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# Praying Before the Father

Jeff Rogers / Lamplighter Bible Study

Matthew 6:5-8

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Chapter six can be divided into two sections: first, our devotion to God (our piety, inward moral righteousness, our heart) (1-18), and second, our example before the world emphasizing our outward righteousness (19-34).

Martin Lloyd-Jones aptly describes Matthew 6 as a chapter that can inspire self-humbling and deep reflection. In verse 1, the Lord introduces the next part of His sermon, setting the stage for our personal growth and understanding. In Matthew 5:21-48, we have explored our beliefs about the law. Now, Jesus guides us to focus on the practice of the law, offering three examples: living righteously (vss. 2-4), prayer (vss. 5-15), and fasting (vss. 16-18).

## I. The Overview (Matthew 6:1)

### A. The Danger of False Righteousness (6:1a)

1. Practicing religion before others in pride.
  - a) Carefully consider that we must remain, “Poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness. These qualities are inclusive and not singular.” Matt 5:3-10.

### B. The Loss of Heavenly Reward (6:1b)

1. The exposure not only of the Pharisees over the top “religion,” but also the devastating impact of sin on us in the form of self and pride.
2. Sin can follow us into the very presence of God. (Martyn Lloyd Jones).

Lloyd-Jones writes, “*We tend to think of sin as we see it in rags and in the gutters of life. We look at a drunkard, poor fellow, and we say, there is sin. But that is not the essence of sin. To have a real picture and a true understanding of sin, you must look at some great saint, some unusually devout and devoted man, look at him there on his knees in the very presence of God. Even there, self is intruding itself, and the temptation is for him to think about himself, to think pleasantly and pleasurable about himself and to really be worshipping himself rather than God. That, not the other, is the true picture of sin. The other is sin, of course, but there you do not see it at its acme [highest point, pinnacle of expression], you do not see it in its essence. Or to put it in another form, if you really want to understand something about the nature of Satan and his activities, the thing to do is not to go to the dregs or the gutters of life. If you really want to know something about Satan, go away to that wilderness where our Lord spent forty days and forty nights. That’s the true picture of Satan, where you see him tempting the very Son of God.*”<sup>1</sup>

Do you view God as your Father? This is a pivotal question we all must ask ourselves as we delve into Chapter 6. Jesus, in His teachings, refers to “your Father” at least 12 times, underscoring the importance of our intimate relationship with God. So, have you personally experienced the redeeming love of God? Have you been welcomed into His family?

None of us can fully grasp the mechanics of prayer. There are likely more queries than solutions about prayer because God’s plan surpasses our finite understanding. Yet, we are instructed to pray. God does not demand us to comprehend what makes prayer effective, but He does ask us to pray. Preparation

## II. The Audience of Prayer (Matthew 6:5-6)

### A. The Wrong Audience: Other Men (Matthew 6:5).

1. Prayer should never be ritualized or rote. Once again, it is a focus on our hearts.
  - a) **Matthew 6:7**, “*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do,*
2. Prayer can become formalized, and one may lose the sense of praying before God.
3. Prayer should not be limited to certain times or occasions
4. Prayer can be short and effective or long and ineffective. Length has no bearing on prayer. **Mark 12:40**, “*...for a pretense make long prayers.*” (Matt 6:7b, *for they think that they will be heard for their many words.*)

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* [Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976], 301

5. Prayer should avoid meaningless repetitions **1 Kings 18:26**, *And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made. 1 Kings 18:29*, *And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.*
  6. Prayer should never be offered to *"be seen of others."*
    - a) It has been said, "The greatest danger to religion is that the old self simply becomes religious."
- B. The Right Audience: God, your Father (Matthew 6:6).
1. What is Prayer - Prayer is communion with God.
  2. Jesus contrasts the hypocritical prayer offered by the Pharisees that had become overly complicated.
    - a) *"Go into your room and shut the door."* The implication is that it is simple and that location is unimportant. It is our heart attitude.
    - b) *"in secret"* – Prayer should largely be conducted secretly.
    - c)

### III. The Content of Prayer (Matthew 6:7-8)

- A. Avoid meaningless repetitions (the word means idle, thoughtless chatter)
- B. The length of prayers does not correlate with their effectiveness.
  1. The Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:26-29) Demetrius and the silversmiths (Acts 19:24-34)
  2. Buddhists spin wheels containing written prayers, believing each turn of the wheel sends prayer.
  3. Roman Catholics light candles believing their requests will continue to ascend to God repetitively.
  4. Rosaries are used to count off repeated prayers.
  5. Avoid thoughtless prayers at regular times.
  6. Repetitive requests are not to be avoided.
- C. Pray for sincere requests
  1. The purpose of prayer is not to inform or persuade God, but to come before Him sincerely, purposely, consciously, and devotedly<sup>2</sup>
  2. Share needs, burdens, and hunger of our hearts before God (**John 14:13**, *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*)

### IV. How should we pray...

- A. Pray Publicly (1 Tim 2:1-4; Matt 14:19; Luke 11:1)
  1. **Matthew 14:19**, *Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.*
  2. **1 Timothy 2:1-4**, *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,*
  3. **Luke 11:1**, *Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."*
- B. Pray Secretly (Matthew 6:6)
  1. **Matthew 6:6**, *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.*
- C. Pray Humbly (Luke 18:9-12; Psalm 79.9, Ezek 16:63)
  1. The Contrast of the Pharisee. **Luke 18:9-12**, *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: '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.'*
  2. The Example of the Publican. **Luke 18:13-14**, *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978], p. 145

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- D. Pray Repentantly (Neh 9) Set up with Chapter 8:1-3, 9
1. **Nehemiah 9:3**, *And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.*
  2. **Nehemiah 9:5–6**, *Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. 6 “You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.*
- E. Pray with other Believers (Acts 2:42)
1. **Acts 2:42**, *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- F. Pray with importunity (Luke 18:1-7)
1. **Luke 18:1–7**, *And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. 2 He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” 6 And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?*
- G. Pray the Scripture Acts 4:23-31
1. **Acts 4:23–31**, *When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’— 27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*
- H. Pray without ceasing (**1 Thessalonians 5:17**, *Pray without ceasing,*