

Pray Then Like This

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- [0 : 0 0] So next week we start on our series in the book of Acts. And so just like last week, this week we have quote, one-off sermon.
- And these are always the sermons where people tune out because they're one-offs, they're not part of series. But we are talking today about the Lord's Prayer. And the Lord's Prayer is something to always revisit, especially in the new year.
- Whether you're a person that makes resolutions every new year or you're not into that, everybody knows that the new year is always a time of renewal, is always a time of recommitment.
- And so every year as Christians we look back on the last year and we realize that we didn't pray in the way that we wanted to pray.
- And it's true of everybody. It doesn't matter how advanced your prayer life is, you know that last year wasn't as good as you wanted it to be. And so revisiting the Lord's Prayer in the new year is always a helpful thing because it's part of recommitting.
- [1 : 0 4] It's a prayer in itself because it's saying to God, I want to want to pray. And it's hard. It's tough. The desire is not always there. And so this morning I just wanted to revisit the Lord's Prayer.
- I preached on the Lord's Prayer around the last new year, but today we'll highlight some different aspects of it than what we did last year. Not that anybody remembers that, but we'll highlight some different aspects of it.
- The simple question we're asking today that I think we'll offer a little bit of help in our prayer life in 2017 is, what is Christian about Christian prayer? So what, in other words, what makes our prayers Christian prayers?
- And we read the whole context of the Lord's Prayer, but we're only going to focus on what precedes the Lord's Prayer today and then two little words, our Father. So what is distinct about Christian prayer? That's the question.
- And the answer, there are multiple answers to this, but three things to look at. Christian prayer is to a Father. It's on the basis of a Son, and it's by the Spirit.
- [2 : 1 8] So Christian prayer is to a Father on the basis of a Son by a Spirit. So first, it's to the Father. Now, a lot of times when we read or pray the Lord's Prayer, which is both meant to be a model for our private prayer life and a corporate prayer that we do indeed pray together, we forget about that the Lord's Prayer has a context.
- And the context of the Lord's Prayer is the Sermon on the Mount. It's plopped down right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, and we read the most immediate context surrounding it just a moment ago.
- The most immediate context is you'll find in verse 5 and verse 7, Jesus says, when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites in verse 5. And then in verse 7, he says, and when you pray, you must not be like the Gentiles.

So in other words, the most immediate context for understanding the Lord's Prayer is that Jesus is presenting the Lord's Prayer in the midst of saying, here are two ways not to pray.

Okay, so there's two ways to not pray. Don't pray like the hypocrites or the Gentiles. And then you'll see right before he starts the Lord's Prayer in verse 9, instead pray then like this.

[3 : 30] You see, so he's saying, the context of the Lord's Prayer, you have to understand, is I'm making a comparison and a contrast. Don't pray like these two. Pray instead like this.

Now, the other thing to notice about the immediate context is that he says, when you pray, don't do this. When you pray, don't do this, but when you pray, pray like this. You see, he says, when you pray.

And the reason he says, when you pray is because everybody prays. This is the first century. Everybody is religious.

There's nobody that's not religious. That's a double negative, but it's true. There's nobody not religious. Everybody is religious in the first century. Everybody prays. The hypocrites pray, the Gentiles pray, and the followers of Jesus.

Everybody's praying. And so you see, there's a difference in Christian prayer and non-Christian prayer. Not all prayers are equal. Not all prayers the same. And Jesus is assuming that.

[4 : 33] But really, this is true for all of history. In the late 19th century, right after Darwin's great thesis, a big world-changing thesis about evolution, there started to be a trend in modern secular discourse that religion was slowly starting to die out.

And one of the famous German philosophers that talked about this was a guy named Nietzsche, you might have heard of him. But in the 20th century, this idea really ramped up that people were becoming less and less religious over time.

And by the middle of the 20th century, by the 1950s and 60s, during the different cultural revolutions in that era, it was the academic, everybody believed it, the academic thesis is we will secularize to the point where there will be no more religion.

It might be 100 years from now, 200 years from now. Today, 81% most recently, kind of average of all the studies, 81% of the people in the world remain religious.

Four out of every five, you see, four out of every five people still pray. At some point in life, and every single academic worth any salt will say to you today that everybody was wrong about the secularization thesis.

[5 : 52] Nobody stopped being religious. You know why Jesus is, it's underlying this whole conversation that Jesus is having? Because people are religious. You can't stop being religious.

Humans are, by nature, religious beings. They have religiosity. Everybody does. It's not about whether you're religious or not. The question is, who are you worshiping? Who are you praying to?

And even the people that check, even if you're one of those, if you're one of the people that check the non-category, no religion on the recent census boxes that we've introduced in the past 25 years, even these people, you see it in pop culture every once in a while, when they're at their wits' end, when you're in the midst of suffering, you throw up that statement.

If you're listening to the unknown goddess Paul says, or to the big man in the sky, the terrible cliché that you hear in movies all the time, see, everybody turns to prayer at some point in life.

And so what Jesus is saying here is there's two ways not to pray, and there is a way to pray. There's a distinct way that a Christian prays. Now, let's talk just for a moment about the two ways that he says not to.

[7 : 10] The first one is about the hypocrites from verse 5. And the question that's being posed in this section is where do you pray?

You see, the hypocrites, they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners. And what he's saying is this, that hypocrites love to pray in both religious and non-religious spaces.

You see, so hypocrites not only love to pray in the synagogue or in the church, but they also love to go stand on the street corner and pray in a non-religious space. Now, this is quite common in the first century.

You would see this kind of thing all the time, these very public expressions of piety through public, just coming out in public prayer. And so Jesus says instead, he condemns them by saying instead, they just want to be seen.

They receive their reward instead, go and shut the door, put yourself in a closet and pray there. Now, look, don't over read it. Jesus is not condemning public prayer.

[8 : 15] This is hyperbole. It's an exaggeration to make a point. He's not saying don't pray in public, go lock yourself in a closet. Here's what he's simply saying. This is all, the whole point he's simply trying to make.

Hypocritical prayer, a hypocrite who prays is a person who has public prayer but no private prayer life. You see, he's saying that a hypocrite is a person who prays in public but has no private prayer life.

He's not condemning public prayer. We have to have public prayer. We'll see it in just a second that he says, our Father, that's a public prayer. He's saying a hypocrite is a person who has no private prayer life.

We've all been hypocrites. The second thing he condemns is the Gentile, the Gentile prayer. Now, all of us are Gentiles by definition.

Well, I'm not sure. There might be a Jewish person here. Most of us are Gentiles by definition. But the word Gentile here doesn't simply mean ethnic heritage.

[9 : 20] Gentile is a replacement word for the word pagan. So what he's saying is don't pray like the pagan religious people pray. Now, again, to qualify, pagan is not a word the way we use it today.

So a lot of times in the church discourse, people will be like, he's such a pagan, you know, or whatever, something like that. And that means big sinner or, you know, something like that. But all pagan means here is a non-Jew, somebody who worships in a different religion.

In other words, typically a polytheist. They believe in multiple gods and they pray to multiple gods. They go to temples throughout the Roman Empire and worship. They might worship Caesar and other gods.

So he says, don't pray like the pagans. Now, what's the issue with how the pagans pray? Did you catch it? Do not be like them. They think they're going to be heard for their many words.

But your father knows what you need. A lot of you that grew up in the church will remember the old way of translating this, the way that it used to be translated, was the Gentiles are what?

[10 : 27] You remember babblers? That they babble. And literally all it says here is that pagan prayer is empty word in repetition.

Another way to translate it is anxious words in constant repetition. Now, the question is why? What's different about pagan prayer and the prayer that Jesus is about to commend to us?

And the difference is simply this. He says the Lord knows what you need. Now, a lot of people have taken that little verse and said, see, we don't have to pray because it says that the Lord knows what we need.

So if you already know what I need, then I don't need to pray, but that's not what he's saying. He's asking it to pagan prayer and the issue is content. The issue is who are the pagans praying to?

You see, why do pagans have to keep throwing up empty words? Repetition after repetition, same thing over and over and over again, but they always come back empty. Why?

[11 : 30] Because the gods that they pray to are completely capricious. A polytheist believes in gods that are often at war with one another.

You can never be sure, right? So as a pagan, you go to the temple every year, you bring the sacrifices, you pay the prices, you bring all the money you're supposed to. You do everything that's been commanded of you, and then you throw up empty words because you don't know whether or not the gods are actually ever going to make good on the promise.

You see? But in contrast, the Lord knows what you need. In other words, he's saying the difference is that the God, this God, the Father that I'm about to tell you to pray for, every single time you pray, you're heard and he makes good on his promise.

He knows what you need. He's not capricious. He doesn't change, that's the point. So instead, Jesus is saying, there's a contrast, pray then like this, and the pray then like this is our Father.

It's our Father. Now, you guys probably today are not struggling with polytheistic prayer, I would imagine.

[12 : 46] Most of you are probably not, don't have household gods that are little statuettes or whatever, and you're probably not struggling with praying to any of them. But the question is that Jesus is asking here.

The underlying question is, have you forgotten? Do you know with your mind, or have you let your heart slip away from the idea that there is particularly Christian foundation for prayer?

So what is it? Jesus invites us here to say Father. He invites us to say Father. In contrast, look, this is a revolution.

This is a prayer revolution. The other religions, the religions in the first, they don't offer this. They don't offer you the opportunity to say Father.

It's a different foundation for prayer than any of the other religions of the world. Now, let me explain that. Our current economic setting makes this very easy to illustrate.

[13 : 56] We live in a world that's, a lot of our interactions, our relationships, are built on retail exchange, business exchange, right? So you might divide the entire way you relate to people in the world, in Scotland, in Edinburgh, in the United Kingdom, or wherever you are, in the West especially, between two ways.

The first way is that you relate to people through retail exchange. So for instance, you go to the store, you went to the store yesterday, most of you probably went to a store yesterday, and you bought something.

And when you buy something, you are indeed in relationship with the person across from you that you exchange goods with. You give them cash money, and they give you something in exchange for it.

And you have to have the money. You have to give them the money, or you're not going to get what you want, what they've offered to you. And that is the way most of our relationships in our lives currently operate.

So your relationship, if you're a renter to your landlord, is a retail relationship based off an exchange, based on a contract. It's a business relationship. Your relationship with your bank, with everybody at the bank, your relationship with your lawyer, if you need a lawyer, lawyer-client relationship.

[15 : 12] Most of our relationships in the modern world are business-like relationships. They're associated with retail exchanges. You put something in, you get something back. And if you don't put it in the inputs, you don't get the output.

Now, of course, you know that there's another way to relate to people. We call it the personal way today. There's the business way and the personal way.

And the personal way is a big spectrum of love. So, you know, on the most like business way of that spectrum, you can think of a student and a teacher.

Sometimes students and teachers develop a relationship of love where you really do learn from a particular teacher in a way that you had never experienced before. Right? And that's a very personal relationship.

But when you get farther down the spectrum, you have boyfriends and girlfriends. Right? And that's a much, that's a more intimate relationship than student-teacher. But then farther down the spectrum, you have, what do you have?

[16 : 18] You have family. Right? And family is the highest pinnacle, the climax of that, of relationships. Family. Here's what Jesus is doing.

When Jesus invites you to say, Father, which is not like the Pagans pray, what He's saying is Christian prayer is based on an entirely different foundation than all other prayer.

It's based on your status as family member. You see? You don't, you don't come, in other words, you don't come in a business-like relationship.

Now, did you think of prayer that way? Did you think of prayer in more of a business-retail exchange? Where you come, where you come to a God, and based on your performances, based on your inputs, you're expecting a certain level of output.

And you're throwing up words and words and words, hoping to get back what you've put in. What Jesus is saying is that's a pagan notion. That's a pagan way of, to pray.

[17 : 24] In contrast, there's a distinctively Christian way to pray. And the difference is, is the foundation, the basis, the status. Christians don't pray, look, he could have said a number of things.

He could have said, our Lord. And Lord is a common word throughout this whole culture for ruler. He could have said our ruler, our sovereign, our king, our creator.

And all of these would have been true of God. All of them would have been true. But he doesn't say that. He says, what? Our Father, because the foundation of Christian prayer is family.

It's that when you go to pray to him, you're praying to more than a ruler, more than a master, more than a creator. It's more intimate than that.

You're praying to a Father. You know, we could illustrate it like this. If you have kids, if you have kids, you understand the difference in these foundations and these two ways of praying, right?

[18 : 29] My son, Ethan, he's three years old. We haven't gotten to this point yet, but maybe we will someday. I hope not. But if Ethan becomes the worst kid on the block someday, you know, just the worst of the worst.

He becomes a criminal. He leaves the house. He totally rebels. I mean, he has a little bit of that spark in him, for sure, right now. If he goes through with it and does all the things he tells us now that he's going to do in life, then there's no telling what might happen.

And he runs off and he takes my money, and the money I don't have, he takes my money and he squanders it. And years go by, and all of a sudden I'm sitting on my porch one day and I look out on the horizon and I see him walking towards me, right?

What am I going to do? Now, in a business-like relationship, in a retail relationship, in the relationship that a pagan has to his God, what does he do?

He assumes that the man on the porch, the boss, the master, is going to do what Donald Trump has said to so many. You're fired. Don't come back to this house. I've let you go.

[19 : 50] You squander my money. You're fired. We are cut off, right? But no, I'm going to put my shoes on, and I'm going to run to him.

And look, I don't care what he did. If you're a parent, you don't care what they do. It doesn't matter. Now, there are issues to work through, sure, but you will go and you will embrace your son or daughter, and you will say, come in, eat with me.

Right? Why? Because he, Ethan, is blood of my blood. He's flesh of my flesh. You see the transition?

There's a status change between a business-like relationship and a father and a son, father and a daughter. It's completely different, right?

You see the difference in Christian prayer and pagan prayer? Have you let your mind and heart sink into a place where you pray to a God that's not your family?

[20 : 52] Or is the foundation of your prayer actually you going to him as you would go to a father? That's the question Jesus is asking of us in this contrast.

You know, to close this point, and by the way, each point gets shorter and shorter, so be relieved. To close this point, look, if Jesus is the revelation of the father, then look, he said this on behalf of the father, come to me, all of you who are weary and heavy-laden.

Come to me. That's the invitation to pray, to speak, to communicate. God the Father said it through the prophet Isaiah this way.

We read it at the beginning of our call to worship. Come, all of you who are thirsty, come to the waters, and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat. Come buy your wine and milk without money, without price.

It's a metaphor. Come and drink from the water he's offering, the water of speaking to him, without money. Don't come to him with money. Don't come to him trying to pay.

[22 : 05] That's not how it works. That's not the foundation. That's not how sons and daughters come to fathers. You don't come to him with the offering saying, if I do this, will you listen? That's not how it works.

Okay, so that's the first point. The second point, and more briefly is this, what is the basis then? What is the basis then on which a Christian can come to the Father in prayer?

What is the basis for that relationship? And the second thing that's distinct about Christian prayer is that it's in the Son. It's in the Son. Now, you see this especially in one word in our passage.

It's all over the New Testament, but in our passage it's one word, and that's the word hour. So he says, our Father. You see, in other words, Jesus is introducing a corporate dimension to the Lord's prayer.

He's saying, come and pray with me. This is our Father. In other words, what he's saying, look, Matthew, we preached on this not long ago, a few weeks ago, Matthew has already introduced in his gospel that this is the Son.

[23 : 14] At the baptism, this is the Son. And you see what the Son is saying? The Son is saying, pray like this, all of you, our Father.

In other words, what's the Son saying? The Son is saying, you are with me when we say Father. He is our Father. I am the Son, and now I'm telling you, you are sons and daughters.

You see, the only way to call God Father is to be with the Son, with Him. And that's what he's saying when he says the little word our, our Father.

In other words, look, many of you will recognize this immediately just a moment ago. When I was talking about Ethan running off and becoming a criminal and squandering everything, you know where, you know, that's not my illustration.

You know whose illustration that is. It's from the Gospels. It's from Luke chapter 15. It's the story of the prodigal son, right? One of the interesting things about the prodigal son in Luke 15, which is, I started to preach on that today, but I just couldn't remember how I'd done it here before, because it's not just in the prodigal son story, that the only prodigal is the Son.

[24 : 36] There's also a prodigal Father. You see, in the first century, it was anathema. It was a total cultural taboo to do all the things that the Father does in that story.

When the Son comes back, everything that the Father does, He lifts up His gown. He runs out to the Son. All of things are unbecoming of a Jewish patriarch.

They would have known. You don't do this. Not to mention the fact that the Son, in the story, goes and eats with pigs. Eating with pigs makes you unclean.

So Jesus is painting a very specific picture. This is an unclean boy. He's a criminal. He squandered all His wealth. He said no to His Father. And now it's not just that He's the prodigal, but that the Father is the prodigal.

Because the Father is loving Him recklessly. He's running out to Him. He's breaking every cultural norm. You see, it's a prodigal love. Now, what's the basis on which you go to the Father, the prodigal God, in prayer?

[25 : 45] Look, it's that Jesus Christ, this man, the disciples couldn't know it yet, but he's the pronouncement of God's prodigal love for human beings.

You see, it's in this man, this man that's standing there and telling them, you pray with me as sons and daughters. It's actually in this man that God has come to pronounce His prodigal love for human beings.

That He's come to say, I'm coming to rescue you. I'm pulling up my gown and running out to the hillside for you. And I'm telling you, no matter what you've done, come back and eat from my table.

It's in this man. What's the foundation? What's the difference between pagan and Christian prayer? It's not simply that you call God Father, but it's that you call God Father on the basis of God's pronouncement of love in this Son.

You see, Jesus went to a cross where He no longer heard the love of the Father, the call, the beckoning of the Father. The Father became to Him judge so that when you come to prayer, you can say Father.

[26 : 51] You see, you call God Father only on the basis of the Son. At the heart of this idea is two little terms in theology that we use.

One is substitution and one is union. So first substitution, you can call God Father and God can rename you son or daughter because the son died bearing your sins for you.

Substitution is something that Jesus is for you. And when you say our Father, you're acknowledging Jesus for me, the son for me, before the Father.

You see? And the second idea is not just that Jesus is for you, but Paul tells us that you are in Him. And this is the idea of union. In other words, that everything Jesus did is yours when you're united to Him.

His death is your death. His resurrection is your life. Substitution and union, that's the foundation for which you can say Father.

[27 : 55] Alright, thirdly and finally, and we'll be done. Lastly, Christian prayer is to a Father on the basis of the Son by the Spirit.

Now, this idea is not directly in this passage, but I'm going to flip, and you can flip there if you want to Romans 8, just to look at two verses. Romans 8 verses 15 and 16.

You know, Romans 8 is the, many people say, the greatest chapter in the greatest letter in the greatest book ever written. It's, you know, it's most people's favorite, it's a lot of people's favorite chapter.

And the central part of, on the Spirit and creation is most people's favorite section. And of the best chapter. And in it, he says this, 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.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Now, there's three just brief ideas I'm only going to list because we're out of time. We're almost out of time here. The first is this, prayer is by the Spirit.

[29 : 04] And it says why? Because you have not received a spirit of slavery, but a spirit of adoption. You see what Paul's doing here is he's reflecting on the Lord's prayer.

And he's saying, unlike the Gentiles, the pagans who operate with the spirit of slavery, a heart of slavery before God, you've received adoption, sons and daughters.

That's the first thing. You don't approach God as a slave. Yes, he's your master, but it's more. You don't approach Him as a son or a daughter. The second thing he says is this, by the Spirit, then you cry Abba, Father.

Now, look, this is probably a direct reflection on the Lord's prayer. Because he's saying when you cry out to God, when you pray out to God, because you have been adopted, the Spirit comes and testifies in your heart your son or daughter, then it causes you to cry Abba, Father.

Now, look, Abba, Abba is an Aramaic term for Father, but it's not just a term for Father. Father is too precise. It's too proper.

[30 : 10] Abba is actually the Aramaic word for what all of you know to be Dada. If you have little kids, you know the word Abba in Aramaic.

It's Dada. It's Papa. In other words, Abba, you hear it? It's the same thing that our kids do when they're just growing up. They can't do anything but say Papa, Mama.

My grandmother, who died just this past year, she was called, only ever knew her as Barbu. Just that too little.

Now, her name is Barbara. Her name is Barbara Jean. But my cousin, who was the first of the grandkids, couldn't say it. So she always said, Barbu growing up. So we all call it Barbu.

And many of you have stories like that. Some of you are named one of these names, right? This is exactly what Abba is. In other words, the Spirit, what he's saying is this, by the power of the Spirit, by the conviction of the Spirit, when you come to pray to the Father in the name of the Son, what's happening is you're coming by the testimony of the Spirit to your Spirit or to your heart, to your mind.

[31 : 20] And he's telling you, you are a child before him. Look, in other words, he's saying, in the power of the Spirit, you can first take the posture that all of you know if you've ever worked in Crush or if you have children, where the little girl comes up to you and does this and says, carry me.

Carry me all day. Carry me. Carry me. Carry me. The Spirit's testimony to your heart is that this is our posture before a Father. The pagans don't pray like that.

It's the posture of absolute dependence. And it's always childlike. You never grow out of it. It's always coming. You see, the Spirit is saying, Paul is saying you always say Abba.

Now, you don't have to literally say that. The point is you always come in childlike dependence. In other words, no matter how big and grown up and holy and wise you get, you're always going higher up and deeper in.

And when you go higher up and deeper in to quote Lord of the Rings, you're actually just becoming more like a child before him. The posture of dependence.

[32 : 34] Right now, we'll just close with, I'm done. Here's what I'll say. All of us probably, most of us, if not all of us, need the prodding and poking of the experience of the Holy Spirit to make us childlike today in 2017.

Because if we're honest with ourselves, we're mechanical. And mechanical is not always bad, but mechanical in prayer needs to be accompanied by childlike dependence.

That's what we're coming to. If we don't have it, we're coming and we're doing this in order to get it again. We go higher up and deeper in to the Christian life so that we can become more like children.

So we need to be honest with ourselves. And the other thing, the last thing I'll say is that you probably also need to be honest with somebody else, which means deep friendships can really help prayer life when you can actually talk to somebody about where you are in life.

That's deep friendship, deep, deep friendship, and it has to be pursued. That's why we pray our Father. It's the invitation into community prayer, honest prayer.

[33 : 49] By the way, I said that was the last thing I'll say. I'll say one more thing. The opposite of babbling, pagan babbling, is not eloquence.

So it's not contrasting saying many repetitious words with eloquence, with being a person who can pray great prayers. Instead, the contrast is with childlike dependent prayers.

So more than all this New Year, prayer will change us. Did you know that? To make us pray like this.

So higher up and deeper in, just dive right in, and it'll change you. Let's pray. Father, we ask, O Lord, that you would restock our heart that we might depend in prayer.

We call you Father today. We recognize us to be your children, your sons and daughters. And so we pray, O Lord, that you would make us depend.

[34 : 49] Please, O Lord, we ask, help us to depend. We want to have you. So we ask for that now, in Jesus' name. Amen.