

# The Right Way to Pray

by Zac Poonen

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*Zac Poonen emphasizes the importance of genuine, God-centered prayer over religious practices and self-interest.*

**Duration:** 27:20

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:5-9

**Topics:** "Effective Prayer", "True Spirituality"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true spirituality over religious practices, focusing on living a God-centered life rather than a self-centered one. It delves into the significance of prayer, highlighting the need to pray sincerely from the heart, centered on God's name, kingdom, and will before addressing personal needs. The message stresses the power of faith and purity of heart in prayer, debunking the misconception that God responds based on the length of prayers or the number of people praying. It concludes with the vital aspect of forgiveness and giving all glory to God.

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## Transcript

Welcome once again to Words of Life. God's word has got an answer for every situation and circumstance we can ever face. Not only how we can live a holy life, in terms of being pure in our heart, etc.

But also, it teaches us how we are to live at home and how we are to work in our office, etc. All these things, God's word guides us. But behind it all, we need to understand the principle with which God is seeking to work.

In our last few sessions, we were considering about how to be good husbands, good wives and good workers, etc. And how to be a good boss to servants. But behind it all, we need to see the principle that must operate in our life.

What does it mean to be truly spiritual? Many people confuse being religious with being spiritual. The pharisees were religious and Jesus was spiritual. The pharisees knew the bible.

Jesus knew the bible. The pharisees prayed, Jesus prayed. The pharisees fasted, Jesus fasted.

The pharisees did evangelism, Jesus did evangelism. So, we find in many areas, there is a lot of similarity. But the fundamental motivation was completely different.

Two people can go to the same church, believe the same truths, be active in prayer, bible study, evangelism, everything. And in the external activities, both may be equal. But one may be religious and the other may be spiritual.

And the difference between the two is like light and darkness. Now, many people don't think that. They assess people by the amount of activity they take part in.

What is the mark of a truly spiritual person? What is the evidence of true spirituality? For that, I want you to turn to Matthew 6. Because behind all that we said in our other sessions about being a good husband or being a good wife or a good worker, there must be a root from which all this comes out. And in Matthew 6, Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. And there, he taught them a spiritual prayer compared to the way the hypocrites prayed.

First, he said how the hypocrites prayed. See, anyone who prays is a religious person. But a hypocrite prays in another way.

He loves to be seen by men, Matthew 6.5, in his praying. A religious person is very keen that other people should know what he is doing for God. They want others to see them praying.

They want others to know how much money they are giving for God. They want other people to know how much they fast. So that they can get honor for themselves.

All their activity is to get honor. But Jesus said, you must not pray like that. He said, when you pray, don't let anybody know about your praying.

As far as possible, hide it from men. So, one of the first marks of a spiritual man is that he lives before God's face and not before man's face. So, one of the first marks of a spiritual man is that he lives before God's face and not before man's face.

He is not doing things to be seen by men. He is doing things for God to see in his life. And then the second thing he said here is, When you pray, don't be like all the heathens who keep on repeating, repeating, repeating in a meaningless way verse 7. Because they think God will listen to them because they have spoken so much.

This is the second mistake a lot of religious people make. They think that God will hear them if they pray for a long time. I have heard Christians say, I prayed for 2 hours.

Or I prayed all night. Of course, they think God will definitely have to hear that prayer because I prayed all night. Or I prayed for 4 hours, naturally God has to hear.

Or sometimes people say, at that prayer meeting we had 10,000 people. 10,000 people pray, definitely God will hear. This is all a deception.

Jesus said, where 2 or 3 are gathered together, there I am in the midst. I will have to ask in my name, I will give them. He said in Matthew 18,19 that even if 2 of you agree concerning anything, my father will do it.

It's not the number of people. 2 is enough. Why 2? Because that's the minimum required for an expression of a body.

The body of Christ means there must be at least one more person. And you don't need more than that. Whether 2 or 10,000 makes no difference to God.

What God sees is, are their hearts pure? So 2 people with pure hearts and who are united. 2 people with pure hearts and who are united. Who have faith.

They will accomplish more in their prayer. In the same way, there are 10,000 people who are impure. Who are disunited.

Who don't have any faith when they pray. So God is not impressed by numbers. I have heard people say like this.

My wife was sick. Because I am well known around the world, I sent messages to all people in many countries. In 50 countries people were praying for my wife.

Hundreds and thousands of people were praying for my wife. And God heard my prayer. Then what about these poor people who are not known in 50-100 countries.

When their wife is sick, who will pray for them? They don't have access to computers and emails. Is God not going to listen to them? This is all a deception. Where does it say in the Bible that if people in 50 countries pray, God will hear? Or that in 10,000 people around the world pray for you that God will hear that? This is all to impress people.

And multitudes of Christians are fooled by all this. I am not at all impressed. Because I know the Bible.

I know Jesus didn't say you have to get people in 100 countries to pray for you. You know that is not a human idea. You know all these political parties.

When they declare a strike in a city. And then they get the whole lot of people to pray through the streets. And you can say 200,000 people came down the streets.

Then the government has to take some action. If 5 people walk down the street, the government won't bother. But if 200,000 people come or 500,000 people come.

Or you have a gathering and 1 million people come there. Or if 10,000,000 people come, the government will have to take an action because so many people are there. Because we are so used to that human way of thinking.

We also think, oh, if 1 million people pray, definitely God has to answer. I want to tell you, he will not answer. He listens to 2 people.

He listens to a person with faith. 450 prophets said they all prayed and prayed and prayed and nothing happened. On Mount Carmel.

And they prayed for hours. Elijah prayed for half a minute. And the fire came.

One man's prayer. The Bible says in James chapter 5. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Not one man.

He must be a righteous man. 1 million unrighteous people will not get anything through their prayer. How is it Jesus' prayers were so powerful? He didn't get people in 100 countries to pray for him.

He never got 1 million people in any gathering to pray together. He prayed alone. And he said the father always listened to him.

So don't make this mistake that the heathen make. One, they think if many people pray, God will hear. And secondly, they think if we pray for a long time, God will hear.

But multitudes of Christians believe this. I can get so many people to pray for me, definitely it will happen. And if I pray for a long time, definitely God has to answer.

That's exactly what Jesus said. Don't be fooled by that. Matthew 6, 7. They think they'll be heard because of their many words.

Or because they pray for a long time. So many people come together to pray. No, it's not based on any of these things.

Prayer is like a circle. First, God puts a burden in my heart. That's half the circle.

And then I pray that prayer back in faith to God. That completes the circle. So, a burden and faith.

So, God has to put a burden in my heart for something. And then I pray for faith back to God. The circle is complete.

And that prayer will be answered. If I pray something which is just my own idea, and I don't have faith, I can pray and ease my conscience, but nothing will happen. And then Jesus told them, this is the way you must pray.

When you pray, first of all say, Our Father who art in heaven. And we already considered what that means. My Father who loves me.

My Father in heaven who controls this whole universe. Then I have faith. So, we start on that basis.

And then we say, Number one request, Father. Not heal my backache. Not give me a better house.

Or a better car. None of these things. There's nothing wrong in these things.

But that's not number one request. But Father, let your name be hallowed. How many of us pray that as the first prayer from our heart? Father, I want your name to be hallowed.

Father, I want your kingdom to come. Father, I want your will to be done. On earth as it is in heaven.

So, notice those three things. Your name. Your kingdom.

Your will. I'm not asking anything for myself now. Jesus said, If you seek God's kingdom and his righteousness, all your earthly needs will be added to you.

You don't have to seek after those earthly things. God will add them to you when you seek his name, his kingdom and his will. And then after that, he told us to pray for our earthly needs.

So, what was he trying to do? He was trying to shift our center and focus on ourselves and our needs to God as the center. The whole problem with man is that he is self-centered. He puts himself and he only thinks of how he can advance and how he can promote his own interests.

And Jesus was changing that. He said, you first pray for God's name, God's kingdom and God's will. And then after that, you can pray for your needs.

Even forgiveness of your sins comes after that. You can ask God to give you your daily bread. And you can ask God to deliver you from evil.

But all that comes afterwards. The first is God's name, God's kingdom and God's will. I'm not saying you have to repeat this prayer exactly like this every time.

But these principles must be there in all of our communicating with God that we come to him in faith as our father in heaven. And we come centered in him with his needs and not my needs. See, all children are born into the world selfish.

We're all selfish as we grow up. We think only in terms of ourselves. And Jesus has come to save us from that self-centeredness.

That self-centeredness is the root of sin. And true spirituality is to be delivered from that self-centeredness. That doesn't happen easily.

If you turn to Philippians in chapter 2, in Philippians chapter 2, we read here what Paul says about Timothy. Paul says, I wanted to send somebody to you Philippians. And I looked around with all of my coworkers and I couldn't find anybody but Timothy who was fit to come to you.

And he says concerning Timothy, I had nobody else like him verse 20 and 21. Because they all seek after their own interests verse 21. He looked at his coworkers and said yes, some of them have looked very wholehearted.

But I see through them Paul said. I know enough to know that these people are seeking their own interests. Maybe some honor.

Maybe some money. Something. Except Timothy.

Timothy sought nothing for himself. He had truly become centered in God. You know the purpose of salvation is to deliver us from self-centeredness and make us God centered.

That is God's will. And that is why Jesus taught them to pray as he did in Matthew chapter 6. Pray in this way centered in God. That is how we should pray.

Now let's examine our prayers according to this line. How many of us can say that we should pray We are thinking of God's name and God's interest and God's kingdom first. We are thinking of ourselves.

We need to shift our center. You know true prayer is that which comes from our heart. Not what we say with our lips.

Saying with our lips is like a parrot repeating what somebody said. And it is very easy to repeat this prayer like a parrot. But to understand it properly is to have our life centered in God and the second part of it there are two parts.

The first is three requests concerning God. Saying father my number one request is your name should be hallowed. Whether I get what I want or not.

Whether you give me this healing or this job or not. Let your name be hallowed. Let your kingdom come on this earth.

So much of wickedness on this earth let your kingdom come. Let your will be done. Now once we have said that then we can go to our needs.

So what are our needs? Here we read first of all give us this day our daily bread. Now there is nothing wrong in asking God for material things. Some people think that we shouldn't ask God for material things at all.

Don't be so super spiritual. Jesus told us to pray for our earthly needs. Father I need some food today.

I have children to feed. Give me enough of my food today. That's a very spiritual prayer.

The only thing is don't think only of yourself. Do you know in this entire prayer the word me and I never come. I, me, mine is not found here.

It's thy name thy kingdom thy will and then Lord there are many of us give all of us food not just me. That means a concern for all of God's people. Lord there are many of us have sinned.

Please forgive all of us our sins. And Father the many of us being led into evil please deliver us from evil. there are two things here.

One we must be centered in God and his interests. And then when we pray for our own needs secondly we need to think of other people also who are in the same boat as us. Don't think only of yourself.

Then we can understand this prayer properly. Father give us this day our daily bread which includes requests for food clothing shelter children's education so that they can earn their food one day when they grow up and get a job. So food clothing housing and children's education God is interested in all of these things.

God is interested in helping us. He is very much interested in getting admission for our children's schools and colleges because he has ordained that on this earth we earn our salary by working. God knows in a place where everybody is a farmer it's ok even if they don't get an education.

That is how it was in the old Jewish days. But we know we know that in most countries it's so difficult to get a job if you don't have a degree or post graduate degree. So God is interested in that.

He is not just interested in the spiritual things in our life. The only thing he says is think of others also. Say give us our daily bread forgive us our sins and deliver us from evil.

One last thing. Jesus said if you don't forgive others God won't forgive you. Unforgiveness is the way by which the devil gets a hold on many people's lives.

How do you want God to forgive you? Totally, freely and not to remember your past against you. God will do that for you. You forgive other people in exactly the same way.

And be sure to give all the glory to God at the end of it all. Thine is the power thine is the glory. Will you pray like that? Say Lord I want to pray like this.

I want to forgive everybody who has harmed me. I want to pray centered in you. And when I pray for my needs I want to think of my fellow brothers needs also.

Forgive us deliver us. Not give me or deliver me or forgive me. Think of God first and my fellow believers the body of Christ next and God will meet our needs abundantly.

God bless you.

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