

(Basics) 53. Not Praying as Hypocrites Do

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of sincere communication with God in prayer, warning against hypocrisy and the performance of religious acts.

Duration: 11:41

Scripture: Genesis 1:27, Psalm 55:17, Matthew 6:5-6, John 10:27, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 4:2

Topics: "Effective Prayer", "Hypocrisy In Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that prayer is not a ritual or a mere repetition of words. Instead, it is a heartfelt communication between a child and their father. The speaker refers to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:5-6, where Jesus emphasizes the importance of the state of one's heart during prayer rather than the specific words used. The speaker warns against being a religious actor, someone who prays in public to impress others, and encourages genuine and private prayer. The sermon concludes by highlighting that prayer is not just about asking for things, but about enjoying time spent with God and listening to Him.

Transcript

Some of the most important things that Jesus taught concerning communicating with God. You know, we were created to talk to God and hear God talk to us. You would not like to have a child that is both deaf and dumb.

Nobody would like to have such a child who doesn't speak and cannot hear. The Bible says that we are made in the likeness of God. And the same desire that we have as fathers, mothers for our children, God also has in a much greater measure.

He does not want to have children that are deaf and dumb, that can't hear what He is saying and that never speak to Him. Are you one of those deaf and dumb Christians who never speaks to your father, who never hears what the father has to say to you? Well, I want to say, if you are, you missed a great deal of the Christian life. God doesn't force us to listen to Him or to speak to Him.

Just like we don't force our children to speak to us, we are delighted when they themselves are eager to speak to us. So what the Bible calls prayer is not a ritual. It's not something that we go through a form repeating certain things to God.

And it's certainly not something like a mantra, far from it. It is a child speaking to a father. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, verse 5, He was telling His disciples how they should pray, how they should communicate with God.

He said, when you pray, the important thing is not the content of your prayer as much as the state of your heart when you pray. And that's why Jesus didn't place the emphasis on certain words to be said. But He said, make sure that you don't pray like the hypocrites.

Now the word hypocrite means actor. And you know an actor is one who gets on the stage and pretends to be somebody which he is not really in real life. In real life he may be a drunkard.

On the stage he will act like a holy man. And there are a lot of religious hypocrites like that. Their stage is the church meeting room or hall.

And when they come to the church meeting on Sunday, they are dressed up to act as holy people. It's a whole thing is a drama. They pray, they preach, they do so many things.

But when they go back from that stage, which is the church and the meeting hall, they become their own selves again and they live the same old lives that they lived before. Just like if you went to the house of an actor and you discovered that he is not behaving in the same way in his house like he behaved on the stage, you are not surprised. Because you say, well there he was acting, here he is a real person.

That's how it is with a lot of Christians. In the church they are acting, they are singing songs of great devotion to God which they don't really mean in their life. And when they come home they are their real person.

And it's that type of thing which Jesus condemned the most. You and I would think that the greatest sins are murder, adultery, theft, etc. But Jesus placed another sin on top of all of these, and that was hypocrisy, acting, pretending to be holy when you are not really holy.

And if you read the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, you will find that he condemned this type of religious acting more than he condemned adultery or murder or anything. We read in the Gospels of women who were adulteresses whom Jesus didn't condemn, they were repentant and Jesus saved them. There was a murderer hanging next to Jesus on the cross who got saved and went to heaven because he repented.

You never find Jesus condemning the murderers because they already know it's wrong and everybody in the world knows it's wrong. Not that those things are not sins, but they are so obvious that everybody knows it's wrong. Why did Jesus condemn the hypocrites? Because they were giving people the impression that they were very holy, when they were not.

And that's what Jesus hated and detested and spoke against and he called such people vipers and people who were ready to go to hell. So whom did Jesus condemn to hell? First of all, not the murderers and prostitutes and thieves, but the hypocrites. And we could say today the people who go to church and pretend to be so holy, but who don't live at home the way they say when they go to church.

And here Jesus speaks about hypocrites, actors. And he says that in relation to praying. So he tells his disciples, before I tell you how to pray, you need to learn how you should not pray.

Because even if you say the right words, if your hot attitude is one of a hypocrite, God will not hear you. See, prayer is like a telephone call. When you dial a number, you wait until the other person has heard you.

That means he picks up the phone. You make sure he can hear, then only you speak. In the same way, when we pray to God, that is we are going to talk to God, it's exactly like talking on a telephone.

The first thing you got to make sure is that God is listening, that he can hear you. Because if he is not hearing you, what are you speaking? What are you speaking on a telephone if there is nobody at the other end of the line? Have you thought of that? Do you ever think that prayer is like speaking on a telephone? In a telephone you speak to a human being, in a prayer you talk to God. And in a telephone you listen to what the other person is saying to you, and in prayer you should be listening to what God is saying to you as well.

For many people, prayer is only talking. And usually it's not even talking. It's just asking God to give you this and give you that, and give your family this and give your family that.

That's it. Just asking is like a shopping list. You know, you go to the market with a shopping list, and you know your wife has told you to buy this and this and this and this and this.

So you go to God and say, Lord, do this and do this and do this and do this. That's not really prayer. You know, what do you think of a child who only wants to talk to his father when he wants to get something from his father? Now buy me a chocolate or buy me this or buy me that and get me that.

And that's the only time the child wants to talk to his father. Would you be happy with such a child? You know as soon as the child comes to you he's asking for something. He's not interested in any other conversation with you.

He's not interested in listening to you. He just wants to ask you for something. If you give that to him, he's happy.

A lot of Christians are like that. And I want to say that just like you would not like to have a child like that, God is not happy with His children who are like that. So prayer is more than just asking.

It's communicating, it's talking and listening to God and enjoying our time together. For many people prayer is a boring thing because they have not understood what it really is. So if we take this passage seriously which Jesus spoke here, it can change our whole life.

And the first thing He said is don't act. When you come to pray, don't pray in order to be seen by men. But He said when you pray, verse 6, Matthew 6, 6, go into your inner room and when you shut your door, pray to your father who is in secret and your father who is in secret will repay you.

So the first thing He said actors do, religious actors, they want to show other people how holy they are. And one way they do that is by letting other people know that they are praying a lot. Do you let other people know that you are praying a lot? Do you talk a lot about prayer, trying to impress other people that you are praying a lot? And when you are praying in public, say in a meeting, there are some people you know who are so shy, they never pray in public.

That's one extreme. The other extreme you find some people who are always wanting to pray long, boring prayers in public. Who are they praying for? They are not praying to God.

They are praying to impress all the other people in the meeting. It will be a good thing, if you ask yourself next time or anytime, when you pray in public, whether that is exactly what you pray in private also. For example, supposing you are praying in public, Oh God, I want a lot of people to be converted and to have faith in You in this country and pray for the millions of people in India who need to hear the gospel.

Ask yourself, do you have the same burden of prayer when you are all by yourself in your room? Or do you pray those things only when you are in public in the meeting to impress other people, that you are a very, very spiritual person? That is acting. Acting is praying in the presence of others as though you have got a great burden and not really having that burden in your heart. It could be praying in very flowery language, impressive, and trying to show off to others what a wonderful prayer you make.

God is not impressed at all. These are the areas in which we can pray only for men to hear. And if you have done like that, we have all done it.

If you are honest, we have to admit that we have all done it. But when we go home from such a meeting, we say, Lord, forgive me, I have sinned. My prayer was a sinful prayer because I offered it to man.

Please forgive me. And if we do that, we will find the next time we can pray more sincerely to God.

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