

Series Series: DIFFERENT/ Sermon on the Mount

Sermon title: Praying In Secret

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:5-15

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Americans love football; American football that is. There's an interesting tradition that I am not sure if it is happening anymore due to liberalism in schools, but this tradition is praying, '*The Lord's Prayer*' before you take the field before a football game.

The coaches and players would usually kneel or as we say, '*take a knee*' and recite '*The Lord's Prayer*' before going out to try to crush each other.

It usually goes like this....(rapidly & meaninglessly)
"Our Father, in heaven...hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. Amen."

And then it is perhaps followed up after the 'Amen' with the coach yelling, 'Let's go kill somebody'....and he may even use some curse words'.

What does Jesus think about this kind of praying?

Many words. Empty phrases. Not from the heart.

How should we pray then?

Let's ask God to help us.

I. The General Principle

Remember, we mentioned last week that the main thing that Jesus is teaching in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, is that our religious practices should be from the heart and not to impress people.

The General Principle is in verse 1....

Matthew 6:1-4

1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

This sums up what Jesus wants to say and he gives 3 examples to illustrate how we can do this; giving, prayer and fasting.

We looked at giving last week and we saw that giving to the needy is to be done in secret to ensure that our hearts are right before God.

Today, we take a look at prayer.

How then should we pray and how should we NOT pray?

So, the General Principle is not to do religious practices to be seen by others.

II. A Specific Example

5 "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. **6** 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. **7** "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. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

First, let's take a look at how **NOT** to pray.

1. Don't pray like the Hypocrites. (Jewish Pharisees)
2. Don't pray like the Heathen. (Nations)

5 "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.

What is this **prayer of the hypocrite**?

The hypocrite is a religious person. They pray and know how to pray. But Jesus says they are acting. They want to look religious to others.

Jesus warns religious people to beware of praying certain kinds of prayers to be seen by others.

What might this look like?

It may be our stance or posture. Maybe we like to stand so people see us or raise our hands in the air or fall on our knees so that people will see us and think we are wonderfully pious.

Maybe it's in our words, our eloquence. We want to sound wise and mature to show off.

Maybe when we tell people that we were up early praying to God....we are praying like the hypocrites.

Jesus says that any...any kind of praying that is to impress others is hypocritical....it's just acting and God won't honor that kind of praying.

Praying to impress other people.

What about the **heathen prayer**?

This is praying like the religions of the world pray.

This is the mantra prayer.

7 "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. **8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

'Empty phrases' here means....'babbling'.

This is the prayer not to impress others but to impress God by saying the same things over and over again or by saying a lot.

This is the prayer that doesn't understand the nature of God.

God doesn't need information and God cannot be manipulated by repetitive mantras.

This is alive and well all over the world.

Muslims repeat the same prayers multiple times.
Hindus and Buddhists '*babble*' mantras over and over again and the more you do it...the better chance the god will answer.

Some Roman Catholics recite the Rosary Prayer over and over again.

This type of praying misunderstands God.

Jesus says, '[Do not be like them.](#)'

Why does he say this and how does this type of praying misunderstand God?

He tells us in verse 8.

8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

He sees in secret and he already knows what we need.

Think about this a moment.

'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.'

This is foundational for understanding how we SHOULD pray.

Prayer is talking to your *heavenly* Father.

Would any of us talk to our *earthly* father by trying to impress them by standing in the living room or on the street corner?

Would any of us talk to our *earthly* father by repeating mantras to him?

Jesus is teaching us how we can come to God. And he is a Father who knows what we need before we ask him.

Prayer isn't impressing other people.
Prayer isn't impressing God.
And prayer isn't giving God information.

Private Prayer is a child simply talking to their Father in private about what they need.

6 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.

Question: If God sees everything and if God already knows what we need and if God has already promised in the Bible that he will take care of all our needs (**Philippians 4:19**).....why pray?

If our heavenly Father, “knows what you need before you ask him”, then why does he says later in the Sermon on the Mount in **chapter 7:7-11**....

“Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds, and the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Why pray?

Reason 1. Prayer changes us.

John Calvin says it correctly I believe in his section on ‘*Why Pray?*’..in the *Institutes of Christian Religion*...

“But someone will say, does He not know without a monitor both what our difficulties are and what is meet [suitable] for our interest, so that it seems in some measure superfluous [unnecessary] to solicit Him by our prayers, as if He were winking, or even sleeping, until aroused by the sound of our voice? Those who argue thus attend not to the end for which the Lord taught us to pray. It was not so much for His sake as for ours.”

As **R.C. Sproul** illustrates...Just as a father may already know what is going on with a child and doesn't need the information, nevertheless he asks the child to climb up into his arms and say, "Tell daddy about it."

We cast all of our cares upon him because he cares for us...and when we cast it all on him...it does us much good.

Reason 2. Prayer changes things.

God has chosen to work through the means of his children praying, even though he already knows what the needs are and is in complete control of the universe.

So, in summary....

Jesus teaches us not to pray to impress others and not to pray to impress God. We are simply to go to our heavenly Father in secret like a child talking to their father and ask him for what we need.

APPLICATION

What can we take away from this passage by way of application ?

Well, as we saw last week....Jesus says 3x in this passage...verse 5... "[WHEN you pray](#)", verse 6.."[When you pray](#)", and verse 7..."[When you pray](#)."

1. How are you doing in your private prayers?

Do you have a time where you spend time with your heavenly Father in private...communing with him?

Some of you may struggle with talking to your heavenly Father. It may be because the whole concept of a caring father is strange to you because your earthly father wasn't very kind or maybe he was distant and didn't ever want to listen to you.

God the Father...your Father in heaven isn't like your earthly father. You can go to him and he will always welcome you and listen to you.

2. When you pray, are you trying to impress man or impress God?

Private Prayer is a child simply talking to their Father in private about what they need.

Are there any ways you need to learn to pray more like Jesus tells us to pray? Ask the Lord Jesus to show you your own heart in the matter of prayer.

3. As I mentioned last week, this privilege of calling God your 'Father' is only available to those who have believed in Jesus Christ.

There is a God in heaven. He is the creator and sustainer of everyone and every thing.

He made us and he loves us.

But our sin separates us from our loving Creator.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in him, should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sin and he rose from the dead and is alive and it is through him that we become not just creations of God but children of God.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

"To all who [did] receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor the will of man but of God" **John 1:12-13**