



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **The Journey III: The Mountain Top of Prayer**

*Matthew 6:5-13*

*March 6, 2005*

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The thing I really want to do today is preach a sermon that just comforts you. I want to preach a sermon that is very predictable, warm, and cozy. I don't want to move us anywhere right now. I just want to talk about prayer. I want to focus in on the Lord's Prayer. I want to have a wonderful time of stories and insights into prayer... But God won't let me. Maybe that's why several weeks ago, prayer became the point on the map we call the mountain top.

Mountain tops are the most majestic, eye-opening spots on our journeys. Mountain tops give you perspective. You can see things from a whole new view. And it's usually a wonderful view. But two things about mountain tops: it's not easy to get there, and you don't stay there long. So it is with prayer. Prayer can be a time to experience God's majesty. Prayer can open your eyes. Prayer can give you perspective—especially when you're in the middle of a tough spot in your life. But like mountain tops, it's not easy to get there, and when we are in prayer, our tendency is we don't stay there long...

The other reason I think God won't let me preach a warm, cozy sermon on prayer is because we're in a battle. Just like we're in a battle with gravity to get to the mountain top, we're in a battle for people's minds. We're in a battle of ideas. Francis Shaffer said "People live and die with ideas." People hear and think and live with ideas. Whether we accept or reject an idea has eternal consequences. "People live and die with ideas."

We are competing in a marketplace of ideas. We're in a battle for ideas. Most of the ideas people have and embrace, for which they love and choose and live and die are not thought-through. The ideas are subliminal. They come into the house through the attic and the basement. We don't examine them, we just accept them. Advertisers know this. If they present it rationally, we'll never buy it. For example, Miller Lite: The beach volleyball players with Miller Lite on the side. There is no association between the two, except for the ad. All it'll get you is a beer belly if you drink enough. Or the Marlboro Man. Marlboro country is not the West, it's the cemetery. These companies have doubled their efforts to sell. We are called to deal with ideas. Today we are going to look at Jesus' idea of what prayer is.

In our passage today, Jesus shares a whole new idea about prayer with his followers. We are overhearing Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: the ideas here are the most influential guidelines of human living in history. Let's look first at Jesus' pivotal words on prayer:

*Matthew 6:5-13 "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 people. 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.*

*This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*

That's it. How should we pray? By performing it for God alone.

Why should we pray in secret? So that we will receive reward from God. What an idea! It's plain speech. No special training needed. But practice helps. It's what takes you to the mountain top. And I love that the disciples themselves had to ask Jesus how to pray, even though they'd been living and working with the man himself!

The Lord's Prayer is personally significant to me. My freshman year at DePauw University, as I was lying in the bunk of the cold air dorm of the DU fraternity one night, I was praying through the Lord's Prayer, line by line, over and over. I don't know why — it wasn't like I was some expert in meditation. And I got to "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven... Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." And something happened. At the time I called it an idea. Maybe it was a vision. I could see in my mind God's spiritual kingdom juxtaposed against our world, settling over it. I just had a sense of its coming. I wanted to join it. I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to see it come true. And I believe God is inviting you to join it as well—because it's coming—a soft, gentle, winsome, contagious, unstoppable force! Veiled right there in the Lord's Prayer. Here's how important this prayer is. For you Bible scholars, the Lord's Prayer is basically an outline for the last half of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus says pray like this: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name..." With that, our focus is off of ourselves and on to God our Father. In one phrase we've claimed our identity as children of the King and put our focus on him. In the Sermon on the Mount, verses 6:19-24 comment on this. Jesus says "*Don't lay up your treasures on earth, where they can be destroyed, but lay them up in heaven. Where ever you have a treasure, there your heart is.*" Jesus is saying if you are centered on money, you don't give a rip about God's Kingdom. He goes on to say "*If your eyes are clear, your whole body is light, but if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.*" When you have an eye on money, it's like you are blinded and you can't see straight. Think of the Enron scandal. I have no doubt that many of those people go to church and wouldn't steal open money. BUT when they were stealing people's retirement funds, they were blind. blind. They didn't think there was anything wrong with it. Jesus says "*You can't serve both God and money.*" Isn't it true You and I take your money and put it where our thoughts and prayers are focused? Basically Jesus said 'If you tell me I've got your heart, I don't know what I've got. If you give me a check, then I know I've got your heart.'

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus is praying this: God's kingdom is coming to earth. Normally we think like the rest of the world. God's kingdom is far away, somewhere out there. But Jesus said that it is come. And with this new way of thinking and living we bring in God's Kingdom here and now, on earth as it is in heaven. In modern words, Jesus has given us a paradigm shift. And it changes everything. We simply act it out now, like a living prayer journey.

Give us today our Daily Bread: In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says in verses 6:25-34 "*Do not be anxious for your life, as to what you will eat or drink... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...*" If you're not centered on the King and the kingdom, you worry. You lose perspective. Jesus says trust God daily, and it will free you up to seek his Kingdom. How many people here today need that freedom?

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us... Next in the Sermon Jesus says in 7:1-5 "*Don't judge or you too will be judged... check out the log in your own eye before you worry about the speck in your friend's...*" First, if someone has a speck in their eye, it hurts. People need your help, not your attitude. Before you can take specks out of others' eyes, get the plank out! Don't be concerned about others' sins until you handle your own sin. Jesus is saying "*If I judge you by a standard, that standard will be applied to me.*" Most people will say "I'd rather keep the speck, than have you help me." This is the dangerous prayer: asking God to forgive you the way you forgive those who hurt you! I pray God brings someone to your mind who needs that from you.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil... Now this is something new! Nobody ever prays to be delivered from temptation. Temptation is too fun. The nature is that you like it, you enjoy it. Even with sins you and I don't worry much about. But listen to the Sermon on the Mount explanation in verse 7:6. Jesus explains "*Don't give what is holy to dogs, and don't throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.*" He's saying you have to know that behind the temptation is the tempter, the evil one, who wants to destroy you. For example, porn: Behind the screen is the one who will destroy you. When a brother or sister falls, our task is to get them back on their feet, deliver them from evil. We Christians are to do it in a spirit of meekness. But look at how the world does it: When a brother or sister falls, Satan and those who follow him take great delight in it. Jimmy Swaggart invited a prostitute to his hotel to watch her. In Penthouse, he had a whole story w/ pictures of the prostitutes who responded to Jimmy Swaggart. You'd think the editor would say to everybody "Get off of his back, it's just good clean fun." But no way. He had pictures and wrote stories. Jim Bakker fell with his secretary 8-10 year before. Hugh Hefner and his

daughter had 2 issues devoted to his fall and had pictures of his secretary as centerfold of the month. Jesus says if you fall to temptation, I have an obligation to get you back on your feet again. But the enemy, who would seek to destroy you, will eat you up. And so Jesus has us pray.

7:7-11 “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.” Jesus is talking about the petitions in Lord’s Prayer, for daily bread, forgiveness (as we forgive others), leading us not into temptation (He never will), and deliverance from evil. If you apply this statement to any random prayer you ask, that’s baloney! Jesus was talking about the Lord’s Prayer. God says “I’m not going to answer prayers for that which takes you away from me!”

One more thing about the mountain top of the Lord’s Prayer: it’s plural! *Our* Father. Give *us* this day. Lead *us* not. This implies that if you and I pray for daily bread together, I’m not to assume that if I get 2 loaves of daily bread means one loaf is for storing. When you pray for your brothers and sisters “lead us not into temptation...” you are implying you’re going to help them on their journey. God who knows how to give good gifts will answer. If I’m praying the Lord’s Prayer, my prayer will be in God’s will.

Jesus himself prayed. Many times the writers tell of him going to “*a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*” *Luke 6:12; Or that he “withdrew to lonely places and prayed”;* *Or that “very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mark 1: 35).*

And just like then, the Lord invites you and me to commune with him in prayer today. Prayer is communion with God. Communion is prayer. And today we’re going to take the some extended time to celebrate communion and bring our offerings of prayer to the altar. Throughout scripture God’s people built altars to God on the tops of mountains and hills. Archeologists are still discovering them. So today, to honor their legacy and experience come to offer him prayer and gifts in communion with God. You don’t have to come all the way up, but something happens when you draw near the altar in prayer and offering.

*Isaiah 56:6 The Lord says “I will bring foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant. These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*