
MOTIVES IN PRAYING

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Questions:

- 1) What did devout men and women of God consistently have in common?
- 2) Is it wrong to pray while standing?
- 3) What does it mean when someone "comes out of the closet"?
- 4) What is a "headache" prayer?
- 5) How long was the Publican's prayer in Lk 18?
- 6) What are rosary beads used for in prayer?
- 7) Before anyone can help an alcoholic, what is the first thing that must happen?
- 8) In order for a doctor to help us, what must we do?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 6:5-8

⁵ "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.

Jesus continues to describe the righteousness which:

- Exceeds the scribes and Pharisees
- Is necessary to enter and remain in the kingdom (Mt 5:20)

He has dealt with moral issues in Mt 5 and beginning with Mt 6 He addresses religious issues (giving, praying, fasting). He is discussing the motives behind our religious practices:

FIRST: He discusses the motives we should NOT have ("to be seen of men")

SECOND: He discusses the motives we SHOULD have ("to be seen of God")

A WARNING

Although we are to have an "*exceeding righteousness*," Jesus warns us not to flaunt that righteousness around:

Matthew 6:1 (ASV)

¹ Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Jesus then proceeds to give three specific examples to illustrate His point:

- Don't parade your **giving**
- Don't parade your **praying**
- Don't parade your **fasting**

In this study we investigate the teachings of Jesus regarding prayer.

In vv9-15 Jesus is going to teach the people how to pray, but first He begins telling them how they should NOT pray.

TEXT (1)

Matthew 6:5

⁵ "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.

"When you pray" – not "if" you pray

The word "*when*" implies:

- Christians can pray anytime they want
- But they will pray

Jesus expects us to be a praying people.

Devout men of God consistently had one thing in common: They were a praying people!

Job	Solomon	Nehemiah
Abraham	Elijah	Daniel
Jacob	Elisha	Jesus
Moses	Hezekiah	Stephen
Joshua	Jonah	Peter
Samson	Josiah	Cornelius
Jephthah	Jeremiah	Paul
Samuel	Isaiah	Barnabas
Hannah	Ezekiel	Silas
David	Ezra	

On and on the list could go! The Scriptures make special mention that these people prayed. Over and over we see in the Scriptures that God's people were praying people!

HYPOCRITES DON'T LOVE PRAYER

Here's the difference between devout men of God and hypocrites:

- **Devout men** of God loved prayer
- **BUT hypocrites** do not

ARGUMENT: Wait a minute! Jesus said they love to pray!

REPLY: No, He said they love to pray "*to be seen of men.*" If there were no men around to watch them and to praise them, they would not bother praying.

(A man who loves prayer will pray whether anyone sees them or not. But these hypocrites pray only when someone watches. They love the praise of men, but they do not love prayer!)

This borders upon idolatry. The true God is not praised and worshipped, but rather the hypocrite sets himself up to be praised and honored.

STANDING

Q: Was it wrong for these men to stand while praying?

ILL: One man believed what Jesus was condemning was the posture of standing while praying.

This man entirely missed Jesus' point. It wasn't the standing itself that was wrong, but rather the motive behind the standing.

Several people in the Bible prayed while standing and were approved by God:

Nehemiah 9:4

⁴ [The leaders of Israel] **stood** on the stairs of the Levites and cried out with a loud voice to the Lord their God.

1 Chronicles 23:30

³⁰ [The Levites were] to **stand** every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at evening;

Luke 18

¹ Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,

¹³ And the tax collector, **standing** afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

Mark 11:25

²⁵ "And **whenever you stand praying**, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

In the Bible holy men of God prayed:

- standing
- lifting their hands
- sitting
- lying down
- kneeling
- lifting up their eyes
- bowing
- placing their heads between their knees
- pounding their chests
- facing a temple

Jesus is not at all concerned about the posture we have when praying, but rather He's concerned about our motive for praying!

- If we **kneel on a street corner** to be seen of men, we are wrong!
- If we **kneel in a synagogue** to be seen of men, we are wrong!

In Jesus' day there were some who went out of their way to draw attention to themselves. They wanted to be looked up to as being devout and holy. They enjoyed the admiration of men.

Q: What then is the purpose of these prayers?

A: Well, these hypocrites prayed to be seen of men. Because that was the purpose of their prayer, it was also the result.

(If they had sought God's praise they would have received it, but because they did not they voided any praise that might have come from Him!)

"they have their reward" (ἀπέχω) – an accounting term: *"to receive payment in full"*

They can expect no reward, or praise on Judgment Day.

PUBLIC PRAYER

Jesus is not forbidding prayer when someone else is watching. He is not condemning public prayer. Sometimes public prayer is necessary:

Acts 27:35

³⁵ And when [Paul] had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat.

1 Corinthians 14:15-16

¹⁵ What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. ...

¹⁶ Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?

Jesus was not restricting the place of prayer. In the Bible men prayed:

- in a temple
- by the sea
- on a housetop
- in a tent
- in the street
- in a fish
- during battle
- in a furnace
- in a prison
- in a cave
- in Hades
- in solitude
- in a garden
- in bed
- in the desert
- on a mountain
- in a house
- on a cross
- by a river

1 Timothy 2:8

⁸ I desire therefore that the men **pray everywhere**, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

If Jesus was not concerned about the place, or posture of prayer, then what was He trying to teach? He was teaching a principle that applies:

- In a synagogue (worship service)
- AND on the street (everyday live outside the worship assembly)

Jesus is teaching us never to pray for the purpose of "*being seen of men.*" My prayers are just between me and God – whether I'm in a worship assembly (synagogue), or my daily course of life (on the street).

- **Worship service** – I'm not praying with one eye opened to make sure someone sees me!
- **Daily life** – I'll not advertise to everyone around me that I am praying:

ILL: Restaurant; big gathering. Better to say a private prayer than to attract the attention of everyone.

THE OTHER EXTREME

While we are not to pray to be seen of men, we must also avoid the other extreme of not praying just because someone is watching.

Jesus taught us that we should:

Matthew 5:16

¹⁶ Let [our] light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Often we are tempted to hide our light. We are embarrassed for someone to see us praying.

ILL: The "*headache*" prayer at school.

To hide our light is just as hypocritical as praying for the purpose of receiving praise from men.

ILL: Daniel was tempted to hide his religion and to pray in secret. The king of Persia had just signed a decree making it illegal to pray to the God in heaven!

How did Daniel respond to this law? This would have been a good time to have prayed in a closet.

Daniel 6:10

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

For Daniel to have prayed in secret at this time and act as though he did not believe in God would have been hypocritical.

There is a delicate balance which we must maintain. We must avoid hypocrisy:

- On the one hand we must **avoid praying to be seen**
- AND on the other hand we must **not refuse to pray because we might be seen**

TEXT (2)

Matthew 6:6

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.

"go into your room [closet]" – What does Jesus mean by "*go into your room*"?

ILL: Of certain sinful and perverted men we say: "*They are coming out of the closet.*"

What do we mean by that? We mean:

- They are no longer secretive about their sin.
- They are flaunting their sin.

To "*enter into a closet*" is just the opposite.

- Jesus does not want us to **flaunt** our praying.
- He does not want us to **pride ourselves** in our praying.
- He does not want us to **seek the praise of men** when we pray.

Notice the emphasis on humility and solitude:

- "go into your room"
- "shut your door"
- "pray to your Father in secret"

EVERY PRAYER MUST BE IN SECRET

Every prayer we pray must be in a closet! When we pray in a synagogue (worship service) or on the street (daily life), we must enter in an "*inner chamber*" or closet.

Q: How can we enter a closet during worship services?

- We take our minds off those around us
- We concentrate on speaking to God

In our daily lives it is sometimes good for us to literally go off to a secluded place where we can be alone. BUT, it is possible to be in a closet right in the middle of a crowd.

ILL: When a man is deep in thought, unconscious of his surroundings, we say, "*He is in his own little world.*" Well ... perhaps he is in his own little closet.

To pray we don't have to:

- Draw attention to ourselves
- Have hands folded
- Have eyes closed
- Have our hands and arms raised

ILL: Roy Lee Criswell praying for food, eyes closed, driving a car on steep mountain road. Zella about had a heart attack.

Jesus is saying whether it's public or private prayer, we must get in our *"own little world"* with God. We must forget about men and focus on God.

"YOUR FATHER"

"Your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly"

Jesus assures us that if we pray in secret God will hear us. That's impressive!

Most of us in our lifetime will never be able to speak with the President of the United States in person. If anyone of us does:

- It will be **only once**
- It will be a **brief** conversation
- It will be **in a large group** of people
- It will **not be remembered** on his part

Yet we are assured in prayer:

- We can speak directly with God the Father
- In private
- Whenever we want
- For as long as we want!

- He will answer our prayers
- And He will give us a reward.

Furthermore, our Father is "*in secret*." He will keep our confessions and requests confidential! We need not worry that something might "*leak out*" to others.

ILL: Sometimes even close friends betray our confidence and tell secrets they are not suppose to.

With God we do not have that problem.

- He is our Father – and fathers don't betray their sons
- He is in secret
- He no longer reveals anything, let alone our private prayers!

Q: But how can we be sure all this is true? Who is this instructing us? Could He be mistaken?

A: This is the very Son of God Himself and we may be assured that He made no mistake about His own Father.

TEXT (3)

Matthew 6:7

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.

Sometimes the hypocrite will pray long and repetitious to receive praise from men:

Mark 12:40

⁴⁰ ... for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

But Jesus in v. 7 is not speaking of someone who is hypocritical. He switches:

- From the insincere worshipper to a misled worshipper.
- From the insincere hypocrite wanting the praise of men to the misguided man thinking verbosity is the key to successful praying.
- From the Jews to the Gentiles.

WHAT JESUS DID NOT FORBID

We must be very careful to distinguish what Jesus is forbidding here.

FIRST: Jesus did not forbid us to repeat a prayer.

Jesus Himself repeated the same prayer three times:

Matthew 26:39-44

³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Repetition itself is not condemned, but rather the multitude of words without thought ... vain repetitions.

SECOND: He did not forbid long prayers.

Jesus Himself often spent entire nights praying to God.

THIRD: He did not forbid us from praying frequently!

WHAT JESUS DID FORBID

Q: If Jesus was not forbidding repetition, long prayers, or frequent praying, then what was He forbidding?

A: He is forbidding men from thinking:

- That **the number of prayers**
- **The length** of our prayers
- And **the time** spent in praying

Makes our prayers efficacious and worthy!

God is not deaf, nor ignorant. He is not reluctant to listen to us.

ILL: First time I was assigned the "*main prayer*" I worried to death it wouldn't be long enough.

How many prayers have been ruined with this sort of thinking? God watches the heart, not the clock.

I wonder how often brethren:

- Drag prayers on and on to show off their spirituality?
- Use flowery words and a ton of religious jargon to impress everyone?
- Preach a sermon to everyone while praying (even quoting references).

Such people are not apparently in closets!

LONG PRAYERS

Sometimes long prayers are appropriate, but the virtue of a prayer does not lie in its length. The most famous prayers in the Bible were short and to the point:

- The model prayer is 66 words long.
- When Peter was sinking in the water, he did not drag on and on with flowery words – he shouted, "*Lord save me*" – just 3 words.
- With 7 words the publican was justified: "*God, be merciful to me a sinner.*"
- With 9 words the thief received forgiveness: "*Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.*"
- When Jesus died He prayed only 8 words: "*Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.*"

Long prayers:

- Are distracting
- Make everyone tired
- Encourage "vain repetitions"

ILL: One brother at a Thanksgiving Meeting led a prayer that lasted more than 45 minutes ... longer than the preaching!

(It's hard to believe there wasn't some "vain repetitions" in a prayer like that!)

Jesus said this kind of babbling is heathenish!

Once Elijah the prophet challenged the heathen prophets of Baal to a contest:

1 Kings 18:26-28

²⁶ So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal **from morning even till noon, saying, "O Baal, hear us!"** But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.

²⁷ And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened."

²⁸ So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

Acts 19:34

³⁴ But when [the Ephesians] found out that [Alexander] was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

The Catholic Church gets its practice of the rosary from this heathen practice of vain repetitions.

The "Rosary"

When a Catholic confesses his sins the priest will assign a certain number of "*Our Fathers*" and "*Hail Marys*" which must be repeated to atone for his sins. He keeps track of how many times he's said his "*Hail Marys*" by moving a bead on the rosary.

THE REASONING OF THE HEATHEN

Why do these heathens babble on and on?

"They think that they will be heard for their many words."

What kind of God is chiefly concerned with the volume of words we say, or the amount of time spent saying it? Not our God!

- Our God wants a prayer that comes from the heart, not just the mouth.
- He wants a prayer directed exclusively toward Him; He does not want to share it with men.

TEXT (4)

Matthew 6:8

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

Q: Why can't we use vain repetitions like heathens who pray to their gods?

A: Because we don't believe in a god like they have.

(1) False gods are ignorant – the heathen feel they must inform their gods about their needs. Our God is not ignorant – He does not need to be informed about anything.

- "Your Father sees in secret."
- "He knows what you have need of."
- He knows BEFORE you ask

Prayer is not for the purpose of informing God. If He had to be informed about our needs He couldn't help even if He was told.

(2) False gods are reluctant – the heathen feel they must use "*vain repetitions*" to persuade their gods to supply their needs. Our God is not reluctant – we need not feel as though we must persuade Him.

WHY PRAY?

What is prayer for then? Why pray if God already knows our needs and He already wants to help?

(1) God wants us to confess to Him that we recognize and feel our needs.

ILL: Before helping an alcoholic he must confess his need.

We are **able** to help
We are **willing** to help
BUT ... we cannot help until he confesses his need.

In prayer we confess our needs:

Jeremiah 10:23

²³ O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself;
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.

Jeremiah admits and confesses that man has a need that no one on earth can meet.

(2) God wants us to acknowledge that only He can supply our needs.

ILL: A doctor cannot help if the patient takes everyone's advice and medicine! We must be loyal to that one doctor.

For God to help, we must be loyal to Him only and follow only His remedy!

Acts 17:28

²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'

God wants us to recognize that He is the only source of help. This is what prayer is about – confessing our dependence upon God.

(3) God wants us to submit to His will in fulfilling our needs.

ILL: A doctor cannot help a patient who will not submit to the prescribed medical treatment.

In prayer we are not to dictate to God:

- what to do

- when to do it
- how to do it

John 5:30

³⁰ I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

I'm thankful that God didn't answer some of the prayers I've prayed in the past.

God's position as a Father does not obligate Him to shower down blessings on self-indulgent children who refuse to "*deny themselves*" and follow His will.

James 4:2-3

² ... you do not have because you do not ask.

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.

(4) God wants and desires our fellowship and love.

This is the most natural desire between a Father and His son. Jesus' constant use of "*your Father*" elevates the Master/servant relationship to a "*Father/son*" relationship.

(5) We are reminded of the value of spiritual things and the inferior value of physical things.

It would be difficult indeed to fret and worry about physical things in the presence of Him who said:

Matthew 6:20

²⁰ ... lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

(6) We are reminded of our faults and the need to repent.

Who can pray without asking forgiveness? And who can ask forgiveness without repenting?

(7) We are reminded of our faults and the need to forgive others.

Who can pray without asking forgiveness? And who can ask forgiveness while holding a grudge against someone?

(8) We are reminded that He is God and we are creatures!

Who can pray to the eternal Father without remembering His greatness, His majesty, and His holiness? And who can remember His sovereignty and forget that we are but dust and ashes?

Genesis 18:27

²⁷ Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

CONCLUSION

What may we say, then, about prayer?

(1) Prayer is not:

- a time to impress people
- to inform God (He already knows)
- to persuade God (He already wants to)
- to dictate to God about what, when, or how to do something

(2) Prayer is:

- a time when we tune out everyone else and focus only on God (we get in our own "little world" with God)
- a time to confess that we recognize our needs
- a time to acknowledge that only God can supply our needs
- a time to submit our case to God and let Him handle our needs when and how He sees fit

That is what prayer is all about!