

INTRO

Good morning church! For those of you that I haven't yet met, and with the way things are going this year might be a good amount of you, my name is Kyle Knight and I'm the Youth and Digital Minister here at Fathom Church, and welcome to Youth Pastor Sunday! The Sunday right after Halloween when the Youth Pastors get to preach.

I am excited to be up here with you today. So if you have your Bibles with you this morning go ahead and open them up to Matthew chapter 6, that's where we will be most of our time. If you don't have your Bible open up a Bible app on your phone or tablet, whatever works best for you.

TRANSITION

This morning we are moving into our third week of our Discipline series, and I'll say this right off the bat. I do believe as Christians we know we should be doing this one! I do believe we got this one down in terms of saying that Yeah I know I should be doing this one, and I think most of us do! I believe this might be the most common discipline Christians actually partake in, and especially from the Disciplines that we are covering in this series. Maybe more than reading the Scriptures, definitely I think more than practicing a Sabbath (at least for me, cause that one is hard, right?)

So I think we might have a head start on this one at least in the sense we could probably say that we at least *do* this Discipline. But, I'm not sure we practice this discipline correctly and especially to the fullest of what God intended it to be for us.

And the discipline we'll be talking about this morning is Prayer.

INTRO: STORY

But first, do you all have a go-to show that you watch? A show that you've seen a million times and you know it's good, but whenever you can't think of anything else to watch or anything new to watch you just go back to what you know is good, your go-to show?

So I've got a newborn at home who has some problems sleeping at night. And when I say that I mean she's up like every hour to eat. So let's just say we are not getting much sleep at the Knight house. But when I'm up with her feeding her, to keep myself awake I like to turn on my go-to show, and that's *The Office*.

Now I call it my go-to show, and actually it's probably safe to say that it's my wife and my go-to show, because even when it's just us and we are trying to find something to watch on a Friday night. And we're flipping through Netflix trying to find something new to watch that we haven't seen yet, or even some new movie we've been wanting to watch. After going through everything for what always seems like as long as it would actually take to watch something, we almost never land on something. So we inevitably end up looking at each other and saying the same words every time. *"Let's just watch The Office."*

Not even a question like, *"You wanna watch The Office this time?"* Nope. It's usually, *"Let's just watch The Office."*

It's our go-to show. I'm sure most of you have that show too. The one you've seen already so many times. But you know it's good. You know all the words to every episode. No matter which season or episode you go to, it's definitely good, but it's one of those that you just go to, it never

disappoints. But it also isn't anything new, right? You even sometimes put it on in the background when you're cleaning or something or surfing through your phone in bed. You can put it on in the background because you've already seen it a million times, you're not missing anything. But you can still hear it every once in a while. You always know what part is coming up next and even if you're not paying attention to it you recite the next line in your head. You know like "Bears eat beets. Bears. Beets. Battlestar Galactica." You know what I'm talking about.

I feel like we all have that go-to show that is always tried and true good, but whenever we watch it it's nothing new, it's usually because we couldn't find anything else to watch. We put it on because we don't really have to think about it. We know what happens already. It's sort of mindless, right?

TRANSITION

Prayer can become a show we go to over and over that we have seen a million times already, that we mindlessly watch, that really just becomes routine...nothing new. Sometimes we treat our prayers like our go-to tv show. They become routine, mindless, even scripted.

I said at the beginning that I do believe we all do this discipline. But I'll speak for myself, I know I treat my prayers often like my go-to show The Office. I have my go-to prayers that for me are easy, mindless (meaning they don't take too much effort and I can just recite a prayer from memory that I've been saying over and over).

If we're not careful, church, the discipline of prayer can become a habit that leads to apathy. But let me reassure you, the prayer that Jesus talks about in the Bible is so much more filling than some of the prayers we

offer up to the Lord on a daily basis. God had so much more planned for our prayer lives than just routine, same ol same ol.

What is Prayer?

I know this might have you looking at your own prayer life a bit bummed out, but hey that's ok. We should be reflecting on these disciplines and their current state in our lives right now, that's the whole point of this series. The good thing is church, we have this (*hold up Bible*) that teaches us what prayer is, why it's important to pray, and how to pray. It's all in here! So let's get started this morning with diving into What prayer is.

What *is* prayer? I'm not sure if you've ever really asked that question before, and maybe you've grown up as a Christian so prayer was just always there, always something you did, so you really didn't think about *what* it is, you just *did* it.

Is prayer just a conversation with God? Yeah, partially.

Is prayer a time to ask God for things? Yeah, partially.

Is prayer a time to even just zip your lips and listen to maybe what God wants to say to you? Yeah...partially.

For our purposes today I want to put a definition on prayer so that we can wrap our minds around it, and that definition comes from the pastor, theologian, Timothy Keller who defines prayer in his book called "*Prayer*", bold title Tim. He says this about prayer that prayer is

(SLIDE) "Continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him." -

Timothy Keller, *Prayer*

Now I know that is not an all encompassing definition of prayer, but for today I want to go with that. Prayer is a Continued conversation that God started in his Word, that eventually becomes a full on encounter with Him.

(BLANK SLIDE)

That's where I want to start on what *is* prayer.

POINT 1: (SLIDE) **Prayer is an encounter with God**

I love this because I think we like to pigeonhole prayer as just a conversation, and most of the time a one-way conversation from us to God. What relationship is that? No good relationship is built on one-way conversations. Ask anyone who's married! Ask my wife! Ain't no way we are having any good one-way conversations between us, that never works out.

But prayer is much more than just a conversation, it's an encounter. And not just any encounter, it's an encounter with the Living God. The creator of the universe. The one who knit you together before you were born. And listen here, we *get* to have this encounter with the Living God! Each and every time we prayer! How awesome is that! Our prayer lives should be an encounter, an experience with God each and every time we talk to Him. This is designed to be so much more than that go-to show we mindlessly go to over and over without thinking just to check it off our Christian to-do list. It's not meant to be scripted the same way that it becomes easy and routine. It's meant to be a rich and worthwhile encounter each and every time. Prayer is an encounter with God.

POINT 2: And just like an encounter or experience with someone suggests,
(SLIDE) Prayer is something that you DO.

It's active, it's engaging, it should take work! It should take practice. It should make you get up and really think about it and DO it. It isn't something you stand by and not take action with. You gotta DO something!

Prayer is not meant to be a spectator sport church. Prayer is not meant for us to be waiting on the bench in the dugout to be called in and *then* to do something. We are meant to be in the game. Taking action. Doing prayer! Jesus took action in his prayer all the time. And many times his action was to *go and pray*, somewhere. And we see that so many times in scripture, for example:

(SLIDE) *Luke 11:1 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*

(SLIDE) *Matthew 14:23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, ^{he} went up on the mountain by himself to pray.*

(SLIDE) *Mark 1:35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

(BLANK SLIDE)

Jesus would take action and go off away to pray. He knew he needed to leave the distractions, the crowds, and DO prayer with his father. Jesus didn't take prayer as a spectator sport and just sit around and not act. He would always be engaged in the encounter, in the experience with his God, with his Father.

Listen, prayer is a gift from God to us as something we get to *participate* in. It's something *for us to do* with God. So we need to DO prayer. We need to be active in prayer, whatever that looks like for us. If it means going up to a mountain to pray like Jesus did so many times than great! Do it! Because I'm telling you if we are just standing by and not taking action in our prayer lives with God, things WILL happen in this world that don't go our way and then we will HAVE to take action against those things in prayer to God. So lets be DOING prayer now church.

HOW TO PRAY

So, prayer is not just a conversation with God, how it is an encounter, and experience with God and something that we actively need to participate in.

So now let's look at How to Pray.

Because I don't know about you but sometimes I know I need to pray and I'm ready to pray, but there are times I just don't know how to pray or what to pray for. Or I question myself saying, "Should I be praying for that?" "Is there a right way to pray, is there a wrong way to pray?" "Uh oh, should I ask for that?" "Is it ok that I just asked for that in prayer?" "How am I supposed to pray?". And listen, all those are justified questions to ask yourself when thinking about your prayer life. Sometimes we just need to be taught how to pray or even told how to pray. And luckily, Jesus teaches us how to pray!

But before we dive into How to Pray, let's take a look at how NOT to pray, ok? Because sometimes I think the way we go about prayer is the

total wrong way to begin with. And again the great thing is, before Jesus tells us how to pray he tells us how NOT to pray!

So let's take a look at what Jesus says prayer shouldn't be. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6 and we will start reading with verse 5:

⁵“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love ^xto stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. ^yTruly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Now, when Jesus says you must not be like the hypocrites and stand and pray in the synagogues or on street corners so others can see, that does not mean you shouldn't pray in front of others at all. What he's saying here is don't be a showoff with your prayer. Don't be flashy. Don't be one of those guys that loves to volunteer to pray just because he loves to hear himself talk and he thinks he's more righteous for praying. Don't be like those guys in your prayer.

In fact, a few times Jesus says to go away in secret and prayer, like in the next verse, verse 6:

⁶But when you pray, ^zgo into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. ^aAnd your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Now does Jesus mean you should pray in secret, by yourself in your room every time you pray? No. But what he is saying is don't be showy in your prayer. If anything, if you need to to not take all the attention on yourself and have everyone looking at you and giving you attention, go to

your room and pray. Go to a place where you can just pray a meaningful prayer to God just you and him instead of walking that line of praying in front of others just to be that guy that wants to be up in front and do it for himself. You've got no business praying in public until you can pray in private. It's true.

Don't pray in front of others just to be seen and make it all about you. Don't be a distraction for others in prayer. Don't put on a show like the hypocrites Jesus is talking about who liked to make it all about themselves and liked to hear their own voice praying.

Jesus says don't make it about yourself. Don't put on a show.

And then he goes right into one more way to NOT pray when he says in verse 7:

⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as ^bthe Gentiles do, for ^cthey think that they will be heard ^dfor their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, ^efor your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

What Jesus is saying here is don't have your prayers to the Living God be something that is so rehearsed that it just doesn't mean anything to you anymore. This hits home for me and reminds me of the prayers I learned growing up. I'm sure a lot of you were in this same boat if you grew up in a Christian household. But we were taught a couple prayers that were family prayers, church prayers, prayers that were passed down that everyone knew. We had a specific prayer we would say before a meal, and a different prayer we would say before bed. And each time we would go to pray in those situations we knew the words we were going to pray, and as

kids we would just recite them. Almost like memorized words from a play we were in. We knew the words and said the same words in the same prayer every time we would pray. And as a kid these words really didn't mean a lot to me. I just knew when it came time for bed I knew the bedtime prayer and I would say it, as fast as I could, just to get it done with.

So we taught Austin the same bedtime prayer probably a year or two ago because we wanted him to know what prayer was and that it was important to pray to God, and he learned them and knows them from memory now.

Well now more often than not when we put him to bed and I say "*Ok time to say our prayers*", I'm met with "*Ughhhhhh. Fine*" A very reluctant fine. And then I just get this, (*mumbling quietly and fast*) "*Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I shall die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.*"

And I'm like "Dude, come on." I mean you can at least not be bored with a prayer already at age 4. Like seriously please.

But then I'm like, first of all, that's how I was with those prayers when I was younger. Those prayers that I was so used to that I memorized for years that they just almost became a burden to say and an annoyance. And they just sort of became empty words and phrases. Church our prayers should not be so mundane and lifeless that they just become routine empty words and phrases heaped up to our Creator. Our prayers should have life!

Now our prayers don't have to be perfect church! We don't need them rehearsed, we don't need to worry if we're saying the right things or not. God just wants us! He wants our prayers to be real, from the heart, a real encounter with Him. He doesn't ask for perfection, he doesn't even ask for

them to be good! He's just happy you're diving into an encounter with Him! He loves to be with you. Don't get so focused on what you're saying in your prayers, just be with Him.

And so if that is what Jesus says prayer is NOT, then let's look at how we should pray, how Jesus gives us some tips on how to pray. Now this is where we're going to get practical church. We have been saying throughout this series that we want to make these disciplines simple and practical for us to take home with us and train ourselves to do.

So here we go. The next part in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus goes into what is called the Lord's Prayer. Many of us know this but let's read it and then I want to break it down to something very practical that we can take home with us and practice ourselves with each of our own prayers.

So let's look at verse 9:

^{9f}Pray then like this:

⁹“Our Father in heaven,

^hhallowed be ⁱyour name.¹

^{10 j}Your kingdom come,

^kyour will be done,²

^lon earth as it is in heaven.

^{11 m}Give us ⁿthis day our daily bread,³

¹² and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And ^olead us not into temptation,

but ^pdeliver us from ^qevil.⁴

Now, we could pray this prayer every time we pray and we'd be doing prayer right. We would. But if you're like me sometimes I look at that prayer and go, *"Well those are some pretty old words, I mean who says hallowed? What does all that even mean?"*

And this is where I come in with this. (*Show ACTS sheet*)

This is something we've put together to help us pray. This is not something we came up with on our own, this is out there as a tool to help us set up our prayers so that we are getting the most out of what God had planned for us in prayer. It's not perfect, it still doesn't encompass everything a pray could have in it. But it's a start. This is a way that we can start training ourselves in the discipline of prayer and helping our prayer lives go from just heaping up wishlists to God or having a one-way conversation with God, to having a deep, meaningful experience and encounter with our Creator.

So let me go through this with you really quick. And again this will be up on the website **(SLIDE) fathomchurch.org/disciplines** so you can print this out and fill it in if it helps you.

So this is a helpful tool called the **(SLIDE) ACTS Prayer** that might help you organize your prayers better and I think expand what we pray to God about.

So let's start with the A in ACTS.

A stands for **(SLIDE) Adoration**:

- Give God praise and honor for who he is as Lord over all. In the Lord's Prayer we see this as "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" or holy is your name.

- This is first and foremost starting off our continued conversation and encounter with God by acknowledging who he is. God I adore you, you are holy, bless you Father. Not starting off with our list of demands first. But acknowledging who we are in the presence of. Start with praise.
- “YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done. One Earth as it is in heaven.” Starting off by getting our right position, our right standing with God. This is all about you God, it’s not about me.
- Adoration, giving it all to God first.

C stands for **(SLIDE) Confession:**

- Yes, this is the one we don’t like.
- Honestly deal with the sin in your life. Confessing those things to God. God I messed up, God I confess I’ve been deep in this sin and it’s pulling me away from you. God forgive me.
- “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”
- This one we don’t like. But we forget how important it is.
- 1 John 1:9 says *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
- We start with praise and then move into repentance. That’s the C in the ACTS Prayer.

T stands for **(SLIDE) Thanksgiving:**

- Verbalize what you're grateful for in your life and in the world around you.
- I feel like this one's hard to do. Especially this year. Especially when everything seems to be going wrong.
- We need to be more thankful in a year that's been like the one we've all had. We need to thank God for the hard times, but also the blessings. Give God thanks for what he is doing in your life and in the life of those around you right now.
- There are so many things to be thankful for.
- God thank you for loving me. God thank you for freedom. Especially right now with what we're going through as a country with the election this week. God thank you that we get to participate in something like this, thank you for those freedoms.
- You start with praise, you move to repentance, and then you move to gratitude. Thank you God.

And lastly the S stands for **(SLIDE) Supplication:**

- Once you've praised him for who he is, and you've confessed and repented of your sins, and you are filled with gratitude for what he has done in your life, than you move to bringing things to him.
- Supplication is just a word that means Praying for the needs of others and yourself.

- Bringing things to God and asking him for things.
- Now this isn't a divine wishlist or anything, but God wants us to bring things to him.
- And not just bringing things in our own lives to him but praying for others.
- Bring things to God, he wants to know your wants and needs.
 - And does he already know what you need? Yes of course, he's God. But just like me being Austin's dad, do I know what Austin needs? Yes, I'm his dad! Of course I know what he needs, I usually know what he needs better than he knows what he needs. I know you don't need Lucky Charms or Cinnamon Rolls for every breakfast. I know you don't *need* ten more stuffys for Christmas when you already have a million! But I still want him to come to me with these things. I still want him to say "Dad I need you. Dad I'm thirsty, can you get me some water." "Yes, son yes. I will get you some water of course."
 - God wants you to come to him with those things.

(BLANK SLIDE)

So that's what we are challenging you with is the ACTS Prayer. Is it the only way to pray? No. Does it cover everything you should pray for? No. But it could be a helpful start for some of us who's prayer lives are same ol same ol. If we committed to praying like this, every day, even for

just 5 minutes, filling this out and praying along with Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. If you prayed more intentionally like this, what would happen? What would happen to your prayer life? What would happen to all the other parts of your life? Your other disciplines? What would happen?

WHY DO WE PRAY

Ok, so we've covered *What* prayer is and *How* to pray already but as we start to wrap this up we still need to talk about Why. Why do we pray? Why *should* we pray? Why do we even need to pray when God seems to know everything already. When he knows what I need and want already. Why pray?

I've got three reasons why we should pray.

Number 1. Why should we pray? Because (SLIDE) **Jesus tells us to.**

It's true. Plain and simple. Jesus tells us to pray. Many times in scripture like in Matthew 6: verse 5 he says "and WHEN you pray", verse 6 "but WHEN you pray" in verse 7 "and WHEN you pray" and then verse 9 "Pray then like this".

It's expected! It's expected that we pray. This is part of it. Jesus doesn't give us a choice. Jesus doesn't say "*Well if you want to pray go ahead*" "*If you feel like it, then sure go for it*". No. He says DO IT! So we should probably do it!

Number 2. Why should we pray? Because **(SLIDE) Jesus did it.**

That's true too! Jesus prayed. He modeled it for us, he came to this earth and HE participated in prayer. All those scriptures I read earlier:

In Luke 11:1 *"Now Jesus was praying in a certain place"*

In Matthew 14:23 *"And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray."*

In Mark 1:35 *"And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed."*

Jesus prayed. And as His disciples, as we are called to be His disciples, we are trying to become more like Jesus. So we need to follow in his footsteps and pray! Pray a lot! Just like he did.

And Number 3. Why should we pray? Here's the little part that's about us in this thing. Because **(SLIDE) Prayer changes us.**

Prayer actually changes you, it strengthens you, it builds you up, it encourages you. In Matthew 6 verse 8 it says *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."* So why ask him? Because we need to be changed. We need change. Asking him opens us up to strength from him that will change us. Remember this isn't about us changing God but God changing YOU. And prayer changes us because we get to be in close encounter with the Living God, asking him for things, thanking him for things, confessing things to him. And that will change us.

Last year, my wife and I were pregnant and expecting our second child. This was after a long long time of trying and failing, and getting help and things not working and really almost trying everything we could. And we finally got pregnant in the summer of last year. We prayed so hard for that baby. Before we got pregnant we prayed for that baby, when we did get pregnant we prayed for that baby, and even after we found out that we miscarried, we prayed for that baby. We might have even prayed harder after the fact than before because we knew that prayer was the thing that was strengthening us during that time, we knew God was changing us through prayer even after it didn't go our way. And it did change us. We knew we couldn't go back and change things, but we prayed anyways and God strengthened us and changed us and got us ready to do it again. And now over a year later we have a beautiful, healthy daughter. God knew what we needed before we even asked, but he still wanted us to encounter him and come to him.

We pray because Jesus tells us to, because Jesus prayed, and because prayer changes us.

(BLANK SLIDE)

CLOSING

So church, what if we trained our prayer life to be something so much more than just the go-to show that has become so rehearsed and scripted and mindless, and what if we committed to experiencing the Living God each and every time we came to him in prayer.

Hey I don't want my prayer life to become mindless and stale. I want my prayer life to be a well worn path straight to God, never losing the

desire to be with him, never losing the excitement of encountering and experiencing him. So let's practice a more robust and lively prayer life this week church.

Let's pray now! **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER (we do this every week, and we ask if you are not a Christian joining us to to just abstain from communion. We are so glad you’re here and you are welcome here but we believe communion is for those who have put their life in Jesus Christ).
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give (also if this is not your home church than don’t feel obligated to give at all, just be our guest today)
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let's stand and sing together.