

4) Praying 102: Pray According To God's Will

- A) Against the prayers of the hypocrites (religious leaders), Jesus also condemns the prayers of the Gentiles (better rendered "pagans" by the NIV in Matthew 6:7).

- B) Jesus specifically criticizes the "repetitious" prayers of the pagans, as though they pray with phrases and in ways that are magical or are like incantations.

- C) Jesus' point is that there is no "way" to properly pray. You don't unlock some sort of secret or convince God of your perspective with clever words.

- D) Instead, Jesus instructs His disciples to pray in the full knowledge of the person of God. Pray with a good theology. God, Jesus explains, already knows your needs, pray according to what the Father gives to His children.

- E) Jesus' point is not to paralyze our prayers (e.g. since God already knows what I need, why pray?). Rather, Jesus is calling on us to approach God as we would a loving and good father (Matthew 7:7-11).

5) How To Pray: Approach God With Thanks

- A) "Our Father who is in heaven..." (6:9). This is a direct appeal to God as loving, powerful and eternal (heavenly). Approach God as the perfect Father, wanting to give to His beloved children.

- B) "Hallowed" (6:9). Approach God with great respect for His holiness, exalting and praising His name above all others.

Changeable People Praying To An Unchangeable God

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AND WHEN YOU PRAY, YOU MUST NOT BE LIKE THE HYPOCRITES. FOR THEY LOVE TO STAND AND PRAY IN THE SYNAGOGUES AND AT THE STREET CORNERS, THAT THEY MAY BE SEEN BY OTHERS. TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, THEY HAVE RECEIVED THEIR REWARD. 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. AND WHEN YOU PRAY, DO NOT HEAP UP EMPTY PHRASES AS THE GENTILES DO, FOR THEY THINK THAT THEY WILL BE HEARD FOR THEIR MANY WORDS. DO NOT BE LIKE THEM, FOR YOUR FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU ASK HIM.

PRAY THEN LIKE THIS:

**OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN,
HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME.**

**YOUR KINGDOM COME,
YOUR WILL BE DONE,**

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD...

~MATTHEW 6:5-11 (ESV)

1) What Is Prayer?

- A) In the earliest chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-20), God spoke to people in a more personal "face-to-face" manner. Speaking back to God was probably understood as prayer, but not called "praying" until Genesis 20.

- B) Most of the cases of prayer in the Bible are petitions, speaking to God about the needs of someone and asking God to do something about those needs.

- C) In most cases, the prayers of God's people are answered in positive ways, although not always (e.g. Deuteronomy 3:25-26, Moses' interaction with God regarding entry into the Promised Land).

- D) For our purposes, we will proceed with a concept of prayer which simply means "talking with God." This includes petitions (asking God for something), and praise (appreciating God for His glory).

2) How Then Should We Pray?

- A) Jesus disciples asked Him to teach them how they should pray (Luke 11:1). Jesus' reply are the immortal words of the Lord's Prayer which are recorded in Matthew 6.

- B) Before (and after) Jesus actually prayed, He spoke with His disciples about their attitudes and approaches to prayer. This is the beginning of prayer for a follower of Christ, is your heart in the correct place to talk to God?

3) Praying 101: We Pray To An Audience Of One

- A) In the times of Jesus Christ, prayer to God had become ritualized and regimented. Prayer lacked the true authenticity of speaking with God and had become speaking at God.*

- B) Jesus Christ criticizes these "heartless" prayers (Matthew 6:5) and credits them as "the hypocrites," a shorthanded way of referring to the spiritual leaders of the day.

- C) The prayers of the hypocrites sounded good, but came from empty heads and stone-cold hearts. Jesus told His disciples that these people "have received their reward in full" (6:5).

- D) Instead, Jesus instructs His disciples to pray in secret (6:6). Jesus uses the metaphor of praying in a special closet or room set aside for prayer rather than praying "for show."

- E) Jesus' point is not one of home improvement, but heart focus. The Father rewards those actions which are "pure in heart," those which seek Him alone in conversation (prayer). God is interested in your motivation, even more than your words (cf. Romans 8:26).

* By the time of Christ, the wording and forms of most prayers had become codified and were to be read or (better) repeated from memory. Prayers like these were to be offered up to God at regular intervals through the day (9:00 AM, 12:00 NOON, and 3:00 PM). Since they became routine, they could be presented without much thought or attention to what was being said. A faithful Jew would repeat the 'Shema' (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) at prayer time, and a compilation of 18 other prayers (known as the Shemoneh'esray). These were said in their entirety at each time for prayer during the day, regardless of where the devout Jew found himself. If on a street corner, or in the market -- the Jews would stop and with great flair, pray these memorized prayers. It became a measure of their piety, but were often offered without a sincere heart for personal transformation, and at times with great pride. Portions from *Matthew 1-7* by John F. MacArthur, Jr. (MacArthur NT Commentaries), *Matthew 1-13* by Donald A. Hagner (Word Biblical Commentaries), *Matthew* by D.A. Carson (Expositors Bible Commentary), and *Matthew* by Mike Wilkins (New International Version Application Commentaries).