

R 2.4 Alone With God

Study Guide based on Matthew 6:6

Jesus began His teaching about prayer in Matthew 6:5 with a warning (see R 2.3). Don't be like the hypocrites. Don't pray to be seen by others and for their praise. Prayer is not meant to be used as a way to advance personal agendas.

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.

Here's the second point Jesus teaches us about prayer:

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.

Let's take this apart piece by piece to capture as much instruction from it as we can.

First, "But when you pray" ... the assumption Jesus makes here is that his followers will pray. Each of us needs to honestly evaluate our attitude toward prayer. One common attitude I've noticed over the years as a pastor is that many of us treat prayer like it's a bucket in our boat. As long as the boat's not sinking, we don't really need the bucket. When things in our life are going smoothly, we don't really need to pray.

But if the boat begins to take on water, then we grab that bucket and start bailing. When the circumstances of our lives get hard enough – a loved one gets sick – there's a financial reversal, then we start praying.

Jesus doesn't look at prayer that way. He prayed to spend alone time with His heavenly father. It wasn't about need. Jesus' prayer life was about relationship. Jesus expects His followers to abide in Him, to speak with Him, to maintain relationship with Him through prayer. "But when you pray ...", I guess before we explore what Jesus is going to teach us about prayer in this verse, we better make sure we're praying. Let's be sure we're taking the first step before we worry about the next.

So here are some definite steps to take when we pray:

Jesus says first,
"Go into your room ..."

Then he says, "Shut the door."

The point here is we pray one-on-one without distraction. We get alone with God. This is not praying at the stop light while waiting for the light to turn green. There's nothing wrong with praying at the stop light, but Jesus instructs us here to pray in a private place without distraction.

So, can you check off the first two parts of this verse?

- 1) Yes, I do pray ... and
- 2) I do get alone with God where I won't be distracted when I pray

Now Jesus says pray to your Father – we address the Lord when we pray – and notice please, we have a heavenly Father. A lot of us endured earthly fathers that were far from perfect. Perhaps we suffered through the mistakes they made. But those that are in relationship with Jesus have a heavenly Father.

He by definition is perfect. He loves perfectly. He will guide us through life. And He's not like our earthly fathers. Our heavenly Father is always right.

Jesus tells us our heavenly Father is in secret. That word secret is the Greek word *kruptos* – it means “hidden” or “secret”. We need to understand that although we’ve worked hard to find a place to be alone and undistracted when we pray, we’re not alone. Our sensory system may not tell us God is there with us. We may not hear or see or feel the Lord when we pray. But the promise of Jesus tells us that God is there with us. He says our Father sees into that hidden place we’ve found. He sees us praying. The Lord is listening whether we perceive anything with our senses or not.

And did you see the last part of this verse? Your Father who sees in secret will reward you. What? God the Father rewards followers of Jesus who find that private, undistracted place and spend time talking to Him. What’s the reward? We’re not told. But does it matter? Our good and loving Father will give us a good and loving reward. Maybe it’s just peace in our hearts and minds. Maybe it’s health for us or someone we’re praying for. Maybe it’s one of our lost friends coming to faith in Jesus. Maybe it’s just the joy of being in His presence.

So let’s review:

- 1) Are you a person who prays? I’m not asking if you pray as you go through your day. That’s great if you do. But here I’m asking whether or not your prayer life is as Jesus instructs in Matthew 6:6.
- 2) When you pray, do you do so in a private, undistracted place? No phone ringing, no tv blaring, no interruptions – you’re in your proverbial room with the door shut. God has your full attention.

If you answered, “Yes” to these three questions, you can be assured that God is with you when you pray and that He is listening as you pour your heart out. Not only that, His desire is to reward you for spending time with Him.

You don’t have to know exactly how God will reward you. It’s a great blessing to be rewarded by our good and loving God!

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did Jesus pray? Please write out your answer.
- 2) List some of the benefits of having undistracted prayer time with God. What’s the point of being in your room with the door shut when you pray?
- 3) What does it mean to you to have a perfect heavenly Father listening to you when you pray?
- 4) What has the Father promised to reward us with if we pray?
- 5) How can you arrange your schedule and your life to make sure your private alone time with God happens? Will you make the choice to pray like Jesus instructs us here?