

To Be Noticed - 2 - When You Are Praying

Introduction

What is prayer? The simplest answer: Prayer is talking to God. It is an avenue opened to us to speak to God about our love and devotion, our wants and needs, and our cares and concerns for others. From the very beginning, God made it clear that walking with Him required that we both carefully listen and humbly submit to His authority and that we express our needs and devotion to Him in prayer. The disastrous consequences of Adam and Eve's failure to trust Him in the garden revealed how important it is to carefully listen and humbly submit. Their sons also illustrate the value of listening and submission. Abel's humble example of listening is still an example today (Heb. 11:4). While Cain's terrible failure is still used to illustrate the difference between the children of God and of the devil (1 Jn. 3:10-12) as well as the path many false teachers walk today (Jude 3-4, 11).

Yet a failure to communicate to God in prayer can be equally disastrous. Only by talking to God can we properly praise, adore and give Him thanks. Without such praise and thanksgiving, apostasy is inevitable, "*because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened*" (Rom. 1:21).

Thus the faith that comes from **hearing** God's word and the closeness that comes from our giving thanks to God in **prayer** are the most fundamental parts of our relationship with Him. Anything that hinders these things is something we should be very concerned about, just as we do everything else in our life that could bring sudden death to us. So like driving a car, or taking medication, we must carefully monitor our faith and our prayers. In this next section of His sermon, Jesus addressed dangers that can destroy the power of our prayers.

When you Pray

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. Mt. 6:5

The Scriptures have recorded many of the wonderful prayers offered by the godly and devout. It is evident that such prayers were the mark of the truly great and godly. It was said of Cornelius that "*your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.*" (Acts 10:4). It is not difficult to see that some would want the memorial before men as much as that of God. Many of God's greatest servants had prayers recorded, not to be admired, but to be used as examples to all who lived after them (Rom. 15:4). Jesus warned against the temptation the pride of life can create. When public prayer is used to gain prestige or honor in the eyes of men, Jesus labeled it hypocrisy and warned that God would neither hear nor answer such a prayer.

Not to be as the Hypocrites

Those who pray with one eye on those who are hearing what they are asking of God are just people up on a stage, pretending to do something or be something they are not. They act holy, they pray wonderful things, but if their prayers are not exclusively for God's ears they are not what they appear. Every disciple of Jesus must take careful thought to how they pray to God when others are listening. The desire to make our words, tone of voice or reverential body position a means of showing others our own godliness or eloquence makes us a hypocrite.

The reasoning here is flawless. Even out of the realm of prayer and only involving human relationships we can see the hypocrisy. What wife would not be indignant to find that her husband's words of love and devotion were carefully crafted to be overheard others? The very idea that he would even care about what anyone else thought while speaking to her would be insulting. Some things are personal, private and special. Their tender appeal and sincerity are based just as much on their exclusive nature as they are the words used to express it. Any husband who chose the tender words spoken to his wife for any other reason than to please her is going to be in serious trouble if she ever finds out.

In the same way, God wants our prayers to Him to be special. They are those private moments where we praise, honor and adore Him, beg for help, intercede for others, reveal our fears and concerns and confess our sins and weaknesses. Who else but God should be in our mind when speaking such things?

When speaking to our sovereign Lord and heavenly Father, it should be something deeply private and personal. Thinking of others or trying to impress them is completely out of place. A terrible act

of pretending. If the wonderful blessing of speaking to God is perverted into a means by which we seek the praise of others, Jesus revealed that its power is broken. Not only does it insult God, but any reward (an answer, godliness, and the warmth of a close relationship) are all squandered. We replace such valuable things only with the praise of men.

Hence hallowing God's name pleases Him when it is done only to hallow His name. When it is done in view of showing others the eloquence, godliness or devotion of the speaker, then it does not please God. In the same way praying for forgiveness in eloquent words of humility and contrition pleases God greatly and leads to His forgiveness, but if it is done to gain the praise and honor of men, then it stops pleasing God, and God withholds the forgiveness.

Go into Your Inner Room

To avoid this temptation, most prayers should not be done in public. There is no doubt whatsoever when we are praying alone that we are sincere and that the words we use are only for God. When disciples go into their inner room to pray, it can only be for God. While in this room, the disciple can pray in secret, and in praying so sincerely and honestly, God will openly reward them.

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. Mt. 6:6

Although most prayers can be offered in this manner, what about public prayers? When Paul revealed "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting," (1Tim. 2:8-9) he expected it to be done in public. We are warned that our food is sanctified by the prayers we offer (*nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. 1Tim. 4:4-5*). How do we fulfill these words? These are public prayers. When we assemble to worship, and when we are preparing to eat together, we cannot literally enter our room and shut the door. But we can do it mentally and spiritually. We must make that separation. We know they are listening and we know that the manner in which we pray can influence them in a good way. But those are secondary issues. We are still praying as though in our room praying in secret. Others are present and listening, but God is the only true hearer that matters. This is another example of narrow way leading to life (Mt. 7:14). We must keep these words of the Lord clearly in mind, even when fulfilling the commands to offer public prayers.

When we give thanks for food in the presence of brethren and family, pray for wisdom and guidance in Bible classes, praise and honor God's name during the assemblies of the saints, it is first, foremost, and exclusively for God. There should be no difference in our heart or in our prayers when praying either publicly or privately. The presence of others listening obviously is not forgotten, but must have no bearing on the words, emotions or desires expressed. They are for God alone. Others are allowed to hear them, and say amen to them, but the prayer is to God.

Meaningless Repetition

Jesus also warned His disciples of another danger to keep in mind.

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. Mt. 6:7-8

There are two areas of concern in this admonition. The first is repeating the same things over and over again. This obviously is not importunity. Jesus pray the same thing again and again in the garden of Gethsemane because it was his deepest concern and desire. This is not vain repetition. But since God already knows before we ask Him what we seek, Jesus revealed we do not need to explain it all to Him. We don't need to say the same things over and over again. Unlike Elijah who mocked the idolaters, warning them that they must repeat themselves again and again because their god may not be listening at that moment, Jesus revealed God is always listening.

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." 1 Kings 18:27-28

Like all good parents, God is always aware of us, knows what we need, and is prepared to give it.

If you then, being 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! Mt. 7:11

Because of emotional need, we may pray the same thing again and again. If a loved one is in surgery and their life is hanging in the balance, and we pray the same prayer again and again all through the night, it is not vain repetition, it is importunity.

The second concern about vain repetition comes when our prayers move into autopilot. We become accustomed to the same phrases and become so comfortable with them that our prayers are no longer prayers, they are merely recitations. The phrases “ready recollection,” “without fear of persecution,” a “safe journey,” are words that can become “vain repetition.” We use them only because they fall from the lips because others have used them. When we use “filler” in our prayers, it can become vain repetition.

Our conversations with God need to be reverent. They must not become simple recitations of the same thing over and over again. Mere repetition does not gain God’s attention. One of the greatest examples of such recitation is in those who pray “the Lord’s prayer.”

After this manner therefore pray

There has been a lot of misunderstanding regarding this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. Some have taken the following words and created the very thing Jesus warned against. Many simply recite these words over and over again in their lives without any real thought to their meaning or purpose as though merely saying the words is prayer.

This is not “*the Lord’s prayer*.” Jesus was not actually praying. It is a *model* or *example* for disciples to review as they compose their own prayers. That is the real force of the term “*manner*.” Which is defined: “*in the manner spoken of; in the way described*.” He did not expect us to quote, but use as a template.

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. Mt. 6:9-13

What do we see in this template? We see Jesus general suggestions for the content of our prayers. We can elaborate on any of them depending on the need and desires of the moment, but these are the things Jesus asked us to manifest enough concern to speak about them to God.

Hallowed be Your Name

Those disciples who truly want their prayers to mean something to God will always open them with the hallowing of God’s name. There are multitudes of examples of this by those prayers recorded in the Old Testament. None of them is the same, but all of them hallow God’s name. Moses(Deut. 3:24), Jeremiah(Jer. 32:17-19), Daniel(Dan. 9), David(1 Chr. 29:10-13), and Jehosophat(2Chr. 20:5-7) are just a few of the many examples God has left for us to consider.

Your Kingdom Come

We also see that the true disciple is intensely interested in God’s kingdom. At that time, prior to the Cross, they prayed for it to come. It was “*at hand*” and there were “*some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power*.” (Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 9:1). Today we are told to pray for all the saints(Eph. 6:18), and to petition God for the churches. Every prayer we pray that involves our brethren and the needs of the church is fulfilling this part of the template.

Your will be Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

We should also pray for God’s will to be done. We saw Jesus do that in the garden(Mt. 26:39-42). We too should be deeply concerned that we are doing God’s will on earth as it is done in heaven. In expressing such desires we are keeping ourselves humble and submissive. Prayers are never demands. They are always prayed with the attitude that if God knows better what I need, I want Him to answer the prayer giving what is best for me in my needs to serve, honor and obey Him.

Give us this Day our Daily Bread

Never should we neglect asking God for the necessities of life. God is the author of all things and we should be trusting him to provide all those things(Mt. 6:25-33). We should be thanking him for every meal(1Tim 4:4-5). When we stop glorifying him as God and giving him thanks for the things we have and need, we are nearing the point of departure from the faith(Rom. 1:21).

Forgive us our Debts And do not Lead us into Temptation

God also seeks our deep concern over our rebellion. Every sin needs to be confessed(1 Jn 1:9). We need to see it as a debt that only God can pay. Jesus was also concerned that we bring even our temptations to him asking him to lead us away from them. When we are in the midst of temptation, or a often committed sin becomes a perpetual temptation, we are not to hide this from Him, or ignore it hoping it will be overlooked or might go away. We should never marginalize or

rationalize them. We must be praying that God deliver us from the evil one, by forgiving us of all the terrible deeds he has tempted us to do. The scriptures are clear that the devil should never be far from our mind. He is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and for that reason alone we should always be concerned about him and seek to flee from him. Jesus wanted us to bring this concern to God in prayer.

As we Forgive our Debtors

Finally, Jesus returns to the forgiveness of sins and bids us to keep in our conscious minds our relationship to others and our forgiveness of their sins. Jesus is very clear. As we ask for forgiveness, we are to ask it in a manner that leads us to think of our own. *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”* That little word “as” is full of meaning. God will forgive us as we forgive others. If we are not forgiving others their sins then God will not forgive ours. So when we pray we need to put that little “as” in there and carefully consider how we do forgive others.

For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever.

Another aspect of hallowing God’s name is our recognition of his sovereign power over all things. This is something Jesus wants us to express in our prayers.

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Rom. 11:36

Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, 27 “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me? Jer. 32:26-27

For with God nothing will be impossible.” Lk. 1:37

Amen

Each prayer should end with this important phrase. It is defined as “firm faithful, surely, truly, most assuredly, so it is, so be it, may it be fulfilled.” It’s first uses in Scripture defines exactly how it is to be understood. God told Israel they were to use this term to bind both blessings and curses upon themselves(Deut. 27:15-26). Hence whenever we say AMEN we are giving our absolute approval to every word and thought of that prayer. It is a solemn thing, and Paul warned no one could give it unless they knew and agreed with it(1Cor. 14:16-17).

Questions

- 1 What is prayer?
- 2 What are the two things necessary for a close walk with God?
- 3 What is a hypocrite?
- 4 How do we become a hypocrite when we are praying?
- 5 Why does Jesus tell us to go into our inner room?
- 6 How can we be in our “inner room” when we are publicly praying?
- 7 What is meaningless repetition?
- 8 How can we say the same prayer over and over again and it not be vain repetition?
- 9 Does the phrase “after this manner” mean we should just pray this prayer?
- 10 How do we avoid meaningless repetition, if we pray in the manner Jesus described?
- 11 If we view this as a template then how would we pray?
- 12 Who are some of the men in the Old Testament whose prayers hallowed God’s name?
- 13 Can we pray “thy kingdom come” today?
- 14 How do we pray for the kingdom?
- 15 How does a disciple express his care and concern for God’s will?
- 16 Should most prayers deal with our daily necessities?
- 17 How many sins do we have to commit before we pray and confess them?
- 18 Should Satan be mentioned in our prayers?
- 19 How often does God want us to remember how we forgive others?