

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: How to Pray

Text: Matthew 6:5-8

POINT 1 - DON'T BE LIKE THE HYPOCRITES (VS. 5A). I know we talked some about this last week, but let me review and add a few things. First, defined the word hypocrite is according to Strong's Concordance, "*an actor under an assumed character.*" Mounce's Expository Dictionary also defines it as "*implying arrogance and hardness of heart, utterly devoid of sincerity and genuineness.*" The word hypocrite is used 13 times in Matthew and refers to the prideful, religious leaders who acted as if they were righteous. And in Matthew 23 alone, 7 times Jesus pronounced woes on the Pharisees and each time called them hypocrites.

POINT 2 - WHAT DEFINED THE HYPOCRITES (VS. 5B)? Their hypocrisy wasn't prayer, but the motive behind it. They loved (*phileo, to be a friend, fond of*) to stand and pray (standing was the proper posture), in the most public places. The synagogue was the most likely place for public prayer to be offered, it was where they worshipped the most. The street corners were also an appropriate place, because devout Jews would stop at whatever time, wherever they were at, for appointed prayer. However, many would time it where they would be at a major intersection so they could have the most public audience. It wasn't wrong to pray at major intersections, but doing so for the purpose of being seen and heard was hypocritical. I think hypocrisy can be summed up in Proverbs 4:23 "*Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.*" Proverbs 23:7 "*For as he thinks within himself, so he is.*" But we can direct our heart to holy things as is the command in Proverbs 23:19 "*Listen, my son, and be wise, And direct your heart in the way.*" Even our worship is derived from a true heart to God. Fake worship or emotion driven worship are signs of a misdirected heart, as is hypocrisy.

The most egregious action was their desire to be seen by men. Pride begins in the heart, and too desire to be seen by men of how righteous you are is a prideful sin. In the most familiar passage of pride is found in Luke 18:11 "*The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.*" Public prayers aren't unbiblical. But to do so to be heard and seen is.

Jesus often prayed in the presence of His disciples, Luke 11:1 "*It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.*" Matthew 14:19 "*Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food.*" And in Acts 4:24a "*And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord.*" We pray publicly in our worship service. We have public prayers, but we shouldn't pray to be heard and seen as one who is "in touch with God" or appears as such. I remember years ago some men when asked to pray in public would pray in the Kings English. I'm not suggesting they were hypocrites but we must watch the pride that can creep into our lives.

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Jesus also said they have their reward. As in the case of giving hypocritically, their reward is the praise of men. In giving it was they were to be honored by men, in praying it was the appearance of super godliness they desired.

POINT 3 - THE TRUE AUDIENCE IS GOD. A basic definition of prayer is “*communion with God.*” And it is God who has provided this provision, to talk to him. Is Jesus telling us not to pray in public? No, we have seen that’s not the case. Why the closet? Why secret? The term “room” or “inner room” was a place where valuables were stored. The primary point isn’t with location but with attitude. That attitude not to be seen by men. We pray publicly here at church, but if there’s a real need in your life now, a family issue, a health issue, you don’t come down here or out in the parking to pray about that, you do so privately. Yes, you ask others to pray. But the point being is that inner room, that alone time is about attitude not visibility.

Application: Much of our prayer life should be in secret. Jesus often went to pray alone. In the garden Jesus told His disciples, “*Sit here, while I go over there and pray.*” If necessary, go to the most private, secret place to pray. You won’t be distracted or bothered. John A Broadus when commenting on this passage said “*If people over hear our private prayers, it should not be by our own intention.*” In other words, we shouldn’t pray loudly on purpose to be heard by others.

What God sees in secret doesn’t mean He isn’t in the public prayer. The overall point is our communion with God isn’t affected by our pride and what other men see. We are communing with the Father. God being the only audience to our prayers, our reward isn’t from men, but from God. The most personal, secret, heart felt suffering, troubles and trials are to be brought to God. Often we don’t share these with others, but we bring them to God. We are assured He will reward us, although we aren’t told how in the text, but He will hear.

Application: We are warned not to be hypocritical in our giving, our prayers. We are told how to pray, secretly, with a heart towards communing with God.

POINT 4 - THE WRONG CONTENT, VAIN REPETITION. What is the first point Jesus makes about how the prideful heathen pray. They use meaningless, vain repetitive words. The phrase “vain repetition” comes from one word in the Greek *battologéō* and its definition is “*to stammer, to repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words, to babble.*” Don’t be confused by assuming that praying for the same things everyday is vain repetition. I do, I pray for specific, certain, daily things. I have for many years. Every single day!

The issue of vain repetition doesn’t necessarily mean they weren’t true followers of Christ either. It was a matter of attitude and heart. They had picked up this practice from the Gentiles, it is also translated “heathen” in the AV. The Gentile pagans believed the longer the prayer the better. It was quantity not quality. It was to be full of many words. Some may have been impressed by the length

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of their prayer, and that's exactly what the pagans sought. So do not model your prayer after those who seek to be long winded, full of babbling words.

It was the pagans that sought their god to answer them with many words and actions in 1 Kings 18:29 "Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, "O Baal, answer us." But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made."

Many Buddhist spin wheels containing written prayers, believing that each turn of the wheel send that prayer to their god. Roman Catholics light prayer candles in the belief that their requests will continue to ascend to God as long as the candle is lit. Certain charismatic groups use repeated phrases and words over and over again until speaking unintelligible confusion.

Paul sought the Lord three times to remove the thorn on his flesh.

Point 5 - God Knows! God does not need to be awakened or aroused to hear you. I want to close by affirming that God knows our very need, our struggle, and our heart even before we pray. This does not mean we shouldn't pray, as some have suggested, because clearly the scripture says we should pray. So He knows our heart and our desire and attitude, and His answer isn't dependent on how long or how we pray. But we are to pray. It gives us comfort. It gives us peace knowing that God isn't moved by length, style, loudness or method.

Application: so pray and pray and pray, seeking the Lord. It's communion with God which He designed.