

OpenTheo

Concern For God's Glory

December 26, 2021



The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows the primary purpose of prayer is not to just request things for ourselves and our loved ones, but to have the glory and purposes of God first and foremost in mind. He explains Pharasaical prayer, pagen prayer and Christian prayer.

Transcript

The Lord's Prayer, which is so familiar to all of us, is much more than a liturgy to recite. It is more even than a pattern to copy. It gives us a profoundly satisfying philosophy in which the essentials of the Christian faith and of the Christian life are created.

And life are clearly set forth. Welcome to The Bible for Today with John Stot. We have been marking a hundred years since the birth of John Stott by bringing you a small selection of the sermons he gave during his lifetime of Bible teaching.

We started these Centenary programs with the earliest known recordings of him preaching at all souls, laying in place. We have travelled through five decades of sermons and today we come to the final message John Stot ever preached at all souls and it was in 2006. He went on to spend his final years in a nursing home before being promoted to glory in 2011.

Prayer was one of the highest concerns of John Stot. Whilst we as Christians may consider prayer as natural and as easy as breathing, John Stot warns us how not to pray and shows us what we should pray. I venture to suggest this morning that the Lord's Prayer, which is so familiar to all of us, is much more than a liturgy to recite.

It is more even than a pattern to copy. It gives us a profoundly satisfying philosophy in which the essentials of the Christian faith end of the Christian life are clearly set forth. That is my conviction.

I hope it will be your conviction too by the end of this morning. At least I am going to make an attempt to convince you. So let's turn to our text in the Bible's in front of you.

Our text is near the beginning of Matthew's gospel chapter 6, where four times, as we'll see in a moment, the expression "when you pray occurs." Verse 5, "when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand in prominent places in order to be seen by men." Verse 6, "when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, pray to your Father in secret, and He will reward you." Verse 7, "when you pray, don't keep on babbling like the pagans, but they think they will be heard for their many words. They seem to be concerned with the statistics of prayer. Do not be like them." And then verse 9, "this then is how you should pray, our Father in heaven.

May your name be honored, your kingdom spread, your will be done," and so on. Now in these verses, I hope you will have noticed, Jesus describes three different kinds of prayer. The first we might call "pharisaical prayer." The second is pagan prayer, and the third is Christian prayer.

Of these three, the first two are to be avoided, while the third is to be followed and to be expressed in our lives. So let's look at them. First, pharisaical prayer.

True, the Pharisees are not actually mentioned by name in this passage, but we easily recognize them from Jesus' portrait of them in other places. He describes them as hypocrites. Now the Greek word "hupokrites" means an actor on a theatrical stage.

The "hupokrites" was playing a part. He was pretending to be other than he rarely was. He was pretending to pray, but in reality he was not.

He was going through the motions of prayer, not in order to have fellowship with God, which is the purpose of prayer, but rather to be seen and applauded by his fellow human beings. Now of course, friends, as we all know very well, there is a right place for public worship. Christians should assemble as we have done this morning in order to acknowledge God, in order to sing his praises.

But Jesus was not concerned about that. He was criticizing rather those who make an ostentatious display of prayer in public. They do it for applause.

Jesus says, "They get what they're wanting. The reward they want is what they receive, but they will receive no more than the applause of men." That's pharisaical prayer. May God deliver us from it.

When we come together to worship, or when we are on our own in privacy, seeking the face of God, I trust that we shall not be like the Pharisees. That brings us, secondly, to pagan prayer. If you have your Bible open, still it's Matthew 6 and verse 7. Don't keep on babbling like the pagans.

Do not be like them. So you see, hypocrisy is not the only sin to avoid in prayer. There is also what the authorized version calls "vain repetitions." The former is the folly of the Pharisees.

The latter is the folly of the pagans. Hypocrisy diverts prayer from the glory of God to the glory of self. Verbosity degrades prayer into a mere recitation of words.

These words do not keep on babbling, where the translation of William Tyndale in the 16th century, in his first translation into the English language, they translate the Greek *verbatologio*. It's found nowhere else in Greek literature, so nobody knows for certain what it means. Some scholars, like the famous Erasmus, think that it is a reference to a man called Batus, who was king of Cyrene and who had a bad stutter.

Others think that the reference was to another person called Batus, who was the author of tedious and wordy poems. But most scholars think that the word is an unimatiapiac expression, the sound that it makes indicating its meaning. But whatever the origin of the word, what was Jesus forbidding us in prayer? What is *Batalogia*? Well, it certainly is not just repetition in prayer.

We will all remember that Jesus himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane, repeated his prayers, were told that he kept on praying, and he said the same words, asking God to deliver him. So clearly, if Jesus repeated himself in prayer, he is not forbidding repetition to us. Now, Jesus was referring rather to all use of words which have no meaning.

This would include prayer wheels and prayer flags. Also, the mindless repetition of a mantra as in transcendental meditation. Indeed, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of transcendental meditation at one point, apologizes for his misleading choice of the word meditation, since true meditation always involves the conscious use of the mind.

So *Batalogia* includes words with no mind, no thought in them. So what about us who've gathered this morning for worship? Are Anglicans guilty of *Batalogia* in our liturgy? Well, doubtless some of us are. Whenever our mind wanders while we're either reciting hymns or prayers or singing hymns, we are then guilty of *Batalogia*.

What Jesus is forbidding, however, is any prayer with the mouth when the mind is not involved or not engaged? Do not be like them, Jesus said. So we thought about Pharisee prayer, we thought about pagan prayer, and we come, thirdly, to a Christian prayer. If the praying of Pharisees was hypocritical, and the praying of pagans was mechanical, then the prayer of Christians must be real, genuine, authentic, sincere, as opposed to hypocritical and thoughtful as opposed to mechanical.

When you pray, Jesus said, "Do not make a public parade of your praying, but rather enter your room, shut the door, pray to your Father in the secret place." But as nothing destroys prayer like side glances at human spectators, so nothing enriches prayer like a sense that God is watching and listening to our prayers. Our Father will reward us, not with some inappropriate reward, but with what we most desire, namely access into His holy presence and a living communion with Him. Moreover, in Christian prayer, Jesus taught we ought to address God as our Father in heaven.

I don't know whether you've reflected on this, or whether you know, indeed, what a truly amazing permission Jesus has given us. Not only given us permission, but given us instruction when we pray to call God our Father. We take it for granted, but we should not do so.

For this was the unique mode of prayer which Jesus Himself used when He prayed. Namely, the Aramaic word "Abba." Sometimes people say it means "Daddy," but that's a little bit too... too... what is the word I'm looking for? Yeah, you know. That's right.

You got it right. So I think a better way to refer to it would be to say it means "My Father" in a very wonderfully intimate way. You may have heard of Professor Joachim Yermias of Gertingen, who died about 20 years ago, and it was he who wrote about the implication of calling God "Abba." Let me quote from him.

Up till now to date, nobody has produced one single instance in Palestinian Judaism, where God is addressed as "Abba, my Father." But Jesus did just this. Nowhere in the literature and prayers of ancient Judaism is this invocation of God as "Abba" to be found. But Jesus, on the other hand, always used it whenever He prayed.

And now the utterly astonishing thing is that He gives us the liberty to use the same mode of address when we pray as He did. I think it is absolutely amazing, this intimate word which He used, we too, may use, just like a child's utterance simply, intimately, and securely. Well, this address to God is full of rich implications, and we'll think about one or two of them.

He teaches first that God is personal. It will be impossible to have a Father who is not personal. He may be, in C.S. Lewis' well-known expression, beyond personality, but he is certainly not less and fully personal.

Secondly, it implies that God is loving. He is not the kind of Father we sometimes hear about, an autocrat, a playboy, or a drunkard. He is one rather who fulfills the ideals of Fatherhood in the loving care of His children.

As Hudson Taylor, the well-known pioneer missionary in inland China in the 19th century, said, "I do not believe that our Heavenly Father will ever forget His children. I am a very poor Father, but it is not my habit to forget my children. God is a very, very good Father, but it is not His habit to forget His children.

So we may call Him Father and know that He loves us. To call Him Father is personal, it is loving, and thirdly, it is powerful. For Jesus' spoke of His kingdom of His rule, which implies power.

He combines Fatherly love with Kingly power and what His love directs, His power is able to perform." So you see, it's always wise before we pray to spend time recalling who it is, who is this God, to whom we are coming in prayer. Well, at last we come to the six

petitions which are included in the Lord's prayer. The first three are concerned with God and His glory, which is really my emphasis this morning.

His name, His kingdom, and His will, God and His glory. Well, the second trio are concerned with us and our needs are daily bread, the forgiveness of our sins and deliverance in the evil one. It is, I think, highly significant that Jesus taught us to become preoccupied first and foremost with God's glory and only later to mention our personal needs.

So our first priority is the honoring of God's name. It is a characteristic, a loss, of our fallen human nature that we are vitally concerned with our own little name. We like to see our name engraved on a brass plate or embossed on a smart note paper.

We like to make a name for ourselves, as we sometimes say. We like to get a name for this or for that or the other, and how different should be the ambition of the redeemed and regenerated people of God. Now our first priority is concerned for the name of God.

A name stands, of course, as a person who bears it, is nature and is character. God's name is already holy because it has been exalted above every other name. Yet we still need to pray that it may be hallowed, in other words, given the honor which is due to it in our lives, in our home, in our church and in our world.

And if our first priority concerned is for God's name, our next priority is the spreading of his kingdom, his royal rule, not so much his absolute sovereignty over nature and over history, which led the psalmist often to cry, "The Lord reigns, the Lord is king over nature and over history." But rather, Jesus is referring to his kingdom as it broke into the world in and through Jesus Christ himself. But alas again, we are more concerned with our own little empire than we often are with the kingdom of God to extend our influence. We love to boss people around and extend our empire, but our concern should be for the progressive spread of the kingdom of God in response to the witness of the church throughout the world.

As people surrender to it, to his kingdom, until that great day when the king himself returns, and every knee will bow to him, and every tongue confess that he is king or lord. Meanwhile, we are living in between times. Between kingdom come and kingdom coming, between kingdom inaugurated and kingdom consummated, between the already of the kingdom and the not yet, his name, his kingdom.

And our third priority concern is the doing of his will. In some ways, this is even harder to pray than the other two, but we all have a will on our own. It's characteristic of human beings that we all have a will of our own.

Even the Lord Jesus himself, whose will was always totally surrendered to his father, he yet needed to keep praying in Gethsemane nevertheless, "Not my will but yours be

done." As for ourselves, we know for sure, as we read in Romans 12, verse 2, that God's will is good, pleasing, and perfect. We have absolutely nothing to fear from desiring the will of God to be done in our lives. Again, it is the will of our heavenly Father who loves us in his wisdom.

And again, we know that to lose ourselves in the will of God is actually to find ourselves, our true selves. So let me draw this to a conclusion. As we are challenged by Jesus to pray the prayer he gave us to pray, we find ourselves challenged by its implications.

Which do we honestly desire? How about a little honest thinking this morning? Which do we really desire most? Is it the honoring of our name or the honoring of God's? Is it the spreading of our kingdom or God's? Is it the doing of our will or God's? These are important questions. It is a challenge that we need to repeat to ourselves even daily because we have been told that every day we are to take up our cross and follow him. So it is a challenge that we need to repent of continuously.

It cannot be settled once and for all. Of course, we acknowledge that we have important personal needs. Our daily bread, our forgiveness, our deliverance, and the evil one, none of these is to be our priority concern.

Important as they are in their place. Important in their place, but their place is a second place. First place must be given to the honoring of God's name and the spread of his kingdom and the doing of his will on earth as it is in heaven.

First place must be given to the honoring of his name, the spread of his kingdom, the doing of his will. I hope that you may find yourself as I try to find myself many times during the day as a test of the genuineness of your or my Christian commitment that we need to keep murmuring to ourselves, Heavenly Father, it's your glory, your greater glory for which I am concerned. Your glory has expressed in your name, your kingdom, and your will.

It is your greater glory which must come first in my life. Are we genuinely able to murmur these words? It's your greater glory, which is my supreme concern. We confess to you, Heavenly Father, we shame the times that we have been more concerned for our own glory than for yours.

We pray that you will not only forgive us, but that you will change the priorities of our daily living, so that we may be able to say what we said at the beginning of the sermon today, that not only may your word be our rule and your spirit, our teacher, but your greater glory, our supreme concern. *Kia ora* s and help us, we humbly pray to the glory of your great and worthy name. Amen.

You've been listening to John Stott preaching on the vital subject of prayer, and this was the last summit he ever preached at all Salslang in place, but you can continue to enjoy

messages by John Stott by going to the sermon library on the All Souls website and typing in John Stott. There are over 600 sermons to choose from. We have a final book recommendation for this week which is appropriately entitled "The Preachers Portrait".

It's issued by Langen Publishing and you can find details on our website, premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott. John Stott was not only a prolific writer, but had much written about him, which you'll find fascinating to read on our centenary website. John Stott founded numerous organisations during his lifetime, which today are flourishing right across the world, the most notable being Langen Partnership. You can find out about this and discover so much more when you visit premierchristenradio.com/JohnStott. And so we come to the end of a life of a remarkable man of God, considered by many as the most influential evangelical of the 20th century, a man Billy Graham called the most respected clergyman in the world.

But the greatest commendation John Stott will surely hear is, from the Lord Jesus himself, well-down, good and faithful soul. The music was John Stott's favourite hymn, appropriately declaring, "Jesus the name high over all."

[Music] I'm Noel Trudenik and it's been my privilege to present these centenary programmes marking a hundred years since the birth of John Stott. We give all the glory to God and are grateful to premier Christian Radio for enabling you to enjoy the Bible for today with John Stott.

[Music]

(buzzing)