

Lord, Teach Us to Pray – Part 7
Overcoming Obstacles to Prayer
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – June 12th, 2022

Intro:

- I believe that all of us who are Christians would agree that prayer is important and perhaps vital. However, I wonder what our prayer life is really like. I am not thinking about this in a guilt trip kind of way, but asking for the true reality of our lives.
- If you struggle with prayer, you have a desire for prayer. And that is a good thing because this means that you have faith and believe that there is a God to pray to and that prayer is important and can make a difference.
- Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "**without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him**" (ESV). So if you struggle with prayer, at least you have some form of faith because if you did not have faith, you would not pray. The way we please God is by having faith in Him and then drawing near to Him, believing that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.
- There are many things that keep us from prayer, and this morning we are going to look at two primary reasons why we don't pray and how to overcome them so that we will improve our relationship with God and see and receive His rewards that come only through drawing near to Him through prayer.
- The truth is that *how* we pray, or *what* we pray, or *when* we pray does not matter if we don't know *why* we pray. I think that perhaps the number one obstacle to our prayer life is that we forget why we pray.

We forget why we pray

- This past week I read a book by a friend of mine called "*When prayer is a struggle – a practical guide for overcoming obstacles in prayer*" by Kevin Halloran, which I strongly recommend to you (it can be downloaded on Amazon). On the opening page of chapter one, he records this quote from Jack Miller:

I pray because I crave fellowship with my Father.

I pray because it shrinks me, my problems, and other people to their proper size.

I pray because it's the best way to get the gospel deep into my heart.

- Jack Miller

- And here is another quote to add to this one:

You do not have because you do not ask.

- James (half-brother of Jesus)

- Often we turn to the "Lord's Prayer" as a pattern for what we should pray. This morning we are going to look at it through another "lens" that will give us reasons *why* we should pray. In this series, we have already looked at the shorter version of the Lord's prayer in Luke 11 as a pattern of what we should pray, this morning we are turning to the longer version, and perhaps the one you memorized from Matthew chapter 6. Here it is:

Matt 6:9-13 ESV

Pray then like this:

"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 also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Why we pray:

- *We pray because God is our Father (Our Father)*
- *We pray because we want His name to be praised (Hallowed Be Your Name)*
- *We pray because we want His kingly rule to expand (Your Kingdom Come)*
- *We pray because we want His perfect will to be done (Your Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is in Heaven)*
- *We pray because we need His provision (Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread)*
- *We pray because we need His forgiveness (Forgive Us Our Debts, As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors)*
- *We pray because we need His deliverance (Lead Us Not into Temptation, But Deliver Us from Evil)*

- These are the reasons *why* we pray, and if you remember why we must pray, you will make prayer as critical and natural as breathing. It will become your most powerful and precious possession and privilege.
- The second main obstacle to prayer is misaligned priorities, that we are "too busy to pray."

We are too busy to pray

Learning to pray doesn't offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart. In the midst of outer busyness, we can develop an inner quiet. – Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life*.

When we work, we work; but when we pray, God works. – Hudson Taylor (Missionary)

Martin Luther, when once asked what his plans for the following day were, answered: "Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

- The story of Mary and Martha has always bothered me because I am much more like Martha than Mary. If you don't remember it, it is found in Luke 10:38-42. As the story goes, Jesus was in town and was staying in the home of the siblings Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Martha was anxiously running around serving the guests, distracted with much service, while Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching.
- At one point, Martha had had enough and, in her frustration and exasperation, went up to Jesus and said:

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me" (40).

- Now, what Martha was doing was good. She was not being lazy or irresponsible. She was self-sacrificing and working hard serving others (as the Bible tells us to do, by the way). These things needed to be done, and they were a blessing to others. Jesus' response is profound and weighty:

"Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (41-42).

- Now notice that Jesus does not label Martha's busyness as bad. What He says is that her being "anxious and troubled about many things" is bad, especially in comparison to what is the "good portion," what is best, and critical, and most important, that which will never be taken away from her. He says that spending time with Him, in His presence, listening to His words, was of greater importance. *Being with Jesus is more essential than even serving Jesus and others.* Martha's to-do list was good, but her priorities were out of order. Why does this happen to us? Let me offer a few suggestions.

Reasons we are so busy . . .

- *We want our lives to count* – couch potatoes don't change the world or accomplish things of value. In the end, our lives will be measured by what we actually do . . . and also why we do it. We are told that if we want to gain our life, we must lose it, and our service actually matters. However, service cannot supersede presence, and our what must be fueled by our why.
- *Busyness is necessary* – we have a ton of things to do, and people are counting on us, and we need to, to survive. The truth is that we do need "bread" to survive, however, "man does not live on bread alone." It is a terrible thing to realize when you have been climbing a ladder all your life and you come to the end, that it is leaning against the wrong wall.
- *We have an overinflated assessment of our value* – we think if we don't, it won't. You and I are not the Messiah, and we are not the answer to everyone's problems. Stick to what God has called and convicted you to do. Stick to that. God has given you enough time every day to do what He has asked you to do.
- *We are proud* – for some of us, being busy is a badge which says we are important if we are needed. You may be important, but you are not the most important. We do this so we can receive the glory and not God.
- *We fear missing out* – FOMO (fear of missing out) is a real thing. We think we have to be everywhere and do everything because we don't want to miss out on anything. This takes so much time and energy that we don't have anything left for the most important things.
- *We don't set boundaries from our technology* – screens are addicting, and the surfaces of our lives are covered with them. They never have "enough," so you have to cage them before they capture you.
- *We are avoiding deeper issues* – we keep busy because we don't want to deal with the real issues of our lives, like dealing with our hearts and the underlying issues of our problems and our busyness. Some people stay busy all the time because they are scared to find out what is at the bottom of the well, so they keep filling it up with superficial pursuits. You will be much better served by internally letting the busyness dry up to find what is below.

- *At the end of the day, if you are too busy to pray, you are too busy. Cut something out. You have time for what you make time for. Make prayer and the word of God a priority. Choose the good portion, and this will never be taken away from you.*
- *Biblically align your priorities. Put first things first. Get up early, and set time aside for both daily prayer and extended prayer. You make room for what is important to you. Set an appointment with Jesus and keep it. This will change your life for the better more than anything else you can do.*

Conclusion

- You and I can overcome the obstacles to prayer. Keep in mind the "why" of our prayers and our need for them. We pray because we want God's name to be glorified, His Kingdom to be expanded, His will to be realized, His provision to be experienced, His forgiveness to be treasured, and His protection to be granted. We have not because we ask not.
- Make the presence of God, listening to His word, and talking with Him a priority. Take time today to examine your heart and your schedule and make the changes necessary to align your heart and your priorities with your Father's.
- Pray