

Matthew 6:5-8

Praying With Jesus Part 1 (How Not to Pray)

Introduction: Though we often speak of prayer in mystical esoteric ways it is one of the most common practices across the human experience. From sacred to secular, religious to spiritual, nations to people, the battlefield to the hospital room - humans pray. And yet while so common place there is still so much mystery to the whole thing. In a general understanding - prayer is talking or communing with the divine. In Christian understanding and teaching, prayer is talking to God the Father, through the atoning work of Jesus the son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible prayer begins with God. He has first spoken to us through natural revelation (creation). Have you ever had a transcendent moment? Maybe it was piece of music? Maybe seeing half dome in Yosemite or looking out over the vastness of ocean. Maybe from Taylor Mountain looking over the beauty of our city..maybe the birth of your child... Transcendence is that moment where you are caught up in such awe, wonder, and worship, you just want to burst out in gratitude to someone or something. This is God speaking to us of his power and beauty - that created all that we see. Then through his special revelation (his word) his character, his acts in creation, his judgments, his redemption and rescue, his love mercy and grace...again that bring us to awe and wonder to burst out in gratitude..what is mankind that you are mindful of us?? Prayer is a response to God's words to humans.

“Prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him.” - Timothy J. Keller, Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

In the Bible we find many different forms of prayer. Prayers of thanksgiving and praise, prayers of confession and lament, prayers of petition and intercession. But all are the same in that they are directed to God. Now of course prayer is part of the Christian life, it is necessary for the follower of Jesus. Even here Jesus doesn't say, if you pray, but when you pray. He assumes that his people will be a people of prayer. For the follower of

Jesus prayer is not just a practice it is a way of being - a continual conversation and dependence on God.

What Jesus teaches here in our passage is the right understanding of who we're speaking to in prayer and the kind of heart that is present in true prayer.

Remember the context is Jesus' teaching about the true righteousness of his kingdom and his kingdom people. Here Jesus is warning us against doing righteousness in order to be noticed by others, and not doing it for righteousness sake, for the sake of our king and the kingdom.

Jesus gives us two “do not” rules for Prayer:

1. Don't pray for show because the Father sees your heart.

- 1. “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. 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.”**
2. The Jewish people have a rich history of memorization and oration going back centuries. From memorizing the Torah with it's hundreds of Laws, to Israel's national story, to daily prayers, psalms and hymns, etc.
3. Their prayers included:
 1. The Shema Prayer - *Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. Blessed is His name, whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever.*
 2. The Psalms
 3. The Amidah Prayer with it's Eighteen Benedictions: *“God of History; God of Nature; The God who sanctifies; For understanding; Repentance; Forgiveness; Deliverance for affliction; Healing; Deliverance from want; For the reunion of Israel; The righteous reign of God; Against slanderers, informers and traitors; for the righteous; The rebuilding of Jerusalem; The messianic king; The hearing of prayer; The temple service; Thanksgiving for God's mercy and the granting of peace.”*
 4. For religious Jews the common practice was to pray 3 times a day, it still is. (maybe you have muslim friends or co-workers and

you know exactly what this is like) But they would stop wherever they were and would pray these prayers. Well apparently it had become a way to show off your “holiness”, your “righteousness,” the depth of your commitment to Yahweh, depending on how long, how passionate, how loud, or how agonized you were in your prayers. But God sees right through this. This approach to prayer makes God a means to an end, and not an end in himself

1. Maybe you come from a religious culture where prayers like this were common - people sound in pain (when they're not), They use a special praying voice when talking to God. They say his name way too many times for any normal conversation.. Even if people don't mean it to - it comes off showy and people get the impression - this is a super religious, devout individual. Now of course if you don't know any better and this is the way you were taught - the good news is -God knows your heart.
2. And this is Jesus' point - the heart. He says, - Go pray in the inner chamber or literally supply closet (The only room in Jewish culture that had a lock on it) Jesus was obviously using hyperbole to get the point across. His point - God the Father sees you, who you really are. Don't make a show, **just be yourself**; seek God not to be seen by others, for praise or recognition but seek him for himself. That should be the great reward of prayer - being with the Father. Jesus doesn't say what the reward is - it maybe a reference to great reward on the day of Judgment. It seems to me that the reward is his presence - when seeking God for himself, we get him. His attention, his presence, his face.

2. Don't go on and on in your prayers - Your Father already knows.

1. **“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. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”**

1. The pagans believed that they were heard by their gods through much prayer.. going on and on. Seneca the Roman Philosopher said, fatigue the gods..wear yourself out with petitions...It was believed and taught that the gods are reluctant to hear prayers unless the prayers are long.. and only when a petitioner has

proven his sincerity by spending time in confession, praise or even quiet do the gods begin to listen...

2. Orthodox Jewish prayer is impressive and must be recited 3 times a day. Muslim prayers as well, they must be repeated 5 times a day in order to be properly executed.. Buddhist and Hindus depend on principles of repetition of certain words, mantras, sounds and syllables in order to connect with the right deity..
3. Jesus' teaching is an incredible contrast to the other religions of the world. "They think the more they talk the more likely they will be heard. Don't be like them..."
4. Sadly many of us treat Christian prayer no different. We approach God the Father as though Jesus never came and the Gospel never took place.
 1. **The Deistic God Prayer:** informing him of every detail of our lives..because he is obviously not here, present and at work in the world. He is immune to our pain and our problems.
 2. **The angry, wrathful, grumpy old man, God prayer:** A lot of saying sorry, begging him for mercy and to simply hear our cries for help. Knowing all the while he really doesn't like people and regrets he ever made mankind.
 3. **The Insecure God Prayer:** Who needs us to butter him up by saying nice things about him, bringing him nice gifts of stuff he likes -while wallowing in depression, misery, and despair. and the list goes on.
 4. But this is not the God of the Bible. This is not the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know that the Father himself loves you, not because of any good you have done but just because he loves you? He loves you as you are and not as you should be? Unfortunately many of us not only have bad theology but also bad Anthropology. When we think of humanity we often think of sin, evil, selfishness (Which are all true). But the Bible shows us another view, a more prevalent one - humanity is greatly valued and greatly loved by God. So much so that God came himself to remove the barrier of our sin, evil and selfishness that barred us from him. And there on the cross Jesus bore our judgment and removed the barrier that separated us from the Father. He took our place, and we get his place. He was cursed so we could be blessed. He was put out, so we could be brought in. He was rejected,"My God,

My God why have you forsaken me? - so we will always be heard.

1. Don't be like the pagans...Your Father Already knows..

2. **Example: 1 Kings 18:20-29**

1. Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it." And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention....And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God." Elijah's simplicity is refreshing, and powerful. He simply prayed, God answered.

5. Jesus tells us here - **Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.**

1. Before we talk about - If that's the case - why pray at all? Let these words sink in - Your Father already knows... he sees you, he hears you, he knows YOU. He does not need to be informed about your situation. He already knows. Listen to David, **"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it...How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand."** -Psalm 139:1-6; 17&18

1. What an incredible comfort this should be to us.
6. Yes, But if he knows, already - why pray at all? Fredrick Bruner says, *"In personal relationships it is precisely the people who know us best, who sometimes know our needs better than we do, that we can talk most freely, so much more with our Father in heaven. Since he already knows - all the more freedom to come and talk about it."* (How true this is)
5. Because of Jesus - we already have the Father's ear, his attention, his unending love, his help, his power...therefore when we go to him we don't need to use many words we can just speak honestly to our Father about what is troubling us - where we hurt, and where we are afraid...where we lack, where we need.
6. In C.S Lewis' book - *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer* says, *"It is no use to ask God with factitious earnestness for A when our whole mind is in reality filled with the desire for B. We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us."*
7. Martin Luther says, The early church fathers have said correctly that many long prayers are not the way. They recommend short, fervent prayers, where one sighs toward heaven with a word or two, as is often quite possible in the midst of reading, writing or

doing some other task...He summarizes - *Prayer for the Christian should be brief, frequent and intense.*

1. What's my point? - Pray what is in you. It doesn't need to be done a certain way, you don't need fancy words. Pray what is in you. Is it anger? Is it a need? Pray it out. he already sees, and knows. Talk with your Father about it. Is it anguish; is it fear? Pray it out. Again, he sees, he already knows. Pray whatever you have.. Go to your Father and talk with him.
2. As you follow Jesus' simple instruction may prayer become a way of being for you- a continual conversation and dependence on the God who loves you, knows you and knows what you need even before you ask.