

# When You Pray - Focus

Prayer is one of the simplest things that a person can do yet it can be one of the most impactful things in a person's life.

Christians tend to have certain "rules" for praying.

- Eyes must be closed
- You should be sitting, kneeling, standing, pacing, face down on the floor....
- Start with Father, end with in Jesus name
- Must quote a scripture
- Ask for God to grant it ONLY if it's His will

All of those things CAN be good. They all sort of have their place but not if they distract from the simplicity of prayer. The reason lots of people don't actually pray is because they don't know how.

People don't know how because we have taken a simple thing and complicated it. It's simple, talk to God and listen to God. It's just as simple as having a conversation with your friend.

Next week and beyond I'm going to break down the Lord's Prayer. It's good to have some instruction on prayer, some guidelines, but ultimately, we just need to pray. It's the most important thing we can do.

Jesus expects us to pray. Look at what He says leading up to the Lord's Prayer:

## **Matthew 6:5-8 (NKJV)**

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

And When You Pray.....Jesus expects his followers to pray. He didn't say IF you pray but WHEN you pray. Prayer is essential to living a Christian life. Prayer is your connection to heaven. Jesus prayed all the time and if Jesus needed to pray, we REALLY need to pray!

*"Prayer also is taken for granted. No man can be in the kingdom of heaven who does not pray." ~ Charles Spurgeon*

So Jesus expects us to pray but then He also expects us to pray in a way that is effective. Yes, some prayer is not effective. That prayer is prayer that has ungodly or selfish motives.

**Matthew 6:5 (NKJV)**

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

He says when you pray, do not pray like the hypocrites! This is the Greek word hypocrites (who-pock-re-tays), it is a theatre term describing a character who wore a mask.

A mask makes you look like something you are not. That's the problem with these men that prayed in the synagogues and street corners. They did it to be seen. They wanted to be seen as religious people but it was a mask.

Their motive was to be seen not heard. I've heard people say that prayer is never a waste of time but I disagree. If our motive for prayer is anything but to connect with God, it's a waste of time.

If you are putting on a mask and playing the part, I've got a secret to tell you.....God knows what's behind the mask. He knows the actor's true identity and character. People can be fooled by the subtlest masks or costumes. I mean look at Superman....no one can tell that is Clark Kent....all he did was take his glasses off and put on tights and a cape! God knows who you are Superman!

But those who pray to be seen, making it LOOK like they are a man or woman of prayer.....Jesus says they already have their reward!

*"While man's faith in God will manifest itself in a man's relationship to men, a man's faith in God is a matter between himself and God alone. When one's religion is used to impress men, God disavows it as providing any basis for His approval. Multitudes assemble themselves in churches, not out of a heart of love and devotion to God, nor because they recognize a sense of obligation to come together with God's people around His Word to fellowship with the Father. They gather together to maintain an image, a reputation before men. They go through empty forms of worship, devoid of any reality. They are there to impress men, and the Lord said they will get what they want. They will have their reward, but not from God." ~ Dwight Pentecost (Lessons in Holiness from the Sermon on the Mount)*

Are you wearing the mask of religion? Is your motive to be seen? For most of you, praying in public isn't your thing but it's not limited to prayer, do you come to church to be seen by men or to connect with Jesus?

If it's to be seen you have your full reward! A reward is pay that is due for labor performed. You may be putting the work in of getting here Sunday morning. But if it's so this person or that person saw you at church with your mask on, you have your payment. They see you here, they see you are "holy" but that's all you get.

Don't we want our reward from prayer to be a Holy and Mighty God responding to us? Take off the mask! Jesus already knows who's behind it!

**Matthew 6:6 (NKJV)**

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

There's that "When You Pray" again..... when you pray....get alone with God. Do whatever you have to do to make it a personal connection. Don't include Him in a group text or a 3 way phone call with a buddy, focus on Jesus.

Charles Spurgeon told a story of a time when He was praying and a man came to see him. The man was a very important man and Spurgeon's maid came to tell him this man wanted to see him. He reminded her that it was his rule to see no one at that time. She tells the man and he says "Tell Mr. Spurgeon that a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ desires to see him immediately.". The maid returns to Spurgeon and delivers the message, and His response was this: "Tell him I am busy with his Master, and cannot see servants now."

See Spurgeon's motive for prayer was connecting with the Master. How many would invite the visitor in and tell them "well you caught me in the middle of prayer, I've been at it for 30 minutes." We hope they see the bible and highlighter sitting out, the prayer journal, the devotional book....don't we look holy? .....reward from men.

What if our prayers were so focused on Jesus, that we turned away every distraction that came our way.....even if it presented itself as "Important". What kind of impact would that have on your life?

**2 Chronicles 16:9a (NKJV)**

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

God is scanning the earth....looking for those whose heart is loyal to Him. He's looking for those who put Him first, who seek His attention and affection over the attention and affection of man!

It says God will show Himself STRONG on their behalf! Who doesn't want that?! Have you ever thought "I am weak" or "I can't do this"? God will be strong on your behalf....as your representative. He will stand before your situation in His strength, if your heart is loyal to Him, if you are focused on Him.

Going back to Matthew, if you go into that secret place and pray, your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.....

So the "payment" for genuine prayer is that God will respond. We often think of God rewarding us openly as in front of everyone. God will show everyone how much I pray by giving me X for all to see His blessing and favor on my life....NO

Openly in this context means at a proper time or place. God will reward your prayer by responding at the appropriate time and place. It can still be in a way that no one else knows.

Why would God reward your prayer by showing everyone else how much you pray.....that gives YOU glory instead of Him!

Now God can reward however He wants, and it may be publicly, but it can be openly and still be in secret....it will be at the right time and the right place.

The next time you are upset and wondering "why isn't God answering my prayer?" remember that He will respond openly....the proper time and place.

I do want to clearly state that I'm not against public or group prayer.

Public prayer is very important....we see scriptures that encourage it...

**Matthew 18:19-20 (NKJV)**

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

**Luke 9:28 (NKJV)**

Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray.

**Acts 12:5 (NKJV)**

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

In Acts, we see them praying together in the Upper Room waiting on the Holy Spirit to come. Afterwards we see them going house to house daily for food, fellowship and prayer. Public or group prayer is good!

Jesus says not to pray in public for the attention of men then He says to go in private and secretly pray.

The principle here is that a true genuine heart in prayer starts by praying in private. It starts with praying to God, one on one, you speaking how you are comfortable, in your language, your style, make your connection.

So often we see people who don't want to pray in groups. Why? Sometimes it's fear of man. They don't want to sound stupid, say something wrong.....but more often it's because they don't know how to pray. They don't pray in private.

This is when you find people comparing themselves to others. Not praying in private can even be the reason they have that fear of man. If you pray regularly, you know how you and God speak to each other. Then why would you care how you pray compared to someone else?

Private prayer comes before public prayer. It's MORE important. It is where we are changed, shaped and molded by God. It's where Jesus ministers directly to us.

If you pray in private, you should be confident praying in public.

Prayer is talking to Jesus. It's not complicated. But if I don't talk to someone in private, it makes it more difficult to talk to them in public. Sure I can piggyback off someone else's conversation, I can jump in and repeat what they say and talk to the person like they do, but it's not real genuine conversation.....it's probably behind a mask.....

How often is this done in prayer? Man of God, Woman of God.....pray in private.....focus on Jesus....connect with Him personally.....this develops a confidence in talking to God and if you can talk to Him in private, you can focus on Him and talk to Him in public!

**Matthew 6:7 (NKJV)**

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

This verse is very often twisted to mean something it doesn't. It does NOT mean that you can't repeat a prayer as in only ask once and then drop it. It doesn't even mean that you can't repeat something within the same prayer. You can! It's OK!

**Matthew 7:7-8 (NKJV)**

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

This verse implies that you should keep asking, seeking, knocking....not just do it once....

When Jesus says don't use vain repetitions, this means “Don't babble”. Don't spout off some meaningless words and don't be excessive and wordy or go on and on and on.

Kind of sounds like what someone would do if they didn't know how to pray....that's why He said “as the heathens do” they don't have relationship, they don't pray in private.

This also applies to repeating prayers without meaning them. This is leading into the Lord's Prayer but do you know that the Lord's Prayer is meaningless if the one speaking it doesn't believe it? This would be vain repetition....repeating a prayer that has not value or significance to you.

Don't pray for attention from men. Don't babble or repeat something that you don't even believe.

**Matthew 6:8 (NKJV)**

“Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

Why pray if He already know our needs?...

Because prayer is the God-appointed way to have these needs met. Prayer prepares us for the proper use of the answer. If we know our need, and if we voice it to God, trusting Him for His provision, then we will make better use of the answer than if God forced it on us without our asking.

Church, we need to pray! Amen? I'm talking about YOU...in private, YOU need to pray! I fear some in this room have been in church for years and don't know Jesus on a personal level. If prayer is awkward to you, you need to do it even more! You need to get to know Jesus more.

As you pray there are a couple questions that you need to ask yourself:

- Who am I we praying to?

The answer here needs to be Jesus otherwise I don't know why you'd waste your time. Get in private, talk to your Creator and Redeemer!

- Why am I praying?

Are they just shopping lists? Do we view God and prayer as some great cosmic vending machine? You put in the right amount of prayer you say the right words and then you get what you are looking for. You lose your job, the kids get sick, your teen rebels so you pray? Or maybe you don't have enough faith to view prayer as a vending machine instead it view it as a slot machine. You put in the right amount of prayer you say the right words and then you pull the lever and hope that you will get what you are looking for.

Or are you building a relationship with your Savior. Do you want to know Him more? It's just conversation, but it can be powerful, life changing conversation....

Through the bible we see people talking to God. Sometimes those conversations are filled with praise. Sometimes they are filled with frustration and confusion. Sometimes we hear people make requests of God and sometimes we hear people thanking God. But regardless of the content of the conversation they are conversations.

Prayer is not about the time of day, the length, even the circumstances. It's about the heart of the pray-er. Beginning next week we'll be diving into the Lord's Prayer one section at a time, but it's not about repeating this prayer. Jesus didn't say "pray this" said "pray LIKE this"

Over the next several weeks I want to challenge you to pray, just simply talk to God like you would a friend or parent, or spouse. Jesus is God, yet He is a man, He'll understand you. He also knows English....

Today as we close in worship, I want to encourage you, if you have a prayer need, YOU come forward and voice it to God. Let the Holy Spirit work on your heart today, it's His power anyway, it doesn't matter whose voice makes the request....