

Russell Kelfer

Pray Like This

981-A

Series: Let God Be God



DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

Pray Like This

You would have thought he was the artist of the century. The lines seemed to be drawn with the artistic flair of a genius. His sense of proportion appeared to be that of someone with years of experience. The shading and choice of colors represented the taste of one who was born with a natural talent found only in a few of each generation. One would have assumed this young boy to be the kind of prodigy that comes along only once in a lifetime.

He was only eight years old, but he appeared to possess the creativity of a man four times his age. What made his every stroke appear so flawless? Only when you got up close could you tell. For behind the canvas on which he painted, there was a sheet of glass. Behind that sheet of glass was the design of a master. His Father, the greatest artist who had ever lived, had sketched a pattern, an outline for the boy to follow. Granted, within that outline, there was great room for creativity. And granted, the day would come when the lad would not need that kind of help. But in the meantime, a very loving father had not simply said, "Here's a brush, now paint." He had sketched in the background just enough of a road map to get him started.

Our Father has done that for us, too. On the canvas of Scripture, He has lovingly designed pattern after pattern for us to follow. We call them principles. Within the scope of those principles, He has given us a great deal of latitude to develop our own individual paintings of life. But without the patterns and without the principles, we would, in essence, be little gods, designing our own theology out of nothing.

No place is that concept more clearly evidenced than in the matter of prayer. Our loving Father didn't just tell us to pray. He taught us to pray. He showed us how to pray. He prayed for us. And finally, just to be sure we didn't miss the point, He tenderly sketched on the scrolls of Scripture a model for us to follow, and then quietly whispered, "Pray like this!" What more could we

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ask for? What more indeed.

Today's study is about that model. It is the beginning of a look at that portion of the Sermon on the Mount that teaches us how to pray. In our last lesson, we looked at three things which, in Jesus' day, made a man or woman religiously successful, and we watched as the Master pulled back the layers of motivation, held them up against the grid of eventual reward, and completely decimated man's concepts of what is and what isn't God-honoring. The three disciplines were giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus assumed that they were doing those things. He began, "When you give...; When you pray...; When you fast...". He did not honor the activities themselves, but rather He cautioned His followers that the key was not what they did, but who received glory for what they did. And finally, He outlined a pattern for rewards that must have rocked the religious community of His day. In essence, He said that every work that is capable of glorifying God carries with it a corresponding reward.

If that reward is accepted on earth, that's it. If that reward is deferred for eternity by transferring it quietly to God, then it will be stored up and given in Heaven. But no spiritual activity would be rewarded in both places. And finally, He clearly stated that if your desire was to be seen and recognized of men, you already have your reward. No matter how much you give, no matter how fervently you pray, no matter how selflessly you fast, if, in so doing, you seek and accept the plaudits of men, you simply lose the approval of God. You already have your reward.

In between His explanation of the second and third of those disciplines, He stopped to elaborate on the matter of prayer. He said, "When you pray, don't play act. Be real. Go into your closet and spend your time in secret with a God who sees what you do in secret." Then He paused and shared one of the deepest truths of His ministry. In just a handful of words, He taught His disciples how to pray.

Now most of us have read that portion of Scripture many times. We have memorized it. We have recited it. But do we use it as the pattern it was intended to be? Or would we rather free-lance; sketch our own designs without so much as looking at the model the loving Father has graciously placed beneath the canvas for us to follow? Today's lesson looks at the first part of that model. Our title is "Pray Like This".

Pray Like This

Our Outline:

I- God Knows; Stop Babbling

II- Pray Like This

Our text then, is tucked neatly inside of last week's passage. It is found in Matthew, chapter six, verses 6-13. We will include just a portion of the verse preceding it. It reads like this:

But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.

Pray, then, in this way: "Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:6-13 NAS)

I- GOD KNOWS: STOP BABBLING

I think you can sense that we are on Holy ground. Already, I think you can feel the closeness that exists between God and His children, a closeness so real that God Himself personally would come to earth to teach them how to pray, to teach sinful men how to communicate effectively with a Holy God. In fact, just the uttering of those words, "Our Father who art in Heaven," tends to cause a sense of awe and amazement in most of us.

God is telling us how to talk to Him so He will listen. *Ought we not to pay attention?* His first instruction before He actually teaches us what to do is to teach us what not to do. What we are not to do is "babble over and over," thinking that "many words will cause us to be heard". Apparently there is, in this concept, more than a warning not to pray long prayers, thinking

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that the longer they are, the more effective they are. There is, tucked in the context, also a warning against getting worked into an emotional frenzy like the heathen did when praying to their gods, thinking that their continual screaming and pleading would wear down their deities and cause their gods to relent and answer their prayers. The Living God would not be influenced, either by the length or the emotional fervor of their praying.

Nor would repetitive praying accomplish anything. God would not be impressed with liturgy that simply chanted over and over into His ear the same phrase as though He might have His eternal hearing aid turned down, and the sheer repetition of it might get through. God wasn't impressed by repetition, nor by babbling. Praying characterized by anything other than clear, concise, understandable words might satisfy an emotional need in man, but it would not qualify as prayer. Jesus said, "Stop babbling; stop repeating yourselves; stop thinking that how much you say or even how you say it will impress God." No, that's not the key. "When you pray," Jesus said, "pray like this".

One more truth jumps out at us in this opening statement of our Lord. He gave the reason that we do not need to jump up and down and babble over and over to be sure God hears our petitions. Listen to that reason,

for your heavenly Father knows what you need before you
ask Him. (Matthew 6:8b NAS)

Jesus begins His dissertation on divine communication by reminding man of the omniscience of God. Immediately He takes the focus off of what man does and places it on what God knows. Immediately He reminds His disciples that we are not praying to either inform God or impress God, but to worship God. We are not waking up a sleeping deity to assess Him of the latest news. We are not His wire service from planet earth to inform Him of the latest developments in our personal soap operas. Nor are we His personal counselors sending Him memos to instruct Him on how to handle our crises in case He hasn't read the latest books. He is God. He wrote the Book. He does not need us to scream at Him so He can hear. He does not need us to repeat for Him so He won't miss it. He already knows what we need. We aren't praying to inform God, but to implore God and to adore God. Anything else, Jesus was saying, is not prayer.

Now think carefully about how you pray. Do you pray to

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tell God what you want? Or do you pray, thanking God that He already knows what you need? There is a world of difference. The difference is between a child going to his parents and telling them he has a headache and a new toy will make him feel better; or a child going to his parents and saying, "I don't feel good, but you'll know what to do. You know everything. Help me." One uses the parents as a perennial Santa Claus, the other as a wise and loving authority. The difference between those two attitudes says a lot about a child's maturity. (And about a Christian's, as well.)

II- PRAY LIKE THIS

Now we come to the meat of the passage. Jesus has warned His followers not to pray as the heathen do (badgering God with repetitive phrases and frantic antics), and not to pray as the Pharisees do (putting on a show so the world would know), but rather to retreat into the secret place and quietly talk to God. Now He tells them specifically how to talk to God. He says, "When you pray, pray like this." Never has a loving God been more specific about how His children should perform a spiritual duty. "Pray like this." I don't know about you, but it would seem to me that we should "pray like this".

A) Thank You, Father, for Being Who You Are

Jesus says to pray like this,

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name."

(Matthew 6:9b NAS)

When you pray, address God correctly; that is with a proper spirit of respect. We are not conversing casually with a peer-level god. We are, the moment we call His name, standing in the very presence of the Creator. So many make so much of the physical posture we assume when we pray. God makes a lot of the spiritual posture we assume when we pray. It isn't so much whether we stand or kneel, whether our hands are folded or lifted, whether our eyes are open or closed. What matters is whether or not we come into the presence of God aware of whose presence we are in. It isn't, "Hi, God, glad you could come." It isn't, "Hey, God, you still there?" It is, "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." That doesn't mean that we must use those words. It means that we must assume that attitude. It means that when we enter the presence of our God, we ought to hear trumpets in the distance.

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When we enter the presence of our God, we ought to see the glory cloud overhead. When we enter the presence of our God, we ought to fall to our knees in absolute obedience and total surrender. We ought to suddenly be aware that by virtue of our place “in Christ”, we have but called, and the Almighty has answered. The Creator of heaven and earth, the Sustainer of life, the God who holds in His hands the keys to death and life and heaven and hell has focused all of His divine attention on us. That is nothing to be taken casually. That is the greatest honor ever bestowed upon man, an audience with the King.

Jesus said, “*Pray like this: Our Father who art in heaven.*” His Fatherhood makes it an intimate relationship, but the fact that He is the God of Heaven makes it an awesome relationship. The fact that He is OUR Father makes it a relationship shared with millions around the world. It places us, not only properly bowing at His throne, but never standing exclusively or condescendingly before others.

Our Father who art in Heaven... Hallowed Be Thy Name.

It means pray like this:

“Dear Father, dear precious, wonderful Father,

Your very name is Holy. Dear Father: everything about you deserves honor and praise. Dear Father, your character (for your name is your character), is beyond our capacity even to comprehend. You are perfect holiness. You are perfect love. You are perfect truth. You are perfect judgment. You are perfect grace. You are perfect. Hallowed be thy name.”

To pray like this, then, means to exalt the name of God in your heart to such a degree that the very fact that He would honor you by hearing you is more than you can comprehend. “What is man that thou art mindful of him?” That’s the posture with which we must enter the courts of prayer. Yes, we can pray driving to work. Yes, we can pray eating dinner. Yes, we can pray while we mow the grass. Yes, we can pray without ceasing. But regardless of what we are doing as we pray, the attitude with which we do it must never overlook the grandeur of being in the presence of the King of Kings. *Hallowed be Thy Name.*

Jesus said, “When you enter the courts of God, enter this way: with respect, with awe, with humility, with a Holy

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awareness that you are in the presence of the Great God of Eternity.” When you enter, enter praying, “*Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.*” Enter praising God for being who He is.

B) Thank You, Father, for Being Sovereign

Jesus goes on.

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in
Heaven. (Matthew 6:10 NAS)

Having praised God in utter abandonment for being who He is, we now pause to praise Him for His sovereignty. We immediately, before we ask Him for anything or tell Him anything, confess before Him that we understand that everything is under His control. We take the burden of Lordship off of our shoulders and drape it around His where it belongs, because prayer is not instructing God. God knows everything. Prayer is not bargaining with God; God does not need anything we have. We need everything He has, so what have we to bargain with? Prayer is not begging God to change His mind so that His will will conform to ours. Prayer is sinful man beholding a Holy God and so worshipping that Holy God that His character becomes our dominant preoccupation, until in utter awe, we conform our wills to His.

“*Thy Kingdom come.*” We might pray, “Lord, the things that matter to you are what I want to matter to me. I come to thee seeking to know your mind, to have your mind. Lord, I know my circumstances are tough, but Lord, the question is, “How can you best use those circumstances to further the Kingdom? Lord, whatever will bring the most Glory to you, may it be so. Thy Kingdom come. Lord, whatever it takes do it, Thy Kingdom come.” That’s praying. Prayer isn’t listing our petty grievances before God so He can remove from our lives the very things that He is using to change us, but rather entreating God to turn up the heat if need be so that the finished product will be a more durable portrait of His character.

Only when we can pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” can we honestly pray, “Thy will be done”. To pray “Thy will be done” means “Father, I don’t know what’s best. If I did, I would be God. But you do. Thy will be done. Yes, Lord, I know that what is facing me looks difficult. But Lord, I know one thing more difficult, to be outside your precious will. Lord, about that

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job, about that relationship, about that sickness, about that ministry: *Thy Will Be Done.*” You say, “But where’s your faith? If you had faith, you’d tell God what you want done, and ‘by faith’ expect it to happen.” No, Beloved, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Faith is not telling God what to do; faith is not knowing what God wants to do, but trusting Him to do it. To walk by faith is not to become God and determine what is best. To walk by faith is to be resting in the arms of God as He determines what is best.

“Thy Will Be Done.” This is not a phlegmatic, unconcerned view of life. It is an excited, confident walk into the unknown, knowing that to the one who made you and saved you, nothing is unknown. That’s prayer. Prayer isn’t standing on the corner of eternity directing traffic. Prayer is crawling up into the arms of the one who is directing the traffic as He determines when to stop and when to go.

Prayer is the process of assuming the mind of God by conversing with God about the character of God. It is stating your needs, as we shall see in our next study, but not to inform an ignorant God of something He has missed. It is to set the stage for an omniscient God to demonstrate that He is an omnipotent God as He accrues glory to Himself by doing that which only He can do.

So when you pray, pray like this:

“Oh, beloved, omnipotent God, In whose hands are the heavens and the earth; of infinite holiness is thy name.

What an honor to be in thy presence. I humbly bow in submission before thy throne. Dear Father, may thy Kingdom become preeminent in my world. Give me, oh, Father, your perspective of life. Grant me eyes to see not what the world sees, but what you see. Oh, Father, Thy will be done. Do, Lord, whatever it takes to accomplish your highest and best. And Dear Lord, do it thy way. I humbly submit to thy plan, Lord. Thy Will Be Done on earth as it is in Heaven. In heaven, Lord, all of life moves around thy throne. Nothing matters but you. No one is glorified but you. No plan thwarts your purposes; no song is sung but the song of praise to thee. Oh, Dear God, may that be so in my world as well.”

That’s prayer. That’s God’s man communicating with God’s

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heart correctly. “Pray like this.” Oh, God, may we learn to pray like this! As we progress, we will pursue the heart of God further as His Son continues to expound on the personal principles of prayer. We will look at what it means to ask for our “daily bread”. We will ask what it means to “forgive as we have forgiven”. And we will explore the “thine is...” phrases and what they mean.

Meanwhile, ought we not to spend a week meditating on the first few principles in this model prayer? Our Precious Lord; the perfect pray-er, has sketched under the canvas of the Word a model for us to follow so we can learn how to pray. The disciples begged Jesus, “Teach us to pray”. Jesus did just that. At least they knew they had a need.

Years have come and gone. The church has, with every generation, interpreted the concepts of prayer from almost every vantage point, its theology ranging from the absolute authority of man over God in prayer to the useless prayer of unbelief that refuses to believe that God can do what He claims He will because He may not be who He claims to be. The church has used prayer as a self-serving beacon to call attention to itself and thus lost its reward. And the church, on occasions, has used prayer as an end within itself and thus deified the method, while overshadowing the Master. But there have been times in history where the church has prayed as Jesus prayed. There have been times when God’s men and women were so amazed at who God is that they stood in total submission before Him and waited patiently for His will to unfold.

They prayed for miracles; but they did so not to exalt either the pray-ers or their prayers. They did so because they stayed in the presence of a miraculous God so long they did not dare believe there was anything He could not do. In those generations, mountains crumbled. In those generations, the enemy fled in fear. In those generations, like-minded saints walked hand in hand into the prayer closets of life and thus walked arm in arm onto the battlefields of life and watched the serpent slain before their eyes.

It was not that they prayed different prayers. It was rather that they prayed to a different kind of God. When they prayed, the Shekinah Glory of God filled the skies above their lives. When they prayed, the awesome splendor of a God whose very name is Holy filled their hearts. When they prayed, the sovereign

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majesty of a God who cannot err filled their circumstances with confidence, supplanted their fears with faith. When they prayed, the eternal I Am was lifted up in their spirits until they wanted nothing but His precious will. So confident of His plan were they; so amazed at His power were they, that heaven opened! Showers of divine mercy filled the skies with eternal evidence of His grace, and a lost world about them began to experience the power that comes when men and women learn how to pray.

When men and women learn how to pray, they pray like this:

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
(Matthew 6:9b-10)

May we but add, “Amen”.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

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