

“SIMPLE STEPS TO EFFECTIVE PRAYER” By Pastor Yau
Text: Matthew 6:5-13 May 17, 2015.

INTRODUCTION:

1) A question frequently asked: One of the questions many Christians asked through my nearly half of a century of service is: How can my prayer life be stronger and more effective? This is a very good question because it shows the sincere hearts of many Christians who want to grow in their prayer life. But this isn't a new question. In the time of Jesus over 2,000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus came to him and asked him to show them how to pray in Luke 11:1, “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him: “Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

2) An example given by the Lord: Often times, we try to tell Christians, new or seasoned, that prayer is as simple as carrying a conversation to your father or a friend. In a way it is true. But on the other hand, we know there are many level of conversation between people that bring different level of understand and results. The same principle applies to prayers. If we want our prayer life be strong, full of meaning and effective, here are some guidelines Jesus gave us to follow in this passage. Jesus himself is a warrior of prayer. There are many records of prayer in the gospels from early days of his ministry to the time he was being hung on the cross before his death. Of course prayers are not speeches where you need to prepare, write it down, and practice it before it is delivered to God. But there are few areas of things we need to be ready as we pray to God our Father. Here are three areas we need to pay attention to when we pray:

PROPER ATTITUDE IN PRAYER: (Luke 6:5-8)

In the Beatitudes in Matthew 5-7, Jesus focused very much on the proper attitude in doing religious acts, attitude of prayer is one of them. God wants to see our hearts more than our acts when we offer

anything good to him or to our fellow men. God wants to see more than what we do, but also why we do it. Prayer is like any other good works Christians always do, we need to do it with proper attitude before our prayers become effective and meaningful.

1) Be sincere when you pray: Prayer is a holy time with God and we need to have the utmost sincere attitude when we pray. Jesus criticized those who prayed without sincere attitude in 6:5, “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.” You may think how can anyone use such a holy moments of prayer to show off or to achieve personal purpose? Yes, there are those who will use any opportunity to benefit themselves instead of glorify God, even in time of prayer. Any intention other than giving God the glory he deserves is inappropriate and unacceptable no matter if it is a personal prayer or in a public worship service.

2) Be focused when you pray: Be focused means be concentrated without disturbances. Jesus suggested this: “When you pray go into your private room shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret.” (6:6, Holman Bible) “Private room” means a place you can concentrate, be quiet and alone, so you are able to face God alone when you pray. This means you'll give God your undivided attention when you meet him and talk to him. We all want others to treat us with respect when they talk to us. How much more we should treat God with utmost respect by focusing on him and him alone when we pray. If your work involves a regular daily meeting first thing in the morning, you will drop everything else and attend that meeting everyday. Why can't you find time first thing in the morning to seek God's guidance in your life at the start of the day in your inner room so you can talk to and listen from God?

3) Be heartfelt when you pray: Prayer should be spontaneous from your heart, not as a ritual from other people. Many main stream denominations published “Book of Prayer” written by clergy or scholars, and placed in pews so people can read in a responsive way

at worship services or other religious occasions. Jesus told us this: “When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.” (6:7) If prayer is a heart to heart communication with God, we need to give God our true heart when we pray. Prayer is never meant to be a ritual or a duty but a spiritual life line drawing spiritual power from God to grow our spiritual life. There is no need of flowery words or well written notes. Any artificial man-made efforts to make a prayer pretty is not necessary nor acceptable.

PROPER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN PRAYER: (Matt. 6:9-10)

Everyone knows that the object of our prayer is God himself. Therefore, knowledge and relationship with God is very important for effective prayer. Without proper knowledge of God or a close relationship with God, you are just mumbling words to yourself.

1) Proper relationship with God: Jesus was serious in his relationship with his heavenly Father. We see this in his teaching and the model prayer here. We all know God is a Spirit and we are human, but Jesus wanted us to treat God as our Father in heaven, a personal relationship Jesus treasured very much. This relationship with God is big enough for a separate sermon or a thesis. In short, we must have a spiritual relationship with God, as children to a Father, to have effective prayers. This means we must first accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, be born again to be children of God, so, we may have that special relationship with God to pray to him. Never treat God as emergency rescuer that we only need him when we are in danger or in needs we can't provide.

2) Proper honor to revere God: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” (6:9) In today's society, most people don't have much idea of revere or honor toward those in higher positions like parents, teachers, government officials, superiors at work or in school. That is problematic in our society. But when we approach God, we need to have that respect toward God. Jesus addressed God with great

honor by using the word “hollowed” to begin his model prayer. Hollowed means to be honored and revered as holy. We know that when we see a judge in a courtroom, we need to revere him by address him: Your Honor! To honor God is not to be afraid of God but to give God his position, even as our heavenly Father, he is a Holy God. If we call a judge “Your honor” because of his position, knowledge and power, how much more we need to respect God with honor when we pray to him?

3) Proper obedience toward God: One of many mistakes in our prayers that set them unanswered is our wrong approach: We want God to give things we want or do our things the way we want, and that is a terrible thing in prayers.

We need to remember this: God isn't our servant nor a genie who we can summoned to give us things we want or do things we can't do it ourselves. Jesus told us when we pray, we need to have proper obedience in heart. So, Jesus told us this: “Your kingdom come, and your will be done.” (6:10) How often do we pray with that kind of heart to allow God's will be done in our life, our situation, our needs? We need to learn from Prophet Isaiah to know that, “God's thoughts are not our thoughts, his ways not our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways.” (Isaiah 55:8-9) Trust and obey is the proper way.

PROPER REQUESTS MADE TO GOD: It's nothing wrong to make requests to God in prayers. Abraham asked God to give him a son. Jacob prayed that God will protect him from harm as he ran away from his brother, and then to meet him on his way back home. Elijah prayed that God will send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice so the Israelites will know that He is the one and only true God. Hannah prayed to God asking to give her a son. Jonah the runaway prophet prayed in the stomach of the great fish that God will forgive him and save his life. Do I need to list any more listings in the Bible that yes we can and need to include our requests in our prayers? In

this model prayer, Jesus included three areas of needs we have so we can pray after him.

1) Pray for physical needs: This is one thing we always know and do in most of our prayers: Asking God for our everyday needs and his provision: “Give us today our daily bread.” (6:11) Of course “daily bread” includes everything we need for our physical life: material, physical, jobs, health, school, safety, everything else we need to maintain our physical life. This is important enough in the mind of our Lord to be listed first in the list of requests in his model prayer. Some may tell you that this shouldn't be first on the list in our prayers. All I know is Jesus did list it first in his prayer. Pray for our needs doesn't mean we have to ask God or in case God doesn't know. But it means we express our dependency on God for his love and provision. It is an acknowledgment to God that he is our sole provider.

2) Pray for relationship needs: After asking for provision of physical needs, Jesus led us to another area of needs: Building better relationship with people around us. In today's society with material provisions readily available within our reach if we have a steady job, a regular income, live responsibly in our life style, meeting physical needs isn't the biggest problem we face. But more and more people suffer from relational problems at home, in marriage, at work or even in the church. Ever since human society was formed from early days in the home of Adam and Eve, relationship is always a problem. When society grows to include others in more complex situation, getting along with people is a real challenge. Jesus offers us a very useful solution to all human problems in relationships: Forgive. In 6:12, he shows us how to pray on this problems: “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” “Debts” means “come short” or “owing to”, usually refers to “offenses”. Jesus wants us to “forgive” those who owe us their offenses as God forgives ours to Him.

3) Pray for spiritual victory: Although this is listed at last, it doesn't

mean it's the least important. I believe this is the last defensive line for all the needs we have: Our spiritual victory over all the needs of our life. Jesus wants us to pray like this: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (6:13) If "lead us not" is translated as "protect us from" temptation, it would be somewhat easier to understand. God will never lead us into temptation for he is a righteous God. But we need his protection, guidance, so we won't be stumbled into temptation. This takes us to the need of walking closer to God and be obedient to his leadership in our life. The second part of this spiritual victory is our dependence on God's mercy to rescue us from evil. This is our need of God's power to rescue us when we have stumbled into evil. This is also an expression of repentance on our side and forgiveness on God's side. Spiritual victory should be part of our daily prayer as we grow closer to God. Do you struggle in your spiritual life? Facing any temptation and need God to deliver you? Ask God and He will help you and bring you to victory.

THESE YOU CAN DO:

1) Building a strong prayer life: Our salvation is only the beginning of the spiritual journey we will travel the rest of our life. Prayer is the lifeline we all need to grow that spiritual life. We will never graduate from our need of God everyday we live. If you feel spiritually weak, get back to God in daily time of prayer and reading his word. There is no other way to keep your spiritual life vibrant without regular time in the Bible and prayer. Don't wait until that desperate moment in life when you have falling away from God to get back to him. Start your daily dose of spiritual intake to keep you strong in Him.

2) Follow the patten of Jesus: If you never have a regular habit of prayer, or you have a habit that isn't effective, you can follow the pattern Jesus gave to his disciples in your prayer life today. Remember what Paul advice Timothy the importance of spiritual

health: “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for the present life and the life to come.” (1Timothy 4:8)