

# 1 Prayers of the Bible

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September 2, 2018

## HOW TO PRAY

**FOCUS TEXT: Matthew 6:5-15**

### KEY VERSE

But thou, when thou prayest . . . pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

— Matthew 6:6

### **BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES**

**Matthew 6:5-18**

**Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8**

**1 Timothy 2:1-8**

**1 John 5:14, 15**

**DEVOTIONAL READING**  
**Matthew 7:7-11**

### CENTRAL TRUTH

Prayer is the earnest expression of our intimate relationship with God.

### BUILDING FAMILY FAITH

Monday	Simplicity of Prayer.	Matthew 6:7-13
Tuesday	Results in Prayer.	Matthew 7:7, 8
Wednesday	Necessary Instruction.	Luke 11:1-4
Thursday	God's Good Gift.	Luke 11:11-13
Friday	Persistent Praying.	John 4:43-50
Saturday	Humility in Prayer.	Luke 18:9-14
Sunday	The Secret Place.	Matthew 6:5, 6

## THE NEED

Prayer is one of the skills most indispensable for Christian living. It is the gateway to growth. Through prayer, problems are resolved, questions are often answered, and needs are met. Simply stated, no believer can function in faith without prayer.

But how much time do we spend **learning** to pray? Our primary method of teaching prayer skills is through example. We hear others praying and follow their pattern. The danger of this method is that we pick up their clichés, which mean little or nothing to us. Our prayer life can become stale.

Formal classroom training on prayer is rare. This may be because we view prayer as a private discipline that is better suited for the laboratory than the lecture hall. But before we practice in the lab of the prayer closet, it would be helpful for us to explore the properties and conditions of prayer.

If you feel comfortable knowing how to pray, how did you learn?

## I. GUIDELINES FOR PRAYER (Matt. 6:5-8)

**Matthew 6:5.** And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

**6. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.**

7. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

**8. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.**

5. While Jesus often taught about prayer using the plural, this command about avoiding hypocrisy is stated in the singular. **Hypocrites** do things to appear to be something or someone other than what they are inwardly. Rather than being motivated by loving compassion or some other noble motive, hypocrites act, hoping to leave a positive, however inaccurate, impression of their character. The hypocrites described in this passage may have been so convincing that they even deceived themselves into believing they were something they were not. How easily these false men could have been viewed as pious because of their public prayers. Yet Jesus, the one whose assessment of us really matters, easily saw through the religious ve-

neer and identified their real character. Jesus saw them as self-righteous, self-centered, and condemned. The hypocrites prayed to **be seen of men**. Their **reward** was that they were seen. How much better for them and for us to be heard in our praying by one who can and will respond.

6. Significantly, it is **when** you pray, not **IF** you pray. Praying is a natural response of one who is in a right relationship with God. **Enter into thy closet**. Effective prayer is not the eloquent public praying of an orator, but rather the private communication with God of the person who simply believes on Him. People may understand and even admire our words, but God is the one whose attention we desire and need. Yet public praying is not forbidden.

What does it take to close the door and be alone with God?

The New Testament Church practiced public prayer (Acts 1:24; 3:1; 4:24-30). Whether praying publicly or privately, our motive must always be to gain the attention of Jesus. Pride causes a man to seek to be heard by his fellows, while humility cares not to be heard except by the Lord. Humbleness of heart and attitude helps to open the way to communicate with God. Those who desire to pray publicly rather than privately may need to consider their motives. We would much rather pray in a prayer closet where no one else sees or knows than to gain the approval of men while going unheard and unseen by God.

7. Wordiness is ruled out as a key to effective praying. Repetition of needs does not influence whether those needs will be met. We must understand, however, that Jesus did not rule out long prayers, nor did He forbid all repetition. He prayed long prayers (Luke 6:12) and even repeated Himself in praying (Matt. 26:44). Some of the parables Jesus used in His teaching taught the importance of persistent praying. The lesson here is that repetition for the sake of repetition accomplishes nothing. Instead, the attitude of the heart of the pray-er is what makes the real difference. Those who pray with a sincere and humble heart have reason to expect answers to their petitions.

8. What a comfort this is to believers! He looks beyond our stumbling words, sees the attitude of the heart, and understands the burden we represent before him. "God knows how to interpret a teardrop" (T. M. Anderson). The heavy burden of the heart is known to Him regardless of our fluency or ineptness in putting it into words. God comes to our rescue. He is waiting patiently, His ear tuned toward our cry. He does not need to be convinced of our need. Instead, He waits, knowing before we ask, and often beginning to work out the answer to our petitions before we think to ask. The use of the word **Father** reminds us of the most healthy of relationships. God our Father wants to give good things to us, His children (Luke 11:13).

## II. THE FOCUS OF PRAYER (Matt. 6:9, 10)

9. After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

**10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**

9. Here Jesus began His great pattern for praying. The best prayers come from the heart of God's child and are addressed to the Father. **Our Father which art in heaven.** These words speak to us of our relationship with God. If He is our Father, we must be His children. This great and majestic God is also personal and loving, for He allows mere mortals into a personal relationship with Him. **Hallowed be thy name.** This proclaims God's name to be sacred and holy. Of course, the understanding is that His name is a reflection of His character. How good it is to serve a God who is loving and holy, and who allows us to be His children. We must be careful to maintain a reverent attitude toward God's name and character in prayer as well as in life.

10. The work and progress of God's kingdom is much more important than the personal interests of those who do kingdom work. Indeed those who are most effective in kingdom work are those who willingly forget themselves in the interest of the kingdom. How important it is, then, for us to pray **thy kingdom come** as a personal petition for the authority and spirit of Christ to rule in our own lives. According to Luke 17:21, Christ's kingdom is within believers. Praying **thy will be done** is resigning ourselves in total surrender to the will of God. This prayer is that the perfect will of God would be accomplished in our lives and in our world, as well as in the world to come. Since God's will is perfectly obeyed in heaven, **in earth, as it is in heaven** must include His will being performed on earth, also.

## III. PETITIONS IN PRAYER (Matt. 6:11-15)

11. Give us this day our daily bread.

**12. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

13. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

**14. For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:**

15. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

11. Then our Lord came to the matter of praying for our personal needs.

Notice the emphasis on today's needs. How easy it is for those who live in affluent societies to get sidetracked into worrying over future needs instead of trusting God for both present and future. **Our daily bread.** Here is acknowledgment that God is the source of all our satisfaction. The most basic and necessary things of life are provided by Him. **Bread** includes all of our necessary food. In fact, the spirit of this prayer would seem to indicate that this term includes all the physical needs of humanity. Yet in this prayer, we must distinguish our genuine needs from our wants. Notice that the prayer is for one day at a time — **daily**. With steady jobs and income, present-day Christians may forget the day-by-day nature of our needs, but first-century Christians who were paid at the end of each day's work could easily see where an injury or sickness could take away income and security. They needed **daily** provision.

**12. Forgive us our debts.** The word **debts** means "something owed." It is often correctly understood as "sin" or "transgression," especially as it relates to something owed to God. When we fail to meet the demands of God's law, we are in need of His forgiveness. In truth, we owe God far more than we can ever pay. Yet in love and mercy, He offers forgiveness of the whole debt of sin. **Forgive us . . . as we forgive.** "The one who bears an unforgiving spirit toward another should pause before he offers this prayer" (*Beacon Bible Comm.*). What if God forgives only as we do? Would we find total forgiveness, or would some offenses be kept on our account?

**13. Lead us not into temptation.** The word **temptation** refers to the idea of "trial, affliction, or anything that tests our virtue." **Deliver** has the idea of "come to the aid of" or "rescue." The deliverance called for here is **from evil** or "from the evil one." It can mean either "spare us from" or "deliver us out of." We can always be certain that God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to endure the temptation. God always will provide a means to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). The prayer ends with a very fitting note of worship. **For thine is the kingdom.** God, and God alone, has the authority to provide answers to the above petitions. **And the power.** Never will we find our needs too great for Him. We are insufficient and cannot adequately meet our own needs. He is all-sufficient. "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). **And the glory.** All the honor for any goodness that comes in our lives belongs to Him.

**14.** Forgiveness is within the reach of everyone. Those who experience forgiveness ought to be the more ready to forgive.

**15.** An unforgiving spirit has no place in the Christian life. Those who continue to carry bitterness and animosity toward others soon discover that they have lost their sense of forgiveness from God as well as security in Him. Forgiveness is Christlikeness. Harboring malice, ill will, or unkind atti-

tudes is evidence of an inner lack. The command of Scripture is **forgive**. Jesus set the example. Our responsibility is to follow His example by forgiving as well. Yet all of us have been offended by someone who has not bothered to ask forgiveness. What should we do in this case? The answer is always, “Forgive.”

## THE DIFFERENCE

In light of the teachings of Christ on prayer, what are the next steps you need to take to improve your prayer life?

Step one: **Reject the lie that image equals reality**. Others may be impressed by your spiritual oratory, but God knows your real state of spirituality.

Step two: **Establish a secret place and time where you can meet with God in solitude**. Carve out fifteen minutes a day to spend time with God. Get away from other people and the noisy world. Power down your electronic devices so you are not distracted. Once God has your full and undivided attention, He will be able to minister to you. Adore Him. Meditate on a verse of Scripture. Open your heart to God. Here is where it pays to be alone and away from others. Do not suppress your emotions. Allow yourself to cry or sing. You may benefit from taking notes or keeping a journal about your discoveries.

Are you comfortable with solitude?

This one habit has the potential to transform your life. If you are unfamiliar or uneasy with solitude with God, research solitude and intimacy with God. Get answers. Then get alone and quiet with God.

Step three: **Guard against unforgiveness**. It is impossible to go through life without being scarred by the offenses of others. Expect people to hurt you. But when they do, forgive as Christ has forgiven you. In so doing, you will keep the waters of mercy flowing over your life.

## POINT OF SPECIAL INTEREST

I cannot say, “Our,” if I live in a watertight spiritual compartment.

I cannot say, “Father,” if I do not demonstrate the relationship in daily life.

I cannot say, “Which art in heaven,” if I am so occupied with the earth that I am laying up no treasure there.

I cannot say, “Hallowed be thy name,” if I, who am called by His name, am not holy.

I cannot say, “Thy kingdom come,” if I am not doing all in my power to hasten its coming.

I cannot say, “Thy will be done,” if I am questioning, resentful of, or disobedient to His will for me.

I cannot say, “In earth, as it is in heaven,” if I am not prepared to devote my life here to His service.

I cannot say, “Give us this day our daily bread,” if I live on past experience or am an under-the-counter shopper.

I cannot say, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” if I harbor a grudge.

I cannot say, “Lead us not into temptation,” if I deliberately place myself in a position to be tempted.

I cannot say, “Deliver us from evil,” if I am not prepared to fight evil with the weapon of prayer.

I cannot say, “Thine is the kingdom,” if I do not accord the King the disciplined obedience of a loyal subject.

I cannot say, “Thine is . . . the power,” if I fear what men may do or what my neighbor may think.

I cannot say, “Thine is . . . the glory,” if I am seeking glory for myself.

I cannot say, “Forever,” if my horizon is bounded by the things of time.