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West Suffolk Epistle

West Suffolk Baptist Church

“Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant”



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Prayer, Piety, and the Glory of God: The Lord’s Prayer in the 21st Century

The Lord’s Prayer is one of the most astounding and theologically rich portions of Scripture. In Matthew’s gospel, the Lord’s Prayer stands at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount. Before Jesus gives instructions on praying, he spends a significant amount of time criticizing the prayer practices of the Pharisees; Jesus evidently did not think much of their many words and empty phrases. By implication, he may not think much of today’s standard fare Christian prayer.

The Sermon on the Mount presents a picture of life in the kingdom of heaven. Thus, the contents of the sermon are those issues that Jesus himself identified as essential to the kingdom. The Lord’s Prayer is no exception. For this and many other reasons, Christians need to regularly revisit the rich theology of the Lord’s Prayer. The prayer stands at the very center of the Sermon on the Mount; as Christ’s followers, it should thus stand at the very center of our lives.

The Lord’s Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is part of Christ’s vision for life in the inaugurated Kingdom of Heaven. The arrival of God’s Kingdom leads to a complete transformation of values that in turn leads to a transformation in piety—particularly in the giving of alms, fasting, and prayer.

No one is better able to teach us these transformed values and the nature of true prayer than Jesus himself. The gospels regularly repeat that Jesus was constantly engaged in the work of prayer. Perhaps the most prominent example is Jesus’ prayer in John 17, what we typically call Jesus’ high-priestly prayer. In this text, we get a small glimpse into Jesus’ private prayer life and his intense communion with the Father. This passage alone shows us the richness of Jesus’ prayer life. Yet, prayers like John 17 cannot serve as model prayers. Indeed, many of the elements of Jesus’ prayer in John 17 could only be spoken by Christ as the divine-human Mediator. The Lord’s Prayer, however, is quite different. The Lord’s Prayer is a prayer for disciples to pray. In other words, Jesus specifically designed the Lord’s Prayer to be used by the people of God and to enrich our prayers. The account of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew makes this point explicitly. Jesus says, “Pray then like this.”

In Matthew, Jesus leads into his model prayer with these words:

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. 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. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.



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Prayer, Piety, and the Glory of God: The Lord's Prayer in the 21st Century - Cont'd

Matthew 6:1 is the key to understanding this passage. Jesus instructs his disciples to beware of practicing their righteousness before men. Jesus urgently warns against a piety that is public and ostentatious—a piety, therefore, that is completely vapid and false. This type of piety is self-referential. It draws attention to the one who is supposedly, by his or her actions, a pious man or woman.

Jesus shows that something is going to be disclosed in our piety—either the glory of God or the superficial, insincere “piety” of the believer. Jesus is also decidedly clear that those who wish to be seen as pious have already received their reward. The Pharisees make themselves look famished and hungry when they fast in order to draw attention to their artificial piety. What they desire are the approving and admiring looks of those who see them. They want to be considered holy by men. They may get what they want—but that is all they will get. Their only reward is the praise of man, but that is where their reward ends. Jesus commends another type of piety—a secret piety that will be rewarded by the Father. The contrast is stark. We can pursue the glory of the Father by humbling ourselves, or we can pursue our own glory by exalting ourselves before others. We simply cannot do both.

You do not have to be a Pharisee to fall into this trap. Christians sometimes feel the need to impress other believers with our prayers, whether in a worship service or in a smaller group. But authentic prayer is never about impressing anyone. The prayer God seeks is the prayer of the humble and contrite heart. As Jesus says elsewhere, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”* ~ **Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr.** *This article is an excerpt from his book, ‘The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord’s Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution’.*

The Coming of the Kingdom

The gospel of Mark is notable for its lack of extended accounts of Jesus’ teaching. Furthermore, Mark gives us noticeably fewer parables than do Matthew and Luke. However, in chapter 4 of his gospel, Mark records four parables. He begins with the lengthy parable of the sower, then follows with three short, pithy parables, each clearly communicating one central idea, as do most parables. All three of these parables teach us something about the kingdom of God.

In 4:26–29, Mark writes:

And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

In this parable, as in the parable of the sower, Jesus taps the metaphor of sowing and seed. Here, however, Jesus does not talk about the different soils into which seed is sown, but about one of the most remarkable dimensions of nature.



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The Coming of the Kingdom - Cont'd

We plant seeds and go to bed. Overnight, rain falls on the seeds. The next day, sunlight warms them. Germination occurs and tiny green shoots emerge from the ground. Soon, the crop is ready for harvesting. Jesus said the spread of the kingdom of God is much like this process. It begins small, but while our attention is elsewhere, so to speak, the kingdom grows. Like the growth of a seed, it is a mysterious process.

I find it comforting to know that this is how God's kingdom works. This parable teaches me that the things I say and do, though they seem infinitely insignificant to me, may have eternal significance as God uses me in the building of His kingdom. Of His own good pleasure, He works through what we do and say not to exalt us but to glorify Himself.

Once, when I was standing at the church door after a service, a young man came up to me and began to tell me that he had heard me speak fifteen years before at a small church in Pennsylvania. He told me that following that service, he had asked me a question, and he was able to repeat my answer to him verbatim all those years later. He said, "When I went home, I could not get your words out of my head, and God used the comment you made that day to convict me to go into the ministry." As I reflected on his story, I wondered how many other words I had spoken to people that had helped them or, perhaps, wounded them, leaving scars on their souls that they carry to this day. We have no idea how powerful a simple word can be, for good or ill.

Every year in the United States, thousands of pastors leave the ministry. Some leave for moral reasons, but most leave because they feel unappreciated by their congregations. They feel like they're spinning their wheels, that they're preaching their hearts out but nothing is happening. They need to hear this parable. Or they need to listen to Paul when he says, "*So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth*" (1 Corinthians 3:7). God can and does use their faithful preaching of His Word, though the preachers themselves may never see their words' effect.

Yet sometimes God does give us a glimpse into how He has used us and our words to glorify Himself. Over the years, I've been a part of countless pastors' conferences and seminars. It always amazes me how ministers in vastly different settings have similar stories about their preaching experiences. So often, I have heard preachers talk about those occasions when they stood in the pulpit and gave a sermon that they did not consider particularly compelling, even though they put their heart and soul into preparing for it. These same pastors have told me that those sermons are what their people remembered and benefitted from years later. God used what these preachers considered weak and unremarkable for great good. I can also testify that this has often been my own experience.

That's the way the kingdom is. We often do not know what God does with our service. We plant the seed, go to bed, and, while we sleep, God germinates the seed so that life grows and eventually produces a full harvest. Then God Himself reaps for His own glory. We simply need to forget about trying to see the fruit of our service immediately. It does not matter if we ever see it. We are called to take the light and let it shine, then let God do with it whatever He pleases. ~ ***Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.***



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How To Love Your Wife As Christ Loved the Church

As a Christian husband, you are not left wondering or speculating about what it means to carry out your role in a way that pleases God and blesses your wife. To the contrary, the Bible provides clear guidance: You are to love your wife as Christ loves his church. In the closing verses of Ephesians 5, Paul describes how, out of love, Christ sacrificed himself to do for you what you could not do for yourself. Out of love he sanctified you to God's purposes, to set you apart so you could live the life God created you to live. Out of love, he purified you, so he could put aside the sin that hinders you and instead give you his righteousness. He did this by the word of the gospel and through it all has a great and final purpose in mind. This is how Christ loved the church, so this is how a husband is to love his wife. Let me tease that out under these headings.

Love Your Wife with a Sacrificial Love

Husband, love your wife with a sacrificial love. I think every husband is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for his wife. Wouldn't you? If someone was holding you and your wife hostage and said, "*One of you needs to die*" I'm sure you'd put yourself forward. "*Take me, spare her.*" Good! You'll die for her, but will you live for her? This is not a one-time act where you get to go out in a blaze of glory and get written up in the newspaper, but a day-by-day dying to yourself for her sake.

Are you willing to make those day-by-day sacrifices? Will you hold loosely to your time so you can invest it in her? Will you hold loosely to your preferences so you can cede to hers? Will you let go of some of your dreams so she can achieve hers? Will you be utterly ferocious with your sin so you can be kind and gentle with her? Ultimately, will you live more for her good than for your own? This is not a difficult burden but a tremendous honor.

Love Your Wife with a Sanctifying Love

Husband, love your wife with a sanctifying love. Jesus died so that he could set apart his bride for service to God. You need to understand that your wife doesn't exist first for your pleasure, your joy, or your comfort. She exists first for God. Yes, she has been set apart to you, but only so you can help her be ever-more set apart to God.

Your wife exists to bring glory to God by doing good to others. This means your task as a loving husband is to be committed and creative in helping her do this. It's your task to help her unleash her gifts, her talents, her passions, her interests in doing good to others and bringing glory to God. Love her with a sanctifying love, a love that ensures she is being set apart to do what God calls her to do and to be who God calls her to be.

Love Your Wife with a Purifying Love

Husband, love your wife with a purifying love. If a wife is to submit it means a husband is to lead, and a key part of that leadership is leading, guiding, and assisting her along the path to holiness. This puts a call on you to grow in holiness first. How can you possibly lead her where you've never been or where you refuse to go? You need to identify your own sin and ruthlessly put it to death. It falls to you to lead the way in holiness, to lead the way in love, in character, in worship, in repentance, in maturity. And then you have the honor of accompanying her as she grows in holiness.



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Now let's be clear: Holiness is not about correcting all of those little flaws and foibles you find annoying. It's not about perfectly conforming her to your will. It's all about helping her grow in purity before God. It's about helping her put sin to death so she can come alive to righteousness. It's rejoicing in who God is making her to be. It's identifying God's grace in her life. It's encouraging her in her spiritual growth and praising and thanking God for every bit of it. It's helping her be as pure and holy as she can possibly be. Do you love your wife with a purifying love?

Love Your Wife with a Gospel Love

Husband, love your wife with a gospel love. Christ washes his church with the water of the word, which is the gospel, and in the same way, you are to wash your wife with the water of the word which is the gospel. This means your husbanding is to be drenched in the gospel. Your love is to be shaped by the gospel. Your voice is to speak the gospel. Your life is to display the gospel. You need to speak truth to your wife, to lead her to the Word of God, to remind her of those precious gospel truths, to pray with her, to worship with her.

Are you washing your wife with the water of the gospel? If you do nothing else in marriage, read the Bible and pray with your wife. Make this a daily discipline. There are few things God uses in richer ways than a husband and wife together in the Word and together on their knees.

Love Your Wife with a Purposeful Love

Husband, love your wife with a purposeful love. Wedding ceremonies are occasions of great joy, but even then there is always just a hint of sorrow because we need to acknowledge from the very beginning that there will be an end. This is why we make vows to one another that say something like, "*Til death do us part.*" You may get 60 or even 70 years with that bride, but then one of you will die and in that moment, the marriage will be over. But she will not be over. Your wife will not cease to exist the moment she dies. No, if she is in Christ, her life will just be getting started. She has a glorious and never-ending future beyond the grave.

You need to keep that in view. Your task as a husband, and your great joy, is to help prepare her for what awaits her in eternity. It's helping her become today what she will be fully then. It's receiving glimpses of who and what she will be in glory. You, my friend, have the joy of helping her toward that great day. God has chosen and appointed you as the one who will accompany her, who will lead her, who will guide her, who will protect her, who will know her deepest, who will love her best, on her way to that celestial city.

So, Live For Her

So resolve to live for her, to sacrifice all you've got for her good. Love her with a sanctifying love that is committed to setting her apart for the great purpose God has for her. Love her with a purifying love that helps her put sin to death and come alive to righteousness. Love her with a love that is shaped by the gospel and whose content is the gospel. Love her with a purposeful love that fixes in your mind and heart the great day when she will be all that God has created her to be. Will you even recognize her in that day for all her splendor, for all her perfection? She will be perfect then, unblemished by even the smallest sin, undefiled by even the tiniest trace of depravity. She will be beautiful and radiant and glorious beyond belief.



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Christ awaits the day when he will present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. That is his great goal and he longs for that day. Shouldn't you then fix in your mind the image of you presenting your wife to Christ? "Here is the wife you entrusted to me. Isn't she radiant! Isn't she beautiful! I've loved her. I've sacrificed for her. I've washed her with the word of your gospel. I've seen her grow in righteousness and holiness. And now I present her to you." What an honor, what a blessing, that God has chosen you to accompany her to that place, to that day. ~ **Tim Challies - Pastor Grace Fellowship Church - Toronto, Ontario - Co-Founder Cruciform Press**

Integrity Promotes a Righteous Person

"Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. Then these men said, 'We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God'" (Daniel 6:4-5).

Live so as to silence your critics

Whenever God exalts a righteous person, there will be those who are jealous and who criticize. Sometimes, as in Daniel's case, the jealousy turns to bitter opposition. But Daniel's accusers had a problem: try as they may, they could find no ground of accusation against him. He was blameless and above reproach in his character and political dealings. Their only option was to somehow indict him for being totally committed to God. What a wonderful testimony to his faithfulness!

When an individual has served in office as long as Daniel had and his enemies can bring no charges of wrongdoing against him, he or she must be a person of great integrity and personal purity. That was the strength of Daniel's character, and God wants you to have that kind of character as well.

There will always be those who want to discredit you. Even if they aren't jealous of your position, they'll resent your Christian faith and will scrutinize your attitudes and actions in an attempt to tarnish your reputation. How will your character hold up under that kind of scrutiny?

The apostle Peter wrote, "*Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation*" (1 Peter 2:12). That means you must live the kind of life that silences your critics and refutes their accusations. When you do, some of them might even come to Christ. Ask the Lord to guard your testimony and to minister saving grace to anyone who might seek to discredit you. ~ **Dr. John MacArthur**



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Birthday and Anniversary Corner - July 2018

Birthdays

*Sadie H. (13)
Elijah D. (16)
Teresa H. (21)*

Anniversaries

*David and Jennifer A. (4)
Les and Jessica T. (17)*

On July 1st Daniel / Diana Kim and Jonathan / April Fox made some closing comments as they said their good byes. Both couples are getting out of the military and relocating to other states. The Kim's will be moving to Washington state near Seattle and the Foxes to Atlanta, Georgia. We as a church family will miss these dear families as they start a new journey in their lives together. May the Lord bless you and keep you!



West Suffolk Leadership

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.
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Please submit information to Walt Lawrence by the second Sunday of each month preceding publication by e-mail, in person or at the church office. The editor reserves the right to edit for content or space. May the Father be glorified in every word.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions from the contributors to this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of West Suffolk Baptist Church or it's leadership.