
How to Pray! Part II

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Our Motivations! So, How do I Pray?

Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14

When this is asked of me I always point the person to Matthew 6:9-13 or Luke 11:1-4. These passages are both called the *Lord's Prayer*. However, they are not prayers; rather, they are “patterns” or templates for us on how to pray. Many Christians over the centuries have memorized these passages as prayers and recite them every day like a mantra. This memorization is a great thing to do, but the passages are not prayers; rather, they are the instructional guides on how to pray. To recite these passages as prayers is like giving a recipe to your dinner guests while forgoing the preparing of the meal. You may think this is silly; who would eat a recipe? But, this is exactly what we are doing with prayer! It is like getting a picture of a car and thinking you can drive that picture to work.

The passages in Matthew and Luke give us the quintessential template on how to pray. Jesus is calling us to a relationship with Him; and, to do that, we are to seek Him. We do this with communication, as we would talk with anyone, with the emphasis on our sincerity. Jesus, in the verses preceding the Matthew passage, is attacking hypocrites who just make a show of it. Their prayers—public or private—were not genuine. We have to be real and poured out to Him (John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:1-14). To make this real and effective, Jesus gives us a systematic *how to do it* checklist. We can then know how and for what to pray, so our own needs do not get all of the attention, and we will not grandstand ourselves with pride and hypocritical actions. Thus, we are not to approach prayer to get what we want, but to get closer to God, as that is what He wants!

Jesus tells us that our prayers are not just selfish wish lists to get God to cater to our needs and whims; rather, their true purpose is for us to be shaped by what He has revealed, and to grow in character, perseverance, and maturity. The reason Jesus is using very strong language, as in condemning those self-gratifying prayers, is that they had bad motivations. Bad motivations come from an improper understanding of God, His precepts, and His call; thus, they seek approval from people and are unconcerned about God (Matt. 11:25; John 11:41; Acts 27:35). The Jewish leaders knew better; to them, God knew everything. Thus, Jesus was challenging their hearts and motivations, not their knowledge.

We have to realize that not all prayers are acceptable to God (Prov. 28:9; Isa. 59:1-2; Luke 18:9-14; 1 Pet. 3:12), because God looks for our motivations first, which is crucial. Jesus is not saying in the Matthew passage not to pray publicly; rather, it is about our influence on others. Our private prayers are the ones that shape us; our public prayers are the ones that are to help others to be shaped and be in spiritual agreement to express praise, worship, seek forgiveness from God and one another,

confess sins, make petitions for one another, and teach one another (Luke 11:2-4; Acts 1:14; 4:24).

Jesus often taught His disciples about the importance of perseverance, faith, and humility in prayer (Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14). He wanted them to realize that prayers are directed to God, not people, and are to be heard by God, not others (Psalm 65:2; Heb. 11:6). Therefore, make sure your motivations are upright, and that you are offering up the kind of prayers that will please God! Real, authentic prayers are intimate, not a 'business model' as the pagans and Greeks saw prayer.

Prayer is not about what we want or us; it is about growing close to God. It is acknowledging that He is the Boss, He is Sovereign and Lord, and we are to be grateful beyond measure for the relationship and communication we can have with Him (Col. 1:15-23; 1 Thess. 5:16-18). Prayer is a two-way communication between God, our Creator, and us! We are made for relationships, and communication is essential for effective, relational growth. For the Christian, prayer is one of the main ways to grow in faith and maturity in our Christian formation; alongside this includes getting into the Word with personal study and devotions, solid, group Bible study, teaching, and the various disciplines of the faith.

Consider this, why waste your time with repetition when our God is sovereign; we do not need to use superfluous words! God is not swayed by the quantity of our words, but by the quality of our heart, offered with a merciful spirit (Matt. 18:21-23; James 2:13). We get far more out of any conversation when we say things differently and say new things. Would you tell your mom or spouse the same sentences over and over again? Then why do this with God? Jesus was condemning the Jewish leaders who, to get what they wanted, used *overload prayers* to tire God out with their many prayers and formulas that were repeated over and over again. The point of the condemnation is that they knew better! Do we know better? What are our motivations in prayer—to grow closer to Him or just to get what we want? The answers will help determine where we are in our spiritual formation.

Thus, prayer is sacred and of the utmost importance, and is not to be just a liturgical exercise or repeated rhetoric. Rather, it is to be a part of our passionate yearning for Christ's work in our life. If we diverge from our prayers to *vain repetitions*, saying something to catch the attention of others, or just having to say something so we are heard, they will have no value or meaning. We must see this as empty and vacant compared to the call of our Lord! This is not to say we should not persist in asking God for something, as long it is biblical (Luke 18: 1-8), but we are not to be wrapped up in our own words, how we say them, try to fit a pattern (other than Jesus pattern), or to impress someone. Just make sure your prayers are not insincere and meaningless repetition (Matt. 26: 36-44; 2 Cor. 12:7-8)! Prayer must be sincere, heartfelt, and real! God is impressed by what is in your heart, not with your quantity or quality of words.

Abraham Lincoln was asked why he was not praying that God would be on "our" side during the American Civil War. He responded, "We do not pray that God is on our side; we pray that we are on His side!" Are you on His side? We can start by keeping our prayer life focused on God, not what others are doing. We are to keep our eyes on

God, not on people! If you only seek God for your needs, you will never understand God or yourself, or His wonderful plan for you (John 17:22)! Your faith will be on your terms only. How sad that would be! How much you would lose out on the growth and opportunities He has for you!

Questions to Ponder

Read Luke 11:1-3

1. How and why is prayer a form of communication, which is essential for effective relational growth?
2. Why is the importance of perseverance, faith, and humility in prayer essential? Can you think of other essential aspects of prayer?
3. How is reciting the Lord's Prayer passage as a prayer like giving a recipe to your dinner guests and forgoing the preparing of the meal?
4. How is the Lord's Prayer more of a "patterns" or template for us on how to pray than just a prayer in of itself?
5. Why are our prayers not to be just selfish wish lists to get God to cater to our needs and whims?
6. What do you think is true purpose for Prayer?
7. How does prayer help shape you and grow you in character, perseverance, and maturity?
8. Do you think that you can waste your time with repetition when our God is sovereign; we do not need to use superfluous words?
9. What are your motivations in prayer? How much attention is there to grow closer to Christ or just to get what you may want? Keep in mind, the answers will help determine where we are in our spiritual formation.
10. Have you ever used prayer to impress someone? What can you do to make sure your prayers are not insincere and meaningless repetition?
11. God looks for our motivations first, which is crucial, so how would yours line up? What can you do to improve?
12. How does your prayer life have an influence on others? How can it more?
13. How do your prayers express praise, worship, seek forgiveness from God and one another, confess sins, make petitions for one another, and teach one another?

14. How important is the perseverance of your faith and humility in your prayer life?

15. What do you need to do to make prayer more real and effective?

16. How can your prayer life be more sincere, heartfelt, and real?

17. What do you need to do to impress God?

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