

# Useless Prayer vs. Real Prayer

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Text: Matthew 6:5-8

Date: May 18, 2011, 7pm

**Introduction:** Open your Bible this evening to **Matthew 6:5-15**. This evening I want to compare useless prayer to real prayer, and I want to cry out to God for power and fuel for ministry. This week we are talking about what real prayer is. Real prayer is a sincere believing heart asking God to supply what we cannot. Pray is the upward desire of the heart for God and His presence.

I say real prayer because I want to distinguish it from vain prayer. There is a kind of prayer that is a great useless WASTE OF TIME. We don't want that kind of prayer.

*Real prayer is the fuel for real ministry.*

## Testimony

I came to know Christ when I was 15. Often I hear that, well, so and so didn't have Christian background, so they are really struggling. That may be true, but we all receive the same power and Person of God in the Holy Spirit when we are saved.

## Prayer is the sign of life for a Christian

Someone said that "**Prayer is the breath of the Christian**". Prayer is like breathing. There aren't certain times. You don't say it's 12 o'clock, I'm going to breathe now. No, you breathe all the time. Intake and exhale and I think prayer is probably illustrated as well in terms of breathing as any illustration I know of. Prayer is the constant inhale, exhale of communion with God that goes on in the life of a believer all the time. Not to pray as to hold your breath.

Just as a new baby cries and breathes—a new Christian begins to pray. I can remember first coming to Christ, and the fervor of prayer that *invaded* my life. You know when God comes in, He comes in union by the Holy Spirit with our soul. He leads us and guides us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit always pushes us to union with Christ which is expressed by constant and continual prayer.

After being converted in an evangelistic meeting at a 15 year old, I had no home church, but I was constrained and drawn to wrestle and pray with God. When Rabbi Saul of Tarsus was saved, the immediate observation of spiritual life and vibrant spiritual activity was: "Behold he prays".

If a person has no prayer life, he likely either has no spiritual life or has quenched the Holy Spirit and is feeling the loving hand of God's discipline.

## Spiritual Gas Station

Do you know why you're here this evening? Do you understand what this service is for?

Tonight's service is a spiritual gas station. When you go for a trip, you expect to stop at the gas station every so often. When you don't stop to fuel up, then you get stranded and stop all together.

Churches are like that. Churches who do not stop their ministries for a while and fuel up with a vibrant ministry of prayer, stop producing fruit. They stop evangelizing. Prayer is the fuel of the Christian life and the fuel of the church.

### **All is Vain without Prayer**

Jesus quoting Isaiah (56:7) said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17).

The hymn writer said, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One come down".

The Lord's prayer is a crucial prayer and a dangerous prayer. Leonard Ravenhill said, "The Prayer Room is the boiler room for its spiritual life." It's the fuel for spiritual living and spiritual, powerful ministry.

When you look at the ministry of Jesus, it is filled with prayer. Even Jesus being God incarnate in human flesh, *needed* to pray so that the power of God might rest upon Him. There is much work to be done—but it is not *our work*; it is *God's work*. Listen to me tonight, *we must get used to doing God's work in God's power*. The arm of the flesh will always fail you.

Many do not know how to pray. Let us come to what is called "the Lord's prayer" in **Matthew 6:5-15**.

In this prayer, Jesus is painting a portrait of what the life and heart of a true regenerated child of God looks like. Let's begin with **Matthew 6 and verse 5**.

### **Scripture Reading**

**Matthew 6:5–8** (ESV) — "5 And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 **But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.** 7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

"9 **Pray then like this:** "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

"11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

- I. **WASTED, Useless Prayer** (vs. 5, 7). It is possible to pray and yet not really pray. I want us to really pray tonight.

When Christ begins teaching about prayer He first tells us how *not to pray*. He's going to address the great self idolatry we all have. He begins to address a problem we all have. The struggle of our heart is so deep, that we are able to turn intimate moments of worship into a religion of self. Our greatest idol is yourself.

Christ looks at one side to the **Pharisees** as an example of this, and another side to the **Gentiles**. Let's look first at verse 5 at the Pharisees love of self.

**A. Self-Serving Prayer is Useless and Wasted [vs. 5].**

Verse 5, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward".

To stand in the synagogue and pray was a position of particular prominence. The Pharisees would fight for that place of prominence. There was no tradition for praying in the streets, but Pharisees were known to time their travels so that at the hour of the prayer, they would find themselves in some public place. They would make a big display of praying so that they would be seen by all the people around them.

What is Christ's point? We as sinners have a frightening ability to turn the worship of God into *self-worship*. What is for God and God alone becomes something that is for us. We can easily take prayer that was made to bring special intimacy with God and use it as a tool to promote ourselves. I have a love for prominence. So do you.

It is easy to take a ministry and show off. It is easy to think because we are serving or praying that we are right with God, when we are really just using ministry or prayer to show off. We can pray and serve God and not really serve God.

**1st time of prayer: Ask God to help you to pray to Him and not for men. And ask Him that our service would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Take time to name the ministries of the church and bathe them in the power of the Spirit, that every servant of Christ would be clothed with power.**

**B. Self-Righteous Prayer is Useless and Wasted [vs. 7].**

Verse 7, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words." Prayer does not make us righteous and gain us an audience with God.

The Gentiles thought that by their long repetitions and incantations, repeated over and over again, that they could get the attention of the gods. Jesus said don't do that. Don't think that there is anything you can do to atone for your sins that would achieve acceptance with God. Listen, if God listens to even one word that comes out of your mouth, it is because you are experiencing His sovereign mercy.

There's no way that I could ever EARN the attention of the Lord of lords. We call that self-*righteousness*—where I come to the place that I believe that I am acceptable in myself.

You and I must realize that our acceptance with God not based our service. We have a tendency to think, well *if I improve and get things together, then God will hear me*. No, I am not accepted by God because I'm a model Christian. If I am near sinless and serve God for a thousand years, my acceptance is based on one thing: His grace. *We go into His presence GRATEFUL for His grace.*

Self-sufficiency and self-worship destroys true prayer. We've got to get self out of the way. We need to realize that God's design for prayer is that we might be totally surrendered to the plan and will of God.

## II. Real Prayer.

### A. Real prayer is birthed out of a NEED for God (vs. 8).

We read in **verse 8**, "Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." Isn't this encouraging. You don't have to prove yourself like the Pharisees and Gentiles. God already knows how needy you are! Just be needy and dependent on Him. Lean on Him in your prayers.

- If God doesn't save your children, friends, and loved ones, who will?
- If God doesn't give you grace to overcome a sinful way of thinking or habit, who will?

We should always pray out of a profound sense of our need for God. God knows what you NEED. He knows the needs of our churches. He's more concerned about us here tonight that you or I possibly could be.

Jesus said, "Without me you can do NOTHING" (**John 15:5**).

God can do what we cannot. We've got to be aware of that. Prayer is not about showing of or fixing ourselves. It's about asking God to intervene! It's desperate.

Often this week you have found yourself in a desperate situation. That's God's invitation to prayer!

“The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16).  
Romans 12:11, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”

**Example:** Twin sister, Tammie, in Hell – **fervency** and **urgency** comes from being hit by eternal **reality**.

**2nd time of prayer:** Pray to God with a spirit of neediness and urgency. Ask God for a spiritual transformation of attitude in our lives, to **see the realities of eternity**, and to pray effectively and urgently. Ask Him to show us areas of sin and strongholds that have held us captive, and ask for His powerful grace to sanctify us as individuals and as His church!

We skipped a verse, so let's look at verse 6. Here is the verse that is sandwiched between the useless practices of those who pray but do not pray.

B. **Real prayer is characterized by a Desire for God (vs. 6a).**

**Verse 6a**, “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.”

Notice Jesus says, “When you pray”. We see here the character of a true believer. A true believer needs manna from heaven. We need to eat the food from God every day. We need power. We want God to work.

**The Secret Place**—We go secretly to God and we wait on Him to answer in His time and His way. The reward will come. His blessing and power will come in the time appointed. We are to go secretly in true faith, with no other motive than to hear from Him and to know Him.

There should be a secret place for all to ask God for His blessing and His power and favor. Jesus would often pray outside in a grove or garden or some remote place where He could not be found.

C. **Real prayer is followed by an answer from God (vs. 6b).**

**Verse 6b**, “And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

He rewards us openly. All will know what His will and way are. Do you need wisdom? Do you have a deep need for God's peace and presence guiding you? Absolutely. Then pray to Him in secret. You cannot expect Him to answer you openly unless you are seeking Him secretly.

**Conclusion:** I want to challenge you to spend more time alone with God confessing your needs, desiring and being filled by Him, and expecting an answer from Him.

**3rd time of prayer:** Pray to God will give us the grace to seek Him diligently and privately and passionately for our needs. Pray that we will keep seeking Him until He answers.

Pray that God will work in the hearts of those in His church that are struggling with their prayer life. Pray that He might KEEP us from prayerless, useless ministry.