

Jesus and the Mystery of Prayer

Read [Matthew 6:9–13](#)

THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE MODEL PRAYER

I was on my way to church to attend a prayer meeting. As I drove, I was thinking about [verse 10](#) of the Model Prayer: **“your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”** (A practice of mine, since early in my Christian life, has been to pick a verse of Scripture, run it through my mind and heart, and ask the Lord, “What does this verse mean to me? How does it change my life?” This is meditating on the Scriptures.) As I thought about this verse, it dawned on me: Jesus would not have told me to pray a prayer that didn’t work. Therefore, when I ask for his kingdom to come, it must come in some form or fashion.

Well, that was an exciting thought! I couldn’t wait to get back to the prayer meeting and start praying for his *kingdom to come* in some areas!

I felt like that thought had come from the Lord himself, and I realized that it must be true for every line of the Model Prayer. *If Jesus told us to pray it, it must be because it will work.* As I began to look at the Model Prayer with this truth in mind, I began to see it in a whole new light: as the basis—or springboard—for a *real*, exciting relationship with God.

Understanding that Jesus would not have told us to pray a prayer that didn’t work is the key to understanding the Model Prayer. It means that everything he told us to pray in the Model Prayer will bring results: it will result in real communication with God, real answers—a real relationship.

In the coming teachings, we’ll look line by line at the Model Prayer. We’ll see how each line of the prayer was meant to bring about *answered* prayer, and a personal experience with God.

But we’ll start with the verses that introduce the prayer, because they contain one of the most exciting promises in Scripture.

Having a Relationship with God through Prayer

If you could ask Jesus to teach you how to do one thing, what would it be? It would be an exciting opportunity, since he knows everything. You could ask him how to pick the right stocks, or how to get the job you always wanted. You could ask him how to be a great athlete, or how to get so-and-so to fall in love with you. You could ask him to show you how to find the cure for cancer, or how to have the greatest marriage, or how to raise kids right. It would be a great opportunity to be able to ask the Lord to teach you one thing.

The disciples had this opportunity when they walked the earth with him. They saw him perform great miracles, but there's no record that they ever asked him how they could perform miracles. They heard him teach life-changing truths, but there's no record that they ever asked him the secret to being a great teacher. They saw him attract huge crowds, but there's no record that they ever asked him the key to building a big following.

What did they ask Jesus to teach them? In [Luke 11:1](#), they asked him, "**Lord, teach us to pray.**" Out of all the things they could have asked Jesus to teach them, they asked him to teach them to pray. Why? Because they had seen in his prayer life the most exciting thing in the world: a real relationship with God. In fact, their request to teach them to pray came right after hearing him pray:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray ..."

[LUKE 11:1](#)

They heard in his prayer life a real relationship with God, and there was nothing more exciting.

In his introduction to the Model Prayer, the verses preceding the actual prayer, Jesus taught that we can all have a real relationship with God through prayer:

[Matthew 6:5-8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ **"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.**

⁶ **But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**

⁷ **And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.**

⁸ **So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."**

In [verse 6](#) Jesus said, "**But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.**" This is one of the most remarkable statements in the Bible. Jesus says that when we go to prayer, Almighty God himself responds:

- He "*sees what is done in secret*" (our act of going to prayer)
- He will "*reward you*" (for going to prayer)

This is amazing if we take it seriously (and remember, that's the key to understanding the Model Prayer, realizing that Jesus would not have told us to engage in prayer that didn't work). Almighty God, who has the whole universe to run, *responds* when you go to prayer. He *notices* what you're doing, and he even *rewards* it. The point is, Almighty God is responding to you. There's a real *relationship* happening here!

It's exciting, isn't it?

THREE REQUIREMENTS

In these verses introducing the Model Prayer, Jesus lists three requirements we must meet if we want to have a real relationship with God through prayer.

The first requirement is desire

We must desire a relationship with God more than we desire the approval of other people.

Matthew 6:5 (NASB)

⁵“When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.”

Jesus said some people pray only to look good to others. In his day they did this in the “*synagogues*,” the first century version of the local church, and on “*street corners*.” He called them “*hypocrites*.” In the Greek, the language of the New Testament, the word is *hupokrites*, and in Jesus’ day it literally meant an actor. Greek and Roman actors wore large masks when they performed a play. The masks had built-in mechanical devices for magnifying the voice. Jesus was saying that people who prayed only to impress others were like actors wearing masks and using false voices. They wanted to look good to others, to seem spiritual, but they really didn’t have a prayer relationship with God. And looking good to others, Jesus said, would be their only reward. They would receive nothing from God.

There’s nothing wrong with praying in public. Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets all did it. It’s only wrong if our *motivation* is “*to be seen by men*,” or if praying in public is the only place we pray.

To have a relationship with God through prayer we must desire it—and we must desire it for its own sake, not to impress others. How would a husband feel if the only time his wife showed him affection and paid him attention was in public or at family gatherings, while at home she had nothing to do with him? He would feel that she didn’t really love him, that it was a show. I imagine God feels the same way if we don’t have time for him except in public.

The first requirement for a real relationship with God through prayer is desire.