

Go and Pray

Matthew 6:5-6

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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.

Did you notice what our Lord teaches about prayer?

“When you pray” not “if you pray”. Last week we saw our Lord’s teaching on giving. And our Lord Jesus Christ said the same thing about giving. Jesus taught “when you give” not “if you give”. And the apostolic teaching about giving is to give with a cheerful heart. God loves joyful giving but secret giving. Give to glorify God not to get glory from man. That was last week.

Today, we look at the subject of prayer. And there is so much we can learn about prayer. The early disciples of Jesus desired to know about prayer that they came to Jesus and asked, “*Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John taught his disciples*”. Luke 11:1.

John the Baptist was teaching his disciples about prayer. And the disciples of Jesus desired to know about prayer. That is a great desire.

What is prayer?

The British preacher, D Martyn Lloyd Jones said that prayer is highest activity in the life of disciple of Jesus Christ.

The expositor James Montgomery Boice says that true prayer is “*prayer offered to God the Father on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ, his Son*”.

Jesus himself taught we ought to always pray and not lose heart. Luke 18:1.

The Bible’s witness is filled with people who prayed.

All the way back in the book of Genesis, we see Abraham prayed to the Lord on behalf of the King of the land he lived in. And, amazingly, the Lord hears Abraham’s prayer and heals the king’s wife and the king’s servants. They have children.

Abraham’s son Isaac imitates the faith of his father and prays for his wife and she has children.

Hannah the mother of Samuel prayed and by her own testimony, she says, “*For this child I prayed and the Lord has granted me my petition..*” 1 Samuel 1:27

A couple of years ago, a lady told my wife and I that her sister was having trouble conceiving and one day she saw her brother-in-law praying. This lady is an atheist. So the brother-in-law said he was

praying to Jesus. And last time I heard from this lady, her sister was pregnant and had a baby. I believe it was the Lord's doing in her sister's life. What a joy when are prayers answered!

Moses was a man of prayer. His prayer on behalf of the people of Israel was heard by God. God was almost done with the people of Israel for their rebellion. Yet, it was Moses' intercession that moved God. God is moved by earnest prayer.

The prophet Daniel was a man of prayer. He prayed three times a day on his knees. In good times and bad times. Daniel knew that his prayer was banned and yet he prayed.

The apostle Paul says that we should be "praying at all times" Ephesians 6:17.

When we went through the book of Jonah, we saw that Jonah prayed from the belly of the whale.

A few years ago, when miners in the country of Chile were trapped for a whole two months, some of them prayed. One of the miners by the name of Henrique said this about prayer – *"For us, prayer was so important. We felt God's presence in a very special way"*.

You can be in the deepest part of the sea or under the earth, and yet prayer is the channel to enter into the presence of God.

The evangelist RA Torrey made this very insightful comment on prayer. *"The day when I realized what real prayer meant, realized that prayer was having an audience with God, actually coming into the presence of God and asking and getting things from him. And the realization of that fact transformed my prayer life. Before that, prayer had been a mere duty, an irksome duty, but from that time on prayer has been not merely a duty but a privilege, one of the most esteemed privileges in life. Before that the thought I had was, 'How much time must I spend in prayer? Now I say, 'How much time may I spend in prayer without neglecting the other privileges and duties in life?'"*.

Jesus himself was a man of prayer – both public and private. Right before Jesus called dead Lazarus out from the grave, Jesus prayed this remarkable prayer.

"And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.'" John 11:41-42. See what confidence Jesus had in his Father?

Psalm 139 verse four reminds us that *"before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether"*.

Prayer is confiding in God the Father through this Son Jesus Christ in the witness of the Holy Spirit. Those who have the Holy Spirit in them will cry out, "Abba, Father". And every believer, every true disciple of Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit residing in them.

Paul writes to the Roman church that we don't always know what to pray but the Spirit intercedes for us. Romans 8:26

Consider this introduction warmup before we get into our passage for today. Verses five and six in Matthew six. We may look at a couple of other verses in this chapter.

Two instructions from our Lord about prayer.

First instruction is a negative instruction.

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.*

The phrase “when you pray” is literally “when you yourselves pray”. The disciples are expected to pray. Jesus expects you to pray. But Jesus doesn’t want his disciples like some people prayed in his day. Who are those people? They are the Pharisees and the scribes.

Jesus makes a similar observation in the Gospel of Mark chapter twelve.

“And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces ³⁹ and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” Mark 12:38-40

Jesus uses the word hypocrites to describe the Pharisees and scribes. Hypocrite is not a title for the Pharisees, scribes or the teachers of the law. Rather this is a comparative clause Jesus uses to make his point. When you pray, don’t be *like* the hypocrites. Hypocrites were stage-players in ancient Greek drama. They would wear a large mask and tell their stories from behind the mask. All of it was just a play. The Pharisees were had become known for doing their prayers in their synagogues and streets. They would pray before went into the temple of God or their place of worship – the synagogue. Very impressive to seen as men of prayer and devotion.

However, they did all this with a purpose. The last part of verse five tells the intention, the motive, the purpose of such prayers. *“That they may be seen by others”*.

The long prayer was only a pretense. It was a cover up for their greed. They prayed so they could get something for themselves at the expense of the poor and gullible.

I don’t know how many people have prepared professionally sounding prayers just for getting a few dollars from poor people but it happens today in Christian circles. The prayers sound the same. Very high sounding and yet absent of real devotion. In Luke chapter eighteen we a prayer of a Pharisee. *“God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get”*. Luke 18:11-12.

If you study the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ, they are impeccable. They are not anything like the Pharisee.

Second instruction is a positive instruction.

We looked at the negative instruction. Don't pray this way. Now in verse six, our Lord teaches the right way to pray.

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.

Now, Jesus does not mean don't pray in public. He is not calling for banning public prayer. He is not calling to not pray in the streets. How many times do we need to pray when we go out and come back in. We need the Lord's help every day.

Here in our Lord's instruction, Jesus uses three specific imperatives – *go*, *shut* the door and *pray*. This will not make sense for an unspiritual person. Why would you go into a room and be by yourself? That doesn't make any sense. There is no one else except you. But it makes perfect sense for a disciple of Jesus Christ. A disciple is someone who was once separated from God by their sin. God who seemed so far away comes close to those know the Lord Jesus Christ.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Ephesians 2:13

It is only by the precious blood of the Lamb that we have access to God.

Once we did not have faith but now we have faith in the Son of God that Jesus Christ died for sinners. And anyone who trusts in him and calls on him has a reward.

"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." Hebrews 11:6

In Christ you have access to God the All Powerful Being in the whole universe. What a great privilege! The Apostle Paul has a wonderful note to the Philippian church. This is what he wrote.

"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Go and Pray.** Matthew 6:5-6

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What does Jesus specifically teach about how not to pray? Matthew 15:36, 26:27, John 6:23, 1 Timothy 2:1, 8

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe it is crucial to have a personal prayer and devotional life as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Why? Romans 12:12, Colossians 2:9-12, 4:2
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: In light of this passage, do you see the need for praying the way Christ taught?