

new year, new start.

Small Habits. Big Results.

Prayer—More Than a Request • *Matthew 6:5-8*

Pastor Kenneth J. Spiller • January 8, 2023

***BIG IDEA:* The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.**

➔ **Have you ever bought something because a commercial made it sound like you couldn't live without it?**

➔ **Have you ever discovered the image a company is projecting isn't accurate? How did that change your perception of the company?**

Our text this morning is in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus addresses a large crowd of followers and teaches on a number of topics, all which answer the question: How do I live a life that is dedicated and pleasing to God? The first section, Matthew 5:1-16, contains the Beatitudes, which emphasize what we are as opposed to what we do. Matthew 5:17-48 deals with the relationship of Jesus Christ to the law. Matthew 6 deals with our relationship with God. Matthew 7 deals with our relationship with humankind. These subjects involve the heart, giving us the opportunity to ensure that our external lives match what is inside.

➔ **Why do you think Jesus presented the Sermon on the Mount in this order?** (*Being versus doing; Jesus' relationship with the Law; our relationship with God; our relationship with one another.*)

➔ **How would your focus change if the order of the sermon changed?**

➔ **How was this order different from the order the religious leaders of Jesus' day emphasized?**

In Matthew 6, Jesus addressed three important pillars of the Jewish faith: giving (*Matthew 6:1-4*), prayer (*Matthew 6:5-15*), and fasting (*Matthew 6:16-18*). Jesus is concerned with the actual acts of giving, prayer, and fasting. He begins each topic by addressing the motive for why we give, pray,

and fast. The same spiritual truth that Jesus highlights here is the truth highlighted throughout the Sermon on the Mount: **The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.**

- ➔ **Why does Jesus address these three pillars of the Jewish faith?**
- ➔ **What motivates you to act and behave the ways you do?**
- ➔ **Have you ever been guilty of doing spiritual activities in order to be seen by others?**

Prayer is connection and conversation with God. Using this morning's text, Pastor Kenneth helped us see four points about how Jesus directs us to pray and how to pray more effectively.

1. Pray regularly. (Matthew 6:5-7)

Prayer should be a regular habit. Jesus uses the phrase, **"when you pray ..."** three times in this short section of scripture. Jesus assumes that His listeners will be praying. While that is an assumption Jesus could make with His original audience, it's not an assumption we can make as readily today.

- ➔ **What do you think it means to pray regularly? Do you pray regularly?**
- ➔ **What steps might you take in order to pray more regularly?**

Pastor Kenneth shared that he has often struggled with the discipline of prayer. As such, he's enlisted the following habits to help him be more intentional in his prayer life:

- Keeping a prayer journal.
- Practicing times of silence before God.
- Spending the first minutes of the day in prayer.
- Setting alarms to pray for specific things throughout the day.

- ➔ **What practices have you implemented that have helped you in your prayer life?**

2. Pray sincerely. (Matthew 6:5)

"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 others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full." –Matthew 6:5

Jesus mentions hypocrites here. The Greek word for hypocrisy means to "play-act" or "act something out." It comes from the

The greatest handicap the church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians.

-Richard Sheppard

ancient world of theater, where a single actor would play multiple parts in a show, using a mask to distinguish the parts. Jesus is encouraging His audience to not behave like the hypocrites – in other words, don't wear a mask. Don't say one thing while living another thing.

Pastor Kenneth offered a few questions which can help us know if we are falling prey to the trap of hypocrisy in our prayer lives: 1. Do you pray longer in public than you do in private? 2. Do you pray differently in public than you do in private?

3. Pray secretly. (Matthew 6:6)

“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.” –Matthew 6:6

Prayer is meant to be a time of connection and conversation with God, but when we use it to make ourselves look good, we miss the point of prayer. In other words – and this is where we step into sinful behavior – we end up *using* God instead of *connecting* with God.

Three times in this chapter, Jesus uses the word secret – see Matthew 6:4, 6:6, and 6:18. He does this to show us the importance of personal, private prayer. It's essential that we spend time with the Father listening to Him and speaking to Him.

We can be honest in our prayers. Going to a private place shuts out distractions. This is important for a number of reasons. What's done in secret reveals what we really believe. It shapes who we are and who we are becoming. And what's done in secret reveals if you're serving an audience of One (God Himself) or an audience of people.

4. Pray specifically. (Matthew 6:7)

“And when you pray, do not keep babbling on like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” – Matthew 6:7

Jesus didn't have much use for prayers that were just empty words. Jesus' prayers were often intensely personal and expressed His deep communion with His father. We don't need to pray with fancy words, as if we could impress God with our eloquence. We need to be ourselves.

We don't pray to get things *from* God, but to get to know God Himself. The goal of prayer is not to get stuff from God, but to get to know God. God knows what we need and invites us to pray specifically for it.

Our Lord was not and is not impressed with a lot of words. He remains impressed with what the heart is saying.

-Kent Hughes



➔ How can you avoid the pratfalls of filling up your prayers with empty words, choosing instead to get to the heart of what you're saying?

➔ Is it possible that the reason some prayers remain unanswered because we become more concerned with others than we do with God?

The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. If we know we're not where we should be in our prayer lives, then we can confess in prayer and ask God to help us.

➔ Is there something in your prayer life that you need to confess to God?

➔ Are your prayers regular, sincere, done in secret, and specific? Which area are you stronger in? Which area do you need to improve?

Practical ways to respond to this message:

1. Set an alarm on your phone for each day for a month for 3:17 p.m. Pause and pray at this time.
2. Attend the 3:17 Prayer Gathering on Wednesday, January 11, at 7 p.m.

The Difference

Author Unknown

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day;
 I had so much to accomplish that I didn't have time to pray.
 Problems just tumbled about me, and heavier came each task;
 "Why doesn't God help me?" I wondered. He answered, "You didn't ask."
 I wanted to see joy and beauty, but the day toiled on gray and bleak;
 I wondered why God didn't show me; He said, "But you didn't seek."
 I tried to come into God's presence; I used all my keys at the lock.
 God gently and lovingly chided, "My child, you didn't knock."
 I woke up early this morning and paused before entering the day.
 I had so much to accomplish that I had to take time to pray.

