

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

February 11, 2018, Pastor Jeff Harrison

Praying Ambassadors

Matthew 6:9-13

I. Introduction:

A. Ambassadors must know their king to represent Him well

Good morning friends. I'm excited about the mission trip to Chile and continuing our Building Faith at Home sermon series. God's Word, in places like Deuteronomy chapter 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians chapters 5 and 6, shows that home is an important place for spiritual nurture and mission. So Building Faith at Home is one of our church's values. We want all our homes, living with others or alone, married or unmarried, kids or no kids, to be loving, Jesus-centered homes.

So this year we're looking at the amazing truth that every Jesus-follower is an ambassador. We saw it in our memory verse this morning, we're ambassadors. In other words, we represent Jesus to others. So if your home has any Christians, it's an ambassador's home. You don't have to have everything together, because what home does, or be Bible experts, or have amazing people skills. No, we all have the privilege of representing Jesus, inviting friends to join us as part of the worldwide, eternal family of God. Wow!

And if our homes are going to represent Jesus well, we've got to know our King, His ways, His heart. And to do this, we've got to be talking with Him. We listen to His Word, the Bible, and respond with our words, prayer. It's conversation with God. And as God's Spirit works through that conversation, we know God more and grow as His ambassadors. So as we begin, let's ask God to help us...

B. A study also motivates conversation with God at home

So a Christian research firm, Lifeway Research, sponsored a statistical study of 2,000 Protestant churchgoers who have adult children ages 18-30. The findings are in the new book *Nothing Less: Engaging Kids in a Lifetime of Faith*.

The goal was to discover what parenting practices were common in Christian families where their now adult children continued following Jesus. Of course, no parent can ensure their child walks with God. I know adults who grew up in loving Christian families who now deny Jesus, and adults with no faith background who now follow Jesus.

So we all depend on God to work in our kids. Yet God still calls us parents to build faith at home. By His grace, He can work powerfully through our imperfect efforts. So the study was looking for if there were any common practices in the families where the now adult children still follow Jesus. And they did discover some practices that made a real difference.

The most important was regular Bible reading. Kids who regularly engaged with God's Word at home were more likely to walk with God as adults. God's Word is powerful, so parents, as we juggle so much, let's not lose sight of the importance of modeling Bible reading, of reading our kids the Bible, of encouraging them to read it.

The second most important practice was regular prayer. Homes where prayer was present were more likely to produce kids serving Jesus as adults. If you're curious, the third most significant factor was the child regularly serving in the church while growing up.¹

But this morning we're talking about the top two factors, Bible reading and prayer. Let's think of them together as conversation with God. God begins our conversation through His Word, the Bible, and we respond to His Words as we pray. An ongoing conversation that encourages our homes to serve as ambassadors of Jesus for a lifetime.

C. How do we talk with God at home?

So how do we talk with God at home? Well, if you've got a Bible, open to the New Testament book of Matthew chapter 6. If you're new to reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

As you're turning, let me share about Matthew chapters 5-7. In these chapters Jesus gives a famous sermon called the Sermon on the Mount. It tells Jesus' followers how to live as His kingdom ambassadors. This morning we'll look at the part of Jesus' sermon called "The Lord's Prayer". In my translation of the Bible it's only 53 words, but it packs incredible wisdom on how to pray and may be among the most spoken sets of words in history. So let's learn from this incredible prayer.

II. Conversation guidelines

A. We speak with our Father (Matthew 6:9a)

Please follow along in your Bible or on the screen as I read from Matthew chapter six, verse 9. Here Jesus says:⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven,

¹ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2017/10/17/young-bible-readers-more-likely-to-be-faithful-adults-study-finds/>
Accessed online on 2/27/18.

So the starting point of conversation with God is hearing He's our Father in heaven. Notice it does not say "my Father", rather "our Father". Of course praying on our own is great, but the "our" here reminds us to also pray with others in our home, if they're willing. For He's "our Father", which really is a mind-blowing thing to say. That the almighty, timeless, creator of everything is Father to every believer in Jesus.

And if you don't yet know Jesus, I'm so glad you're here. Jesus is ready to forgive your sins and reconcile you with your heavenly Father. It happens as you come to Lord Jesus in faith, trusting that He lived a perfect life, in your place, on your behalf, and then took the penalty for all your sins on the cross, and then rose from the dead.

It sounds presumptuous to claim that God is our Father, but His Word tells us that all who trust in Jesus are adopted as a son or daughter of God. So when we pray, we can start by remembering Who we're talking with, our good, good Father.

It's why we sang this morning, "You're a good, good Father; It's Who You are, it's Who You are, it's Who You are. And I'm loved by You; it's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am."

Sadly, some of us don't have good earthly fathers, it can make it hard to think of God as our good heavenly Father. So if you feel that struggle, let me share some pics my wife Stephanie took of me and my kids. I'm no perfect parent, but as you see a father loving his kids, I hope it gives a small glimpse of our heavenly Father's love.

1282 (G & K sitting) & *1531* (G & K swinging) & *1697* (G & K hugging) – "These are my kids, Grant & Kate, and I love watching them have fun with each other."

1588 (me throwing G) & *1853* (me swinging K) & *1829* (me tickling G) – "And I love playing with these fun, sometimes silly kids."

1116 (K on my back) & *2292* (hugging K) & *1407* (K in my lap) – "Kate, she's my little 'Sweet-Sweet.'"

2342 (G behind with head turned) & *1345* (G behind me) – "And Grant, he's my 'Buddy.'"

Now I spent an excessive amount of time selecting these pictures because I love even just looking at pictures of my kids; that's how much I love them. And God loves each of His children immeasurably more. Your heavenly Father cherishes you, more than you can fathom. The song is true, "You're a good, good Father; It's Who You are, it's Who You are, it's Who

You are. And I'm loved by You; it's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am." No matter how your prayers are answered, you can never lose what is most important, your good, good Father.

B. We submit to our king (Matthew 6:9b-10)

And that's just the first four words of the prayer. Let's keep going in the middle of verse 9, which says: hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

So "hallowed" means to "set apart, to honor" God's name. Some Jewish people in Jesus' day had such a respect for God's name that they wouldn't even speak it. And as God's ambassadors, our homes represent His name, so we ask God to help us to honor His name.

And we pray our King's interests advance, that "His kingdom come and will be done". So as God's ambassadors, we pray that many join us in following our King. We ask God to help us take next steps with Jesus and help others take next steps with Jesus who help even more people take next steps with Jesus.

And as we pray verse 10 we also look forward to that day when things are on earth as it is in heaven. No more sin or pain or death, knowing and serving and celebrating with our King.

It's going to be phenomenal, but that doesn't mean it's always easy for us to pray today "Your kingdom come, your will be done". For this prayer makes us think about if we want God's rule in everything, or if there are some inches, or yards, or miles of our life not surrendered to Him. And "Your will be done" is a vulnerable prayer, it's volunteering to give up trying to control things.

My prayers are often more like "Hey God, how about we do my will, in my way, in my timing." Now if there's anyone who can teach us to pray, "Your will be done" it's Jesus. He prayed it in a garden called Gethsemane as His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. You see, Jesus was facing the horror of absorbing God's wrath for all our sins on the cross, and He fell to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." As we see Jesus pray this way as He rescues us, so we are inspired to pray "Your will be done".

Similarly, I think that's probably why the prayer starts with "Our Father." For as we remember that God is our good, good Father, who loved us enough to send His precious Son to save us, it helps us "hallow His name". It helps us trust Him, that it really is best for our Father's rule to grow in our lives and our world as we look forward to that great day when things are "on

earth as it is in heaven”. So the conversation begins with God’s fatherly heart for us, and submitting ourselves to Him before submitting our requests to Him. To say it another way, worship before our wishes.

C. Help with today’s needs (Matthew 6:11)

Now ready to make our requests, let’s see, starting in verse 11, what we are to ask for. Verse 11 says, ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

We’re invited to ask God for today’s needs. It’s natural to think first about material needs like food, clothing, shelter, but also God invites us to ask for other kinds of needs too. And of course we are also free to ask our heavenly Father for things that we just want.

But the metaphor of “daily bread” helps us focus more on needs and less on luxuries. Which is challenging in our society. I don’t know about you, but I’d like quite a bit more than the necessities. These six simple words in verse 11 help me focus less on that and more on gratitude for what I have.

And when it comes to needs, I’m also often too focused just on “this guy’s.” So it helps that the prayer is for “our” daily bread, not just “mine”. It invites us to think about the needs of others in our homes, church, and community.

D. Help with forgiveness (Matthew 6:12)

Next, verse 12 reminds us that we need other kinds of help too. Verse 12 says,

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

The Bible says all our sins are forgiven when we trust in Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family. But the Bible also teaches in places like 1 John chapter 1 that as we confess our sins to God, we experience an on-going cleansing that grows our relationship with Him.

Now this isn’t a perfect analogy, but if my kids sin against me, they’re still my kids and I still love them, even if they don’t apologize. But if they do confess and ask for forgiveness, it can cleanse their conscious and increase our experience of intimacy as I forgive them. And it puts my kids in a position where I don’t need to keep lovingly disciplining them to encourage them back in a godly direction.

And so similar things happen when we ask our heavenly Father to forgive us. This of course requires us to put down our distractions and pause long enough to reflect on our sins. But as we take this time and repent, we experience more of the incredible forgiveness God has gifted us in Christ.

Verse 12 here connects your relationship with people with your relationship with God. So if I just can't forgive someone in my home, or you're just done with someone in our church family because of how they've hurt you, that's a sign we need God's help. To ask Him to help us see afresh the enormous debt He forgave us. And as we joyfully receive God's forgiveness, we ask for His forgiveness to flow through us to the other person.

Forgiveness when you're really hurt is so difficult, it's even hard for me with some milder offenses. It's a reminder of how much we need to keep connecting with God to live in His ways. It makes the results of that Lifeway study no longer surprising, that homes where kids regularly engage with God's Word and pray are more likely to keep walking with God.

E. Help with temptation (Matthew 6:13)

We all need connection with God, needing His help to forgive and with other struggles. As verse 13 says: ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

We're all vulnerable, with evil still inside us and an evil enemy bent on our destruction. So we seek God's help. The prayer is not that we never experience temptation, rather that we not be led into temptation. The Bible book of James, chapter 1, says that God tempts no one to sin, but that if we depend on God as we face trials, He'll mature us through them.

And again, we are weak, so we ask God for help, that we are not led into temptation and fall, but instead that He deliver us. The deliverance could be through God bringing a Scripture to mind at the right moment or prompting someone to lovingly caution you about a sin.

Verse 13 is the part of the Lord's Prayer I forget about most often. But when I do pray about temptation and spiritual warfare, it helps me to depend more on God, be more alert against sin, and anticipate God growing me through trials.

So the Lord's Prayer starts with addressing God as our Father, then inviting His rule everywhere, and concludes by asking for help with today's needs, forgiveness, and temptation.

Author Paul Miller wrote a really great book on prayer titled *A Praying Life*. In it Miller observes that you'd think Jesus, as God's Son, wouldn't really need a specific prayer time. Yet we see Jesus pulling away to pray on His own and praying with His disciples. And if Jesus needed this conversation with His heavenly Father, then how desperately do we.

In the book Miller says that, "... if like Jesus, you realize you can't do life on your own, then no matter how busy, no matter how tired you are, you will find the time to pray." (p.49). So, Miller concludes, "You don't need self-discipline to pray continuously, you just need to be

poor in spirit.” (p.65). And that’s how Jesus starts the whole Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. He begins by saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” For awareness of our need keeps us in conversation with God. In our poverty of spirit, we make room for God’s Spirit.

III. An example conversation

A. Personalize the Lord’s Prayer

And the Lord’s Prayer is an amazing guide to this conversation. Back in verse 9, Jesus does not say that the Lord’s Prayer is “what” we should pray, though of course it’s fine to recite the Lord’s Prayer. Rather, Jesus says in verse 9 that the Lord’s Prayer is “how” we should pray, it’s a guide to how we pray as Jesus’ representatives.

So one good way to have conversation with God is through the Lord’s Prayer. So grab the sermon outline in your program. There are more out in the foyer if you didn’t get one. Let’s look under the heading *Conversation through the Lord’s Prayer*.

So we can go through the Lord’s Prayer, line by line. First we listen to God’s Word, then respond with our words. You can have this conversation with God on your own or with your home. Even pretty-young kids can understand the idea that God is sharing things with us through His Word, and that we can talk with Him about what He shared with us.

You can see on the handout that God’s Word to us here starts “Our Father in heaven”. So we hear God reminding us that He’s our heavenly Father, that’s Who were talking with. And then we respond.

You might say to God, “Thank you for loving me enough to send your Son to save me so that I can now call you Father.” Another time you might say, “God, I’m struggling to believe you love me, help me to trust you today.” Or you might say, “God, it is awesome to be your child. Please help my roommate/spouse/kids to experience your fatherly love too.” Make your response as long or short as you want, and when you’re done sharing, listen again.

Next here God’s Word invites us to hallow His name and pray for His kingdom to come.

You might respond, “God, I honor your awesome name and look forward to when your will is done on earth as in heaven.” Or “Heavenly Father, help Your kingdom come in my class as You help me to love the other students and share about You.” Or “Father, my wife is frustrated at work, please help her to still honor Your name there.”

Next we hear God invite us to ask for our daily bread. So you say, “God, please help me to find a job for my needs and to help others in need.” Or, “Father, please help my child connect

with another believer at school so they can encourage each other and their classmates.” Or, “God, please help us just get through this day and heal our bodies from this flu.”

Then we hear God’s Word invite us to ask for forgiveness and forgive. So you might say, “God, I’m sorry I looked at porn today, thank you for forgiving all of my sins, your grace is awesome. Help me to walk in your ways and be honest about my struggle.” Or, “Father, Your Word here reminds me I’m still bitter at my family member/roommate for what happened. I don’t even want to work on forgiving them, please help.” Or “God, I thought I forgave that church member, but I still can’t believe what he did and don’t really want good things for him. Help me remember I need your grace too; and forgive as you forgive me.”

Then we hear God invite us to ask for help in our temptation. So you say, “God, I’m bringing so much anger home, please help me be patient with my kids tonight.” Or, “God, please protect our home from the works and effects of the evil one.” Or, “Father, I’m so stressed out and tired right now, lead me not into temptation in this painful season.”

B. Let’s talk with God at home

This conversation with God, listening and responding, doesn’t have to be long, you can pray through the Lord’s Prayer like this in a few minutes. And if praying through the Lord’s Prayer all at once is too much for your home, pray through one phrase each time. Listen to God’s Word say that He’s our Father, and speak to Him about that. And later on, when you’re about to eat, take a moment to thank God for that daily bread and pray for the family receiving your church food pantry donation.”

As I’ve talked through the Lord’s Prayer this week, I’ve found it helps keep my mind from wandering as much in prayer. And it also helps me focus more on what matters. Instead of rushing straight to ask God for the things, many of which I don’t even need, I listen to His Words first. I connect with my good, good Father. I remember that He’s my king and I’m His ambassador. And then I’m more ready to bring my requests in faith.

I still ask for things I need and want, for myself, my home, our church, other friends and family. For health, finances, for my kids to do well. It’s great to pray for those things, and our heavenly Father wants to hear us share our heart about them.

But the Lord’s Prayer reminds me to pray for other important things, like that His kingdom be advanced in my home, our church, and our community. And important things like submitting as I pray “Your will be done.” Things like not sweeping my sins under the rug as I

confess them and ask for help against temptation. Things like enjoying His forgiveness and admitting to my struggle forgiving.

God didn't give us the Lord's Prayer to add another thing to our overwhelming to do lists. He gave us this gift because our homes need conversation with Him to be His ambassadors today and for a lifetime. So let's keep talking with God.

IV. Conclusion

A. Pam's testimony motivates us to pray at home

And now would you join me in welcoming Pam Jenness to the front? The Jennesses have been part of our church family for six years and Pam is doing an amazing job as our Children's Ministry Coordinator. I've invited Pam to share because I'm encouraged by her prayer at home.

So Pam, how do you pray at home?

Could you share a couple examples of how God has worked through your prayers at home?

Now it's always easy for you to consistently pray at home, right?

So what keeps you praying at home?

B. Transition to the Lord's Supper

Would you join me in thanking Pam for sharing? We're going to conclude our service by sharing the Lord's Supper, which is a great chance for conversation with God. Todd, thanks for leading us.