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Grounders:

What, why, and how do you pray? Do you pray solely for your personal comfort and abundance? Do you ever pray in a public restaurant, hoping that people seated near you will see you? Do your nighttime prayers sound like broken records saying the same selfish things in the same selfish ways for the same selfish reasons? What would happen if you prayed for what God prayed?

In His *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus described the *be-do-go of full surrender*. In essence, He said, “Who you are to *be* determines what you *do* which determines where you *go*.” In Matthew, Chapter 6, Jesus moved from who we are to *be* to what we are to *do*. He began with three acts of piety in Judaism: (1) giving to the needy, (2) praying, and (3) fasting. In each, Jesus cut to the heart of the matter exposing why we do what we do. We either have a selfish motive or a selfless one. With each good deed, He described what not to do, then what to do. Jesus said, “Do pray.”

First, do not pray with the motive to be recognized and honored. “*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 men*” (Matt. 6:5).

Hypocrites were actors. They wore masks on stage, pretending to be one way on the outside, though they were another on the inside. Jesus said that if being seen (outside) was one’s motive (inside), then the attention he had received was His reward in full (a reference to payment in ancient business receipts). There would be no reward of an intimate relationship with God because of the selfish motive.

Second, do pray in secret. “*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*” (Matt. 6:6). Jewish homes had only one room with a door—a storage chamber. Jesus used this imagery to describe a secret place where no one but the heavenly Father would see. This does not mean that we cannot pray publicly. It means that we should not seek selfish recognition and honor when we pray. When our prayer motive is unselfish, our reward is intimacy with God.

Jesus cautioned against babbling like pagans who when they prayed reminded their deity about their good deeds in order to receive a return favor (Matt. 6:7). Sometimes we do the same with God, reminding Him of all of the righteous acts that we accomplished in order to receive a one-for-one benefit. Greeks used many names for their deity in order to gain its attention. Often times, we pray publicly using many names for God in order to be seen and heard by others. Two thousand years ago, Rabbis debated the use of fixed prayers, a pattern used by many of us today. They determined that they were acceptable only if offered genuinely. Thankfully, Jesus taught us how to pray to the one who knows what we need before we ask Him (Matt. 6:8).

Jesus taught us how to be a person who PRAYS (Matt. 6:9-15). Prayer is the connection of one’s heart with God’s. Jesus said, “*This, then, is how you should pray*” (Matt. 6:9).

(1) Praise “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name*” (Matt. 6:9). *Heaven* had three meanings: (1) where we go when we die, (2) the stars in the sky, and (3) the air



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in and around us. When you pray, praise your heavenly Father for who He is (holy) and for being as close as the air is in and around you.

(2) Renew “*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (Matt. 6:10). It was understood that after God’s kingdom came, His will would be done on earth as in heaven. Jesus ushered in God’s kingdom. As a result, this part of Jesus’ prayer calls for a renewing of our minds in order to experience God’s kingdom and will in our lives (Rom. 12:1-3). This is a 180 degree turn from our world’s standards. Jesus prayed for His Father’s will (Matt. 26:39). When you pray, renew your mind.

(3) Ask “*Give us today our daily bread*” (Matt. 6:11). This referenced God’s provision of Manna in the desert for the Israelites. It is an illustration of total dependence on God for our needs to advance His kingdom. When you pray, ask God for your needs to advance His kingdom.

(4) Yield “*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*” (Matt. 6:12). C. S. Lewis said that “as” was the most sobering two-letter word in all Scripture because the prayer is for God to forgive us in the same exact manner in which we have forgiven others. For some of us, this is a scary prayer. We have to yield all unsettled accounts to God, radically issuing to others the forgiveness that we have received from Him. If we don’t, then we really haven’t received God’s forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15). When you pray, yield all unsettled relational accounts to God.

(5) Surrender to be Spirit led “*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*” (Matt. 6:13). The Aramaic sentence structure might indicate “Let us not sin when tempted,” rather than “Let us not be tempted.” This is supported by the fact that Scripture tells us that God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13). When you pray, surrender your heart to be Spirit led.

Take a 30 day experiment, and be a person who unselfishly *PRAYS* in secret. Go into your own room at night, get on your knees if you are physically able, and (1) *praise* your heavenly Father for who He is, (2) *renew* your mind to seek His will for your life, (3) *ask* for His provision of your needs to advance His kingdom, (4) *yield* all unsettled relational accounts to Him, and (5) *surrender* your heart to be Spirit led. In this pattern, pray specifically for someone who is either skeptical of or seeking God to surrender his heart to Him. The kingdom of God will break through your life in a way that only God’s intimacy can do. That intimacy will attract others to Christ in you.

Praying in secret,
Mitch