

# The Enemies of Prayer

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 September 2021

Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

[ 0 : 00 ] If you have your Bibles, open them this morning to Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 6, and we're going to begin our reading in just a moment with verse 5. You recognize this is a part of the Sermon on the Mount.

It's the portion where Jesus turns his attention to the matter of teaching his disciples how to pray, and it's the definitive passage in all the Scripture of Jesus on the subject of prayer.

I want you to know I'm beginning today a new series. We've been doing the Jesus Effect, and beginning today I'm going to do a four-part series on the enemies of prayer.

Throughout my lifetime, I've tried to read the Scripture and to pray and to witness and do things that believers want to do, but when I talk to other believers and they're transparent and open, I find that pretty much a lot of us, maybe most of us or maybe all of us, kind of share this in common.

Of all the Christian disciplines, the one that we think would bless in our lives the most is prayer, and yet that's the one that we perhaps do the least of.

[ 1 : 06 ] It's the one that we don't feel very good about oftentimes in our life. Every one of us today, if I said, how many of you believe in prayer, would raise your hand? If I said, do you think there's power in prayer, that God will move as we come to him in prayer, every one of us would acknowledge that, but we would probably be a little embarrassed if folks knew sometimes how little we pray.

And so I want to preach for the next four weeks because I think there's nothing more important in our life than prayer, very openly and honestly about prayer. And I want to talk about the enemies of prayer.

And so if you have something to take some notes on, I want to encourage you just to write down these enemies. We're going to see a number of them over the next few weeks. But today we want to start with the first one.

It doesn't mean it's the first of importance, but it's simply the one that we're coming to first here in the Scripture, and that is praying with wrong motives. If you pray with wrong motives, you're not going to be effective in prayer.

And let me tell you what I mean when I say the enemy of prayer. I'm not talking about just lifting up words to God. I'm talking about those words getting higher than the ceiling.

[ 2 : 18 ] I won't ask for a show of hands, but my guess is probably everyone in this room has had occasion where you prayed and you walked away wondering, man, did God hear that? Did it get any higher than the ceiling?

Was I just talking to myself or did God really hear? So when I talk about prayer, I'm talking about effective prayer, not just the uttering of words, all right? And so the first thing I'd tell you is that praying with wrong motives is the enemy of prayer.

Look with me to chapter 6 and verse 5 and hear what Jesus says about that. Whenever you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen.

That's the reason they're doing it. To be seen by people. I assure you, they've got their reward. Now, obviously, he's thinking of the Pharisees.

And boy, we like to give the Pharisees a hard time, right? And Jesus gave them difficult moments. He called them snakes and vipers and compared them to whitewashed tombs and graves.

[ 3 : 27 ] He recognized they were phonies, right? And so oftentimes, I hear folk in church criticize the Pharisees because they love to impress people.

In fact, Jesus gives us a number of ways in which they tried to impress people. They would wear wide hems around the bottom of their garments. They would put scriptures in little boxes and place

them on their head.

They call them phylacteries, right? And they would even pray on the street corner. Now, here's what Jesus is saying. He says, people come to the temple and they pray.

And they stand when they pray, perhaps out of respect to God. And they do that in the temple. But these self-righteous Pharisees who want folk to see them, they'll even go out on the street corner and they'll begin to pray.

Imagine you're downtown Pickens on Main Street. And there's a guy and he's just talking to the top of his lungs and he's talking to God, right? Now, you know, one of two or three things has to be going on.

[ 4 : 31 ] There's either something wrong with this guy, maybe mentally, or maybe he's just that spiritual. Maybe he's just a guy who is just so moved by God and so in love with God that he's walking down the street.

And suddenly, it dawns on him. There's something he needs to call out to God about. And so right there on the corner, he just stops and he prays, right? That would be a pretty unusual sight, though, to see.

And Jesus is talking about these folk because I believe that's the conclusion a lot of their peers, a lot of the folks who weren't Pharisees had concluded. They had come to the place.

They saw these people stand on the street corner praying. And they thought, man, what a godly guy. I mean, he is just so moved to talk to God right here out in public. But Jesus says, I want you to be aware the reason they do that is to be seen of men.

Now, like I said a moment ago, we can get pretty hard on the Pharisees, right? We don't like it when people are hypocrites, when they're phonies, when they come across as holier than thou, and they're legalists and all that sort of thing.

[ 5 : 37 ] But can I tell you something, and you don't want to hear this, and I'm including myself in this. We're more like those Pharisees than we like to let on that we are. Every one of us, if we're absolutely honest, we struggle with doing things not so much to please God but to please man.

Now, some of you are saying, well, preacher, you just don't know me. I just don't do that. When I worship, when I serve, whatever I do, I'm doing it to please God, and I don't even think about men. Really? How many of you right now hold an office in church that you don't really want to have, but you didn't want to disappoint the preacher?

You don't want to disappoint somebody on the nominating committee. Brian singled you out and said, well, you've got a good voice, and you ought to be in the choir. And so you said, well, okay, because you didn't want to disappoint Brian. You see, the truth of the matter is, a lot of the things we do, if we're honest about it, we do to be seen to men, and not because it's necessary for God or what we feel in our heart.

There's sometimes a combination of both, right? We want to please God, but we really are motivated oftentimes. What I really want is for these folk to think I'm a good guy, and I'm just doing exactly what I need.

Let me give you another example. I know probably none of you in this room would ever do this. But have you ever had a quarrel with your wife or husband on the way to church? Or maybe you're getting on the kids. You're having to get on to them because they were late getting in the car, or they don't dress the way you want them to dress, or there's something coming up in the afternoon.

[ 7 : 06 ] They're already starting to argue. And it's just bitter as it can be getting to church, right? But you pull into the parking lot, and as soon as you park that car and open the door, well, there's the pastor.

Or there's Deacon Joe. Or there's your son's school teacher. What do you do? You go from, hey, teacher. So good to see you today.

Isn't it going to be a blessing to be here at church today and to hear from God? Now, why do you do that? You do that because you don't think bad, or you don't see you fighting. It didn't bother you that God was watching that argument in the car, heard every word of it, saw you misbehave, but you get here in front of folk that respect you and think well of you, and suddenly you've got to change all that, right?

So oftentimes we do what we do because we're motivated for men to see us and think well of us. In truth, we like to impress others sometimes as much as the Pharisees.

Several years ago, it was two elections ago, right before President Trump was elected, they hadn't had the Republican primary here in South Carolina yet, and some of the candidates were coming

here to South Carolina. You'll remember that.

[ 8 : 18 ] In fact, I'm not even sure that President Trump had declared that he was going to be a candidate at that point, but they had, remember about 18 candidates at that time? Well, some of them came to the upstate, and a friend of mine who pastors a large church in the upstate called me, and he said, Ralph, I'm going to bind.

He said, we've got about 2,000 people coming to our church who want to meet these politicians and hear what they've got to say, and my grandson has just passed away, and I've got to go to Charleston.

I've got to be in Charleston, and I need somebody who will come and sit on the stage with these guys and ask them questions. I want to tell you, that's so far out of my element, you can't even imagine, right? And so I just hem-hawed around, but his grandson had died, and I didn't want to disappoint him, so finally I said, well, okay, I don't know what I'll say.

Do you have questions? He said, no, you've got to come up with your own. Okay, so I go and agree to do that, right? Well, I get there, and they've got the bomb-sniffing dogs and all this mess and secret service, and they're checking you out, and I'm nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs, and finally they come out, and they say, these guys are here in the back, and we want you to come back and meet them, so the first time you meet them is not on stage.

It's not going to be a debate. It's just a one-on-one. Then we go to the next one, the next one. So I say, okay. I go back, and this first politician to meet, one of the nicest guys you'd ever meet in your life.

[ 9 : 40 ] Felt like you knew him forever, okay? He says, there's another one over here. I want you to meet him. I go over, and I stick my hand out, and this was a senator. He was probably leading the polls at that time, and I stick my hand out, and I said, hi, I'm Ralph Carter.

And he says, well, I'm, and he calls his name Senator so-and-so, and when he does, when he's telling me who he is, he takes his hand, he puts it on my hand, he's shaking my hand like this, so warm and endearing.

But guess what? He's not looking at me. I'm here, and he's not looking at me. He's looking over here and over here, and he's scanning the room, and I've got enough sense that I figure it out. I'm a nobody. I could have told him that before I came in the room, right? He's not interested in talking to me. He's interested in meeting this other politician or this news reporter or somebody who can do something for his campaign, right?

So as quickly as I shook his hand, I just let it go and said, nice to meet you, and turned because I thought, well, if you don't talk to me, then, you know, I don't want to be in your way, and I just went on my way.

[ 10 : 51 ] When I was writing this message a couple of years later, I followed that incident, and you know what occurred to me? I wonder if sometimes it's that way with God. I wonder if when we gather with God and we go through the pretense of prayer, if really and truly our mind is on other things and on other people, and we're praying not for his benefit but for others, and I wonder if God ever gets that feeling where he's going, are you talking to me?

Are you really in conversation with me, or are you just trying to impress through your prayer somebody else? The enemy of prayer is praying with wrong motives.

The second enemy of prayer, and this one's going to surprise you, praying in public, praying in public. Look at chapter 6 and verse 6. Jesus continues this same idea.

When you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And some translations tack on that word openly.

Now, Jesus has just told us not to be motivated by trying to get the attention of men. So now he follows that up with the idea of, to prevent that, go into the closet where no one sees you but God.

[ 12 : 10 ] Why would I mean go into a closet and pray? Have you ever thought about that? It seems a little odd, doesn't it? Go into a closet and pray. Why would you go into a closet and pray? I'll tell you why. One reason.

Because no one sees you in the closet but you and God. It helps make your motives more pure. Do you understand that? If I'm standing here praying, I can be trying to impress you.

But when I get alone and I know my wife's not watching, my children are not watching, my church is not watching, it's just me and God here, I've got to believe that God's listening. I've got to believe

that God's going to answer, or why would I pray?

So it indicates sincerity. It indicates real faith in God. But there's another reason. It also enables me to be transparent with God.

It enables me to be honest with God and come clean with God and say what's really on my mind and heart. And I'll tell you something. That is virtually, I'm not going to say it's impossible, it's virtually impossible to do in public prayer meeting.

[ 13 : 15 ] It's hard to do even with two or three folk holding hands, but much less in a room full of folk like this. I've been pastor in 50 years. I've preached a lot of places.

I've shared my testimony with people in their homes. I've done funerals and weddings. I've done about everything I guess a pastor is called upon to do, but I'll tell you something.

The hardest thing I've ever been asked to do is to pray publicly. In fact, if I were honest with you, I'm not sure that I could say over a handful of times in my whole 50-year ministry, I've ever felt in my heart that I walked away from praying in public successfully, that I did that really the way I should have done.

You know why? Because every time I pray, when I pray in a crowd like this, no matter how hard I try to block you out, it's virtually impossible to do so. Do you understand that?

If you're in a Sunday school class, if you're in a small prayer, it's just hard to not think of the fact, well, so-and-so's here, and they're listening. And you want your theology to be right, and you want to make sure that you touch all the bases, that you mention all the things that were requested, and that you get the names of folk right, it's a difficult thing to pray in public.

[ 14 : 33 ] And so I want to tell you, public praying can be the enemy of real, genuine prayer. Let me prove it to you from another perspective. Go with me to Matthew's Gospel.

Keep your hand here in Matthew 6. And if you're using your Bible this morning, and not just reading off the screen, go with me to Matthew chapter 26. And I want you to read three verses with me.

Matthew chapter 26, and verse 36. Here's what we read.

Then Jesus came with them to the place called Gethsemane, the night before he dies. And he told his disciples, sit here while I go over there and pray.

Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, my soul is swallowed up in sorrow. To the point of death, I'm ready to die.

[ 15 : 32 ] Remain here and stay awake with me. Going a little farther, he fell face down and prayed, my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not as I will, but as you.

I'm going to tell you, this is the most intense moment, I believe, in Jesus' earthly life. He's left the upper room. They've gone to the garden. He knows he's about to be betrayed.

He leaves those disciples behind, eight of them. He goes a bit further, and he asks these to pray.

He goes a bit further and leaves his inner circle, Peter, James, and John behind.

Pray, watch, be vigilant. He goes further, and the Bible says this, he falls face down on the ground. Some of you may have prayed like that, but most of us have not had that experience.

He falls face down on the ground. His heart is broken. His heart is heavy. He says, Lord, they're about to put me to death. If there's any way possible, if there's any way for humanity to be saved, is what he's in essence saying.

[ 16 : 40 ] Other than me dying on the cross, I pray God you'd find it and let this pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done. He comes back and he finds them sleeping.

He goes back and prays and comes back and finds them sleeping. Goes away and prays, comes back and finds them sleeping. The Bible tells us in another gospel, he prays so intensely, it looks as though he's sweating drops of blood.

I've talked to physicians about this. You know what they say? That he was so intense under great stress, the capillaries in our forehead can actually burst, and that's what gave the appearance, he's sweating blood.

I'm saying to you today, Jesus could not have prayed that prayer in the midst of Peter, James, and John. He wasn't able to pray that with those other disciples who waited behind.

That kind of intense honesty, transparency with God comes only when we are alone. Remember David in Psalm 51? In Psalm 51, David has committed adultery with Bathsheba.

[ 17 : 47 ] He's had Uriah, her husband, murdered. He sends him to the front and withdraws. Can I tell you something? He was as guilty of murder as if he had taken out a handgun and stuck it to the back of the head of Uriah and pulled the trigger.

He's that guilty. Nathan comes and confronts him with his sin. He prays this beautiful prayer in Psalm 51. I think it's the most beautiful prayer you read of confession anywhere in Scripture. And he calls out to God. He says, God, you know everything about me. And then he says, Lord, cast me not away from your presence. Take not your Holy Spirit from me. Create to be a clean heart, oh God. Renew a right spirit within me. He's a broken, broken, broken man. I want to ask you something. Could he have prayed that leading worship at First Baptist Church of Pickens?

Not in a thousand years. Could he have prayed that with his wife, Michael, at his side? Never. Could he have prayed that in front of his boys? He had a number of sons. Could he have said, guys, come here.

[18:47] I got to tell you something. Your dad's failed and prayed that prayer. Could he have prayed it with his soldiers? That kind of sincere transparency and honesty, I don't tell you something. It only comes when you get along with God.

There have been moments in your life, maybe not as dark as in David's life, but there have been dark moments in your life. Some folk get the mistaken notion, what I need to do is get on a stage and confess it to the world.

I want to tell you something. What you do in public that becomes public knowledge, you need to confess publicly. But those things that are private knowledge that only you and God know about, you need to confess those privately.

But that means getting along with God and bearing your soul to God and saying, God, here's the honest truth about my life. Third enemy of prayer, and that is creating false assumptions.

Now, I'm going to mention two of these, but there are others, okay? Again, just look up and listen for a minute. Let me preface what I'm going to say by telling you this. In the Baptist church, we're pretty bad about this.

[19:54] If we own an answer to something, we like in our mind to think, well, how should it be according to how I think instead of how should it be according to what God thinks?

And if we don't see a clear answer, we'll just make up one. And that's how we come sometimes to get these false assumptions. And when I mention these two false assumptions to you, you're going to readily say, I've heard that.

I've even thought that way or maybe even I think that way now. Here's false assumption number one. You ready? That praying longer is better than praying shorter.

That lengthy prayers are better than short prayers. You know what that says? What that says is this, just logically, that God's got this scale in the heavens and he's saying, okay, they prayed this much, but no, I'm not going to answer yet.

No, well, that's a lot of more. No, not yet. Okay, now I will. The little bit of praying doesn't matter, but a whole lot of praying is really, and the more words they use, the better I like it.

[21:05] Can I ask you, where did we ever get that silly notion? Because I'm going to show you clearly, it's not a biblical notion. I want you to look at what Jesus said in chapter six and verse seven.

Listen to Jesus. In verse seven, he says, when you pray, don't babble. We all know that, right? What babble is. Just to go on and on to yak it up. When you pray, don't babble like the idolaters since they imagine they'll be heard for their many words.

Words. He says, that's what the idolaters do. You see an example of it in 1 Kings 18. Elijah takes the bullet. They create two altars. He says, you got to pray.

The prophet of Baal prays first. Remember what they did? They jumped up and down on the altar. He kind of made fun of them. God not listening. They began to cut themselves. They began to chant and rant and rave.

[22:04] No one answered. And so Jesus says, don't be like the idolaters. Don't just babble and use a lot of words. Look at the very next verse he gives us.

Verse eight. Don't be like them because your father knows the things you need before you ask. So Jesus, he's got a different assumption.

Jesus says, I want to tell you something. It'd be better if you were briefer in your praying than verbose in your praying. I want you to go with me to the book of Ecclesiastes chapter five.

And I know some of you probably are wondering, where in the world is Ecclesiastes? Go to Proverbs and turn right. You'll be right there. Ecclesiastes chapter five and verse one.

You ready? You ready? Guard your step when you go to the house of God. You hear that? Guard yourself, your step, when you go to the house of God.

[ 23 : 09 ] Better true draw near in obedience than to offer sacrifices as fools do for they are ignorant and do wrong. A lot of folk in the Old Testament hide the idea if I didn't show up with a sacrifice, I'm good to go.

And God makes it clear through the prophet Isaiah and Jeremiah and others your sacrifices have become a stench in my nostrils. What I want from you is obedience and faithfulness and openness and transparency.

Look at verse two. Do not be hasty. Don't be quick. To speak and do not be impulsive. To make a speech before God.

God is in heaven and you are on earth so let your words be few. What about that? It's pretty clear. Solomon is telling us the same thing Jesus says in Matthew chapter six. You don't have to be verbose. Now, a lot of you in this room are not going to get this, but Brother Mendel and those in here my age, you will.

[ 24 : 14 ] Back in the 70s when I was a seminary student at Fort Worth, Texas, my folks lived over in Anderson, South Carolina. You know when we called home? Same time everybody in this room who's my age called home.

You called home on the weekend, you called home after nine o'clock. And the reason is because you could do it for 10 cents a minute, right? Some of you think that's just the craziest thing ever. But really true, in those days, if you were poor the way we were and most folk were in seminary, you'd wait till Saturday night and honest to goodness now, we'd look at our watch and say, okay, you got three minutes.

Go. And they'd call and you'd talk to them for three minutes. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying God's somewhere so far off you don't want to bother him, you don't want to take his time. He's got a lot of other people who need to talk to him. He's not saying that at all. You know what he's saying? He's talking about the holiness of God. And he says, you need to remember you're immortal on this earth, but God is in heaven.

[ 25 : 16 ] He's holy. He's righteous. He's sovereign. He knows everything. So when you come to him, you don't have to explain things to him. You don't have to argue with God.

Just come to God and be transparent and tell God what's on your mind and on your heart. So a lot of words is not important with God.

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, 21 words. Jesus' prayer in John 17, the longest prayer we ever hear Jesus pray.

You know how long it is? Go home today and see if I'm telling you the truth. If you read it, it lasts about four minutes. About four minutes. We don't need to pray long, verbose prayers.

Here's the second thing and final thing I want to say to you today. It's another false presumption about prayer. Prayer doesn't get us what we want.

[ 26 : 15 ] The false assumption is that prayer does, that prayer gets us whatever we want. Now let me just ask you, have you ever watched television, seen one of those televangelists, one of those prosperity preachers, and he makes a statement something like this, you just love God, be filled with the Holy Spirit, probably send me some money, an offering, and pray, and you can expect the Wells Fargo truck to pull up any minute.

Have you ever heard him say, name it and claim it? That's the one I hate the most. As though you had power to just order God, God, I need a new Cadillac, he's gonna give you a new Cadillac. Or God, I need a new Volkswagen, he's gonna give you a new Volkswagen. It just doesn't work that way. And I want to tell you something. As a result, a lot of folk get discouraged about prayer.

In fact, my guess is there's some of you in here who pretty much stop praying. You go through the formality of it at mealtime, but in a meaningful way, many of you have stopped praying because you've listened to that nonsense and bought in that nonsense, and you think, when I pray, God will act.

He'll just meet my request. The Bible says if I just pray believing, he'll do anything. And there are two, three passages that kind of give us that appearance. If you just look at that, in isolation.

[ 27 : 40 ] But I want to tell you, experientially, if we're honest today, we just know that's not so, isn't it? Does God give you everything you ask for? You ever prayed for anybody to get well who was sick, somebody you loved, and they died?

You ever prayed for a child to get a job, and it didn't happen? You ever prayed for a situation at church, or at work, in your home, to be turned in a different direction, and it didn't? I'll tell you something. We're just lying to one another if we say, when I pray, everything I ever ask God for, he's gonna do. It just doesn't work that way. Because that's not what prayer is about. I want to tell you what prayer is about. If you've got a sheet of paper and pencil, I'm gonna tell you five things to write down. I hope you'll write them down and go home and think about it later. Prayer is about praise. It is about acknowledging the existence and the greatness of God. It is about praise.

[ 28 : 48 ] It is about acknowledging the greatness and the existence of God. I'm gonna close this message today with a verse in just a minute from Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6. But I'm telling you, what that verse says is this, without faith it is impossible to please God.

More than anything else, faith is an expression of our confidence in God. It says to God when we pray, God, I know you exist.

I wouldn't be praying if you didn't exist. I think you're real. You're not make-believe. You're real. And so, prayer is about praising God, acknowledging his existence and greatness.

Prayer is also this. It is petition. It is asking God to help us. It is relying and depending on God. You know the difference principally between people who are believers and not believers?

People who are non-believers believe they're capable of getting through life on their own. And believers are people who believe God exists and I can't do this on my own and the only way I can do it is to rely on him, to depend on him.

[ 30 : 00 ] Can I ask you today, are you relying upon God? Man, I hope you are. I hope you've come to the place that you recognize you're just not able to do it on your own, that you need help in life and you've turned to God and said, God, I need your help.

That's one of the elements of prayer. A third element is thanksgiving. expressing our gratitude to God. God, thank you for what you're doing.

Thank you for what you have done. Thank you for what you're yet going to do. A fourth element, and this is one of the most important in my opinion, is transparency.

Transparency. Now look up and listen and get this. I know you're trying to take notes, but you need to hear this. You can never pray effectively. Never once until you become transparent with God.

That means taking off the mask and taking off the mascara and taking off your Sunday go-to-meeting clothes and taking off all those things that we do to make ourselves appear nice and coming clean with God.

[ 31 : 09 ] You see, in life, we are basically two people. We are the person that everybody sees us and knows us to be, the public recognizable figure, who your wife sees, who your children see, who your husband sees, who your pastor sees, who the deacon sees, who the congregation sees, but you're also somebody else.

You're that person who you and you alone, others know you, and they may know you well, and they may know you intimately and extremely well, but I'm going to tell you something. Nobody really knows you, but God and you.

At the end of the day, a lot of folk can think they know you, but you are the only one who really knows you. And when you pray effectively, I don't tell you what has to happen, because this is a frightening thing.

You've got to come to the place that you just get naked before God and take off all the religious clothing and let Him see you for what you are and be honest with yourself about it.

Have you ever had that kind of frank discussion with God? God, I know that the people of the church think this about me. They think highly of me. They think this, but God, you know the truth about me. You know the guy I am when no one is around.

[ 32 : 23 ] You know the guy I am when things don't go my way. You know the guy I am when my wife and kids make me really, really mad. When that guy at work ticks me off, you know how I really am and who I really am.

You know the thoughts that enter my mind. You know the things that I think about. Sometimes I don't even like them myself, God. It's exposing to God that part of yourself that you don't like. And you've got a part like that, right? Right? This is yes and no and don't know, right? You need to be honest.

If you can't be honest in here, you won't be honest with God. You've got a part of you that you don't like, wish it wasn't a part of you, but right now it is. When you're glorified, it won't be there, but it is now.

And there's a part of Ralph Carter I don't like. There's a part of Ralph Carter I hide from Regina. There's a part of Ralph Carter I don't want my kids to see. I'm not going to expose it to you. But I'm going to tell you something.

[ 33 : 25 ] I cannot pray unless I can come to the place that sooner or later I get honest and open with God. And that's where we're transparent with God. When I pastored, I'd have a lot of people sometimes come to the altar and they'd pray.

And on occasion I'd look over and see somebody who's really emotional and I might go over to them and just kneel quietly or bend over and put my hand on their back and say, would you like me to pray with you? And sometimes, oftentimes they would say, yes, I would.

But on occasion, I've had people say, no, thank you, Pastor. But I just need to be alone with God. I don't tell you something. It always thrilled me to hear that. Because I know what he's doing is, what she's doing is, she's dealing with something that I don't need to know about.

There are things in your life that nobody knows about but you, but you need to deal with those with God in prayer. That's what real prayer looks like. It's not just sitting down at the table and thank you, Lord, for the food and help us to be healthy today and you're such a good God.

Amen. That's not real praying. You understand that? Everything we call praying is not praying.

Fifthly, prayer is surrendering our will to God and asking God to bend our will to his.

[ 34 : 40 ] Now, you know what's wrong with that mentality I mentioned a moment ago? It started this point that prayer is God giving us what we want.

If God doesn't want to give you something, why in the world would you want it? Who's smarter, you or God? In this situation you're praying about that you think you know the answer and you say, God, I just need you to come to see things from my perspective.

Please, God, I need you to act in this fashion. I'm going to tell you, you're never going to be smarter than God. You're never going to know more than God. He's never made a wrong decision. You've made plenty.

I've made plenty. So why in the world would I want to persuade God to come to my position? Prayer is this. It's me praying and asking God for things but over time recognizing, you know what, God's not going to do that.

So what I've got to do is I've got to bend my will to his. There have been people I've loved dearly that I've prayed for, even some I've prayed for right now, that I've just come to the place I've concluded God's not going to answer my prayer.

[ 35 : 47 ] He's not going to heal them. He's going to let them die. But I want to tell you something. It's better that I've been my will to suit his than for him to build his will than his will to suit mine.

Because Ralph's been wrong many, many, many times and God never has. You understand that? Now, I want you to see this prayer that Jesus prays. It's called the model prayer.

It's found in chapter 6, verses 9 through 13. Look there with me. Therefore, you should pray like this. Here's how Jesus says to pray. Our Father in heaven.

You see what element that is in that outline I gave you? It's praising God, acknowledging his existence. Your name be honored as holy. Praise, acknowledgement of God, his existence. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. It's bending our will to God's will. Not my way, but your way. Give us today our daily bread. Petition, reliance, dependence upon God.

[ 36 : 50 ] And forgive us our debts, sins, as we also have forgiven our debtors. That transparency, that confession of sin. And do not bring us into temptation.

Reliance, dependence on God. But deliver us from the evil one. Reliance, dependence upon God. Surrender, aligning our lives to his will. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever, amen.

Acknowledgement of his greatness and expressing our gratitude to him. My favorite verse, I close by telling you this.

In all the scripture, I got a lot of favorites. But I think if I had to pick just one verse for me, it would be Hebrews 11.6.

Hebrews 11.6 says this. It's in that chapter on the heroes of the faith and about the importance of faith. Hebrews 11.6 says this. Without faith.

[ 37 : 53 ] Now get this. Absolute statement. Without faith. It is hard to please God. No. Really hard to please God.

No. Next to impossible to please God. No. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. You hear the power of that?

You can attend Sunday school. You can be baptized. You can be dunked. You can try to right all the wrongs in your life. You can say, I won't drink and I won't chew and I won't go to girls that do. You can get all that stuff right. Be here every Sunday. Have Sunday school pins down to your knees. Without faith. Sorry. You're not going to please God.

So why is faith so important? Then he goes on to tell us. Without faith, it is impossible to please God because those who come to him. Now how do you come to him?

[ 38 : 51 ] Can you visit heaven? Can you see God? He's invisible. The only way you can come to him, the only way you can come to him in this life is to come to him in prayer. You know that.

So he says, Without faith, it is impossible to please him because those who come to him through prayer must believe that he exists. The only reason a man will ever get alone and pray by himself when no one's watching or listening, when there's no advantage to praying other than that God hears it, is when he genuinely believes he exists.

He's real. He's there. He's listening. And that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him. That there's a reason to pray because God answers and God blesses those who pray. Not always by giving us what we want, but by showing us what he's up to in our lives and bending our will to his.

Can I ask you, is that indicative of your prayer life? Some of you, in just a minute we're going to have a hymn of invitation. Brian's going to sing one verse of a song.

[ 40 : 09 ] I'm going to ask you just to remain seated because I want you to pray during that time. And I'm going to tell you specifically what I want you to pray about. I want you to pray, if you don't have faith, that God would build your faith.

There's a man who came to Jesus on one occasion and Jesus asked him, do you believe? And he said, I do, but help my unbelief. In other words, my faith is not all it should be, but would you help it to grow?

I'm going to ask some of you, right now in just a moment, to bow your head and I'm going to ask you to pray, God, I want to believe in you. I want to pray. I want to trust you. I don't want to just say that. I want to really be a person of prayer.

But Lord, there's some doubts I have in my mind and I'm asking you to take those away. And I'm asking you to give me great faith. And then there's a second group of people.

Some of you here in this room at one time had faith in God, but somewhere along the course of life, you've lost it. You've had a tragedy occur or something happened that disappointed you and you've lost confidence in God because God didn't answer your prayer the way you thought and you thought that if I prayed, he must answer.

[ 41 : 23 ] You listen to some of that nonsense. And so your faith in God has been shaken. And I'm asking you today to say, God, I want you to restore the faith I lost. Because some of you, I'm talking to some of you today that you know exactly what I'm talking about.

There was a time you believed in prayer and you called out to God and you cried out to God, but that day's passed. Maybe people around you don't even know it. You've kept up a facade, but you know, I just don't pray the way I once did because my confidence in God has been shaken.

Ask God to give that confidence back. Would you do that? Bow our heads in prayer. You pray right now while he sings. Amen.