

Life in the Kingdom: When You Pray

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Intro:

Coming into Part 3, which is most of chapter 6: practicing piety - devotion - putting into practice all that Jesus has just taught:

- when you give (vs 1) (our relationship towards others)
- when you pray (vs 5) pray like this (vs 9-13) (our relationship with God)
- when you fast (vs 16) (our inner state of being)

Each section has a caution / warning, an encouragement/ command and a promise.

Putting into action what Jesus has just taught. Love is a verb.

Following Jesus with one's life vs Believing in Jesus with your head.

"The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist... Whatever one hears he must hasten to put into practice what he has heard."

Gregory the Great c540-604AD (slight paraphrase)

When You Pray

Matthew 6:5-8 (NLT)

5 "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. 6 **But when you pray**, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

7 "When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!

"Practicing Prayer"

When you pray... Jesus is making a big assumption here!

Caution - Encouragement - Promise

Caution: "To Be Seen"

vs 5 "don't be like the hypocrites... publicly on the street corners... to be seen"

Don't show off! Whether it's with your charity, prayer or fasting.

Don't make a show of it. It's not a performance. This is not to get bonus marks.

Context:

Every ancient and modern culture has its prayers.

eg. "oh God, oh God, oh God"

Prayer is throughout the Scriptures:

- Idyllic form: God communing with Adam and Eve in the Garden.
- Psalms contain many forms of prayer. The author communicating with God.

Can be spontaneous and recited.

Hebrew people: recited prayers as a routine form of piety at prescribed hours.

- They Prayed the Psalms.

- They prayed fixed hour prayers / customary prayers:

- Before going to bed (vespers or compline)

- When they got up (morning prayers)

- At the time of the afternoon sacrifice (mid-day prayers)

Amidah: *“Bless us, our Father, one and all, with the light of Your face. For by the light of Your face you have given us, Lord our God, a Torah of life and love of kindness, charity, blessing, mercy, life and peace. May it please You to bless Your people Israel at all times and in every hour with Your peace.” (Deut 6, 11, Numbers 15)*

Wherever they were at each of those prayer times they stopped to pray.

“The hypocrites” Jesus is talking about would ensure that at those fixed times of prayer they would be in a place where they could be seen. They planned to be conspicuous.

Praying in order to be seen by others - the motive is what Jesus is zeroing in on - not the form or the framework.

They pray with one eye watching to see who’s noticing.

Jesus is saying, give your full attention to prayer. Your 100% is warranted here.

Eg. - Have you ever been in a situation in which you could think of nothing else - perhaps a concert or an event of some kind. It’s kind of like that - once you get to the end you realize you haven’t thought about anything else the whole time! Like?

Song: “Our attention, our devotion...”

Attention is the most basic form of Love.

Encouragement: Check your Motive

vs 6 - *But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.”*

Jesus isn’t against praying in public - he did it all the time.

He’s using hyperbole to make a point - possibly even comical.

The word for “room” can be translated as pantry or closet.

Jesus is shining a light on our motives. He’s interested in the heart.

>> *What’s behind the words that we utter in prayer?*

- >> *What's behind the silences we embrace when in prayer?*
- >> *What's in our hearts as we approach God - our loving parent.*

“Prayer must be *an act of affection; it is more than a question of using the lips, for God asks for the allegiance of our hearts. If the heart is not in in, if it is only a form which is carried out more or less correctly, what is it then?” Karl Barth (in Following)*

Caution: “Babbling On and On”

vs 7 *“don't babble on and on” / “don't pile up a jumbled heap of words” NTE*

Jesus is commenting on the kind of prayer in the non-Jewish world at the time. Writings and inscriptions give us a clue to the prayers offered to gods and goddesses.

- Long, complicated magic words repeated over and over anxiously hoping to appease some diety, or persuade them to be favourable to the one praying.
- Striving to impress with their long complicated rhetoric.

Eg. If we talked *to people the way we talk to God.*

“nonstop prattling in the presence of God” McKnight p172

Jesus is saying this doesn't impress God.

Eccles. 5:2 *“Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.”*

Prayer:

- Lowest form: shouting into a void - hoping that someone out there may be listening.
- Highest form: *“prayer merges into love, as the presence of God becomes so real that we pass beyond words and into a sense of his reality, generosity, delight and grace.” Wright p 58*

Most of us live somewhere in between these two.

Do we sometimes think God isn't listening? is aloof?

That we will need to repeat over and over in order to get his attention?

That we need to come up with the right formula? Pray this way...

Song and dance not necessary!

You may find that words / forms are helpful - a framework or a starting place.

PS. Jesus is about to give the disciples a framework he recommends - an on-ramp.

“Some Christians *think that their fervour, their sincerity, or their technique may gain them God's ear. Some think, “If I rise early in the morning and pray on my knees, in the*

*cold, without coffee, then God will hear me.” But such prayer performances may not be seeking God at all. They may be seeking God’s benefits or may even be trying to manipulate him. Instead of pleading for mercy, they attempt to force God to be merciful. Persistent prayer is certainly good, but God does not answer prayer because our persistence impresses him. **He answers prayer because** he loves us. True prayer seeks to commune with God, not to extract benefits from him... True prayer rests in God’s generosity, not in our efforts to earn rewards. True prayer waits on God’s wisdom, rather than assuming that we can accurately assess our needs. True prayer trusts God and finds its confidence in him.” Daniel M. Doriani (in following p 170)*

Promise: God Knows

vs 8 “...your Father knows exactly what you need...”

Father: pater (pat ayr) Πατήρ

“one who imparts life and is committed to it, begetter, originator, progenitor – one in “intimate connection and relationship”

If he knows, then why doesn’t he do something?!

“The problem in prayer is that God is not too busy for us, but that we feel too busy for him. God does not remove himself from us; we remove ourselves from him.” Daniel M. Doriani (in following p 170)

When life is heavy and hard to take, go off by yourself. Enter the silence. Bow in prayer. Don’t ask questions: wait for hope to appear.” **Lamentations 3:28-30** (MSG)

Your Father knows...

You don’t need to convince God of anything. You don’t need to instruct God. God knows what you need better than you.

Now - Go and Do. Put it into practice.

Not to be Seen.

Not babbling on and on.

Pay attention

Check your motives

God Knows

Breath Prayer