

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 16, 2020 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



How to Pray
Matthew 6:5-15

READ: Matthew 6:5-15

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. ⁹ In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. ¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. ¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. – Matthew 6:5-15 (NKJV)

M. Scott Boren has written an excellent little book entitled, "Difference Makers: An Action Guide for Jesus Followers." I want to listen to this statement from M. Scott Boren, "There are so many problems in our fallen world that it's easy to feel as if one person's efforts can't do much to fix them. But God calls every believer to help solve the world's problems, and one ordinary person's life can actually make an extraordinary impact on the world. You can make the world a better place through your life, and you don't have to be in worldly positions of influence (such as Hollywood or Wall Street) to do so."

But how? That is the question. How do we truly make a difference?

Boren goes on to tell us how, when he says, “When you rely on God to help you impact the world, His power will start to work through you in your neighborhood, workplace, and everywhere else you go – impacting the world around you significantly.”

“Before you can impact the life of another for Christ, you must have been impacted by Christ in a personal and life-changing way” You can’t be a world changer if your world hasn’t been changed by Him to start with. Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” actually teaches us how we may impact our world and the lives of those around us for Christ. We have been adding these important keys to impacting your world from Jesus’s sermon. Let’s review where we’ve been and add another one in our study as we proceed through Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.” We are now up to 9 important keys to impacting your world...

9 Important Keys to Impacting Your World: (From the Sermon on the Mount)

1. To impact your world for Christ you must **KNOW CHRIST PERSONALLY** = *Matthew 5:1-12, “The Beatitudes”*
2. To impact your world for Christ you must **REFLECT CHRIST** to the **WORLD** (others) = *Matthew 5:13-16, “Salt and Light”*
3. To impact your world for Christ you must **LEARN** to **LIVE** by the **WORD** of God daily = *Matthew 5:17-21, “Fulfilling and Living by the Word”*
4. To impact your world for Christ you must **RIGHTLY RELATE** to **OTHERS** = *Matthew 5:22ff*
5. To impact your world for Christ you must **GUARD YOUR HEART** = *Matthew 5:27-30*
6. To impact your world for Christ you must **BUILD STRONG CHRIST- CENTERED MARRIAGES AND HOMES** = *Matthew 5:31-32*
7. To impact your world for Christ you must **LIVE A LIFE OF INTEGRITY** = *Matthew 5:33-48*
8. To impact your world for Christ you must **PRACTICE RADICAL GENEROSITY** = *Matthew 6:1-4*
9. To impact your world for Christ you must **BECOME A MAN OR WOMAN OF DEEP AND FERVENT PRAYER** = *Matthew 6:5:15*

Oh, folks one of the most powerful and impactful tool in the arsenal of a Christian is prayer. It is also, perhaps, one of the most underutilized and undiscovered tools. I believe prayer is one of the most underused and underestimated tools that we, as Christians have. Our prayer are often flimsy, and meager utterances of nothing more than self-petition for our petty needs and wants. Little fervent and impassioned prayer happens from the vast majority of those who profess Christ, and that is precisely the reason for our little impact and change in our world today. Here is what some of the greats who have gone before said about prayer:

QUOTES ABOUT PRAYER:

- Billy Sunday said, “If you are a stranger to prayer, you are a stranger to the greatest source of power known to human beings.”
- E.M. Bounds said, “God shapes the world by prayer. Prayers are deathless. They outlive the lives of those who uttered them.”

- Andrew Murray said, “Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do. Expect unexpected things above all we ask or think”
 - Edwin Harvey said, “A day without prayer is a day without blessing, and a life without prayer is a life without power.”
 - Martin Luther said, “To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”
 - Oswald Chambers said, “We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties.”
 - D.L. Moody said, “Every great movement of God can be traced to a kneeling figure.”
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Dr. Gary Linton says, “The average Christian spends less than ten minutes each day in prayer.” Why don’t we spend more time in prayer? Most of us believe in prayer, at least in theory. Then why is it that we find it so hard to actually pray? Jesus said in Luke 18:1, “*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*”

We are exhorted in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to “pray without ceasing” and we are actually told in 1 Samuel 12:23 that “*prayerlessness is sin.*” So, why then don’t we pray?

The disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). And in our passage Jesus give us the “model prayer,” actually teaching us how to pray. Yet when Jesus was in His great hour of need they could not pray. He said, “*What, could ye not watch (pray) with me one hour*” in Matthew 26:40? So given all of that why don’t we pray?

Why don’t we pray as we should?

Let me give these to you as we get started in talking about prayer... these are 10 reasons that perhaps we don’t pray as we should or ought, maybe reasons why our prayer lives aren’t what they ought to be or why we shrink away from prayer fail to make this most important spiritual discipline in the life of a Christian such a dynamic part of our life as a believer.

10 Reasons Christian’s Don’t Pray

(1.) **We don’t believe** – Hebrews 11:6 says “*He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.*” We must really believe “He is” or we will never come to Him in prayer. If we don’t come to Him in prayer we inevitably don’t really believe. We don’t believe God will hear or answer our prayers. We either don’t believe He is able to answer our prayer, our request is too big for Him, He can’t handle it, He’s too far removed (transcendent), or He doesn’t really care enough to intervene on our behalf. Paul wrote, “*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed*” (Romans 10:14)? We are unable or unmotivated to call on Him because of our unbelief. Think about it, if we knew that if we asked Him for something right now He would grant it, would we not go to Him in prayer? Of course, any of us would. Let me encourage you, nothing is too hard or difficult for Him (Ephesians 3:20, Genesis 18:14, Job 42:2, Jeremiah 32:17 and 32:27, Luke 1:37, Matthew 19:26). God does care and desires to meet our every need (1 Peter 5:7,

Philippians 4:19). We must correct our thinking and then we will be free to seek Him in prayer (Proverbs 23:7a).

- (2.) **Our flesh is weak** – Mark 14:38 says it, *"The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."* Our flesh is opposed to anything spiritual and will fight us all the way. Paul said, *"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are in contrary to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please"* (Galatians 5:17). If you want to see how weak your flesh is try praying for an entire hour (Mark 14:37).
- (3.) **We lack spiritual discipline** - We may be saved, sanctified and Spirit-Filled, but without discipline we will never spend quality time with God in prayer. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 37:4-5 (I love this verse), *"Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass."* Notice the verses says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord, commit your way to the Lord."* Many have the desire to pray but never get around to it. We may delight in the Lord and desire to spend time with Him but it takes commitment and discipline if we are to follow through on our desire and spend time with Him in prayer. No one will ever spends regular quality time in prayer without commitment and discipline. We must have a resolve that nothing will get in our way of spending time with God. It will help to set apart a specific time for daily prayer. Once we get use to it, it will become easier and easier. It is important that we don't give up if we happen to fall short and miss a day. If you miss one day just take up where you left off the next day and keep pressing on.
- (4.) **We've left our first love** - Jesus said to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:4, *"I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent."* We no longer have that enjoyment of God's presence we once had. We have left our first love and must return. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 34:8, *"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him."* Like many couples, we start off loving spending time with each other and as time goes on we let the fire die out and spend less and less time with each other. At the beginning of the relationship nothing could keep us apart. It's the same with our relationship with God.
- (5.) **We don't want God to interfere with our life** - Hudson Taylor said, *"Whenever we truly get alone with God, He'll deal with our lives."* When we get alone with God in prayer, we put our self in a place for God to work and mess in our life. Like the rich young ruler He begins to put His finger on things in our life (Matthew 19:16-22). Not to spend regular time in prayer shows an unwillingness for God to work and have His way in our life. Let's expose our self to Him in prayer allowing Him to do what He desires in us. We will be the better for it.
- (6.) **There's sin in our life** - John Bunyon said, *"Prayer will make a man cease from sin as sin will entice a man to cease from prayer."* Think about it, when we have had failure in any area, we are less likely to spend quality time with God. This is usually on our part, not God's. We feel guilty and unworthy and unmotivated to approach Him. This is why we must keep ourself in right standing and immediately make things right with Him when we have failed (1 John 1:5-9). Actually, when we have had some type of failure, the first thing we should do is boldly run into His presence. The Bible says in Hebrews 4:16, *"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."* Notice, we are to approach the throne of grace with boldness in order to obtain mercy and find grace to help. Mercy is not giving us what we deserve, whereas grace is giving us that which we do not deserve. To obtain mercy denotes we have messed up in someway and

therefore we are in need of mercy. When we have failed, let's boldly run to Him instead of running away from Him.

- (7.) **We are lazy** - Prayer is often laborious. The Apostle Paul said of his fellow believer, Epaphras, in **Colossians 4:12** that he was, *"always labouring fervently for you in prayers."* Prayer takes effort and work if we are praying as we ought. Paul requested of the Romans in **Romans 15:30**, *"I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."* We must strive in prayer to God. Therefore, our lack of prayer is often the result of laziness. We are exhorted, *"not slothful (lazy or sluggish) in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"* (**Romans 12:11**). *"That ye be not slothful (lazy or sluggish), but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (**Hebrews 6:12**). Prayer demands thought, concentration, effort, resolve and persistence. Let's discipline ourselves to seek the face of God. Let's stir up ourselves to lay hold of God, labouring fervently in prayers".
- (8.) **We don't make prayer a priority** - We don't have time to pray or more accurately, we don't make time to pray. Other things take priority over prayer. This is proof of idolatry (**1 John 5:21**). According to Jesus, a little later in our passage, in **Matthew 6:33**, we are to *"seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."* Even those in full time ministry let things sneak in to rob us from spending quality time with God in prayer – sermon preparation, visitation, church administration, counseling, etc. These things are often spiritual in nature, but nonetheless distractions. Nothing should take priority over time with the Lord. **Martin Luther** said, *"I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer."* And **R.A. Torrey** said it ever so clearly, *"We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little. Many services, but few conversions; much machinery, but few results."*
- (9.) **We've become discouraged** - Jesus said in **Luke 18:1**, *"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint."* We can often become fainthearted when we don't see the results to our prayers right away. We get discouraged and give up. Jesus goes on to teach us a parable in **Luke 18:4-5**, of a widow who goes to an unjust judge seeking help. The judge seems to ignore and refuse to listen to her. She is undaunted by his refusal and relentlessly continues going to him with her request until he says, *"Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me."* Jesus went on to say in verses 6-8, *"Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"* Jesus is challenging us in this parable not to ever give up. Though the answer to our prayer delays and does not come immediately, we are to continue seeking God until we see the results we are seeking. This persistence in prayer is the type of faith God is looking for in His people.
- (10.) **We lack the spirit of prayer** - Paul wrote in **Romans 8:15**, *"You have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry out, Abba, Father."* And in **Galatians 4:6**, *"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father.'"* When we are adopted into the family of God through the new birth, God's Spirit begins to reside in us and is constantly crying out from within us to the Father in prayer. If we do not have a sense of the Holy Spirit crying out to God from within us we may not have received His Spirit through the new birth. If we have been born again and aren't stirred by the Spirit of prayer, perhaps we need a fresh

charge of this Spirit of Prayer or we need to be filled anew with the Holy Ghost. Let's ask God to fill us afresh and anew with the Holy Ghost and cause His fire to burn within us. When we are filled with the Holy Ghost, we will find the Spirit of God crying out from within us in prayer and praise. Disciplining ourselves in our time in God's Word and prayer will help to rekindle this in our life (Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16). I have noticed, the more time I spend in prayer, the more I sense the Holy Spirit crying out from within me to God.

So here is how Jesus says to pray... notice His words in verses 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."*

How should believers practice prayer?

In Matthew 6:5-8, Christ continues to correct the wrong manner in which the Pharisees and scribes did their acts of righteousness... here, in prayer. After addressing the abuse of giving (v. 2-4), he focuses on the abuse of prayer. Though at times done incorrectly, the Jews were known for prayer. William Barclay said, "No nation ever had a higher ideal of prayer than the Jews had; and no religion ever ranked prayer higher in the scale of priorities than the Jews did. 'Great is prayer,' said the Rabbis, 'greater than all good works.' One of the loveliest things that was ever said about family worship is the Rabbinic saying: 'He who prays within his house surrounds it with a wall that is stronger than iron.' The only regret of the Rabbis was that it was not possible to pray all day long."¹ In addition, Jews had formal prayers for every aspect of life. Barclay adds, "There was prayer before and after each meal; there were prayers in connection with the light, the fire and the lightning, on seeing the new moon, on comets, rain or tempest, at the sight of the sea, lakes or rivers, on receiving good news, on using new furniture, on entering or leaving a city. Everything had its prayer. Clearly, there is something infinitely lovely here. It was the intention that every happening in life should be brought into the presence of God."²

They also had regular times of prayer. Devout Jews would pray three times a day—9 am, 12 pm, and 3 pm. When the Babylonian public officials wanted to find a way to accuse Daniel, they knew he was vulnerable in his prayer life (Daniel 6:10, cf. Ps 55:17). Even though Jews were known for prayer, there was much confusion and misconceptions about prayer. In Matthew 6:5, Christ describes people who "love to pray" however were praying incorrectly.

¹ Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 220). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

² Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (Third Ed., p. 223). Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.

It is possible for us to love to pray as well and yet be wrong in how we do it. Christ rebukes the common practices of the religious leaders and instructs his disciples on proper praying. In Matthew 6:9-13, he continues to teach on prayer, as he gives a pattern of prayer, often called the Lord's Prayer.

As was true with the Jews, many people today are confused about their prayer life and struggle with it. Even the disciples approached Christ, later in his ministry, about teaching them how to pray in Luke 11. After watching Christ pray, praying with him, and hearing him teach on it, they still struggled with it. And this is true for many of us.

In Matthew 6:5-15, Christ begins to teach his disciples how to correctly pray, and therefore, we'll learn principles about properly practicing prayer.

Big Question: In Matthew 6:5-15, what principles can we learn about practicing prayer?

BELIEVERS MUST PRAY AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Notice Jesus' words again in verses 5-6, 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.

Did notice Jesus' words in the first part of verse 5 and verse 6... "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites... But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.

As with giving, Christ doesn't say, "if you pray" but "*when you pray.*" Christ expects believers to practice the regular discipline of prayer.

Application Question: What are some aspects of a regular, disciplined prayer life?

5 Aspects of a Regular and Disciplined Prayer Life to Remember: (Matthew 5:5-15)

- 1. Prayer take times** - Like with any discipline, we must take time to do it. If we are going to pray effectively, we must set aside periods of time to partake in it. As mentioned, devout Jews would pray morning, noon, and afternoon. Yes, we are called to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). However, without set times of intimate prayer with God, our spontaneous prayers throughout the day won't be as rich and fluid. Having focused times of prayer will enhance our spontaneous praying throughout the day. We should select times to focus on prayer and guard them.

What works for you? What are some things you have found helpful in your own person prayer life? *devotionals, praying Scripture, journaling your prayers, having certain things you pray for on specified days, write out your prayer life daily, prayer cards, etc.

A great time to do this—apart from distractions—is in the morning. In the Psalms, the writers often talk about seeking the Lord in the morning. Consider the following verses:

- Psalm 119:147 says, "*I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in your word.*" **Why do you think 'in the morning' is so important and key?**

What did he do in his praying specifically? Do you notice an allusion to praying Scripture here? What does that look like?

- Psalm 5:3 says, *"My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up."* Again the reference to 'in the morning'... *what was the Psalmist pledge about morning praying here? Again, why is this so important and key? What did you think he means by the phrase 'I will look up'?*

Similarly, Christ often got up early in the morning, while it was still dark, and went to pray (Mk 1:35). The morning is a great time for us to focus on prayer as well. *It is harder to be distracted when nobody else is up and the daily grind hasn't begun.*

Another interesting thought to consider is that we often don't pray because we feel like we don't have time. However, prayer maximizes our time. We've already mentioned Martin Luther's words on this. Remember, he said, *"I have so much to do that I shall have to spend the first three hours in prayer."* He realized that time devoted to prayer typically makes the rest of the day more productive. It makes us more effective at work and in relationships with others. This is true because through devoted prayer we invite God, Himself, not only into our great tasks and trials, but also into the mundane. The Lord maximizes the time of those who maximize their time with him. Certainly, you will find this true, as many others have. Are you setting aside fixed times to be with the Lord?

2. **Prayer is often enhanced by having a quiet place where we regularly meet with God** – In our passage in Matthew 6:6, Jesus calls us to go into our room and close the door—to seek the Lord in secret. Notice it in verse 6 of our passage, *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.* He practiced this himself, as he commonly went on a mountain to pray (cf. Lk 6:12, 9:28, Matt 14:23).

In Acts 10:9, Peter went on his rooftop to pray.

Where do you go to be alone, away from distractions, to focus on God? It doesn't necessarily have to be a room; it could be a routine. It could be a walk in the morning. It could be putting on your head phones to listen to worship while bringing your requests before God. Where is your secret place? What is your routine like when you meet with God? Christ had one and so did his apostles (cf. Acts 6:4, 10:9). We should have one as well. **I have always found a my secret place to pray. We have moved quite a bit in my ministry in the past almost 38 years, but every where we have gone there is a restless with me until I find my place, both at home and the church I served in (Silo = upstairs baptistery dressing room/ prison break/ searching the church)*

3. **Prayer takes sacrifice** - As with any discipline, we often have to give up something to do it. Sometimes it sleep, or other things... We must give up time on the Internet, our cell-phone, and with family or friends. We may even need to sacrifice ministry to have good prayer time. In Acts 6, the apostles gave up an opportunity to serve widows to focus on prayer (v. 4). We must do the same if we are going to be disciplined with our prayer lives. What is God calling you to sacrifice in order to focus on prayer?

4. **Prayer flows out of time in God's Word** - If prayer is talking to God, meditating on God's Word is God talking to us. **We can't have a healthy prayer life if we are not hearing God speak back.** A one-sided conversation is never very productive. Prayer flows out of regular meditation on God's Word. In fact, our faithfulness to God's Word leads to answered prayer. ➡ In John 15:7-8, Christ said, *"⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples."* **How can Christ's words "remain" in us?** They remain in us by consistently studying and thinking about them. They also remain in us as we daily obey them. By doing this, Christ says our prayers will be effective. God will answer our prayers.

In fact, this is taught in other verses as well:

- 1 John 3:22 says, *"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight."*
- James 5:16 says, *"...the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*

A righteous person is one who knows and obeys God's commands. When we do that, God answers our prayers. This makes perfect sense. If a father blesses his children when they are disobedient to him, it only reinforces their sins. If you reward disobedience, it only increases disobedience. If you reward righteousness, it increases righteousness. For that reason, God blesses his children who love and obey his Word. The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. David agreed with this principle by stating it negatively. He said, *"If I had harbored sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened"* (Psalm 66:18). Harboring sin—meaning not enjoying and practicing God's Word—hinders our prayer life. Prayer comes out of healthy communication with God. Healthy communication with God comes from hearing God's Word and responding in obedience. In fact, it should be added that one of the best ways to pray is simply to pray exactly what Scripture says. Christ even prayed the Psalms while on the cross (Matt 27:46, Lk 23:46, Ps 22:1, 31:5). We should continually be prompted to pray from our time in Scripture, and we should continually pray what Scripture says.

5. **Prayer is enhanced when practiced corporately** - Since Christ tells believers to go into their room, some have thought that this forbids corporate prayer. This is not true. Christ commonly prayed with others and even asked others to pray with him. When Christ went to pray, right before going to the cross, he brought three disciples to pray with him (Matt 26). He did the same at his transfiguration (Matt 17).

In fact, the Lord's Prayer, which he teaches right after this text, is in the plural, "our Father," "our trespasses," "our daily bread," and "deliver us from evil" (Matt 6:9-13).

Though Christ emphasizes individual prayer in this passage, he soon focuses on our need to pray corporately afterward. We must do both. Corporate prayer enhances our prayer life, and Scripture says it is especially powerful. Matthew 18:19-20 says, *¹⁹ "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."*

For this reason, we should commonly share our problems, concerns, and ambitions with others, so they can pray in agreement with us. When we don't do this, we spiritually impoverish ourselves. It's like the eye saying to the hand, "I don't need you." We need the prayers of the body of Christ. When others agree with us in prayer, our prayers are more powerful. In this passage, Christ doesn't say "if you pray" but "whenever you pray." He expects us to pray, and therefore, it must be a regular discipline. Are you disciplined with your prayer life?

Application Question: What are some other helpful principles or tips for practicing a disciplined prayer life? What is your prayer closet or routine that helps you with prayer? In what ways do you struggle with regularly praying?

BELIEVERS MUST BE CAREFUL OF WRONG ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES IN PRAYER

Notice our passage again in verses 5-8... follow along with me as we hear Jesus' words on prayer again, 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."*

Observation Question: What unhealthy practices does Christ warn believers about in their prayer lives?

Christ warns of several wrong tendencies in our prayer life (and righteous acts in general) that we must be careful of. Let me give these to you. There are from Jesus, Himself, in our passage. Again, if our prayer life is going to be powerful and impactful, not only for our lives, but for others and the world... the kind of prayer life that impacts the lives of others, we must be careful of these wrong and unhealthy practices that deter and hinder our prayers.

3 Things to Beware of in Our Prayer Life: *things that many hinder and deter our prayers, wrong attitudes and practices to beware of in our Christian life

1. Be care of being self-conscious and others-conscious in prayer - Christ said that the hypocrites prayed standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others (6:5). This word *"hypocrite"* was used of actors in a play. They performed in order to receive applause from others. There is a tendency towards this in the midst of our prayers.

Yes, we should consider others when praying, especially when praying in public. We should consider their needs and God's desires for them, so we can pray accordingly. However, we should not be praying with the intention of gaining their approval or for them to notice us. If we do, our prayers cease to be worship to God.

In prayer and other acts of righteousness, we must guard against being self-conscious and others-conscious.

Application Question: How can we discern if we have wrong attitudes in our prayer life? Here are some pointed questions we must ask:

- >Do we pray more frequently and fervently when in public than when we're alone?
- >Are we spectators of our own performance in prayer—considering our words, volume, and what others think?
- >Is it important for us to tell others how long and fervently we prayed?

If we answered yes to any of these questions, then we may have pharisaical motives that need to be repented of.

2. **Be careful of being thoughtless and heartless in prayer** - In verse 7, Christ says, *"do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do..."* *"Vain repetitions"* can be translated *"empty phrases"* (ESV) or *"babbling repetitiously."* What was Christ referring to? Sometimes pagans would simply repeat a phrase over and over again—trying to coax a response from their gods. For example, we see this today with Hinduism and Buddhism when the word "om" is repeated over and over again, as they pursue blessings from a deity. Christ warned against similar vain repetitions. No doubt, many Gentiles, who converted from paganism, tended to worship God in this manner, but using Christian phrases instead. In addition, Jews sometimes would add many different adjectives to God's name like wonderful, awesome, majestic, sovereign, and so on. Again, this often became a form of vain repetitions.

Interpretation Question: Is Christ warning against repetition in prayer in general? Obviously not. Before Christ went to the cross, he prayed three separate times for an hour (Matt 26:36-46). Scripture indicates that his main petition during that time was *"My Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will"* (39, 42, 44). He sought the Lord three times for three hours with this petition being the primary focus.

Paul prayed three times for his thorn in the flesh to be removed (2 Cor 12). In Luke 18:1-8,

Christ encouraged the disciples to persevere in prayer through the Parable of the Persistent Widow. This widow continually went to the judge asking for justice, until he finally responded because of her persistence.

Should there be repetition in our prayer? Yes. What Christ warns against is vain repetition. This means thoughtless prayer—when we're saying something with no heart or focus. Sadly, this often happens when we pray before a meal or other common endeavors. Sometimes we rattle off these prayers with no thought or real intention to engage God. Vain repetitions are also a warning against allowing our minds to wander during prayer. Again, then we're just offering words with no heart or thought.

3. **Be careful of needlessly long prayer** – Along with warning about vain repetitions, Christ warns against long prayers, which come from these vain repetitions. He said, *"For they think*

that they will be heard for their many words." Many Jews believed that long prayers were preferred over short ones.

Interpretation Question: Is Christ forbidding long prayers? We must be careful about saying long prayers are bad and short prayers are good. That is not the point Christ is making. He is warning against long prayers that are repetitious, thoughtless, and void of a right heart. Sometimes long prayers are needed in the same way long conversations are needed.

Application Question: In what ways have you struggled with some of these negative tendencies—praying self-consciously or conscious of others, vain repetitions/thoughtless prayers, or needlessly long prayers? In what ways can church culture sometimes propagate negative types of praying?

BELIEVERS MUST PRAY WITH A PROPER KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND HIS CHARACTER

Notice Jesus words again in verses 7-8, *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.*

Observation Question: In Matthew 6:7-8, what aspects of our relationship to God does Christ mention, which should positively affect our prayer life?

After Christ calls his followers to not be like pagans in their prayers, he tells them why—by implication, God is not like the pagan deities. Pagans lived in fear of their deities. They believed they had to coax them into answering their prayers. They not only continually repeated their petitions for hours, but also would cut themselves and offer human sacrifices to appease them. Again, we saw this in the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18: they cried out, "Baal, answer us!" from morning to noon (v. 26). When there was no answer, they began to shout louder and cut themselves with knives and swords until evening—still to no avail (v. 28). They tried to coax their make-believe god into answering their prayers. Christ essentially says our understanding of God will either negatively or positively affect our prayers.

Therefore, to pray effectively we must develop our knowledge of God and his character. Christ points out two understandings about God which should help us pray properly:

2 Important Things to Remember About God that Will Help Us in Our Prayer:

- 1. God is our father (v. 8)** - By pointing out this reality, Christ essentially says God wants to bless us, give us what we need, and lead us into what is best. He is not a pagan deity whom we should live in fear of. Certainly, he deserves our reverence as our Father, but he also loves us and wants to be intimate with us. Christ used this same reasoning when encouraging his disciples to pray in Luke 11:9-13. He said, *"So I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, although you are evil, know how*

to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" He says if a human father, who has sinful tendencies, provides good gifts for his children, how much more will God the Father provide for his children?

Basically, Christ says we must come to God in faith because he is our heavenly Father.

2. **God knows everything (v. 8)** – The fact that our Father already knows everything is meant to encourage us to pray more. Sometimes we won't share with people because we are afraid of their reaction—will they reject us, hate us, or use the information to hurt us? God already knows; therefore, we should run into his presence to share.

Why share if he already knows? Because it allows God to work in our hearts, it draws us into more intimacy with God, and it accomplishes God's will in our lives and that of others.

Application Question: In what ways have you experienced wrong views about God that negatively affected your prayer life—whether that was being angry at God or accepting false doctrine? In what ways is the doctrine of our need for faith in prayer being abused in the church? What is the proper balance?

CONCLUSION

How should believers practice prayer?

1. **Believers Must Pray as a Spiritual Discipline**
2. **Believers Must Be Careful of Wrong Attitudes and Practices in Prayer**
3. **Believers Must Pray with a Proper Knowledge of God and His Character**
4. **Believers Must Be Motivated by God's Reward in Prayer**