

## Matthew 6:7-18 - Prayer: Short and Sweet

Well there is probably no topic that strikes shame and guilt into the hearts of most Christians than evangelism and prayer. Evangelism is telling people about Jesus, prayer is simply talking to God - and I think it's safe to say that for most of us, we could use some improvement in both of the categories.

Can I tell you something? Jesus knows this and he loves us anyway. He died for a people he knew wouldn't be so great at praying. And he rose for a people he knew would not proclaim the faith as often as we should. That's not to give us a pass, but it is to remind us that Jesus knew who we were when he chose us. And he still said with all confidence "I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." Jesus is going to rule and conquer and save and love us despite our failings.

And apparently Jesus knows how hard it is for his followers to pray because in the SOTM he address prayer 3 times. We saw it several weeks ago, we see it here this morning and we'll see Jesus touch on prayer again in chapter 7. This morning there is just one basic point: small prayers can make a huge difference.

You don't have to spend hours and hours in a prayer closet trying to think of things to say to God and keep from falling asleep to have God answer your prayers. Short, sweet, powerful prayers are often what God uses to advance his Kingdom and serve his people. So hold on to that: small prayers can make a huge difference.

Now here's the deal: a lot of us have been in the faith a long time and know what prayer is and maybe we even have a routine of prayer and feel comfortable praying. That's great. But not everyone knows what they should be doing when they pray or even how to pray. So before we get to our passage here, let me touch on a couple of prayer basics. **Turn over to Luke 11:1-4.**

As I've mentioned before, the Sermon on the Mount is really an outline of a sermon that Jesus probably gave hundreds of times. Jesus didn't just preach this at the beginning of his 3-year ministry, he preached it over and over. So especially in the Gospel of Luke you'll see bits and pieces of it scattered all over because Jesus preached it over and over. And I want you to notice something here. **Read 1-4**

So 2 things I want to point out: who asks about prayer? One of Jesus's disciples! One of the 12 sees the disciples of John the Baptist, knows that John has instructed them how to pray, and they need some instruction, too. I mean you'd think the apostles would know how to pray. But this disciple - we don't know which one - says teach us how to pray. The whole lot of them need a lesson on prayer.

The second thing I want to point out: what chapter is this? Eleven. This is a year or 18 months into Jesus's ministry and these guys are like, "Time out. Jesus, we don't really know how to pray." And Luke records a prayer that is half the length of Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer. It's a very short prayer.

So all that to say, if you've been in the faith a while and people maybe even look to you as someone who is more mature, and yet you're thinking to yourself "I have no idea what I'm doing when I pray" don't feel bad, the apostles were in the same boat.

And to be fair, they probably did pray. They probably said something to God on a regular basis. But they had never really had instruction from Jesus himself on exactly what to say. I think that's probably true for many people. They come into the Christian faith and other believers just sort of assume everyone knows what to say or how to talk to God. When people get saved there's not a booklet that magically appears under your pillow like the tooth fairy that gives you a lesson on how to pray.

Most of you know that I was 14 when I was saved. My cabin counselor laid the gospel out, I believed it with all my heart, and then he asked if I wanted to pray to God. Or, he said, "Do you want me to pray for you?" And it was weird because I had no idea what I was doing but I knew God loved me and I knew my sins were forgiven and I knew that I could approach the sovereign creator of the universe and he would hear. And even though I had no idea what I was doing, I prayed - I wanted to use my words. Now that was probably the weirdest, most awkward prayer in the history of prayers. But you know what? It was pleasing in the Father's ears. Because here was his newly adopted son crying out to him.

But I didn't know what I was doing and many others don't as well. And while there are some principles we're going to apply I think it's important for us just to recognize that whatever you've been doing is good. It's the natural impulse of God's children to pray and it pleases God when we do.

**Turn to Rom. 8.** So here in Romans 8 Paul is talking about the work of God the Holy Spirit. And specifically what talks about here is how the Spirit of God worked in us at salvation. In **Vs. 15** he's called the Spirit of adoption. That is, he is the Spirit defined by his work adopting people into the family of God. He's the adopter. By nature he takes spiritual orphans and puts them into a family. And that was all of us. We are all alienated - orphaned - from God. And it was God the Spirit in sovereign grace who brought us into God's family. **Read 8:14-17**

I've seen 2 adoptions in my life. And there's this, for lack of better word, magical moment where the judge drops the gavel and this person is now family. Full rights, full access, full inheritance. Two minutes ago they had no more rights than a friend sleeping on your couch, gavel bangs, now they have every right and privilege as a full born son or daughter - no distinction.

And what Paul says in **Vs. 15** is that for all who have been born again, saved into the family of God, there is now inner longing and compulsion for us to pray where we can't help but cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" We go from being aliens to being **children**. The Spirit doesn't just **allow** us to cry "Abba, Father!" The Spirit compels us to say that. Calling on God as our Father becomes an instinct.

My children have been sick recently and sometimes they'll wake up in the middle of the night. And they wake up and they're in pain and hurting and what's the first thing they cry out? "Dada! Dada!" During the day they usually cry out for Mama, but usually at night they call out for me. That's just their impulse.

That's what he's saying. If you've trusted in Christ alone to forgive your sins, your faith, your adoption was the work of the Spirit. And that same Spirit has also put into you an automatic impulse to call out to God. Not as king, not as judge, not as homeboy, not as the heavy handed patriarch of the house. As **Father**. Abba - that's like papa or dad. It's a biblical term of affection that most of us give to our own dads. We don't usually call our dads "daddy" or "Father." I call my dad "dad" or "pop." Even if your dad was a CEO or the president or an astronaut or whoever, you'd call him dad. That's the idea, you're his child.

That's the warm family structure that the Spirit has brought us into. No matter how good or bad our prayer life is, every child of God, I think deep down, desires to talk to and relate to God in a familial way like a perfect father. We call that prayer.

You say: well I don't have a desire to pray. I think that's a real struggle. That could be for one of 2 reasons. One could simply be you're in a season where you feel very far from God. I would encourage you to simply pray that God would give you a desire to pray. And ask him over and over. The other could be that you're not a child of God. Maybe you've never had a desire to pray. If you've never had a desire to pray - it's never been an impulse in your life at all to pray - you might need to examine whether or not you're in the faith. What if you realize - hey, maybe I'm not a believer? Pray to God! Ask for forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. Either way, the solution to prayerlessness is to go to the Father and talk.

That's really all prayer is: just talking to God like he's your father, because if you are in Christ he **is** your Father. That's really all it is. It can be long and elaborate and impassioned and heart felt. Or it can be short and sweet and rough around the edges.

"Father, I don't want to answer this phone call right now because I'm not excited about what will be said."

"Father, I'm a complete idiot for saying those things. Please forgive me for my ridiculous tongue."

"Father, I'm tired of these struggles and trials. Can you take these struggles away from me? Or maybe better yet help me stop being a baby about them?"

"God I don't even know what to say to you, I don't know how to pray."

You ever have a tough time talking to a family member? You don't even know where to begin? It's okay that it's like that with God. **Read 26-27**

Did you know that when we are so low and so confused that we don't even know what to say to God, the very same Spirit who empowers us to pray actually prays for us? And he prays on a level that is so profound and so amazing words can't even describe it. And where we don't often pray in accordance to the will of God, the Spirit is God and prays in perfect alignment with the will of the Father and the Son.

And did you know that even Jesus is talking to the Father on our behalf? **Read 34-35**

So even Jesus, God the Son is interceding for us. He is praying - talking - to the Father on our behalf. The Trinity is in constant, loving conversation - even right this moment - about you and for you for God's glory even if you don't know, even if you don't realize it. The Spirit and the Son are in constant prayer even when we don't realize it, even when we don't know that we need it. They pray continually for us.

As John MacArthur once said: Do you realize you have 2 members of the Trinity praying for you non-stop, carrying you all the way to glory?

And the same access the Spirit and the Son have to the Father, we have been given to the Father and long to have with the Father because the Spirit has put that longing in us. Every Christian I know, even if their prayer life is horrible, wants a good prayer life. They desire more communication with the Father. Why? Because the Spirit has adopted us into the Father's family and put that longing into us.

And it's not like the Father is annoyed by our requests. Or irritated because we don't have our prayers down just right. If you're a new Christian you probably pray like a new Christian. If you're a little older in the faith it will probably show.

I don't get down on my 1 year old because he can't articulate exactly what he wants with proper grammar. I don't fault my little guys if they're in trouble and they just yell out "Dada!!" I don't make them say "Father, I am suffering pain of injury and require your tending to." I get where they're at. I usually know what they want even if they're struggling to say it. In fact, that's what Jesus get at back in **Matt. 6. Look** back there. **Read Matthew 6:7-8**

Just like we know what our kids want when they're trying to tell it to us, God knows perfectly what we want before we even ask.

So all that to say, even though Christians have a desire to pray because the Spirit has put that desire in us, we often don't know what to pray or how to pray. That's a common thing. Jesus is going to teach us how to pray in the Lord's prayer, which we'll get to next week.

But here, even before we get to how to pray, the big principle Jesus pushes home for us - and that I want to unpack with the rest of our time - is that small prayers can make a huge difference.

Now, with that, I want to unpack 3 simple truths about short prayers here from our passage.

#### 1) God **wants** us to pray short prayers

Now, stick with me for a minute. There is an expectation that believers will pray. That's not a point of guilt, Jesus just assumes we will pray. **When** you pray. There is an expectation of prayer in the Christian life because the Spirit who made us Christians is in us compelling us to cry out to God. So that makes sense.

But God wants us to pray short prayers. Let me show you that in 2 ways. First, look at **Vs. 9. Read**

Jesus says pray like this, then he gives a prayer that is 52 words long in the ESV. In the Greek it's 57 words. That's it. He commands us to pray a prayer that is shorter than most fast-food orders. And you remember

when we read Luke's version? Was it longer or shorter? It was shorter: 36 words in the ESV. So Jesus commands us to pray a short prayer.

We also see that God wants us to pray short prayers because our prayers are to be different than the prayers of the Gentiles. **Read 7**

So Jesus critiques the prayers of Gentiles. Gentiles were non-Jewish people. From the perspective of Jesus and his disciples they were unbelievers. And their prayers are filled with fluffy non-sense and they think that lots of fluffy non-sense will get their prayer answered.

I think if we're honest we're not too different than the Gentiles in those ways. I think sometimes we just keep adding stuff into our prayers that don't really make much sense or it's a phrase we've heard and sounds religious or good but really has no meaning.

Jesus says don't make the long story longer. Make the long story short. But shouldn't we pray longer prayers? Is it okay to pray longer? Well, the answer is yes. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with longer prayers. But God would rather us pray 52 words on a regular basis in constant communion with him than pray 552 words every other week because we never get around to it.

Long prayers are not more holy. Long prayers are not more effective. Long prayers are not more mature. In fact, if you do a survey of the prayers in the NT - where Paul or whoever is praying for the churches - the prayers are rather short. They're not long.

God wants us to pray short prayers.

## 2) God wants us to pray for what we really want. Read 7

Have you ever prayed to God and you really want to get to something but you feel like you can't just jump into it? Maybe you need forgiveness, maybe you need a miracle, maybe you want wisdom, maybe you want a wife or a job or whatever. But before you get to that you've got to go through the motions: Thank him for this and that, check all the prayer boxes, so on so you can get to what you really want.

You know what that is? It's superstition! It's we've got to put enough quarters in the candy machine before something good pops out. God's not a candy machine that needs fluffing or buttering up in order to give us something.

And that's what Jesus gets at. To be fair here, Jesus isn't specifically attacking the **length** of the prayers of the Gentiles, is he? Really he's going after 2 things: empty phrases and thinking long prayers will have a bigger effect with God. He's going after this idea that we have to put on a show for God and brown nose God to get what we want.

I think we all know this, but brown nosing is not a relationship. Buttering up is not a relationship. When we do that to God it's not based on our relationship to him as Father. It's based on thinking he's a vending machine.

And so we do 2 things. We heap up empty phrases. The NLT says "babbling on and on." We say things that are unnecessary. I had a professor in Bible College challenge me on my prayer life one time and it kind of hurt. He basically hit me with what Jesus is hitting all of us with. He said it sounds like your padding your prayers for some reason instead of just talking with your dad.

I would say the word "just" a bunch of times. God if you "just" this or that, I "just" ask that this...I don't know why I said "just" a bunch but I did. Or I'd say "Father God" a bunch of times. In the course of a 30 second prayer I'd say "Father God" 10 times. We don't talk like that to people, let alone our own fathers. And here's one that hurt: "Be with so and so" or "bless so and so" - he asked me: what does that mean? When I ask for God to be with so and so, what am I asking for? Well, wisdom or safety or godliness or perseverance. Why don't I just ask for those things specifically?

Now, I hesitate to even say those things because now we're all going to feel self conscious when we pray. And no one is going to want to pray out loud because we're all going to mentally note when we say those things. And that's not my point - if you take note of my prayers I still have those elements in there.

But here's the thing, we get into habits when we pray. And we end up talking to God in a very different way than we talk to our own dad. And the point here is really, just talk to God like you'd talk to your dad. You need something, ask for it but be intentional.

I was talking with a friend recently and he wanted to pray for me so we got ready to pray and I bowed my head and there was this silence. And I'm thinking "we are praying right now, right?" And he said "Give me just a minute, I need to think about exactly how I want to pray." And so we were just silent for a minute and then he started to pray. And I thought that was really cool. He was thinking about exactly what he wanted to say to God, exactly how he wanted to pray. He approached the throne of grace boldly, but intentionally.

I often just launch into talking without even really thinking about what I'm going to say. I'm like Peter on the Mt. of Transfiguration just saying stuff because I don't know what to say. Lawyers call that "word salad" - when you say a whole bunch of words but at the end of it all you didn't really say anything.

Jesus says don't heap up words. Just say what you want to say.

And Jesus says don't think that long prayers will get us what we want. **Read 7**

Listen, God doesn't answer our prayers because they are long. God answers our prayers because he loves us. He's our Father. **Look at 7:11**

Do you realize God loves to answer our prayers just because he loves us? And he wants us to simply ask him for what we want.

There's a military term that I've come to love and it's the acronym BLUF. It stands for bottom line up front. In the military it's a practice where people state their conclusion at the beginning or their request at the beginning of the conversation and then support it with other information afterward. No meandering, no rabbit trails, no repeating points over and over. Just - boom - here's what I want to tell you.

Is there something you really want from God? Just ask him point blank. And ask him for that over and over and over. God is not irritated by us asking specific prayers. Jesus tells us to pray over and over and over. Ask God specifically for you want. Jesus even says to ask to the point you think you're annoying God. But God wants us to ask for what we really want.

### 3) Short prayers help us remember God knows all things. Read 8

Now, this is a weird turn in the discussion of prayer. Jesus is basically saying: Don't babble in our prayers because God knows what we need.

Well, if he knows what we need, why pray? If he's sovereign in giving us everything, why do we pray? Listen, I've got nothing more profound to say than: because he tells us to. The Holy Spirit has put into our hearts a desire to pray, Jesus the Son tells us to pray, and the Father wants us to pray.

We could get into big long discussions about sovereignty and responsibility and all that. There's also the relationship aspect. As an adult my parents constantly tell me they like hearing from me - not texting, not emails, a phone call. And I'm the same way: I just like talking to my kids. I think God's like that too. He just likes to hear from us.

But the bottom line is he wants us to pray. Does he know what we need? Absolutely. He is omniscient - he knows all things. We're not giving God new information when talk to him. "Oh man, you wanted wisdom in that tough situation? I had no idea!" "You wanted a house or a husband? News to me!"

No, what we tell him is what he's known for all eternity. Back before Genesis 1 - for all eternity past - he knew that Jason Upchurch would ask him for a specific thing on this day in March of 2020. He's not caught by surprise. Yet he still wants us to pray to him.

And the connection that Jesus seems to be making here is that praying short prayers reminds us that God already knows it. Praying small prayers reminds us that God knows all things, cares for us, knows us intimately, and wants us to come to him constantly. Look at the connection. **Read 8-9**

Do you get that connection? The reason we pray short prayers is because we know that God knows what we need. If we know that God knows, we won't spend a lot of time babbling, we'll just get to the point. And that's what he wants. Not because he's bothered by long prayers, but because he would rather a short genuine conversation than a long superficial one.

So pray to God. Don't feel guilty that you don't pray as much as you should. Be encouraged that regular, short prayers to God can make a huge difference.

**Pray**