

Matthew 6:5-15, Genesis 12:1-4a
Prayer: Adoration and Forgiveness
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In 5:16 Jesus said, "let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."

Now in Matthew 6, Jesus speaks about giving, praying, and fasting—core expressions of covenant life. He assumes we will do them. *When you give. When you pray. When you fast.* But this time he warns to do so in private.

Jesus isn't contradicting himself, but he turns our attention inward. To examine our motives and to turn us away from garnering praise for ourselves. *Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.*

Street corner prayer doesn't yield the same kind of status today, but the desire to get recognition for being spiritual, to appear godly, to win praise and influence, is still tempting.

In Jesus' day, Jews commonly prayed at set hours, such as 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Public prayer itself was not the problem. Jesus himself prayed publicly. The issue is not public versus private; it is heartfelt versus performative. When we pray—even in worship—the focus is not how we sound, but whom we address. Jesus warns that even holy practices can rot if the eye is on the audience. When righteousness is performed for recognition, God gets squeezed out.

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

Jesus isn't condemning persistence. He warns instead against empty repetition—words used like magic incantations, as though quantity could manipulate God. As one commentator puts it, we do not pray to persuade God, but to confess our need and declare our dependence. Prayer does not inform God. It forms us. Again, if we focus on a the right words, we'll squeeze out God, whom the apostle Paul says, listens even to our groans when words fail us.

We examined two weeks ago the intention of solitude. The necessity of slowing down and coming before God in silence. Last week we looked at the temptation to be more than human - and Jesus winning us the freedom to be fully creature, not posing as Creator.

I want to continue those themes as we look, not at all the Lord's Prayer, but focus on two aspects of the prayer Jesus taught. Adoration and Forgiveness.

Adoration - adore, praise.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name....

- Begin with God, not ourselves
- God of the covenant, not personal genie
- Beloved, maker of heaven and earth, and us

- Adoration: who God is

A simple way I was taught to think of praise is that thanksgiving is for what God does, Praise/adoration is for who God is. They do overlap for we often learn who God is by what he does, and we often recognize what God does because of who we know him to be. Often used together in scripture, but adoration brings up another aspect of prayer that we may miss if we only give thanks.

We, like the Hebrews, will soon forget God, his gifts, and his character and substitute lesser things.
God is real, true, magnificent, powerful, merciful
how easy it is to praise lesser things: new vitamin, favourite musician, good piece of work.
These are golden cows if they get in the way of us fixing our thoughts on the living God.

We come into God's presence through adoration. And in God's presence, we experience the joy of the Lord, which is our strength. If you are having trouble praying, add adoration. Gives strength (expectancy, peace) to our soul.

Without praise we risk spiritual starvation. Adoration keeps us abiding in Christ - connected to the vine.

One can hardly read the Psalms without being deeply impressed that we are to praise the Lord. Praise(s) 164 times. Adore him for his attributes in song: Amazing Grace, How Great Thou Art, Lord of the Dance.

Open up Bible or hymnbook. Find a description or character of God. Take a moment to praise God for that attribute. Share it with the person beside you.

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.

Forgiveness - we pray: forgive us our debts, our trespasses, our sins. As we forgive those who do so against us.

Take a big breath. Let it out slowly. Feels good to get a lung stretch. This time take as big a breath as you can and hold... now without letting it out, take another big breath.... impossible right? There is only room for you to inhale the next lungful when you've breathed out the previous one.

How many of you have taken first aid sometime in your life? Someone is out of breath, what do you do? You give them the breath they need.

If you insist on holding your breath
you may be depriving someone of the air they need to live
you cannot take in any more yourself

This is a good image of forgiveness. Like the air in your lungs. There is only room for you to inhale more when you've breathed out what you have been given. "If you insist on withholding it, refusing to give someone else the [breath] they may desperately need, you won't be able to take any more in yourself,

and you will suffocate very quickly."¹

We pray in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. There is something about the mercy of forgiveness that must be passed on in order to be alive and effective in us.

When the lungs are full and we refuse to expel, we perish. When we are forgiven and refuse to forgive, we perish.

If our forgiveness chamber is open to receive God's love and forgiveness, it must be open to pour it into others. If it is closed up to others, it will be locked up toward God as well, and spiritual death occurs. We must forgive in order to be forgiven.

Forgiveness doesn't pretend nothing happened... lest we think we also have done nothing wrong to receive God's grace. "The key thing is that one should never, ever give up making forgiveness and reconciliation one's goal. If confrontation has to happen, as it often does, it must always be with forgiveness in mind, never revenge." [5]

But because we have been given much, we are to pass it on. Blessed to be a blessing. In Jesus, we are grafted into the tribe of Abraham, and covenant members of the promise. *I will bless you... and you will be a blessing.*

Abram has been summoned, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." It is a call away from security, familiarity, and comfort. Abram has roots, history, loved ones. And yet—he goes.

Jesus summons us away from controlling prayer to garner attention, or manipulate God, to a prayer that loosens our grip on what is familiar and trusting that God's purposes are larger than our comfort.

This is the posture of our Lenten practice. Private generosity, prayer, and fasting. Practices that draw us to God's purposes not merely for ourselves, but so that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Obedience that participates in God's global, redemptive plan.

This is the way of discipleship, loyalty to the one who was, and is and is to come. One God, now and forever. Amen.

¹ Wright, 40.