



SERIES: Becoming Spiritually Fit 2022

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Thursday, 01/13/22

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-8

TITLE: How to Pray

Have you ever asked someone how to do something, but instead of telling you what to do, they tell you what not to do instead? How do I pronounce this word? Not like that. What shirt should I wear? Not that one. Where should we eat? Not there. Sometimes knowing what not to do is the best first step toward getting it right.

That's Jesus' response to His disciples when they asked Him, "how should we pray?" in Matthew chapter 6. Responding to the disciple's question of how to pray, Jesus says this, Matthew 6:5-8.

“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.”

This is the “what not to do” portion of the Lord's Prayer. So what is it that we shouldn't do? Based on verse 5, it seems like we shouldn't pray to try to draw attention to ourselves. Praying shouldn't be a look at me, listen to me activity. It should be communication between us and our creator.

The purpose of prayer should be to draw attention away from ourselves. Look at God. Listen to God. Prayer shouldn't be a public spectacle. On the contrary, Jesus tells us that we should go and be alone with the Lord where no one else can see. The purpose here, I believe, is to remind us that prayer is between us and God, and it isn't for show or the approval of others.

But does this mean we should never pray with other people? I don't think so. There are many examples of public, corporate prayer in the Bible. When we lead people in prayer or are being led, the goal should remain the same. The focus should be on communicating with God and glorifying Him.

Others have told me before that I pray “well,” so to speak. And I've had people ask me how they can pray better. My advice is always the same: focus your attention on God and forget about the other people present in the room. It's just you talking to God. This is extremely, hard but the more we do it, the easier it becomes. The focus should always be on God. If we lead prayers, we

want to focus on God, and if we are joining the prayers of someone else, we should want to focus our hearts and minds on praying for the same things they are saying.

Jesus says in verse 7, “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”

This reminds me of a time I was talking with members at my church; we were admitting that when we pray in groups, and people are taking turns praying, we spend the time thinking about the words we will say instead of focusing on what is being prayed for at the moment! But I think if we look at Jesus' example, the focus should not be on how good we sound or what words we use. We don't want to say a bunch of nice-sounding words that sound holier; we just want to speak with God and draw near Him. It's not about how we sound; it's about what's on our hearts. Look again at verse 8; the specific words aren't that important; God already knows what we're going to say before we say it!

So, how should we pray? We should go before God wanting to speak to Him and be drawn into His presence. We should focus our hearts and minds on God's glory and not on the people around us. Whether we are alone, I'm praying and agreeing. It's not about looking good or sounding good. Just pray to God and let Him know what's on your heart because He cares for you!

So when you pray, talk to the Lord, be honest, be real, and focus on the Lord.