

Prayer Starts Here – Motivation!

Study Guide for Relationship 2.3

There are two basic things that every follower of Jesus Christ must develop.

First, everyone of us must learn God's word. God wants us to worship Him in truth – Jesus is the truth – God's word is truth – we'll never develop into mature disciples of Jesus if we don't learn the truth of God's word. How can we obey all He's commanded if we don't know what He's commanded?

The second vital component every follower of Jesus Christ must develop is their individual prayer life. Scripture tells us to pray without ceasing. Jesus tells us to abide in Him. He wants us to experience a vital connected relationship with Him. We are instructed to follow the example of Jesus and pray.

Now some of us treat prayer like a parachute. It's nice to know it's there, but we'll only use it if we think the plane is going down. If we only pray when our lives appear to be crashing, we miss the point of prayer. God wants relationship with us. As you know, communication is essential to any relationship.

But how should we pray? What does Scripture teach us about prayer? Today we begin where Jesus began when he taught about prayer in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:5 “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Jesus' first point in this teaching about prayer is a warning against hypocrisy. “You must not be like the hypocrites.” So just what is a hypocrite? If you google it here's what you find:

A **hypocrite** preaches one thing, and does another. You're a **hypocrite** if you criticize other people for wearing fur, but pull out your big mink jacket as soon as it gets cold. The word **hypocrite** is rooted in the Greek word hypokrites, which means “stage actor, pretender, dissembler.”

Or here from Merriam-Webster's dictionary:

- 1:** a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion
- 2:** a person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs or feelings

So first, God warns us against coming to him in prayer without genuinely engaging him in heart-felt communication. Jesus speaks of the hypocrites of his day – the religious leaders of Jesus' day used to get in front of a crowd – after all you can't really pray unless there's a crowd there to appreciate how pious you are – they prayed in the synagogue – they prayed on the street corners – and here's their motivation:

“... That they may be seen by others ...”

These hypocritical prayers were primarily interested in boosting their pious appearance before the people. They weren't interested in genuine communication with the sovereign Lord. Instead, these hypocrites were motivated by pride. They prayed to build up their image before the people.

Jesus' first instruction about how to pray is a warning. Don't ever come before God in prayer to impress others. Praying when our hearts are full of pride is worthless.

As Jesus will explain in the next lesson, genuine prayer begins with honest, heart-felt private conversation with God.

Matthew 6:6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Nobody else needs to even know we are people who pray. Prayer is between us and God. Pride has no place in prayer.

Now I don't believe Jesus is saying it's wrong for a person to lead a public prayer in front of a group of people. His concern is the motivation of the one praying. Are they praying because they want to genuinely speak with God or are they leading the prayer because they want the approval or the admiration of the group?

Jesus says that if we come before Him in prayer so that we can receive the approval or admiration of others, the only reward we will receive is the approval or admiration of others. In other words, God isn't going to respond to the show. As we'll learn next time, God responds to the one who prays with genuine heartfelt honesty before Him.

In Luke 18 Jesus illustrates the difference between genuine and hypocritical prayer.

Luke 18:10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'

13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Pride has no place in prayer. The guy who prays about how he's a great religious guy is not heard by God. The man who humbles himself and honestly comes before the Lord – be merciful to me a sinner – he's the one the Lord listens to.

Some of us might look at this warning and think, "Oh, this doesn't really apply to me. I'd never get in front of a group of people to pray so I could never violate Jesus' warning." Perhaps it's true that you'll never pray in public, but each of us still would do well to heed Jesus' warning. Let's examine our motivation when we pray.

Is our prayer life motivated by what others will think of us?

Or, Is our prayer life motivated by being in communion with the Lord?

Are we praying because we want to honestly speak with the Lord from the heart or is our pride pushing us to pray? It's a question worth considering.