

There was a preacher who had a custom of calling all the little children together before services and he would tell them a Bible story. One morning he decided to talk to them about prayer and to illustrate how prayer works he brought a telephone with him. In his illustration he told the children that when they talked on the telephone, there was someone else on the other end of the line listening even though they can't see them; and that's the way it is when you pray. God is on the other end of the line. You can't see him but he is listening. One little boy spoke up and asked, "What's His number?" That's an important question because we need to be able to get in touch with God. People pray because they believe that prayer is effective, yet a lot of people who believe in prayer rarely engage in it. There are times when they wonder just how effective is my prayer. How can I know God hears me? Well, Matt. 6 helps us with prayer as Jesus explains exactly what it takes to get in touch with heaven by emphasizes three things.

THE FIRST IS THAT WHEN WE PRAY WE NEED TO PRAY SECRETLY. Jesus understood that his people would pray because in v5 Jesus says *"And when thou prayest, ..."* and not if you pray. The same thing is repeated again in vs. 6 & 7. As far as Jesus was concerned, it was not a matter of "if" but a matter of "when." Prayer is something the Christian is expected to do and at times it needs to be in private. *(Mat 6:5) And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Jesus is addressing the hypocritical prayers of the Pharisees. They loved to pray on the street corners and in the synagogues. These were two of the busiest places of their day as people were constantly coming and going. These Pharisees wanted to show off their spirituality in prayer.

Every afternoon there was a sacrifice offered in the temple and when it was time for that sacrifice, a trumpet would be blown and the people knew what was about to happen in the vicinity of the temple, and they would all stop and turn in the direction of the temple, and they would pray. The Pharisees would make sure that at that exact time they were in the busiest part of Jerusalem so that their prayer would be seen by as many people as

possible. They were praying to be seen of men and not to get in touch with God and as such, they received their reward.

Jesus is not condemning public prayer. We have Biblical examples of public prayer. In Acts 12 the disciples were gathered together to pray on Peter's behalf. Jesus prayed publicly on the cross for his accusers. But Jesus is condemning prayer for the wrong motive; praying with the desire to be seen and the purpose of impressing others.

A young lawyer went to work for a prestigious law firm and his first day he arrived early to his new office before anyone else arrived. As he was sitting in his plush chair behind his desk he heard someone coming down the hall. To make an impression, he picked up the telephone and began a fake one-way conversation. He said, "Now you better get it done or we will see you in court." By this time the man was in the doorway and the young lawyer motioned him inside as he said, "Yes, I expect you to take care of it and soon. I don't want to have to call you again. Do I make myself clear?" Then he hung up the receiver. Then turning to the man that had just come into his office that he was trying to impress he said, "Yes sir, how may I help you?" The man with a smile on his face said, "I work for the phone company and I'm here to connect your phone line."

(Mat 6:6) But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. While there is nothing wrong with our public prayers, they ought not to be a substitute for our private prayer. When we pray in private, it is an indication that we really believe in the power of prayer. It's when nobody else hears that we express our innermost and sincere thoughts to God in heaven. It shows the strength of our faith in prayer. You can pray a little more fervently and specifically in private prayer than in public prayer. So the point Jesus is making is that when you pray you pray to God and not performing to others.

NO. 2. WHEN YOU PRAY YOU PRAY SINCERELY. ***(Mat 6:7) But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.*** Jesus is talking about meaningless repetition; a prayer that is not

from the heart for that's the way the heathen's pray. The pagans of that day worshiped a multitude of different gods and they perceived that their gods were much like people so that they needed to repeat their request over and over again just to insure that their god was listening. This is what happened with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. They felt that their god was distracted and not hearing their prayer, so they prayed over and over trying to get his attention.

So it was with the pagans. They felt that they had to repeatedly pray the same thing over and over just to get his attention and then once they had his attention, they had to continue repeating that prayer to make sure that he understood their prayer. After repeating that prayer enough that they felt they had their gods understood their prayer, they continue to repeat it to show how serious they were in that prayer in hopes of influencing an answer.

So out of that mindset, the pagans of the first century would repeatedly pray the same thing over and over again. It became a mindless repetition. Well, that's not the case with God, so Jesus instructs his disciples not to pray like that. Let us recognize that there is a danger that we can fall into that trap. We too can repeat the same ole phrases over and over again without thinking about their meanings. There is nothing wrong with those phrases if we use them because they are expression that ought to be expressed. But the problem comes in when we become so familiar with those phrases that they lose their meaning and we say those expressions w/o thinking about what we are saying.

The purpose of prayer is to commune with God. Prayer takes place when our heart touches the heart of Almighty God and you can't do that if you are not thinking about what you are saying. When we pray, it's not how many words we say that's important; nor the rhetoric of our prayers; or the eloquence of our prayers. What is important is the sincerity of our prayers; a prayer from the heart.

(Mat 6:8) Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. Some have questioned that if God already knows what I need, then what's the purpose of prayer? Let's us understand that prayer is not to inform God but rather it's to show our dependence on God. God knows what you need before you

ask him. Our request to God is an indication that we understand that we need His help; we are depending on Him. Many times we fail to receive God's blessings simply because we don't ask. *Jas 4:2 ... ye have not, because ye ask not.* We need to pray secretly and we need to pray sincerely.

NO. 3. PRAY SYSTEMATICALLY. Jesus taught us how to pray and he teaches us to include four simple things. **He teaches us to start with praise.** (*Mat 6:9*) *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (10) Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* Jesus teaches us to focus on God as we begin our prayers. ***Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*** That word "*Hallowed*" means "*to lift up, to make holy.*" God is to be exalted and lifted up in our prayers. We are to praise Him because of who He is. So it is appropriate to begin a prayer with respectful praise. It's easy to be so consumed with our concerns that we lose sight of who we are praying too and fail to render to him adequate praise. And as we praise God for who He is we pray, ***Thy will be done.*** In prayer we really discover what God wants. It not a matter of simply getting our will done rather it's a matter of getting his will accomplished in our lives. It's only the submissive heart who can pray this prayer. We pray as a submissive and confident child to the will of his father. Generally speaking, parents want what is best for their children and so it is as we approach our wonderful and mighty Father in heaven. We are confident in praying "thy will be done" because we know His will is always best for us.

Solicit God's provisions. (*Mat 6:11*) ***Give us this day our daily bread.*** It seems the term "bread" represents more than just food. It embraces all of life's needs and necessities. It may be a physical need, it may be an emotional need, and it may be a spiritual need. Whatever it is, we can feel confident in taking that request to God. There is nothing in your life too big for God to deal with or too small for His concern. So it is we can pray about whatever concerns we have in our heart. Understand that there is a **difference in praying for our daily needs and our daily wants.** God has promised to give us what we need but he has not promised to give us everything that we want. When

we understand that, it will help keep us from becoming discouraged in prayer when God answers “NO” to our prayer request. It helps us to put prayer in a different perspective. Understanding this concept will help keep our prayers from becoming selfish and totally self-centered. James said *Jas 4:2 ... ye have not, because ye ask not.* Then he also adds, *(Jas 4:3) Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* He is reminding us that there are times we do not receive our prayer request because we are asking for our own pleasures. The problem here is the danger of turning prayer into something self-centered and selfish; to which such a prayer will not be answered. A wise father will not give his child everything he wants, but he will give him everything that he needs.

Seek God’s pardon. *(Mat 6:12) And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* This takes our prayer from the realm of material to the spiritual. As God’s people we have physical needs as well as spiritual needs. Because, even as a child of God, we make our mistakes like everyone else so we need God’s cleansing; his forgiveness. Isn’t it a blessing to have a God who is willing to forgive? This realm of forgiveness is more than “Father forgive me” but should be expanded to include “help me to do better.” Notice that this is the only request in the prayer that has a condition attached to it –“*forgive us AS we forgive.*” If we expect to be forgiven we must be willing to forgive.

Secure God’s power. *(Mat 6:13) And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.* We are constantly in a spiritual war and while we may never hear a shot, we are in a war nonetheless – we are in a war with the devil. He is our declared enemy and is doing everything that he can to destroy us. Peter describes him as an adversary seeking to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). One of the greatest defenses against Satan’s attacks is prayer. While there is certainly nothing wrong with asking for God’s forgiveness, maybe we would not have to spend as much time asking for forgiveness if we’d seek a little more deliverance. We all have spiritual weaknesses in our lives that Satan tries to exploit. “*Father lead us not into temptation but delivers us from evil.*”

Jesus spoke much against being hypocritical; let us not be hypocrites in our praying. When we pray, let us pray SECRETLY, SINCERELY, AND SYSTEMATICALLY. When we do that we can be assured that we have a hotline to heaven. Let me remind you that prayer is based on a relationship with a child talking to his Father. It's not to Jesus the Son, not is it to the H.S. but to God the Father. If you are here today and are not a child of God, then you need to become one by obeying the gospel.

Invitation. Do you have that father son relationship?