Prayer Series – Lesson 2 | November 22, 2026

Prayer: How Not to Pray

Key Scripture: Matthew 6:5–8

1. Review: Four Barriers to Prayer

In our previous lesson, we identified four barriers that can keep us from developing a consistent prayer life.

1. **The Theological Barrier** – Believing that because God is sovereign, our prayers are unnecessary. However, God desires a relationship with us and invites us to participate in what He is doing.
2. **The Unanswered Prayer Barrier** – Becoming discouraged when God does not answer as we expect. Sometimes God's answer is yes, sometimes no, and sometimes wait. We must learn to trust His wisdom.
3. **The Not Good at It Barrier** – Believing we do not know how to pray. Prayer is something we develop through consistent practice and a growing relationship with God.
4. **The My Image of God Barrier** – Having an incorrect understanding of God's character. How we view God directly affects how we approach Him in prayer.

2. Jesus Teaches Us How Not to Pray

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches His followers about life in the Kingdom of God.

Before teaching His disciples how to pray, He identifies two ways they should **not** pray.

3. Don't Pray Like a Hypocrite

Matthew 6:5

Jesus warns against praying to be seen and admired by others.

- The word *hypocrite* originally referred to an actor who wore a mask.
- The religious leaders were sometimes guilty of doing the right things with the wrong motives.
- Their prayers were designed to impress people rather than communicate with God.
- They were more concerned about appearing spiritual than developing a genuine relationship with God.

Luke 18:11–12 – The Pharisee's prayer illustrates the danger of spiritual pride and self-righteousness.

Key Principle: Our motivation in prayer matters. True prayer comes from a sincere heart, not a desire for recognition.

4. The Importance of Private Prayer

Matthew 6:6

Jesus instructs His followers to enter their closet, shut the door, and pray to their Father in secret.

- The emphasis is not on a particular room or location but on eliminating distractions.
- Jesus frequently withdrew from crowds to spend time alone in prayer.
- Private prayer removes the temptation to perform for others.
- Genuine intimacy with God requires intentional time in His presence.
- Both public and private prayer are important, but our hearts must remain focused on God.

Key Principle: Intimacy with God requires intentionality. We must create space in our lives to be alone with Him.

5. Don't Pray Like the Heathen

Matthew 6:7

Jesus warns against using vain repetitions and believing that many words guarantee an answer.

- The heathen believed they could manipulate their gods through repeated words and lengthy prayers.
- Prayer is not a way to pressure God into doing what we want.
- Longer prayers, louder voices, and impressive language do not give us greater control over God.
- We cannot force God's hand through the intensity or volume of our prayers.

Ecclesiastes 5:1–2

Solomon reminds us to approach God with reverence and to be more ready to listen than to speak.

Key Principle: Prayer is not about the number of words we speak but the sincerity of our hearts.

6. God Already Knows What We Need

Matthew 6:8

Jesus reminds His disciples that God knows their needs before they even ask.

This raises an important question: If God already knows what we need, why should we pray?

- Prayer is not simply about informing God of our needs.
- Prayer is not merely a transaction where we exchange requests for answers.
- God invites us into a personal relationship with Him.
- The greatest reward of prayer is not necessarily receiving something from God but spending time with God.

Key Principle: The heart of prayer is not about getting things from God. It is about being with God.

7. Prayer Is a Conversation

Prayer involves honest communication between us and God.

- We can talk to God about things that matter to us and to Him.
- Genuine conversation involves both speaking and listening.
- Prayer does not require polished language or impressive words.
- We can bring our fears, frustrations, confusion, struggles, and needs to God.
- God desires honesty and authenticity in our relationship with Him.

Key Principle: Prayer is a mutual conversation, and part of that conversation involves listening to God.

8. Biblical Examples of Honest Prayer

Hannah – 1 Samuel 1

Hannah prayed out of deep anguish. Her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Her prayer was sincere, and God heard her.

David – Psalm 22:6

David frequently expressed his emotions honestly before God. His prayers demonstrate that we can bring our deepest struggles into God's presence.

Moses – Numbers 11

Moses openly expressed his frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of leadership.

The Tax Collector – Luke 18:13–14

The tax collector prayed a simple prayer asking God for mercy. Unlike the Pharisee, he approached God with humility and sincerity.

Key Principle: God is not looking for perfect prayers. He is looking for honest hearts.

9. Learning to Pray Authentically

We do not need to impress God with our words.

Sometimes our prayers may be as simple as:

- "I need You, God."
- "Lord, forgive me."
- "I have failed."
- "Help me, Lord."
- "I don't know what to do."

God welcomes our honest prayers, even when we struggle to find the right words.

C. S. Lewis wrote:

"We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us."

10. Final Takeaways

1. **Don't pray to impress people.** Pray to connect with God.
2. **Don't try to manipulate God.** Trust His wisdom and character.
3. **Make time for private prayer.** Remove distractions and develop intimacy with God.
4. **Remember that prayer is relational.** God wants our fellowship, not just our requests.
5. **Learn to listen.** Prayer is more than talking to God.
6. **Pray honestly.** Bring your whole heart before Him.

The central lesson: Prayer is not about performing, impressing, or manipulating. It is about developing an honest, authentic, and intimate relationship with God.

Questions for Personal Reflection

1. Am I more concerned about how my prayers sound or about genuinely connecting with God?
2. What distractions keep me from spending meaningful time alone with God?
3. Do I approach prayer primarily to receive something, or to deepen my relationship with Him?
4. Am I taking time to listen to God when I pray?
5. What would change in my prayer life if I became completely honest with God?