

The CORE TEACHINGS of JESUS

When You Pray...

Rough Transcript

Jeremy Schurke

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All right. Like he said, my name is Jeremy Schurke and I am the director of Mirror Labs, which is an R&D skunkworks of Man in the Mirror. Brett said, "Hey, we want you to come on board and help us figure out how to reach and disciple guys in their twenties and thirties." It's a big challenge these days, as we all know so that is my role. He must've been pretty desperate to ask me, but I'm glad I had the opportunity to do that. And so right now we're in the series called The Core Teachings of Jesus. How has this series been going so far?

Pretty good. Okay. Pat asked me to speak on prayer. So I'm going to speak on the teachings that Jesus did on prayer. I'm going to teach about it, it's a hard act to follow, after Jesus. But the first thing I did when he asked me that I thought, where should I start? Maybe looking up the word core, what does core mean? And as I kind of moved through some of the definitions, the one I'm going to use today is the central innermost or most essential parts of anything. When I thought of the word core, I thought the Earth's core, this liquid hot mag... I don't know what's in there. I've never seen it.

But I know that it's in the smack dab middle of the earth. So when I think of the core teachings of Jesus about prayer, well Jesus, the central part is the New Testament teachings is the Sermon on the Mount. The core would be well it's Matthew five through seven. So in the middle would be six and lo and behold verses five through eight is about prayer. So you can't get much corer than that. And so we're going to start there this morning, teaching about Jesus's teaching on prayer. But before we do that, we probably should pray. So let's do that.

God, we're here. We want to hear from you. We're present in your presence. So help us understand your word. Give me words to illuminate your words and give all the men here and online ears to hear what you want them to hear this morning. In your name we pray, amen. All right, so we're in the middle of the core sermon of the core teachings of Jesus right here in Matthew six. Has anyone read Matthew six in here? That's good. That's a good thing. It's an interesting chapter. Most chapters in the Bible are interesting. This one, if I had to summarize it in one phrase it would be we get what we ultimately want. When Jesus is teaching to everyone he's saying, "You're going to get what you ultimately want." He makes it clear that we're not going to get everything we want, especially if our wants are opposed to one another.

But what he's saying is our greatest desire will be what we ultimately get. And if you want God, well, in the top half of this chapter, he talks about three core disciplines on how to get God, how to meet God. Does anyone know what they are? That's fine, I'll tell you, alms giving, showing mercy to the poor, praying, and fasting. These are three ways that you can meet God. So again, prayer is right at the core of those three disciplines. And if we take the Lord's prayer out of that for a second, and we stack those three things right together, the way they mirror each other is kind of unbelievable. So I'm sure you can't see this, but I'll do it really quickly here.

Jesus says in these three different sections, "When you give, when you pray, when you fast do not, do not, do not as the hypocrites, hypocrites, hypocrites, because they will be honored by others. They will

be seen by others, but truly I tell you they'll receive their reward in full. But when you give, when you pray, when you fast, your father who sees what's done in secret will reward you." What's worth repeating? Why do you speakers repeat themselves? If something's very important, you want to hammer that home. Just keep hammering it home until it lands, until it lands in. And so obviously Jesus is trying to convey something very important to us by repeating three times some of the same stuff.

So let's dig in and see what he's trying to tell us. "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. When you pray..." What's the assumption here? That you're praying. He's not saying if you pray, how you pray, can you pray? He's saying, when you pray, 2000 years ago, everybody prayed.

It wasn't even an option. There was no like, oh, I'm going to pass today. You're either praying to the God of the Jews or to the gods of the pagans. And I don't know if it's because of technology, the technological age and we're distracted more. I don't know if it's because of science and modernity. We think we understand how things work. So we don't need God anymore, but we do not have this assumption that everybody prays. But Jesus here is saying, "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites." Has anyone in here ever been called a hypocrite?

I can't tell you how many times and what I think they were trying to convey to me was like, you're saying something and doing something else. But it's an interesting word choice by Jesus. And he says it three times in those three verses. So I decided I'm going to look up the word hypocrite. What does hypocrite mean? So in Greek, the word *hypokrites*, *hypokrites*, you just say it fast and pretend you know what you're saying, it means an actor. It means a stage player. It literally translates an interpreter from underneath because. In ancient Greece, these actors would have masks on and they would be interpreting what the mask would be conveying to the audience. So to be a hypocrite is to be an actor pretending to be someone else. And Jesus is using this word towards who? Religious people.

He's not talking to the pagans. He's talking about the religious people in the synagogues and on the streets in the civic life of the Jews. And so he's saying these religious hypocrites perform the religious acts to be seen by others. Even the word to be seen, comes from a Greek word *theasthai* and again, I'm just going to say it fast, which is a root word for theater, which is interesting. Because there's one reason actors act, it's to be seen. They act to be seen. And the ultimate goal for anybody acting is to be seen. Where's the stage with the biggest audience, because I want to be seen. So a hypocrite is an actor pretending to be someone else. Who do these religious hypocrites want to be seen by when they pray? Just based on the verse? By others. "But when you pray, go into your closet, shut the door and pray to your father who is unseen. Then your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

When you pray. What's the assumption here? That you are praying. Go into your closet a Palestinian home usually was one room and might have some walls that would separate it, but is easily being able to walk through this one room house, but they would always have a small storage closet inside the house. And what was interesting about it was, it was the only room that could be locked and they would keep their animals food in there and make sure no one got to it. So in some ways, this closet that Jesus is referring to is the least sanctified part of the home. But on the other side, it's the most private part of the home. So why would Jesus implore the listeners of the Sermon on the Mount to get into the animal feed closet, lock the door and pray? That's a odd request, right?

Well, because as religious people, we tend to focus on the wrong crowd. We tend to focus on the wrong audience. We're so desperate to be seen, it's so core to who we are, that we settle for the approval of man and we figure out the best way to act like a Christian so that others will admire us and applaud our efforts. We tend to mimic the audience we want to find acceptance in, everyone does this. We tend to mimic the audience that we try to find acceptance in. And most of the time we settle for the wrong audience.

WHOSE APPLAUSE DO YOU CRAVE?

To be seen by the seen or to be seen by the unseen, that is the question. So when you pray, whose applause do you crave? The public approval of man or the private approval of God? This is all a motivational question. When we're giving, when we're praying, when we're fasting, why are we doing that to begin with, why do we do anything as Christians? See, we're all acting out this life of ours right now. And the core part of being human is to seek affirmation, to seek approval, to seek applause. That's not a bad thing. That's how God made us. It's so desirable though, that we forsake and then hide this image of God bearing-ness that we have. And then we literally change our public personas and put these masks on when needed to fit in and public because we're seeking the approval of the wrong audience.

So how do we combat this? It's a huge temptation. All of us are always tempted to do this. Well, let's take Jesus at his word. Find a private place away from the public, lock the door and seek out the applause of God. Do you guys have any place to go to have total privacy, to commune with your father away from the public? Is there a space, a secret space that you go to actually be with God away from everybody else?

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans for they think they will be heard because of their many words. And when you pray, what's the assumption here? Oh, it seems like a theme. Do not keep babbling. This is not a diatribe against long prayers. Jesus prayed all night. I've never prayed all night. So Jesus is not talking about length. He's again, talking about motivation. Why do these pagans keep going on and on and on about their God? Well, they thought if you say the right thing at the right time to the right God in the right way, you get to unlock this God code and you can get whatever you want. So they would keep going and going, it was like playing the lottery, the God lottery. And hopefully they get the right combination because they thought, if you get God's attention, well, then you get the floor so you can get what you want.

And what's interesting is who you pray to determines how you pray. Whoever you think you're praying to, well, that's going to determine how you pray. And apparently the Gentile gods were either hard of hearing or had ADD or something because they were doing whatever they could to get their attention, hold that attention so they can manipulate them. But here's the problem. Our God is not deaf and our God is not dumb. Guard your steps when you go into the house of God, go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools who do not know what they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven, you are on earth. So let your words be few.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Here's point number two, when you pray, choose quality over quantity. Can you guys recall some of your deepest, most intimate prayers you've ever had with God over the course of your life? I mean, can you picture in your mind what the circumstances were that caused that? Because I know for me, some of my deepest prayers happened when I was in the midst of pressure, like circumstantial pressure, where for example, I remember one time I was laying on my kitchen floor, not knowing if I was going to be married tomorrow still. And I know that I wasn't thinking I'm going to call one of my friends. I said a prayer that was short, to the point, and towards an audience of one. Because when you have nowhere left to turn, well, then you can see what you really think of God. And Augustine said this, "Remove from prayer much speaking, not much praying." The quality of our prayers matter to God much more than the quantity.

And we'll finish up here. Do not be like them for your father knows what you need before you ask him. The pagans, the people in this world that have no relationship with the living god, they have no concept of one, a God who cares. And two, a God who willingly responds to his people, it's so foreign to them they could not even imagine it if they tried. Before they call, I will answer. You see pagan prayers are

frantic because they don't know exactly what God is like. And it's almost like a child nagging their father. I can think of my son just calling him all the different names and being like, dad, dad, daddy, daddy-o, father, papa, Jeremy, daddy, daddy, daddy. He just goes on and on trying to get my attention because for the gods to hear your request, you had to get their attention.

REMEMBER GOD SEES EVERYTHING

But here's point number three, when you pray, remember God sees everything. The Jewish people prayed knowing that God already sees everything. He sees the good, he sees the bad. He sees the ugly. And in spite of that, still wants to have communion with his children and he's already seen it all. And this is a lot different than a nagging child. This is my son, little stud, next Michael Phelps, Link. Wolfgang's up in the corner, Effi's right there. But whenever I come home every day, I love all my kids, but I just love Link more right now.

Every day I come home, open the garage door, guaranteed I start to hear the pitter patter of a two year old running down the hall. I hear, "Daddy, daddy." I look over, I see a boy who's joy drunk on his face, I pick him up, hug him, wrestle with him. And I know everything about this kid. I know what he's peed on, what he's pooped on. I know when he's had a temper tantrum and I'm still so excited every time when he comes running to me. And I'm sure maybe some of you guys here would be the same if you have adult children who just, you see them calling you for no reason but just to talk. There's just something about that, where you know everything about them. And yet in spite of that, you are so excited to spend time with them.

You see, the pagans, they're asking the wrong question. The people in the world today that don't know God are asking the wrong question. It's not, what do we need to do to get God's attention? We already have his undivided attention. He sees everything. The question is, what do we need to do to give our attention back? So here's the Big Idea. **When you pray, you must hide and seek the father.** Religious people are focused on the wrong audience. They're looking at the crowds around them instead of the God who made them. Pagans are focused on the wrong gods. They're praying to a God in a way that doesn't make sense because it's not the right God. So religious people are focused on the wrong audience. Pagans are focused on the wrong gods and the people of God are just plain unfocused. We have trouble focusing.

We're so easily distracted, so easily tempted, and you can see it all throughout scripture. Just follow the Jews, follow Israel, their focused on God, they're unfocused. And then they're focused back, oh, they're looking over at this neighboring nation. Oh, they're focused back on God. Oh, there's a squirrel. Oh, they're focused back on God. Oh, there's Baal. It's just a constant God calling us back to him himself. And so I want to laser focus us right now on this idea. If we were to really hide, hide from others so we weren't tempted to please them so they would praise us, if we sought the true God instead of these false pagan idols, I think we would actually start to see the unseen God. The one revealed throughout nature and testified through sacred scriptures. A God who sees us like no one and nothing else can. This invisible God that became a visible savior.

All for one reason, there's only one reason God did all of that, because God wants to commune with us. God wants to be with us. God takes the first step every time, he takes the first step towards us and we choose to respond or not. I mean, think about it, there's no other reason that God would save and restore this world after there's so many times we've broken our promise with him. And so many times we've walked away from him and ran away from him and destroyed his creation. Other than the fact that God wants to commune with us still, and God is still faithful. So prayer at its core is just simple communion with our father, which is really a profound statement. It seems simple. And yet it's so profound because I can't tell you another religion, another political structure, another social group that has ever conceived of such a loving God or gods than the Judeo-Christian one.

I would love for you guys just to get a glimpse and a picture because I know when I was preparing this, I got one and I was just like, I think I see it. I think I see it, to be seen in the theater of God. Our father invites us to go to an unseen stage, to be with an unseen audience of one, to fully reveal our unseen self. The one that we would never reveal in public because it's too weak. It's too jacked up. And it's an unbelievable invitation with literally the ultimate reward that God's talking about, that Jesus is talking about.

It's possible to spend time with God. And I know as Christians, we talk about God a lot, but it's so remarkable that it's possible that we can spend time with the God who created the universe and that God wants to spend time with us. "We should never utter one syllable of prayer, either in public or in private until we are definitely conscious that we have come into the presence of God and are actually praying to him."

Let's pray. Lord, when we pray we're to hide and seek you as father, this first hide and seek game happened in the garden we hid and you sought after us. And now after the fall, you're asking us to hide so that we can seek after you. What a grand mystery, this all is, how you've perfectly put all this together in the ways that only you could. So we're before you in awe of your holiness and splendor, and yet we're also before you as little children, excited to be with their father who loves us and cares for us and wants to spend time with us. Seeing is believing, help us to develop eyes to see the unseen, to see you in places that no one else will see. It's in your name we pray. Amen.