

Matthew 6:5-8 *When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.*

INTRO / RECAP

We are in the middle of a study on the disciplines of righteousness. As Matthew, chapter 6, began we learned in verse 1 that (1) we are to practice our righteousness, (2) we are warned to not practice our righteousness for the notice of men, and (3) that there is heavenly reward in practicing rightly. Simply: **1. PRACTICE, 2. BEWARE, 3. REWARD**

Last week we noted that there are three pillars of righteousness in the Jewish faith:

1. **TZEDAKAH** – benevolent giving and acts of human kindness
2. **TELFILLAH** – prayer; conforming our will to that of God
3. **TESHUVA** – self-evaluation in fasting, or designated denial

And then we noted that these are the exact 3 disciplines that Christ calls us to in practicing our righteousness, found in Matthew 6:2-18. Note in your Bibles the very obvious triple repetitions:

1. RE: GIVING

Vs. 2 “when you give to the poor” ... don’t do it to be seen of men

Vs. 3 “but when you give to the poor” ... do it in secret

Vs. 4 “and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you”

2. RE: PRAYING

Vs. 5 “when you pray” ... don’t do it to be seen of men

Vs. 6a “but you, when you pray” ... do it in secret

Vs. 6b “and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you”

3. RE: FASTING

Vs. 16 “whenever you fast” ... don’t do it to be seen of men

Vs. 17-18a “but you, when you fast” ... do it in secret

Vs. 18b “and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you”

Notice the clear pattern in each of **PRACTICE, BEWARE and REWARD**

THE DISCIPLINE OF SECRET PRAYER

Clearly our passage emphasizes the importance of secret prayer, not seen by men, but done as our righteous discipline one-on-one with God. But before we consider this, I want to say a word about the importance and value of instant, public prayer – for one might be led to believe that this passage is teaching that any prayer said in public is inappropriate, but this would be a misunderstanding.

A Word About Instant, Public Prayer

Our Bible teaches us of the important place of instant, public prayer. Congregational prayer, small group prayer or one-on-one prayer done with others watching is appropriate and also a practice of righteousness when done with no pretense (special “pulpit” voice) or wanting to impress (with

flowery words or showing off knowledge of Scripture) or with an agenda (of promoting your personal opinion).

In the following Scriptures the phrase “be devoted to prayer” can just as easily and accurately be translated “be instant in prayer” – and you will find different excellent translations using one or the other interchangeably.

Romans 12:12 *[Be] devoted to prayer [= instant in prayer]*

Colossians 4:2 *Devote yourself to prayer [= be instant in prayer], keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

The point is that God commends praying in the moment, and not just promising to pray later at a more appropriate, private time. Prayer is so welcome at the hospital bed, over the neighbor’s fence, when a loved one is leaving for an important event, at a special celebratory occasion, at a moment of crisis or anxiety - or really, anytime. Such a prayer can comfort, encourage and be an example of the importance of the discipline of prayer. I’ve often found people surprised and delighted by an unexpected but welcome prayer – over the phone, by email, text, letter, or in person

So feel free to pray as God leads, instantly and publically.

The Emphasis on the Discipline of Private, Secret Prayer

But as I have already said, the emphasis in our Matthew 6 passage today is on private, secret prayer. Is the discipline of the Jewish TELFILLAH, which literally means “focus.” And for me, that is the most difficult aspect of private prayer – focus. That is the discipline – to focus on a God who is invisible to our eyes and who already knows what we are going to pray and knows our needs before we ask (v. 8).

Clearly,

1. Don’t pray to be noticed by others (v.5)
2. Pray in private to your Heavenly Father (v.6)
3. Talk in normal conversation, not with memorized words (v.7)
4. Don’t try to convince God of what he already knows but humbly present requests (v.8)

How exactly we do this can vary from person to person, but Jesus makes it clear that this discipline of righteousness is be PRIVATE and SECRET as much as possible. It is, then, to be one-on-one with the Father in intimacy.

So if focus is the primary difficulty and requirement (“TELFILLAH”), then how can I best focus?

SUGGESIONS ON FOCUS

1. **CALLED** – Remember that God has called me to this divine appointment

Hebrews 4:16 *Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of Grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Hebrews 10:19-22 *Since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ...*

2. **BELOVED** - I am loved by God and He loves for me to come to Him

Psalms 62:8 *Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.*

James 4:8 *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

James 2:5 *Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

3. **DELIGHT** – God wants to give me the delights of my heart

Psalms 37:4-5 *Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.*

4. **INTIMATE** – God wants me to be humbly comfortable before Him

Psalm 131:2 Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother ...

Practical ideas for FOCUS

- 1. ALOUD** - I personally find that praying aloud helps me focus
- 2. QUIET** – Ambient unnatural sounds distract, so I strive for quiet
- 3. AGENDA** – Having a list, either written or in mind, is a great assist
- 4. BEGINNING AND ENDING** – Beginning with praise and ending with thanksgiving for a specific ending to the prayer meeting helps maintain my focus

Important Things For Which to Pray

- 1 My world
 - The peace of Israel
 - The spread of the gospel
 - Churches and families of Christian martyrs
- 2 My nation: leadership and military
- 3 My local community
 - The homeless and hungry
 - The orphans and abused
 - The addicted
 - The spiritually lost
4. My church
 - Unity
 - Pastors and leadership
 - Widows and widowers
 - Those with special need
 - Our church children
 - Our missionaries
 - Our positive impact on the community
4. My family
 - Being a better lover and respecter
 - Needs of my loved ones
 - Christian unity
5. Personal
 - A stronger devotion to Jesus
 - Love for those who struggle with me
 - Better sharing of my faith

CONCLUSION

Our Lord Jesus instructs a righteous discipline to regular, private conversation with our Heavenly Father. May we enjoy a continual, unceasing conversation of praise and petition with our God, moment by moment. But may we also develop the habit of specified, intimate times of prayer focus, where we allow our will to conform to His. For Father always knows best.

PRACTICE the privilege of private prayer

BEWARE neglecting this essential discipline

REWARD for your effort is guaranteed to come!

Additional Material (not included in the spoken message)

SCRIPTURAL IMPERITIVES

HOW?

Cleansed (Proverbs 15:8,29; 1 John 1:9)

In the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:26)

With pure motives (James 4:3; Psalm 145:18))

Aligning with God's will (1 John 5:14)

In the name (authority) of Jesus (John 14:13-14)

Believing in an answer (Mark 11:24; 1 John 5:15)

Never giving up (Luke 18:1)

Continual inner conversation (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

For WHOM?

For those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

For all the Lord's people (Ephesians 6:18; James 5:16)

For those living apart from God and in sin (1 John 5:16)

For your persecutors (Matthew 5:44)

For WHAT?

Wisdom (James 1:5)

Provision (good gifts; needs) (Matthew 7:11)

Anxious circumstance (Philippians 4:6)

Protection from temptation and the evil one (Matthew 26:41)

More workers for God's vineyard (Matthew 9:38)

For the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6)