

	M. The Three Great Rules for Prayer, (Part II) 6:7-8
1 Rule 1: Do not use empty repetition ^{DS1}	7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
2 Rule 2: Do not speak much	
3 Rule 3: Trust God	8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.
a. He knows your needs	
b. He desires to hear your prayer	

DIVISION IV

THE TEACHINGS OF THE MESSIAH TO HIS DISCIPLES: THE GREAT SERMON ON THE MOUNT, 5:1-7:29

M. The Three Great Rules for Prayer (Part II), 6:7-8

(6:7-8) **Introduction:** among the religious there is often a tendency toward long prayers, particularly in public. Too often people measure prayer by its fluency and length, thinking that length means devotion. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl.5:2). Christ puts the matter very simply, yet strongly: “When ye pray,” follow three great rules.

1. Rule 1: do not use empty repetition (v.7).
2. Rule 2: do not speak much (v.7).
3. Rule 3: trust God (v.8).

1 (6:7) **Prayer—Repetition:** the first great rule of prayer is striking—do not use empty repetition (see DEEPER STUDY # 1—Mt.6:7). There are several things that lend themselves to empty repetition.

1. Memorized prayer: just saying the words of a form prayer, for example, the Lord’s prayer. There is nothing wrong with praying a memorized prayer, but it should be prayed through and not just repeated with no thought behind the words.
2. Written, well-worded prayers: thinking that what we say is so expressive and so well worded that it is bound to carry weight with God. The words may be descriptive and beautifully arranged, but the heart must be offering the prayer, not the mind and ego. Such prayer is empty repetition.
3. Ritual prayer: saying the same prayer at the same time on the same occasion—over and over again. This can soon become empty repetition.
4. Formal worship: praying in the same way on a rigid schedule can lead to praying by habit (repeated practice) with little or no meaning to it.
5. Thoughtless prayer: speaking words while our minds are wandering. Being tired is no excuse. It is better not to pray than to pray insincerely.
6. Religious words and phrases: using certain words or phrases over and over in prayer (just because they are religious sounding). (Compare using such words over and over as *mercy, grace, I thank thee O God, in Jesus’ name.*)
7. Habitual references to God: using such empty repetition as “Lord this,” and “Lord that,” and “Lord here,” and “Lord there,” and “Lord...,” “Lord...,” “Lord...” How little thought is really given to approaching Him whose name is “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Is.9:6).

There are several things that will keep us from using empty repetition in prayer.

1. A genuine heart: really knowing God personally and having a moment-by-moment fellowship with Him all day long.
2. Thought and concentration: really focusing upon what we are saying.
3. Desire for fellowship with God: praying sincerely, really meaning it.
4. Preparation: preparing ourselves for prayer by first meditating in God’s Word.

Note something of extreme importance in discussing “vain repetition.” Christ does not say repetition in prayer is wrong. It is not wrong. What is wrong is vain, empty, meaningless, foolish repetition. Christ Himself used repetition in prayer (Mt.26:44), so did Daniel (Dan.9:18-19), and so did the Psalmist (Ps.136:1f).

Thought 1. Note six lessons.

- 1) There is one major problem with the praying of believers: they do not pray enough. They do not take enough time to pray and to pray in earnest.

There is one major problem *when believers do pray*: prayer is often vain, empty, thoughtless, meaningless, and repetitive. Too often a believer prays and does not concentrate. His mind wanders off somewhere else; he only mouths the words. Such thoughtless and meaningless prayer is clearly seen in public prayer and in the powerlessness of believers today.

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- 2) There is one sure way to prepare our hearts for prayer: meditating in God's Word.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim.3:16).

It is in the Scripture that the believer learns about God, himself, and the world—the nature and truth of all things. It is the Spirit of God who takes the Word of God and moves upon the believer's heart revealing that for which the believer should pray. Therefore, the believer is stirred to pray for whatever the Word of God and the Spirit of God has shown him (Ro.8:26; cp. Jn.14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor.2:12-13).

- 3) Vain repetition in prayer, whether formal or thoughtless, is *desensitizing*.
⇒ It discourages the sincere and the newly converted.
⇒ It cools the willing and the gifted.
⇒ It stifles the committed and the mature.
⇒ It turns away the seeking and the lost.
- 4) Repetition in prayer *is* dull. Empty repetition affects worship, interest, and attendance at services.
- 5) Vain repetition is tragic. Prayer should be one of the most meaningful experiences in life. God is certainly willing to meet the believer in a very special way—anytime, anyplace. So many hearts are just...
- barren
 - dull
 - complacent
 - dry
 - hard
 - lethargic
 - desert-like
 - rusted
 - still
- So much praying is merely going over and over the same things ranging from “bless Mom and Dad” to “give us a good day tomorrow.”
- 6) Empty repetition turns God away and cuts the heart of the committed.

“Having a form of godliness [long prayers], but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim.3:5).

“Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Mt.15:7-8).

DEEPER STUDY # 1

(6:7) **Prayer—Repetition, Vain** (battologesete): to babble much; to use many phrases; to say idle things; to say meaningless things. Vain repetition means at least two things.

1. It means saying the same words over and over again without putting one's heart and thought into what is being said.
2. It means using certain religious words or phrases (sometimes over and over again) and thinking God hears because one is using such religious talk.

2 (6:7) **Prayer, Long**: the second great rule of prayer is an eye-opener—do not speak much. Too many think that length equals devotion; that is, the longer they pray the more God will listen to them (they are showing God their sincerity), and the more spiritual they will become.

God does not hear a person's prayer because it is long, but because his heart is genuinely poured out to God. Length has nothing to do with devotion, but a sincere heart does.

Long prayers are not forbidden. What is forbidden is the idea that long prayers are automatically heard by God. Christ prayed all night (Lk.6:12). The early disciples prayed and fasted, and sought God for ten days and nights waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1f). A believer should sense the needs of the world so much that he is driven to seek God and His intervention for long periods of time, and the seeking should be often (Eph. 6:18).

Why do some pray long prayers?

1. Some feel long prayers convince God. They feel God has to be moved, nudged, and stirred to hear and answer.
2. Some feel they need long prayers to explain the situation. They feel God needs to be informed and made to understand a particular situation and how it has affected them.
3. Some feel long prayers make them more spiritual, more mature, and more devoted.
4. Some feel long prayers are just demanded of believers. It is expected; it is the religious and godly thing to do.
5. Some feel long prayers show God their sincerity. They secure God's approval by long prayers.
6. Some feel long prayers impress people. They show people just how deeply spiritual they really are.

What are ways to prevent the sins that arise from long prayers?

“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl.5:2).

1. “Be not rash with thy mouth.” Control your mouth. Do not let your mouth rattle on and on without thought. It will often rush and hurry with every thought that crosses your mind.
2. Be not “hasty to utter anything before God”: sit still, be quiet, without saying a word for awhile. Do not rush forward to speak.
3. Think about who God is. Picture a man: his mouth is quiet; he has been still for some time. He has been preparing, gaining control of his mind and thoughts so he can appear before the Sovereign Majesty of the universe. He focuses his thoughts upon God, the One who is in heaven far above the earth. He meditates upon God's sovereignty and majesty. God is the center of his thoughts (Ps.46:10).

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4. “Let thy words be few.” Speak—but make your words deliberate—just as deliberate as the words of any interviewer before a sovereign ruler. Request—just as any obedient son would request of a revered father. The person who approaches God like this speaks with respect and thought, with care and love. He speaks few words and straight to the point—all from a prepared heart and mind.

When should the believer spend a long time in prayer? There *are* special times when an extended prayer time is necessary. Some of the times are clearly seen in Scripture.

1. Sometimes a special pull to praise and adore God is felt within. When the believer feels this pull, he should get alone, spending a long time praising and worshipping God (cp. Acts 16:25).

2. Sometimes a special need arises. This may be the believer’s own need or a friend’s need. He should intercede until God gives the assurance that the need will be met (Eph.6:18; cp. Acts 12:1-5, esp. v.5).

3. Sometimes an unusual experience or event has taken place or is about to take place in the believer’s life or ministry. He should get alone and share the event with God. And he should stay before God until the experience has taken place (courage, confidence, power, faith, love). (See Introduction—Mt.4:1-11.)

4. Sometimes a great trial or temptation is faced. A long session of prayer may be needed to gain strength and to keep the believer away from the trial or temptation. (See DEEPER STUDY # 1—Mt.4:1-11.)

5. Sometimes a matter needs to be worked through or a major decision needs to be made. Help and direction should be sought from God. God should be acknowledged in all of the believer’s ways. He should remain before God until the answer is given. (Cp. Acts 13:1-3, esp. 2.)

Thought 1. Prayer is a matter of the heart, not a matter of words and length. Praying is sharing; it is sharing with God just like a person shares with any other person. Just as he shares thoughts, feelings, praise, and requests with others, so he shares with God.

Thought 2. Prayer is a personal relationship. Prayer is not speaking into thin air. God may be “in secret” (v.6); He may be invisible, but He is there. He is there more than any other person who may be in our presence. He is the One whom all men are to know and to whom all men are to be vitally related. Too often, the awareness and consciousness of His presence are allowed to fade, and we just go through our long prayer with a wandering mind leaping from thought to thought. Long prayers lend themselves to this danger. How insincere! How irreverent! How often the heart of God must be cut and hurt!

Thought 3. There are prayers of believers and prayers of the heathen. A distinction is made by Christ Himself. He says that both pray.

1) The heathen pray using vain repetition and speaking empty words.

2) The believer is vitally related to God; therefore, he prays to God who is his Father. He prays to God just as a son shares with his revered father.

“But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Mt.6:7).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Mt.23:14).

“All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled” (Eccl.6:7).

3 (6:8) **Prayer:** the third great rule of prayer is forceful—trust God.

1. God knows the believer’s need even before the believer asks. Why then should the believer pray?

Prayer demonstrates our need for God and our dependence upon God. Prayer gives time for concentrated sharing and communion between the believer and God. It is not enough for man to carry a knowledge of God in his mind as he walks through life. Man needs to have times when he is in the presence of God and can concentrate his thoughts and fellowship upon God. He needs such time with God just as he needs such time with his family and friends. Man is not meant to live in isolation from people nor from God. He must have times when he is in the presence of both man and God and can concentrate his thoughts and attention upon both.

The believer, therefore, does not pray only to have his needs met but to share and fellowship and to enrich his life with God.

Thought 1. God knows the believer’s needs. The believer does not have to worry about God’s knowing or meeting his needs. The believer’s concern should be living in the presence of God, taking enough time to share and to fellowship with God. The more he shares and fellowships with God, the more he will know God and learn to trust and to depend upon God’s care and promises.

Thought 2. God is the believer’s Father. The believer is God’s son. The believer can, therefore, *rest* in God and His promises. He does not have to strain and pray long in order for his Father to hear him. His Father already knows and cares. He is to get with His Father for long periods of time sharing and fellowshiping, learning and getting to know his Father intimately.

2. God desires to hear. God knows the believer’s need even before the believer asks (cp. 2 Chron.16:9; Is.65:24). God desires to hear and answer the believer’s prayer, to meet the believer’s needs. God desires to work for the believer’s deliverance and salvation (see outline and notes—Ro.8:23-27; 8:28-39. This is one of the great passages on assurance and confidence.)

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3. God has ordained prayer as the medium through which He blesses and moves among men. (See DEEPER STUDY # 3, *Prayer*—Mt.6:5-6; pt.2—1 Th.5:15-22).

“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” (Ps.31:19).

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about” (Ps.32:10).

“The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate” (Ps.34:22).

“They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever” (Ps.125:1).

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Pr.3:5-6).

“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe” (Pr.29:25).

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Is.26:3-4).

“Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green” (Jer.17:7-8).