



Session 4: The Lord's Prayer

- OPENING -

Consider using one of the following questions as an opening activity for your group before moving into a closer look at the passage.

- Take a moment as a group to prayerfully read Matthew 6:1-18.
 - Pray that God would use this time together to help encourage you in your prayer life.
- Prayer is a part of each Christian's life, but some people really struggle to feel satisfied with their prayer life.
 - Do you find personal prayer to be natural for you, or is it something that you have to consciously cultivate in your life?
 - What are some things you have tried, successfully or unsuccessfully, to help your prayer life grow?
- Jesus is emphasizing inward and private righteousness throughout these verses.
 - What is the danger when our righteousness is practiced for the purpose of outward show? What happens to a community when outward righteousness becomes over valued or over hyped?
 - Why do we want applause from others? How do we balance a healthy desire for community affirmation and guidance, with an unhealthy desire for recognition and status?

- DISCUSSION -

Giving

1. Jesus emphasizes that the giving of his disciples is meant to be in secret and not publicly proclaimed.
 - How can we practice giving in secret?
 - What are some unhealthy ways that giving occurs in Christian communities?
2. Notice that Jesus is emphasizing giving to the needy in Matthew 6:2-4.
 - Where and how can we as individuals and as a church be active in giving to the needy?
 - How can we give to the needy in a way that is secret and practices good stewardship?

Contrasts in Prayer

3. Jesus contrasts the prayer of a disciple with the prayer of a hypocrite (see Matthew 6:5-6).
 - Why do you think Jesus emphasizes the danger of hypocrisy in prayer?
 - Where do you see this danger for hypocrisy in your prayer life cropping up?
 - What can you do to develop or maintain sincerity in your prayer life?
 - What reward do you think Jesus is speaking of in Matthew 6:5-6 when he talks about God rewarding prayers offered in secret?
4. Jesus goes on to contrast the prayer of a disciple with the prayer of a pagan (see Matthew 6:7-8). Pagan prayer believes that there is something about the way a prayer is offered, or the words used that make it effective.
 - What is Jesus's critique of this prayer?
 - Where do you see the danger of "babbling" appear in your own prayer life?
5. Both of the contrasts Jesus offers here are based in the belief that human beings can manipulate God. The hypocrite believes that their outward show can not only fool people, but also God. The pagan believes that by using the right words in the right combination or repetition they can get God to do what they want.
 - How are you tempted to use prayer as a tool for manipulating God?
 - How does sincerity in prayer, and reliance on God's sovereign knowing help alleviate the temptation for our prayer life to become manipulatory?

The Lord's Prayer

6. Jesus opens his teaching on prayer, by first addressing our posture before God (6:9-10)?
 - What does it mean for God's name to be "hallowed" and what is meant by God's "name"?
 - What are we asking when we pray for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done?
7. There are three basic requests that we make for ourselves in the prayer: physical provision, forgiveness and guidance.
 - Which of these three do you pray for most regularly?
 - Why is our forgiveness of others so important to our relationship with God?
 - Who do you need to forgive in your own life, as you seek God's forgiveness?
 - Where do you need to pray for guidance and deliverance right now in your life?

Fasting

8. Read Matthew 6:16-18. Notice that Jesus assumes that fasting will be a regular part of the life of his followers.
 - Do you think 21st century Christians make fasting an integral part of their practice as believers? Why or why not?

- How can you practice fasting in your own life?
- What do you feel like you need in order to make fasting a part of your life and relationship with God? Do you need to know more, do you need a friend to practice this privately together?
- What are the inherent dangers that come with fasting (and with discussing it in a public group!)?

- CLOSING -

- In which of these areas of giving, prayer, and fasting do you most want to grow?
- How can you encourage one another in these practices while still retaining Jesus's emphasis on these being secret and private acts?