

Sermon Based Discussion

Sermon Title: When you pray...

Sermon Series: A Better Way to Pray

Sermon Text: Matthew 6:5-8

OPENING QUESTION

1. What kind of prayer do you prefer, if any: praying aloud with others or praying by yourself? Why?
2. Have you ever prayed for what you consider to be a "long" time? How long was it and what was it about?

We start with these two questions to orient us to the topic of our motivation for praying and our expectations of prayer. Most of us tend to prefer praying aloud with others or praying by ourselves. But both are essential aspects of a vibrant prayer life. This Bible passage also calls us to consider why we pray for longer periods of time. We will see how the Lord Jesus taught his followers to pray.

INTO THE BIBLE

Read Matthew 6:5-8

3. What is the nature of the hypocrisy Jesus is denouncing?
4. What kind of reward do hypocrites enjoy and what do they stand to lose?
5. What is the nature of what Jesus describes as "praying like a pagan"?
6. What's the connection between making empty prayers and the belief that our Heavenly Father already knows what we need before we ask Him?

GOING DEEPER (Sharing/Application)

7. What do you think about the comparison that those who are afraid of sounding bad in prayer struggle with the same sin as those who aspire to sound good in prayer?
8. Are you someone that should try to pray more in private or more with others?
9. What would your prayers be like if we *really* believed that our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we even ask Him?
10. Take a few minutes on your own to figure out a time, place, and topic to either pray in secret/private or pray with someone. If you think you need to grow by praying with others, make an appointment. If you think you need to grow by praying in secret/private, then don't tell anyone your plans!

Tips for Group Prayer

Conversational prayer can be used anytime two or more people pray together. It differs from what we often experience in group prayer...talking in detail about our prayer needs so there is little time to pray or one long monologue prayer after another. *Conversational prayer* recognizes that prayer is really dialogue, and includes God from the outset. We converse in prayer not only with Him but also with the others present. It is prayer in which we invite the Holy Spirit to lead us and expect His edifying work among us.

Getting started:

- Don't take time to share prayer requests unless very briefly. Let them come out as you pray.
- Agree to confidentiality if this is appropriate.
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Basic guidelines for praying:

- Be brief. Limit yourself to a couple of sentences at a time, covering one thought instead of many.
- Use everyday language.
- Pray spontaneously instead of going around the circle.
- Build on the prayers of others as in conversation. When a topic is complete, it will be clear by the silence. Anyone can move on to the next topic, not just the leader.
- If a scripture comes to mind, do pray it if it seems at all related. This is often how the Holy Spirit edifies our prayers.
- Pray loud enough so others can hear you. For those with soft voices, don't pray with your head down.
- Pray along silently with the one who is praying. Discipline yourself not to be thinking about what you'll pray but to stay actively involved when you are not praying.
- Don't rush to fill a silence. Silences are normal, and can actually be restful.
- If someone is uncomfortable praying aloud (very common), give them the freedom to pass and to pray along silently.
- Don't close each prayer *in Jesus' Name, Amen*. Assume that every prayer is prayed in His Name. This fosters a continuity or flow in prayer until the very end, when the leader of the group will close *in Jesus' Name* for the entire prayer session.

Adapted from the Navigator's Conversational Prayer guidelines from the website of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (www.redeemer.com).