

Genuine and Hypocritical Prayer (Matt. 6:5-8)

A Small Group Outline



1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
 - Sing a few songs of praise to God

2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings (MB)*, pp. 83-86
- Vs 5: From Matt. 6:2 we discovered that 'hypocrites' refer to actors who wore different masks to play different roles. In this context Jesus is speaking of those who wore masks of pretension, giving people the impression that they were pious, prayerful people – when in actual fact they were more interested in being admired for their righteousness.
- Vs 5: Corners of the street: Places where business was transacted
- Vs 5: Have their reward: The public admiration and attention is all they will get
- "The Pharisees had stated hours for prayer; and when, as often came to pass, they were abroad at the appointed time, they would pause wherever they might be—perhaps in the street or the market place, amid the hurrying throngs of men—and there in a loud voice rehearse their formal prayers. Such worship, offered merely for self-glorification, called forth unsparing rebuke from Jesus" (MB 83).
- This passage does not speak against public prayer, but "teaches that private prayer is not to be made public" (MB 83).
- Vs 6: When you pray go into your room: "Have a place for secret prayer. Jesus had select places for communion with God, and so should we. We need often to retire to some spot, however humble, where we can be alone with God" (MB 84).
- Vs 6: "In the secret place of prayer, where no eye but God's can see, no ear but His can hear, we may pour out our most hidden desires and longings to the Father of infinite pity, and in the hush and silence of the soul that voice which never fails to answer the cry of human need will speak to our hearts" (MB 84)
- "Those who seek God in secret telling the Lord their needs and pleading for help, will not plead in vain....The sure result of our intercourse and fellowship with our Lord will be to increase piety, purity, and fervor. There will be a growing intelligence in prayer.

We are receiving a divine education, and this is **illustrated in a life of diligence and zeal**" (MB 85).

- "The soul that turns to God for its help, its support, its power, by daily, earnest prayer, will have noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth and duty, lofty purposes of action, and a continual hungering and thirsting after righteousness. By maintaining a connection with God, we shall be enabled to diffuse to others, through our association with them, the light, the peace, the serenity, that rule in our hearts. The strength acquired in prayer to God, united with persevering effort in training the mind in thoughtfulness and care-taking, prepares one for daily duties and keeps the spirit in peace under all circumstances" (MB 85)
- Vs 7: Vain repetitions: "The heathen looked upon their prayers as having in themselves merit to atone for sin....The Pharisees had adopted this pagan idea of prayer.... The repetition of set, customary phrases, when the heart feels no need of God, is of the same character as the 'vain repetitions' of the heathen" (MB 86)
- Biblical examples of heathen vain repetitions are found in 1 Kings 18:26; Acts 19:34
- Vs 7: 'Vain repetitions' are based on a view that God is distant, unfeeling and reluctant to assist his creatures. One needs to get in lots of prayers to twist his arm, and persuade him to do what He otherwise would be unwilling to do. This surely is not the God of the Bible.
- Vs 7: God knows what we need, yet we are still encouraged to pray. Parents generally know their children's needs yet they still want them to ask. Prayer is not for God's benefit since He already knows our needs. It is for ours. Prayer elevates us to God, links us with the Source of wisdom and power, and strengthens us to do His will.
- "The most eloquent prayers are but idle words if they do not express the true sentiments of the heart.... God does not desire our ceremonial compliments, but the unspoken cry of the heart broken and subdued with a sense of its sin and utter weakness finds its way to the Father of all mercy" (MB 86)
- Questions for consideration:
 - Are there times when we can subtly publicise our prayers, by for instance, saying that we are so tired because we got up early to wrestle with God in prayer?
 - Could we pray flowery prayers during church services, thinking more of what people think of us, than of communicating with God?
- *Read Matt. 6:5-8. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** (use only a few). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
 - What are vain repetitions in prayer? Why does Jesus speak against praying that way? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - What common or overused phrases do you hear frequently repeated in people's prayers? Why do you think people often use these? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - How can prayers become formal and empty, instead of heartfelt and sincere?
 - Do you think there is a similarity between vain repetitions and nagging? Why or why not?
 - Is God discouraging public prayer in vs 6? Why or why not?
 - What do you think is the value of secret prayer?
 - Why do you think it important to have a 'secret' place and time for prayer?
 - If God knows our needs, why do you think we still need to pray?

- **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
 - Do you often have prayers (or lines in prayers) that you repeat without much thinking? Does this happen all the time, or at certain times? (*ask one question at a time*)
 - Do you have a secret place and time for prayer? Elaborate.
 - How would you like to improve your prayer life?
 - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I WILL statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will no longer recite my rehearsed meal prayers (that often feel so empty), but will try to offer meaningful, heartfelt prayers of thanksgiving for my food. I also want to apply this same principle to other areas of my prayer life."

6. Share (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

7. Closing prayer

Prepared by Shandrell Penniken / Northern Conference