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Series: The Sermon on the Mount
Message: Teach Us How To Pray

Transcribed Message
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Matthew 6:5-8

If you have been a Christian for very long, you are familiar with the idea of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines. By the way, if you've been a believer for a long time, you should be very familiar with the idea of spiritual discipline. The idea of spiritual discipline is that they are simply habits of devotion. They're habits of devotion that we commit ourselves to and they can be things that we do either in personal, private settings, or they can be things that we do corporately together. With most of them, they spill over between those two. There are things that we do privately and personally with regard to devotions of the heart, and there are things that we do together. They're in that same way. We're doing many of those things this morning and we'll continue to do those as we go along in the morning.

Don Whitney has written a book and the name of that book is Spiritual Disciplines. He says there are three primary catalysts that God uses to move us on in our walk with God, to grow us up in Christ. Three primary catalysts. There are people. There are circumstances. There are spiritual disciplines. If you look at those three things that God uses, it should be apparent very quickly that two of those three you and I don't have any control over. We really don't have any control over people and how they interact and how they behave in relation to ourselves. It is pretty obvious that circumstances are beyond our control in many cases. Then we get to that last one. That last one is this matter of spiritual disciplines. Habits of devotion that we give ourselves to in order to promote our walk with God and our growth in Christ.

As we work our way through the Sermon on the Mount, we come again this morning to the 6th chapter. In the opening 18 verses of the 6th chapter, it seems to me that Jesus uses this matter of spiritual disciplines in these three illustrations that He gives us in these opening 18 verses. The context if you remember is chapter 5, the chapter we finished just a couple weeks ago. It was really all about this matter of getting

it right. Jesus was basically bringing a word of correction. He was bringing a word and then He introduced in each of those cases saying that you have heard it said. You have heard it said and it was wrong what you heard. Here is what you needed to hear. He wanted them to get it right. He wanted them to know what it was that God has called us to do and to be. When we get to chapter 6, it's going to be about doing it. It is to going to be all about doing it right. The focus shifts from that of the teaching to that of the practice. It's very instructive.

We commented on this last week and we'll comment on it more as we go along this morning. but the very first word in my translation of the ESV of chapter 6 is the word "beware". That should get our attention. As Jesus begins to talk about this matter of spiritual disciplines, He talks about giving. He talks about praying and He talks about fasting. The very first thing that He says to us, and I think it informs the whole of those 18 verses, is He says beware of something. What He wants us to beware of (and we'll see this in verses 5 through 8) is that you can do the highest of the spiritual disciplines. whatever it is that you understand falls into that category, and there are many things like we saw last week. Giving. Like we're going to see this morning, praying. As we'll see in a few weeks, the matter of fasting. The matter of coming together in fellowship. All of these things fall within this category. You can do any and all of those things, Jesus is going to tell us, and you can do it in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons, including prayer. Jesus is going to help us get it right.

I want to begin by reading the first 8 verses of the 6th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 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. 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. 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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

Let's start off how not to pray like a hypocrite. The easiest answer is follow Jesus's instructions, right? How not to pray like a hypocrite. Let's do a quick background to this matter of what we're going to be approaching in the weeks to come which is simply called the Lord's Prayer. It could very easily be called the Disciples' Prayer because while the source of this prayer is obviously Jesus, this is a prayer that Jesus could pray for us. It's not so much a prayer that Jesus Himself needed to pray. In some parts, yes, but not in every part. What we have here, while we're probably not going to be able to change the name to the Disciples' Prayer and have it stick, is really a prayer that Jesus prays on our behalf and teaches us how to pray for ourselves.

Secondly, where do we find it? We find it in two places of the Gospels. We find it in the Gospel of Matthew right here tucked away in the Sermon on the Mount. You find it again in the Gospel of Luke in the 11th chapter. All of the Gospel accounts record for us that Jesus was a man of prayer. Often times, whether it's Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, there will be an incident or an account where Jesus went off alone and He prayed, or He took some of His disciples and He prayed. After all, the very last event in the life of our Lord before the cross was found in in the garden of Gethsemane with the disciples and then with the three of the inner circle. Jesus is praying and they're sleeping. All through the Gospels you have the writers telling us of the fact that Jesus was a man of prayer. Matthew and Luke record what we call the Lord's Prayer.

How is it that we are to use this prayer that Jesus gives? This is probably the best known and most used prayer within the Christian community at large. There are many faith traditions that on a Sunday morning like this have this prayer as a regular weekly part of their worship liturgy. They say together the Lord's Prayer. You can go to people who have had a relatively small amount of exposure to the Bible or to spiritual things and most of them have either heard of or know what the Lord's Prayer is. Here we have a prayer that has been used extensively, is well known.

What is that ultimately Jesus had in mind when He gave us this prayer? It's important to suggest first of all that what Jesus really gives us here is a model. What Jesus really gives us here is more of a pattern. It is not so much that Jesus is telling us this is a prayer that we're to recite. I'll comment on that in a moment. The disciples said in the Gospel of Luke Jesus, Lord, would You teach us? They didn't say Lord, would You teach a prayer? They didn't make prayer a noun. What they said was Lord, would You teach us to pray? It was a verb. There is absolutely nothing wrong at all with saying it. In fact, I would encourage you to pray this prayer. I love to just think through and pray through this prayer often. But the point is, there's more here than simply a suggested prayer that we say every day. You may very well do that, but Jesus is giving us a pattern, a model, some guidance as to what our prayers are to look like as we relate with Him.

Fourthly, why Jesus said what He did. Why did Jesus say what He did? Just as you have in the matter of giving in verses 1 through 4, that word "beware" is going to inform everything that happens in this chapter. He says to us beware that as you give you're giving for the right reasons in the right way. Now He's going to come in this section and He's going to say beware that as you pray, pray in a way that pleases and honors God. Here is a warning to us that we don't want to pray like the hypocrites. We want to pray in a way that honors God, in a way that pleases God.

That's why it's instructive for us to take note of this word "beware". It's a word that speaks right out of the military terminology. It is speaking of a centurion, of a guard. Whatever else the guard does, he is supposed to be alert. He is supposed to be aware. He is supposed to be paying attention. That's what we should initially take away from what Jesus is saying here. As you pray, be alert. Be attentive. Understand that there are some things here that God wants us to be mindful of. What are we to guard against? We are to guard in particular against hypocrisy. The word "hypocrisy" is a word that comes out of the theater and so actors and actresses literally were hypocrites. That's where this word comes from. It's okay to be a hypocrite in the theater. It's okay to take on a roll. It's okay to assume a character that isn't really you. If you do it really well, you portray that character so convincingly that people begin to relate and think of you as that person. It is perfectly legitimate and good and normal in the theater. But Jesus says

you need to really be careful that when you come to matters of spiritual disciplines, beware that you're not a hypocrite. Beware that you are not more concerned about putting something forward that isn't true of you than you are of entering into the act of worship and the devotion of heart itself. Be careful that you don't assume a character and cause people to think that you're something that you're not. It's a word of warning that Jesus gives us as we come to this matter of prayer.

With that background, let's look again at what Jesus says is important for us to know. I'm going to just jump over to Luke 11 to give you that sense of how this unfolded. "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place and when He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples.' And He said to them..." and He goes on to give them what we have referenced as the Lord's Prayer. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear that interaction between Jesus and the disciples? Lord, teach us to pray. One of the first things should be who better to learn from? Who better to learn from?

If you have a question, if you have an area of interest, how exciting would it be to sit down with somebody who is an absolute expert in that field? Let's say for instance you wanted to start an online business. Wouldn't you like to have 30 minutes with Jeff Bezos and just hear how in the world did you bring together this concept that we know of as Amazon? I think I read this week the guy makes \$150 million a day. You'd want to pick his mind. If you wanted to talk to somebody about investing, you might want to sit down and spend 30 minutes with Warren Buffett and learn the principles that allowed him to be a successful investor. If you wanted to talk to somebody about concepts of law, wouldn't it be exciting to sit down with Chief Justice Roberts of the Supreme Court and have a conversation with him? Pick any area that you want and how cool would it be to be able to interact with somebody who's done it and who's done it really well. Here is the opportunity Jesus gives us to do that very thing. This is Jesus's response to the disciples. He is going to walk us through and give us some of the most significant statements that we have anywhere in the Bible about prayer. This isn't one sinner teaching another sinner how to pray. This is the sinless Son of God giving us the insight from God Himself as to what it is that honors and pleases God in our relationship to Him as we call out to him in prayer. I don't know about you but this should give us a sense of

excitement, a sense of anticipation. What is it that Jesus is going to say by way of instruction that we can grab ahold of and grow in this discipline and this habit of our heart as we relate to God in prayer? Who better to learn from? I can't think of anybody.

Here are a couple of other things before we go to that next point. You can read all through the gospel accounts and you do not find another account, another interaction with Jesus and the disciples in which they ask Him anything similar to this. This is direct. It doesn't mean these conversations didn't happen but the Holy Spirit didn't see fit to give it to us. We don't have an interaction between Jesus and the disciples in which they said Jesus would you teach us how to teach? Would you teach us how to preach? I'd love if that had been an interaction and had been recorded. How insightful would that be. When you get to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, do you know what the people said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount? Nobody teaches like this person. He teaches like nobody we've ever heard. You can learn all of these things without having that direct question. But the disciples don't come to Jesus and ask Him to teach how to do miracles. Would You show us just how it is something that would help us in the sharing of our faith? This is the one interaction that the Holy Spirit reports for us in Scripture in which the disciples asked Jesus directly about the area and say teach us. Give us Your insight into this area.

Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't say I can't believe you guys don't have it by now. Aren't you glad He didn't just brush them off? Aren't you glad He didn't say that's a good question. It's really a gift. You either have it or you don't. Aren't you glad He didn't say there is truth here for you but it's not for everybody. There's only a select few that really need to learn to pray the way I do. Our Lord opens up to them and us this answer to their question of Lord, teach us to pray.

So what do we learn about prayer from Jesus? What do we learn from Jesus about prayer this morning? I want to put four things before you. Four things in answering this question in what we can learn from Jesus about prayer. The first thing: prayer is about a relationship. Prayer is about a relationship. God has called us into a relationship. God has called us to be a part of His family. I think you see at the beginning of this section that we are looking at this morning when He says to us, don't pray like this. You're in a relationship. You're in a relationship. So when you understand

that you're in a relationship, the first thing Jesus says is don't pray like this. Verse 5: "And when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and street corners." It is likely that what Jesus is referring to is that there was a formal prayer that Jewish people said three times a day. It was at a set time of the day that they would offer that prayer. It is very likely that there were people, hypocrites Jesus says, who wanted to be in the most public place they could be to be able to offer this prayer so everybody would see how spiritual they were. We know within Islam there is the call to prayer seven times a day. They stop what they're doing and they get down on their prayer rug and they pray. They do that in whatever venue they're in. This could very well be a reference to something similar to that when He says that they want to be in the synagogue where they can be seen. They want to be on the street corner where they can be seen. Jesus says that's not the way you are to pray. Don't pray with the idea of impressing the person sitting next to you. Don't pray with the idea of showing somebody just how spiritual you are. Instead of having a spirit of pride come in a spirit of humility which would be very in keeping with what we see in the rest of Scripture.

Can you imagine how our relationship would go in which as this relationship unfolds, the person that you're trying to develop this relationship with spends all of their time trying to impress you with who they are and trying to impress people around you. Can imagine how fun that would be? We've probably have all been in an experience like that. We've probably all been in a relationship that felt like that. It just seems like everything this person does and says is for their benefit or for the benefit of people around them. I would suggest that that relationship is probably not going to go very far. Jesus says that's one way that you should not pray.

Verse 6 offers us another insight: 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. Don't be heaping up empty phrases. 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." Jesus basically is saying to us here don't treat prayer like some formula. Don't get the idea that the way you say it is somehow more important than who it is that you're saying this to. There isn't a way that God is looking for you to say something. He is

looking for you to open your heart to Him in a spirit of humility. Don't fall into the trap of pretentious praying.

I came across a humorous write-up that takes off of this and I ask your forgiveness if I'm in here too often. This is about how people pray in church. Don't keep track if I pray like this. He talks about Pious Patty. When Pious Patty prays, everyone knows he's serious and pious because he says Loooord and Gawd and JEEEE-sus. Repetitious Raleigh says Heavenly Father and Lord between every phrase. Focused Frederick says the word "just" before every other sentence. Bonnie and I were actually talking about this a couple weeks ago as we were walking. How easy it is to say the word "just" in prayer, almost using it in a different way than the way that it is understood. Just do this, Lord. Just do that. We challenged ourselves as we were praying to not use the word "just" at all. That's what Focused Frederick does. Highfalutin Harold uses a lot of big theological words. Cliché Clarissa uses a lot of clichés. We'll be careful to give you thanks.

Quotatious Quentin likes to actually quote people as he prays. Here's one example. This guy is praying and he says, "As Richard Foster taught us..." Summarizing Stephen. This one could be me. Summarizing Stephen. It's the guy who preaches and then in his prayer covers his whole message and gives you all the points again so that you don't forget them. Preaching Peter is the person who preaches at you while he is supposedly praying. You know, the guy who is trying to bring everybody under conviction apart from the Holy Spirit. And then there's Sendoff Sam. I love this. This is a guy who can't quite land the plane at the end of his prayer and so he closes this way: "and the glorious and majestic, everlasting, beautiful, ever-loving name of our only Lord and Savior, the Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to whom be glory and majesty in honor forever and ever in the matchless and comfortable, victorious, glorious name of Jesus, amen, amen and amen." Now I'm going to have to be very careful and mindful of how I pray. Don't pray that way. That's the way we're not to pray. We're in a relationship. If you're in a relationship, you do pray with this in mind.

Listen to what He says. Verse eight: "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." If you look at chapter 7 verse 7 (we'll get to this in a little bit) He says ask and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened. What does this say to us? It says to us that God is good, that our heavenly

Father is good and gracious and longs to give good gifts to His children. He always knows what is best for us. As we pray, He knows what it is that we need before we ask Him. God isn't a slot machine. God isn't a vending machine. We don't come to Him in prayer with the idea that we just say something and He cranks out whatever it is that we've asked. Our God is a good and gracious Father. He loves and looks forward to His interactions with His children.

Thirdly, in that point of relationship, remember that you're in a family. Remember that you're in a family. We'll start off in a couple weeks and the very first thing Jesus says is pray like this. Our Father. Huge implications for us to understand. Ten times in this passage Jesus called God Father. So that speaks to the fact that we're in this family. We've been adopted into this family. We've been accepted in this family. Our relationship with our heavenly Father is both an intimate one and it is a personal one. When He says in verse 6, go into your closet to pray. He's not saying that you can't pray anywhere but in your closet. That would mean we couldn't pray together as believers. So of course that's not it. It is simply reminding us of the intimacy, the personal nature of this relationship. I love what someone said when they put it this way. There is a great distance between us and our helplessness and God and His glory. We have this picture. There is great distance between us and this glorious God. Do you know what? Our Father reaches all the way across to us. That's what our Father does for us. We're praying to an infinite, majestic God. That God has reached all the way across to us in the person of His Son.

The second thing we'll see is that prayer is about God. Prayer is to be about God. That means the chief concern as we come to God in prayer is in fact to be God-ward, not manward. As you look at the Lord's Prayer, there are six petitions and the first three petitions are all God-ward. They're all focused on God. They're focused on His glory, His Lordship, His will. They're all about His agenda, about His purposes, about His priority. It reflects Matthew 6:33, which we'll get to again at the end of this chapter, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else that you need will be taken care of. It's God-centered. We begin by focusing on God. It is similar in its construction to the 10 Commandments. We start there. There's no other gods. Don't have any other gods before Me. Don't take My name in vain. He gets us focusing

on God. Jesus does the same thing, and He says when you pray, pray with an understanding that prayer is about God. There's going to be a balance, but you start by focusing not on yourself, not on other people. Focus on God.

The third thing about prayer. Prayer is about real life. It is about God but it's also about real life. There's practical realities. There's practical stuff. The next three petitions are going to be all about the needs that we have. Those physical needs of our daily bread. The need for pardon spiritually. We need the forgiveness that God offers. The need for protection. There is a battle going on. Those are the needs that speak to the concerns that occupy our heart and our mind. We focus on God and then rightly we're prepared to say God, You alone are able to meet these needs, to provide this for me. We have that balance. We often struggle right here. We often struggle with this matter of being independent of God and we can do this ourselves.

Then finally, prayer is about forgiveness. Prayer is about forgiveness. When you look at verses 14 and 15: "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." At the end of the prayer, this isn't actually a part of what we repeat or what we think of as the Lord's prayer, Jesus elaborates on one of those six petitions. The one petition that He elaborates on is what? It's a matter of forgiveness. Why do you suppose that out of those six things that Jesus lifts up and says here is a pattern, here's a model to follow, why do you suppose out of those six the one that He touches on after is this matter of forgiveness? I'm wondering if it isn't because He knows full well that this is one of the areas of greatest struggle. This is one of the areas in which we do regular battle if you will. It's possible that we struggle in all these other areas of course, but it is here that we probably need the greatest help. Why? Because forgiveness is hard to receive, to extend, to offer, to live. It is hard. Jesus says this is needful in your relationships with others. Your relationship with God is affected by that. That is why Peter says husbands live with your wives according to knowledge. Treat them the way they're to be treated. Why? One of the reasons is so your prayers will not be hindered. Walk within the framework of forgiveness.

Our Friday men's group just started reading Francis Schaeffer's book True Spirituality. If you know anything about Francis Schaeffer, this man that God used

greatly. I think of him as a prophet of the 20th century, seeing things that were yet to unfold. He wrote numerous books. A man of deep faith with an intellectually huge mind to challenge our culture and our day. After he had pastored for many years, he fell into a deep spiritual crisis in which he literally had the bottom of his spiritual life drop out. He came to a point where he began to question everything that he had been teaching and living for all those years prior. Do you know what it was that kind of pushed him over the edge? Do you know what he and Edith looked back and said the crisis of that time was related to what? It was seeing how poorly Christians treat each other. It just caused him to say is this stuff real? The way they interacted and the way they treated each other was so poor. He was in a denomination that was going through a lot of really hard stuff, so that's the context. It is important, but it was that which really caused him to spiral downward.

So to help us get there, what is it that God has done? To help us get there, to understand this we go to the cross. We go to the gospel and it is there that we see that God has extended grace to us. It is there that we see that God has extended forgiveness to us. It is there that we have the basis for extending forgiveness to each other. My friend, you and I can do, we can enter into the highest of spiritual disciplines and we can do it in the wrong ways and for the wrong reasons, including praying. Jesus wants to help us get it right.

What do we take away? John Stott said this. John Scott said, "The most difficult thing we do in the Christian life is prayer. After the task of prayer everything is easier." Maybe you read that and say I don't relate to that. I read that I say yeah, I can relate to that. This is a regular area of battle for the child of God. If that's the case, and I believe that it is, then I think is still appropriate for us to say today Lord, teach us to pray. Teach us to pray. We're in this family relationship with You. Teach us what it is to just open our hearts to You on a regular basis. In times of personal discipline of prayer together as the people of God, teach us what it means to pray. It all begins with a personal relationship, doesn't it? It all begins with a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You can't get there apart from that. You can't get there apart from the cross. What a wonderful occasion we have this morning to end time together around this table of communion.

Let's pray together. Father God, we are so very grateful for what it is that You have done on our behalf. Thank You for answering this very direct specific question that the disciples lifted up that is in our hearts as well. Lord, I pray that for myself and for each one who is here this morning, that the reality of being in Your family, that experiencing acceptance and forgiveness would be something that would flow out of our lives in gratitude to You and in relating to each other. Father, we call out to You and ask that in the weeks that are ahead of us that You will indeed do this good work of teaching us how it is that we can pray. In Jesus's name, amen.