

# Finer Grounds Mini-Series

## Matthew 6

### Lesson 2: Matthew 6:5-15

Before we start with the next passage in Mathew chapter 6, it might be helpful to re-read verses 1-4. Don't forget to keep in mind the main theme of Jesus' sermon, which can be found in Matthew 5:20. Also, remember that in our first lesson we tried to identify the different areas of righteousness in chapter 6 which Jesus contrasts (I see four). We saw that in verses 1-18 Jesus gives us three areas of righteousness which we need to "beware" of practicing in front of others in order to be noticed by them. We focused on verses 1-4 where Jesus contrasts how we should give. In this lesson we will work through the next area of righteousness which Jesus contrasts in verses 5-15.

#### Read Matthew 6:5-6

Just like we saw back in verses 2-3, Jesus doesn't say "if" you pray, but rather "when" you pray. By using the term "when" Jesus indicates that this kind of prayer should be a natural way of life for those who practice the kind of righteousness God approves of. You'll notice Jesus follows a similar pattern in this section; He first compares the righteousness practiced by the "hypocrites" versus the kind of righteousness God wants us to practice. In our last lesson, we identified who Jesus is referring to as hypocrites: the scribes and the Pharisees.

What Jesus seems to be doing in verses 5-6 is discussing our motivation for why people pray, contrasting the wrong motivation with a righteous one.

*As you read verse 5, what can you identify as the motivation behind the hypocrites' prayers?*

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The motivation behind the hypocritical prayers of the scribes and Pharisees is they "love" to pray in places like the synagogues and street corners "to be seen by men." Just like in verses 1-4, these are the places with the most traffic, where they are most likely to catch other people's attention.

*As you read this verse, is it possible Jesus is describing a scenario where the Pharisees start to pray and other people accidentally notice them? Why or why not?*

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It's pretty obvious that Jesus is describing situations that are carefully planned in order to draw attention to the one offering the prayer. The fact that they "love" to get this reaction affirms this is a deliberate attempt to call attention to themselves while praying. Today we don't see many people praying on street corners or standing up in synagogues in prayer to get attention, but there might be some other areas we may be tempted to pray as the hypocrites do.

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**How many places can you identify where you've seen people pray for the purpose of getting attention from others?**

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Jesus says when people pray for the reason of getting noticed by others "they have their reward in full." Staying in context, this "reward" is the recognition and praise that comes from other people (just like we saw in verse 2). How sad a condition the Pharisees find themselves in, the only reward they receive for their righteousness is the fading approval of the crowd which cannot satisfy them for more than a brief moment.

In verse 6, Jesus gives us instructions on how to keep our motivation for prayer righteous. He gives us three steps 1.) go into our inner room, 2.) shut our door, 3.) pray to our Father who is in secret. You can't get any more opposite from how the scribes and Pharisees prayed than by doing this! At this point we might ask, "What is Jesus trying to help us understand about our motivation for prayer by commanding us to go into an inner room and close the door when we pray?"

**If hypocrites pray to draw attention and praise from other people, what does praying in secret force our motivation to be?**

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Who will be able to hear our inner room prayers? Who will be able to see them? The answer is obvious; the only possible audience for that kind of prayer is our

heavenly Father "who is in secret." If I were to ask you "Where is God?" how would you answer that question? Does God live in a church building, is that His "sanctuary"? Is God only in public places?

**Read Psalm 139:7-10.**

What a great comfort to know that even when we are utterly alone, our Father is there paying close attention and ready to hear His children cry out to Him. Perhaps you have a "prayer closet" in your home where you go to pray in secret.

**What are some good places you can think of where we can get away from everyone to spend time in secret with our Father in prayer?**

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Jesus affirms that if we pray "in secret" we will receive a reward from our Father. Again, this is His praise and recognition of our seeking Him. That should be our sole motivation for going to Him in prayer. Prayer is not a public spectacle, nor should it be used as a sermon addressing those around us. When we pray we must only be concerned about getting God's attention.

**On a side note, do you think Jesus is saying it's always a sin to pray when other people can see it? Why or why not? Be sure to back up your answer with Scripture references.**

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Jesus is *NOT* saying every public prayer is a sin. We know this because:

- Jesus prayed with groups of people (Matthew 14:19)
- The apostles prayed with groups of people (Acts 1:14; Acts 27:35)
- We're instructed to pray in Christian gatherings (1 Timothy 2:8)

In this section Jesus is addressing the motivation behind our prayers to God. A hypocrite prays to get the attention people, a righteous person prays to get the attention of God.

### Read Matthew 6:7-8

As Jesus begins verse 7 with "and when you are praying" we see that He has something else He wants to teach us about prayer besides having the right motivation.

**If verses 5-6 have to do with the motivation behind our prayers, what do you think verses 7-8 are instructing us about?**

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From verses 7-15 Jesus is now addressing the manner in which we say our prayers. Rather than talking about the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, Jesus brings up the manner in which the Gentiles pray.

**Who are the Gentiles? Given Jesus' audience, why do you think He would use them as an example of how not to pray?**

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Since Jesus is preaching to thousands of Jews, bringing up the manner Gentiles pray is a powerful illustration. The gentiles are outsiders, pagans, godless unbelievers who know nothing about one true God (Arndt 276). A child of God (at that time Jews, but today Christians) would never want to pray like those who have no relationship with God.

Gentiles pray with many words in "meaningless repetition." This term (ΒΑΤΤΑΛΟΓΕΩ) means that you speak in a way that resembles stammering or, "To use the same words again and again, speak without thinking" (Arndt 172). Jesus indicates the reason they just repeat phrases over and over is they think the more words their prayers have, the more likely their prayers will be heard.

**What are some examples of prayers or parts of prayers you've heard that might be described as "using the same words again and again without thinking"? As you analyze your own prayer life, can you think of any examples where you've prayed in this way?**

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We've all probably been guilty of praying in "meaningless repetition." Whether we're reciting a memorized prayer or just repeating benign phrases in our prayers without actually thinking about their meaning.

**Why do you think God isn't interested in these kinds of prayers the Gentiles offer?**

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Verse 8 gives us the reason why meaningless repetition is a waste of time. Our Father knows what we need before we ask Him, so adding a bunch of thoughtless phrases doesn't make our prayer sound any better to God.

**Read Matthew 6:9-13**

Jesus now tells us to "pray then in this way." Notice, Jesus does NOT say, "pray these exact words" as many have taught. But let's consider that. Suppose we are supposed to memorize this prayer and recite it over and over, do you see any conflict with the previous verses if we did that? To memorize and recite this prayer over and over is a direct violation of Jesus telling us not to use "meaningless repetition" in verse 7. Rather than giving us a formula for prayer, Jesus is telling us the kinds of things we need to be praying for.

**This prayer is often called "The Lord's Prayer." Yet, look closely at the words. Could Jesus have actually prayed this prayer in its entirety? Why or why not?**

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Jesus never prayed this prayer, nor could He because Jesus could not say, "Forgive us our debts" since He never sinned. You may prefer to call this prayer "The Disciples' Prayer" or "The Model Prayer" for this reason.

*This is a fascinating prayer to analyze, and we want to ask several questions of the text.*

**What are the different ways Jesus instructs us to speak to the Father?**

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**How is the first half of the prayer different from the second half?**

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**Why would it be important for me to say these specific kinds of things to God?**

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I see this prayer divided into two sections. First, Jesus wants us to glorify God in our prayers (vv. 9-10). Secondly, He wants us to make appropriate requests from our Father: physical and spiritual (vv. 11-13). We don't have space to discuss every phrase in this prayer, but we'll hit some of them.

"Hallowed be your name." We don't use the word "hallowed" very often. This word is simply the verb

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form of the word “holy” or “sanctified.” A more literal way to translate this is “make your name holy” or “sanctify your name.”

**Why would we tell God to “make your name holy” in our prayers, and how would God answer a prayer like that?**

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“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” What is Jesus referring to when He speaks of “Your kingdom”? There are a couple possibilities. At that time there was a kingdom yet to be established, which was Christ’s church. If that’s what Jesus means here, then we wouldn’t pray this part of the prayer today. However, the word kingdom is often used in a generic way to refer to the rule of God in our lives. Drop down and read Matthew 6:33. There He’s not saying, “Seek the church and His righteousness”, because the church didn’t even exist yet.

**When you read all of verse 10 together, do you think kingdom is a reference to the future church which Christ would establish, or do you think He’s referring to God’s rule in our lives? Why?**

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“Give us this day our daily bread.” Now, Jesus transitions into the kind of requests we should make of God. There are certain physical requests we should make.

**Why do you think they would have to pray for “daily bread”? What was that supposed to teach them?**

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**Is praying to God for our “daily bread” different than asking God to win the lottery, or to be able to buy a new BMW?**

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In verses 12-13 Jesus gives us the kind of spiritual requests we should make of the Father.

**Look closely at verse 12 and ask, “What happens first... God forgives us our debts or we forgive the debts of others?” Is it important that Jesus puts it in this order?**

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Drop down and read verses 14-15, because Jesus gives additional comments on that point.

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*Jesus indicates that before we ask God to forgive us our debts, we must be willing to forgive those who come asking forgiveness of us. How do you want God to forgive you? Is that the same kind of forgiveness you offer to others who seek it?*

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*“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” You may have a footnote in your Bible that says “the evil one” which is how this literally reads in the Greek. Jesus seems to be indicating that we can ask God for spiritual protection against the temptations that the evil one (i.e. Satan) can bring against us.*

*Can you think of any examples from Scripture where God limited the amount of temptation Satan could bring against a righteous person?*

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*The book of Job is perhaps the best example, where we see God limiting the power Satan had to tempt Job to sin. Why would Jesus tell us to pray for this? Why doesn't God just always keep us from temptation whether or not we're praying to Him about it?*

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*Jesus helps us see in this passage the right way to pray versus the hypocritical way of the scribes and Pharisees and the fruitless way of the godless Gentiles.*

*Our goal should be to pray in such a way that we are seeking a reward (the attention) of our heavenly Father instead of a reward (the attention) of other people. God also wants us to truly think about the words we use. Our prayers need to glorify Him first and foremost, and then we should make appropriate requests from our Father. In our next lesson we will move on to a third area of righteousness Jesus wants us to practice.*

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### Works Cited

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature 2000 : n. pag. Print.

Note: The author uses the New American Standard Update for all quotations and references.