Good Morning. If you have got a Bible with you I am going to read from Matthew’s gospel and Chapter 6. Matthew Chapter 6 is the middle of three chapters that comprise what we call The Sermon on the Mount, the most concentrated record we have of anything that Jesus said, speaking publicly.

And I am going to read from Verse 5 down to Verse 15 of Matthew Chapter 6.

“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
As we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.’”

And then the version of the Bible I am using puts in the margin some words that appear in the text in some translations:

“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.”

This week we are emphasizing prayer in all the activities of the church that will be taking place this week – life groups, the youth ministry, other events.
Effectively it is a week of prayer and intercession, but we want it to be more than that. We want it to be a year of prayer and intercession where that is an emphasis. But also, more importantly, we want lives of intercession.

In the school of prayer, all of us are learners. Probably if you want to embarrass a Christian, ask him or her about their prayer life.

And for many of us we might say, “Well, I would like to spend more time in prayer, I wish I spent more time in prayer; I don’t know how to spend time in prayer.”

But the disciples of Jesus were also learners. In Luke 11:1 you have an occasion when it says,

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”

Notice the request this disciple makes to Jesus. He does not say, “Lord, teach us how to pray” as though it were a matter of methodology or technique or structure, but “teach us to pray.”

And that is probably the level that most of us are at. It’s not that we need more sermons on prayer or we need more seminars on prayer so we can learn some techniques and some processes in prayer. What our need is to actually pray.

And in reply to that request, Jesus gave to them in Luke 11 what we call “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Now I just read to you similar words in Matthew Chapter 6 where it occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. And I read them from Matthew Chapter 6 because it gives a wider context there to how I think we should understand this prayer.

And a part that struck me reading this passage just a few weeks ago, in fact, was that in Verse 6, Jesus said,

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen.

“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

What struck me is that Jesus said, “Your Father will reward you.”

Usually we lay stress on prayer being answered, and that is the value to us of our prayer. But here Jesus lays stress on our prayer being rewarded and that is the value of our praying.

I suggest to you, and I want to explain this to you in a few moments, that prayer answered is secondary and prayer rewarded is primary.

What do we mean by this? What did Jesus mean? What is the nature of this reward?
Well let’s look at the context in which Jesus said this because He talks about two kinds of praying in the verses that I read to you just now.

One is by people who Jesus describes as “the hypocrites” and He says in Verse 5,

“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 men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

He talks about them being rewarded for their praying, but the reward that these people receive for their praying is that other people have seen them at prayer and presumably their hope is they have concluded “these are spiritual people” and their reward is their reputation.

They have been seen by men and their reputation is enhanced – that is, their motive in praying in public (so on the street corners, standing in the synagogues) and the fulfillment of their praying is that other people have seen them and give them a few brownie points and say, “Well he’s a spiritual man of God because I heard him pray and he prayed a great prayer.”

When others think of them as praying well, it is mission accomplished for them. That’s one group.

The other Jesus describes in Verse 6 when He says - and He is speaking to His disciples here, although the crowd are listening; when He preached The Sermon on the Mount, He addressed Himself to His disciples - He said,

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

This is about being in secret, behind closed doors, where there is no audience except God. And the primary message of those three verses where He contrasts the hypocrites with what He is telling these disciples is to say that when your words exceed your heart and your heart is truest when we are alone – that’s why close the door, in secret. There will be no pretense, no desire to impress; you will be genuine before God.

But when our words exceed our heart, the words are empty. And they become what the King James Bible calls in Verse 7, “vain repetitions – vain repetitions.”

The NIV says,

“When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”

Because they think about their words and the effect of their words on others; it is not a genuine communion and a genuine communication with God that takes place in the secret place.
This is why prayer meetings and prayer gatherings, you know, can be dangerous because we can go to them to contribute words, to give impressions, but not be a true expression of our hearts.

When our public praying is different to our private praying, the difference is the margin of our hypocrisy and our pretense.

The real mark of your prayer, says Jesus, is when nobody is looking and nobody else is listening and you are alone in secret.

This doesn’t mean, of course, there is no place for public praying – there is. There is in Scripture. Two of you agree on anything you ask for – that’s two people praying together. You have in Acts Chapter 1 a hundred and twenty people meeting together and praying.

But the public expressions of our prayer are valid to the extent that they are expressions of our private praying.

So if our words exceed our heart, the words are empty.

You see they are not mechanisms by which we come to God. They are not hoops you have got to jump through in order to get to God – you do this, you do that, you do the other and you will connect. It is a matter of the heart.

And in Jeremiah 29:13 God said to Jeremiah,

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

It is not about praying the right words, but it is seeking with all our heart, is what He says there.

That’s why I get nervous, you know, when people talk about the sinner’s prayer as though if there are certain words you pray, that makes you a Christian.

Nobody in the New Testament that I can find ever became a Christian by praying a prayer.

There was that poor man who said, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

And it is good to pray – I always pray with somebody when I lead them to Christ. But it is not the prayer that makes you a Christian; it is the change of heart. The word “repent” literally means “the change of mind”.

It is the change of mind, the change of heart, a disposition that is changed toward God where He has been at work in us to draw us to Himself. And something happens within us that means that from that moment we are a new person.

The Holy Spirit bears with our spirits that we are children of God. And if something doesn’t happen inside you, don’t call yourself a Christian. You can pray till the cows come home the right words thinking, “If I just say these words, somehow this will get me through to God”.
It is a seeking of the heart; it is a response of the heart.

In Psalm 27:8 the psalmist writes there,

“My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face! Your face, LORD, I will seek.’”

And if I can take this liberty, I would recommend that you take that verse and maybe make it a motto for your prayer life, maybe this year.

Psalm 27:8:

“My heart says of you, ‘Seek his face! Your face, Lord, I will seek.’”

Because if our words exceed our heart, the words are empty words.

What then is the actual reward of true praying that Jesus talks about in these verses, that your Father who sees in secret will reward you?

Well, after He has spoken about that, He then said in Verse 9,

“This, then, is how you should pray”

And there follows what we traditionally call “The Lord’s Prayer” because it is the one that He taught His disciples to pray. But unfortunately, this often becomes repeated parrot fashion so as to fall into the category of vain repetitions Jesus just talked about not doing, when it is based only on words.

But there is in this prayer something much deeper that I suggest to you, from the context here, tells us what the reward of praying is.

And I want to suggest three things from this prayer that are the reward of praying.

The first reward is that praying brings us into communion with God. That is a wonderful privilege and an enormous reward to us.

Verse 9 says,

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

The initial direction is to God Himself. It goes on,

“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

It is about God Himself.
This is the first time in the Bible that God is ever addressed as Father in a personal way. God is called Father in the Old Testament on a few occasions in a metaphorical sense, that He is like a Father.

So in Psalm 68:5 He is a

“Father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God is his holy dwelling.”

That is metaphorically speaking.

Psalm 103:13 says,

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.”

There He is likened to being a father. And it is possible, of course, to understand the fatherhood of God in this general sense.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:6 says,

“There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.”

There he speaks of God being the Father as the source of life and the originator of all things. And that’s a valid use of that word “Father”.

Somebody might be described, as Nelson Mandela has been described, as the father of the nation in South Africa, meaning that the new South Africa was something which he played a big role in bringing to birth. We might use those kinds of descriptions.

But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of God as Father in a personal, intimate sense 17 times in those three chapters and this is something new.

Now I am not going to point out to you those 17 times, but I recommend you take some time to go through Matthew 5, 6, and 7 and notice all the times He speaks of God as Father.

This was radically new. You see, no Jew ever addresses God as Father – not in this personal way.

But here Jesus teaches us to pray by beginning, “Our Father”, in a personal, intimate, relational, familial sense.

Now how does this come about?

Scripture tells us that God has only one Son. He is described as the “only begotten son of the Father”. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” is how the NIV translates it.
However, when a person becomes a Christian, the act of becoming a Christian is the act of becoming united to Christ, being baptized by the Spirit into one body, which is His body – into Christ, where His position becomes our position.

And what is true of Jesus in His relationship with His Father becomes true of us in relationship with the Father simply because we are in Christ. Or as Paul puts it in Ephesians, “we have been adopted into Christ.”

So Ephesians 1:5 speaks of us being,

“adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

Romans 8:15 speaks of,

“For you received a Spirit of sonship. And by him…”

That is, in Him, in Christ,

“…we cry ‘Abba, Father’.”

Abba was a familiar term. It is like the English “daddy”.

I remember once being in Israel a number of years ago on the other side from Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives and I was walking over in that area and there was a boy out with some sheep, just looking after them; they were grazing.

And suddenly I heard him shout, “Abba! Abba!” And he was calling to his father using this term. Abba – it is a familiar, intimate, personal, relational word.

And the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ becomes our Father simply because we have been adopted in Christ and we share His Sonship.

So when Christ becomes your Savior, God becomes your Father. We are now in the family. We are now united with Him.

And that’s why Paul says in Galatians 3,

“You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Now strictly speaking, all Christians, whether you are male or female, are sons of God, only because our identity is in Christ, the Son of God, to whom we are being united.

Now if you think that is sexist, that we are all sons of God, I am sorry about that. But don’t get too upset because at the end of the Bible you discover that all of us, male and female, become the bride of Christ. So we all end up feminine actually; we all end up being the bride.
But we are sons of God in the sense that our sonship, our child of God status, is not an inherent one within ourselves; it is by adoption, by being part of the Son, the only Son; we are in Christ.

And this is a wonderful thing that when Christ becomes your Savior, God becomes your Father with all the privileges of that familial relationship of a child with its father.

For those outside of Christ, God is not their Father.

John 8:44 Jesus said to the Pharisees,

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires.”

And elsewhere in the New Testament there is a clear distinction made between the children of God and the children of the devil.

So in 1 John 3:10:

“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

So there are children of God, there are children of the devil, and you know which is which by the way they live their lives, because the character of the Father becomes expressed in those who are united with Him.

And so this opening part of this prayer and the first reward (remember, that’s Jesus’ word – you will be rewarded) is that as we approach Him as our Father, we are brought into communion, fellowship, intimacy with God Himself.

And He goes on to say,

“Our Father…hallowed be your name.”

We have a combination of two very important things there. We have the intimacy of our Father linked with the transcendency of our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name.

To hallow is to revere His name.

Both of these dimensions are vital, that intimacy of a child with the father and His transcendency – His is big enough for every situation we bring to Him.

My children (I am not sure if a couple of them are here in this service) but they don’t call me father – it’s a bit stayed. They call me dad. But they don’t say, “Hi Dad, hallowed is your name.” They don’t put me on that kind of pedestal. They know my frailties and vulnerabilities.
But we come not just to a father; we come to a father who is limitless in His capacity. He is in heaven and He reigns from heaven over earth. He is close enough to love and be loved by and to fellowship with and He is big enough to be sufficient for every eventuality that you and I will face.

And so this first reward brings us into intimacy with God. That is why Jesus stressed before giving them the words of this prayer, “Go into the room, close the door, and be in secret” because it is in secret that your true heart is exposed. And if you have nothing to say to God in secret, you have nothing to say because there is no relationship, there is no intimacy.

Now some of us are frightened of this sense of intimacy. It is not easy. We don’t find it easy to be exposed, to have our hearts open and naked before God, because all of us struggle with battles in our hearts and we bury some things, we hide some things. It is our protection; it is our defense mechanism.

But the one place you can be absolutely disarmingingly honest about your own heart is alone with God. He won’t be shocked and He won’t be out of His depth.

And we expose our hearts.

Some of us find prayer hard simply because we find intimacy hard, honesty hard.

Henri Nouwen has written this in a book he wrote on prayer. He said,

“Prayer is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow the other to enter into the very center of your person. You allow him to speak there, to touch the sensitive core of your being and allow him to see so much that you would rather leave in darkness, to let him into that place where your life gets its form. And that is dangerous to us and it usually calls for defense.”

If you find yourself defensive you need to learn to get honest with God and expose all the truth of your heart before God in private, secretly.

Of course prayer is not one way. I have no time to show you this morning in Scripture that there are many times when God speaks to people while they are praying. I have listed them and I have got them elsewhere but I am not going to give them to you this morning. But there are many times when it says, “while they were praying the Holy Spirit said” or “as they were praying, an angel came, spoke”, or “as they were praying God said.”

You have got this again and again in Scripture. God speaks to people when their hearts are most open, when the praying is most genuine and authentic and we have been brought into communion and intimacy with God.

It becomes the setting for God to speak. It becomes the setting for God to probe and reveal and convict and to show us things.
When God wants to go deeper into our lives and God wants to deal with some of those strongholds in our lives, the best defense against that is to not pray, not talk to Him.

And sometimes our lack of communion with God is a defense against parts of our hearts that we would rather leave untouched because sadly, some of our sins, we actually enjoy. We know they always pay a bitter price at the end, but we can know that and still hold on to them.

And it is in that honest, secret communion with God where our hearts are scrutinized, that God does His deepest work. And the reward for this is huge.

You go into the room and close the door and you deal with God in secret alone and you will be rewarded, is what Jesus was saying here. It is huge.

I have known distance from God. I have known barriers in my life; I have known blockages in my relationship with God and my communion with Him.

David wrote in Psalm 66:18,

“If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.”

And when he says, “If I had cherished sin, the Lord wouldn’t listen to me”, that’s not God being churlish you know, “If you don’t do this I won’t do that”.

No, but rather if you cherish sin in your heart, David is saying, there is no room for God to work and be active in your heart.

Now we may be overcome in a fault. Paul talks about that. If someone is overcome in a fault, restore him gently and put your own protection up in case you too be tempted.

Sometimes we are overcome in a fault. There are things that seem to be more powerful than we are, and often we need somebody else to walk alongside with us and help us with some of those things. That is true.

We all battle with sin, the old nature; the flesh fights against the Spirit – that is a constant thing. But if you cherish sin, if you love it, if you accept it, if you tolerate it, if you explain it away, if you defend it rather than battle with it, then you cannot meet with God.

Some of us sentimentally would love to be free from our sins, but actually we don’t want to pay the price for that; we want to hold onto them because we actually love them.

And sin gives its rewards for a season but it’s only seasonal; it does end. But when we come to God, those sins are dealt with.
So actually prayer is both the cause of our intimacy with God and it is the effect of our intimacy with God. It opens the door for deeper fellowship. And sometimes we have to wrestle to get into that place of being alone and honest.

And sometimes a piece of paper helps, you know, just to write down what are the barriers in my life, what do I need to bring to God, what do I need to confess and call it and name it and acknowledge it rather than bury it and hope it will go away, because it won’t until it is poured out into the open.

So going into your room and closing the door opens the opportunity for communion, fellowship, intimacy with God. And to do that with an open Bible is the safest way to do that because God speaks to us through His Word. It is not just that He has spoken, past tense; here’s a book He gave a few thousand years ago; He is speaking through it and He does speak through it in the present.

And that intimacy with God changes all our priorities in prayer you know. It is no longer coming to God to give a celestial shopping list. “I have got some needs here so that’s why I am going to pray.”

It is no longer when we pray together in prayer meetings, a case of getting a few folks together to gang up on God and get some reaction from Him, to get some things done that we need doing. That’s sometimes the mentality of our praying.

But it is meeting with Him and enjoying communion with Him and fellowship with Him.

That’s the first reward: prayer brings us into communion with God.

The second reward I suggest is that prayer brings us into alignment with God because, having said, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” He then teaches to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

That’s half of the prayer gone and it’s all been about God so far – His person – Father – His hallowed name.

Now it is about His activity on earth: “Your kingdom come, Your will be done.”

But the communion with God in the first two clauses (Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name) leads to alignment with God in the second two clauses (Your kingdom come and Your will be done).

And this aligning our will with God is not about finding a middle road between the will of God and my will (maybe God will adapt to fit what I want). It is certainly not about God coming into be aligned with our will; it is about us being aligned with His will and with His purpose.

And as we sang in that beautiful new song - I have never sung it before this morning – called “As We Pray”, there are lines in there that say, “As we pray, the will of God and man align.”
Later, “As we pray, the will of God and man unite.”

My will may be here; God’s will may be here; the effect of praying is not the middle ground. The effect of praying is my will moves over to His will because my prayer is, “Your will be done.”

How can I pray like this? I can pray like this because when I know Him, I will trust Him. And when I trust Him, I will say, “Your will whatever the cost, whatever the issue.”

You know it’s possible to be a Christian and not really know God. It really is.

Jesus said to Philip, you know, the night before Jesus was arrested, He spent that time in the Upper Room with His disciples and in John 14:9 Jesus said to Philip,

“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?”

“Philip, don’t you know Me?”

Well, of course Philip knew who Jesus was. If he met Him on the street he would greet Him. “I know exactly who He is.” He had lived with Him for the best part of three years. Philip knew.

You asked Philip how tall is Jesus, he would tell you. “What size shoes does He take?” He would tell you.

You know, “What color are His eyes?” He would tell you.

“Does He have a beard or does He shave?” He would tell you.

He knew Him in that sense only. And Jesus said to Philip, “Don’t you know Me?”

Because you see, Philip’s questioning was evidence of the fact that though he knew Jesus physically, he did not know the heart of Jesus.

I was reading an intriguing comment by Frederick Buechner. Frederick Buechner is a great writer – you may have come across his books. I was reading it this week actually. It was a memoir and he was looking back on his time as a student in New York.

And he, just in passing, talked about some of the people who influenced his life and he mentioned one preacher that he heard. And he just said, you know, this preacher made the comment that Peter may not have been lying completely when he denied knowing Jesus.

Remember, when Jesus was arrested, Peter was asked, “Aren’t you one of His disciples?” He denied it and in two of those three denials, in Matthew 26, he denied with an oath, “I don’t know the man.” The third time he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”
And Buechner quotes this preacher who said, “Peter may not have been lying completely because Peter had learned to resist the will of God, the will of Jesus Christ.”

Do you remember earlier Jesus said, “I am going to Jerusalem to suffer and die” and Peter said, “No so Lord, this will never happen to You.”

And Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan, you are a hindrance to Me. You are not on the side of God but of men.”

Peter knew the physical Jesus but he did not know the real Jesus, the heart of Jesus.

But when you do and your relationship is one of communion and intimacy,

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

Because you know Him, you trust Him, your prayer becomes, “Your will be done, Your kingdom come.”

But outside of that trust we cling to our own little ideas and little agendas. And that’s why our communion with God and our alignment with God are connected. You can’t jump in the middle here and say, “Well, I’ll just seek to do the will of God” if you do not know Him in that way that Peter didn’t know Jesus, and Philip didn’t know Him.

Our alignment with God is only rectified when we come back into communion with God. You see, knowing the will of God is not like knowing a spiritual GPS where somehow God just guides you down the road and you know where to go and what to do.

No, it comes out of that intimacy where in prayer, we are honest and real. We have heart communion with God. Out of that, “Your kingdom come”, which means, “my kingdom go; Your will be done, not mine.”

The third thing that prayer brings us to, the third reward, is that prayer brings us into provision from God. The second half of this prayer: Verse 11 down to Verse 13. There are three personal requests:

“Give us today our daily bread.

“Forgive us our debts are we have forgiven our debtors.

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”

There requests are all for our personal needs – physical need, spiritual need, moral need.

The physical need, “Give us today our daily bread.” Notice it is, “Give us today our daily bread” not “give me today my monthly supply.” “Help me to stockpile enough to last the year.”
Should we have enough resources for next month, next year, that is okay but it is not what we have a right to. We don’t have an entitlement to that.

Elsewhere in Matthew 6 Jesus talked about, “Don’t worry about tomorrow.” And He was being serious when He said that. We don’t take that seriously, “Well yeah, that’s fine,” but actually some of us carry so many burdens because we are worried about tomorrow.

Don’t worry about tomorrow. Give us our daily bread. That is what we may ask Him for. And Proverbs 30:8-9 has this interesting comment where it says,

“Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

“Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.”

Says the writer of the Proverbs there, “What I want is enough for today. If I have got too much I might become a little arrogant and think I am okay and I don’t need anything and I disown God because I am self-sufficient. Or if I have too little I might be tempted to steal. I don’t want to struggle with that as a temptation. I just want enough for today.”

And there is a wonderful, beautiful feature of the Christian life we don’t talk about very much but it’s a very important one in the New Testament. It is contentment. Paul wrote to Timothy,

“Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

David said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” meaning, “I am content.”

And so many of us jeopardize our relationship with God because we are not content.

And so you have to go back to the steps, go back and say, “Is my will aligned with the will of God?” And go back to that, “Am I in communion with God, because when I am in communion with God I enjoy that intimacy, but also that transcendency. God is enough. God is sufficient. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

And so what do I need? I need physical needs met but for today. And godliness with contentment is great gain.

Spiritual need: “Forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.”

We come to God in need of cleansing. We are not promised or offered sinlessness in this life. We need this probably to keep us humble and dependent, the fact that we do struggle – all of us.

But along with that is something very important. You know when I was preparing this, this week, I thought, you know, it’s interesting there is no real intercession in this prayer. It’s all about God; it’s all about me. Give me my daily bread. Forgive us – it’s plural actually.
But actually I realized I was wrong because “forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our
debtors” and I have realized that the key there is this: it is my relationship with God, our
relationship with God, our union with Him that makes us the blessing to the world that we want
to see.

You forgive me as I forgive others. And one of the things that our prayer life will do if it is
effective is it will put our human relationships right in as much as we can do.

We can’t put every relationship right because it takes two people to make a relationship. But we
are forgiven, we are forgiving.

In fact in Verse 14 Jesus said there,

“If you forgive men when they sin against you, your Father will also forgive you.

“But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

So this is a vital thing. It is not just a selfish “forgive me, forgive me, forgive me but I don’t care
about them.”

No, what God does in us must flow through us. Otherwise, what He does in us is short-circuited
and we don’t experience His forgiveness.

You know D.L. Moody wrote, “I believe lack of forgiveness is keeping more people from having
power with God than any other thing.”

Well that is addressed in this prayer.

The third need is moral need: “Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.”

The implication is not that God may otherwise lead us into temptation for God is never the
author of temptation. James tells us, [James1:13]

“When tempted, no one should ever say ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be
tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone.”

So it is not saying, “Please don’t lead me into temptation because You might otherwise”; rather it
is saying that as He delivers us from the evil one, part of God’s ministry to us is to keep us free.
He is able to keep you from falling, we are told in the book of Jude. And we need His help in
being delivered from the evil one. We need to acknowledge that.

And out of this will flow, of course, blessing to other people. The greatest blessing I can be to
my wife is to keep right with God because good things will be the consequence. But when there
is controversy in my own heart with God, she will be the one who gets hurt.
You see all of this flows out as well. And intercession is a natural consequence of this. And later in John 17 Jesus prays for the wider world and for people and for His church and so on. And so we must.

But it is from this heart, this hub of our prayer and communion with God and alignment with God and our provision from God that we are able to minister to the world. And we discover then that prayer, intercession, is actually not a simple thing at all.

I have a book here by Oswald Smith called “I Have Walked Alone with Jesus.” And it is a book of daily readings and it has been sitting on my shelf for a while and I picked it up the other day.

And I read January 1st and this is what he says, (those of you who are not familiar with Oswald Smith, he was the founder of this church). He writes,

“Intercessory prayer is without doubt not only the highest form of Christian service but also the hardest kind of work. To the person who is not an intercessor, such a statement seems absurd. Prayer to most people is looked upon as an easy occupation – that’s because they know nothing at all of the ministry of intercession. Their prayers for the most part are centered upon themselves, their loved ones, their own personal interests and an occasional petition for the perishing world. Their prayer life is spasmodic; it is considered a side issue and is readily neglected if other things demand attention. Such a person is in no way affecting the kingdom of Satan – hence prayer, so called, is easy.

But the Christian who enters into the ministry of intercession will pass through a very different experience. Satan will do everything in his power to hinder and obstruct. There will be a conscious realization of his presence and opposition. Then, too, discouragement will cross our pathway. We pray on for a certain time and then because the answer does not come, we grow discouraged and give up.

Thus Satan uses his most successful weapon against us and breaks down our determination to become intercessors. And then when all else has failed, he will burden us with work. Satan would rather have us work than pray anytime.”

Full well he knows that prayer-less work will be powerless and fruitless. Hence if he can only keep us busy so that we don’t have time to pray, he will have accomplished his purpose.

Intercession is work, battle.

This prayer of Jesus is not primarily about intercession but it must lead to intercession. This prayer is about your heavenly Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. That reward, if you find communion with God, that leads to alignment with God. What a reward! That leads to provision from God. What a reward! So that now out of the reward of that union with Himself, there will flow blessing to other people as well.
That’s why we are not organizing special prayer meetings this week when we thought, planned and felt burdened for this great need in this church for prayer. The prayer meetings will come and go and may attract all the wrong kind of praying anyway, that Jesus talked about here.

Our challenge is that we become people of prayer. And in so doing, it becomes a church of prayer.

But maybe you are not in communion with God and the finish of this prayer are these words:

“For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever, Amen.”

And I heard a Scottish preacher some years ago speak about this verse. He said, “Yours is the kingdom” and he asked the question: are you in it?

“…And the power” and he asked the question: do you know it?

“…And the glory.” Do you show it?

Are you in it (the kingdom), do you know it (the power); do you show it (the glory, which is the character of God)?

And I am going to encourage you and challenge you to commit yourself to time with God this week where you shut the door somewhere. And it would be wonderful if that became a habit. Maybe take time every day. Maybe it has to be every week for any length of time alone with God.

But you will be rewarded in a deeper, fuller, more satisfying intimacy with Himself.

I am going to close by giving 60 seconds of silence in which, in the silence, I would like you to pray and just tell God where you need to start, the defenses that need to come down that enable you to be intimate and open and honest with Him. Let’s have 60 seconds of silence.

Lord, we say with the disciples, Lord, teach us to pray, please, our God.