

Matthew 6:5-8 *When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

Too often we treat prayer as a means to maintain our Christian life without fully grasping what it is meant to be. We can miss the significance of prayer. Only when we give prayer its rightful place of the highest part of the work that has been entrusted to us that we will see that there is nothing so needed and so important as prayer.

Do we find ourselves at a loss for words in prayer? Do we find ourselves coming before God without expectation? Does it seem like a waste of time or a distant hope? God means for prayer to have an answer. **Verse 5** *When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites.* It was not an "if you pray" but a "when you pray." Prayer for Jesus was always a constant attitude. Jesus tells us to not be the one who pretends to be religious, the hypocrite, the one just acting a part. Originally, the word "hypocrite" was used to describe a stage actor, one playing a part, often with a mask.

Prayer was important to the Jews but misunderstood... it was a ritual, from the head, not from the heart. How much has our prayers become rituals in our lives, saying words without significance? Jews had a prayer for every problem. They had specific prayer times, long prayers, prayers to benefit people instead of God, meaningless repetitions, prayers to be seen and heard. **Verse 7** *do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.* What if prayer was admired by man but was rejected by God?

Jesus addresses these things and offers us three promises regarding prayer:

- The Father sees.
- The Father hears.
- The Father knows.

1. The Father sees. **Verse 6** *But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* Everyone must have a place away from the concerns and distractions of this world to be alone with the Father. We so easily allow distractions in to our prayer time. Instead of using a digital Bible, pick up the written Word, the Book, the Bible so we are not distracted by it. God is found in the secret place. Find a place and remove distractions so our focus is on God and God alone. God sees us. He sees our effort to prayer.

Prayer is not about what we offer but what He gives to us. To become a person of prayer, we must set aside time and a place for God to speak. Expect to hear from the Father as we come to Him in prayer.

The secret place for only the priests in the Temple was called the Holy of Holies. God was always there waiting. God is always waiting for us. Make prayer significant in our lives.

2. The Father hears. Verse 6 *But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* Jesus says that the secret place cannot be fruitless and its blessing will show itself in our lives. It is a promise. Do our prayers reveal that we don't believe God's promises? God sees us, hears our requests, and will reward us. Our approach in prayer should be child-like faith and confidence that our prayers are heard. Do we expect God to bless us? Are we timid in requests, thinking that our words sound bad or don't have power? **Hebrews 11:6** *And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for the one who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He proves to be One who rewards those who seek Him.* The reward comes because we seek Him and not because of our efforts, strong emotions, or elegant words. The power of prayer rests on the love and power of the Father to whom we bring every need. God asks us to come as we are. He waits eagerly for us to come to Him in humility, trusting, and asking Him to change our lives.

3. The Father knows. Verse 8 *So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.* We do not need to compel our God to listen. He is not distracted. Laying prostrate, getting louder, tears, on our knees, are not bad but should not be used as a means to get something from Him. It should be from our humility, recognizing who God is and who we are and wanting to bow before Him. One is our effort; one is our response. God knows before we ask. Sometimes we fear we ask too much; sometimes we offer a partial payment.

An Old Testament example in 1 Kings 18 - Elijah comes against the gods of Baal. The people make huge requests of their god, Baal. Elijah then soaks the altar with water and then simply asks God to reveal Himself. God answered with fire consuming all on the altar and the altar itself. There wasn't any deal making. Elijah knew God and asked with confidence.

If we know with certainty, having been led by the Holy Spirit and according to His Word, that what we ask for is what we need, then we can with great confidence ask and expect to receive what we ask of the Father. Let us in our own prayers, when consumed with pressing matters, filled with urgent requests and overwhelmed with many words, pause and remember... Our Father sees us. Our Father hears us. Our Father knows us. Make being alone with God our highest priority. The Father knows what we need before we ask.

How have your prayers become rituals, saying words without significance?

How do our prayers reveal that we don't believe God's promises?

What hinders your prayers?

What new thing do you want to ask God for?