

This, then, is how you should pray, ... Matthew 6:9

Many of us have memorized the Lord's Prayer, the model that Jesus gives His disciples to emulate. But how many of us know the words that precede it? While usually overlooked, I was struck by their practical instruction.

*And when you pray, you must **not** be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*And when you pray, do **not** heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do **not** be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:*

Before Jesus shows them how to pray, He first tells them what it's not.

It's not a show

Don't pray to be seen by others. If that's your purpose, then you will have accomplished it, but will have missed out on prayer's true value. Prayer is an intimate conversation with a Father who loves us. Jesus directs us to go to a place free of distraction and make that a place of prayer. We can pray at all times but there is also a need for intentionality and focus.

It's not about you

The Gentiles thought that God's answer depended on them praying a certain way. I can be tempted to think I need a quiet time of a specific length or [fasting](#) to get God's attention to show I'm serious. But that puts me in charge of results as if it depends on me to do it right. It's not about us figuring out the right words or formula, it's about the [character](#) of the One to Whom we pray.

It's not about informing God

God knows everything we need before we ask Him. But He wants us to ask, to talk to Him about it. Maybe He wants to change our mind, instruct us, or make clear His glory in the answer.

I need all of these reminders in one way or another as I approach God in prayer. He

deserves my attention wholly. He is worthy of my trust in Him alone. God knows my needs and desires, even though I often think I need to bring them to His attention to get the consideration it needs. But what He wants is to have a conversation with me about it. He wants me to put my request before Him - maybe to open my heart to other possibilities, maybe to encourage me or build trust, or maybe to help me let it go.

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done ...*

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