



But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matt 6:6)

What did our Lord mean when He made the statement above in Matthew 6:6? Did He mean that prayers made at other times and in other places are not valid? Not at all! There are two kinds of prayer – private and communal. Our Lord, in His Word and Works, taught us BOTH. When He prayed, He often resorted to the seclusion of the mountain height, or the garden solitude, to unburden His soul to His Father in Heaven. Before taking decisions of grave import, He often prayed long, private prayers as: *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* (Luke 6:12) This mountain prayer session occurred prior to naming the twelve apostles on the next morning. In this case, the seclusion of the mountain is equivalent to the privacy of the closet. As one climbs nearer the mountain peak, the world below falls away and there is only one view and that is toward Heaven. Our vision can more clearly be focused on things not of this world.

But are all prayers to be made in the closet, or some secluded place? What is the shortest prayer of the Bible? Are all of a private concern? We have examples of the two shortest prayers of the Bible which reflect both a personal, and a general (or communal), prayer. This first prayer was uttered by the disciples in general: *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, **Lord, save us:** we perish.* (Matt 8:25) The prayer was, **Lord, Save US!** The more personal prayer which was uttered out of fear and desperation was that of Peter who had begun to sink in the swirling waters of the Galilean Sea: *And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, **Lord, save me.*** (Matt 14:29-30) The first illustrates a communal prayer, the second a personal and private one.

Immediately following our leading text today, our Lord demonstrates a few other characteristics of prayer (including a model communal prayer). *7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. 8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need*

of, before ye ask him. (Matt 6:7-8) The salient point of our Lord's further qualification of prayer is the principle of sincerity and lack of public and prideful display. How strongly He admonished the Pharisees for their long public prayers to be seen of men: *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.* (Matt 23:14) You will search in vain for this verse in its context of your corrupt NIV, ESV and other modern wonders of phony translational deceptions. Perhaps it conflicts too much with the modern theology of 'name-it-and-claim-it' gospels, or for fear of the clergy that men might interpret their own greed (of the clergy) for filthy lucre to be represented in that precise verse.

Our Lord then proceeds to illustrate the perfect Communal Prayer – the Lord's Prayer! It begins with Our Father – not MY Father, or YOUR Father, but OUR Father. This prayer can be said in worship with relevance to every member of the congregation. It asks for nothing but that the Kingdom of God come to us, God's will be done both in earth and in Heaven, for our daily bread, for forgiveness of our sins, and for deliverance from evil. Please note the absence of greed in this prayer, and its general application to all of us of faith. What a refreshing thought that all of our prayers would stipulate that His Will, not ours, be done – for His Will is always a perfect will and one that accords abundantly with the wants of our souls.

This devotion is limited in scope. Men of far greater stature and spiritual nature have written extensive works on prayer that will feed the soul of those seeking a deeper meaning and understanding of prayermen such as E. M. Bounds, for example. But we need reminding of the simple processes of geometry if we undertake navigation projects just as we need reminding of God's Word on prayer when we feel a deep need in the heart. But let me stipulate that no one, other than the Lord, can teach us how to pray. Prayer is not a subject that is separate and apart from the simplicity of God's Word but, rather, encompasses all facets of it. No father or mother has to teach a baby when to ask for food. He cries out in hunger, and the nourishing milk is forthcoming. The same is true of prayer. The more simple, direct, and heart-felt a prayer, the greater the ears of the Lord to hear it. You may aver, But God hears ALL prayers. No, He does not choose to hear all: *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:* (Psalm 66:18)

God does not ALWAYS answer our prayers according to our praying. Why not? *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* (James 4:3) We often ask for things that we desire instead of that which is edifying¹. I will point out below a few additional characteristics of the prayer life of the saints of God.

Why pray?

Because there is an expected response to prayer – a response that the supplicant often does not wait to hear. We sometimes stress our desires as if to a 'Genie in a Bottle' and wait for the Genie to grant our wish. That is not the nature of real, Godly prayer, and God is Sovereign and never obligated to grant our demands for wealth and other such things. Prayer is 'effectual' for the sincere appellant. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (James 5:16b)

We pray to be spared temptation: *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Matt 26:41)

We pray because we are commanded to do so: *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* (Luke 18:1) How is it possible to pray always? We pray always by making our lives a fitting prayer to God in the testimony we live out day by day.

¹ We ask for what WE want, He gives us what we need. Need and want do not mean the same thing.

When to pray?

When confronted with grave decisions: *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.* (Luke 6:12-13) As well, we pray in moments of danger as did Peter when sinking in the sea. The foxholes of mortal combat makes Christians of every man!

We should make it a point to pray at three cardinal points of the day. If we prayed at mealtime, this would be satisfied in breakfast, lunch, and dinner (supper for those from Tennessee). *Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.* (Psalm 55:17) We should, as well, seek the face of the Lord early every awakening day: *O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee.* (Psalm 63:1)

We pray continually. Continual attitudes of prayer depends upon a continual acknowledgement and awareness of God's will for our lives. *Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.* (Romans 12:12) Observe patience and rejoicing attend a continual prayer attitude toward God.

Do not cease to pray! *Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* (1 Thess 5:16-18) It is that phrase, In everything over which many stumble. They prefer to give thanks only for those benefits of God that coincide with the will of the supplicant.

Pray both in times of affliction as well as rejoicing. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.* (James 5:13) Even sorrow can be turned to rejoicing if one will resort to hymn-singing which, by the way, is merely a musical prayer. Do we mean it when we sing: Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me?

Pray when we have carelessly transgressed against another. *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.* (James 5:16a) If the problem is ALWAYS the fault of the other, better pray a special prayer for yourself!

How to pray?

We pray in the Spirit, but we cannot pray in the Spirit if we are obsessed with the WRONG spirit. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;* (Eph 6:18) *But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.* (Jude 1:20)

We perform a labor of prayer in remembering all for whom we pray and for specific aspects of need. *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.* (Col 4:12) There are times when the need of prayer for others is urgent and great, yet we may foolishly think our present mundane duties of greater importance.

It is important that we pray with understanding unless we are praying FOR understanding. *I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.* (1 Cor 14:15) Not in some contrived 'unknown tongue', but with understanding!

We must pray in faith, with Holy hands – not doubting the result to be the Will of the Lord even if not our own. *I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* (1 Tim 2:8) *Not wavering in faith: But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.* (James 1:6)

What to pray for?

The answer to this question can best be summarized in *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* (Luke 22:42)

For laborers for the Lord's Vineyard to be sent to us. *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.* (Matt 9:37-38) And we pray for all men, as well. *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* (1 Tim 2:1-2) As distasteful as it seems to me to pray for our current President, I am obligated to do so – not for his wicked ways, but for the salvation of his soul like unto that of Saul on the Road to Damascus².

Perhaps the most important aspect of prayer is to pray for understanding of God's will for, with that understanding and conformity to it, we shall always be on Holy ground with the Lord; *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;* (Col 1:9-11)

Here is the eleventh Commandment of Prayer and the loop-hole breaker: *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.* Phil 4:6 (KJV) The term 'careful' used here does not mean caution, but do not be overburdened with care for the temporal things of life. Eternity is far longer than your moment of vaporous existence on this planet. We ask for our wants with thanksgiving, if we have prayed in the Will of God for those things, for it is certain that God will always grant what it is His will for us.

I realize I have plagiarized God's Holy Word to a great extent in this devotion; however, God's Word is not copyrighted and you may be certain, I have permission of the Author. (*___~)

² We pray for his success not to his standards and desires, but to God's standards and desires.