

# Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 4/10/2020

## Mini Series – “Making Disciples -Learning to pray”

### Part One - “How to have an effective prayer life”

**Matthew 6: 1-18** Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.<sup>2</sup> “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.<sup>5</sup> “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. <sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> “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. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.<sup>16</sup> “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

When it comes to teaching us how to pray, there is no greater teacher than the Lord Jesus Christ. We can learn from other people – prayer warriors who have shared their secrets of prayer for example - but Jesus is the best teacher on prayer we could have. As the eternal Son of God come in human flesh, he enjoyed perfect

communion with his Father through prayer. He modelled prayer so perfectly that his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, so that they could pray in the same way. As the one who indwells every true believer by his Spirit, he is able to lead us in true prayer in a way that human teachers can't. By his Spirit, he guides our praying, and empowers us to pray. Learning how to pray is not an intellectual exercise. Instead we seek to experience Jesus at work in our lives, empowering and enabling us to pray as he leads.

### **Why do we need to be taught how to pray?**

Prayer is a universal phenomenon because deep in the heart of every human being is a desire to reach out to some greater being. Wherever you go in the world, you discover people praying to something or someone. For Christians, the sign that a person has been born again by the Spirit of God is that they begin to pray, crying to God for forgiveness of sin. From this comes a lifetime of communication with God. True prayer for Christians should come as naturally as breathing does for humans, but Jesus obviously felt we needed to be taught because he gives us instruction in this passage.

**vv5-9** gives us two reasons why we need to be taught.

#### **1. There is such a thing as sinful (or false) prayer.**

Because sin is so deeply rooted in the human heart, even our prayers can be deeply flawed – a shocking thought. There is probably no higher activity that Christians do than coming into God's presence to speak with God, and having him speak to us through his word, but Jesus shows us that it is possible to do this in a sinful way.

##### **a) We can pray in a way that feeds our desire for self-praise (v5).**

These men looked for ways to pray where everyone could see them, wanting the praise of people and taking the praise that should have been directed to God. That is what they got, but it's all that they got – they had no fellowship with the living God. Jesus uses them as an example to warn us against praying in a way that feeds our desire for self praise.

##### **b) We can pray in a way that makes results dependent on our own efforts (v7).**

Jesus is referring to the prayer rituals that pagan people used and are still using, saying their set prayers at set times, as a way of manipulating the gods to get what they wanted. Jesus warns us that not all prayer is true prayer. We can pray in a way that makes the result dependent on our own efforts rather than on the purpose and will of a loving sovereign God. We might think that:

- If we pray for long enough, maybe God will do what we want
- If we get enough people praying, that will surely move God to answer
- If we use the written prayers of people who got what they asked, then God will do the same for us

There is nothing wrong with persistent prayer, asking others to join us in prayer, or using written prayers as long as we don't depend on these things for the results.

**We need to be taught how to pray because sin has ruined our relationship with God, causing us to seek self praise and to be self dependent.**

## **2. There is such a thing as true prayer and we need to know the difference (vv6 & 8)**

False prayer is all about self, but true prayer is born out of knowing God as Father. That's why Jesus went on in **v9** to say <sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

The Jewish hypocrites and the Gentiles (**vv5&7**) didn't know God, although they thought they did.

Not everyone knows God in this intimate relationship where they can call him Father. The Bible teaches that God is the Father of all humanity in the sense that all humanity owes its existence to him. More often, and more particularly, the Bible makes a distinction between those who are rightly related to God as Father and those who aren't.

Speaking to religious Jews who claimed God was their Father, Jesus says "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. ....

<sup>44</sup> You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.

**(John 8:42-44).**

The Bible shows us that a supernatural work of God's Spirit has to take place in our hearts.

**Romans 8: 14-16** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

When a person is truly born again by the Spirit of God, they have the knowledge that God is their Father, and they naturally cry out to him. The evidence that this is a true work of God is that they come to love Jesus. Unless that has happened, any prayer will be the false prayer of the religious hypocrite or the gentile pagan.

**Where God's Spirit is at work in us, there will be true prayer and we can grow in that work of prayer.**

**To do this, we need to put into practice what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 6:6 & 8.**

**We grow in our life of prayer by shutting out and opening up.**

**a) In our praying we have to shut out other people and ourselves (v6)**

Jesus is promoting private prayer here – the kind that no one but God sees. You need to find a place away from people, where it is just God and you. Jesus is encouraging us to shut out other people and ourselves from our minds.

We need to get rid of the attitude that prays for purely human benefit, directing attention to ourselves.

This will happen as:

- God humbles us through suffering when he takes from us what we consider to be precious
- we spend more time alone with him than with others
- we find that secret place of prayer, where God really deals with us

**Public prayer is necessary but needs to flow out of our private prayer life.** Public praying is commanded by Jesus when we gather. Pastors are to pray publicly for those entrusted to them, and we are to serve one another by praying for and with each other, but if we don't spend much time in private prayer, we have no right to

pray in public. When we do pray in public, we need to forget that there are people listening and focus our minds on God.

**b) In our praying we have to open up to God as he reveals himself in the Bible**

We must get hold of the truth that we are in God's presence. When we pray, we are talking to God – he is the one whose ear we have. We should remind ourselves that we are coming before the almighty, eternal, great and holy God, in all his power and majesty. We need to pause and think about this first, rather than rushing into his presence. The more we know God, the better our praying will be, and the only way to know him is through his written word, the Bible, and his living word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**We need to begin with praise so that we are aware that we are in the presence of the living God.**

- He is our heavenly Father, giving us both physical and spiritual life. He cares for us, disciplines us for our good, and provides for everything we need. He loves us, even to the point of offering up his own son to secure our salvation.
- He is the creator and sustainer of the universe, holding it together by the power of his word. He governs the nations, so that the most powerful human kings act to accomplish his will. He governs tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanoes and the flight of the sparrow. The whole spirit world is under his sovereign control so that angels do his bidding and demons have to submit to him.

He is:

- Omnipotent – nothing that overwhelms us will overwhelm him
- Omniscient – there is no problem we face that he doesn't know about or have a solution for
- Omnipresent- there is nowhere we can be where he hasn't already been, or where he isn't there to meet us

**This God spoke the universe into existence, sustains it every second of every day, and raised Jesus from the dead.**

It is this same God who bends his ear to hear us when we pray.

Why would we not want to get alone with him, speak with him, and seek his strength,  
wisdom and presence?