

Last week we discussed **Matthew 6:5-7** – “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 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.” What do you think Jesus is telling us here and why?

Matthew 6:8 – “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Who should we not be like?



Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) was the Seminal leader of the Protestant Reformation. He was a German priest, theologian, author, hymnwriter, professor, and former Augustinian friar. Luther was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation, and his theological beliefs form the basis of Lutheranism.

What do you know about the time of **Martin Luther**?

What was his religious world like?

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“You do not need to convince God with words, or instruct him at length; for he knows beforehand better what you need than you do yourselves.” What is **Luther** saying here about our prayers to God?

“Therefore we need not teach him or prescribe with our long babbling what and how he is to give to us: for he will give in such a way that his name may be hallowed (greatly revered and honored) and his kingdom and his will may be advanced and promoted, etc.”

What is Luther saying here about how we are to speak and pray to God? How do you pray and speak to God?

If God provides for us daily with “sun, rain, corn, money, body, life, etc.”, why does he tell us to pray for these things?

“He does not require it, indeed, for the reason that we are to teach him this with our praying, viz., what he is to give us, but in order that we may acknowledge and confess that kind of blessings he is bestowing upon us, and yet much more he can and will give; so that we by our praying are rather instructing ourselves than him.”

What is Luther saying here about prayer? How does prayer benefit us?

“For thereby I am turned about, that I do not go along like the ungodly that never acknowledge this or offer thanks for it;”

What do the “ungodly” not acknowledge and why is this displeasing to God?

“...and my heart is thus turned to him and aroused, so that I praise and thank him,”

How is our heart aroused and what is the effect on us when this happens in prayer?

“But a Christian heart, that learns out of the words of God, that we have everything from God and nothing from ourselves, such a heart accepts this in faith and familiarizes itself with it,...” What does acknowledgement of God’s provisions and gifts do to us?

“...so that it (the heart) can look to him for everything and expect it from him.” What mindset are we to have with God and prayer?



Helmut Thielicke (1908 - 1986) was a Protestant theologian and rector of the University of Hamburg. After repeated interrogations by the Gestapo from the mid-1930s onwards, he was finally dismissed in 1940. Hoping to promote Christian democracy in postwar Germany, he proposed a plan in 1942 that led to the establishment of the first Evangelical Academy in Bad Boll in 1945. In 1954, continuing his postwar efforts to revive Germany’s academic and spiritual heritage, he accepted a call to Hamburg to found a new theological faculty, where he acted as both dean and professor while also pastoring the main church of Hamburg, St. Michaelis.

“And we may add: The Father knows what you need even contrary to what you ask.” What is **Thielicke** saying here?

Are there times when you have recognized that what you wanted, what you prayed for, was not the best answer for you?

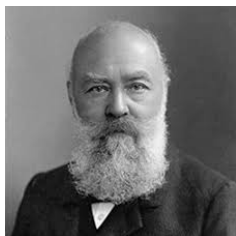
“Jesus shows us that the Father knows our deepest needs and secrets. And that means that he looks upon human beings as a mother looks upon her child who is sick or in pain.” A mother will help her child though he may not know why he is sick.

Do you see the similarity between the mother/child relationship and God and his children? How are they similar?

“Twofold comfort”...First, God is always there before we pray....the Father has a far deeper interest in us than we ourselves:...”

Have you ever thought of God being more interested in you than you yourself? What does this mean?

“Second, when God seems not to hear our prayers,...then the reason is that he knows our trouble and everything we need far more deeply than we ourselves,...” Have you experienced a time when you felt like your prayers have not been answered?



Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842 - 1919) was a German Lutheran pastor and religious socialist. He was a well-known preacher. In 1899 he announced his support for socialism and joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany; for this, he lost his position as minister.

“We don’t have to explain our requests in great detail to God, or try and make quite sure that he knows our needs. God knows about even the smallest matters and takes them straight into his heart.”

What is **Blumhardt** saying here?

“This doesn’t mean that we just let things happen.. Jesus said **“Before you ask him.”** “It never displeases God when we come to him with our heartfelt requests. ...this helps to make us ever more aware that in all things God is the giver.” Prayer is a reminder that our Father in heaven provides everything for us with our best interest at heart.

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What was the world like before Martin Luther?

Before **Martin Luther** (pre-1517), religious life in Western Europe was entirely dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, which functioned as the central authority in daily life, politics, and spiritual salvation. It was a world focused on sacraments, saint veneration, pilgrimage, and the urgent need to reduce time in purgatory through indulgences and good works.

The Catholic Church held dominant spiritual and significant political power in Western Europe for roughly 1,000 years, typically cited from the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE until the onset of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 CE. Its supremacy covered the entire Medieval period (Middle Ages).

Key aspects of religious life before Luther included:

Centrality of the Church: The Church was the primary mediator for salvation, with immense economic power and political influence over daily life.

The Sacramental System: Religious life revolved around the seven sacraments, with confession required at least once a year. The Eucharist (mass) was the center of worship, viewed through the lens of transubstantiation.

Worship and Doctrine: Services were conducted entirely in Latin, which was not understood by the average person. Prayers for the dead and belief in purgatory dominated popular piety.

Pervasive Corruption: Many religious orders faced scandals, and clergy were frequently criticized for being uneducated, worldly, or corrupt. The sale of indulgences, which were believed to shorten punishment in the afterlife, was a major, controversial practice used to fund projects like St. Peter's Basilica.

Reform Movements: Despite the seeming stability of the Church, widespread awareness of the need for reform existed. Movements for spiritual renewal, like the *devotio moderna*, emphasized personal prayer and piety, while Christian humanists called for better education and scripture-based faith.

Depending on where in this world you live, how does this 1,000 year period compare to the time we live in today?