most likely to gather. The implication here is not that the hypocrites happened to be at this place at the time of prayer, but rather that they planned their route and day so that they could be at a large intersection at the time for prayer so they could be observed by a large crowd.¹ Their attitude and the motive for prayer had been corrupted.

It is not wrong to pray in public. There are many examples of public prayer in the Bible. One is by King Solomon on the grand occasion of the dedication of the Temple. I will read just a brief excerpt from 1 Kings Chapter 8.

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; ²³ and he said: "Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts. (skipping to verse 28)

²⁸ Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O Lord my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: ²⁹ that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.

¹ MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7. Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. 1985. Page 365.

It is not wrong to pray in public. There are appropriate times for public corporate prayer like in the worship service or even as we open our time together in Women's Bible Study. There are times that circumstances find us individually praying in a public place.

However, it is wrong to bring a corrupted attitude and motive to our prayers. It is wrong to exchange an audience with God for an audience with men. The hypocrites were looking for a special reward from God; but the only reward they were going to get was the one they were currently receiving, the praise of men.

Prayer was not designed as a way to talk to other people, but a way to talk to God. Our reward is not the praise of men, but the praise of God as we strive to hear the words, "Well-done my good and faithful servant." (Matthew 25:21)

The Remedy

Jesus provides a remedy for this corrupt prayer practice. He says, ⁶ **But when you pray . . .** notice we are expected to pray. It is not an optional peripheral exercise to our faith, it is central. So if you have sort of been on the outside of prayer looking in, watching others pray, listening to lectures on prayer; it is time for you to get into the game. It is time for you to develop your own habit of prayer. If you have had a lifelong habit of prayer I encourage you to look more closely at areas in which you could improve.

⁶ **But when you pray go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.**

When we pray, we are to seek out a place protected from these temptations, from the distraction to pray to an audience of men, rather than to God. Jesus said, "When you pray go into your room". The word Jesus uses here for room is (tameion) and it means an inner room. It could be any sort of small room, even a storage closet. These types of rooms were often secret in Jesus' day and used to store valuables. The idea is to go to a place where you can focus on God, where you are not tempted to craft your words for anyone except God, a place where you can pour out your heart and really talk to God.

One of my favorite examples of this kind of prayer is also from the life of Solomon. Solomon as King of Israel had many responsibilities. He had political responsibilities, governing responsibilities, but also spiritual responsibilities. One of those was leading the nation in public prayer as he did the dedication of the Temple.

But Solomon also needed times of private prayer where he could focus on God without the temptation to craft his words for his listeners. I want to read you an example of one of these prayers at the very beginning of his reign. He was about 18 years old.

1 Kings 3:6-9

⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" ⁶And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

⁷Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. ⁹Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

That is A Heart's Cry to a Loving Father. Can't you just picture Solomon as a very young man with the weight of the world on his shoulders pouring out his heart to God, confessing that he does not have the skills or the experience to govern the people of God? All of us need a place and a time for private prayer in our lives.

The second corruption of prayer by the hypocrites was the content of their prayers. They didn't have much content. In fact, their prayers more closely resembled the worship of the pagans than communication with the living God. Jesus said, ⁷And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. A vivid example of this contrast between the worship of pagans and communication with the living God is found in the story of Elijah. Let's turn and look at 1 Kings Chapter 18. ²¹And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

Elijah proposed a contest. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were to choose a bull, and prepare it on the altar. They would then call on the names of their gods and Elijah would call on the name of the Lord and the God who answered by fire would be recognized as God. " So all the people answered and said, "It is well spoken."

²⁵Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it." ²⁶So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!" But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made. ²⁷And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. ²⁹And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

³⁶And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. ³⁷Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again." ³⁸Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. ³⁹Now when

all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

We don't have to babble on and on like the pagans at Mount Carmel. We don't have to cut ourselves or draw blood to get God's attention. Their God wasn't real he was a made up, imaginary god, worse he was a mask for Satan. We are not to be like the pagans.

The Remedy

Jesus offers us a remedy as well for this corruption as well. The remedy is for us to remember who Our Father is and His nature. Jesus said, ⁸ "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

When my daughter Katie was around three years old, I vividly remember driving with her in the car. Katie has always asked questions seemingly beyond her age, but on this particular day it was more taxing than usual. She began with: "Do we have gas in the car?" (Mind you I was not in the habit of running out of gas). So I absently assured her that yes, there was gas in the car.

She then wanted to know if the oil had recently been changed. Then she proceeded to request an explanation on the intricacies of our car insurance policy, and the loan status on the vehicle. I don't know, maybe she had seen too many commercials for Geico or something.

However, what began as a funny exchange quickly switched in my mind. I began to think this child thinks I am an idiot. This child thinks I don't understand how to provide a very basic need in her life of getting safely from one place to the next in a car.

As the years have gone by and the girls have grown older, I find I still have that little hot button which sometimes is pushed rather easily. For example, when I am in the middle of making four lunches at 6:30 a.m. and one child rushes through the kitchen calling over her shoulder, "Mom I need a lunch today". I answer calmly, "Yes, I know.", but I am really thinking, "Yes, I know that is why I am standing here making them as I have consistently for the past ten years (or so depending on the age of the child). Or Mom, I need money for the field trip today, "Yes, I know it is on the table."

Now, I don't want to create the impression that I can anticipate every need of our children or that I always get things done without reminders, because I don't. But, I am amazed how many times they ask me to do something that I am already in the process of completing for them. Sometimes that hurts my feeling because I begin to think that they have no trust in my abilities or are not giving me any credit for past performance.

But, don't we do the same thing. We forget who God is and what he has done for his people for centuries and what he has done for us throughout our lives. I wonder if it hurts the heart of God when his children make requests that imply that he is not aware of their needs or worse He doesn't care for their needs. Jesus reminds us that God is our loving Father and he knows our needs even before we ask for them.

And all of those lessons are useful to ponder as we prepare our minds and hearts to listen as Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. I have to echo Michelle's sentiments of a few weeks ago, that sometimes the two of us look at some of these topics and think, who am I to be teaching on such this topic?

Much has been preached on the Lord's Prayer, much has been written, and much has been pondered through the ages. I am not foolish enough to think that I can actually "teach" something profound on the Lord's Prayer. I come to you, also as a fellow student. What I offer to you this morning/evening are my reflections from praying, reading, and meditating on this passage. The Lord's Prayer is going to be taught in two separate lectures. I provided an introduction and then will go through with you the first half of the Lord's Prayer. Next week, Gretchen will teach the second half of the prayer and do a wrap up to answer some overall questions.

Lord's Prayer

I will be reading from the New King James Version, because it is closer to what I learned as a child.

⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

I have broken this passage into five phrases for us to think about. They are first,

Our Father

First, we are to pray to God and God alone. No one else is worthy of our prayers, not even the angels in heaven. We are to focus on God Alone. We are to focus on His Nature and His Glory. Only when we begin our prayers by focusing on God can we gain some perspective on our needs and requests. Only then can we really appreciate that His nature is such that he is able and willing to help us in our daily lives and in the trials we face.

We are to address God, as our Father. We are in an intimate and loving relationship with God. He is our Father. Each of us has or has had earthly Fathers, some were very good and Godly men and some were not.

Our Earthly Godly Fathers while not perfect still gave each of us brief glimpses of the attributes of our Heavenly Father. For a long time I did not think my father had much to offer in this area. He didn't live up to the ideal I had constructed, or perhaps it was the ideal that my college professors suggested of what quality family dynamics should be. But as I got older, and realized parenting was not quite as easy to carry out as it is to criticize, I found many attributes of God in my father that I had overlooked. I hope you also will find in your Fathers glimpses of your Heavenly Father.

Some of you may not have had Godly Fathers, perhaps you even had a very ungodly father, and I want to say to you, I am sorry. I am sorry that your Earthly Father did not provide for you a helpful illustration for God as a Loving Father.

However, even under the worst of circumstances, we can grasp the difference between a good example and a bad example. God is Our Father. He is perfect. He is loving, concerned about every detail in our lives, and knows our needs even before we ask. He is approachable. We can be confident in His love and forgiveness.

The plural pronoun "our" reminds us that while God is concerned about each of us as individuals, He is concerned about more than just each of us as individuals. When I am in a difficult situation with another believer or even a conflict I find it helpful to think about this.

In large families there are many competing demands to be managed. I am finding this at times to be particularly challenging as Scotty age 7 would like his mother to read him his bedtime story, while one teenage daughter would like to study with her friends, another has a basketball game, and yet another would like to go to the grocery store to purchase treats for school the next day. A wise parent must look at the needs of all concerned and teach them to defer to one another and learn that they will not always get everything they want exactly when they want it. Sometimes I think we are disappointed with God without realizing that our prayer, answered No, may actually be the "yes" answer for another person. God is not just concerned about my needs or my wants, but all of us belong to a large family and God is the Father to all of us and is concerned about all of us.

Our Father in Heaven

God is in Heaven and we are on the Earth. There is a difference between us. There is a difference in our perspective. We are bound by time and space He is not. We are limited in what we can see and understand, He is not. Our resources are limited, His are infinite. We are sinful, He is perfect and Holy. God is in Heaven, we are on the Earth and prayer is the communication method God has provided to span this distance.

Hallowed Be Your Name

Although we have an intimate relationship with God as our Father, we do not want to drift into a casual relationship with the Sovereign of the Universe simply incorporating him into our lives when we feel like it. God is our King, Our Lord, and Our Savior. He is worthy of all our respect and honor.

The word used here for hallowed means to make holy. We as Christians are in the process of being *made* holy, but God *is* holy. When we pray to hallow his name we are praying that all of the sum total of his attributes of holiness will be recognized and properly attributed to Him.²

As we pray the Lord's Prayer particularly "Hallowed Be Your Name", we need to think about our role in hallowing or making holy God's name. Do we in our conversations attribute proper respect and reverence to God? Do we take the name of the Lord in vain? If so, what does that say about our true understanding of the holiness of God? By our everyday actions do we provide others' with a glimpse of the attributes of our Holy God so that they may also understand Him as holy? Do we show respect and honor for the name of God by the music we listen to, the magazines we read, the sites we surf on the internet, or the books we read? When we pray both privately and publicly do we with our words, actions, and attitudes honor the holy name of God.

Your Kingdom Come

What is the Kingdom of God? We know it was a subject that was very close to Jesus' heart because he spoke of it a great deal. Pastor John Steer preached on this phrase just a few weeks ago. In that sermon he noted, Jesus described the Kingdom of God as a precious pearl. It is worth selling all you have to obtain, because it is so valuable. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It may be small now, but it is growing bigger and bigger. The kingdom of God is like yeast. It works silently in a lump of dough, but changes the dough forever.³

Additionally,¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15).

²⁵ "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:15)

⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' (Luke 10:9)

² MacArthur, John. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1-7. Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. 1985. Page 378.

³ Steer, C. John. Praying for God's Kingdom to Come and His Will Be Done in 2010. January 2&3, 2010. Available at autumnridgechurch.org.

²⁰ Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

The Kingdom of God as you may have realized from those verses has two dimensions. The Kingdom of God has a future Eternal Dimension. And a present dimension in which we see varying elements of God's attributes like: compassion, justice, sovereignty, peace and love being displayed by his followers in pockets throughout the world. So when we pray, "Your Kingdom Come" we are praying for the 2nd Coming of Christ to the earth to establish His Kingdom. We are also praying that the attributes of that Glorious Kingdom will be manifested on Earth in brilliant flashes of hope that will draw others to God. 1 Corinthians 4:20 says, **20** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. The evidence that we possess the Kingdom of God, or God's presence, within us is demonstrated by the Holy Spirit's power. That power is what enables us to serve, to give, and to demonstrate the attributes of God.

You may be looking around saying what can I possibly do to help the kingdom of God come both in the future sense and in the present sense? First, we pray. We pray just like Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. Next, we listen and we look. We listen for God to provide opportunities in which we can join him in His glorious work on this Earth.

We have many opportunities right here at this church. One is A Call to Serve or A.C.T.S. These are opportunities right in our own neighborhood to serve others as the Church of Jesus Christ. Perhaps you remember a few weeks ago when Dan Farm mentioned our partnership with two local schools. By working with other community partners we will be providing backpacks with food for the weekends for children and their families who have no food outside of what is provided at school and we will provide mentoring and homework help for students who need it. We will provide needed basic clothing for children, especially those who lack adequate winter gear. We also have opportunities to serve and to give to our Bold Initiatives: the Compassion Evangelic Hospital, the Center here at Autumn Ridge, and Next Chapter Ministries.

Maybe as you listen to all those needs and initiatives you think, I can't do all of that, I can't meet the needs of all of those people; I can barely meet my own. But you see that is the beauty of the church. As individuals we don't have to do it all; but as the body of Christ we each come together doing the small pieces that we can and the result is something only God can weave together. There is a meeting on Thursday night for those who would like more information about the A.C.T.S. 4 Kids ministry which is the partnership program with neighborhood schools that I just mentioned. Details are on your announcement page. I encourage you to go and hear more information. If you are unable to go, but are still interested there is a sign up in the lobby. We can each do a little piece. Some of you have the time and resources to take on major leadership roles in an effort like this one, but I encourage you not to shy away from these

opportunities if you only have time and resources for a small portion of the project. Everyone can do something.

If you were here at worship on Saturday Night or Sunday you should have received a white grocery bag. We are supporting In His Name Food Distribution by filling the bags and bringing them back next week. Again this is a small project that we can each do. Maybe a jar of peanut butter, a few boxes of cereal, and a few canned goods don't sound like much; but if every one of us brought a bag back next week the impact would be significant in this community.

If you are a member of another church here this morning/evening and I know we have at least 14 churches represented at Women's Bible Study, I encourage you to participate as well because this is not just an Autumn Ridge Church Program this is an opportunity for us as the body of Jesus Christ to act as we pray Your Kingdom Come.

Your Will Be Done on Earth as It is in Heaven

The final segment of the Lord's Prayer that we will be looking at this morning/evening is Your Will Be Done on Earth as It is in Heaven. How is God's work done in Heaven? Again I am simply going to use the answer that Pastor Steer provided to us a few weeks ago in his sermon. "God's Will in Heaven is done: willingly, continually, completely and quickly".⁴ May we carry out God's will in that way as well. This morning to end our time together, I would like all of you to stand as we recite the Lord's Prayer together. I realize you may have learned it in many different translations, but we will pray the one on the screen. Then you will be dismissed to your small groups.

⁹ . . . Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

⁴ Steer, C. John. Praying for God's Kingdom to Come and His Will Be Done in 2010. January 2&3, 2010. Available at autumnridgechurch.org.