

## SERMON NOTES ON MATTHEW 6:5-8 (SECRET, SIMPLE AND SINCERE)

This passage is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-8). In chapter 6, Jesus zeroes in on hypocrisy. In the first 4 verses of the chapter he said, "Don't be hypocritical in your giving." In verses 16-18, He says, "Don't be hypocritical in your fasting," and here (vv.5-8), he tells us, "Don't be hypocritical in your praying." This Bible word for "hypocrite" which translates to "an actor," means to pretend to be someone or something that you are not.

Nobody who has ever lived knew more about praying than the Lord Jesus Christ. He tells us in this passage how we can make sure we connect with God every time we pray. He tells us literally how to get on the hotline to heaven and He identifies three ways: 1. PRAY **SECRETLY**, 2. PRAY **SIMPLY**. 3. PRAY **SINCERELY**.

As a prelude to what He had to say on prayer in verses 5-8 of Matthew 6, **Jesus took it for granted that His disciples would pray**. So there is a triple emphasis in verses 5, 6 and 7.- of **when** you pray, **NOT** if you pray. You can have your house full of gym equipment to assist you exercise and be fit, but if you don't use them they are as good as a costly decoration. Similarly, you may acquire all the information on prayer, what it is and what it's not. If you do not pray, it is of no profit to you.

Jesus first advice: When you pray, **pray secretly**. Why? Because that is the antidote to hypocritical praying and the only way you can be on a one-to-one with God.

### 1.PRAY **SECRETLY** (verses 5-6)

Verse 5: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others..." Every afternoon, sacrifices would be offered at the temple. after a public call to prayer. As a devout Jew, wherever you were, you were expected to stop, stand, turn toward the temple and begin to pray.

The hypocritical Pharisees, would make sure that when the call for prayer was made, they would **just happen** to be standing at the busiest street corner in the city, and there they would pray. It was all for show and Jesus saw through their play-acting knowing that it was only to get public attention. Jesus did not condemn public prayers, but **to pray only when others will notice you indicates that your real audience is not God**.

There's a story of a young lawyer, who pretended to be speaking to a client on the line to impress his caller. Unknown to him, the person he wanted to impress was the Technician who had visited him to connect his line. Jesus said there is a lot of public praying that is just like that; praying for a show, but unfortunately, nobody is on the other end of the line.

So Jesus said: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you" (verse 6). **When you're in the secret place it's just you and God**, no applause, **and that's all God wants it to be**. Your secret place could be when you are walking or driving, but be careful not to close your eyes lest you become a disaster on wheels! It could be when you are doing a prayer walk with a friend.

You don't have to be perfect. This teaching about prayer is to help you develop a close relationship with God so that when you are alone with Him, you can be yourself. And the more time we spend with Him in prayer, the more like Him we become. Nicky Gumbel says "God does not want His friends only to be interested in what they can get out of him. He wants you to seek His presence not just his presents.". Now let's not misunderstand Jesus. He is **not** saying that we shouldn't engage in any public praying. Jesus prayed publicly such that his disciples heard him pray and were so bowled over by his simplicity and profundity. When Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father, His eyes were solely fixed on Him, not the people around him. If they happened to listen in on His prayer, that was purely incidental; what mattered most was God listening in.

Now this teaching can affect us all - not so much by praying in order to impress, but **by not praying for fear of not being impressive enough**. So you are at a prayer meeting-maybe in the Connect Group and the reason you won't pray- **not can't pray**- is that you are afraid of stumbling over your words, of appearing not to be a good prayer person and so you clam up. Shyness aside, that is falling foul of what Jesus is getting at here. **If we are sincere in talking with God, what he thinks and not what other people think is all that matters**. You will discover that the more familiar you are with the God of the Bible, the richer your prayer-life will be.

**2. PRAY SIMPLY.** Now Jesus goes a step further to the **second DO NOT in prayer**. *"But when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words."* (v.7). During Jesus' days, there were those who believed in many gods. Hence when you wanted to pray to these gods, you had to know their real names by which they were addressed as the god of fertility had to be addressed rightly and not as the god of rain etc. You had to say the right things like magical words or else your god would not open the door. You had to be earnest and sometimes go to the extent of physical harm to get the attention of your god as the prophets of Baal did in their context with Elijah (1 Kings 17: 20-39).

*"The world today, is full of so-called 'prayer warriors' who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas, programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense"* (Matthew 6: 7ff MSG). The babblers will say we have to press the right buttons, use the right formulae if we are going to get God to respond. **Paganism misunderstands the purpose of prayer by misunderstanding the character of God**

However, our God is a Father, who wants to be asked and who wants to answer. You see, by asking God for things we are affirming reality, that our God is a generous Giver and we are grateful receivers. And the more we commune with Him in prayer, the more His glory shows in our lives and faces.

Jesus' corrective in verse 7 is that we should not be like them. This is not to say we should not be persistent in prayer or agonise in prayer or spend time in God's presence. In fact, Jesus encourages us to be determined. We must realise that He is the Father who wants to demonstrate his loving care for his children. He tells us to **ASK, (Ask, Seek Knock Matthew 7:7)** so that our joys may be full. **Our requests actually count- prayer really does make a difference.**

### **3. PRAY SINCERELY (v.8)**

Do not be like them, the hypocrites and the babblers, because your Father knows the things you need before you ask him. Jesus knows tough times are coming, and He knows his disciples would need that personal relationship with God in order to weather those difficult times. Jesus wants our prayers to come from our heart, and delivered—directly to our Father as the only listening Audience. He wants to hear directly from us, the words that reveal the content of our heart.

Charles Spurgeon said, **"The prayer of the heart is the heart of prayer."** The praying that God hears, the preaching that God endorses, the singing that God applauds, is not what comes out of the lips only, it is what comes from the heart. God wants you to spend quality time with Him: A time to pray, a time to read God's Word, a time to listen to God's voice. Just a few minutes a day is all it takes to keep our lives on course.

### **Conclusion**

- Let us be a church and people full of **"When you pray, not if you pray,"** who learn to love prayer as a life-line for our pilgrimage.
- Let us be a people and church that will not embark on any task until after we have taken it to the Lord in prayer. Remember, before Jesus chose His followers and before going to the cross He prayed.
- Let us be people that love the Lord for his presence and not just for his gifts.

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### **TAKE AWAY QUESTIONS**

1.What does hypocritical praying look like and how does its reward contrast with sincere praying, praying in the secret place and from the heart? **2** .Why did Jesus warn his followers to avoid babbling when praying? **3** . Is Jesus in any way suggesting we should not pray in public and pray only with very few words? See Luke 6:12. **4** . How is *not* praying in a group or in public for fear of *not being impressive enough another form of hypocrisy?*