

7.22.18 "The Lord's 'un-prayer'"

O. INTRO:

The desire to look good (or to not look bad) to others is the engine that drives most lives.

It (looking good/not looking bad) dominates thoughts, impacts emotions and drives actions...it drives some towards accomplishment and others towards avoidance of failure.

But it is an engine that ultimately drives our hearts away from God.

There are a few exceptions of people who are not driven by this desire:

1. Very small children are unconcerned with what others think of them...but they quickly grow out of this and become aware of what others think or what they think others think of them...and it starts to influence them.
2. People who are either so depressed, ill, or beat down by trouble and sadness that they cannot care what others think...they either have a different perspective or don't have the energy to care.

When you are sick enough, or sad enough...you tend to not think about what others think about you.

3. There is another exception and that is people who have sufficiently died to self and have become alive to Christ.

The "sick and sad exceptions" can have what has been called the "faith of desperation."

It is a powerful thing...to be so desperate that you cannot care what others think of you.

But it is still short of what is ideal and what is called the "faith of sufficiency"

A faith where you have experienced the sufficiency of Christ to the place where all that matters is what he thinks of you, and his life expressed through yours.

Paul reached this state of living

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

I don't believe that was just a declaration of faith in what ought to be, or should be...I believe it was his actual, practical experience.

This is what has been called the "exchanged life."

Our lives exchanged for the life of Christ in us.

Paul experienced in deep and real ways the life of Christ lived out through his own life.

He lived, and many others have lived since Paul...a life that was set apart for the purposes of Christ to the extent that he lived in the real power of Christ day to day.

Power to endure suffering, power for contentment and joy, power to see Christ exalted through him no matter what the circumstances.

It is a power to live independently of the opinions of others...and this positioned him to live loving Christ and others more fully...he wrote.

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10

It is not that he didn't care about others, or that he was unconcerned with what others thought about him...it was that he was not driven by these things but by what God thought of him.

He lived to hear "well done" from Christ...and not from others.

I'm sure it was nice when others complimented him(why wouldn't it be)...but this did not drive his life.

This "exchanged life" was crucial to his faith.

A kind of faith...that released God's power into and through his life.

It is important that we do not discount realities just because we have not yet experienced them personally.

This kind of life is not something that is only for super-stars like Paul...this exchanged life is available for you and for me.

We must die to the desire to impress and to please others...we must become people who truly want to please God.

This is a big part of what we seeking to close the gap on this year...and every year God grants us.

Jesus once spoke to a group of people who appeared to be spiritual motivated but largely they were trying to look impressive to one another.

He said to them...

"How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"

John 5:44

What was uppermost in their minds and hearts was the honor of others in their own group.

Their desire for this honor was keeping them from believing God...from real faith in God.

You cannot hold to the esteem of others to that degree of importance and at the same time believe that God is who he is. (Willard)

As long as we are hung up on honor from other people--our reputation, appearing to have it all together--we cannot truly believe and trust God.

Why is this?

Because if we believe God is who he is...absolute sovereign, creator and owner of all things, holy, powerful, beautiful...my purpose for existence and my only hope for life as it was intended to be lived.

Then...we would certainly not allow the opinions of others to dictate the course of our lives.

How could we?...God alone would hold this position of influence in our minds, hearts and choices.

Several years ago I was talking with a person I had only just met, I was in a room of people with varying degrees of human power (some had quite a bit).

Suddenly, in my conversation with this man...I felt the "heat" of embarrassment come over me...a felt my face go "red"

I can't remember what embarrassed me...maybe I misspoke.

I eventually "recovered" and got out of the conversation and moved on.

But I didn't like it...mainly because of what it showed about my heart.

And to be honest...I was probably most bothered, not by the fact that it showed I was still somewhat of a people pleaser...but by the fact that perhaps the man had noticed my discomfort.

I was short of a double people pleaser...embarrassed when I misspoke...then embarrassed that I was embarrassed by that.

The experience was for me like a check engine light.

It showed up on the dashboard of my face...and it revealed a deeper problem.

I had been a roll that week...doing well in not being impressed with others, or trying to impress...but my heart, was still prone to people pleasing.

I had not truly, to the extent that is available for me to enjoy...experienced the exchanged life.

I have in spurts experienced the faith of desperation...but it has been short lived.

When things even out...I tend to revert to life lived by own energy and ability...a life where comfort and convenience and image take precedent over the glory of God and the good others.

Human desire is infinite by its nature and its design.

You simply cannot get enough money, power, love, glory...praise, affection, popularity, stuff.

It is like trying to satisfy a fire by feeding it wood...it doesn't become full and then go out...it becomes fiercer...more hungry.

Such is the human heart...that has not learned to find its full sufficiency in Christ.

Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. Ecc. 5:10

The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. Ecc. 1:8

Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man. Prov. 27:20

We were made for God by God...so our desire is infinite by design, but it has been distorted by sin.

We can close the gap on wanting what is good to want...God will help us...order our desires so that we want him above all else.

Today, let's take an honest look at our often misdirected desires to look good to others or to not look bad to others...and let the realization of where our hearts truly are...drive us to God, our heart's true fulfillment.

I want to live the exchanged life as Paul described in Gal. 2:20...and I think most of you do as well.

We must embrace with our minds the reality that this is the life we would really want if we could see things are they actually are.

THIS YEAR=CLOSING THE GAP AND FAITH AND LOVE: OUR SUMMER SERIES: A Conversational relationship with God.

We spent 5 weeks on the Lord's Prayer...Jesus taught us **how** and not just **what** to pray.

Today we go back to the verses just prior to the model prayer...to what might be called the "Lord's unprayer"

Before he taught them how to pray, he taught them how **not** to pray.

Matt. 6:5-8 “And 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. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Walk through this together.

1. A warning to not "play" at prayer:

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites”

Jesus first warns against praying like the "hypocrites"

Religious hypocrisy is a frequently misunderstood concept.

Sin is not hypocrisy...unless of course you claim to not have any sin.

But the Christian who sins is not necessarily a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy is when a person is "playing at faith."

The word "hypocrite" originally meant a stage player, an actor.

This is not about "perfect praying"; it is about "authentic" versus "pretend praying."

What makes this person an "actor" is not their location, whether synagogues or street corners.

It is not their posture, "standing" vs. "kneeling"

There are many authentic prayers in the Scriptures that were prayed in a variety of locations from various physical postures.

The problem here, that turns this prayer into hypocrisy, is the posture of the heart.

The real issue is apparent in the phrase, **"they love...to be seen by men."**

Stage actors love to be seen by others, and there is nothing wrong with that.

They use their gifts and talents to entertain.

However, prayer is not entertainment; it is a conversational relationship with God.

Prayer is directed at God, not to those who might be listening or praying with you.

Anytime you are praying in a public setting, whether with one another person or with many, it is impossible to forget others are there.

It is not even wrong to pray to God in a way that speaks to those around you. Jesus did it. **"Then Jesus looked up and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me' " (John 11:41-42).**

Jesus spoke to his Father, but also to those around him.

The difference is that Jesus did not pray in order to please or impress people.

You can pray a "pretend prayer" even if others are not around.

A private prayer that flows from a heart that is uncommitted to the will of Christ...is something of a pretend prayer.

If your heart is not fully his...don't wait until it is before you pray.

But pray first about your heart...be honest with God.

"God I'm praying, but I am struggling to surrender to you."

"God, I don't know that I can trust you...please help me."

The opposite of hypocrisy is not a perfect heart it is an honest one.

Take what is actually in your heart to God in prayer...no pretending.

2. Jesus said that God "rewards" the heart that is fully his.

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Jesus is not saying that public praying is wrong, he did it himself...He is telling us to beware of "pride prayers."

Again, it is not about the setting of the prayer...public or private...but the posture of the heart towards God.

A prophet once spoke to a King whose heart had turned from the Lord and said as a rebuke...

2Chr. 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

The prophet was telling the King..."the truth is, this is not you."

But this could have been and should have been true of him.

It could and should be true for us as well.

The strength of the Lord, in real and tangible ways...flows into the hearts of those who are "fully committed to him"

We must die to living for the applause of people...have hearts that are fully his.

*Ask God to help you with this, choose to move towards this way of life.

We must pray for God to give us this kind of faith...and we must actively drive these foolish thoughts from our minds...and these foolish actions from our lives.

To live to please people is to embrace what is fleeting at best: if you do impress them, they will quickly forget you in favor of thoughts of self.

But truth be told, if you believe you are impressing others it is likely an illusion...you only think you are being impressive.

People are generally not impressed with people who are attempting to impress them.

Are you?

But even if you succeed in impressing others, what have you gained?

Or the better question...what have you lost?

You have lost the favor and power of God in your life.

Think carefully here: When you have sought to impress others...how long and how well did it satisfy?

-What about when you have lived to bless others and to honor Christ?

The gospel of Luke gives the clearest example of both playing at prayer and really praying...both done in a public setting.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified

before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9-14)

One sought to impress others...and failed to impress God.

The other was unconcerned with his reputation...he was desperate...his prayer got God's attention and affection.

Jesus is not impressed by you, but he does want to talk with you...he wants honest relationship with you...this is an amazing thing.

3. Then Jesus warned against the "Prayer of babbling"

We must Simply Ask from God and never attempt to manipulate him.

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

My daughters will frequently say to one of my young grandchildren who became frustrated and or very emotional..."use your words."

They are so angry, sad...they stop communicating with any clarity and just start making sounds.

These sounds without words are designed by young children to coerce the adults around them into obeying them.

And sadly, sometimes parents do "obey" these coercive, incoherent sounds.

God does not respond to "babbling"...it is an attempt to coerce...he cannot be coerced.

Praying the same prayer over and over is not the problem here...that is not "babbling"

In fact, one of the most heartfelt prayers that can be prayed is, "Help me Jesus. Help me Jesus."

And a wordless "groan" is one of the most powerful prayers we can pray.

Repetition, groans without words...these are not the problems in this passage, again it is the heart behind the "babbling."

We are not to babble like the pagans, literally "Gentiles".

This critique was directed at the non-Jews who believed that their gods were moved to action by the words of their followers.

However, Jesus was not limiting his critique to non-Jews, he was warning the Jewish people to not fall into

that same trap.

In the world of man-made religions with man-made gods, prayers can be a kind of incantation.

You must get the words just right, like combining different elements in a chemical compound.

Then you must repeat them over and over until they "work"

You eventually compel God to take your desired action with your repetition.

Jesus told the parable of a distraught woman who wanted justice from a bad judge.

The woman kept badgering the judge day and night...demanding that he take action to bring justice.

Finally he said "I don't care about this woman and or God...but she is wearing me out so I am going to take action."

Jesus then said in **contrast** to the wicked judge:

Luke 18:7,8 will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.

This parable is demonstrating that God, unlike the corrupt judge will move on behalf of his people...we do not need to try and wear him down.

He is our friend and father...we do not have to treat him otherwise...he is not a corrupt, unconcerned judge.

But Jesus told this story to encourage persistence in prayer...look at what he said before he told the parable.

Luke 18:1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

The difference between persistence in prayer and babbling is that we are not trying to "wear" God down with our many words.

We are demonstrating through the clearest, most honest words that we muster...lifted up to God day after day...that we believe he is our only hope, that he does answer our prayers.

Babbling is an attempt at manipulation...it's trying to wear God out and bend him to your will.

We pray with honest words from our hearts and minds to God, then in the end we bow our wills to him.

4. Jesus addresses the question of "Why pray at all?"

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

Jesus said we are not to think that God responds to the **quantity** of our words, but rather to the quality of our hearts.

His reasoning is, "Your **Father** knows what you need before you ask him."

Your Father...is after your heart...he is actively seeking to strengthen those whose hearts are actively seeking him.

On the surface, the fact that God knows our needs before we ask doesn't seem like an encouragement to pray at all.

If he knows what I need before I ask him, then why ask him?

Again, think in terms of actual relationships...father/child relationships.

If you are a parent and you know what your child needs, does this mean you will give it to her regardless of whether she asks or not?

What if what you really want for your child is something deeper than merely for them to "get what they need" from you?

What if you want deep relationship with them?

What if you want them to see what they actually need and not just what they want?

What if you want them to grow into maturity and part of that growth requires them learning to humble themselves and ask?

There are many reasons why a good parent would want a child to ask for what they need, even though the parent knows it.

Think about it another way, how could God NOT know what you need? Is he not God? Is he not all-knowing?

Of course he knows, but that does change the fact that he wants you to pray?

What this indicates is that he is not just about "getting stuff done."

We often turn life into a series of tasks and days to be completed in order to get to the next one and then, when we run out of days and tasks...we die.

That is not what our lives are to be about.

God, views our lives as training...we are training now to reign with him in the future.

He is making us into certain kinds of sons and daughters.

Praying is part of this training.

Your loved one may know you love them, so why continue to tell them so? Because it is part of the relationship to do so.

Your friends may know your story, but want to hear it again anyway. Why is this?

Because they are your friends and they enjoy hearing about and living "in" your life with you.

No, God doesn't respond to "babbling" because he already knows what you need, so he doesn't need to be convinced or coerced (as if this were even possible).

But yes, God does respond to simple, honest prayer because it is an important part of relationship with him.

CONCLUSION:

There are no rules for praying, either in this warning against how not to pray or in the model prayer that comes after this passage.

There are, however, important principles for prayer here. The largest principle is that of trust.

Prayer is about developing a trust relationship with God.

The principles Jesus gives here and in the following passage are much more about heart direction than word perfection.

A relationship with God is based on trust. We are only able to come to him at all because of Jesus and the way that he has opened up for us.

Now, because of this trust relationship with God, we do not have to get every word right. In fact, we can come to him when we are confused, or angry, or doubting.

We can speak directly and honestly from our hearts because that is what he desires from us.

Give great attention to a surrendered and honest heart.

"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. " (Matt. 12:20).

When we see our great need for God and talk to him out of that need, we don't have to get all the words just right because our hearts will be right.

When we come to him as the "bruised reeds" that we are, we experience his compassion.

Jesus said, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask." What exactly does he know that we need?

First and foremost, that we need him.

He knows that and it remains for us to more fully know that as well...our praying is part of growing in that understanding.

1. Do not pretend...pray honesty to God.

2. Look to your heart...if we pay attention to the source of our action(our hearts)...our actions will take care of themselves...ask God to change your heart...to help you take steps to change.

3. Do not attempt to manipulate God...use honest, heartfelt words...and seek to surrender to the will of God, rather than seeking to get him to surrender to yours.

4. Take all your requests to God...the fact that he knows what you need should be a great encouragement in your prayers.

He desires relationship with you...this is your greatest good, your best possible life.

***A life where we increasingly die to the need to look a certain way to others...and to have a growing faith in God(where we are actually concerned with what he wants) and growing love for others (where we demonstrate love to them in tangible ways)**



Closing the Gap:

*Where am I?
Where do I want to be?*

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:10

**"How can you believe if you accept
praise from one another, yet make
no effort to obtain the praise that
comes from the only God?"**

John 5:44

"You cannot hold to the esteem of others to that degree of importance and at the same time believe that God is who he is."

Dallas Willard

**Human desire is infinite by its nature
and its design.**

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enough; whoever loves wealth is never
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and neither are the eyes of man.**

Prov. 27:20

“And 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. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

Matthew 6:5-8

1. No "playing" at prayer

“And 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. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

**"Then Jesus looked up and said,
'Father, I thank you that you have
heard me. I knew that you always
hear me, but I said this for the
benefit of the people standing here,
that they may believe that you sent
me' "**

John 11:41-42

**If your heart is not fully his...don't
wait until it is before you pray.**

**2. God "rewards" the heart that is
fully his.**

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

**"For the eyes of the LORD range
throughout the earth to strengthen
those whose hearts are fully
committed to him."**

2 Chronicles 16:9

**We must die to living for the
applause of people.**

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Luke 18:9-14

3. Ask...don't try to manipulate

"And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

"And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly."

Luke 18:7-8

**Then Jesus told his disciples a parable
to show them that they should
always pray and not give up.**

Luke 18:1

**We pray with honest words about
what is in our hearts and minds then
in the end we bow our wills to his.**

4. Why pray at all?

**"Your Father knows what you need
before you ask him."**

**We are training now to reign with
him then.**

**Prayer is about developing a trust
relationship with God.**

**"A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not
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Matt. 12:20