

Our Motive and Means For Prayer Matthew 6:5-15

Please turn in your Bible to **Matthew 6:5-15**. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the motivation of why we give, pray and fast. Today we are looking at the second area of concern, the area of prayer. As a Christian, we know we should pray, but how much do we pray and perhaps the bigger question is why we pray and what we pray for.

A Puritan pastor, William Gurnall said **“When people do not mind what God speaks to them in His Word, God doth as little mind what they say to Him in prayer.”** In other words, if we don’t read, listen to and obey the instructions God has said in His Word, He is of a mind not to listen to our prayers. Jesus lays out how we should pray and then gives us a model for prayer. It’s often called the Lord’s prayer, but could just as easily be titled the disciples prayer for it is a template of how we should pray. We could spend a month of Sundays or more on this topic, but we’ll condense it into one as we think about our motivation for prayer. **So what does Jesus have to say about prayer in this section?** Let’s consider three things Jesus has to say about self-centered prayer, secret prayer, and sacred prayer.

If we were to give a simple definition of prayer it would be this: prayer is talking with God.

In His ministry and life Jesus focused a lot of His time and teaching on prayer. He often went out into desert places to pray alone. He taught prayer by stating that men out to pray and not give up and to watch and pray so we don’t fall into temptation.

Paul added the importance of prayer by saying that we should pray without ceasing, pray for each other and to pray with all kinds of prayers and to do so with thanksgiving. We cannot argue its importance yet how often do we neglect it and when we do pray what is our motivation. In our passage, Jesus first talks about prayer that is self-centered.

I. PRAYER THAT IS SELF-CENTERED – vv. 5, 7

Jesus begins His discussion on prayer with a simple word **“when”**. It’s a word that refers to time. He didn’t use the word **“if”** which calls into question whether or not a person prays, but when making an assumption that His audience was in the habit of praying. But then immediately follows it with a word of caution, a warning if you will about the how of prayer.

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites.”

We learned about that word last week and found that it refers to an actor, someone who pretends to be something they are not, someone who is putting on a show. They’re not that way in real life. To take a phrase from an old 1950’s song **“Oh, yes, I’m the great pretender.”** They know in their heart they are just acting the part, but they make it appear and sound so genuine.

Notice first their posture in prayer.

A. Their Posture In Prayer – v. 5a

Jesus says they are standing. Now, please note that standing wasn’t an uncommon posture for prayer in Jesus’s day. Scripture speaks of a number of postures people used when praying.

Elijah sat with his head between his knees.

Solomon knelt and prayed when he dedicated the Temple.

Hezekiah went into the Temple area and lay prostrate on the floor and prayed.

No one posture is greater than another, although different postures may have different meanings. God’s receptivity of our prayer isn’t dependent on posture. The emphasis is on the heart.

Bowing is an expression of honor and reverence.

It’s often used as a sign of our worship and a demonstration of devotion to God. When God came down in the cloud to meet with Moses on Mt. Sinai, **Exodus 34:8** says Moses bowed low to worship.

In **Psalms 5:7** David said **“As for me...I bow down in reverence to You.”**

We read in **II Chronicles 6:13** that Solomon knelt to pray at the Temple dedication.

We learn in **Daniel 6:10** that even though it meant defying the king’s edict, Daniel continued his

practice of kneeling in prayer three times a day.

Prayer while lying prostrate was a sign of submission. In **Nehemiah 8:6** we read that **“they bowed low and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.”**

When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He **“fell on His face and prayed” (Matt. 26:39).**

The Bible also mentions praying with lifted hands. **Psalm 141:2 “lifting up of my hands at the evening offering.”**

Paul said **“I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.” (I Timothy 2:8)**

Both Solomon and Ezra lifted their hands while lying prostrate.

When we pray, we generally do so with our eyes closed as a way of avoiding distractions and keeping our focus on prayer but don't close your eyes to pray if you are driving.

We read that Jesus lifted His eyes when He prayed at the tomb of Lazarus (**John 11:41**) and when He blessed the bread and fish when feeding the multitude (**Luke 9:16**).

Those are just some of the physical postures we find in Scripture. So when Jesus says they were standing, it wasn't so much about the position as it was about the reason. They did it to be seen by men. Their motive was to gain attention. Look at me.

Jesus tells a story about two men who went into the Temple to pray (**Luke 18:9-14**). It says in **v. 11** that the Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. His prayer was self-centered. Look at me, God, consider the great religious person I am. While on the other hand, this tax collector when he prayed couldn't even look up. It's not about our posture. It's about our heart.

These hypocrites stood to be seen. Jesus then talked about their place of prayer.

B. Their Place Of Prayer – v. 5b

“They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners.”

Now, let's understand first that the synagogue and street were normal places to pray. We pray during our services privately as you pray and ready your heart and mind to worship God and then also publicly as I or others lead in prayer during different times of our service. It's part of worship.

Even praying out on a street was a normal practice. There were certain times of the day that prayer was offered. When that time came no matter where you were, you prayed.

In the checkout line at the market.

Weeding your garden.

Folding the laundry.

Talking with a neighbor.

Tending sheep.

Whatever you were doing and wherever you were, when it was time to pray, you stopped and prayed.

The problem with the Pharisees is that they made it a habit to be in places where there was a large crowd at prayer times. Now, we read the word street and have an idea in our head of what it means. We all live on a street. Some streets don't have many houses. My Grandma lived on a street that only had four houses and her house was the last one on the street. Across the street was the river. The word Jesus uses here for street actually refers to a wide, major street where there would be lots of people at any given time of the day. Think of it like going to 5th and Broadway in New York City where it's busy all the time. When these hypocrites prayed, they made sure there was an audience. Their purpose was to be seen by men. From last week, we learned the word “seen” is our word for theater, a place to perform. That was their place to get an audience. What does Jesus have to say about their practice during prayer.

C. Their Practice During Prayer – v. 7

In Judaism, prayer had become ritualistic and routine. They did it because that's what they had been taught. It was formal and repetitious. Prayer was reduced to a formality that lacked sincerity. They had prescribed prayers for every object and every occasion. If eating a meal, pray this prayer. If going on a journey, pray this prayer.

If offering a sacrifice, pray this prayer.
 When it's a new moon, pray this prayer.
 When there is a festival, pray this prayer.
 When there is good news, pray this prayer.
 When there is bad news, pray this prayer.
 Prayer had lost its purpose, meaning and sincerity.
 The religious leaders thought long prayers were best
 and the more likely God was to hear and answer.
 In **Mark 12:40**, Jesus condemned the prayers of the
 Pharisees who **“For a show make lengthy
 prayers.”**

Some religions, like Buddhism, use a prayer wheel.
 Spin the wheel and pray that prayer.

That was the way the pagans prayed. Jesus used the
 word babbling in the NIV, or vain repetitions in the
 KJV. Jesus isn't saying we shouldn't repeat our
 prayers. He's not advocating that we only need to
 pray for something one time and that's it. Paul
 prayed about his thorn in the flesh three times. Jesus
 is referring to the kind of repeated prayer that just
 drones on and on repeating the same thing over and
 over. It's the kind of prayers that were offered by
 the prophets of Baal when Elijah challenged them
 on Mt. Carmel.

I Kings 18:26-29

Jesus is referring to prayers that are idle,
 thoughtless chatter or meaningless jabber. The
 pagans thought their gods first had to be woken up,
 then badgered into hearing and answering.

Augustine wrote **“It was your Lord who put an end
 to longwindedness, so that you would not pray as if
 you wanted to teach God by your many words.
 Piety, not verbosity, is in order when you pray.”**

John Bunyon stated **“When thou prayest, rather let
 thy heart be without words, than thy words without
 heart.”**

When we pray, our practice should not be like the
 pagans who think that being wordy is what's
 required. Often times, the best prayers are the
 shortest prayers.

Jesus tells us not to pray like the self-centered
 hypocrites in their prays, often being like the pagans

using lots of words just to be seen by others.

So, how does Jesus say we should pray? Notice His
 teaching on prayer that is secret **verses 6 and 8.**

II. PRAYER THAT IS SECRET – vv. 6, 8

Jesus doesn't just tell us how not to pray, He
 follows it by us how we should pray. Again, it boils
 down to motive. Yes, it's okay to pray in public, but
 watch how and why you do it. But if we really want
 to determine if our motive is right and sincere, pray
 in private. How you pray in private is a determining
 factor in one's motive.

He says we should be private in prayer.

A. Be Private In Prayer – v. 6a

If finding one spot in your house or garage or
 basement can help you stay focused in prayer, then
 by all means go to that spot and fervently bring your
 requests to the Lord. The issue isn't the location,
 it's the attitude. Much of our prayer life should be
 in secret. It's the mindset of praying throughout the
 day when you're driving, when you're shopping,
 when you're doing chores around the house, when
 you're working, when you're resting – as Paul says
“pray without ceasing.” Wherever you are can be
 your secret closet.

It doesn't have to be in a physical room, it can be in
 the quietness of our heart and mind, to be still and
 know God as the psalmist writes. We find Peter up
 on the rooftop praying when God spoke to him
 about going to the Gentiles with the gospel. The
 desert was where Jesus chose for His secret room.

Although you may have or need a physical room
 that is secluded and reserved for times of earnest
 prayer, let's not suppose that this is all that Jesus
 meant. Rather, let's think of it more as a state of
 heart and mind as you shut the door to distractions
 so that you can communicate with God, to come
 boldly into His presence at the throne of grace.
 Let's also bear in mind that this should be a regular
 occurrence of prayerful activity as being necessary
 for your spiritual well-being just as breathing is
 necessary for your physical well-being.

Martin Luther stated that **“If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith.”**

How important it is to go to a private place to pray. even on a busy street corner you can pray in secret. It's in the private place that the test of our sincerity comes out. When no one else is around to hear us or see us, the true motive of the heart is evident.

It's also in that place that we are to be personal in prayer.

B. Be Personal In Prayer – v. 6b

That's the time to get very real with God, to pour out your heart.

Psalm 34:4, 6, 17-18

v. 4 “I sought the Lord, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.”

v. 6 “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him; He delivered him out of all His troubles.”

vv. 17-18 “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their trouble. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

I Samuel 1:10, 12-17

When was the last time we went into our private place and poured out our heart in a personal way to the Lord?

When was the last time we went into our private place and just spent time worshipping God?

Robert Murray McCheyne stated that **“what a man is on his knees before God, that he is, and nothing more.”**

How I am in prayer, is who I am in public. Who I am in public is the product of my prayers. When I say that prayer should be personal, I don't mean that my prayers should be self-centered, but that my heart empties itself of its requests to God, casting my care on Him, knowing that He cares for me. I also mean that it's personal because of the intimate relationship I have with the Father. Knowing that

He cares for me, invites me to ask in prayer knowing that if I ask for bread, He won't give me a stone because He desires what is best for me. It's knowing that if I delight in Him, He will give me the desires of my heart. That doesn't mean God gives me whatever I ask because He is pleased with my good behavior, but instead my desires are in alignment with His desires for me. I want His will when I pray.

So when we pray, we need to be practical.

C. Be Practical In Prayer – v. 8

Let's be honest that sometimes our prayers are as vague as saying the sky is blue, but what shade of blue is it? If you go to the paint store and tell them you want to paint your room blue, they'll take you over to the display and point to the color palette and ask you which shade: ocean, cobalt, indigo, sky, peacock, sapphire, teal, navy or a bunch more. When we ask God to bless someone, name what it is you want God to bless.

Bless them with good health
Bless them with good friendships
Bless them with wisdom
Protect them from evil
Protect them in their travels
Protect them in their job
Provide for employment
Provide for a medical bill

Even though Jesus says that God knows our needs, we are to ask anyway.

Charles Spurgeon once said: **“There is no need for us to go on beating about the bush, and not telling the Lord distinctly what it is that we crave at His hands. Nor will it be seemly for us to make any attempt to use fine language; but let us ask God in the simplest and most direct manner for just the things we want...I believe in the business of prayer. I mean prayers in which you take to God one of the many promises which He has given us in His Word, and expect it to be fulfilled as certainly as we look for the money to be given us when we go the bank to cash a check.”**

Make your prayers practical by being specific and centered on God's promises. Never presume upon God in your prayers what He has not promised.

I also see in **vs. 8** that we are to be patient in prayer.

D. Be Patient In Prayer – v. 8

“God knows what you need before you ask Him.”

Don't think for a moment that your prayer will automatically be answered right away. He can work that fast and sometimes He does. But oftentimes His timetable isn't necessarily ours. Can I get a witness? We want our prayers to be like instant oatmeal: pour out the bag into a bowl, add some hot water, stir and eat.

Prayers are often not microwave ready. They're more likely to be slow cooker or crock pot prayers where we have to wait patiently for God to answer. In that time of waiting, God is developing our faith. How often do you suppose Abraham and Sarah prayed for God's answer for an heir? They waited some 25 years before the answer came.

Paul waited for an answer to his prayer about the thorn in the flesh that had been given him. We might think that God turned a deaf ear to his request because it was never answered in the way Paul wanted. Instead, Paul understood the answer to his prayer to be in God's sufficient and sustaining grace. He didn't say God didn't answer my prayer. He found the answer to be in recognizing that when he was weak, he was strong because God's grace was sufficient for what he needed. So let's learn to be patient when we pray.

Psalm 37:7 “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

Keep praying until God answers or the Holy Spirit tells you to stop, but along the way be patient.

Jesus spoke about the kinds of self-centered prayers. He spoke about the kinds of secret prayers. He concludes with prayer that is sacred.

III. PRAYER THAT IS SACRED– vv. 9-15

The Westminster Shorter Catechism reads: **“Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies.”**

In his book on The Weapon Of Prayer, E.M. Bounds writes: **“the central significance of prayer is not in the things that happen as results, but in the deepening intimacy and unhurried communion with God at His central throne of control in order to discover a ‘sense of God’s need in order to call on God’s help to meet that need.’”**

In essence, prayer is more about our intimacy with God than it is His answer to our need. If we are really honest about the necessity and place of prayer in the life of the believer, we would spend more time communing with God.

A.C. Dixon states that **“when we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do...but when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.”**

In these closing verses, Jesus gives us a model for prayer. Let me share six things Jesus teaches us about how to pray.

First of all notice that in prayer we are to approach God with reverence.

A. Approach God With Reverence – v. 9

He is our Father, which implies both authority and relationship. As we pray we need to remember who He is. He is God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything. Like the angelic host who cater to His every command, we should cry out with them **“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord, Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” (Isaiah 6:3)**

He is worthy to receive all glory, honor, power and praise for ever and ever. Yes, we are told to come into His presence boldly, but never let that boldness be presumption. He is God and we are not, so let's remember to give Him the reverence He deserves and while we come boldly we also bow before Him.

Let's remember that He is holy, that His name is Holy. His name speaks of His character and as holy He deserves our worship and reverence.

But Father not only speaks to His position of authority, it also speaks to a personal relationship with Him, one that He is personal and has resources to provide us with what we need because He cares for us as His children.

Second, we are to advance God's will.

B. Advance God's Will – v. 10

We don't pray for our will to be done on earth, but that God's will be done on earth, just as God's will is done in heaven.

Stanley Jones states it this way: "Prayer is surrender—surrender to the will of God and cooperation with that will. If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God."

Are we praying God's will on earth, praying that His kingdom will come? Do we desire His sovereign rule here on earth?

I'm afraid all too often the motivation of my prayers are for my will to be done, not God's.

Amy Carmichael wrote:

And shall I pray to change Thy will, my Father, until it accord to mine?

But, no, Lord, no; that shall never be.

Rather I pray Thee blend my human will to thine.

Pray that God's will is our will.

We find the third thing our prayers should include and that is to ask for needs.

C. Ask For Needs – v. 11

We just read that God knows what we need, but here we are told to ask anyway. The word "give" doesn't mean we can demand of God anything as if we are a child throwing a temper tantrum because we can't get our way, but to request what we need. Daily bread means more than just food. It means our provision for the day. It's a reminder that we are dependent on Him for all our needs all day, every

day. Every day for 40 years the Israelites received their daily portion of manna. Scripture says that no one gathered too much and no one gathered too little. It was sufficient for the day.

The word "give" reminds us that **"every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." (James 1:17)**

Now when Scripture says we don't have because we don't ask, doesn't mean we can ask whatever we want and expect to get it. As we spend time in God's Word, we will better know God's will and know what we can ask for.

Too often our prayers stop there with the asking and Jesus says there is something else we should include in our prayers. We need to admit our sin.

D. Admit Our Sin – v. 12a

A debt is something we owe and when we sin it is credited to our account. When we admit our sin by agreeing we wronged God and confess that sin with repentance, God forgives us and no longer credits it to our account.

I John 1:9 "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Psalms 103:12 "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Micah 7:18-19 "Who is a God like You, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; You will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

Confession isn't enough. Confession merely names our sin, admitting we did it. Repentance must also accompany confession. Repentance is forsaking it or turning away from it.

The fifth part of our prayer should be in response to our admission of sin and seeking forgiveness and that is to abound with forgiveness.

E. Abound With Forgiveness – vv. 12b, 14-15

Just as God has forgiven us, we are in turn to

forgive others.

Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

In **I Corinthians 13:5** Paul writes that love keeps no record of wrongs. That means we don't hold a grudge against someone who has treated us wrong. Instead, we are to forgive. When we think about all the sins we committed against God, and He forgave every one of them, can we withhold forgiveness from someone who has sinned against us? The answer should be an obvious no.

Peter asked Jesus one day how many times he should forgive someone who wronged him. Is seven times enough? The Pharisees taught that you should forgive a person three times and then you were off the hook. Peter said if I double it and add one for good measure, have I done what's required? Jesus responded by saying that as many times as someone offends us we should forgive that many times. In essence, we are to forgive in the same way God forgives us.

Warren Wiersbe suggests that “**forgiveness belongs to the matter of fellowship: If I am not in fellowship with God, I cannot pray effectively.**” Additionally, if I am not in fellowship with others, how can I say I'm in fellowship with God? Forgiving others is the mark of a truly transformed heart. We need to abound with forgiveness.

There is one more part to sacred prayer that should be added. It has to do with acknowledging our weakness.

F. Acknowledge Our Weakness – v. 13

We will never escape temptation in this life. We have an enemy that seeks to devour us. He has no good will for us. And we are to pray first that we won't be led into temptation. This is an admission that we have an enemy. Tony Evans says our prayer

is to “**Ask God to keep you from getting into situations that detour you from the Kingdom road.**”

I Corinthians 10:13 “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above what you are able, but will, with the temptation also make the way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

When it comes to temptation and deliverance from evil, we need to ask for divine intervention, because in our own power we will give in to temptation.

Psalm 23:3 is the answer to when we pray not to be led into temptation but be delivered from evil. When we follow the Lord who is our Shepherd, He leads us in paths of righteousness. Someone said we can't keep the birds from flying over our head, but we can keep them from building a nest there. Acknowledge your weakness in pray and ask for divine deliverance.

What are you praying for? Is your prayer self-centered or is it secret and sacred? Jesus gives us a great model to follow when we pray and why we pray.