

How we should pray



Matthew 6: 5-8

The Lord Jesus taught the disciples how they should pray: Do not pray like the Pharisees who pray publicly, nor like the heathens who speak meaningless words. Know with whom you speak, pray devoutly, speak simply and trustingly to the Lord, like a child speaks to its father. Thus the Lord will bear your prayers.

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The children are taught that fervent, sincere prayers reach our heavenly Father.
It is very important to pray from the heart.

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Almost 2000 years ago, a youth by the name of Ben lived in the vicinity of Jerusalem. He lived at the same time as Jesus. The following experience tells of Ben:

Ben is lying on his mat on the floor. He is still dozing a little as he has only just woken up. The house is already filled with much activity. Ben hears the women puttering about in the kitchen area. In a corner of the house someone is muttering a prayer, others are chatting together. Ben's sister is humming a melody to herself.

Ben does not live alone with his parents and brothers and sisters. Other families also live in the same large room. He is used to people coming and going all the time. It is quite normal that some sleep while others work, or that others again eat or even pray. This does not worry Ben, he is used to it. He gets dressed. Before he eats his breakfast, he quickly kneels down on his mat again and murmurs a prayer. Ben then calls: "Good morning, Mother!" "Good morning, Ben. Here is milk and bread. Eat and drink!" Mother places a wooden dish filled with milk before him and hands him a piece of unleavened bread. Whilst he is eating, she says to him: "Today you can come into town with me. We must go and buy vegetables and fruit at the market." Ben is very excited: Go into town! That is always so much fun and so exciting! One sees so many interesting people and things there. Within the shortest time he jumps up from the table, puts on his sandals and is waiting in front of the house for his mother.

Yes, the city is really a lively place! Ben would love to stop everywhere and watch the goings on. At many of the street corners he sees men with long beards and costly robes; learned and pious people. These are the Pharisees. The Pharisees stand on the street corners and constantly mutter prayers to themselves. Their lips move quickly as they know these prayers by heart. They pray like this for hours. Ben is amazed. They must have learned much to be able to pray so well! Many people stop to look and admire them. "Those are honest and pious people," comments Ben's mother. "God must surely love them if they pray so much."

At the same time that Ben and his mother are shopping in the city, the Lord Jesus and his disciples are also there. Jesus sees the Pharisees praying publicly to God. But Jesus does not admire them. He is sad for he sees how these people pray. He goes up onto a mount with his disciples from whence he wants to speak to them and all the others who wish to listen to him. The word has been going around for some time already that this Jesus wishes to preach a sermon.

Young Ben asks his mother: "Where are all these people going?" "You know, someone has told me that they want to listen to a sermon by Jesus of Nazareth."

"Please come, Mother, I would like to see this Jesus too." Ben follows the other people flocking to hear Jesus speak. They find a place to sit on the grassy slope of a hill. The sun is shining brightly. Birds are singing in the shrubbery, otherwise all is quiet. Then the Lord Jesus begins to speak, calmly, quietly. He tells of his Father in heaven; of the kingdom of heaven and of how the people should live so that God can be pleased with them. He also speaks of prayer, and Ben listens very attentively

Jesus Christ is our teacher

as he has just seen so many Pharisees praying. "Do not pray in public, on street corners, like the Pharisees. They only want to be admired and praised. They rattle off their prayers which they have learnt by heart, but they do not speak to God with their heart. The rattling off of words is no prayer. That does not please God. When you pray, go into a quiet room, close the door and pray to God with an honest heart. Do not babble endless meaningless words like the heathens. They think that God will listen to them because they talk so much. God knows what you need before you even ask for it. Speak to my Father as a child speaks to its father. Speak to him in simple words, trustingly, then he will hear your prayers."



We pray sincerely. For the soul to commune with God one needs a quiet place and sufficient time.

The Lord Jesus still speaks of many other things, but Ben is not listening any more. Although he does not quite know where he can pray quietly and undisturbed at home, he is nevertheless happy. He has understood how he should pray.

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Then a thought strikes him ... he knows of a quiet place at home where he can pray: In the little room where they used to store supplies and valuables. It is always quiet there and he can speak to God undisturbed.

2



In the divine services we listen attentively, join in the prayers and do not allow anything to distract us.

1 Do you know what is important when praying? (We pour out our heart before God!)

2 We look at the first picture with the children. What may this girl be praying about? The children need to be made aware of living prayer, and the living God to whom they pray, and whether they always take enough time for praying.

We explain to the children that we do not only pray at home, but also in the Lord's house. We show them the second picture. Perhaps it is a little more difficult to pray in church (many people). But there too we want to bring to God our thanks sincerely and strive not to be distracted.

Important for the children is to know that prayer should not be connected only with 'Church', or be 'dry' recitations, but an expression of the soul, an inner urge, which can find utterance anywhere. The main thing is that the heart is involved.