



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO PRAY? • MATTHEW 6:1-15 •

10/16/2022

MAIN POINT

The motives and way in which people pray reflect who they think God is and how He answers prayer.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Describe your prayer life in one word. Why did you choose that word?

Christians agree that prayer is essential, yet very few of us are satisfied with our experiences in prayer. Why do you think that is?

What must you believe about the character of God in order to pray rightly?

Prayer is a gift from God. It is the divinely orchestrated means by which we can commune with our loving Father. For that reason, the Bible is full of commands and instructions about prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that being His follower means more than just doing right acts. He taught His disciples to live as He lived and pray as He prayed—seeking the Father’s glory and approval. In fact, the motives and way in which people pray reflect who they think God is and how He answers prayer.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ MATTHEW 6:1-4.

What does it mean to “practice righteousness”? How do people practice righteousness in front of others?

The first example Jesus gives to illustrate righteousness is giving. Jesus’ statement, “whenever you give,” assumes that giving and caring for others are natural parts of being disciples. The same phrase is repeated in verses 5 and 16 in regards to prayer and fasting.

What are some selfish motivations for serving the poor? How do these motives compare with the ones Jesus desires us to have?

How did Jesus describe hypocrites in these verses? What are their motives for giving?

The instructions about the left hand and the right hand (vv. 3-4) prohibit us from celebrating our own acts of righteousness. When you give, remember that nothing you have comes from your accomplishments. All that you own is given to you by God. By giving in private, you eliminate the temptation to take the praise for yourself.

How can we determine if our motives for giving are pure? Does it really matter to us, or is it only God's business?

How does giving impact you on a spiritual level?

Jesus' remedy to hypocritical giving is to give in secret. Secrecy mitigates the mixed motives of guilt or duty or prestige in giving. Confidentiality assures that the need is met while the temptation toward prideful praise is avoided. Discreet giving, as Jesus taught, is a beautiful expression of faith. Such giving trusts that God knows and rewards the giver. It becomes a true offering to the Lord that seeks to please Him alone. In the next set of verses, He applies the same principle to prayer.

READ MATTHEW 6:5-8.

How can we know if our motives are pure when it comes to prayer? What are some obvious clues our motives might not be pure?

If you prayed only in public and never in private, what might that reveal about your heart? Why are both types of prayer necessary?

Verse 7 warns against prayers that attempt to wear God down to the point of giving the person what they are asking. The opposite of babbling is humble, honest, and brief prayers. God knows what we need and desire before we ask; we do not need to hold Him under a siege of words. Jesus gave an example of the type of prayer God approves of in verses 9-13, commonly known as the Lord's Prayer.

READ MATTHEW 6:9-13.

Take a look at the six specific things Jesus prayed for in His model prayer. What general aspect of prayer does each specific statement represent?

What do we learn about how to pray from Jesus' example? Why do you think God approves of this type of prayer?

Jesus began by praising God, mentioning His role as Father and His holiness. He then voiced His submission to the Father's spiritual reign in this world by praying for the kingdom to come and the Father's will to be done. Jesus petitioned God as Sustainer and Provider when He asked for daily bread (v. 11). Of course, Jesus taught in other places that we can bring all our needs to God. Next, He demonstrated how to confess our sins before God to be sure that we haven't become the obstacles to our own experiences with God. And finally, He asked for God's protection. He closed His prayer with another statement of praise.

How does praying as Jesus demonstrated help us keep our motives in check?

READ MATTHEW 6:14-15.

Why do you think God values forgiveness so highly? With that in mind, what is the appropriate motive for forgiveness?

Jesus showed that forgiveness is important for His followers. He expects those who experience His forgiveness to practice forgiveness. He said if you forgive people, then your Heavenly Father will forgive you, and if you don't, God will not forgive you. The point is that Christians are to forgive others in response to God's forgiveness. However, if we don't forgive others, we cannot claim God's forgiveness for ourselves.

Failing to forgive others demonstrates that we have not experienced God's forgiveness.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What differences do you see between the attitude of Jesus' model prayer and the way you usually pray?

Do you think prayer usually changes us or changes God? How can your answer influence the attitude you bring to prayer?

What specific action or attitude regarding prayer is God asking you to change right now?

PRAYER

Pray as honestly and simply as you can to close your group. Ask the Lord to remind you of His character and to help you focus on His character when you pray.

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 6:1-15

Matthew 6:1 serves as an introduction to all of 6:1-18. It establishes the theme of doing acts of righteousness before men, and thus losing reward from your Father in heaven. Jesus' exhortation Beware of is the present tense form and emphasizes the need to be on the alert to the temptation to seek our reward from men. Jesus was not condemning the righteous acts themselves. His concern was the motivation behind the actions. The same act of obedience can be right or wrong, depending on why a person does the act. Jesus has already commanded us, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father who is in heaven" (5:16). The difference is in whom others see as a result of our public righteousness. Do they see only us, or do they see our Father more clearly?

The opening when (v. 2) implies that this was a teaching that applied to any instance of giving. Jesus began by telling His hearers not to give alms, ascribing such ostentatious behavior to the hypocrites (referring to the scribes and Pharisees of 5:20). Key to the passage is the explanation of their motive: to be honored by men. In this first example, Matthew uses a verb meaning praise (5:16), whereas in the second and third examples, he uses another verb meaning "to make visible" (active), "to be seen" (passive). The meanings of the words overlap, but the concern is the tendency toward competition with God for glory.

"Giving" or "almsgiving" is the translation of terms meaning "perform an act of mercy." By the first century, the phrase came to mean specifically the act of giving to the needy. This kind of giving was not mandatory in Scripture, for it was above and beyond the three required tithes. God's people are not to give to draw attention to themselves. In classical Greek, the term hypocrite referred to an actor on stage, wearing a mask. In the New Testament, it came to have a negative connotation, referring to someone putting on an act (i.e., masking the truth). Jewish rabbis taught that almsgiving received especially high reward. How empty to know that, due to one's own pride, there was no reward remaining for an act of righteousness beyond the glory of the moment. This was shocking to a first-century Jewish audience.

Verse 3 begins with the strong adversative, But when you. The emphasis on "you" was intended to draw a stark contrast between the hypocrites just described and Jesus' kingdom servants, the disciples of 5:1-2. Jesus' instruction in 6:3 is

exaggerated wording intended to make the point: “Do all you can to avoid drawing attention to yourself.” Since nothing escapes the eye of God, even the most private act is noticed and will be rewarded. Jesus’ use of the title Father added warmth to His guarantee of reward. This is not to be seen as a mechanical kind of relationship. Rather, the gift from the heart is given out of love for the Father, and the reward is returned as to a dearly beloved Son.

The reward (6:4,6,18) is not unrelated to the concept of reward in 6:1. The first word leans more toward the idea of repayment; thus, the idea of reimbursement for our “expense” incurred in each act of righteousness. But the point is the Father rewarding His servants. We were “created ... to do good works” (Eph. 2:10). In keeping with the instruction of 5:16 to “let your light shine,” our Father in heaven will reward us for good works. The issue for the Pharisees was works apart from God’s righteousness. The Pharisees were trying to establish their own righteousness by works.

Jesus’ instructions on prayer began with a warning. Jesus was cautioning against praying in public with the motive of receiving admiring glances and pats on the back for being so devout. Jesus instructed us to find a private place for prayer where thoughts of people’s responses won’t distract us (v. 6). Thus in secret we can focus on the Father. A second mistake when praying is to babble (v. 7). Jesus was not forbidding prayer for the same thing over and over (see 26:39-44). He even told parables about persistence in prayer (Matt. 7:7-11). Jesus stressed that the Father listens to earnest hearts, not endless words. Jesus reminded us the Father knows the things we need before we ask Him (v. 8). This is not to discourage us from making specific requests in prayer, for He invites us to do that (7:7-11). It does assure us that He will answer in ways that best meet our needs, further His kingdom, and enhance our usefulness.

By commanding His disciples to pray like this rather than simply “pray this,” Jesus demonstrated that this prayer was offered as a model rather than to be recited (v. 9). Your name be honored as holy suggests that Jesus expected His disciples to live righteous lives that honor rather than profane God’s name (5:16; Lev. 22:31-32). This is an important precondition for successful prayer. God is the ideal Father—all-loving, all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, and always present with us. At the same time, He is in heaven, which tells us He is greater than we can comprehend; so we approach Him as our Father with due reverence. Our implies that Jesus intended this prayer to be a model for prayer for when disciples gather as a group.

Your kingdom come (v. 10) could be translated “Your reign come.” The kingdom has come in the hearts of all who have submitted to Jesus as Lord. It also is coming as more people yield their hearts to His reign. The kingdom will not have come fully, though, until Jesus returns and establishes it absolutely and forever. To pray for the Father to see that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven frightens some people. Heaven is the only place free of sin and its painful effects. We should daily pray for the future coming of God’s rule in which He will reign fully and completely over the world.

In verse 11, the prayer’s focus shifts from God’s eternal purposes to our temporal needs. We are to request what we need to sustain life, such as daily bread (Matthew 6:11). Daily may be understood as “for today” or “for tomorrow,” in either case pointing to immediate need. This prayer reminds us that our Father is our Provider. As a wise father, God provides what we need, not necessarily what we want. We also are to ask for forgiveness (v. 12). Debts are sins viewed as obligations to the Father. The Greek grammar indicates that the disciple prays for forgiveness from God only after having first expressed forgiveness to others. The final petition (v. 13) has puzzled many believers—Do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. We know God is good and does not tempt us to sin (James 1:13), so how are we to understand this? The overall meaning is obvious: the prayer is for the Father to keep us doing His will rather than being led astray by Satan.

Verses 14-15 further exhort the kingdom servant concerning the necessity of forgiveness in human relationships if we expect God’s forgiveness. These verses, and 18:21-35, explain 6:12. Receiving God’s forgiveness motivates forgiveness toward others. Jesus expects us to replace this specific petition with more personalized requests for forgiveness for the specific sins in our own lives.