

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: Prayer

Part 2

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend February 14/15, 2009

The Lords prayer is probably the most familiar prayer in all of the Bible. So why are we studying this prayer? Of all the prayers that we could look at, why are we looking at a prayer that almost all of us probably know by heart or at least we've said over and over again in...in different church services or...or in other areas of...of our life and of our own prayer...private prayer life. It's because most people know this prayer more as a method rather than a model. A model is simply a guide, it's...it's an outline. A method changes it into a system, a technique, a formula. And what we're learning is that the Lord's prayer was never meant to be a formula. Let's turn to that familiar passage now in Matthew, chapter 6. And let's go back again and look at what Jesus is attempting to teach as he teaches us how to pray. Prayer is not something that...is...is natural or easy. I've heard people tell us that. I've heard people tell...tell believers that they should just be as natural in praying as it is in breathing but I haven't honestly found that to be the case in my own life. Prayer is something that needs to be learned. It's something that needs to be studied and...and worked at. It's something that needs to be incorporated into our lives but how we see prayer, how we understand prayer, will really kind of determine how it works out in a practical way on a daily basis in our relationship with God.

Jesus starts the whole aspect of teaching with two shocking words. He says: I want you to pray like this. I want you to pray by saying, our Father. You need to know before we go any further that was a radical departure from what was normal in the day. Remember what we were learning last week about...about this whole passage? That really the...the Lords prayer is not a standalone piece of scripture that can be extracted out of the scriptures. But what is it? The context tells us that it's part of the Sermon on the Mount. That it actually is a part of what Jesus is saying not just in verse...in chapter 6 but back in chapter 5 where he starts debunking, demystifying what...what religion was to that particular day. He...he used several familiar phrases. He would say, you heard it was said but I say to you. He says that over and over again. You've heard it said by the scribes and the Pharisees and the religious teachers of the day but I say to you, I tell you the truth. And he goes through several different topics, anger, lust, divorce, letting our yes be yes, our no be no, the concept of retaliation. And he comes to chapter 6 and he says, now I want you to be aware of practicing your righteousness so other people can see it. He says, I don't want you to be hypocritical and I don't want you to be hypocritical in three areas...in your giving, in your praying and in your fasting. And then he lasers focuses in on praying. He says, I don't want you to be hypocritical like the Pharisees and the scribes. I don't want you to just turn prayer into something that's a...that's a large show. Now up to this point in his sermon, this already would have gotten the attention of everybody around him. But when he started teaching, I want you to pray like this and he said, "Our Father". Personally, I think you probably could have heard gasps...audible gasps from the crowd. Do you know why? Because up until this point, God had never been addressed with any kind of degree of intimacy. This was a radical shift in

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understanding someone's position before a holy God. Most Jewish people would not even utter the name of God let alone call him, "Father". Tom Constable in his online commentary writes: Only fifteen times was God referred to as the Father in the Old Testament. Where it does occur, it is used of the nation of Israel or of the kings of Israel. Never was God called the Father of an individual or human being in general. So up into this point, God had never been spoken of in such an intimate way. And you how...how Jesus starts his teaching? He says, I want you to call God, patra, or...or the very colloquial familiar term for father. Other places, he used the Aramaic, Abba. He says, I want you...I want you to think of God, the Father, as God like a personal daddy, a personal father, that you have a relationship with. And just to take this one step further in your in your understanding, let me read from a...a noted Jewish scholar whose name is Joachim Jeremiahs and he writes this, he says: "No place in the immense literature of Judaism is this invocation of God as Abba Father to be found." He goes on to say, "Abba was an everyday word. It was a family word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner, yet Jesus authorizes his disciples to repeat the word Abba after him. He gives them a share in his sonship. He empowers his disciples to speak with their heavenly father in a familiar and trusting way." Do you hear what he's saying? He is saying up until this point, all of Judaism would've...would've gone the opposite direction in approaching God. They would have been much more formal. They would have been much more technique, systemized in their praying. Jesus breaks that barrier. And he says, no, I want it to be based on a relationship. If you hear nothing else this morning, you need to understand that our communication, our prayer with God is that of a father/son, father/daughter in relationship. That's what a model represents.

Do you know what this model actually represents? It's more than just praying. It represents the fullness of our relationship in God. You've heard me tell you this before but you need to understand this...this is a foundational element of our relationship with God is that now all of our...our failures, all of shortcomings, all of our sins, all of those were completely paid for at the cross. The cross was not just an event that took place that secured salvation. The cross eradicated our failures, our sins, past, present and future. So we do not stand before God wanting, we stand before God complete. You say, well, what does this mean? It means that your relationship is based not on what you do but what Christ has already accomplished or done on the cross. You see, if you don't understand that, not only will you have issues in following after God but it's going to affect all aspects of your relationship with God, especially your prayer life. It'll work out something like this. If you don't realize you are already secure, loved by God, the Father, you will formalize prayer and you will make it as something you have to do, you'll feel like you have...like a check off...you've got to check that off your list just to appease God or make God happy or...or to please him. If you go down that mindset where you...you feel like there's something you have to do to gain God's approval, not realizing you already have it, you'll turn prayer into a method and then when you struggle

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with prayer, and you will ...because we all do. Or you feel like you don't pray enough, you'll start to feel like God is mad at you or angry at you and instead of running to him, you will run from him. You see, you have to put in your mind what Jesus is saying in these opening words, "Our Father", he is saying that this is based on a relationship. You say...well, why you....why you're going over this and over this. I'll tell what...I know that many of you come from very formal religious backgrounds and many of you struggle because you have in your mind this mindset that formal somehow equals formula...that you are so used to the formulas of religion. In fact, I...I would imagine that many of you come from some backgrounds that...that are so formal and formalized that you don't even have think about it when you go to those religious settings...that when it starts you know what to say...when to say it...how to say it...you know when to sit...when to stand...when to kneel. It has become such a formalized function that you can just go through it without really investing anything of yourself in it. And...and Jesus is saying, that is not how I want you to communicate with God. I don't want it to be a formal formula. I want it to be a relationship like a son or a daughter to a loving, caring father. That's how he starts.

I would imagine at this point he had everybody's attention and he was...they were waiting for what was going to come next. So he says to them, I want you to pray like this. Look at the text, he says: Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name. We're going to learn seven components of the Lord's prayer over the next several weeks. It's a very historical way of studying this passage. Ah...many times, it is broken down into seven petitions or...or...or seven different movements. I call them components because components are a modern word. It's something you and I understand. A component makes up a whole. But you don't have to necessarily have components in any given order...you can just take them out of different order and put them on again. That's the Lord's prayer. The Lord starts by showing us the first component and he says, this component is that you approach God in adoration. You approach God first through some type of praise, some type of adoration. That's what verse 9 shows us. Look, it says, we approach him as our Father who is in Heaven....means that he's not on earth...he's hallowed meaning that he's holy. So what does this say? Well, two aspects. First, he's not like our earthly father, we understand that. But more importantly, he resides in heaven and he's holy which means that we exist in a monarchy and our king who happens to be our father is good and holy. Why do you think Jesus starts here? He starts with adoration. Why does he start here? Because I think he wants to set our focus in prayer. That's why I said prayer...or...or the different aspects of the Lord's prayer are like components. The first component that he introduces is taking our minds off ourselves and putting it on God. Look....look at the passage, he says: Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done....your....your...your. Here's a triad in scripture; it's all about him. We adore him, we praise him, we boast in him. Do you realize what he's saying? You start in your

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prayer relationship with God focusing on God. You see, when you understand this, you will never again run out of things to say to God. When you understand that we can come to God and we can boast in him, we can adore him, we can praise him, we can tell him of his greatness, then we have an endless opportunity to commune with him in a relationship.

And you know something else it does? It takes the focus off of ourselves and puts it where it should be...on him. You know, many times, we like to become infatuated with what we need and what...what our desires are. I want to challenge you to do something this week. Instead of praying about something for yourself, why don't you spend at least one period of time of praying where you don't even mention any of your needs. Mention nothing that you need, but rather focus all the attention on him give him the adoration. That's a component of prayer. You know, many times, we a...tend to make things about ourselves and...and...we tend to...to grandiose things that are going on in our lives. Do you know what happens when you have an opportunity to step out of that? Step out and see the large, grandness of God, it puts things back into perspective. Ah...ever been to the Grand Canyon? Doesn't the Grand Canyon kind of put life into perspective? When you stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon and you look down into it or when you go down into it and look up out of it? What does it do? It demonstrates your significance, doesn't it? You feel a sense that all the things that you've accomplished in your life pale in comparison to whoever created this. It puts things in right perspective. That's the exact same thing that adoration does when you go before God, the Father. It puts things in right perspective. You say, alright? What do I say? Well, what do I say...in this...in this sense of adoration to the Father? Well, this is where we need to take our cues from the psalmist. There's nothing wrong with going to psalms and incorporating this into your own prayer life. Ah...there's nothing wrong with that sense of...of working through passages and putting them into your own words. In fact, that's an excellent way to learn how to pray. Let me give you a couple of examples of...of some things that...ah...I've been taught in my own prayer life. Turn with me to Psalm, for example Psalm 8. You might want to write some of these down and you can look at them...go back to them in your own private time. But for example, Psalm 8, teaches us how to give a sense of praise and adoration to the Father. Psalm 8, verse 1, says, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! There it is! That's a wonderful way to begin praying. God, you are mighty, you reign over the earth, your name is above everything that I can understand, see, comprehend. Verse 2, middle of verse 1 rather...You have set your glory above the heavens. Drop down to verse 3: When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him. One of the things I like to do in the summer...take my kids, we lay out in the deck, late at night, turn out all the house lights, just look up into the stars. You know, you kind of have that sensation like you're feeling...you're falling upwards and...and you...you know when you get to places...ah...that are grand...go out

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west...you can kind of sense the curvature of the earth and there's a grandness, a large scale to the earth. When we lay on our deck, I'll talk to the kids and say, isn't God amazing? Look...look at all the stars. Look how large our universe is. Look how amazing he is. You know, that's...that's a type of praying. We just can be overwhelmed by the beauty of creation...that leads us to adoration. Turn with me to another passage.

Turn to Psalm 96, Psalm 96, verse 5, it says: For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majestic are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Now listen to this: Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, bring an offering...come into his courts! Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Three times, ascribe, ascribe, ascribe. We just saw another triad a moment ago. By the way, that's very rare in scripture. It's like in Isaiah, chapter 6, holy, holy, holy. You know what that is? That is a Hebraic way of trying to get the readers' attention. Don't miss this. This is important. So the psalmist is saying, don't miss this. This is important. Ascribe worth, adoration to God. In other words, God is saying, I want you to do this. This is a way that we can relate with one another. This is a way that can move your Spirit and connect it to mine.

And so where does Jesus begin? He says, look, first component. I want you treat God in a relationship but then I also want you to approach him first in adoration and praise and in worship. And then he takes us in a very similar direction still keeping the focus on God in verse 10...in verse 10. He says, your kingdom come, your will be done. What is this? This is acknowledging God's will. That means when we come to pray we are preoccupied with what God would want in our lives and his agenda throughout the earth. What we're basically saying when we come to God is that we acknowledge that your will is more important than my will, that I have a preoccupation with your agenda, not my agenda. You say, wait a minute. Aren't we supposed to be praying for others and praying for ourselves? Yeh...we'll...we're going to get to that.

But the best prayer is the prayer that says, your will be done. I...I often will pray that with people who will come forward when we a...we celebrate communion on the first Wednesdays here. After communion, we invite people to come forward and we pray for physical needs and spiritual needs and financial needs and whatever is going on in their life and the elders and the staff will gather. And when I have opportunities to pray for people that'll come forward and they'll ask for some type of prayer. And many times, it's a prayer for some type of physical healing. I remind them that we're not only praying for God to heal us...we're not only praying for God to move us out of our financial predicament or...or out of a relationship...whatever. But we're also praying that his will be done in that particular situation and that we don't want that situation to end until his will is accomplished in our life. Sometimes that's hard for people to grasp because we

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want to be out of difficult situations but we don't want to rush out. We want to say, God, I want your will to be done regardless of what the situation might be. You say, would God really do that? Well, absolutely. Do you remember what Jesus was praying right before the cross? He was praying to the Father...relationship, right? And he was saying, if there's any way, could you have this cup...that this trial to pass from me, but how did he end? But your will be done, right? So God often places us into situations we might not like, we might not understand and rather than trying to rush through or rush out, what...what is our heart? Our heart is saying, God, your will be done. Your will be done. Your agenda be filled before mine. Jesus also says, your kingdom come. You need to understand here, kingdom does not necessarily refer to a...a geographical territory so remember, we're learning how to pray, right? So he's saying, I want you to pray that my agenda is more important than yours and I want you to pray that my kingdom comes. What does he mean by this? If it's not a geographical...geographical territory, what does he mean? Listen, he's saying...he's saying, I want my kingdom to be dominant. I want my kingdom, my sovereign domain, to be what is primary in the world and in your heart. Ah...how do you pray about something like that?

Well, let me give you a few things to pray about. Four, very quickly. The kingdom of God comes first through conversion when we pray for people to come to know the Lord. The kingdom of God rests in his people. And what is the call in our life? Our call is to be praying for his kingdom to come. What does that mean? That means we pray for people to come to know the Lord. Do you do that? Is that a part of your prayer life? Is that a component? Father, I pray that you would draw the hearts of people but you have to know who those hearts are. So that predicates an idea that you're actually involved with people who may not know the Lord. Why? So that you might have an opportunity to lead them to the Lord or be a vessel of leading them to the Lord or if nothing else to be praying for them. Do you want to jumpstart your prayer life? Get involved with people who do not know the Lord. Now you'll begin praying...God I want your kingdom to be enlarged and alive in their heart.

Another way that we pray for God's kingdom to come is through repentance. We...we pray not only for own repentance but for the world's repentance, for our country's repentance. In II Chronicles, chapter 7, it says: If my people who are called by my name, humble themselves, pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways, what's it say? Then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their lands. Do you understand what this passage is? This is not just a promise. This is...this is a promise that is moving towards the kingdom of God. That God would ultimately have dominion in everyone's heart. And so what do we pray? We pray, God, soften the hearts of men that they might come to know you.

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So we pray for conversion, we pray for repentance. Number three: We pray for commitment. In just a few chapters beyond the Lord's prayer and the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew, chapter 13, he talks about the importance about the kingdom of God and how commitment...that our commitment...in other words, that our preoccupation with God's kingdom is more important than ours. We'll talk more about that in weeks to come. Number four: We also pray for the return of Christ. Have you ever done that? Jesus tells us to do that right here. Pray for his return. Pray that he might come. You see, the passages, your kingdom come, this idea of come is an imperative. Its...it's a ...indicating a sudden, instantaneous appearance. It literally could be stated, your kingdom come now. Why do we pray for that? Because we ultimately want Christ to be glorified. Again, this first section is all about taking the focus off of ourselves and putting the focus on God.

So how do you pray this week? We're just going to...we've just looked at two. We've got several more to look in our seven components of the Lords prayer. But start with these two. Focus on these two. You're not going to go wrong. You want to know how to pray? First approach God with adoration, praise, worship. Secondly, come to him, acknowledge that you want his agenda fulfilled over your own. We move from this into the next component next week. Let's pray together.

Lord, we want to learn how to pray. We want to learn what it means to be in relationship with you, not just a formalized prayer. God, help us from...from that. We want to be people who a...talk to you in the...in the context of a relationship. And so I pray that you would teach your people how to do that. Help them this week as they stumble through trying to think up ways to adore you and to praise you. Help them see that as they continue on this journey that it becomes much easier for them...that it starts to flow and that there's a connection because of that relationship. And then as they pray for your will to be done and your kingdom to come, help them to understand that what they're saying is that they want...want you to have the dominance, the preeminence in life putting us in proper prospective of you. Pray that we become a church who understands how to pray. Give these people desire to pray. We want you to receive all the glory. We pray these things in Jesus' Name. Amen.