

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5-7

Praying to Our Father Who Is in Secret

Matthew 6:5-6 | Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on October 11, 2026

INTRODUCTION

“What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father.” (Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 251)

I wonder how you view your Father -- frowning and harsh, or with a great warm smile of love? Do you think of your Father in heaven as generous or miserly? Do you view him as full of grace and love, or stern and hard to please?

Fundamental to the Pharisees (the people Jesus is warning us that we can be like) was a very flawed view of God. I am afraid that is something we all can still struggle with, and we need Jesus to correct this. The hypocrites did not see the Father rightly, and Jesus is greatly concerned by this. Though they did not realize it, they had bought into the lie of the serpent in the Garden of Eden – that God, who is the Creator and Ruler, is a miser rather than a generous God with a big garden and only one no. The idea that God the Father is a slave master, a tyrant over people, frowning upon them and their ways, is the Pharisees' view of the Father – not the real one. Jesus wants his followers to know, and to live knowing, what their Father is really like.

Last week we saw the principle of verse 1: **beware that in your righteous acts or religious devotion to God you are not hijacked by service to self and the praise of man rather than your Father in heaven.** This morning we come to the second of three illustrations

that shed light on that principle. And I want us to see our Father through Christ (holding your hand), which is fundamental to our seeing the shallowness of seeking security and significance in the praise of man over our Father.

See the same formula. Verses 5 and 6 follow the same pattern we saw in verses 2 through 4: “When you...,” “not like the hypocrites...they have received their reward,” and then “your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

But I also want you to see that with prayer, Jesus breaks his own pattern. Giving gets three verses, and fasting gets three verses. Prayer keeps going all the way through verse 15 – a very prominent and important excursus that brings us to the Lord’s Prayer.

Let me read our text – Matthew 6:5-6

5 “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. 6 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.”

Matthew 6:5–6

Let’s walk through this text with our Father central and Christ holding our hand:

1. OUR FATHER EXPECTS HIS CHILDREN TO TALK TO HIM (V. 5A)

Notice again that Jesus says “when you pray,” not “if.” Jesus assumes that those who follow him will pray. And he goes further– he instructs us in a more thorough way, as we will see when he introduces the Lord’s Prayer, and even in chapter 7 when he tells us to ask and seek and knock. Prayer is not a burden laid on us. It is a gift from our Father, who wants to hear from his children. It is one of the great privileges of being children of God!

The religious of Jesus’ day would have focused on praying three times a day – this is not what is being condemned. God is a prayer-hearing God and calls us to pray – which included public and private times of prayer. Consider Daniel.

Daniel: Public Prayer Rooted in Private Prayer

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Daniel 6:10

Daniel prayed where he could be seen. The windows were open. But look at the words “as he had done previously.” This was not a performance. It was a habit formed long before anyone was watching. And when the king’s law made prayer dangerous, Daniel did not hide it, and he did not parade it. He just kept doing what he had always done.

Here is the contrast. The hypocrites prayed publicly to **gain** something from men. Daniel prayed publicly at the risk of **losing** everything to men. Same visibility – opposite motive. The difference was not the location.

Jesus: The Son Who Withdrew to Pray

And then there is our Lord Jesus. Jesus prayed publicly. At the tomb of Lazarus he prayed out loud, and he even told us why:

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.”

John 11:41–42

So even his public prayer was for the good of others and the glory of the Father – not for his own reputation. But the Gospels show us Jesus withdrawing to pray alone far more often than praying in front of people.

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.

Mark 1:35

But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

Luke 5:16

He went up on the mountain by himself to pray (Matthew 14:23). He prayed all night before choosing the Twelve (Luke 6:12). And in Gethsemane, he went a little farther, away even from his closest friends, and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father” (Matthew 26:39). Jesus shows us private prayer, and he shows us what it looks like to know the Father.

Watching Jesus pray made the disciples want to pray. His public life flowed out of his secret life with the Father. (Luke 11:1)

In the next chapter (7) he will say – “ask, seek, and knock...your Father gives good things to those who ask.

2. BE CAREFUL WHEN PRAYER FORGETS THE FATHER (V. 5B)

Here again is the warning...acts of righteousness for the wrong reason.

Jesus challenge is to those who love to pray to be seen. **“You must not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners.”** What do they love? Not the praying – the standing and the being seen.

Here in this passage we see the temptation that even as we go to do one of the most holy things possible – to pray to a holy God – we can sin. We can serve self, and the act of devotion to God can be hijacked for self-service. We can lose sight of the most important audience!

To pray to God is to show adoration, submission, and dependence on him, with humility, honesty, reverence, and gratitude. But when we come to prayer in order to impress others, we do not do these things. We are not adoring him – we are adoring ourselves. We are not depending on him – we are depending on the approval of the people listening. DO YOU SEE THE HIJACKING THAT CAN TAKE PLACE?

Why They Did It

Because the hypocrites did not view God rightly and did not have a real, true relationship with God, they were not real in their actions before others. The Pharisees were insecure before God, and so they sought their security in their fellow man and what he thought about them. They had a distorted view of the character of the Father –

regarding him as a slave driver or a tyrant who did nothing but place restrictive burdens on God's people.

"Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." They got exactly what they wanted – the praise of men – paid in full. And that is all they will get. They are laying up treasures that rust and fade away... 6:19-21. The praise of man is a counterfeit treasure – a broken cistern that holds no water.

Turning the Mirror on Us

We must be careful. We could watch out for our own prayers and focus on self as we supposedly talk to God in front of other people. How often do we want to sound just right, or spiritual, and get anxious and depressed when we fail to do so – not for reasons relating to God, but for reasons relating to ourselves?

When I do pray in public what and who am I thinking about?

I love these questions that D. A. Carson gives:

- Do I pray more frequently and fervently when alone with God than I do in public?
- Do I love the secret place of prayer?
- Is my public praying simply the overflow of my private praying?

And let me add one to this:

- Do I pray far more for people than I text or tell them I do – so that my telling them I'm praying for them is almost an understatement, and never for the praise of others but only for their encouragement?

If we answered no, this passage is meant to be the Father's loving correction of our hearts if you are a child of God – or a serious alarm

bell for those who are playing religion. It happened in Jesus' day, and it has happened ever since. The Sermon on the Mount will end with that warning (7:21–23).

But this is for the followers of Jesus too, whom he is shaping and changing. And the best way to overcome such evil is to spend time in secret prayer – private prayer – as verse 6 says – and learn to know who your Father truly is!

3. PRAY ALONE WITH OUR FATHER, THROUGH THE SON (V. 6)

“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.”

Matthew 6:6

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that this matter of prayer is not only that we should shut out other people, but that we should shut ourselves in with God, and concentrate upon him in our relationship to him.

The hypocrites went to the street corner because that is where their audience was. Jesus sends us into the “prayer closet” because that is where the Father is. The shut door is not lonely. He is there. We need to truly learn this! I am so thankful that my dad modeled this prayer life in ways that I will never forget – in ways I hope I will forever be different. I would come down in the morning having seen evidence of private prayer to His Father.

There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life. Do we pray? Not just say we do!

We Come Only in the Name of Jesus

But how does a sinner walk into the presence of a holy God and shut the door? We do not get in by becoming good pray-ers. We come in the name of Jesus Christ, and in him only.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

John 16:23–24

Jesus is our priest. Under the old covenant, only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, once a year, and not without blood. But when Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). We shut the door to the world because Christ has opened the door to the Father. We come based on the merits of Christ!

Since then we have a great high priest ... Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14–16

Jesus Our Intercessor

And Jesus is not only the door we come through. He is praying for us.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Rom 8:34

When we pray poorly, he prays perfectly. Before Peter's great failure, Jesus told him, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). Jesus prayed for Peter before Peter even knew he needed it. That is the kind of praying I want to grow in – praying for people far more than I tell them I do. And that is the kind of intercessor we have right now at the Father's right hand.

The Spirit Helps Us

Not to mention the help of the Spirit described to us in Romans 8:26. – He helps us in our weakness for we know not what to pray for as we ought. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Again, back to our understanding of who the Father is and our relationship with him. We don't have a relationship with him by becoming a good pray-er and earning our status of sonship. The reward we look for is the reward of a son who already has a Father and is secure in that relationship. We are sons not slaves and We cry out to our Loving FATHER!

The Father Who Answers

I believe it is true that if we really believed who the Father is and took his command seriously, we would see God at work answering prayers in greater ways. Your Father is more willing than you think.

We will get here before the Sermon on the Mount has ended -

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

Matthew 7:11

Could it be that the Father is waiting for his children to come in, shut the door, and in Jesus' name ask? And in this come to know how real and close and good He is!

CONCLUSION: THIS IS YOUR FATHER

If we really understand who our Father is, the gift of prayer he has given us, and his love and grace toward us, we would not think so foolishly as to pray for the applause of man [or give miserly or for show – vv. 2-4]. So let me close by showing you who this Father is, just from the Sermon on the Mount:

- He is **generous** – he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (5:45).
- He is **near** – he is in secret, and he sees in secret (6:6).
- He **knows** – he knows what you need before you ask him (6:8). Don't be anxious for he knows you need them all...(6:32)
- He **provides** – he feeds the birds and clothes the grass of the field; how much more you (6:26, 30).
- He **gives** – how much more will he give good things to those who ask him (7:11).

He is not a frowning tyrant. He is not a miser. He is holy and perfect, and yet he has given you his Son, who is your Mediator, who brings you into relationship with him, and who intends to grow you into great delight and intimacy with the Father by his Holy Spirit.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, who brings his sinners into his kingdom and rescues them, declares that there is a Father who has made peace with you if you will receive the Son. “To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). The Father smiles upon them and gives them mercy and grace. He brings them into a relationship in which he always cares, he is generous, he is all-knowing, and he calls them to talk to him, to ask for things, to shape their hearts to his priorities, and to care more for his approval than for all the praises and approval that come from our fellow man.

If you are a child of God, and your prayer life has been more about your audience than your Father – hear his loving correction, not his rejection. You are a son, a daughter. The door is open. Go in. Let Jesus hold your hand and say – you have my righteousness and that is enough and your Father’s love is so much better.

If you have prayed little because you thought he was hard to please – The Father loves Jesus and now sees you holding Christ’s hand – He sees Christ in you! Look at the cross. He is not reluctant. Come to him through Jesus, who is praying for you right now.

If you have been playing religion – this is the alarm bell. You can say the right words in public and not know the Father at all. But today you can receive the Son, and through him have a Father who will never turn you away.

Oh, I long for you to grow in the knowledge of this Father – and by that I mean an experiential knowledge. Truly knowing him as Father, and loving him, and wanting to please him – not to earn your status of being a son, but because you already have it – and enjoying his pleasure upon you.