



Think Before You Pray

Matthew 6:9

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We continue a study in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6. It's always a joy to stand up and preach a passage that has been at work in your own heart and that's certainly the case for me today, as we are going to look and introduce the whole matter of Jesus' teaching on prayer – what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, a matter that has received extensive exposition throughout the centuries of church history and you feel a little bit humbled to try to speak with that history behind you. But that's what the Lord has called us to do and I'm glad for the opportunity to do it.

During the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus gives a masterful explanation on the implications of repentance. He started His public ministry in Matthew 4:17, a summary statement of His opening salvo in His preaching, when Matthew records Him as saying:

Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Then in Matthew 5:3, Jesus says:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" links repentance to everything that follows in these next three chapters. And as you look at the broad sweep of what Jesus says in this wonderful sermon, what He is saying is that when someone has truly repented of his sins and put his faith in Christ, increasing practical righteousness will be the mark of his life. It's the same kind of message that the apostle John gave in 1 John, particularly in chapter 3.

I think it would be fair to say that righteousness is the dominant theme in the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon presupposes a repentant heart and simply shows the life that flows from that new heart. When God saved you – when He saves anyone – He truly saves them by the power of his Spirit. He gives that person a new heart and that new heart desires to conform itself to the person of Christ. We understand there is a progressive element to sanctification, there is an element of growth, but right from the start, the seed is planted in the heart of the person and he says, "Now I want to be righteous; now I want to become like my Savior."

In a positive sense, that person desires to conform himself to the person of Christ and be like Him in his character. In a negative sense, the true Christian wants to avoid sin in every form. It is all about living out practical righteousness, drawing closer to the God who saved you and having your character conformed to His likeness. This is basic. And you would expect something basic as Jesus opens up His public ministry and explains the significance of what “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” is.

I want you to see very briefly how dominant this theme of righteousness is throughout this sermon. Starting in Matthew 5:6, Jesus says:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they – the language is emphatic: they and they alone – will be satisfied.

Verse 20 of the same chapter, Jesus says to His disciples:

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Chapter 6:1 – here talking about the daily practice of righteousness and the spiritual disciplines, Jesus says:

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

In chapter 6:33, Jesus kind of pulls it all together in terms of how this righteousness is to be the priority of your life – He says:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Righteousness is the key theme at every key juncture of the passage as Jesus transfers from one section to another. He is always emphasizing this theme of righteousness. This is what is to be true of all of you who name the name of Christ. The surpassing authority of this sermon, the invasive and pervasive nature of what it means for every aspect of your life, is absolutely breathtaking.

That theme, and the broad scope of it, is reinforced as you understand the broad sections of the Sermon on the Mount. In the first 12 verses of this chapter, Jesus deals with righteousness in your inward character. In verses 13-16, He deals with your righteousness in relationship to the world around you. In verses 17-48, righteousness is expressed in a heart-felt obedience to the law of God. In chapter 6, it is righteousness in daily spiritual life. And in chapter 7, it is righteousness in relationship to future judgment.

Righteousness, righteousness, righteousness is the theme. That theme that includes proper theological understanding but is not limited to it. It's a righteousness of theology and scripture that transforms you. Head knowledge is not enough.

And so as we come now to Matthew chapter 6 – with that little bit of context set in your mind – we come to this familiar passage beginning in verse 9, commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. Some people balk at that name because Jesus Himself couldn't have prayed every element of this prayer – Jesus had no sin to confess, for example. But it is the prayer that the Lord taught to His disciples, and that's why it is called the Lord's Prayer.

As we come to this prayer, what you have to see and understand to really get the full impact of it is that this prayer is part of a greater context of the righteous life that should belong to those who are in Christ. Jesus had been dealing with prayer some in verses 5-8. Look at verse 5 with me in chapter 6. He says, "When you pray." He introduces this whole element of your prayer life.

And if you are like most of us – certainly if you are like me – when you start to wed the themes of righteousness to your prayer life, and the surpassing greatness of what prayer should be with what your actual practice of it is, you come with a measure of fear and trembling. You feel conviction on it because you realize that your prayer life falls short. Jesus understood that and Jesus gives us this teaching to help us to pray in a way that would be worthy of the righteousness of God Himself.

In those verses 5-8, summarizing very briefly, Jesus told His disciples, "Don't pray like the Pharisees do. Don't pray like these people who stand out on street corners and do all of their praying so it calls attention to themselves." He says don't do that – don't pray like those hypocrites who simply want the praise of men. He says when it comes to your personal righteousness, when it comes to the way that you live out the spiritual disciplines, He says, "Forget about what the praise of men is; you just be righteous in your own prayer closet before God and trust Him to reward you."

He goes on in verses 7-9 and He says also, "Don't pray like Gentiles do" – these people who just mindlessly repeat the same words over and over, thinking that the sheer volume of their prayers can somehow move the finger of omnipotence to grant their request. Many words are not the key to good prayer.

Let me say that again, and let me tell you why I emphasize it. I think the tendency is among evangelicals, among well-intended Christians who are not really thinking all the way through what they need to be thinking about – when it comes to improving your prayer life, they will start by saying you need to pray more. It is a good thing to pray longer, but that's not where you start. If you are praying badly, it doesn't help to pray twice as long.

No, what you want to do if you are serious about your walk with Christ, if you are serious about living out a righteous life in the presence of God, you don't want to start your

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thinking saying, “I’ve got to pray longer.” You want to say, “I need to pray *better*.” And Jesus teaches us that – that’s why He gives us this prayer beginning in verse 9. He looks at His disciples and He says, “The Pharisees and the Gentiles – they pray that way.” He comes to you today, if you are here in Christ, and He says, “No – by sharp contrast, you pray this way—you pray differently because you belong to the kingdom of God.”

Let’s read the passage, verses 9-13, very quickly to get it in our minds and to start to embrace the teaching that the Lord has for us here. He says in verse 9:

Pray then in this way – since you are not supposed to pray like Pharisees and Gentiles, then pray this way – Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.]

Now, having in mind the fact that the whole sermon deals with the matter of righteousness, chapter 6 dealing with righteousness in the spiritual disciplines in the more narrow sense, you can see where the context fits with this prayer, as He deals with the specific element of prayer. There is a whole context of what Jesus is saying here. He didn’t just start talking about prayer out of thin air.

And so, this is the righteous way to pray and this righteous praying is part of the overall righteous life of the true Christian. What does righteous prayer look like? What is it that your heart should aspire after when you are on your knees before God? That’s the question.

Now let me start with a couple of well-known general observations before we get into the meat of what I have to say today. Notice how the first half of this prayer is entirely devoted to the interest of God Himself: “Father, let Your name be magnified; let Your will be done; Your kingdom come.” The supremacy of God in the universe, the greatness of His exalted character, means that His priorities should be your first concern in prayer.

As the pattern of your life, as the mark toward which you continually should be heading in your prayer life, the priorities of God’s kingdom and the exaltation of His name should ever be first on your lips. That alone is conviction enough to carry us for a week or two probably.

The second half of this prayer is oriented toward human needs: our daily bread, our need for forgiveness, our need for spiritual protection from temptation – all of those vital issues to living out daily life. Physical provision, spiritual provision – without it we could not be sustained for even a moment. And yet Jesus teaches us to put that in second place. Even the necessities of your life are subordinated to the greater supremacy of the magnification of the name of God and the furtherance of His purposes – that’s where you start when you think about praying.

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Jesus teaches us to express our needs only after – get this – only after you have squarely put the glory of God first in your affections. We need this teaching to change us; we need this to transform us on our knees, and it will if you embrace it. The sad truth of this is that most of us, including your speaker this morning, are far too concerned with what we want and with what we have to say in prayer. And that’s got to change, beloved – that’s not righteous.

That’s not right that God would give us the gift of prayer and that we would take that and twist it as a means to accomplish everything that we want to the exclusion of a concentration on who He is and the magnification of His name – that’s not right; that is not righteous. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this in this connection:

We tend to be so self-centered in our prayers that when we drop on our knees before God, we think only about ourselves and our troubles and perplexities. We start talking about them at once and of course, nothing happens. That is not the way to approach God. We must pause before we speak in prayer.

Stated differently, you need to think before you open your mouth in prayer. You need to stop yourself – take your right hand as you are getting ready to pray and simply put it over your lips, and hold it there until you have thought through who it is you are speaking to.

Jesus’ pattern for prayer teaches us to be much more thoughtful, purposeful, and God-centered in our praying even when – and get this; this is where I really want you to understand this, that God-centered approach – even when you are under the press of circumstances that threaten to undo you. Especially then, especially when the fire is hot at your feet, especially when the threat is great to your well-being – that is when you must stop and honor God for the inherent worth of His great character.

I want to show you an illustration of what I am talking about in the Old Testament. Turn back to the book of Isaiah in chapter 36 and 37. We will only be here very briefly, but hopefully long enough to make the point. Isaiah 36 and 37 – in these chapters, King Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah at that time, was under a serious threat.

Sennacherib, the king of Assyria had been invading countries that surrounded Judah, and the countries had been falling like dominos before his tyrannical hand. As we come into this particular section, cities in Judah had also fallen. The threat to the kingdom was great, and now Sennacherib through his representatives were at the walls of Jerusalem demanding surrender, demanding capitulation.

And here were these representatives of Sennacherib, the representatives of mighty Assyria, who had so recently had a string of unchallenged military conquests, and Hezekiah is trembling inside the walls of the city without the power to respond to them in a military fashion. I want you to see the threats from this powerful nation that were

bearing down upon his mind – in chapter 36, verse 18, Assyria’s representatives say to the people of the land:

Beware that Hezekiah does not mislead you, saying, “The Lord will deliver us.” Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arphad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? And when have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the Lord would deliver Jerusalem from my hand?

In chapter 37, verse 11, it says that the report was to be given to Hezekiah:

Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all of the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared?

Here is this king, godly king, responsible for protection of his nation, without adequate resources to respond to the threat that is before him. And the powerful argument that is being laid at his feet is that “You are in the same position as all the kings that have gone before you that have already been conquered. They cried out to their gods and I conquered them, one right after another. They fell like dominos before me and you are just next on the list. What’s going to be any different about you? Come out and surrender and let’s put an end to this” – enormous propaganda pressure upon Hezekiah.

And from all appearances, national survival was at stake, Hezekiah under tremendous threat. And here is what I want you to see – chapter 37, verse 15:

Hezekiah prayed to the Lord saying, “O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.”

Notice, beloved, how he starts out: He does not start out whining about his problems, even though his problems were great. He sets all of it aside in his mind; he pushes it all out of the way to focus even for a short while on the greatness of the character of God.

Verse 17:

Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see...

Only now does he begin to bring his request before Him.

Incline Your ear... and listen to all the words of Sennacherib, who sent them to reproach the living God. Truly, O Lord, the kings of Assyria have devastated all the countries and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them.

Now comes his request; only now comes his real request – verse 20:

Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, Lord, are God.

And verse 36, skipping over a lot of important details obviously, you see how God responded to that prayer of Hezekiah and proved the majesty of His name to Sennacherib and all of Assyria:

Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead.

And the supremacy of God had been vindicated in response to a prayer that put Him first, that exalted His name before the request ever crossed Hezekiah's lips.

That's how, beloved, a righteous man prays under pressure. The character of God controls his praying, not the press of immediate circumstances. It would have been easy for Hezekiah to run in and say, "Oh, Lord, You've got to help us now!" and just bypass the majesty of the One to whom he was speaking. You can't pray that way, beloved. You have to acknowledge the grandeur of who you are speaking to first. If you die while you are expressing His praise, that's okay, because you would die with heart affections set with the priorities where they need to be.

And so you, as a righteous man, as a righteous woman, how do you pray righteously? You subordinate your concerns to the glory and character of God – that's what Jesus is teaching us here.

Now with that said – in principle, I understand, it is not that hard to understand – the spiritual battle for you and for me is to fight this and make that happen in reality in our own prayer life. You face the same temptation I do. You want to use prayer to manipulate your circumstances so things go the way you want them to go. When you start out praying that way, that's not right. Beloved, I say it in love, I say it as one chastened by this very passage, but that's not right. The righteous man gives priority to the exaltation of God.

John Stott said it this way – he said:

It is always wise before we pray to spend time deliberately recalling who God is. Only then shall we come to our loving Father in heaven with appropriate humility, devotion, and confidence.

Beloved, when you think about praying righteously, when you think about praying well, I want to encourage you to think this way – righteous praying does not start with you talking. Righteous praying starts with you thinking – thinking about whom you are

addressing, and letting that affect and influence your heart so that you pray in a way that honors Him, not out of desperation.

Go back to Matthew 6 with this context in mind – the priority of the character of God, the need to remember and think about whom you are praying to before you say anything. Jesus says in chapter 6, verse 9: “Pray, then, this way.” Here is a pattern for prayer; it is not a formula to be mindlessly repeated.

Jesus had just condemned that kind of mindless repetition two verses earlier. He wouldn’t have condemned mindless repetition and then said, “Here, repeat this whether you are thinking about it or not” – that’s ridiculous. No, what He is giving us here is He is setting forth in a very divinely-inspired compact format the priorities and principles that should be the hallmarks of your prayer life as a pattern for the way that you pray.

This morning, all I want to do is focus your attention on these simple words: “Our Father who is in heaven...” because in those words, where Jesus by the genius of a divine mind summarizes in such simple language the grandeur that belongs to His disciples when they pray to God righteously, we find three requirements for righteous praying – in those simple words, “Our Father who is in heaven.”

1. You Must Be a Christian

You must be a Christian. These words presuppose the repentance that I described earlier. These words describe someone, in the context of the sermon, who belongs to the kingdom of heaven, someone who has been born again. Jesus had just rejected the prayers of the Pharisees and the pagans, so we know that this couldn’t possibly be a prayer that all men, converted and unconverted alike, are invited to pray. The context forbids that idea. Jesus is talking to true disciples.

John 14:6:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.”

And so for Jesus to say, “Pray this way,” and to start out saying, “Our Father,” is obviously an implication, is obviously an indication, that He is speaking to people who have come to know the Father and can rightly call Him that. Only through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ can anyone truly call God “Father.” The father of everyone who is not a Christian is the devil; if you want to pray to that father... well, good luck.

But even in this word “Our Father” Jesus is presupposing what at that time was still future: His shed blood for the forgiveness of sins that is necessary before anyone can rightly pray. The Father-child relationship that is intrinsic to true prayer begins with salvation in Christ – it all flows from there. Only those who have been born again can know God as Father, so only true Christians can pray in the righteous way that Jesus lays forth here – simple point. Secondly:

2. You Must Believe the Goodness of God

You must believe the goodness of God in order to pray righteously. In the broader context of this passage, we see Jesus assuming the goodness of God as He teaches on prayer – it just bleeds out from everything that He says.

Think about this: first of all, Jesus is teaching the love of God by simply saying that He will receive your prayers – that is a response of a loving Father, that He would receive what His children say to Him. God is no remote deity who spun the world out and kicked it out to let it run out on its own. No, He knows your needs, He understands, He loves you, He receives your prayers – it is part of His goodness.

Not only His love, but in this passage He shows His faithfulness by rewarding those who seek Him. Look at the end of chapter 6, verse 6 – He says:

When you pray to your Father who is in secret, your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

A promise of reward based on the faithfulness of God – part of His goodness. Thirdly – His love, His faithfulness – we also see His wisdom expressed in this teaching on prayer. Look at the end of verse 8, where Jesus says:

Do not be like them – do not be like those babbling Gentiles who pray so foolishly, He says – do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Your Father is wise: He understands what you need – part of His goodness.

There are other things that we could say. God shows His personality by responding to heartfelt prayers; He understands human language; He understands communication; He is a person. And so in this passage, we see the goodness of God already having been assumed and taught as Jesus leads up to this.

And it is in that context of the goodness of God that Jesus tells His disciples to pray, “Our Father – my Father – our Father who is love incarnate, our Father who is faithful, our Father who is wise, our Father who is a person – a holy person at that” – that is what you call to mind as you begin to pray. You call to mind the goodness of God, and His immutable, unchanging nature guarantees that when you as one of His children come to Him, you are going to find a good God listening to you.

The plural “our Father” indicates that your prayer life should extend beyond your own circumstances and include those of the people around you. You are part of a kingdom that is bigger than you are. And your prayers should embrace the needs and the

opportunities of those around you as well. So Jesus here decisively rules out a private and selfish approach to prayer – that’s just in passing.

I want to focus more on this word “Father” because that is where we see the goodness of God expressed as we pray here. The true Christian who approaches God based on the righteousness of God alone, on the righteousness of Christ alone – you approach God with a full assurance that because of the death and resurrection of Christ, because of His righteousness that has been imputed to you, that you are fully reconciled to God in Christ – your sins have been forgiven, and therefore, you have entered into a relationship where God is your Father, committed to your provision and protection.

“Father, I belong to You, Father, the one who provides and protects. Father – the one who is so good.” This word “Father,” which we use in a breath as we usually start out praying: “Father, we pray....” – No! Let that word “Father” stop you in your tracks! You are talking to the supreme God of the universe and calling Him Father? Wow – that is an intimate relationship! There is implicit and explicit trust in such a relationship.

When we call God Father, we are saying, “God, You are near. God, You receive the prayers of Your children. God, I fear no judgment from You because there is no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus. I have privileged and confident access to You in Christ.”

And beloved, if you would just stop for just a couple of minutes and *think* that way before you start to pray, it will transform everything that you say, because all of a sudden, you are not crying out of desperate circumstances. All of a sudden, you are speaking to one whom you’ve consciously remembered you have an intimate relationship with – with one who loves you to the perfection of Christ, who has purchased your soul and will bring eternity to pass and you will be a part of that. And you start out saying, “I’m overwhelmed with the goodness of God.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that if you can honestly pray “our Father,” in the sense that we are talking about it here, your problems are already over. Your problems are already *over*, because the Supreme One has set His supreme affection on you – what could possibly matter in light of *that*?

And so as a good Father, God lovingly protects His children; He lovingly provides for them. He knows your needs, He provides for those needs, He rewards those who seek Him. Beloved, just put your hand over your mouth for just a couple of minutes – I just beg you to do that before the next time that you pray, and think about those things.

You must recognize the goodness of God as you come to prayer – that your Father is with you. Trust, confidence and hope will be the mark of your discourse with Him. Hebrews 11, verse 6, says this:

Without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This is righteous praying, beloved. It is impossible to please God in your praying if you don't come to Him with this mindset. Put out the doubts about His goodness. Before you get on your knees, look at yourself in the mirror and say to yourself, "God is my good Father; He will bless me as I come to Him."

Beloved, you can never let your soul fall into this place where your prayer life turns into cries of dark desperation because you are so worried about what is going on around you. Take yourself in hand, think about the goodness of God, and say to yourself, "Out with this discouragement; out with this despair; *out* with this doubt – my Father is good!" And He hears you, and one way or another, all will be well.

So just embrace that mindset as you go to prayer, beloved. Confidence and trust will be the mark of your prayer – don't you want that? I do; I want to pray with confidence; I want to pray with trust. I am not about to look at the cross of Christ and His shed blood for my sins and have any questions about the goodness of God and His intentions for my life – amen? "Our Father" – those terms produce confident trust. And the third requirement for righteous prayer in this passage is:

3. You Must Believe the Greatness of God

Jesus says, "Pray then in this way: Our Father who is in heaven..." The juxtaposition of those terms is absolutely astonishing – an intimate relationship expressed by the term "Father," and yet, a transcendent relationship because this Father is in heaven.

If you like the theological terms: in these simple six words in English, Jesus has expressed both the imminence and the transcendence of God. He has been throughout this passage – just as He has been with the goodness of God – He has been assuming the greatness of God as He teaches on prayer. It just bleeds out from everything that He says.

In verse 7, He teaches the holiness of God, because God only receives right prayers. He is not indifferent to whether someone comes with sin-stained hands or not. He is not indifferent to how He is approached – He is holy.

His omnipresence is taught in this passage. Look at the end of verse 6 again: "Your Father who sees what is done in secret..." That assumes the omnipresence of God – that wherever you go, wherever you are in private, God sees you.

He teaches the omnipotence of God in this passage. In that same passage in verse 6 He says, "He will reward you." God has the power to respond to your prayers in any way He sees fit. He is absolutely unhindered because He has the power to accomplish whatever He wishes.

Jesus teaches the omniscience of God in this passage. Verse 8: "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him..." He doesn't need you to inform Him about anything; He

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already knows. In a perfect, simple moment from all of eternity, He has known everything including your needs.

This is the greatness of God; this is the transcendence of God. And so He is absolutely sovereign. Applying that to this particular matter, He rules over prayer. He determines how you should pray, He determines His response to your prayers, and He is not manipulated by many words. Holy, sovereign, majestic God this is!

When you pray, you are approaching a God who has an essence that absolutely transcends you. It is the distinction between a creature coming to his uncreated Creator, the one whose special manifestation of His glory is not within your reach here on earth. And so beloved, when you call God “Our Father who is in heaven” to mind, you are recognizing His sovereign position as Lord of the universe and His authority over you as well.

With that in mind – this great sovereign God, this holy God – beloved, as you go to prayer, as you are thinking about His goodness, you also need to be thinking about His greatness. And you need to give this great God the priority that He deserves when you pray. Your needs, as pressing as they are, are not the most important thing in the universe. Praise God that He will receive our prayers about our needs, but He already knows those – we don’t need to inform Him.

The greater need for your prayer life most likely is to take that right hand and put it on your mouth again and say, “I’m praying to the God of the universe – omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God.” And you say to yourself, “That’s true, therefore, God has the power to carry out His good intentions for His children; He has heavenly power to accomplish His desires.” And you cultivate that conscious reality in your mind and you do it again and again and again until your heart submits to the truth, until your feelings come in line with what you know to be true through the revelation of the scripture.

And as you do that, beloved, just as the goodness of God produces confident trust because this Father loves you, so this Father in heaven – as you contemplate that – will produce humble reverence as you pray. Out with this flippant approach to prayer! Out with the casual approach that does not recognize that we are praying to One who is in heaven.

So where does this leave you? Your settled mindset – it’s your settled mindset and yet you feed it again and again and again with your meditation – is this: “My Father is good, and I trust Him. My Father is great, and I bow before Him.” And that frames the entire way that you pray.

Beloved, in the press of people and in the press of circumstances all about you and the daily stuff that we all go through – whether as a mom or as an executive or as a pastor or whatever – in the press of everything that life brings upon you, when you go to prayer, you have got to engage your mind and step back from all of that so that godly perspective will govern the way that you pray: “Our Father who is in heaven.”

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And so what Jesus lays before us here is a spiritual opportunity for you to cast aside spiritual mediocrity and get back to the serious and joyful business of a close walk with God, a walk where He has preeminence, by His goodness and by His greatness, in everything in your heart, particularly in your affections when you pray.

So where do you start? For most of us, we need to start with repentance. We need to take ourselves in hand and say, “You know, I am just so tired of being so selfish in prayer. I’m tired of not giving God the glory that He deserves when I get down on my knees.” And you repent of that and say, “Lord, I want to embrace a God-centered approach that gives You the glory whenever I get down on my knees.”

And when have repented and when you have chastened your heart about that, then beloved, with the doors to heaven flung open, with the goodness and greatness of God firmly entrenched in your mind, you go to Him and you pray with passion: “God, I must see Your name exalted. I must see Your will done. Father, I’ve got these niggling needs here; can You help me with those too and forgive me of my sins? Will You guard me from temptation as I go forward?”

That, beloved, is the way to pray righteously. Let’s pray:

Our Father who is in heaven, we honor Your goodness and Your care for us and Your faithfulness. We honor Your greatness, the majesty of Your holy name. Father, as we look out – as we contemplate for many of us returning to homes, returning to ministries – we pray that Your name would be exalted in all that we do.

We pray that Your kingdom would be advanced through our efforts. And we pray that Your will would be done, whether it is on to prosperity or poverty, whether on to success or failure, blessing or chastening. Father, we just beg You to do Your will, for You do all things well.

We commit our needs to You as well, Father – our needs for provision, our needs for forgiveness, our needs for Your future spiritual protection and provision upon our lives. So help us, Father, that we would be able to live like You want us to do, to live these righteous lives that the Sermon on the Mount calls us to.

And Father, in particular today, we pray that we would be so enchanted with Your great character and Your goodness toward us that every single time we get down on our knees to pray to You, that those thoughts would permeate all that we think and say, and that the confident trust worthy of Your goodness and a humble reverence that is worthy of Your greatness would ever be the mark of the way You find us praying before You.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.