

Text: Matthew 6:5-8

Title: How to Pray

Truth: Jesus teaches His followers how to pray.

Date/Location: Sunday May 16, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

We turn first to Luke 11:1 which records a different circumstance, but the Lord Jesus gives the same teaching about prayer. Notice that Jesus modeled prayer. This induces a question by one of the disciples who was concerned about how to pray well to God. Other rabbis taught their disciples to pray. John the Baptist taught his disciples.

The desire to pray and sense that it is a necessity is instinctive in the believer's life. But I think it is not instinctive for a new Christian to know how to have a prayer life other than the idea to cry out to God and ask for help. For corporate prayer settings, perhaps you have the human-level problem of "mic-fright." "What do I say when I pray, I can't speak in public! I am not even sure if I should pray out loud. I have never prayed out loud before."

Far more important is the "spiritual" concern in terms of the connection to God that prayer represents. You might wonder how to pray to God, what to say, how to say it, with what manner do you come to God, what kinds of things are OK to ask, etc.

I. Why Pray?

After receiving basic Christian teaching, a Christian knows that God knows everything and has planned everything. Therefore, you might wonder, "Why should I pray at all? What good can it do to pray if God has everything under control?"

A. Prayer is commanded (1 Thess. 5:17).

B. Prayer is assumed (Matt. 6:7—*when you pray*).

C. Prayer is modeled by Christ (Luke 11:1, 6:12; Mark 1:35).

D. Prayer is exemplified throughout the Bible: all the holy people of God prayed. Here are some examples: **Abraham** in Genesis 20:17, **Isaac** in Gen. 25:21, **Jacob** in Gen. 32:9, **Moses** in Exodus 33:12, **Hannah** in 1 Samuel 1:10 and 2:1, **Samuel** in 1 Sam. 7:5 and 12:23, **David** in 2 Samuel 7:27 and Psalm 4:1, **Solomon** in 2 Chron. 6:19, **Ezra** 10:1, **Nehemiah** 1:4, **Job** 16:17, **Hezekiah** in Isaiah 37:15, **Daniel** 6:10 and 9:1-19, **Jonah** 1:14, 2:1, **Habakkuk** 3:1, the first **church** in Acts 4:31 and 12:12, the **elders** in

Acts 6:4, **Paul** in Acts 9:11, **Cornelius** Acts 10:2, **Peter** Acts 10:9, and certain **women** in Acts 16:13.

E. Prayer makes a difference.

1. Does prayer change God? No, because God is immutable. But it does please God when His people pray to Him.
2. Does prayer change the events in the world? Not from what God has ultimately decided will happen, but yes, from the human perspective with respect to where those events seem to be headed.
3. Does prayer change me personally? Yes, because it expresses dependence on God, helps us move away from self-sufficiency.
4. Does prayer make a difference for other people? It certainly shows care and encourages others.

Prayer is more for *us* than it is for God!

II. How to Pray?

- A. Just start praying! Imperfect prayer, if done toward God in faith, is still good prayer. No one can offer a perfect prayer. God is pleased with prayer offered to Him as opposed to those petitions offered to false gods (Hosea 8:11, 14). He is pleased with your dependence upon Him, for that is truth.
- B. Do *not* only ask God for things. Praise Him; thank Him; confess your sins.
- C. Ask in the name of Christ. See John 14:13, 16:23-24. This was a new thing for the disciples because they had not asked anything in the name of Christ. This is not a formula, not a tack-on, not a magic trick, not an “open sesame” password. Through Christ is the only way that favor flows from God to us. When you ask for something in the name of Christ, you ask by way of everything that Jesus is and has done. I am saying that I believe the request in Jesus’s name is worthy of association with Jesus, and that it would honor Him if it were answered favorably. When you praise or confess or give thanks in His name, you are approaching God in the only way (John 14:6) that He can be approached.
- D. Ask according to God’s will, 1 John 5:14. This has thrown many for a loop because they feel they do not know what God’s will is. And that is true—in one sense. Recall that there are two facets to God’s will.
 1. What *will* occur. This is sometimes called God’s *decreed* will. We might pray that John Doe will regain health after his heart surgery. But we do not know in advance whether that *will* occur or not. Therefore, we

cannot pray in accordance with *that* will of God. Do not worry like, “How do I pray, because I do not know what is going to happen?” Do not worry yourself about praying in agreement with what you do not know and cannot know will occur in the future.

One special case: On some occasions, we can pray in accordance the future for-sure will of God, because we know that some prophecies are going to come to pass. Example: if we pray, “Please stop the Tribulation from coming and the mark of the beast from being given to people,” you already can know that prayer will fail. It will fail because it is against what God has promised *will* occur. That is praying in disagreement with what God has revealed in the Bible. And that brings us to the other sense of God’s will.

2. What God *commands* is also His *will*. It is His *prescribed* will. This is what is in the Bible. Godly principles, what God desires in His people for holiness, etc. These items may not occur in fact, but they should. “Seek first the kingdom of God...” That is what is *supposed* to happen, but it does not always happen. “This is the will of God, your sanctification...” That should happen, but sometimes we fail, and the people we pray for fail in that way. But if you pray in agreement with these principles, with what the Bible teaches, you are praying in accordance with God’s will! That is how you *know* that you are following the Apostle John’s instruction to ask according to God’s will.

E. God’s will is specified in Scripture and also instructs us as to the manner of our prayers—reverently, patiently, boldly (Matt. 6:9, Luke 18:1, Heb. 4:16). It also instructs us that we are to seek, ask, and knock (Matt. 7:7). We can *ask* for things when we do not know what might be best or what the outcome will be. Why ask if you already have the answer? Therefore, while we do not know what *will* happen in the future, we can ask, if we ask in agreement with God’s prescribed will.

F. Let us analyze this prayer: “Don’t let so-and-so die from this disease.” We cannot know what God’s plan is for that person, therefore we cannot say that we are praying God’s decreed will as if we know the future or as if our faith is so strong we have named the outcome that we want and God is bound to do it. We do know that God’s will revealed in the Bible is that everyone dies, save for the rapture. Sooner or later a constant prayer for someone to be kept alive will meet with a negative response from God. But we can ask, “God, would you permit this person to live? By your mercy, would you spare them that they and we may praise You, that they may continue to live and support their family, that human suffering

would be reduced, and that grief would be forestalled at this time? Meanwhile, would you increase the faith and obedience of the person and his family and friends?" This is a prayer in accordance with God's will.

Be assured that God is pleased that we ask Him—instead of some other god, or people, or the government or whatever. We look to GOD for our needs.

Know this: just because your prayers are answered in the negative, this does *not* mean that they were asked outside of the will of God. The prayers may have been "wrong," or they may have been just fine, but God answered in a different way than you had hoped. In any case, what God has chosen is *always* the best way.

III. Introductory Instruction about Prayer, Matthew 6:5-8

The Lord instructs us on some more on "how to pray."

A. No Pride. Just like in 6:1-4 where the Lord told us to do our charitable deeds in a discreet manner, so He tells us to pray. The hypocrites pray to be seen by people. We ought to pray, and we might be seen by people, but we do not pray TO be seen by people. If we pray like the hypocrite, then we have received our reward. In effect, God does not hear such prayer. Not that He does not know what the hypocrites say, but He does nothing with it except perhaps heighten their condemnation because of their blasphemy.

Instead, our prayer should be mainly done in private. That is the point of the room with the shut door. This protects us from our own pride—it takes other people out of the equation so that we cannot impress them.

Yet the requirement to pray privately is not private in the sense that it can never be done in the sight of other people. How do I know this? Luke 11:1. There was no temptation in Jesus for the praise of men. Praying in our church, for example, is not public in the way that the Lord condemns here. We come in here, shut the doors behind us, and pray amongst ourselves. We are not going to impress anyone in here. We are not livestreaming our prayer time to impress those outside! We are not in the synagogues and street corners offering prayer. Whether here or anywhere else, if you have the temptation to puff yourself up before people in prayer, then button your lips in church until you overcome.

Ultimately, you are looking for God's reward, not the temporary meaningless reward of people.

B. No Empty Repetition. The heathen (pagans, idolators) pray repeated prayers over and over again in a rote fashion. It is like Acts 19:34 where the crowd chanted the same thing over and over for two hours. The “Hail Mary” prayer used by many people is claimed to be the oldest Christian and most repeated prayer. It has become for some the de facto replacement of the model prayer in Matthew 6. But saying it repeatedly is meaningless, not to mention that its contents are wrong. Mary is not the Mother of God and she does not pray for us sinners. Jesus Himself intercede for us, and we can pray for ourselves to God directly.

Such repetitive prayers are meaningless because there is no heart behind them. We do not talk to one another that way except perhaps to our pets and our small children, so why would speak to God like that? He is much higher and worthy of far more reverence, creativity, and just plain normalcy. If you were thanking another person or asking them for something, would you ask them in the same manner with repeated words 10 times?

What is condemned here is vain repetitions, not meaningful repetitions. Paul prayed three times in 2 Cor. 12:18 but this was not a violation of Jesus’s command.

C. Not Like the World. The Lord instructions us, “do not be like them,” the repetitious heathen and the proud hypocrites. Prayer is between God and those who are related to Him through faith in Christ, not for show, and not a religious ritual. We are to be unlike the world in more ways than prayer: in priorities, values, activities, etc.

D. No Low View of God. I take this from the Lord’s statement that God already “knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” Jesus still assumes here that you will ask. But why ask?

Praying assumes that (a) God knows what you need; (b) God knows whether you know He knows what you need. If you do know it, and He knows that you know it, then why does God tell you to pray? It is not informing Him of the need!

Example: God knows you need salvation. So why does He not just give it to you? He wants us to be involved by asking!

A child asking for something is an honor to parents—if it is not too repetitious or for something bad. Good parents delight in this sort of thing. Now, mom and dad may not give the thing asked for outright, but they may help the child use normal means to get it, whatever it is. But they receive the asking gladly, and answer it.

Conclusion

God has decided how all things will be since the foundation of the world.

But He has chosen to work through ways and means, not directly via angels or miracles. In praying, you become part of the infinite interconnection of events that God uses to accomplish His purposes.

Why pray? God told us to! But we also pray so that we can be involved in His program. He decreed what would happen, and He prescribes that we pray, and in fact as we obey that, we show what God decreed *includes* that we pray. And then His reward is given to those who have willingly participated in His work on earth—so you can be involved in God’s work *and* be rewarded for faithfulness in the matter of prayer!

Prayer shows dependence upon God, and this honors God. That is what we want to do—glorify God in everything.

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