

THE RIGHT MOTIVE FOR PRAYER

MATHEW 06:05–06

Introduction — Motive for Prayer

This passage is speaking to *those who pray* — people who take prayer seriously. Prayer is one of the greatest acts of the Christian believer. Talking to God, whether by thought or tongue, is the way a believer fellowships with God; and the one thing God desires is fellowship with man (Isa. 43:10). Thus, it is essential that we pray and pray often, communicating all day long with God.

However, that we *do* pray is not the concern of Christ at this point. His concern is *how* we pray. It is possible to pray amiss, with the wrong motive and in the wrong way. It is possible to pray and never be heard by God. It is possible to pray and to be speaking only to ourselves, to have our prayer go no higher than our own ears. Therefore, Christ sets out to teach us the right and wrong motives for praying.

- I. The wrong motive: praying to be seen by men (v. 5).
- II. The right motive: praying to be heard by God (v. 6).

MATHEW 06:05–06 DANGERS SURROUNDING PRAYER

There are dangers surrounding prayer, some negative factors that must be guarded against.

1. Prayer can become hypocritical (v. 5). A person can pray for the wrong reasons, with the wrong motives.
2. Prayer can become habit-forming (v. 5). Prayer is a wonderful experience, very rewarding emotionally and mentally and in having our needs met as God answers our prayer. We can begin to *love praying* and still be praying amiss.
3. Prayer can become connected with certain places (v. 5). A believer has places that mean much to him in his prayer life, but he must guard against limiting God's presence only to those places, even if it is the church.
4. Prayer can become empty repetition (v. 7). A person can take any phrase or form of prayer and make it a meaningful experience, or make it a formal and meaningless occasion. (Note how often the Lord's Prayer is repeated by rote memory with the mind focused elsewhere.)
5. Prayer can become too long (v. 7). A believer can begin to feel he is heard because of "many words" (Eccl. 5:1-2).
6. Prayer can become self-glorifying (v. 8). A person can begin to feel he must inform and convince God of his *great* need. When the answer comes (out of the

mercy of God, despite praying amiss), the believer begins to *glory in his spirituality* — that he has what it takes to get things from God.

7. Prayer can become self-deceptive (vv. 7-8). A person can begin to think he is heard (1) because of “many words” and (2) because he convinces God of his need. □

MATHEW 06:05–06 WARNING ABOUT PRAYER

Note the things Jesus says about prayer.

1. Christ says “When you pray.” He is referring to personal prayer (v. 6).
2. Christ assumes that the believer does pray, and the idea conveyed is that the believer prays often.
3. Christ says there is a right way and a wrong way to pray. “When you pray, do not...” vs. “But when you pray...”
4. Christ says that some “love to pray,” and they are the very ones who commit this fault. They pray amiss, with the wrong motive.
5. Christ pictures two men praying. One man prays to men (v. 5); the other man prays to the Father (v. 6). The first man is a hypocrite; the second man is a true son of the Father. □

MATHEW 06:05–06 SIGNIFIANCE OF PRAYER

Believers are expected to pray. Prayer is God’s appointed medium through which He acts for man. *Sharing and talking* together are the way all persons communicate, have fellowship and commune together. This is true both with men and God. Prayer requires our presence, sharing and talking; and God wants to have fellowship and commune with us. Few persons heed this fact; few persons take prayer seriously. Therefore, if we want the blessings of God upon our lives and ministries — if we want the work of God going forth in power and bearing fruit — we must pray and we must intercede in prayer.

Mat 6:6 “*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*” (see Mat 6:7).

Mat 6:9 “*This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’*”

Mat 26:41 “*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.*” (see Mark 13:33; 14:38; Luke 21:36; 22:40,46)

Luke 18:1 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*

Eph 6:18 *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

1 Th 5:17 *Pray continually.*

1 Tim 2:8 *I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. □*

I. Mathew 06:05 The Wrong Motive for Prayer

The wrong motive for prayer is praying to be seen by men. Two preliminary things need to be looked at before discussing this point.

1. Praying — even loving to pray — is not a sign that a person really knows God.
2. The fact that a person really knows God means that he does pray. No matter what a man may think in his mind, if he really knows God and really believes in God, he talks to God. There is nothing that could keep him from praying. He knows God personally — knows Him as his Father who loves and cares for him ever so deeply. Therefore, just as any child who truly loves his father, the believer talks, converses, and shares with his Father. This says something to the person who prays primarily in public and prays little, if any, in private. He must search the genuineness of his heart and profession.

Christ says that a man who prays to be seen by men *loves to pray, but he is a hypocrite.*

1. The places where he *loves to pray* are *out in public*, in the synagogue (church), and in the streets (restaurants, and other public places).

Thought 1. Five facts about prayer.

- 1) Some love to pray publicly. They love representing the group and vocalizing their praise and needs to God. Some have become very charismatic and fluent at public prayer, yet they lack that essential love for private praying. Christ says, “hypocrite” (v. 5).
- 2) Some pray only in public. They pray before their family (at meals and family prayers, usually with children); in church (when called upon); and in public (when eating in restaurants). They seldom, if ever, pray in private. How destitute is the prayer life of so many!
- 3) Prayer is to be offered to God both in church and in public. But public prayer is to be public, not private. Too often a person has his *personal devotions* when called upon to pray publicly. He has neglected his *private prayers* and his inner need has

not been met. Thus when he begins to pray publicly, he slips into praying his own *private prayer* instead of representing the group.

- 4) Some hypocrites pray, and they pray much. There are some *religious people* who pray little, if any. These can learn from the hypocrites.
- 5) Note the posture of this hypocrite. He stood praying. This is an acceptable posture for prayer (Mk. 11:25); but the picture is that of pride, arrogance, and self-confidence. Kneeling is a picture of humility, reverence, and dependence upon God (Lk. 22:41; Eph. 3:14).

Rom 12:16 *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

Gal 6:3 *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

1 John 2:16 *For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world.*

Hab 2:4 *“See, he is puffed up; his desires are not upright — but the righteous will live by his faith.”*

2. The man who prays only in public prays for only one reason: not because he loves to pray but because he loves recognition.

Thought 1. Note two lessons.

- 1) The sin is not failing to pray. The sin is praying *only* in church and in public. A person who prays publicly but seldom prays privately fools himself. Christ says real prayer (prayer to the Father) matters nothing to that person. He prays only for recognition — to be heard by men.
- 2) Praying publicly should be done. There is a great danger, however, in public prayer: having one’s pride stroked. It is so easy to be praying publicly and have self-centered thoughts run across one’s mind.
 - => That one is really praying a good prayer. Such prayer is nothing but waxing eloquent with words.
 - => That one’s prayer will surely be admired.
 - => That one’s prayer is really demonstrating a close walk with God (a deep spirituality).

Mat 15:7-8 *“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”*

1 Cor 8:2 The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

Prov 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Isa 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.

3. The man who prays only in public receives his reward: public recognition. Three things need to be clearly seen about this man.
 - a. He will experience good feelings and satisfying thoughts about his spiritual state and religious piety. He will possess a good self-image and some confidence in his standing with God. The esteem and praise of men and feeling good about what he has done gives him a good self image. *But* in this case it is a false self-image.
 - b. He has cheated himself, really missed out on the most intimate presence and greatest future in the universe. He has lost his soul. He shall never hear, “Well done thou good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:21).
 - c. He gets just what he deserves: public recognition. If he places so little value upon sharing himself with God, he deserves no more than what man can give him — human recognition.

Thought 1. Man’s esteem fails at several points.

- 1) Man’s esteem is temporary. Everything passes — ever so quickly. Man soon forgets and moves on to other things.
- 2) Man’s esteem becomes commonplace. Even the greatest skills that elicit praise become routine and commonplace to man when performed day by day. Soon man no longer acknowledges his uniqueness. Such abilities are merely expected and accepted; he no longer elicits praise and recognition.
- 3) Man’s esteem is powerless. It cannot answer prayer; it can only recognize man’s ability to put words together and to see man’s expression, fervency and emotion. Its power is limited to the things of this world, and that power is even limited and short lived. Man’s esteem can do absolutely nothing about the spiritual needs of his heart.
- 4) Man’s esteem is not to be the judge of his life — God is. No man is any greater than any other man; men are mere men. All men have the same need: to turn to God in prayer, praying for His acceptance and recognition. Therefore, the esteem of man *by men* is meaningless in the light of judgment and eternity.

1 Pet 1:24 For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”

Psa 49:12 But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

Psa 49:17 For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him.

Hosea 4:7 The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful.

II. Mathew 06:06 The Right Motive for Prayer

The right motive for prayer is praying to be heard by God. Three preliminary things need to be looked at in this point.

1. The willingness to take time to pray: “When you pray.” There has to be the will to pray. The believer must take time to get alone to pray. Too few ever take time to pray, and even fewer spend more than a few minutes in prayer. Too many stay all wrapped up in the world and its day-to-day affairs, some of which are necessary, but how much more necessary is prayer!
2. A closet is a necessity. The believer must have a private place deliberately chosen for prayer.
3. A personal relationship with God: a *Father-son* relationship is absolutely essential. God is our *Father*; He is available as fathers are available to their children. We are to go to Him, pray, share, commune and let Him shower us with His care and protection and meet our every need (Psa. 91:1).

Note: Christ says that a man who is genuine prays to be heard by God and not by men.

1. The place he chooses for prayer is in his private closet. Christ says: “Get alone”; “Go into your room... close the door.” Be unobserved, undisturbed and unheard. (2 Kng. 4:33; Isa. 26:20.)
 - a. *Get alone*: unobserved — out of everyone’s sight.
 - b. *Get alone*: undisturbed — avoid interruptions and disturbances.
 - c. *Get alone*: unheard — concentrate and meditate to allow God the freedom to work in your heart as He wishes.

Acts 10:9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray.

Acts 10:30 Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me.”

Mat 6:6 “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Mark 1:35 *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

Mark 6:46-47 *After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land.*

Luke 6:12 *One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.*

Luke 22:41-42 *He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

2. The reason the believer prays in his private closet is because God is in secret or unseen. Note two significant facts.
 - a. God "is unseen"; therefore, a person can meet God only in *secret*. Even in the midst of a worshipping crowd, a person must concentrate and focus his attention upon God who is unseen. There must be a secret heart-to-heart meeting and communion if a person wishes to pray and truly share with God.
 - b. God "is unseen"; therefore, He is not interested in show, but in substance. Show is before men. Substance is found in the secret, quiet, meditative place. Remember: everything that exists began with an idea, and the development of the idea came from *private and quiet thought and meditation*, not out in the public before people — at least not often. The same is true of spiritual matters. Spiritual show takes place before people, but spiritual substances or qualities that really matter take place in secret. When the believer pours out his heart, he receives his greatest encouragement and strength in the secret place of the Most High, not in the public places of mere men.

Thought 1. Many pray on the run; few pray in secret. Why do so few have a quiet time, a daily worship and devotional time? Why do so few keep their daily appointment with God? This is one of the most difficult things in the world to understand in light of who God is and in light of man's desperate plight and need. No man would ever fail to keep his appointment with the state leader of his nation.

- 1) Many say they do not have the time, so they do not take the time. But in all honesty, it takes only a little effort to get up a little earlier in the morning — if they are really all that pressed for time. All they need to do is to rearrange their schedule to allow for a quiet time just as they arrange for any other important meeting. However, few do this; therefore, they are without excuse. Many believers are faithful in meeting God daily. It is just a matter of discipline and priority.
- 2) Most have the time; they just do not take the time. They neglect getting alone with God consistently.

- 3) Many have not been taught the importance and benefit of a quiet time with God every day. This is a justified accusation against Christian parents, preachers and teachers. So few have practiced and stressed what they have always heard about the importance of prayer. The silence of believers and their failure to reach the world in sound doctrine is unbelievable, especially after two thousand years.
 - 4) Some have not yet learned to discipline themselves and to be consistent in their spiritual lives. There is no better area to learn discipline and consistency than in a daily quiet time. A person should just begin and do it. When a day is missed, a person should flee discouragement, “forgetting what is behind,” and reach forth to a new day and begin again. Eventually, consistency and discipline will be learned, and the person’s soul will be fed with the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8, 20; see Phil. 3:13).
3. The reward of the genuine prayer warrior is open blessings. The praying believer will be rewarded in two very special ways.
 - a. The strength and presence of God will be upon his life (Ezr. 8:22; 1 Pet. 5:6). God’s presence is unmistakable. There is a difference between a person who walks in God’s presence and a life that walks only in this world (Mt. 6:25-34, esp. 33). God rewards the praying believer with His presence and blessings. The believer’s needs, material and spiritual, are met day by day.
 - b. The believer’s prayers will also be answered (Mt. 21:22; Jn. 16:24; 1 Jn. 5:14-15). The answers to prayer are clearly seen by a thinking and honest observer. God has promised to answer the true prayer of a genuine believer. God takes care of the genuine believer with a very special care. Sometimes the answer is seen in a renewed strength

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us

- in a provision of some necessity.

Mat 6:33 “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

- in a conquest of some great temptation or trial.

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- in a peace that passes and transcends all human understanding.

Phil 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- in self-discipline that is incomprehensible.

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

Thought 1. The praying believer, the believer who becomes a true intercessor, will be rewarded openly on that special day of redemption.

- 1) God “was appalled that there was no one to make an intercession [no intercessor]” (Isa. 59:16).
- 2) Christ, the Great Intercessor, “always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25).
- 3) The interceding believer shall stand openly in a very special relationship with Jesus, the Great Intercessor Himself, before God the Father.

Mat 21:22 *“If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”*

Luke 11:9 *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*

John 14:13-14 *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”*

John 15:7 *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”*

John 16:24 *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”*

1 John 3:22 *And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*

1 John 5:14-15 *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him. ■*

MATHEW 06:06 PRAYING IN SECRET

Prayer is to be done secretly. The believer is to get by himself and pray to God secretly. This means three things:

1. Concentration is needed: meditation, contemplation, thinking deeply upon God and sharing accordingly.
2. A person must get alone, apart from all else: secluded, private, out of view from all.
3. God is unseen: invisible, yet there. A person must believe and have faith that God is there. God is Spirit, but He still hears and responds. Every believer should have a secret, quiet place that is dear to his heart, dear because it is the place where he draws near to God and God draws near to him. □

JOHN 01:48 FIG TREE AND WORSHIP

*“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.” **John 01:48***

In Palestine the fig tree stood for peace, security, rest and worship (1 Kng. 4:25; Mica. 4:4). Very often a man would seek solitude and worship under his fig tree. No doubt this is what Nathanael had been doing. When Jesus told Nathanael that He had seen him under his fig tree, He was telling Nathanael that He knew everything about him, even the deepest longings of his heart. Jesus knew Nathanael’s despair and sense of hopelessness; He knew his longing for peace and release and freedom. That was enough to cause Nathanael to give his life to Jesus forever. □