

FTBC

GROWTH TRACKS


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Welcome to Growth Tracks which is FBC's program designed to set the disciple on the firm foundation spiritual maturity.


In 2 Corinthians 4:6 (ESV) Paul writes "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

The key to growth in our spiritual lives is encountering the glory of God through the person of His Son who is His perfect image. The more our hearts are filled with the knowledge of Him the more our characters are moulded, the more our hearts are filled with His love and more our lives will be directed towards the purpose for which we were created....to glorify Him. Each chapter is designed to provide a progressive track to show the face of Christ through selected but key passages in the Bible laying down the bed rock foundations of faith that will form the basis for a life -long learning and growing in to the likeness of Christ. Prayerfully follow these chapters and His Spirit will propel you into a trajectory of robust growth and spiritual transformation. Learn how to read the bible by tackling whole passages of Scripture rather than piece meal verses. See how principles from the passages will be translated to everyday life. For those disciples going into the Gamma program these presentations will help bridge the gap between the Alpha Beta programs and the more in- depth Gamma discipleship program.

For those who prefer to listen and see the contents of this book you can go to our website at [www.fbc.com .my](http://www.fbc.com.my) and each chapter will be presented in a series of slides at the resources section of our site under the title "Growth Tracks"



MODULE 8



LEARNING TO PRAY - PART 1

This is the start of the series on prayer. We are going to learn, how to pray. Prayer is communication with God and the best way to start is to look at the Lord's Prayer, whom Jesus himself taught his disciples on how to pray.

PART 1 – THE NATURE OF PRAYER

The passage from which the teaching is taken from is from the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew 6:5-15 (ESV) And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This is a passage that is basically divided into two sections. The first section from verses 5 to 8 is about the fact that there are two different ways in which we can approach prayer. The second section is from verses 9 to 15, which is actually about the lord's prayer itself.

Firstly, there are two ways to pray.

1. God as your boss, which is a pagan or business relationship.
2. Father-son relationship where God is your father.

Let's look at the first way in which Jesus warns us not to pray.

Matthew 6:5-15 (ESV) And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.

Hypocrites are two faced people, what they say in public is different from what they feel in private.

For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others.

So their motive for prayer is to be admired by others.

7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Here we actually have people praying very eloquent prayers with lots of words, as if God would be impressed with those words. This is a business or pagan kind of relationship, where we perform and He is expected to reward which is not part of prayer. So he says,

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

This is because it is not based on your words that you are evaluated. So being eloquent makes no difference.

Boss-Employee Relationship:

So prayer can be a business relationship where God is your boss and you are like the employee. This attitude is based on performance on what you do and is conditional. If you perform you will be accepted. So therefore God will reward you by answering your prayers but you need to perform. So in this dynamic with God as boss and we as employees, the deal is that He will reward us when we pray and because we have lived a righteous life. However, this quid pro quo dynamic is precarious because there will inevitably many times where the prayer is not answered. There are only two ways this is going to wind up. In the first instance we are going to blame God. In this scenario, we feel as if we have obeyed but God has let us down. So therefore, we become angry and we become cold towards Him as He has not lived up to His part of the bargain.

Alternatively instead of blaming God, we start to doubt ourselves when the prayer is not answered. Maybe we haven't lived up to the standard God had required of us. We become anxious and afraid because maybe God is angry and cold towards us because we haven't lived up to His standards. So in this kind of business relationship with God, two things happen.

1. We only pray when we are in trouble or our ultimate treasure is threatened, otherwise we don't bother to pray because prayer is a means to gaining something.
2. We don't pray unless we have performed well enough. Hence only when we feel that we are holy enough, God will actually pay attention to us because God's interest towards us is a function of our performance, not of His love.

Here is another Pharisee or religious leader that illustrates the point.

Luke 18:9-14 (ESV) He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Here we actually have a Pharisee a religious leader not your average Joe, he confidently comes to God expecting a good result when he pray based on his performance because he fasts and give tithes. Jesus in the passage points out that this is precisely not the right way to approach God. The right way to approach God is that of the tax collector coming before God, asking God to be merciful as he has nothing of intrinsic value to barter with God. The tax collector approaches as a creature to the Creator whilst the Pharisee presumes upon some kind of merit or standing before His Creator. Unfortunately, this indicates that sadly, either he has a high view of himself or a low view of God.

Let's recap, let's not approach God like in a pagan relationship. We are not supposed to be like the hypocrites. The hypocrites receive their reward because their reward is public adulation and reputation. They are praying, so that they will be noticed or God is swayed by their achievements.

Father-Son Relationship:

The second way in which we can approach the whole issue of pray is as a father-son relationship, not as a pagan or business relationship. Here you actually you have an intimate relationship where

6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret

So it is something done in secret.

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

The prayer is not done for public adulation or respect. The prayer is a private communication between God and his adopted son that is all of us.

Here we have Jesus telling us to pray to your father in secret. The issue is this that this is private, a prayer relationship is private between you and God, it is not to be paraded in front of the public and it is not based on the many words, we don't have to be very eloquent, we don't need a magic formula on how to pray because God knows what you need even before you ask him. He can read our minds; we don't have to articulate it in the most exotic manner in our speech in order to sway God to relent to provide what we ask for.

Now let's look at the second part, which is basically the Lord's Prayer itself. Here we have

9 Pray then like this:

So this prayer is not a mechanical prayer with a whole series of words that we need to repeat as if it is a magic formula or incantation. This is a guideline; it is a pattern in which we can pray.

The pagan's have prayer wheels with special words inscribed on those wheels, we just have to rotate them and you don't actually have to verbalize the prayer, the wheel does it for you. In some faiths, prayer has deteriorated to the extent that the prayers have become the means of penance. Which means that the prayer becomes something so awful that you do it as a punishment to atone for our sin. The happens in some churches as part of their confession before a priest which is hideous because what was originally meant as a beautiful privilege for us to express our love to God in communication has now been recast as penance.

So let's start off examining the Lord's Prayer. In the first phrase, is when you pray, we pray:

Our father who art in heaven

1. So it is our father, it is not my father. It is a corporate address to God.
2. Our Father determines our attitude towards prayer and saturate ourselves with the fact that when we are praying, we are praying to a heavenly Father who loves us and who has our best interest in mind.
3. This is the only way to adore God. There is reciprocal love. God is a source of wonder. 1 John 3:1 (ESV) See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

So our Father is a response to the fact that God has adopted us and we can now come freely towards him. Martin Luther was so impressed with these words, he actually said, "If he could understand the first two words of the Lord's Prayer as Christ did, the rest of his life in Christ would fall into place."

So our Father establishes the father-son relationship on a plane of prayer. The Old Testament emphasized the transcendence (the separateness) and sovereignty of God. The New Testament practice with Jesus brings us closer. Our father in Heaven. So there is a tension between intimacy and the sovereign power of God. It is our Father

which conveys a sense of intimacy and yet this Father is in heaven the Lord of the universe.

The father-son relationship is based on what Jesus has done and anchored on the fact that we are saved by His blood. We recognize His power by saying who art in heaven. We are accepted by this God.

So there we have it, if we are to pray with God as our boss then our prayers would be called impersonal, anxious, out of duty, mechanical and would always feel unworthy. If we have prayed with God as our father in heaven, our prayers will be warm, confident, loving, open and humble.

PART 2 – PRAISE AND ADORATION

Here is the second part of the prayer, “Our father in heaven, hallowed by your name”

The word ‘hallowed’ means to praise, to treat as sacred and ultimate, glorious and great. It is a praise word. Where our entire hearts are basically captivated by the wonder of who He is. To make somebody your ultimate concern. It is a prayer that He will bring people to a proper attitude towards himself. Hallowed expresses an aspiration that He who is holy will be seen to be holy and treated throughout His creation as being holy. Holy basically means “separate “ and is the ultimate property of God the attribute of all attributes that is to be in a class of His own... the only God.

Hallowed be thy name, the name of God means it is a reflection of who He is. God himself as He is and as He has revealed Himself, His character and His authority.

Some people would ask, why start with praise and adoration. Why don't we start with confession?

Tim Keller points out that it is very important to start off with hallowing God with praise and adoration, because hallowing God will affect your confession or your petition later on.

If one approaches God in a different manner as in pagan/business relationship where God is boss, then petition comes before worship or confession comes before worship simply a means to an end we are coming to God to gain something. It is the same thing in our petition we confess first to gain access to God in order to gain things we ask in our petition of Him.

Hallowing God is important because when you will look at God and react to his majesty, He becomes the most important person in the world, certainly all our own selfish desires and petty ambitions are seen for what they really are. They cause the preoccupation and worship of other idols in our lives. When we hallow God we see our own idols for what they really are. They all became too pale in comparison to our Almighty King. Worshiping first heals our hearts, all our failures in life are actually failures of adoration and expressions of our idolatry. In Genesis 3, the serpent lies and tells Eve, you cannot trust God. We too think that He doesn't have our best interest at heart, so therefore you cannot trust Him, we cannot pray to him. Only when our hearts are healed, then we regain the proper perspective to properly petition God or ask for forgiveness and confession. We can only truly confess when we see our sin and we can only see our sin when we set them besides His perfection. Likewise, how can we ask God for forgiveness of sins unless we see His majesty and how our sin insults His majesty. So worship God first, hallow His name.

How do we hallow his name? How do we actually worship?

Here is an example. A poem from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, how do I love thee?

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.

So praising is expression. Here is an example of hymn of praise to God,

*The love of God is greater far, Than tongue or pen can ever tell, It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win, His erring child He reconciled, and pardoned from his sin*

The song highlights the attributes of God for which we praise him for. Look at Psalm 63, where the psalmist thinks of who he is and what he has done.

Psalms 63:5-7 (ESV) My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,⁶ when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night;⁷ for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

So worship and adoration is thinking of who He is and what He has done for us. Thinking about who He is seen in so many others psalms

- Psalms 97:9 (ESV) For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.
- Psalms 102:15 (ESV) Nations will fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory
- Psalms 100:3 (ESV) Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
- Psalms 98:1 (ESV) Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has **done marvelous things!** His right hand and his holy arm have worked **salvation for him.**

All these psalms cause us to think over who He is and we worship and adore Him for who He is. The psalms act as a portal for us to catch a glimpse of the reality of God which we in our sinful minds will find it hard to appreciate.

This is the Psalm that expresses praise.

Psalms 63:3-4 (ESV) Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

Psalms 63:5 (ESV) My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips

So worship is not only thinking, meditating on who he is and what he has done but applying it to our lives

Psalms 63:3-4 (ESV) Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

You gain courage because of his steadfast love. Here is another Psalm

Psalm 27: 1 The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

So here we actually take a point about God and apply it on our lives that it changes emotions. There is no longer any fear or anxiety. So the point about worship, we say about how strong He is, this declaration sorts out our problems addresses our fearful and anxious thoughts when we see about how merciful He is and this cures our feelings of guilt. Our realization of His wisdom it sorts out our problems of being upset at how our lives are going because we are persuaded by the words of the psalm and begin to depend on God's wisdom.

The great theologian St. Augustine of Hippo actually writes, much of our problems in life were actually the disordering of our loves. He writes

“The quest for happiness consists in attaching ourselves in love to objects of desire that we think will make us happy. But for this to occur, a knowledge of the metaphysical order and value of objects of love is necessary such that love might be properly ordered”

So applying what Augustine says, we have a whole bunch of things which we find important in our lives, friends, food, big house, jobs, vacation, family or riches.

Each object needs to be ordered in terms of the degree of satisfaction that they give to us. Here is an example of a person who orders his loves.

1. Food
2. Drinks
3. Holiday
4. Friends
5. Job
6. Family

What is the problem here? What will happen to this sort of person?

This is the wrong order or priority of these loves which will cause him to most likely wind up as a homeless fat man.

What about this other person? He puts

1. Jewels and riches
2. Job
3. His house
4. His vacation
5. Family
6. Friends

What is wrong here?

He has wrongly put material possessions and riches and jobs way above family, In all probability he is going to wind up as rich, divorced man. All problems and suffering in life are because of problems of adoration. Because you prioritize the wrong things.

So praise will help us reorder our loves. Praise and adoration will change this order in your life. The more you are able to see his greatness, the more his love means to us. This praise will frame all the other parts of the prayer

PART 3 – SUBMISSION TO HIS WILL

We continue on with the Lord's Prayer.

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

This is an expression of submission and hope. We submit patiently to all that God allows and it is important when this happens first. We need to remember “Thy will” comes before “give us this day our daily bread”. We bend our will to His instead of the other way around. In the transactional view of prayer in a pagan relationship it is quid pro quo we give Him something to gain something from Him. This approach diminishes God to someone who can be bribed.

This is an example of a book written of about a prayer in the bible which has gone wrong. This is written by Bruce Wilkinson, “The Prayer of Jabez”. It is actual piece of scripture

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 (ESV) Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” 10 Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked.

Wilkinson writes,

If Jabez had worked on Wall Street, he might have prayed, “Lord, increase the value of my investment portfolios” . He says using this prayer is a key to a life of extraordinary favour with God” and he has been praying it every day for 30 years.

So the function of prayer can either be an instrument for us to control God or instrument for God to control us. It becomes an instrument for us to control God when we are in a pagan or business relationship with God, we give God what he wants and he gives us what we want or it has become an instrument of relationship for a father-son relationship for God controls us and guides us.

Matthew 5:6 (ESV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Jesus teaches us not to seek the blessing, but the activity that brings forth the blessing. So we will never get to relate to God unless we say, “Thy will be done”.

This is another a practical example of the misuse of God's word in Joseph Prince Ministry blog. He writes,

Now, I am not saying that you must take the Holy Communion every day. But if you feel led to and you

want to, go ahead! The thing about taking the Holy Communion daily is this: If you are sick, you can be made well on a gradual basis. This means that you get healthier and stronger from day to day—first thirtyfold, then sixtyfold, then a hundredfold! But the Holy Communion allows you to receive a measure of healing every time you partake in faith, so that you get better and better. The more you take it, the better you become. There is no pressure to believe that you receive it all at once. Isn't God good? He meets you at your level of faith!

You see, while you can receive healing through the prayer of faith (Mark 11:24), it sometimes puts pressure on you because it requires you to believe that you receive it all—complete healing—the moment you pray. There is nothing wrong with the prayer of faith, but you may find yourself saying, “I must believe I receive it all, now! I must believe I have it all, now!”

So here is the problem with Joseph Prince's approach. You have got a sick person and he has got trouble praying in faith to receive it all. It is harder to have faith, to have the healing. So what he does is that he advises us to do next best thing. To use a ritual, to have the Lord's Supper and by taking the Lord Supper, participating in a ritual, we actually get what we want from God without actually having to have the requisite high bar of faith. Now this is dangerous and it puts us in a situation where we are actually manipulating God or using God because we fool ourselves into believing that a ritual will unlock God's otherwise stingy hands and release healing. This is a demeaning attitude towards God and calls in to question if the person actually is worshipping God or in his mind some idea or idol of what he thinks God is like.

This is also an absolute distortion of the Lord's Supper. The Lord Supper was instituted that we may remember Him, that we may remember the sacrifice He made on the cross. So when we partake the Lord's Supper, we express our faith in His death that will save us. Now it is being hijacked as a means to gain healing from God, which was never its original purpose. We are now in a situation where we are no different from a pagan using a prayer wheel to get what we want from God.

So here we can see, how it is vitally important that “Thy kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”, comes before the petition ‘give us this day our daily bread’. Because if it is the other way around, we would be actually using God rather than serving God.

This sentiment is echoed in John 15 where Jesus teaches us four conditions for answered prayer and these conditions, actually reflect the fact that we should be praying for His will in our lives first rather than using Him to gain our will.

John 15:7-8 (ESV) If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

Let's explore in detail four conditions for answered prayer in this passage in John which is reflected of the Lord's Prayer when it says, “thy kingdom comes, thy will be done”.

The first condition,” if you abide in me, and my words abide in you”. The word abide in the original language is “to remain” hence we are to have His Word remain in our system and be the priority in our thinking and desires. Naturally this means our prayer need to be in line with Gods agenda and will and not ours alone.

The second condition is “By this my Father is glorified”, which means prayer aims to glorify God, not to satisfy the greed of man.

The third condition is that the “we bear much fruit”, so therefore the outcome of the prayer that is anticipated should result in the spiritual transformation that God desires in our lives, an unselfish love.

The fourth condition is, “prove to be my disciples”. The answered prayer will prove that you are following Jesus and have His will as paramount in your life.

We have to start of our pray and prioritise “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” and often times the reason why our prayers are not answered is that our prayers are not reflective of that motive. Instead we often pray with the opposite motive as James writes,

James 4:3 (ESV) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions

This is a prayer that seeks our own greed, our own glory rather than God that’s why it is not answered. We need to pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

Application Questions for Discussion

1. What is the difference between the way pagans pray and how we should pray?
2. Some churches use the Lord’s prayer by getting the worshippers to recite the exact words of the prayer repetitively. What are the pros and cons of such an approach?
3. What is the reason we should start out our prayer with “our Father”?
4. Why should worship precede petition for our needs?
5. Someone said that using the Psalms in our prayers of worship made our prayers more powerful, in what sense is he wrong and in what sense is there some truth in the statement? How does reading the Psalms and using them enhance our worship? How can they be misused?
6. Why do we seek His Kingdom and His will before we ask for forgiveness or petition for our needs?