

# Jesus and the Mystery of Prayer

Read [Matthew 6:9–13](#)

## 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)**

<sup>5</sup>“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.”

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

### *The second requirement is a meeting place*

#### **Matthew 6:6 (NASB)**

<sup>6</sup>“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.”

We need to have a place we can meet privately—even secretly—with God. Jesus did. *“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there”* ([Mark 1:35 NASB](#)). He met privately with God first thing in the morning. This was his top priority.

After feeding the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish, he sent the crowd away and *“He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone”* ([Matthew 14:23 NASB](#)). He sent the crowd away, then he went and met with his Father. It was more important to him to be alone with God than with an adoring crowd.

**Why does our meeting place with God need to be private?** So we can be sure we’re praying for God’s eyes only, that our motivation is just to be with him. If we **“publicize”** our prayer life, our motivation might be to look spiritual to others. But if we’re praying for God’s eyes only, God knows.

And Jesus said that Almighty God will respond to this! He will **“reward”** us. Would you like to receive a **“reward”** from God today? Jesus has told you exactly what to do.

**How will God reward us for meeting with him?** One reward is some peace and quiet. People's lives today are often too busy and crowded. You might say that they lack margin. Margin on a page, of course, is the empty space around the text. Margin in our lives is some space to breathe. We tend to run from one activity to another, one meeting to another, and are always connected—by cell phones and email and text messages and the Internet and laptops and tablets. Some private time in a meeting place with God will help build some margin in our life, help us remember what is really important.

Another reward for meeting with God—perhaps the main reward Jesus was referring to—is answered prayer. If we meet with God for his eyes only, he will gladly do things for us.

I used to get my hair cut in an old-fashioned barbershop. A TV in the corner played daytime programs. Magazines were strewn here and there on empty chairs. Hair clippings gathered on the floor. The barber was a hard-working entrepreneur who had moved to the Los Angeles area from Chicago. He knew I was a pastor. One day, when no one else was in the shop, he opened up and told me why he believed in prayer.

His unit got caught in a rice paddy in Vietnam. For weeks they were hemmed in and couldn't get out. They were in constant danger from enemy fire. They were eaten by leeches. Finally, a helicopter rescued them.

It was a miserable time, and the barber freely admitted that combat was not for him. So back in camp, while his friends were out "whoring and drinking," as he put it, he went to chapel and prayed to be spared any more combat action. While his friends were out partying, he went and met with God about the desire of his heart.

Not long after offering his prayer, he found his path crossing an officer's. Before he knew what he was saying, he found himself asking, "Sir, you need a barber?" He told me he didn't know why he said it—he hadn't thought of it the moment before.

The officer stopped in his tracks. "You a stateside barber?" he asked. "Licensed?"  
"Yes, sir."

The officer placed a call to a general, who had just lost his regular barber. The officer asked if he'd like a new one. And with that my barber became the general's barber. He never had to return to combat. When he was leaving Vietnam, he inquired about his old unit and was told, "They were all killed." The barber told me he wasn't a religious man, and it wasn't until years later that it dawned on him that God had answered that prayer in the chapel, and saved his life.

The main reward of a meeting place with God is answered prayer.

We've seen so far that the first requirement for a real relationship with God through prayer is desire, and the second requirement is a meeting place.

***The third requirement is trust that he hears us***

**Matthew 6:7 (NASB)**

**<sup>7</sup> “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.”**

Jesus said we don't have to use “*many words*” (7) to be heard in prayer; we don't have to *earn* a hearing by how long we pray, how loud we pray, or how hard we pray. Jesus said our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask him. Jesus is telling us we can trust that God hears the prayers of our heart.

**The third requirement for a real prayer relationship with God is to trust that he hears us.** Trust is a necessity for every relationship. Do you draw close to people you don't trust? No, you stay away from them. Trust is a necessity for a relationship. To have a real relationship with God through prayer, we must trust that he hears us.

One thing that will help us trust that God hears us is to remember that he has more than one answer to prayer. Many have lost confidence in prayer because they asked for something and didn't get it. They've concluded that prayer must not work, at least for them. They have failed to understand that God, like any good parent, has more than one answer to a request. Usually when we talk about answers to prayer, we're talking about the “**Yes**” answer—when we get what we want. But that's just one answer, though admittedly the most popular one.

God has at least **four different answers to prayer:**

**1) “No” is one answer to prayer.**

Sometimes we're asking for something that is not God's will for us. What we want may be bad for us down the road, or it may deflect us from God's ultimate plan for us. As parents, don't we tell our children “**No**” sometimes? Don't we shake our heads at parents who don't seem to have this ability with their children, and end up spoiling them? Certainly our perfect Heavenly Father is sometimes going to say “**No**” to his children's requests.

**2) “Slow,” as in “slow down,” is another answer to prayer.**

Sometimes the *timing* is not right. It's God's will to give us what we're asking for, but not yet. He is going to answer the prayer, but on his timetable, not ours. We need to “**slow down**” and wait.

**3) “Grow,” as in “grow up spiritually,” is another answer to prayer.**

Sometimes the Lord has to wait for us to mature before he can give us what he wants to give us. We're not ready yet. We've all heard stories of lottery winners who end up broke and broken. They weren't ready to handle all that money.

God, on the other hand, likes for his children to *grow* into their blessings and responsibilities. He's generally a rather slow promoter. Joseph, though innocent, spent years in prison before God elevated him to his place of responsibility and authority in Egypt. Moses spent forty years in the desert before God deemed he was ready for his

great calling. The apostles spent three years on the road with Jesus before being released into their ministry.

God wants us to grow into our blessings, so that we will have the ability to handle them well. Therefore, sometimes his answer to prayer is **“Grow.”**

**4) “Go,” as in “Yes, it’s a go!” is the fourth answer to prayer.\***

When the *request* is right (it’s God’s will), the *timing* is right (its God’s time), and *we’re* right (we’ve matured enough to handle what we’re asking for), God says **“Yes”** to our prayer!

“Yes” is our favorite answer, but we need to remember that all the answers are good for us. He has heard us whatever the answer. We must trust this to have a real prayer relationship with God.