

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 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.

Matthew 6:6 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.

Matthew 6:7 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.

Matthew 6:8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

We can't help but hear the word prayer and immediately think in terms of a spiritual discipline. It is... and it isn't.

God seems to want to talk to us and with us. He created Adam and Eve and came into the Garden everyday to talk with them. After they sinned He came and made a way that they and their descendants could go on talking with Him.

Abraham is in one place called the friend of God (James 2:23). Think of the best friend you ever had. You enjoyed talking with them.

At one point He calls us His friends; so, again, prayer is something like two friends talking.

When Jesus was on the earth He spent a great deal of time praying. His recorded prayers are informal and reveal the depth of His relationship with His Father.

Prayer, then, is like talking to a best friend or to my loving Father. It's not to be made something formal.

Matthew 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.

The Lord calls them **hypocrites**. They were actors, acting like they were praying. The Jews of Jesus day weren't really praying at all. They were pretending to be spiritual.

They acted like they were praying by **standing in the synagogues** and praying out loud. They thus turned weekly worship into a stage upon which they might perform.

The meetings of the Church are not stages or platforms upon which to pretend we are spiritual. We are not to draw attention to ourselves. If we do, we are actors in a very bad stage production.

The hypocrites weren't content to draw attention to themselves in the synagogues. They stopped on the street corners and prayed. The indication is that they prayed out loud and not for someone but with themselves.

The qualifier is that **they may be seen of men**. It wasn't to be heard by God but to be seen by men. God was not interested in their acting. The only credit they would get for it was from other men who were fooled by them into thinking that they were spiritual.

- being changed to bring change -

This idea of being seen by men gives us a principle to apply. I think, if it is possible, we should pray as privately as we can. If you are in a situation where you feel led to pray for someone, and you are in public, try to be as private in public as you can. Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself.

Sometimes it cannot be avoided. Better to pray than to not pray! Just be certain your motive is to be heard by God and not to be seen by men.

Try this: Just pray as if you are still talking! You don't always need to bow your head and hold hands with or lay hands on the other person. Jesus is right there in your midst! Talk to Him as if you could see Him.

Skip to verse seven:

Matthew 6:7 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.

One commentator called **vain repetitions** stock phrases. Imagine talking to your best friend or father using stock phrases over-and-over again! It would be ridiculous and sad.

There is a Pentecostal practice of using many words repeated over-and-over. I don't get it. Again, I wouldn't do that in any normal conversation. If I did I'd be rude.

Matthew 6:8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

Them (they) are the people using vain repetitions. It sounds like they think there are certain ways to pray that tap into the power of God.

Every few years there is a teaching within professed Christian Churches that indicates a secret formula or formulas for prayer that unlock incredible power.

When Jesus said that your **Father knows before you ask Him** He wasn't saying you should not ask. Think in context of what He just said. You shouldn't approach God as if He were a force or a power that can only be unleashed with the right set of words or gestures. He's your friend and Father who knows your needs and wants to meet them. He wants to talk with you about them – not be incanted to!

In verses five and seven, the Greek pronoun translated **you** is plural. But in verse six, in order to emphasize private communion with God, **you** switches to singular. It is the Lord's instruction on how each of us should really pray. Let's look at verse six.

Matthew 6:6 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.

Jesus was not prohibiting public prayers. He wasn't saying you could never be seen praying. Think of Daniel, for example, who got thrown into the den of lions because he prayed daily with his windows open toward Jerusalem.

Jesus wants you to think of the imagery. In contrast to the actors on a stage, you go into a private **room** and **shut** the **door**. Prayer isn't a public performance, although it sometimes occurs publicly. It is a private conversation, although it sometimes occurs publicly. That's the idea.

A paraphrase of this verse says,

"Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his **grace**" (The Message).

I hate role-playing! I know it is important and a good teaching technique in many settings.

You're not role-playing or play-acting when praying. You are talking to your best friend and loving Father. You have a sense of His presence always even though it is **secret** in that He cannot be seen with you.

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Talk with Him as if He were really there... Because He is!