

Matthew 6:5-8

Review:

Today we are back in chapter 6 of Matthew. To review, let me remind you that the first verse of the chapter is key to understanding the next 18 verses.

Matthew 6:1

Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

The verse starts with a stern warning: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them . . .” “Practicing your righteousness” covers three topics: giving to the poor, praying, and fasting. These were the three spiritual practices most valued by the Jews. Last week we talked about the topic of giving to the poor. Today we are going to talk about the topic of prayer.

Observation:

I want to start off by making some observations about the passage. There are two things we are going to look at: the context and repetition. By context, I mean looking at the verses that surround our passage to see how they connect and add to our understanding. When I talk about repetition, I mean repeated words, phrases, ideas, or grammar patterns. Repetition is very important when you study the Bible. It is used to emphasize something important. Matthew 6 has a lot of repetition, so we want to pay attention to that. I’m going to give you a few minutes to read through Matthew 6:1-18 and make your own observations before we study the passage together.

1. Circle the words “your Father” or “our Father.”
2. Box the word “hypocrite.”
3. Underline this sentence: “Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”
4. Underline this phrase: “your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”
5. Are there any other repetitions that you notice?

Matthew 6:5

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

The Wrong Way to Pray:

The verse begins with the word “when.” It is assumed we will pray, just like it is assumed we will give to the poor. Jesus describes the wrong way to pray before he explains the right way. He is talking about heart motives again and says we should not be hypocrites. In Matthew 5:20 we learned that the hypocrites were the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:20

For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

To quickly review: a hypocrite is: “one who pretends to be what he is not.” Integrity is the opposite of hypocrisy. Integrity is wholeness of character, sincerity, consistency. God’s standard of righteousness is much higher than man’s. People try to make the outside look good, God deals with sin in the heart and replaces it with righteousness at the heart level. Righteousness on the inside will reveal itself in righteousness on the outside.

Where did the scribes and Pharisees love to pray?

A synagogue is a natural place to pray. Street corners are an unusual place to pray. The Jews had appointed hours of prayer: 9 in the morning, 12 noon, and 3 in the afternoon. It was not uncommon for a Pharisee to stop and pray wherever he was when it was prayer time. It is interesting that the word for street in verse 5 is different from the word for street in verse 2. In verse 2 it is a “lane or alley with buildings on both sides,” a small street. In verse 5 the word is a broad wide street. It is implied that the Pharisees were choosing the spot where they would get the most attention, standing at the corner where two large streets met. This makes sense, their motive for praying was to be seen by men, so they picked the spot most to their advantage. Being seen by men was the only reward they received.

“Truly I say to you” is a phrase you underlined. The word “truly” is actually the word “amen.” Sometimes the word is doubled: “truly, truly.” R.C. Sproul said “Whenever we read in the text of Scripture our Lord giving a statement that is prefaced by a double ‘amen,’ it is a time to pay close attention.” This is only a single “amen,” but the meaning is the same. This phrase conveys the idea that “what follows is true” and “the person making the statement has first hand knowledge and authority about it.” To the Jews listening, it was as if Jesus was saying “I know this is true firsthand.” It was a statement of deity.

Matthew 6:6

But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

The Right Way to Pray:

Now we actually get to talk about the topic of prayer.

What does this verse say about where we should pray?

The “but” at the beginning of verse 6 tells us that what comes next is a completely opposite approach to prayer from the one described in verse 5. The “you” in verse 5 was plural, the “you” in verse 6 is singular, emphasizing personal, private, one on one communion. An “inner chamber” was a room in a house without outside windows, a private place, in direct contrast to prayer in the most prominent public places. Jesus adds the phrase “close the door,” which is another layer of privacy for a prayer “done in secret.”

Who is the audience in this prayer?

What is the connection between “your Father” in heaven and prayer?

One commentary said, “The basis of all prayer is that of the Fatherhood of God and our relationship to Him as His children.” Prayer is meant for an audience of One, our Heavenly Father. It is an intimate, personal, heart to heart conversation with the God of the universe who is also our Father. This is the right motivation for prayer.

Luke 18:10-13

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.

This passage shows the same two kinds of people described in Matthew 6: a self righteous Pharisee who compared Himself to other people and whose prayer was meant for an audience of people, and a tax collector who in humility prayed only for the ears of God.

Matthew 14:23

After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.

What are some other benefits of going somewhere to be alone to pray in secret?

More Instructions on Prayer:

When Jesus gets to the topic of prayer, he has a lot more to say than he did about giving to the poor or fasting. He adds this instruction in verses 7 and 8. The Lord's Prayer is verses 9-15. The plan is to study the Lord's Prayer when we meet again in the Fall.

Matthew 6:7-8

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. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

What is the warning in these verses?

Why do the followers of Jesus not need to do this?

Matthew 7:11

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Psalm 139 tells us God is intimately acquainted with us. Why do we pray to a God who already knows everything? It isn't that He needs to be informed of anything or manipulated to respond. It's about the Fatherhood of God again isn't it? We pray to express our complete dependence on our Heavenly Father, who loves to "give what is good to those who ask Him."

One last question . . . Do these verses mean that it is wrong to pray in public? Is it more righteous to pray in secret? Are short prayers better than long prayers? Is it wrong to pray repeatedly for something?

Application:

Is there anything in your prayer life that needs to be adjusted? Any mixed motives or wrong ideas about prayer?

How does the Fatherhood of God impact your praying? Is there something you can do to invest in a more intimate relationship with God?

Matthew 6:1-18

Key Verse:

1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

Giving to the Poor:

2 “So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **3** But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Praying:

5 “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **6** But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

7 “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. **8** So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

9 “Pray, then, in this way:
‘Our Father who is in heaven . . .

Fasting:

16 “Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. **17** But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face **18** so that your

fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.