

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/9/94 PM
Matthew 6:5-8 "Some Do's & Don'ts When Praying"

Introduction of Service: The service this evening is the third in a three month trial. Our aim is to implement the importance of corporate prayer in our church. Once a month on Sunday evenings, for 3 months, we're trying a new format with our evening service. In a sense, we're moving our "Prayer Meeting" to Sunday evening. After a brief devotional from God's Word on the subject of prayer, we move to 6 "prayer rooms" located in various places in the church building. For our prayer time, we'll gather as families, and meet with others in our deacon care groups. If you are a visitor, feel free to go with a friend to any group you desire.

We'll be giving more specific instruction on this later in the service.

Intro (of message): I love to be around new Christians, don't you? Their enthusiasm for Christ is contagious. And to hear a new Christian pray...now that's a treat. No fancy words, no theological jargon, just a personal conversation between two people that love each other!

Problem: After we've been saved awhile, after we've hung around other Christians for a couple of years, we encounter a dangerous tendency. If not careful, we may settle into spiritual autopilot. We start going through the motions.

With that in mind, tonight we're going to turn to Mt 6. There, in vv 5-8, our Lord gives us some practical "do's and don'ts" to keep in mind when praying. To prepare for our prayer time, let's observe what Jesus had to say about prayer.

Context: The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus delivered the sermon to His followers early in His ministry (5:1). Multitudes of curious listeners overheard Him as well. The sermon addresses this key question: What's involved in being a disciple of Christ?

In ch 5, Jesus presented a contrast--between the righteousness God requires, and the type of righteousness being promoted by the religious leaders in His day.

Key Verse: 5:20 "...except your righteousness (= right living) exceed..."

In ch 6, Jesus revealed that something good can become something bad. When? When our motive is wrong.

Example #1: Giving to the poor (1-4)

Example #2: Prayer

Example #3: Fasting (16-18)

Last month, we looked at the Lord's prayer, in vv 9-13. There the Lord teaches us how to pray. But in vv 5-8, He teaches us how NOT to pray.

Outline of Matthew 6:5-8

I. When praying...(5-6)

A. Do not try to Impress People (5).

B. Remember that prayer is a Personal Matter (6).

II. When praying...(7-8)

- A. Do not try to Impress God (7).
- B. Remember that our Father knows (8).

I. When praying...(5-6)

V 5 "WHEN you pray"

Stop there. Notice Jesus assumes we will pray. Prayer is not optional. Back in May 1986, a writer for Discipleship Journal came up with 6 common reasons we use for not praying: 1. Prayer is boring. 2. I don't have anything to say. 3. I don't have time. 4. I can't keep my mind on prayer. 5. I need a new way to pray. 6. God never listens.

Prayer is not optional. But there are times when prayer is a stench to God. Which brings us to our first warning.

A. When praying...Do not try to Impress People (5).

V 5 "do not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray"

Stop there. Ok so far. Nothing wrong with loving to pray. But...

V 5 "love to pray STANDING in the synagogues..."

Is all public prayer wrong? Certainly not. It's commanded in I Tim 2:1. Solomon prayed in public. Paul and Silas praised God aloud in the prison. Jesus let His disciples see Him pray.

But listen. It's wrong to pray in public if we are not in the habit of praying in private (Wiersbe, 25). That's what hypocrites do.

That's what many of the Pharisees did. Where did they like to pray?

1. Standing in the synagogues

It was a mark of distinction to be chosen to lead the assembly in prayer. And if chosen, there was danger. It could go to your head. Public prayer could turn into a power struggle (so can other types of public service--like preaching, or singing).

Illust: Children's S.S. class "I want to pray." "No, I want to."

2. At the corner of the streets

Every afternoon at 3:00, a daily sacrifice would occur at the temple in Jerusalem. And throughout the country, every good Jew would pause then for afternoon prayer.

Do you know what the Pharisees did? They just "happened" to be in the middle of town at 3:00. They timed it perfectly, so everybody could see them pray, so everybody could be impressed with their godly devotion. They loved to pray in public, to be seen, to impress people.

Application: You say, "Not me. That's why I don't pray in front of people in church. I can't." Granted, public prayer can be intimidating. But let me ask you, "If you are a person who doesn't pray in public, why don't you?" You say, "I get too worried about saying the right words. I'm afraid of what people will think of me."

Wait a minute. Wasn't that the Pharisees' problem? They were preoccupied with what people thought of them. See the connection? NOT praying in public, and praying in public can both be wrong, when in our heart we're worried about impressing people.

Q: What's the result of prayer that tries to impress people?
V 5 "They have their reward."
How then should we pray?

B. When praying...Remember that prayer is a Personal Matter (6).
V 6 "But when you pray..." Do 3 things:

1. Enter your room.
2. Shut the door.
3. Pray in private.

The word "room" refers to the inner room in the middle of a Jewish home. It had no windows. It was the only room in the house that had a lockable door on it. You could go there, shut yourself off from the distractions of the world, and be alone with God.

When we pray, we need to remember that prayer is a personal matter.
And what will be the result?

V 6 "And your Father...reward you openly."

Never forget Who we're talking to when we pray. Our Father. Why do we worry so much about impressing people when we pray? Why do we get nervous about using the "right" words?

Illust: When we lived in G.R., we attended a church that had more than 15 men with M.Div. degrees. There was a young man in that church named Dale. He was in his 20's. He had an associates degree in computers. He also was diagnosed with M.S. And Dale loved the Lord. When he prayed, he prayed with simplicity and authority. Do you know why? He knew he was talking to his Father.

II. When praying...(7-8)

The first warning in prayer--Do not try to impress people.

A. Do not try to Impress God (7).
V 7 "But when you pray, use not vain repetitions..."

Pagans refer to non-Jews, Gentiles. For the Gentiles, prayer was often characterized by magical incantations and chants. They thought if you wanted to get the gods to help you, you had to badger them, to bother and annoy them until they could do nothing else but give in to you! The NEB translates v 7, "They imagine that the more they say, the more likely they are to be heard!"

Obviously, if we have a wrong view of God, we'll have a wrong view of prayer. And if we have a wrong view of prayer, we may try to use prayer to impress God.
Illust: My experience as an 11 year old--guilt in prayer

Application: Just because we repeat a request does not make us guilty of vain repetition. When are we guilty of vain repetition?

Any time we pray with the mouth and our mind is not engaged. Dr. Robert A. Cook (Wiersbe, 26) said, "All of us have one routine prayer in our system; and once we get rid of it, then we can really start to pray!" Can you relate?

Wiersbe observed this, "With some people, praying is like putting the needle on a phonograph record and then forgetting about it." (26)

Q: Are you like a stuck phonograph needle when you pray?

I don't know who first said it, but it is a challenge to me, "One mark of a godly man is that his public prayers are short, and his private prayers are long."

Why should we not try to impress God when we pray?

B. Remember that our Father knows (8).

V 8 "...for your Father knows..."

What a comforting thought! Our Father knows!

You say, "Well if He knows, why pray?" First, because He commanded us to pray. And second, because prayer is an opportunity for God to display His greatness.

Illust:

Instructions for Prayer Time:

There are 6 "prayer rooms" located in various places in the church building. We're going to divide into prayer groups, according to deacon care groups. If you do not remember who your deacon is, the lists are posted by the doorways. If you are a visitor, or a regular-attending non-member, feel free to go to any group you desire.

Greeters will be standing at the doors to help you find your way.

Location of Prayer Rooms (arranged according to Deacon Caring Groups):

Bill Baldwin--Auditorium (near piano)

Don Boggs--Jr. High room (downstairs in Educational wing; former office area)

Jack Branon--Sr. High room (in the basement of the new facility)

Don Cole--Gym

Dave Purrington--Upstairs room in Gym (room above Awana store)

*Pastor Kevin will lead this group, since Dave is gone.

Gary Storm--College & Career Sunday School room (next to Choir room)

*I will lead this group, since Gary is out of town.

General Instructions about Prayer Time:

1. You have 3 minutes to find and go to your prayer room. Each group will spend about 5 minutes sharing requests, and then 10 minutes praying.
2. No one has to pray out-loud who does not want to pray. We don't want to embarrass anyone.
3. The deacon will act as the leader of the group. He will ask for prayer requests. Then he, along with 3 or 4 others, will lead the group in prayer.
4. When your group is finished, you may stay for a time of fellowship, or you may leave. We will NOT reassemble in the auditorium after the prayer groups are over.

Specific Instructions for Deacons:

1. Please set up your "prayer room" before the evening service. Make sure you have plenty of chairs (20-25).
2. Arrange the chairs in a way that makes it easy for people to share requests (such as in a circle, or semi-circle). Arranging the chairs in a series of "rows" doesn't work well for a prayer group because it's hard to share requests when people are looking at the back of someone else's head.
3. Try to keep things "moving." Allow about 5 minutes for sharing requests, and then about 10 minutes for actual prayer time.
4. Ask 2 or 3 others to join you in leading the group in prayer. Be careful not to ask someone to pray who feels uncomfortable praying outloud in a group (you may want to find and ask the individuals ahead of time).
5. To God be the glory for how He uses this time, for His honor, and our good!