One of the all-time greatest opening scenes in a movie has to be the opening scene of the first *Star Wars* movie. And when I say, “first *Star Wars* movie,” I mean the original first *Star Wars* movie. The one with Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia and C3PO. The first one that ever came out. The one we now call “Episode 4.” Anyway, I don’t know if you remember how that movie starts, but right after the scrolling introduction floats up out of the screen, a spaceship zooms into the screen. And it’s a pretty big spaceship. It’s got several distinct sections. It’s got 11 engines blasting on the back. It’s a big ship. But then as you keep watching, that spaceship flies away, and a second spaceship starts to enter the picture. It’s chasing the first one and shooting at it. And suddenly your whole perspective gets redefined. Because just the front tip of that second spaceship is bigger than the whole first ship. It takes 12 seconds for the second spaceship to completely fly into the picture. And it’s at that moment that you realize, “This is going to be a huge movie.” Actually, the best way for you to see what I mean is to just watch the clip real quickly. It only takes about 25 seconds. You start out thinking the first spaceship is big, but then as you keep watching, you realize that’s just the tip of the ice berg. There’s even bigger stuff in store. And that is a great parallel to what’s going on in our text today. Turn in your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 6. We’re looking at Jesus’ teaching on prayer in verses 5-15. And as we study this text, I hope you’ll see that Jesus teaches us truths on two different levels in these verses. He gives us some really big, really important truths about prayer. But those truths just set the stage for some even bigger truths that Jesus teaches us. So read with me, Matthew 6:5-15, and hopefully you’ll see what I mean. Jesus says, *"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.'*

*“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

Now, I don’t know about you, but for me, the big truths that I notice right off the bat are the truths about how to pray. The first thing Jesus says about how to pray is in verses 5-6. He says, “When you pray, don’t be a hypocrite who prays just to be seen by other people. Instead, make sure you direct your prayers to God.” Pray to be heard by God, not to be seen by men. The second thing Jesus says about how to pray is in verses 7-8. He says, “When you pray, don’t babble on forever, as if the sheer volume of words will eventually get God’s attention. Instead, pray believing that God always hears you as soon as you ask… and even more than that, pray believing that God already knows even before you ask.”

Now, like I said, those are big truths about prayer. Those are important truths about prayer. And we could spend a lot of time talking about what prayer is and how to pray and what to say. And we’ll do some of that in a few minutes. But before we do that, we need to keep looking at this text, because I want you to see that those aren’t actually the biggest truths here. Those are just the first spaceship flying by. The second one is way bigger, and it sets the scale by which you measure the first one. Here’s what I mean: when Jesus tells us not to pray to be seen by men and not to babble on like pagans, He doesn’t stop there. In both cases, He goes on to tell us *why* we shouldn’t do that, and in the process He reveals even bigger truths to us. First, in verse 6, Jesus explains why we shouldn’t pray just to be seen by people in public settings. And the reason is because *God*, who is unseen, sees what is done in secret, and *God* is the one who will reward us. Then, in verse 8, Jesus explains why we shouldn’t babble on forever with many words. The reason is because *God* knows what you need even before you ask Him.

And here’s what I want to make sure you see… And maybe it’s obvious to you, but for me, it’s the type of obvious that’s easy to overlook… And that’s this: The biggest truths in this text aren’t nearly as much about prayer as they are about God. Jesus emphasizes that the foundational truths are truths about who God is – that God is unseen, that God sees what’s done in secret, that God is the one who rewards you, and that God knows what you need even before you ask. Those are the primary truths, and then the truths about how to pray are just secondary truths that grow out of the truth of who God is.

Basically, Jesus is saying, “Here’s what you really need to know about prayer: You need to know God, because prayer is all about God. If you know who God is, then you’re going to pray the right way. And when you don’t pray the right way, it’s because you don’t really understand who God is.”

So the big idea that I want you to see today, the main truth that sets the context for everything Jesus teaches about prayer in these verses, is this: Your view of God determines the way you pray. Your view of God determines the way you pray. Or you can say it the other way around: The way you pray reveals your view of God. The way you pray reveals your view of God.

Let me give you a few quick examples. And just so you know, I’ve prayed a lot of these ways in my life, so if any of these sound like you, don’t get offended. I’m right there with you. It’ll be good for us to laugh at ourselves a little bit. Have you ever heard somebody pray something like this, “Jesus, dude, man, you’re just awesome. Aw, Jesus, you’re my best bud. Jesus, you’re just great.”? That person has fully grasped what Jesus said when He said, “I call you friends and not servants.” That person sees God as His friend. And that’s an important thing. Now, there probably needs to be a balance to that, because God is also our holy and righteous judge who deserves our respect. But the point is, the way you pray reveals your view of God. As a second example, have you ever heard someone pray like this, “Oh Almighty Father, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we cometh to Thee this blessed and glorious morn to asketh Thee for Thou favor and forgiveness uponst the ones Thou hast chosen hitherto forewith evermore to bless… Thee Thou Thy.”? Evidently, that person thinks God’s primary love language is Shakespearean English. In all seriousness, that person probably has a very high view of God’s holiness and wants to show reverence and respect to God. And again, that’s an important thing. But again, there’s also a balance to that, because God graciously allows us to come to Him as we are and to be real and authentic with Him. But the point is, the way you pray reveals your view of God. Some other examples: maybe you typically pray like you’re afraid to make a mistake. You’re afraid if you don’t ask in just the right way, God won’t listen. That may be because you tend to think of God as a petty taskmaster who’s just waiting for you to slip up so He can slap your hand with His big wooden spoon. Or maybe the majority of your prayers are just asking God for worldly blessings… to give you money, to make you successful, to make you popular. If that’s true, if the majority of your praying is asking God for stuff, then whether you realize it or not, you probably think of God as a genie in a bottle or as a benevolent grandfather Santa Claus. Or maybe you pray hesitantly because you’re not sure God really wants to bless you. Or maybe you pray doubting, because you’re not really sure God is able to bless you. Or maybe you come into God’s presence boldly and confidently, yet humbly and worshipfully, because you know that Jesus Christ has given you direct access to God and God has graciously invited you to come to Him. And yes, it’s an awesome privilege. And no, you don’t deserve it. But it’s yours nonetheless, because God is so good that He gives it to you. So you’re both bold and humble when you pray, and that reveals your view of God.

The way you pray reveals your view of God, because your view of God determines the way you pray.

And before we move on, I think it’s really important to take this truth one step farther. We need to realize that this truth isn’t just about prayer. This is a universal truth that applies across the board to every area of your life. Your view of God doesn’t just determine the way you pray. Ultimately, your view of God determines everything in your life.

For example, your view of God determines the way you worship. Do you come to worship thinking that you should be entertained or that God should be exalted? Do you come to worship expecting people to perform for you or desiring to express your praise to God? Is the most important part of worship for you to hear the music you like or for you to honor the God you love? Basically, does your approach to worship reveal that you think life is all about you or all about God? Your view of God determines the way you worship. When you truly know God and you recognize Him as the greatest, most valuable, most precious Being that exists, when you encounter His grace and are overwhelmed by Him, then true Christ-centered, God-honoring worship flows out of that. Your view of God determines the way you worship.

Your view of God also determines the way you give. Do you give rigidly and reluctantly, suggesting that you’re not really sure God is worth it? Is your giving a calculated act of administration, because you don’t want to give God a penny more than you have to? Or do you not give at all, because so many other things are more pressing than God and you’re not sure God can be trusted to give you what you need? Or do you give generously and lavishly and joyfully, because you have been so overwhelmed by the greatness of God’s grace that you just can’t help but overflow with worship in every area of your life, and you want your money to serve the great purpose of demonstrating that God is more valuable than anything else in the world? Your view of God determines the way you give.

Your view of God also determines the way you forgive. Probably the greatest example of this is the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. If you remember, Joseph’s brothers sell him into slavery out of spite and jealously, but ultimately God blesses Joseph and makes him the second most powerful person in Egypt. And eventually Joseph’s brothers have to come to Egypt because of a famine, and they learn Joseph is still alive, and they’re going to be at his mercy. And they’re afraid Joseph will take revenge on them, so they beg him to forgive them. And do you remember what Joseph says? It’s one of the greatest statements in the Bible. In Genesis 50:19-20 Joseph tells his brothers, *“Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to… (save) many lives.”* You see, Joseph trusted God so much that He recognized God’s sovereignty and wisdom even in allowing him to be sold into slavery. And Joseph saw that God was so great that God used everything in his life… even the worst things that had been done to him… for good. Joseph’s big view of God’s sovereignty allowed him to forgive his brothers. Joseph’s view of God determined the way he forgave.

So, do you withhold forgiveness, because you feel the need to demand justice? Do you withhold forgiveness, because you feel like somebody’s gotta look out for you, and if nobody else is going to, then you better look out for yourself? Or does your view of God set you free to forgive? Do you realize that God is just, and He will take care of everything in exactly the right way? And do you realize that God is looking out for you, God is taking care of you, and He’ll do a way better job than you will, so you can die to yourself and stop looking out for yourself and freely forgive? God’s justice and God’s goodness set you free to forgive. And then above all, do you realize that God has already forgiven you so much more than you will ever forgive anyone else? In light of God’s forgiveness to you, what can you do but forgive others… or be the greatest hypocrite in the world? God’s forgiveness motivates and inspires and requires your forgiveness. Your view of God determines the way you forgive.

And by the way, that’s really what Jesus is saying in verses 14-15 today. He says, *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* And it’s easy to misunderstand those verses, because it sounds like Jesus may be saying, “You have to earn God’s forgiveness by forgiving other people.” Don’t make that mistake. Don’t forget the way Jesus begins His sermon. He says that it’s spiritually poor, broken, empty, bankrupt, mourning, meek, starving-for-righteousness people who receive God’s blessing. And God’s blessing is that He pours His righteousness into those empty people. And then God’s righteousness flows out of us as mercy and a pure heart and peacemaking and love and forgiveness. You don’t forgive first and then receive God’s grace. You receive God’s grace first, and that makes you a forgiving person.

But how does that fit with verses 14-15 today? It fits when we realize that the way we forgive reveals our view of God. When you forgive, that’s evidence that the grace of God is working in your heart and changing you. It’s precisely because you have seen God and encountered His grace that you become a forgiving person… and if you’ve encountered God’s grace, then yes, God is forgiving you. On the other hand, if you never grow in grace and never grow as a forgiving person, that’s evidence that you haven’t yet encountered God’s grace and been changed by Him. And so it’s true that the person who doesn’t forgive won’t be forgiven by God, because they haven’t encountered God’s grace. But it’s not that your forgiveness earns God’s grace. It’s that your forgiveness shows that you really have encountered God’s grace, and you know God’s grace has already forgiven you... and that’s why you forgive others. Your view of God determines the way you forgive.

What we’re really seeing is that your view of God is the most important thing in your life. Knowing God, having a personal relationship with God, knowing the truth about who God is… that is at the heart of everything else you will ever think or do in life. The way you pray, the way you worship, the way give, the way you forgive, the way you use your time, the way you treat people, the way you treat your spouse, the way you raise your children, the way you treat your parents, what you think about marriage, what you think about abortion, what you think about material possessions, what you think about suffering, what you think about persecution, what you think about life and death and heaven and hell… all of it is determined by your view of God! There is nothing more important in your life than to know the One True God through Jesus Christ His Son. Everything rises and falls on that.

A.W. Tozer says it perfectly when he says, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. For this reason, the (greatest) question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most (important) fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.” Your view of God determines everything else in your life.

And so for just a few minutes, I want us to look back at our text and draw out three truths Jesus teaches us about who God is. The first truth is that God is all-knowing. The official theological term is that God is omniscient. But that’s just a fancy way of saying that God knows everything that is happening, everything that ever has happened, and everything that ever will happen. We see this in both verse 6 and verse 8. In verse 6, Jesus reminds us that God sees what’s done in secret. Secret things aren’t secret from God. He knows them all… good and bad. And then in verse 8, Jesus tells us, *“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”* God already knows what you need, because God knows everything. God is all-knowing.

The second truth about God is that God is sovereign. And what I mean by sovereign is that God is in complete control of everything. God is able to bring about His purposes. No plan of God’s can be thwarted, and nothing happens outside of God’s control. God sovereignly rules and reigns over everything. And the truth of God’s sovereignty is everywhere you look in Scripture. Let me give you four really clear examples. In Isaiah 46, God says, *“I am God, and there is no other. I am God, and there is none like me… My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please… What I have said that will I bring about; what I have planned that will I do.”* Psalm 115:3 says, *“Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.”* In Job 42:2, Job says to God, *“I know that you can do all things. No plan of yours can be thwarted.”* And in Ephesians 1:11 Paul tells us that God *“works out all things in conformity with the purpose of His will.”* God is sovereign.

And Jesus teaches this truth in a very interesting way today. In verse 7, Jesus tells us that when we pray, we shouldn’t babble on like pagans as if we’re going to be heard because of our many words. What He’s really saying is, “Don’t think that long prayers or repetitious prayers or especially eloquent prayers are the key to getting what you want. Is your view of God so small that you think you might be able to manipulate Him with the length of your prayer? You’re not going to manipulate God with the length of your prayer! God is sovereign!” And again, this reminds us, our view of God determines the way we pray.

So… God is all-knowing and God is sovereign. And I know that for a lot of people, the truth that God is both all-knowing and sovereign raises a perplexing question about prayer. If God is both all-knowing and sovereign, then what’s the purpose of prayer? Why pray at all? And you can understand why people ask that. If God already knows everything, then why do I need to tell Him about it or ask Him for it? And if God’s already in complete control, then I don’t need to ask for anything, because He’s got it under control. And would it really make any difference if I did ask, because isn’t He just going to do what He’s going to do anyway?

Now, those are huge questions, and I’m going to give you a fairly brief answer, so it won’t touch on every aspect you’ve ever wondered about. But I hope the brevity may prompt clarity, as well. Two things: #1 Prayer is a privilege that *God* has given *us*. God didn’t create prayer for *His* benefit so that He could find stuff out. God created prayer for *our* benefit, so that we could have a relationship with Him. You’re not praying to tell God something. God already knows it. You’re praying to talk to the God who created you and loves you and bought you at a price. There are a whole lot of things that Christy already knows, but I keep telling her anyway. Things like, “I love you. I’m glad to be married to you. I love spending time with you. You’re my favorite person in the whole world.” Now, Christy already knows those things are true. But that doesn’t keep me from telling her. I tell her, because I love her, and I’m in a relationship with her, and I want to communicate with her. The same is true of prayer. Prayer is a privilege by which we communicate with God and grow in our relationship with God.

On top of that, even though God already knows everything, you don’t. And a lot of times, when you pray, God will help you see things that He knows and you don’t.

The other thing to say about this is that we tend to totally misapply the truth about God’s sovereignty. We think if God is sovereign that means nothing we do matters and nothing makes any difference. That is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, the Bible teaches the exact opposite. The Bible teaches that the only reason that *anything* matters is because of God’s sovereignty. God’s sovereignty is the guarantee that there’s any meaning at all in this universe. Here’s what I mean: The Bible teaches that God created us as creatures who are responsible for our choices. Well, if God’s not sovereign, we don’t know whether or not He was successful in doing that. But if God is sovereign, then we know we really are responsible for our choices, because our sovereign God made us that way, and He always accomplishes whatever He sets out to do. You see, our responsibility is not undermined by God’s sovereignty. Our responsibility is grounded in God’s sovereignty.

Now, let’s apply that to prayer. God’s sovereignty doesn’t mean that our prayers *don’t* matter. God’s sovereignty guarantees that our prayers *do* matter. God has told us that He created things in such a way that prayer does matter, and since God is sovereign, if He says prayer matters, prayer matters.

When God created, He sovereignly chose to create in such a way that He lets us influence Him with our prayers. That’s God’s sovereign choice. So when you pray and God acts in response to your prayer, that doesn’t undermine God’s sovereignty. That confirms God’s sovereignty. Remember, God created prayer, and God chooses to respond to prayer, so when you pray and God responds to that prayer, that means things are happening exactly the way God wants them to happen. In answering your prayers and being influenced by your prayers, God is sovereignly doing exactly what He sovereignly chose to do from the very moment of creation. For whatever reason, it pleases God to answer your prayer. He just enjoys it. It tickles Him. He wants to do it. He chose for it to be that way. So God’s sovereignty gives meaning to your prayer.

Alright, we have to move on. The third truth about who God is: God is good. At the end of verse 6, Jesus tells us that God rewards us when we pray to Him. Our good God gives us good rewards. Also, think about verses 7-8 again. Jesus says, “Don’t babble on like the pagans, as if that’s going to convince God to give you what you want. God already knows what you need.” And make sure you realize what Jesus implies there. The implication is that you don’t have to keep asking over and over, because God will give you what you need. You don’t have to compel God or manipulate God, because God is good. In fact, in the very next chapter, chapter 7, verse 11, Jesus tells us that God *wants* to give good gifts to those who ask Him. He wants to do it, because He is good.

Now, real quickly, let me clarify two things that are often misunderstood here. First, this does not mean that you should never prayer long prayers or that you shouldn’t pray for the same thing maybe for years. We know in the Bible that Jesus prayed all night sometimes. That definitely qualifies as a long prayer. We also know Jesus told a parable in Luke 18 to teach us that we should be persistent in prayer and not give up. And we know from Paul’s letters that he prayed the same things for churches many times. So how’s that different from what Jesus says about the pagans’ prayers? The difference is not so much in what you do, but in the heart behind why you do it. When Jesus says pagans babble on thinking they’ll be heard because of their many words, the idea is that they’re mindlessly repeating stuff. They think they’ve got to wear God down. They think it’s the religious ritual and repetition of saying the right words that gets them what they want… as if prayer is some sort of magic formula. What those prayers really say is that they don’t trust God, and they’re trying to figure out a way to get what they want from a god who can’t be trusted to give it to them willingly. And Jesus says, “That’s a terrible view of God, and therefore, a terrible view of prayer.” The right way to come to God persistently in prayer is to say, “God, the reason I’m coming back to you is because you’re my only hope. I know Who you are, and I know that only you can do this, so it makes sense to ask you. And I’m going to keep on asking, but I also want to declare that I trust you. And I know whatever you do will ultimately be best.” In that case, the reason you keep asking is not because you don’t trust God, but because you do trust Him. So absolutely, pray and pray and pray. Pray persistently as if God is your only hope… because He is. But also make sure the reason you pray persistently is because you trust God, not because you doubt Him.

The other potential misunderstanding that I want to clarify is that Jesus does not say God is going to give you everything you ask for. God is going to give you what is good and what you need. And there are times that could be the exact opposite of what you ask for.

It’s like the little boy who was sent to his room for misbehaving. After a few minutes, he came out and told his mom, "I've been thinking about what I did and I said a prayer."

"That's good," she said, "if you ask God to help you be good, He will."

"Oh, I didn't ask God to help me be good," replied the boy. "I asked Him to help you put up with me."

God doesn’t give you everything you ask for. He gives you what is good and what you need. And here’s the really good news: when you remember that this same God who is good is also all-knowing, that means He *knows* what’s best for you, whereas you’re just guessing. And God giving you what you need will be way better than God giving you what you ask for. And then, on top of that, when you remember that this same God who is both good and all-knowing is also sovereign, you have the great comfort of knowing not just that He *wants* to give you good things, and not just that He *knows* what you need, but that He’s actually *able* to do those things. The omniscience and sovereignty and goodness of God all work together to give us an accurate and glorious and hope-filled view of prayer. Knowing who God is determines the way you pray.

So when you know the truth about God – that God is all-knowing and sovereign and good – when you see God as the great, big, huge God that He really is, it changes how you pray. And as we get ready to close, look at what Jesus says about how we should pray in verses 9-13. These are very familiar verses. We usually call them the Lord’s Prayer or the Model Prayer. Jesus says, *“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.”*

I want you to notice three things very quickly. First, because God is such a big God who is all-knowing and sovereign and good, you can ask Him for what you need. Jesus says, *“Give us today our daily bread.”* Your big God can take care of you, and your good God will meet your needs. So ask God for what you need. But second, notice how small a portion of Jesus’ prayer is focused on those types of needs. One line says, *“Give us today our daily bread.”* One line focuses on physical needs. In the rest of the prayer, Jesus prays for God’s name to be hallowed… in other words, for God’s name to be recognized as holy and exalted as holy. Jesus prays for God’s kingdom to come on earth. Jesus prays for God’s will to be done on earth. Jesus prays that we will be forgiven. Jesus prays that we won’t be led into temptation. And Jesus prays that God will deliver us from evil. All of those are spiritually-focused, kingdom-minded prayer requests. And what this tells us is that Jesus is monumentally more concerned with the kingdom of God and spiritual issues than He is with the kingdom of earth and worldly issues.

And I just want to ask you, “How different is that from the way we usually pray?” How much more time do we usually spend praying for physical, financial, and health-related issues than we do praying for the gospel to advance and people to be saved and Jesus to be exalted and God to be glorified?

God has given us such a great resource in prayer, and so often, we focus it on such small things. And it’s not that you shouldn’t pray for physical, financial, and health-related issues. Jesus does pray, *“Give us today our daily bread.”* But if that’s all you ever pray, or even the majority of what you pray, you’re not praying the way Jesus prayed. God has given us the great power of prayer so that we can pray for the great things of God!

We should be consumed with the things of God and not the things of this world. And the way we pray reveals whether or not that’s true of us.

Finally, notice how Jesus starts His prayer. *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”* The very first thing that Jesus prays, the thing that takes priority over everything else, is that the name of God will be recognized and exalted as holy. When you start to see God for who He is, when you have a big view of God and you see His goodness and His greatness and His sovereignty and His grace, you realize that the most important thing in the whole universe is for God to be glorified as the great and holy God He is. That’s how you know whether or not you have really seen God for Who He is. Is the great priority and passion of your prayer life for God to be exalted as the most valuable, most glorious, most worthy, great God that He is? God is more valuable than anyone or anything that exists.

Do you believe that’s true? Do you pray like that’s true? Do you pray with a zeal and a burden for God’s glory to be on display for all creation to see? Have you seen God for who He is? Because when you do, everything else will pale in comparison to the matchless value of God’s greatness and glory.

So, Church, my prayer is that we will love God so deeply and we will know God so intimately that who God is will determine the way we pray. I pray that the omniscience and sovereignty and goodness and infinite worth of God will cause us to pray passionately and persistently for the spiritual things of God… to pray that God will do His great work in this place… to pray that God will draw people to Jesus and save them… to pray that God will transform us and make us like Jesus… to pray that God will pour out His grace and do what only God can do.

Will you join me in praying for that right now?