



We enjoy the incredible privilege of fellowship with the Father through the Son by the Spirit. God has revealed his heart to us in his word, and he invites us to share our hearts with him through prayer.

In his book "A Praying Life," Paul Miller tells us that prayer should resemble a lively conversation around the table with a few close friends. He describes pushing the dishes away, pouring a cup of coffee, and lingering in conversation—conversations where we lose track of time and are sad when we have to leave.

Unfortunately, for most of us, prayer is more of a chore than a delight. Sometimes we wonder if it really makes a difference. We've tried to pray, but we just can't. We are easily discouraged and quickly lose interest.

Miller continues, "Something is wrong with us. Our natural desire to pray comes from Creation. We are made in the image of God. Our inability to pray comes from the Fall. Evil has marred the image. We want to talk to God but can't. The friction of our desire to pray, combined with our badly damaged prayer antennae, leads to constant frustration. It's as if we've had a stroke."

"American culture is probably the hardest place in the world to learn to pray. We are so busy that when we slow down to pray, we find it uncomfortable. We prize accomplishments, production. But prayer is nothing but talking to God. It feels useless, as if we are wasting time. Every bone in our bodies screams, 'Get to work.'"

"One of the subtlest hindrances to prayer is probably the most pervasive. In the broader culture and in our churches, we prize intellect, competency, and wealth. Because we can do life without God, praying seems nice but unnecessary. Money can do what prayer does, and it is quicker and less time-consuming. Our trust in ourselves and in our talents makes us structurally independent of God. As a result, exhortations to pray don't stick (Paul E. Miller, A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World)."

In the next few weeks, we will be exploring our Lord's teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus introduces us to a simple, no-frills pattern of prayer. Our hope is that we will slow down long enough to delight in God and enjoy the privilege of knowing and walking with him—that we will take Jesus' teaching to heart and learn how to pray.

Jesus introduces us to prayer with two simple rules.

DON'T TRY TO IMPRESS EACH OTHER (vv. 5-6)

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.*

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.*

1. What are some of the subtle things Christians do to try to impress each other?
2. What does this reveal about us?
3. Why is it deadly?
4. What is Jesus' solution to hypocrisy?
5. The Bible challenges us to do life together. That involves singing together, studying together, encouraging one another, and praying together. How do we balance the call for secrecy with the call for living in community?
6. How does God reward our devotion to him?
7. What causes us to be more interested in the approval of others than we are in the rewards of single-hearted devotion to him?

DON'T TRY TO IMPRESS GOD (vv. 7-8)

⁷*And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

1. It seems as if the Gentiles preferred quantity over quality. Jesus describes their pray lives with two phrases “babbling” and “many words.” What are some of the ways we tend to emphasize quantity over quality?
2. How would you describe quality in prayer?
3. What happens when we emphasize quantity over quality?
4. What role does quantity, if any, play in prayer?
5. How does knowing God as “your father” relieve you from the pressure of thinking you have to pray a whole lot to be heard?
6. How should the fact that “your Father knows what you need,” shape your prayer life?
7. What needs to happen when there is a conflict between “what you want” and “what you need?”