**Series**: How to Pray

**Title**: 1. Our Father in Heaven

**Scripture**: Matthew 6:1-18

**Description**: Many disciples will ask for guidance on how to pray. The other disciples need it no less. This series works simply through the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.

# Read 6:1-18

# Pray

# Intro

* Review: Prayer undergirds the church-family-program in God's power. Feedback last received - important; Things left to move on to...
* cf Jesus repeated in Luk 11 - Answer to request by disciples

Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "**Lord, teach us to pray** (Luk 11:1)

* People want to be taught; Disciples who encounter it recognise the attraction, acquire the desire to pray... ; with a Concern to be acceptable, be worth God's time.
* These are Noble desires - ought to be answered;

**Context**

* We find it amid Matt 6; ch5-7="**kingdom-life**". In the centre, **6:1** "*beware*" > to ***give attention to*** actions of righteous: mercies, prayer, fasting
* 9. "*Pray then like this*". ::> A **model**; In answer, *prayer as it ought to be*
	+ ourpath = probably 3 messages on this prayer (not 12! cf MacArthur, the Disciples' Prayer)
* **Today - opening to prayer**
* What Jesus says is a prompt for discernment as we enter prayer - the parties involved: **Who** approaches **who**? **Who is fit** to approach? **Who is** approached?

# Fit to Pray, "When you pray"...

* NB to see He's **addressing those who already pray**... "*When you pray*"... This is not only for those new to prayer. Half of the fitness is getting rid of what doesn't belong.

## Not like the Hypocrites

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites"

* = Part of a repeating pattern in v1 to 18 - Every activity of kingdom life demands a conscientious effort to not be a hypocrite, or at least, LIKE a hypocrite - LIT ILLUS: actor on a stage, purely for show, but different at home.
	+ **This pattern**: *When you "*practice compassion", "pray", "fast" - do not do it *just like the hypocrites*, who do it to be glorified superstars *before people*
		- **v2**: that they may be praised by others
		- **v5**: that they may be seen by others;
		- **v16**: that they may be seen by others, "Beheld!"
	+ ... "I tell you the truth, they receive their wages" meaning - they *will be praised* by others, and *seen* by others... ONLY. They labour in the act, they get paid. [**but v1**, *you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven*]
		- **This is the first test we face when *praying together*** - "I want my prayer to be acceptable by them"(!)
			* This mistake keeps **newcomers** from praying,
			* and it keeps **old-timers** tripping up on props
		- This then means, **before we pray** in the company of others, we have to **discern** our **motive**: Is it "*in order to draw men's eyes and earn their approval*"?
		- When Jesus says '*go into your room and shut the door*' He's not banning praying publically - He prayed often in the presence of others!!
		- He's saying, **if** what's controlling your prayer is that you are, or the prayer is, accepted by others, you'd be better off **shutting up**.
		- ***It's not always hypocrisy***/pretence - might only be "LIKE the hypocrites". e.g. Feeling pressed to pray before others "*so that they don't think less of me*" > that's not hypocrisy, but you're in the kindergarten of acting.
* **APP**: Take some time to discern what's going to drive you in prayer, and especially praying before others...
	+ **How is it different when public**, and is that difference legit, or driven by fear/fame?
	+ We all need to develop in praying with others - but start on the correct foot - not doing it for approval of others. So many have started on the wrong, been trained in acting, and need unlearn - // "set the equaliser" purposely being invisible.
	+ There are those who come aplenty confident of what the others will think, and those who avoid because of what people will think - both are like hypocrites. The one really legit time to avoid praying with others is when you're desiring others' approval.

## Not like the Pagans

* it's not only hypocritical pray-ers that are unfit to pray; Very sincere pray-ers can err too - if they're praying like pagans!

7 "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

* By "Gentiles" - of other religions, pagans who don't know the Living God; Their error: "If God can only hear and understand and be pressed, He will attend to me" - They see prayer, and very specific kind of prayer, as the key to God's help
* Always been a popular thought (cf Elijah and the prophets of baal, who called and danced an cut themselves till the blood gushed - and no answer came). We find this today in prayer even among Christians - but it's highly mistaken
	+ "*empty phrases*" - Onomatopoeia - saying "bata" - repetitive, meaningless words, - a special sound / language that captures God's ear. Sometimes it's words of meaning, but they've become meaningless by repetition, such as happens in the RCC, repeating 10 "Hail Mary's" and even this very prayer! *But let's look at ourselves* - Even in our **familiar cliches** - we pray emptily
	+ Jesus is not banning repetitive prayer - the Psalms are full of repetitive prayer; but prayer that trusts in its words
* In it's simplest, it's the fear that if my words aren't correctly formed, my prayer will bounce off the ceiling!
* These are all wrong because, (8) *your Heavenly Father knows what you need before you ask him*.[another time we'll consider why then we still need to pray]
* **APP**: Take time to discern - What is the simplest and least wordy I can pray this - does it feel less spiritual?!!
	+ I love hearing most prayers - but having been a pastor in prayer meetings for 11 years, the freshest prayer in the world is by the ones who haven't "learned how to pray"! by which I mean - fallen into cliches; Every word purely in faith - get a bit lost, stumble;
	+ ILLUS: Streaming on a poor connection - only hear every 10th word. If God only hears what is intentional in faith - how much of what we verbalise actually sounds in Heaven?

Jesus prepares the model by first showing **how NOT to pray**: plenty of bad examples we might copy:

* Not like hypocrites *to draw mens eyes and earn their approval*
* Not like pagans *to flood God's ear and manipulate his arm*

There's only **one fitting approach** -

**v9** Pray then like this: "**Our Father in heaven**

Not as **the hypocrites**, nor **the pagans**, but as **Children to a Father**

## Children of the Father

* "*Father*" is such an important word in these 3 chapters - but concentrated here in ch6, 12 times
* in *The father in Heaven*, who **rewards**, who **sees**, who **knows**, who **forgives**, who **feeds** - but look - every single time, that word is preceded with the possessive pronoun, "***YOUR***"
* And so it's only fitting that the model prayer opens up with the address: **OUR**//, **FATHER**//.

I'd like to share 2 things we must recognise in that address - think about when we remember these words

### The Privilege of welcome prayer - acceptable before God

* The reason why you CAN pray - with no approval from earth, and no power to force Heaven, is that God is your Heavenly Father
	+ Father to all creatures by Creation
	+ But unique Fatherhood by the spiritual rebirth (John 1:12 "to those who believed in Jesus name, the right to become children of God - children born not of blood, flesh, man, but of God") - even as Rom 8:15, *Abba, Father*
* We know that as we start praying, we are immediately accepted through the work of Jesus

 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1Jo 3:1)

* What a **privilege** - which we neglect when we go prayerless!
* But Note also - *He is* ***OUR*** *Father*. The *very opening* of the model prayer is prayed by *a family of children*! In fact - the entire prayer is prayed together. That's quite something for motivating praying together. You can't really pray this on your own, can you? At least not ignorantly of the brothers and sisters you are one with!! ***The privilege*** is to be ***enjoyed together*** - and truly there is a sweetness to it -as hypocrisy and paganism fades, a heavenly sweetness flows greater than individually.
* Last time we recognised how when we pray together there is often inhibition or even irritation. Diversity in Number of words, kind of words, movement, depth, confidence... And even in the same church we can avoiding praying with one or more because of this **diversity**... **Which is silly** : The Diversity is there because prayer ought to be the ***most honest*** thing one does - not the ***most acceptable*** (Ps 139:1 "*you have searched me and known me*")- [[So especially when prayer genuine, it will be as diverse as personalities are.]
	+ This is where Corporate **Worship in Song** greatly helps - this **is corporate prayer**, in unanimous agreement - and little chance for anyone to feel left out. Yet, even then we have diverse personalities of music, and the ***same silly avoidances*** can crop up - because some like singing one way and others another : animation, vocabulary, number of verses, depth
* The very model presses us to pray together. The Privilege of acceptance before the Father, is a privilege we need to give the whole body - that in their honest prayer, we welcome them, as God does.

### Secondly - that there are Two parties approaching

* "***Our***...***Father***"
* I said that, '*Today - "opening to prayer" - What Jesus says is a prompt for discernment as we enter prayer - the parties involved:* ***Who*** *approaches* ***who****?* ***Who is fit*** *to approach?* ***Who is*** *approached?*'
	+ The Hypocrites approach men - like collecting their wages before going home;
	+ The Pagans approach a deaf god - like rallying a march for better privileges;
* But ***prayer as it's meant to be*** is not like that
* We aren't the only ones approaching, because God has also *approached us* - prayer is Communion -->
	+ Jesus makes a big thing about "our reward in Heaven" (vs getting wages) - see v1, v4, v6, v18
	+ What's the reward, in prayer? **God** is the reward! As He said to Abraham - Gen 15:1. I AM Your exceedingly great reward! Your reward is ***in Heaven*** - it is Himself; And that is what we receive in Prayer - the God who approaches, even us.
* !! we **don't need rules** of prayer but **revelation** of God : that He is "OUR FATHER" - the more we realise who God is, and who we are - the more natural prayer will be.

# Conclusion

* Learn this model prayer if you haven't yet.
* Prayer **begins** by recognising our Father - .
* "Our Father" is a model of address - God is addressed in diverse ways in scripture, and we should be as diverse: "Lord Jesus", "Sovereign Lord", "O God", "O LORD God", "Abba Father" :
	+ Help yourself in prayer by : Next time you read the Word, Highlight the titles of God for use in prayer! Catch yourself in meaningless cliches... - [we'll have more for this next time...]
* When you begin, ask, "**Who** am I praying to?" The Answer is an Eternal Expanse - you may just stick right there; [[ ! In eternity, our prayer will go no further than this line... no requests - Just Wonder at our God]
* We're addressing Him who rewards, sees, knows, forgives, feeds : Who has Accepted, and Has Approached.

# Pray

Will you join me?