

“When You Pray” by E A Terry Delivered 7/22/18
John 16: 16 – 31; John 14: 6 – 14; Luke 11: 1 – 13; Matthew 6: 5 – 15 (Sermon)

Prayer was an essential part of the Jewish religion and The 12 disciples had prayed previously with limited success when Jesus sent them out to minister to the people.

But the disciples realized there was something different about the way Jesus prayed.

Miracles happened when Jesus prayed.

So the disciples said, ***“Lord, teach us to pray.”*** (Luke 11:1)

If that your desire this morning ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to receive the principles of praying that Jesus gives to us in The Bible.

You see if you want your prayers to be more powerful and effective you must have a sincere desire to improve on a skill that you think you already know.

I want to begin this morning by saying Jesus gave The 12 Disciples and us a model to use when we pray.

It would be more appropriate for us to refer to Jesus’ Prayer in John 17 as *“The Lord’s Prayer”* and for us to refer to this prayer as *“The Disciples Prayer”*.

Jesus gave us the prayer we refer to as *“The Lord’s Prayer”* as a model or an outline to teach us the content and the attitude of a prayer.

The effectiveness of a prayer is not measured by how long it is or how loud it is, or how big the words are in the prayer, but rather the effectiveness of a prayer depends upon if you are in the right relationship with Jesus and if you ask for the right things in the right way.

The Lord’s Prayer was not given to be recited as a ritual.

So why do we pray the Lord’s Prayer each Sunday?

We pray The Lord’s Prayer every Sunday to remind us that Almighty God is our creator, we are His children, and we are totally dependent upon Him.

When we pray The Lord’s Prayer we are also reminded that as Christians we are a part of The Kingdom of God and we are reminded of our rights, our privileges, and our responsibilities of being a part of The Kingdom of God.

When we carefully study our lesson from Matthew we find Jesus did not give His disciples a sacred formula to be repeated over and over but rather Jesus gives us a model for all of our prayers.

You see there is a tremendous difference in saying a prayer and praying the way Jesus taught us to pray.

Prayer is by definition a conversation with God.

And as you know for a conversation to be meaningful we have to listen as well as to talk.

The fact that God gave us two ears and one mouth should remind us that we need to spend more time listening in our prayer time.

Jesus begins His teaching on prayer with a warning not to be like the hypocrites.

A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something they are not.

Hypocrites say one thing and do something else.

Hypocrites are fakes or phony.

Hypocrites are not genuine.

Although Jesus did not specifically name the Scribes and Pharisees in this passage Jesus was definitely referring to them.

We know that because the Scribes and Pharisees practiced their religion for show.

They wanted everybody to think they were holy.

In Matthew 23:27 Jesus referred to the Scribes and Pharisees as ***“White washed tombs”***.

In other words on the outside they were appeared to be righteous but their relationship with God dead.

Jesus saw right through their self-righteous acts and in verse 5 Jesus pointed out what was wrong with their prayers.

“do not be like the hypocrites for they love to pray standing in the synagogue and on the street corners to be seen by men.” (Matthew 6:5)

Some people have interpreted verse 5 as a warning about corporate prayers in church since Jesus included ***“standing in the synagogue.”***

But we know that is not what Jesus is teaching here because Jesus exposed the motive behind public prayers; ***“to be seen by men.”***

In addition The Gospels record Jesus praying in public as well as praying privately.

So the warning also applies to us today.

If our motivation for praying is pure we would not be afraid of praying in public because praying is simply telling The Lord what is on our mind.

If we truly wanted to tell God what we feel we would not have to carefully prepare our words before hand.

Now do not misunderstand me, if you know you will be praying in public you should prepare by making an outline so you do not forget what you are to pray for and so that you will not ramble in your prayers.

When we pray in public we need to make sure our motive for praying is to communicate with God and not to impress the people listening.

We also need to make sure our prayer comes from our heart, our purpose is to make intercession for the people praying for, and that God will be glorified by our prayer.

Notice in verse 5 and in verse 7 Jesus said; ***“when you pray”***.

Jesus did not say ***“if you pray”***.

Jesus invites and expects all of His disciples to pray on a regular basis.

Prayer is to be a vital part of every believer’s life.

Jesus’ first warning to His disciples in verse 5 was not to be like hypocrites.

Jesus’ second warning to His disciples in verses 7 & 8 is not to be like pagans.

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6: 7 – 8)

The dictionary defines a pagan as a heathen or a person who does not believe in God **or** a believer who engages in idolatrous practices.

The warning for us is not to repeat the same words over and over in our prayers like a magic incantation As you know prayer is a conversation with God.

Think about this; if you were requesting something from a friend you not repeat your request to them over and over without stopping.

So why would we repeat the same words over and over to God in our prayers like a magic incantation.

It is not wrong to come to God many times with the same request.

We saw that last week in The Parable of The Persistent widow.

Jesus encourages us to be persistent in our prayer request.

What Jesus is condemning in verses 7 & 8 is a repetition of the same words in a single prayer.

Our prayers are to be directed to God and to come from our heart.

Our prayers are to be to the point.

Our prayers are not to be a ritual but rather to be a personal conversation with God.

Notice Jesus tells us there is a reward for praying in verse 5 & 6.

To the hypocrites Jesus said their **only** reward would come from the people who heard them pray (verse 5).

But our Heavenly Father rewards us when our prayer is directed to God. (Verse 6)

If we want God to grant our request we must come in the name of Jesus, our motivation for praying is done out of love for Jesus, thanksgiving for all Jesus has done for us, and when we want God to be glorified by granting our petitions.

After giving us warnings about how not to pray, in verse 9 Jesus said ***“This then is how you should pray.”***

Remember for a conversation to be more than superficial words, the conversation must be personal.

And to be personal there has to be a relationship.

The Greek word for ***“Father”*** used in verse 9 of our text is ***“Abba”*** which the familiar form; it is like *“Daddy” or “Papa”*.

When my children were little and they wanted something they would approach me by crawling up in my lap and saying, *“Daddy, I love you”*.

When they did this I knew they wanted something.

However, the point is their requests were based upon an established loving personal relationship.

For our prayers to be powerful and effective we need to have an established personal relationship with Jesus Christ who is the mediator between God and man.

1st Timothy 2:5 says: ***“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ...”***

Think about the significance of calling God, ***“Father”***.

God created humans in His image so that we could have a close personal relationship with Him.

However, when mankind chose to sin by disobeying God we separated ourselves from God’s presence.

We all inherited a sinful nature and we all commit sinful acts. (Romans 3:20)

Isaiah 59:2 clearly tells us ***“your iniquities have separated you from your God.”***

And Psalm 66:18 clearly tells us that God will not hear our prayers if we have sin in our heart.

But The Good News is God loved us so much that God provided a way for us to come back to Him. Jesus came to earth to die on the cross to pay the price of our sins.

John 1:12-13 says, *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.”*

Galatians 4:6 says, *“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”*

You see the right to call Almighty God **“Our Father”** it is not something you have earned but rather it is a privilege Jesus earned for you.

The word **“our”** reinforces our personal relationship with The Lord Jesus Christ.

When we say **“Our Father”** we are showing respect, we are acknowledging God’s authority, and we are willingly submitting to our Heavenly Father.

When we say **“Our Father”** we are also acknowledging our Heavenly Father’s right to discipline us. (Hebrews 12: 4 -6)

So you see when we pray **“Our Father”** we are not just repeating empty words!

It is an awesome privilege to come to The Creator of the entire universe and say, **“Our Father”**.

It’s amazing how life begins to come into the proper perspective with those two words **“Our Father”**.

I may have health problems, relationship problems, and / or money problems; but by the grace of God I have the privilege to come to my Heavenly Father and ask Him to take care of my problem.

And my Heavenly Father is the only one who can give life and health.

My Heavenly Father is the only one who has unlimited financial resources.

My heavenly father is the only one who controls all the events of the universe.

My Heavenly Father is the only one who can change people’s hearts.

I may look poor, powerless, or sickly but those two words **“Our Father”** mean I am rich, I am powerful, and I am very much alive because of my close personal relationship with my Heavenly Father.

You see it is only through that relationship with Jesus that gives us the boldness to even come into the presence of Almighty God.

It is that relationship with Jesus that gives us confidence to make our requests known to Almighty God.

It is that relationship with Jesus that provides assurance that our prayer will make a difference.

Listen to the assurance that Jesus gives to us in the Sermon on the Mount.

“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:9-11)

Our faith rests upon our relationship with God as our heavenly Father.

We ask believing and we will receive because God is our Heavenly Father, God loves us, and our Heavenly Father always wants what is best for His children.

You see effective and powerful praying is all about our relationship with The Lord!

Our attitude toward God and the place we have given to The Lord in our lives has much more to do with the effectiveness of our prayers than any techniques we may learn.

First and foremost, prayer is about our relationship with The Lord.

We have the privilege of coming to the Creator and Ruler of the universe because of our relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We only have a right to approach God the Father through God the Son.

When we say, ***“in heaven”*** we are reminded that we are not approaching an earthly father who is limited in his presence, limited in his capabilities, and / or limited in his wisdom.

We are approaching the creator and ruler of the universe.

“In heaven” reminds us our God rules from heaven and is total control over everything happening on earth. Prayer is the bridge between our earthly circumstances and heaven’s unlimited power and unlimited resources.

God’s word to us this morning challenges each of us to carefully examining our prayer life.

Do we pray in order to impress other people or are our prayers truly seeking The Lord’s will.

When we pray are our motives pure and do our requests come from our heart?

Do we spend as much time listening as we do talking?

Praying reminds us that we are accountable to God and we are totally dependent upon Almighty God.

Remember Jesus has given us the great privilege of having a personal conversation with Almighty God.

AMEN