As is true for many of the Sunday School lessons, there is a lot of material to cover in this lesson. But the material in these chapters is so important that it would be a shame to focus on only part of it. So I will focus on the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:5–15), but I will also make notes for the rest of both chapters.

Matthew 6

Jesus continues to teach about true righteousness, a righteousness that goes beyond mere obedience. He first discusses three basic acts of piety in first-century Judaism: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (verses 1–18). Then he teaches where we will find our treasure (verses 19–23), and he teaches us that we ought to serve God without taking thought for ourselves (verses 24–34). Is there a connection between these three teachings (piety, treasure, and not taking thought)?

Verses 1–4: In verse 1 the Greek word translated “to be seen” is a word related to the theater. We might loosely translate it “to be a spectacle.” In verse 2 the word translated hypocrites could also be translated actor in other circumstances. Rather than “someone who pretends to be something good that he is not,” the word had more to do with being an interpreter of words and ideas. For most Greek-speaking people, hypocrisy didn’t have the negative meaning that we
associate with it until long after Jesus’s time. However, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible the word *hypocrite* is used to denote someone who profanes or pollutes holy things.¹

What is Matthew emphasizing by using these words to tell us Jesus’s teaching? Why would the charge of hypocrisy—causing pollution—be particularly galling to the Pharisees?

What does Jesus mean when he says that those who give in public “have their reward”? It is easy to condemn those whom Jesus describes in verses 1 and 2, but how difficult is it to live the teachings of verses 3 and 4? In other words, how tempting is it, when we do good, to tell someone, to get our reward from other people’s recognition of our good deed? What about when we do something because “it gives me a good feeling”? Are we doing it for reward, and if we are, what does that say about our deed?

Some may see a conflict between the doctrine taught in these verses and that taught in Matthew 5:13–16. How would you reconcile that seeming conflict?

**Verses 5–15:** In the Greek it is clear that the Savior is making a strong contrast here: They pray that way, but *you* should pray this way. To learn more about the Savior’s teaching here, compare the Lord’s Prayer in the Book of Mormon and in Matthew.

Joseph Smith said, “I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I enquire, what was the question which drew out the answer, or caused Jesus to utter the parable? . . . To ascertain its meaning, we must dig up the root and ascertain what it was that drew the saying out of Jesus.”² In Matthew,
to whom is the Lord speaking and why? What’s the occasion? Ask the same questions about the Nephi version of the sermon. Do the different answers to those questions for the Book of Mormon and the New Testament give the two versions different meanings? What might some of those differences in meaning be? What advantages are there for us to have two almost identical versions of scriptural passages?

Here is a side-by-side comparison of the Matthew prayer and the Nephite prayer, with some notes about language inserted in a smaller typeface. I have followed each section with questions that the comparison raised for me.

3 Nephi 13:5–15

5 And when thou prayest thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray, standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:5–15

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

_hypocrites_: See the earlier discussion of this word.

_reward_: “pay” or “wage”

What kind of prayer is the Savior condemning here? How is it a matter of acting? Of polluting holy things? Of dissembling? Does that condemnation apply to our public prayers, such as those in church? If not, why not?
How is pay a good description of what the hypocrites receive?

The previous verses were about almsgiving. How does this discussion of prayer follow from the previous verses?

To the Nephites, the Savior says “thou shalt not do as the hypocrites.” Matthew’s version says “thou shalt not be.” What does each teach? How is public prayer a reward?

3 Nephi 13:5–15

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret; and thy Father, who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Matthew 6:5–15

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

closet: an inner chamber, a storeroom
secret: hidden, concealed
reward: literally, “give forth”; a strong way to say “give”
openly: “clearly” or “publicly”

Given the problem of doing good for a reward, why does the Lord follow this exemplary prayer with a promise of reward? What question is he addressing? What kind of reward might this refer to?

This verse is parallel in structure to verse 4: the teaching about prayer is like the teaching about almsgiving. Verse 4
tells us that the Father sees in secret. What does that mean? This says the Father is in secret (using the same Greek word). What does that mean?

3 Nephi 13:5–15

Matthew 6:5–15

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

_vain repetitions_: The Greek word means “stammering, babbling”

_heathen_: a foreigner

_heard_: have their requests granted

Who were the heathen? They were not the same as those Jesus called hypocrites. Against what is Jesus warning? Why warn against the prayers not only of the hypocrites but also of the heathen? Could the parallel suggest that those who pray using vain repetitions are like those who do not recognize the God of Israel?

3 Nephi 13:5–15

Matthew 6:5–15

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him.
Compare verses 24–35 and D&C 84:80–84. How are the two parts of this verse related? In other words, what does the connective *for* mean here?

Verse 8 may give us hints for understanding verse 7 better. The word *therefore* suggests that verse 8 is an explanation of verse 7. How does the fact that our Father already knows our needs explain why we should avoid vain repetitions?

**3 Nephi 13:5–15**

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

**Matthew 6:5–15**

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name.

*after this manner*: translates a Greek phrase that literally means only “this”

*hallowed*: holy

What does it mean to pray that the Father’s name be holy? Do we do that? When?

**3 Nephi 13:5–15**

10 Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

**Matthew 6:5–15**

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

*will*: what one wishes to happen.

The Greek of verses 9 and 10 emphasizes the word *thy*. Why?
What does it mean to pray that the Father’s kingdom “come”? Why does the Lord omit “Thy kingdom come” when he gives the Lord’s Prayer in the New World? What is the kingdom of the Father? What does it mean to pray that the Father’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven? Do perhaps the first three petitions of this prayer mean essentially the same thing? If so, why are they repeated? How do we pray for these things in our personal and public prayers?

Matthew 6:5–15

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

daily bread: the meaning of the Greek word here is uncertain, but it is usually taken to mean the bread that is sufficient for a day. Compare the story of manna (see Exodus 16 and John 6:48).

Why does the Lord omit “Give us this day our daily bread” in the New World? To what does this part of the prayer correspond in our own prayers? What might its omission in the 3 Nephi version suggest? Some have suggested that “daily bread” really refers to the bread that will be shared at the Messianic banquet. (See Matthew 8:11.)

To what else might it refer? Is this petition at odds with the teaching we will see in verses 25–34?
3 Nephi 13:5–15
11 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:5–15
12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
\footnote{\textit{forgive}: The Greek word means “send away” or “abandon.”}
\footnote{\textit{debts}: This is a literal translation: “something owed.”}
\footnote{\textit{debtor}: This is another literal translation: “one who owes.”}

How are our sins debts? What does this verse tell us about how our relation with others affects our salvation?

3 Nephi 13:5–15
12 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 13 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Matthew 6:5–15
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
\footnote{\textit{lead}: “to bring into,” “to lead”}
\footnote{\textit{temptation}: The Greek word, from a word meaning “to pierce,” means “going beyond the limits.” Therefore, the word means “to sin.”}
\footnote{\textit{deliver}: a middle-voiced verb (similar to our passive) meaning “to flow” in the active voice.}
Thus it means “draw us away from.”

*evil*: The Greek word means “that which causes pain” or “that which is lacking”; it could mean either “evil” or “the evil one.”

*power*: This could also be translated *virtue*.

Why does the Lord speak of the Father *leading* us into temptation in both versions? What are we to make of that metaphor?

Paraphrased, the final clause says “because the kingdom and the power and the glory belong to thee forever.” Why does this begin with *because*? In other words, what does that clause explain?

3 Nephi 13:5–15

14 For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you; 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 6:5–15

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

*forgive*: “cancel”

*trespass*: literally, “falling aside”; therefore, “false step” or “sin”
These two verses aren’t part of the prayer itself, but a comment on it. Why do you think that the only part of the prayer commented on is the part about asking for forgiveness?

Verse 16–18: In the early books of the Old Testament, fasting is a sign of mourning or repentance, accompanied by wearing sackcloth and ashes. These verses parallel the form used in discussing almsgiving and for the beginning of the discussion of prayer. As in each of the previous cases, the emphasis is on going beyond what was then considered to be the standard of righteousness. What would it mean to go beyond the standard of righteousness for fasting in Jesus’s day? What would it mean in our day?

Do we have community or cultural standards of righteousness? Are we expected to go beyond those? How? Does this mean, for example, that rather than paying a 10 percent tithe, we should pay 12 percent or 15 percent? Or that we should fast all three meals on the first Sunday of the month rather than the two required by the Church? How do we distinguish between good forms of going beyond the requirements of the law and bad forms?

Verse 19–23: Only righteousness—about which Jesus is giving a new teaching—results in anything of lasting value, and what we treasure tells us what we value. How do we recognize righteousness and avoid Pharisaism?

Verse 24–34: Verse 24 provides a transition to a new theme: we cannot serve both God and possessions (mammon).

Verses 25–31 give various examples of what that means: we need not take thought for ourselves and our provisions because God will provide. “Take no thought” might be better
translated “don’t be anxious” or “don’t worry.” How does that change your understanding of these verses and what Jesus commands?

President John Taylor once taught that these verses do not apply to people generally, but to those who serve in the Church through the priesthood. How do these verses apply to them? If that is right, does it follow that the rest of us ought to worry? In what ways? Are there healthy ways of worrying about the things we possess?

How does verse 33 explain verses 24–32?

What does “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” mean? It isn’t a quotation from scripture, but seems to be a proverb of the time.

Matthew 7

The sermon concludes with a series of sayings that are not necessarily related to one another. These may not have originally been part of the Sermon on the Mount itself. Matthew may have known about these teachings from other times and added them as a collection to the end of the sermon.

Verses 1–5: The Greek word translated judge is a very strong word. It means “condemn or cut off.” When are we guilty of the kind of judgment of which Jesus speaks here? Notice the insertion that Joseph Smith makes in these verses. How does that clarify or change their meaning?

Verse 6: What is Jesus teaching here? Whom is he thinking of?
The terms *dogs* and *swine* were among the most derogatory terms of the time. Some have thought that he is prohibiting the disciples from preaching to the Gentiles. What do you think of that explanation?

When would we be giving holy things to the dogs or casting our pearls before swine? How do we avoid doing so?

**Verses 7–11:** The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13 keeps petition to only one line (verse 11), and the version that the Savior gave to the Nephites in 3 Nephi 13:9–13 omits it altogether. What does that say about the form our prayers ought to take?

Here in Matthew 7, however, we see that we are commanded to petition for our needs. Is there a contradiction between the Lord’s Prayer and these verses? Explain what you think.

In these verses, is Jesus emphasizing what the Father gives or what we ask? What difference does your answer to that question make?

If the Father already knows our needs (Matthew 6:8, 32), why should we petition at all?

In verse 11 Jesus calls those to whom he speaks evil. Is he being hyperbolic? Why does he use that term?

**Verse 12:** This is one version of the Golden Rule. How is it related to Leviticus 19:18? Can a person who is not pure in heart use the Golden Rule as an accurate standard of his conduct? What problem might he encounter using it?

**Verses 13–14:** Remember that the word *strait* means “narrow”: the gate leading to destruction is wide and the road to destruction is spacious, but the gate leading to life—eternal
life—is narrow. What does it mean to say that few find the strait gate? Why don’t we find it?

**Verses 15–20:** We can recognize prophets by their fruits. Notice that verse 19 is a word-for-word repetition of John the Baptist’s teaching (Matthew 3:10). Why was this teaching particularly important at Jesus’s time? How is it important to us today? Where do we encounter false prophets?

**Verses 21–23:** To whom is Jesus referring when he speaks of those who say “Lord, Lord” to him? Of those who prophesy in his name? Of those who do miracles in his name? Why would some who did these things be excluded from his presence? How can prophesying in Jesus’s name and working miracles be iniquitous? Do any of the teachings that have come before this in the sermon answer that question?

**Verses 24–27:** What does it mean to hear the sayings of Jesus and to do them? What does it mean to hear them and not do them? How do these verses relate to Deuteronomy 6:4–9? How do they relate to Matthew 7:21–23?

**Verses 28–29:** There have been debates about when Jesus was talking to the crowd and when he was talking to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Verse 28 suggests that whatever the answer to that question, the people gathered at the bottom of the hill were listening, for his teachings amazed them. The Greek word translated *authority* means “authority by commission,” so they heard his teachings as the teachings of God rather than as merely the scriptural interpretations of the scribes. Compare this to Alma 17:3.