

Sermon 2/16/25

“Communing with God”

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Matthew 6:5-13, Luke 11:1-4

Well Good Morning Shepherd Church! It is my pleasure to fill this pulpit for you all one last time today. I do not in any way want to take the focus off of the word of God this morning, so before we get into the thick of it all, I just want to say on behalf of my family and myself that we will miss all of you and it has been a pleasure to call Shepherd Church home these past few years. We have been overwhelmed by the love this community has shown us, and I leave confident that the Lord has great plans in mind for Shepherd Church, plans to help and not to harm, plans to give a future and a hope. And that applies to each of us in turn. If we follow the Lord, He is always working, in all circumstances, no matter how difficult, for our good and for his glory. This church will always have a hope and a future so long as this body puts God first, and allows all other influences to be secondary.

And that does lead us into the heart of our message this morning. Because the only way you can ever trust someone is if you get to know them. The promise of a stranger should not mean anything to any of us. But when you know someone, if they make you a promise, you can trust it.

In order to trust God's promises, including that one we just spoke of in Jeremiah 29:11, we have to get to know the promise-giver. As Christians, unique among all the religions of the world, our faith teaches that we can actually walk in fellowship with our

God. Through the Holy Spirit, at the moment of redemption, God comes to live inside of us. And what that means is that our relationship with God should be the most intimate and consequential relationship in our lives. There is no part of your life, no other person, task, or joy, that should take precedence over your relationship with the Lord.

So let me ask you this. What part of your life have you failed to surrender to the Lord? What stubborn, rebellious holdout have you allowed to remain in a heart that should be fully his?

After the Japanese surrendered to the United States and the Allies during World War II, there were Japanese holdouts on small islands all over the Pacific, who held out for decades, believing that the war was not over, or that the surrender order was fraudulent. Some of them even continued to fight long after any hope of victory was gone.

Sin is like that in us. We are all sinners, and our natural bent is towards sin. Our flesh wants to sin, and stubborn pockets of sin in your life can hold on and fight for decades if they are not rooted out and defeated. And even in the heart of a redeemed person, sin can do enormous damage if it is allowed to fester.

1 John 1:8-9 "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

So what are the sin holdouts in your life? Because we all have them. We all have blindspots, tiny islands in our soul where we allow sin to maintain a foothold. The war is over, but the enemy remains.

All of us have seen stories of churches and pastors and leaders who have been brought down before their time because of sin that was tolerated long past its time. Tiny island holdouts of gossip, greed, envy, lust, whatever it might be, that end up serving the same purpose as the iceberg did for the Titanic.

Many people were saved from the Titanic; if you know the Lord, you already have a lifeboat, so if you run into a glacier of sin to continue this analogy, you're not going to go under. You'll be plucked from the waters. If you confess your sins he is faithful and just to forgive your sin and purify you from all unrighteousness.

But, and here is the point, you never had to end up in the water to begin with. And in fact your life would be a lot more pleasant, a lot more fruitful, and a lot more joyful, if you were able to avoid those pitfalls altogether.

Works and effort do not save you, but they do show you to be saved. And part of the effort expected of us is to come to the understanding that there is no part of our lives in which we have liberty to pursue only our own desires.

Following Jesus isn't a 9-5 job. It's 24 hours a day. You don't get time off for good behavior. You don't get to take breaks from Jesus. You don't get to say "Well I've had a stressful week, but I've done my quiet time, so I think I've earned a little sin this week."

What if I went to my wife and I said "I've been a good husband this week. I've worked hard, provided, and helped you take care of the kids. It Was pretty stressful. So I think I've earned a little time with my girlfriend..."

Not going to work out is it. But you see, that's how we treat Jesus every time we give in to the sin in our lives. You're not just making a mistake, you're being unfaithful to the relationship. And it is only because God's grace and mercy are immeasurable that

he has the patience to continuously forgive our trespasses. But just because he forgives is no excuse for us to test that promise.

Romans 6:1-2 says “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?”

Galatians 2:20 puts it this way “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.”

Having a relationship with Jesus means that you no longer live for yourself; you live for Christ. Every part of your life must be lived with Jesus in mind.

So “Pastor Shawn” you might ask, why are you talking so much about sin? I thought this message was about the Lord’s Prayer, about Communing with God.

Well here is the big idea. When I was dating my wife, the more I spoke to her, the more I got to know her, the more I fell in love with her, the less I wanted to do anything that would cause her pain. And the same should be true of our walk with Jesus; the more time you spend with him, the more you get to know and experience the majesty of who he is, the more you enjoy the awesome privilege of being able to communicate with and get to know better the God who made space and time, the less time you’ll want to spend doing things that cause him pain. Every time you sin, you are contributing retroactively to the pain he experienced on the cross, for he bore the weight of all our sins. And if you love him, you’ll stop doing that.

And in order to love him like that, you need to learn to spend time with him. And that means learning to pray.

And we know that prayer helps us to overcome sin because Jesus taught us this. We'll get to the obvious place, the Lord's prayer, in a moment, but even to his disciples in the garden, just before the cross, Jesus said "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

And prayer is a skill that you can improve through practice. But the only way to get better is to start the habit and be consistent in it. And even if you struggle to pray, you should make yourself do it, trusting that the Lord knows our hearts even when we struggle to find the right words to say. Romans 8:26 says "Now in the same way the spirit also helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself, intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the spirit is because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

So you don't have to pray perfectly in order to be heard by God, so don't let perfection be an obstacle to you. But if you want a model for prayer, the Lord provides it in the scriptures.

As we saw a few moments ago, this prayer is recorded in two places in scripture, with slight differences. We're going to look at the version from Matthew 6 since there's a little more there, but before we turn there, I want to read the introduction from Luke 11 for context because I think it applies to the theme of our teaching today. "It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, when he had finished, one of his disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples."

So when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, the Lord's prayer is what he taught them. And so I think there's great value for us then in a careful analysis of that prayer this morning.

I want to go word by word through this passage this morning, so please go ahead and open up to the version in Matthew 6 so that you can follow along with me. And as we begin, remember that we use it as an example; you do not have to recite the Lord's prayer every time you pray unless you find spiritual benefit from it in that it aligns you with God's will for prayer. After all, we see Jesus pray many times in scriptures and he does not follow this prayer word by word when he does so. So there is value in repetition and memorization, but I think that even greater value that can be found here is the attitude that Jesus is demonstrating for us through this prayer.

So let's look at this and see what truth we can glean from it.

"Pray then in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name."

The prayer starts off with "our". "Our Father, Who is in Heaven." You are part of a community in Christ. I think it's interesting that here in Matthew 6 the phrase is "our father" but in Luke 11 it is simply "Father."

He is both your Father, and Our Father, collectively as his church. And I don't want us to rush past Jesus calling God by the title "Father" either.

Father was not something that the believers in the Old Testament called God. That implied a familiarity and intimacy that was unknown to the Old Testament saints. But Jesus is here to set a new example for us. Obviously to Jesus, the Son of God, it is appropriate for him to refer to God as his Father, but the important thing here is that is

modelling this prayer for us. He is giving us permission to approach God as our Father, in the same way that he does.

But God is not a father similar to our earthly versions of that title. He is “our father who is in heaven.”

He is enthroned above, as King of the Universe. He is our Father, but he is also our Lord, and so while there can, and should be, familiarity and honesty in our prayers, there should also be reverence. He is not just “Our Father” he is “Our Father in Heaven” and that is a significant distinction.

And that reverence continues into the next line “Hallowed be your name.” Hallowed means to make holy, to set apart as holy. Our Father in Heaven is Holy, and his name deserves to be honored. 1 Timothy 6:15-16 says that God is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light.”

And it is that God, the eternal, immortal God of the universe who dwells in unapproachable light, that, through the work of Jesus, we are allowed to call “Father.”

Don’t let that privilege pass you by this morning. We have been adopted as sons and daughters into God’s Royal Family, and that was only accomplished by Jesus’ willingness to carry your sins to the cross on your behalf.

The takeaway from these opening lines is that we should approach God intimately as a father, and reverently as Lord, with the acknowledgement that he is equally deserving of both of those honors.

Vs. 10 “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven.”

Before Jesus asks the Lord for anything for himself, he prays for the advancement of God's Kingdom, God's work, God's will.

Our priorities in this life should always place the work of God, and the will of God, before our own needs and concerns. If your prayers are always about yourself, then those priorities are misplaced. As Christians, we remain in this world for a purpose, and that purpose is the advancement of the kingdom of God, accomplished first and foremost through the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the building up of both the local, and the universal, church.

God's will deserves to be advanced, not our own wills. If something benefits the Kingdom of God, but does not benefit you, it is the Kingdom of God that takes precedence over your desires and preferences. And what that also means is that if you disagree on something, understand that the purpose of the church is not to cater to your whims and wishes first and foremost, but rather to advance the Kingdom of God, and if that means that your preferences must go to the wayside so that you do not become a stumbling block to the march of the gospel, then that is the sacrifice that all of us must be willing to make. You are allowed to have your opinions, and you are allowed to plead your case. But when your preferences become more important than the Kingdom, then you have wandered into sin. And if you seek to cause dissension over something that is not an issue of sin, or malpractice within the church, then that issue is no longer the problem, the problem is your attitude.

There is no perfect church. No one will ever get 100 percent of what you want from a church. But that's a good thing, because the church is not supposed to be about you, it's supposed to be about Jesus.



The church isn't a country club or a social setting. It's meant to function as a temple to the living God. It is a place of worship and discipleship. And while it is a place of fellowship, the fellowship of the church is grounded in the work of the Kingdom. And a proper posture of humility would say "For the good of the church, for the good of the kingdom, I will lay my preferences aside and seek first that "Your kingdom come, and your will be done."

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 1 "Now I urge you brothers and sisters by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement. For I have been informed concerning, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you."

There are things worth arguing about. Issues worth fighting about. But I challenge you to seek the Lord in prayer and discernment before you continue to pursue a disagreement within the church. Because if it is not an argument that can be established biblically, chances are there is no benefit to you bringing it up. The bar for you to quarrel within the church is a very high one, and anything that comes in under that bar, should be put aside for the good of all. His Kingdom Come, His Will be done. His priorities come before our own.

Matthew 6:11 "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

So here, after first addressing God with both familiarity and reverence, and after praying for the advancement of God's kingdom and God's will, now Jesus makes his own requests to the Father.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” Tell God what you need today. What financial needs do you have today? What illness do you need healing from? What child needs to repent and come home. Give those things to the Lord every single day.

And I don’t think that Jesus is saying here that we can’t pray for the future, but I think this model speaks to the heart of God for us in that we should be leaning upon the Lord for our needs every single day of our life. We need to rely, every single day, upon the Lord to the extent that if the Lord is not who he says he is, then we will fail utterly in our tasks.

Every day of my work here at Shepherd Church, from the very beginning I have prayed Exodus 14:14 over my day “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” I don’t have time up here this morning to recount the countless ways that the Lord has provided for me via the promise found in that prayer. It turns out that if you trust the Lord with things, he comes through again and again and again.

And that means that you can bring him your needs today, you can bring him your needs tomorrow, you can bring him your needs the day after that, and every single day of your life you should lean on the God who has never slumbered nor slept, your Father who has never failed, and never will.

When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God provided only enough manna for the day they were in. They had to trust in God day by day by day that he would continue to provide. That is the kind of faith that God wants us to exercise in our own lives.

At a certain point, we can all make “praying about the future” into “worrying” about the future. And we need to be careful of that. Because faith says that the God who provided for you today will still be there to provide for you tomorrow. As Jesus

teaches just a few verses down in this same chapter “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

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

This is an interesting part of this prayer because we know that Jesus did not put this line in there for himself. He was sinless; he never needed to confess his own sins to the Father. We, on the other hand... Yeah, we regular human beings, we’ve got stuff every day, if we’re being honest, that we need to bring before the Lord and ask forgiveness for. And this ties directly into the final verse, 13, “and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

I do want to note from James 1:13, before we look at that verse closer, that God does not tempt anyone. And so what Jesus is really asking for here is that God would help him to avoid temptation. That verse reads “No one is to say when is tempted ‘I am being tempted by God’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he Himself does not tempt anyone.” So don’t be confused by that.

We need forgiveness from God, because we sin, but here we learn that God will forgive us, as we forgive those who have sinned against us. So if God does not hold grudges, neither can we, not if we want our sins to be forgiven. Vs. 14 says “But if you do not forgive other people, then your Father in heaven will not forgive your offenses.”

Vs. 12 goes hand in hand with thirteen. Vs. 12 is about asking, and giving, forgiveness, but asking for forgiveness is not enough if you aren’t trying to avoid that temptation in the future. Repentance is asking forgiveness and then turning away from your sins onto a better path. This whole “Well I’m saved so I’ll just sin and ask forgiveness later” thing directly contradicts the spirit of these verses. I’ve read this once

already, but I'll read it again from Romans "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

Just as we asked earlier, what are the sin holdouts in your life? What part of your life do you hope no one ever shines a light on? All your deeds are known to God. It is time, right here, right now, today, even as I finish speaking, to repent of those habits and ask God to help you avoid that temptation moving forward.

Romans 8:11-14 says this "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, for if you are living in accord with the flesh you are going to die; but if by the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons and daughters of God."

If you are not bothered by your own sin, then one of two things is true of you this morning. Either A., you do know the Lord but you've lived with your sin so long that you've become blind to it, which is an incredibly dangerous place for a believer to be, or B. You aren't bothered by your sin because you never knew the Lord to begin with.

Matthew 7:7 "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

All of us, every one of us, only have so many chances to recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy before the time will come in which it is too late to do anything about it. When all of us stand before the Lord, and see the wonder of his majesty and the love in his eyes, we will feel the shame of every decision where we chose sin and self over the savior. When we see the marks on his hands and his feet and realize that our bad decisions put them there.

Shepherd Church, you will regret nothing in this life that you do for the Lord in the end. But you will regret everything that you have ever done with only yourself in mind. Jesus calls you to live for a higher and better purpose, a life lived for things that will last into eternity.

So seek communion with the Lord your God and every single day, and allow that fellowship and that reverence to change you from the inside out. Approach God as Father and Lord. Pray for the advancement of his kingdom, and then for your own needs.

And then, seek God's help in dealing with your sin. The time has come to go all in.

Hold nothing back for yourself; no hidden sin, no pocket of rebellion, no dark shadow in the corner of your heart. Matthew 16:25 says "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."

John 10:10 says "The thief comes to steal and kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly."

Give unto the Lord, the devotion that he deserves from you, and you will walk in the abundance that can only come from following closely after Jesus Christ. But if you

walk in the way of the thief, the Enemy, then the sin that entangles you will continue to steal from you, kill your soul and destroy your life.

But no matter how far you've gone, no matter how long you've hidden that part of your life, there is no sin, no habit, no evil you could confess that could ever overcome the surpassing grace and love of God that was made known to us by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Have no fear of coming to the Lord this morning. He will welcome you with open arms. He's been waiting for you to come home.

Let's Pray.

Father through Jesus we have the surpassing privilege of knowing you personally as Father and Lord. Help us leave our childish deeds of darkness behind and walk in the abundant life available to us through communion with Christ Jesus our Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

