



when you
PRAY

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WEEK ONE: MATTHEW 6:5-9

WEEK TWO: MATTHEW 6:10a

WEEK THREE: MATTHEW 6:10b-13

Prayer is more than words—it's how we connect with God, align our hearts with His will, and experience His power at work in our lives. Jesus didn't say *if* you pray, but *when* you pray—and He gave us a clear guide for how to approach God with confidence and purpose. Join us as we follow Jesus' example to learn and practice prayer together.

WEEK ONE

MATTHEW 6:5-9

⁵ “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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

Hypocrisy is the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform. Jesus often questioned the motives of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He noticed that they liked to hold people responsible for human-made rules that they wouldn't follow themselves.

One of the things Jesus confronts them on is their prayer life. Jesus highlights how the Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to make sure people could see and hear them praying. His point was that they cared more about being seen or heard praying than they did about actually connecting with God.

The point of prayer is not to view God as a vending machine that you use to get what you want. The point of prayer is to connect with God. That kind of connection cannot be faked. God won't be fooled by our pretending, and do we really want to lie to ourselves? That seems ridiculous.

It's settled then, there is no reason to pretend to pray. Either we pray or we don't.

Here, Jesus tells us to keep it between us and God. There is a great example of this in the book of 1 Samuel. In this story, Hannah is praying at the temple asking God for a child. She's desperate. She's been married a long time with no child to show for it, and her husband's other wife has many sons.

She's praying in her heart to God, and the priest of that time sees her and believes her to be drunk. He is confused by the way she is praying because he was used to loud, outspoken prayers. Hannah was just desperate for God to hear her and give her the grace and mercy she needed.

Jesus also encourages us to get to the point of what we are asking for in prayer. God knows what you need already. Again, the goal of prayer is for us to align our hearts with God's. We aren't going to surprise God with what we are talking with Him about.

Can you tune into the fact that God is all powerful and the fact that God wants to give us the desires of our heart? God just wants the desires of our hearts to align with His.

How do we do that? Jesus gives us the blueprint to start with. We start with growing our desire to be present with God. Jesus tells us to pray by starting with, "Our Father."

This phrase references a parent. That is how intimate Jesus wants our relationship with God to be. He knows us as well as our earthly parents know us. He knows everything about us and everything we have ever done, and He loves us no matter what.

Do you feel unconditionally loved by God the Father?

Jesus wants us to understand that intimacy is available with the all powerful God. He makes that clear by saying, "Our Father, in

Heaven.” We have access to the throne room through prayer. We have access to the unlimited power of God.

How does that reality make you feel? You have access to unlimited power. Do we choose to access that power often?

With that kind of access, we should have no problem honoring the name of God. “Hallowed be your name” just means, “God, you are holy.”

God is perfect. So what this means is that we should desire to align our hearts with God’s instead of trying to convince God to align with our hearts. All too often we think about prayer as a way to make God do what we want Him to do.

If we can think of an all-powerful God who loves us unconditionally, we can understand that we shouldn’t be in charge of anything. We should quickly submit to God.

QUESTIONS

Jesus contrasts prayer that is seen with prayer that is shared with God alone. What tends to shape your own prayer life more – being impressive, being correct, or being honest? Why?

Jesus says the Father already knows what we need before we ask. How does that change the way you think about the purpose of prayer?

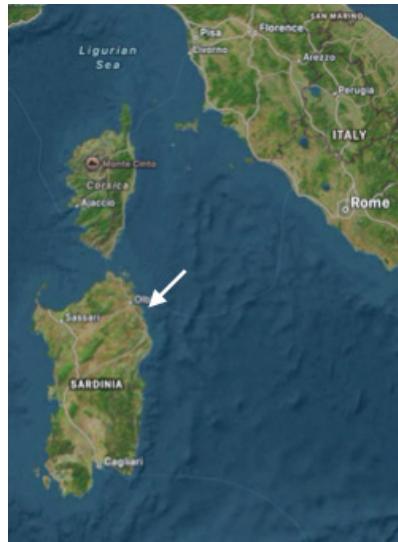
What would it look like for you to pursue presence with God rather than productivity – or checking a box – in prayer this week?

WEEK TWO

MATTHEW 6:10a

^{10a} your kingdom come, your will be done...

Have you heard of the Kingdom of Tavolara? Tavolara Island is off the northeast coast of Sardinia. Sardinia, of course, is a large island in the Mediterranean Sea that is part of Italy.



As of 1815, the island was uninhabited. Giuseppe Bertoleoni claimed to be its monarch after an encounter with the King of Sardinia in 1836. Giuseppe was working as a shepherd at this time, and he was the only person on the island during the King's visit. After being named king of Tavolara, Giuseppe sent for his family from some neighboring islands to join him.

It's disputed whether or not there was actually a kingdom designation from the king of Sardinia in 1836, but the Bertoleoni family passed down the monarchy through their family until 1962. The Bertoleoni family is still on the island of Tavolara, but

it is no longer officially designated as a kingdom. They enjoy a simple life owning and operating a few restaurants on the island.

How could anyone think a tiny island, with a population of around 50 people, is its own kingdom?

What is a kingdom if not a place to make things the way you want them? You get a chance to have everything go just the way you want it to. Isn't that something we pursue in everyday normal life?

We don't ask other countries to recognize the little kingdoms we build, but we function like kings and queens.

Ad campaigns since the early 90's have pointed to this reality. Do you remember the "Your way, right away; at Burger King now," ads that ran on TV?

In today's social media world, the algorithms tend to give us exactly what we want. To the point where we can live in a world that isn't necessarily real, because we get stuck in what we have created.

The idea of Jesus' prayer model is to set self aside. "Your kingdom come." We say that or maybe we have said that, but do we know what we are asking for?

Jesus spent the majority of His ministry saying things like, "the Kingdom of God is like..."

In all of these stories Jesus is drawing a picture of what living in the Kingdom of God will look like. Generally, what it looked like was nothing like what we would choose. The kingdom of God in Jesus' description never looked like what society looks like.

Jesus talks about leaving everything you have known for one thing that changes everything. He talks about needing just a little bit of faith.

Needless to say, the Kingdom of God will not be like what we think of when we think of kingdoms. Human monarchies are generally self-focused, but the Kingdom of God is nothing like that.

The picture Jesus gives us is one of peace, hope, joy, justice, and love. It's possible in an earthly kingdom, but it's guaranteed in the Kingdom of God.

The key to the prayer that Jesus asks us to pray is desiring the Kingdom of God to be our reality, to actually want that over our own kingdom, and to fix our hearts on God's will being done instead of ours.

- ❑ the kingdom of God is like
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like a **mustard seed**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like a **treasure**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like **verses**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like **leaven**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like a **pearl**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like **parables**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like **yeast**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like a **seed**
- ❑ the kingdom of god is like a **farmer**

QUESTIONS

Where do you notice yourself building or protecting your own “kingdom” in everyday life – control, comfort, success, or image?

What do you think you’re really asking when you pray, “Your will be done”? Where do you feel resistance to that prayer?

What might it look like to desire God’s Kingdom more than getting your own way this week?

WEEK THREE

MATTHEW 6:10b-13

^{10b} on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today 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 the evil one.

Have you seen the movie *Field of Dreams*?

It's a movie based in Iowa where a farmer mows down a part of his cornfield to build a baseball stadium. The ridiculousness of a move like that is elevated by the circumstances of the farming community in the mid-80's. The farm crisis, and resulting financial pressure, made sacrificing farm land seem insane.

Ray, the farmer, was being guided by "a voice" that only he could hear. He traveled around the country assembling a group of characters to join the "team" that was already practicing. That team was the famed "Black Sox", a.k.a. the Chicago White Sox from 1919 that were accused of intentionally losing the World Series.

Shoeless Joe Jackson was the star of that team, and he is the character we hear from mostly in the movie. We find out during the movie that Ray's dad had played baseball around the same era as Shoeless Joe.

In one of the most powerful scenes of the movie, Ray and his dad, John, are left alone on the field. When Ray and John have a chance to talk, John asks, "Is this heaven?"

Ray answers, "No, it's Iowa."

Then he asks his dad if he would be up for playing catch.

This is a powerful moment in the movie because the last few encounters Ray had with his dad while he was still alive were contentious to say the least. He refused to play catch with his dad. He was embarrassed by his dad, had it out with him, and left. Ray's dad died before they were able to restore their relationship.

Although this movie begins as a whimsical opportunity for wrongfully accused players to get a chance to play ball again after lifetime bans, it turns into the opening of the window between heaven and earth for the purpose of restoring a relationship that was once destroyed.

The picture of the afterlife in this movie is an interesting one. It doesn't totally point to the reality of what Jesus shows us about heaven, but maybe there are glimpses.

There is joy, love, peace, hope, and an overwhelming sense of satisfaction. Is that heaven? Ray and his family get to experience a little bit of heaven on earth.

Do we desire to bring heaven to earth? Do we want the peace, love, hope, grace, and mercy available to us through eternity in the presence of God? Do we want that now?

That is the offer Jesus has for us. The experience we will get in heaven is available to us now on earth. We have to choose it, desire it, and pursue it.

Maybe we believe heaven is only a future reality, something that is to be attained after death. Followers of Jesus tend to build up in their minds what eternity in the presence of God is going to look and feel like. It becomes a goal of our life to go to heaven.

If that is the case, wouldn't we want that all the time? Wouldn't we want that every day? Shouldn't we do everything we can every day to ensure that we are bringing heaven to earth?

The pursuit of heaven on earth is all about aligning our heart with God's. We are called to pursue the character and the Kingdom of God now, rather than waiting until the end of our lives.

God is love. He is full of grace, mercy, and kindness. God is joyful and creative. He is just. Don't you want to live in a world that looks like this? Wouldn't you sign up today for a life that is like this for its entirety?

QUESTIONS

When you imagine "heaven," what qualities or experiences come to mind? Where do you catch glimpses of those things in your life right now?

Jesus invites us to pray for daily provision, forgiveness, and protection. Which of these feels most present – or most needed – for you right now?

How does forgiveness (both receiving it and extending it) play a role in bringing heaven closer to earth?

What is one concrete way you could participate in bringing peace, grace, or restoration into your everyday world this week?

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