
WE ARE THE CHURCH

Marks of a Healthy Church

DESPERATE PRAYER

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on March 4, 2018

INTRODUCTION

All Christians know that they should pray, and even non-Christians often find some comfort or significance in prayer. But all prayer is not the same, and prayer is certainly more than good wishes. In fact, Jesus provides a model prayer that gives us great insight and help for our own prayer. In this message, we shall investigate the Lord's prayer, and we shall take special note of the desperation in prayer that is so common among those who seem to most powerfully enjoy the presence and provision of God.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10).

All Christians know they should pray, and even non-Christians often find some comfort or significance in a kind of prayer. But all prayer is not the same, and prayer is certainly more than mere good wishes. In fact, Jesus provides a model prayer that gives us great insight and help for our own practice of prayer.

Focusing on the eternal God, the Lord's prayer is a desperate outcry to the good and sovereign King. It is no dispassionate or distant plea, however, for the King is also called “our Father.” Christians are welcomed into the kindly and gracious presence of their maker, sustainer, savior, and rewarder. Such an experience is nearly too much to comprehend. And yet, this experience is available to all Christians at every moment of every day.

However, our awareness of our own desperate need for God is not usually as keen as it should be. So, Christians often wait until moments of crisis and pain to lean upon God's tireless strength and provision. Oh, may God make us aware of our great need in order that we might be a praying people. And may God work in the prayers of His people to bring about His good purposes in the world.

MATTHEW 6:5-13 (ESV)

5 “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. 6 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.

7 “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. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

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

THE POINT I’M AIMING AT TODAY

Healthy Churches are marked by eternally-minded and desperate prayer.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

- (1) THE ETERNAL FOCUS OF THIS PRAYER**
- (2) THE DESPERATE LONGING OF THIS PRAYER**
- (3) HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE MARKED BY THIS KIND OF PRAYER**
- (4) APPLICATION: LET’S BELIEVE GOD MORE DESPERATELY**

(1) THE ETERNAL FOCUS OF THIS PRAYER

- **The Eternal God**

- God's name is **holy** (v9)
- God is the eternal **king** of heaven and earth (v10)
- God is eternal **judge**, presenting rewards and issuing penalties (v5-6)
- God is **omnipresent**, everywhere you go (v6)
- God **omniscient**; He sees all things, even the secret stuff (v6)
- God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful); He is the giver of daily bread (v11)
- God is **sovereign** (ruling and controlling all), for He is the one who must lead away from temptation and deliver from the evil one (v13)
- God is **forgiving**, and this implies merciful and gracious too (v12)
 - Friends, do you think about God like this?
 - When you pray, do you **remind yourself** about who God is?
 - Could it be that your **weak prayers** are the result of your **low view of God**?
 - Have you **forgotten** that God is **holy**, sovereign, and king?
 - Have you **forgotten** that God is forgiving, merciful, and **kind**?
 - Could it be that your **lack of prayer** is the result of your belief that **God cannot** or **will not** do as He **promised**?

- **The Eternal Human Needs**

- **Notice what is absent from this exemplary prayer.**
 - There is no mention of a **health concern**
 - We should pray for the sick. ***“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him...”*** (James 5:14).

- There is nothing of **job** promotions
 - God does care about your job. “*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ*” (Col. 3:23–24).
- There is no place for **luxury** and **material comfort**
 - God does give good gifts to His children. “*Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*” (Matt. 6:26)
- **We need God!**
 - We need a **heavenly Father** (v9)
 - We need a **holy** heavenly Father (v9)
 - We need **all things subdued** under God’s good kingship (v10)
 - We need **daily provision** (v11)
 - We need **forgiveness** (v12)
 - We need a good and powerful **guide** and **deliverer** (v13)
- **We need all these, but we need them from God and in relationship with God!**
 - And we need these things eternally. Our dependence upon God, our need for Him, our utter hopelessness without Him is eternal.
 - Friends, do you **know** your **need for God**?
 - Do you **feel** your need for a **kind** and **holy Master**?
 - Are you **aware** of your own **weakness** in life’s **circumstances**?
 - Do you **sense** your **desperate need** for someone to **guide** you and to **deliver** you from the powerful forces of the **world**, the **flesh**, and the **devil**?

- **The Eternal Human Hope**

- ***Notice again the absence of temporal comforts.***

- Our hope is not in the rise of a political party.
- Our hope is not in a growing confidence in ourselves.
- Our hope is not in anything we might find in this mortal life.

- ***Our hope is in the good and gracious Fatherhood of God.***

- Our heavenly Father ***sees*** and ***hears*** all things (v6)
- Our heavenly Father ***knows*** your needs (v8)
- Our heavenly Father is ***kind*** in ***giving good gifts*** (v11)
- Our heavenly Father is ***forgiving*** (v12)
- Our heavenly Father is ***wise*** and ***powerful*** (v13)
 - Friends, do you know God as ***heavenly Father?***
 - Have you ***experienced*** God's ***kindness*** towards those who ***love*** and ***trust Him?***

- ***Our hope is in the ultimate justice and sovereignty of God.***

- Our heavenly Father is ***heavenly***, not earthly (v9)
- Our heavenly Father is ***holy*** (v9)
- Our heavenly Father is ***King*** (v10)
- Our heavenly Father ***makes final judgment*** (v12)
- Our heavenly Father ***gives final reward*** (v6)

Summary: This prayer focuses on the good and sovereign and eternal God...

(Segue) ***and our desperate need of Him!***

(2) THE DESPERATE LONGING OF THIS PRAYER

- We desperately depend upon God for everything
 - Jesus reminds us that prayer is not merely for the sake of prayer.
 - “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***” (v5).
 - Prayer is the expression of our utter dependence upon God.
 - He is our ***source of provision*** (v11)
 - He is our only ***hope*** for ***forgiveness*** (v12)
 - He is our ***guide*** and ***deliverer*** (v13)
 - God “***created the world... and He upholds the universe with the word of His power***” (Heb. 1:2-3).
 - Paul quoted a pagan philosopher when he said, “***In Him [God] we live and move and have our being***” (Acts 17:28), and this accords perfectly with Job’s words, “***In His [God’s] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind***” (Job 12:10).
 - Jesus says elsewhere, “***Apart from me you can do nothing***” (Jn. 15:5).
 - Friends, do you know that ***you are utterly dependent*** upon God for ***everything?***
 - Do you know that this is true ***whether you believe*** it or not?
 - ***Do you believe*** God is your ***source of provision?***
 - ***What do you have*** that He has not given to you?
 - Your ***health?*** Your ***life-status?*** Your ***family?*** ***Isn’t it all*** from His kind hand?
 - ***Do you thank Him*** for His gifts? ***Praise Him*** for His mercy?

- **We desperately plead for those around us to believe**
 - “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **Your kingdom come**, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (v9-10).
 - When Jesus began His public ministry, His message was summarized in the statement, “**Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” (Matt 4:17).
 - Jesus’ sermon on the mount was focused on entrance into the “**kingdom of heaven**” through righteousness (Matt. 5:17-20).
 - And Jesus explicitly says that those who enter “**the kingdom of heaven**” will do so by faith/belief in Christ (Matt. 8:10-13).
 - Therefore, to pray for God’s kingdom to come is (in part) to pray for the **spread of the Gospel among those who don’t yet believe**.
 - And we have an example of this kind of prayer in Scripture.
 - Some of the first Christians prayed, “**Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them... truly in [Jerusalem] there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats [toward us] and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness...**” (Acts 4:24–29).
 - Friends, do you want to see **your friends** and **family members** come to **know Christ** as savior and lord?
 - Do you know **only God can bring spiritual life** to the heart of a sinner?
 - **Do you pray** for God to graciously save?
 - Oh, God! **Please help us** to think and speak and act seriously in regard to the **lostness** of the **people around us!**

- **We desperately rely on God’s deliverance**
 - “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (v13).
 - The Scripture provides examples of the kind of prayer that **asks for God’s help to grow in holiness and resist temptation**.
 - Paul prayed, “*From the day we heard [of your faith], we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be **filled with the knowledge of his will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to **walk in a manner worthy** of the Lord, fully **pleasing** to him: **bearing fruit** in every good work and **increasing in the knowledge of God**” (Colossians 1:9–10).*
 - James reminds us that we **ought to pray for one another when we sin**, for God “*gives life*” and **frees us from sin’s bondage** (James 5:16).
 - And we know that **only God can help us resist** and **stand against** the **onslaught** of the **evil** one.
 - Peter tells us, “*Be sober-minded; be watchful. **Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour**” (1 Peter 5:8).*
 - And Peter would know, because Jesus had earlier told Peter, “*Satan would sift you like wheat, **but I have prayed for you...**” (Lk. 22:31-32).*
 - Friends, don’t we all know **temptation** is a **regular** experience in life?
 - How do **we expect to resist temptation**?
 - Do you know any Christian who is **overcome by his or her sinful** desires?
 - Do you think they are just going to **get over it**? Have you?!
 - Don’t you know that **there is an adversary**, and his spiritual forces are set up against you? Your kids? Your grandkids? Everyone you know?
 - **How do you plan to resist or stand against** all of that today? I hope you are not thinking you’ll be successful in your own power!

- **We desperately long for another world**

- “***your Father*** who sees in secret ***will reward you***” (v6) and again “***Your kingdom come***” (v10).
- The Bible says that “***each one’s work will become [visible]***” on that “***Day***” when “***it will be revealed by fire***” (i.e. the judgment of God). “***If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward***” (1 Corinthians 3:13–14).
- Paul tells us that God will “***grant relief to you who are afflicted...***” but this relief is promised to come “***when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels***” (2 Thessalonians 1:5–7).
- Jesus tells us, “***I am coming soon, bringing my recompense [or reward] with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end***” (Revelation 22:12–13).
 - And to this we say with John (who heard and wrote it), “***Come, Lord Jesus!***” (Rev. 22:20).

Summary: We desperately cry out to God because He provides, He saves, He delivers us from the evil one, and He is bringing us to our final home!

(Segue) So then, healthy churches are marked by this kind of prayer.

(3) HEALTHY CHURCHES ARE MARKED BY THIS KIND OF PRAYER

- **Healthy Churches corporately express dependence upon God**
 - We pray much in our ***corporate meetings***.
 - We ask God to convict, forgive, comfort, teach, and enliven us.
 - We pray for ***various aspects*** of our ***corporate gathering*** – our beginning approach to God through singing His word, our reading and hearing His word, our receiving and applying His word, our giving of offering to extend the word of God.
 - We pray at ***various*** gatherings ***throughout the week***.

- **Healthy Churches privately express dependence upon God**
 - We pray much ***when we are not together***.
 - We ask God to convict, forgive, comfort, teach, and enliven us – ***personally***.
 - We pray for ***various aspects of ourselves*** – our spiritual growth, our physical health, our emotional stability, and our intellectual capacity.
 - We pray for ***various aspects of our lives*** – our family, our resources, our job, our education, and our plans for the future.

- **Healthy Churches privately express a corporate dependence on God**
 - We pray much ***for one another*** when we are ***not together***.
 - We pray for ***God's strength*** in the lives of those church ***members who are weak***.
 - We pray for ***God's wisdom*** in the lives of those church ***members who are facing uncertainty***.
 - We pray for ***God's comfort*** in the lives of those church ***members who are grieving or suffering***.
 - We pray for ***God's conviction*** in the lives of those church ***members who are ensnared by sin***.
 - We pray for ***God's help*** to meaningfully ***love one another*** as a church family.

(4) APPLICATION: LET'S BELIEVE GOD MORE DESPERATELY

- **Will you forgive me for not leading better in corporate prayer?**
 - There are so many things I am failing to pray for as a pastor in our corporate gatherings.
 - I have felt tremendous conviction this week regarding my responsibility to lead the way in prayer.

- **Will you believe God more desperately for our church?**
 - Will you pray for one another?
 - Will you ask how you can pray for one another?
 - Will you pray for those you see struggling... those you have a tough time liking... and those who are much different than you?
 - Will you pray for those who lead... me... our praise team... our life group leaders... our awana leaders... our student ministry leaders... our deacons... and many others?
 - Clint will help lead us in this in a moment.

- **Will you believe God more desperately for our community?**
 - Will you pray for God to radically transform Diana and our surrounding communities?
 - Will you pray for those who do not love and follow Christ?
 - Will you pray for those who are hopeless and seem weak?
 - Will you pray for those who are confident and seem powerful?
 - Will you pray for God to cause the Gospel to be clearly preached in many churches?
 - Will you pray for those churches in our community to be healthier?
 - Joseph will help lead us in this in a moment.

- **Will you praise God more often in your prayer?**

- It seems to me that one way to shift our focus in prayer towards more desperately believing God is by intentionally spending some of our prayer time in praise.
- Will you take time to praise God in prayer?
- Will you praise Him for who He is?
- Will you praise Him for what He has done?
- Barry will help lead us in this in a moment.

Major Point: Healthy Churches are marked by eternally-minded and desperate prayer.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/about/>

Kingdom-Centered Prayer by Tim Keller

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5315f2e5e4b04a00bc148f24/t/537a729ce4b0d45559686e1e/1400533660135/Kingdom-Centered+Prayer.pdf>

The Chapel Message that Changed My Prayer Life by Jared Oliphint

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-chapel-message-that-changed-my-prayer-life/>

18 Things to Pray for Your Church by Jonathan Leeman

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/18-things-to-pray-for-your-church/>

32 Principles for Public Prayer by Ligon Duncan

<https://www.9marks.org/article/thirty-two-principles-public-prayer/>

Sample Corporate Prayers from CHBC by Various

<https://www.9marks.org/article/sample-corporate-prayers-december-9-2007/>

John Calvin's 4 Rules of Prayer by Joel Beeke

<https://www.ligonier.org/blog/john-calvins-rules-prayer/>