

September 1, 2019

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“When You Pray...”

Matthew 6:5-8

Do you have to believe in God to pray? Apparently, some think not, as a group of “non-theists” challenged the Pennsylvania House of Representatives rule requiring those who give the opening prayer to believe in God or a “higher power.” As we begin a series on prayer, we obviously need to clarify—what are we talking about?

I. Prayer is not WINDOW DRESSING for a religious life, Matthew 6:5.

II. Prayer is not a COERCIVE METHODOLOGY for divine intervention, Matthew 6:7.

III. Prayer is COMMUNION WITH YOUR FATHER, Matthew 6:6,8.

It may be true that practically everyone prays, in some general sense. But it is followers of Jesus, who are “abiding” in their relationship with the Father through Jesus, who experience this communion with God. It matters not whether men see, and we have no need to “twist the arm” of the Father we trust. We rest in our fellowship with one who deeply loves us, and cares about us beyond our understanding.



How do children sometimes try to gain their father’s attention, especially if he is otherwise distracted?

What kinds of things might they do to try to coerce him into satisfying some “want” they have? How is prayer sometimes like this in relationship to our heavenly Father? In contrast, what does healthy father-child “communing” look like?

#### **For Further Study, Thought, and Discussion:**

1. Window dressing may be described as “something used to create a deceptively favorable or attractive impression.” In Luke 20:47 Jesus describes the Pharisees as those who “...for a show make lengthy prayers.”

--Who would be impressed by this show?

--What danger is inherent in public praying, as Jesus indicates in Matthew 6:5?

--Do you think the cautions Jesus gives here are relevant to some of our discussions about public praying, such as in our schools or government meetings? What applications might be made?

2. What is the interplay between the child of God “getting what they want” (see Matthew 7:7-11) and the fact that the Father “knows what you need before you ask him” (6:8)?

--How does this underscore the purpose of prayer as communing with the Father?

--How does it affect our understanding of God’s answer to our requests?

3. Psalm 37:4 is often quoted in reference to prayer.

--What does it mean to “delight yourself in the Lord”?

--What happens to the desires we have as we delight in him?

--Viewed from the opposite perspective—what happens to our desires when we don’t delight in or commune with the Lord?

4. What are some of the components of communing with the Father, or abiding in him, reflected in John 15?

**NEXT WEEK:** “Our Father in the Heavens” Matthew 6:9