

## The Glory of Prayer

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We are all drawn to a light, seek a power, to live a full and vibrant life. Jesus wants to show us how to live that life by opening up prayer. In chapter six, he shifts his attention away from our relationship to God's law to our relationship with *God*, the Father. He does it by addressing the *motive* of our praying, the *manner* in which we should pray, and we'll close with some reflections on the *movement* of prayer.

### The Motive of Prayer

Think of your soul as a light bulb, and prayer as what connects you to the current of God's presence. What does your bulb look like? Is it screwed in, burning *brightly*? You have a sense of God's greatness, your affections aglow for Christ. You find yourself enlightened by God's words. Your prayers are real and answered. You find yourself serving others. Or is your bulb *flickering*? Prayer is on and off. Communion with God is more duty than delight. Prayers don't seem to be as easy, maybe you're struggling with some doubt, but you know God is good, so you keep trying to pray and serve others despite your spiritual dryness. Or are you *dim*, maybe even out altogether? Little to no light and warmth. Cold to prayer and God's word. Nothing to give to others. If you come unscrewed in prayer, you will eventually drift away into the darkness, losing the Light that makes life bright and true. To all of us Jesus says, "Pray no matter what." It's that important. Don't pray fake prayers. Be authentic but pray. Jesus says three times, "When you pray" (5-7) not if you pray. **But what if you find prayer hard?** What if you're flickering or dim? What should motivate prayer? Jesus begins with what shouldn't: "[Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven](#)" (6:1). There are couple motivations I want us to pick up on. Notice he says **beware**, be alert, be cautious you don't pray *before others*, before an audience. At the time, Jews would often pray in public. Even today that can be seen in Jerusalem at the Wailing Wall. And it's not that public prayers are bad. **They can be quite edifying in various gatherings, but when unmatched with private prayer they become a kind of performance.** Disconnected, rote, prayer at meals, before a meeting. So how do you get here? What's the motivation? **Jesus says, is to be seen.** Have you ever heard about a difficulty someone is going through or a doubt they are struggling with and said or texted back, "I'll pray for you," but didn't. Why? Because you wanted to be *seen* as prayerful. *Sometimes we care more about the audience than the actual person.* This is practicing righteousness before the wrong audience. That's publically. It's also possible to pray to be seen *privately*. Say you are praying with a group of people. And in the silence of your mind, you actually begin to judge other prayers, I pray more authentically (they don't ever confess sin), or I pray with more empathy. Or switch it around, they pray with so much more passion or wisdom. Your private audience condemns or praises you. The motive is still for *you* to be *seen*. Maybe we need a little DFW: "[You will become way less concerned with what other people think of you when you realize how seldom they do.](#)" Of course, realizing how little people think about us might motivate us more to get attention. Aware of this, Jesus compares prayer for an audience to philanthropy. It's like giving to get your name in a brick, a program, or on a screen. It's not really about your belief in the cause, it's

(v, 2) “[that you may be praised by others.](#)” [Regents] The original wording reads, “so that they might have glory by men.” We’re all drawn to a **glory, a power, a light, and the trick is finding one that won’t fail you.** Glory from people offers no true light, no true power. When we rely on them for life, the soul flickers and will go dim. When you go day to day, week to week, cruising on community you’re driving away from the Light. Another audience that weakens prayer is **Self**. Your problem isn’t that you pray to be seen; it’s that you don’t pray much at all. Your bulb doesn’t flicker; it’s barely lit. You don’t see the need for it. The reason for this is that you’ve got all the power you need. You can do your job, quite well.

Relationships are fine. Nothing in your life that you can’t handle without God. Isn’t prayer for weak people? An anthropologist studying secular communities for years has noted that being secular is linked closely with four things: 1) emphasis on personal autonomy 2) the right of individual choice in one’s life 3) rejection of traditional worldviews 4) reluctance to be associated with traditional forms based on metaphysical beliefs. *While it’s important to think well about everything particular Christianity, what secularized people don’t realize is that, in insisting on radical, personal autonomy and rejecting all other worldviews and traditions, they establish their own faith tradition, dominated by the Self and one’s ability to reason.* A closed universe that revolves around the sun of the Self. **When we import this omnipotent view of the Self into Christianity, it rejects prayer because prayer acknowledges something greater than the Self.** It views prayer incorrectly, as something to be leveraged when weak or powerless to get through life, a kind of opiate for the masses. But this is not the meaning of prayer at all. Like the audience of others, the audience of Self obscures true meaning of prayer by being drawn to diminished glory and lesser light. Prayer, Jesus says, is about a kingdom much bigger than the Self. It is about a power greater than our little career or lifespan. It connects us to a much greater reward, a reward in secret, “[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.](#)” (6). The true motive of prayer isn’t self-reliant glory or the glory of others. It’s the glory of God the Father who makes the soul burn.

### **Manner of Prayer**

How do we get into the deep reward of prayer? Jesus says you do it in secret. Jewish homes were built with a room unattached to the outer clay walls. The reason for this was so that thieves couldn’t dig through the outer wall to get into it. This secret room contained their valuables. Jesus is saying there is something so precious, so sublime, that it’s worth stopping everything to see. It’s where the valuables are. When I saw the crown jewels in Buckingham palace, I was surprised to find them in a room off to the side, not out front on display. It took some effort to get back there, and then once there, I had to stand in line for quite a while, but it was worth the wait, the effort. It was worth stopping, slowing down to take in their glory. Christ is our crown jewel. Everything else can wait. Prayer puts us in his presence. As one Scripture says, “God is a rewarder of those who seek him” *but we must seek him.* Prayer is **intentional**. Go into the room, shut the door, and pray. It’s also **relational**. *Pray to your Father, our Father who art in heaven*, Jesus uniquely refers to God as *Father*, not king, lord, master, but Father. And we are meant to pray as adoring children. Do you know how children become adoring of their parents? They spend time with them and watch them. This summer I got to go zip-lining with my son in one of the top 10

ziplines in the world, *and it brought us closer together!* We suited up in all our gear and rode out to the canyon, the wind whipping across our faces in the back of the Austrian military ATV. We clipped in for six, yes six, ziplines 200 feet above Wolcott canyon in Colorado. Zipping back and forth across the canyon, we talked, laughed, and screamed, face to face for two hours, taking pictures and relishing one another's company. We've got matching T-shirts to prove it. **Soul brightening prayer takes time and a Face.** We often see prayer as a list. Since we got home from Colorado, my son gets up early every morning, and gives me two or three hugs. Then, when its time for me to go to work, he walks outside to watch me get in the car and waves until I drive off. He's 10. Focused time with the Father brings affection for the Father. The Father wants to reward you, to thrill you with his presence and glory, but we have to lay down the glory of others and the glory of Self. **We have go to the side room if we are to see the jewels, to give up time because we believe in the cause.** Why? Because we've found true Light. We've found his face.

### Movement of Prayer

The motive of prayer, the manner of prayer, now very briefly a word on the movement of prayer. Jesus says here's how you pray, **Our Father who are in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.** What is he telling us about prayer? That it's marked by self-forgetfulness. The Lord's Prayer doesn't start from the bottom, sins and daily bread, and work up to the top, hallowed be your name. It starts from the top, Father in heaven and works down lead me not into temptation. It moves from heaven to earth, God to man. When we put God on top he reorders everything. When we're dialed into him, he casts light and joy into all of life. He gives us the power and the grace to get through challenging seasons, children, classes. But when we put those things on top, they paralyze us, drive us into the dark, because they're not meant to fuel us for life. The movement is top-down and its **outside-in.** In the novel *Clockwork Orange*, a revolutionary character says something jarring, "*You were not put on this earth just to get in touch with God.*" Despite the reward of God-centered prayer, we can sometimes treat prayer and the spiritual life like an **escape**, a refusal to face the real world and take real responsibility. But notice it starts your kingdom come, not mine. Your will be done, not ours. Outside-in. In a mysterious way, our prayers help us bring heavenly revolution to earth. When we pray your kingdom come, we are obligating ourselves to the agenda of heaven on earth—the reordering of everything under the rule of Christ. The kingdom comes to make worshippers out of sinners, to give bread to the needy, to deliver from evil, and to forgive sin. The kingdom comes to enthrone the true King, and to distribute his grace. Prayer puts us in touch with God's kingdom movement. And the movement began with Christ. He turned the world upside down. The poor became rich, the weak made strong, the rejected accepted, the proud humbled, sinner made saint. This is how Jesus began this sermon. *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Will you pray outside-in, for those around you, for the cities of Dublin and Montreal and Austin? That we would repent of sinful self reliance and become poor in spirit? It all begins in secret. Go to your room, close the door, and pray to your Father. It ends in secret. There, in the quiet of prayer we come face to face with our chief reward, our Father who art in Heaven, the King of glory. And there we begin to love his glory more than our own and others, and our souls start to burn brighter and brighter. We become happier and happier in Christ. And then we show the world a city on a hill, a light that **burns bright** (5:14,16).