

Abuses In Praying

When was the last time you prayed? Was it over a meal? The Mishnah provided guidelines for giving “grace” at a meal. The exact words of the prayer changed with the type of food to be eaten. There was a different prayer for fruit, bread, vegetables, herbs, “greens,” and dairy products. Women, slaves, and minors could not ask males to bless their food. The Jews were required to recite the “Eighteen Benedictions” every day, and they were required to pray to God three times a day. Prayer was important to the Jews, but they missed the fact that God was a person. Why do you pray? When do you pray, and how do you pray? Jesus wants to talk to us about praying to His Father.

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; . . . (NASB) Matthew 6:5-8

RELIGIOUS LEADERS. In Matt. 6:1-4, Jesus has just told us that the Jewish leaders wanted the people to know that they gave money. In most cases they gave money for wonderful purposes - the poor and needy. Jesus, who sees into our hearts, said they did it to gain honor from the people. We discovered that He encourages us to give from our hearts, and not to seek honor. Have you ever give to someone without any other person knowing?

Jesus was not just talking about some new person in the church who is seeking to be noticed and respected. He was not talking about some “wall-flower” who everyone ignored. For us today, we could say that Jesus was talking about the pastors of churches, the spiritual leadership of the church, the Sunday School teacher, or the Awana leader who wanted you to think he/she is really very spiritual. It is amazing that all of Jesus’ illustrations have started with the spiritual leadership.

LOOK AT ME. Jesus is after the “spiritual” lead-

ers again in verse 5-8. This time He is talking about prayer. Have you every been at a prayer meeting where you were uncomfortable, but you decided to pray anyway because it might look bad if you did not pray? Or, have you ever struggled with what words to say in your prayer because you feared looking badly and wanted others to think you did great? If your answer is yes to anyone of these questions Jesus has some words for you,

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have

their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you. (NASB) Matt. 6:5-6

Jesus’ words are unbelievable. He says these religious leaders loved

Mishnah

The morning prayer [may be recited] until midday. R. Judah says, ‘Until the fourth hour.’ The afternoon prayer [may be recited] until evening. R. Judah says, ‘Until mid-afternoon.’ The evening prayer has no fixed [time]. (Berakhot 4.1).

R. Gamaliel says, “Each day a man should pray the Eighteen [Benedictions]” (Berakhot 4.3).

“One may stand to pray in a solemn frame of mind. The pious ones used to tarry one hour [before they would] pray . . . (Berakhot 5.1).

to pray in the synagogues and in the open streets (the literal Greek) to “appear truly” to men. The Greek word for “appear” comes from *phaino* which means “to shine,” “to appear,” or to “light up.” The word is sometimes used to speak of the shining sun. These men wanted to be seen by everyone. They wanted to shine like the sun and to appear to be very righteous.

How does Jesus react? He said we should go into an inner room in the house, hide from the crowd, get away and pray in secret. Jesus is not against prayer meetings. The apostles had a prayer meeting while they waited for the Holy Spirit to come (Acts 1:12-14). The question is, “When you pray in public, is God your real focus?”

ASKING & ASKING. God is not impressed with how many times we ask Him for the same thing. That is Jesus’ next point,

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. (NASB) Matt. 6:7

The Greek word Jesus uses for “meaningless repetition” comes from *battalogo* which means “to babble” or “to heap repetitions.” And the Greek word He uses for “many words” is *polylogia* which means “talkativeness,” “wordiness” or “to speak a lot.” It is common in different religions to just ask and ask and ask the god(s) for a specific request. Jesus is talking about attempts to manipulate God with repetitive requests. Jesus says do not endlessly repeat your prayers,

Therefore do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him. (NASB) Matt. 6:8

Even before you prayed, God knew what you needed. Jesus is not saying that you cannot repeat the same request. He is saying God heard you the first time and repetitive prayers will not ensure that you get what you want.

Jesus is talking about heart attitude. In Luke 18:2-7, Jesus tells us the Father responds to a pleading heart that is in pain. In fact, Jesus repeated His request three times to the Father as He struggled with the fact He was going to die on the cross (Matt. 26:44). Paul the apostle asked three times for his “thorn in the flesh” to be removed (2 Cor. 12:7-8).

James 5:17 tells us that Elijah “pray prayed.” That is the literal Greek. This means Elijah was serious in his prayer. The verse does not say he prayed much, but that he was serious in his prayer.

Jesus is not saying, “Do not repeat your request.” He is saying God hears and knows. Trust in God the Father to hear. *Prayer should not be an attempt to manipulate God but to talk with Him.*

JESUS’ PRAYER LIFE. Almost every time the Bible tells us that Jesus prayed, we read that Jesus prayed alone - not in groups. He would get away from the crowds and even His own disciples. There are times when He did pray in the presence of others, but they are the exception. Jesus

mainly prayed in secret and not in public. He prayed for others and also for Himself. Jesus is our model for prayer.

CONCLUSION. God is a person who desires that we trust Him to hear us. God is a person who wants us to talk with Him and not for the purpose of seeking the praise of men and women. God wants a heart that is broken and hungering for righteousness and a deeper relationship with Him - a disciple who loves Him. For a Christian, prayer is talking with your friend!

<i>Jesus’ Prayer Life</i>	
<u>He Prayed</u>	<u>Passage</u>
Alone	Matt. 14:23 Mark 1:35 Luke 22:41
On a Mountain	Matt. 14:23
In the Wilderness	Luke 5:16
Morning or Evening	Matt. 14:23 Mark 1:35
All Night	Luke 6:12
Often	Luke 5:16
For Children	Matt. 19:13
For the Apostles	Luke 22:32
For Himself	Matt. 26:39