

When we're young we're taught important lessons that are meant to help us as we grow. I'm not just speaking of physical infancy either. The same is true of "spiritual" infancy; those early days of being made a new creation and being born again through faith in Jesus Christ. Those early lessons are not just supposed to guard us as we grow. They are also intended to guide us as we grow. And maybe more importantly, they are aimed at encouraging us to go deeper and desire growth.

One of the first things we learn about is prayer. While I believe that a person is saved before they pray the "sinner's prayer" (because God knows their heart), one of the first things we do as a disciple is pray. It's like a newborn taking his or her first breath of life. And it should become just as reflexive.

Many times we use some basic prayers to teach children or new Christians. Prayers like: Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep or a Blessing. We may even go a little deeper and encourage them to memorize and utilize the Model Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13.

However, for many, that's the extent of their prayer life. That's sad. It's like a person learning to crawl but never advancing to walking. You can crawl anywhere and everywhere but it's not what mature individuals do. Another tragedy occurs when those early prayers become nothing more than rote rituals; things to check off on a daily Christian "To Do" list.

Jesus addresses such prayer issues in today's passage. The Jewish people were a praying people but their prayers had become tainted by tradition and spiritual laxity. One of the leading causes of this prayer erosion was the practices and preaching of the Pharisees who had turned a call to intimacy with God into an opportunity to toot their own horn and show off.

So as we look at this morning's passage, let us do so with the intention of learning how to pray righteously. And one of the first steps in that lesson is learning how NOT to pray.

Scripture: Matthew 6:5-8

I. Righteous Prayer: How NOT to Pray

A. **Aim & Audience**

1. To be seen and heard by men
 - a) Public place - crowded street
 - b) Piety perceived
2. To intimately commune with God
 - a) Private place - closed room
 - b) Piety practiced

B. **Attitude**

1. Hubris
 - a) Full of oneself
 - (1) Luke 18:11-12
 - b) Flippantly
 - (1) Insincere
 2. Humility
 - a) Fully reliant upon God
 - (1) Luke 18:13
 - b) Faithfully
 - (1) In anticipation of an answer
- C. Act**
1. Repetition
 - a) Rousing gods
 - b) Repeating the same prayer
 - c) Repeated portions of a prayer
 2. Ridiculous
 - a) Rambling and aimless
 - b) Repeating God's name
- D. Answer**
1. Seriously
 - a) We must take prayer seriously and realize it's importance in our growth and development
 2. Secretly
 - a) We must pray privately. If we pray publicly more than privately we have an issue.
 - b) Private prayer should direct and develop public prayer
 3. Silence
 - a) Remove distractions so we can focus
 4. Sincerity
 - a) Our words must express our heart because there is no deceiving God
 5. Ceaselessly
 - a) While we should set aside times to pray throughout the day, we should live in a constant state of intimate communication with God
- E. Aid**
1. Prayer Journal
 - a) Praise of God for who he is
 - b) Thanksgiving for what God has done
 - c) Confession and repentance of sins
 - d) Needs that you desire God to meet
 - (1) Physical, Financial, Spiritual

The Bible makes it very clear that God's people are to be praying people. It doesn't matter which testament you look at. It doesn't matter whether you are discussing the nation of Israel or the church of believers. It doesn't matter if you're dealing with people millennia ago or in modern times. God longs to communicate with his children. Being the perfect God that he is, God is the perfect communicator. He both speaks and listens. The Bible is the primary way he speaks to us and prayer is the primary way he listens to us. Any time someone comes to me and says they feel far off from God or they feel their relationship with God is one sided, the first question I ask is "Are you praying?" You see God not only desires to communicate, he desires to converse. Conversations are two sided; they have a back and forth.

This morning, if you are struggling in your relationship with the Lord, ask yourself these questions and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth. "Am I praying regularly?" You can't have a close relationship with anyone with whom you don't communicate. "Am I praying properly?" Go through this morning's bullet points and ask. "What is the aim of my prayer?" "To whom am I praying?" "What is my attitude toward prayer?" "Are my prayers hollow and repetitious?" "Are my prayers distracted?" "Are my prayers sincere?" "Do I pray without ceasing?"

Once the Holy Spirit reveals the answers to these questions, use our time of invitation to respond as he directs, whether that be by confession and repentance or by rededication to and reapplication of God's truth.