

When You Pray

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[0 : 0 0] if I was to ask you this morning do you pray what would your answer be I'm sure most of us would say well yes of course I pray so often however so often we say our prayers like we teach children to say their prayers and this morning I want to think about prayer and to see how well we've progressed from saying our prayers to praying from simply going through a ritual to communing with God there was a little children's poem that used to say or that says it still says it I sometimes say my prayers but do I ever pray and do the wishes of my heart reflect the words I say you know every time a minister or a preacher stands up to preach he preaches to himself as well as to everybody else and this is surely true when it comes to thinking about prayer

I'm preaching to myself as well as to you in studying and preparing this message I'm challenged by it about my own prayer life about my own personal prayer life personal prayer is one thing that nobody else knows about it's a matter between us and God isn't it whether or not you come to church we all know we see you here whether or not you pray with your family your family knows but whether or not you pray in private to God only God and you know and yet prayer is an essential part of the Christian life indeed the first act that any of us do in our lives that truly pleases God is when we pray as sinners coming to Jesus when we bow at the foot of the cross and accept Jesus as our saviour and we pray God be merciful to me a sinner or come into my heart Lord Jesus or thank you Jesus that you died and carried all my sins and that in you I am forgiven that's the first act that we do that truly pleases God because before then we're rebels and strangers and all our righteous acts are filthy rags in God's sight so the first act that pleases God and the first act of the believing heart is prayer coming to God in prayer to Christ so one way or another the newborn child of God is going to pray and will continue to pray all through his or her life it's part of our nature just like the child runs to mum when it needs something or when she falls and cuts her knee she runs to mum it's part of our nature prayer we were created to know God

Adam and Eve they had that relationship perfectly back in the garden communing with God was natural to them but sin came in and broke it spoiled that relationship so as soon as they sin we find them running and hiding from God not wanting to see him but Jesus restores it when we're born again he restores it when we're adopted back into God's family and prayer is a normal part of that relationship because it's as normal as a child talking with his father so how are we praying now if you're a married man or woman and you tell me you have a good marriage which I hope you have but you never talk to each other you both do your own thing all week long you never say a word unless you have to just to keep the house running or if there's an emergency then you speak or if you say well we've an hour a week when we talk together we don't talk at any other time

I begin to wonder if your marriage is a good one in fact I would very much doubt it was a good one if that was the story and yet sometimes as Christians we're like that with God we only speak when we have to as it were or that once a week for one hour on a Sunday morning when we come to church yet we have got as Christians we've got that relationship with God that relationship has been restored and it's a relationship like a child to a father or a relationship like a bride to a bridegroom and it's bound to include speaking together it's bound to include prayer prayer prayer is to faith what breath is to life and just as a man cannot live if he doesn't breathe so prayer is a vital part of the Christian life prayer is a Christian's vital breath the Christian's native air now Jesus taught his disciples to pray and we're going to look at what he taught them in Matthew chapter 6 this morning part of it just part of this teaching but the interesting thing about it is when Jesus taught his disciples to pray the first thing he taught them was he said this is how not to pray this is how not to pray verse 5 he says when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites and I'm going to follow his example and work our way really through verses 5 to 8 this morning so he starts off by saying don't do it this way this is what you don't do and in verse 5 he says when you pray you mustn't be like the

hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues in the street corners that they may be seen by others truly I say to you they have received their reward don't stand in the street corners or the most obvious place in church to pray now we can see how much society has changed when we read this can't we because

I don't think most of us are tempted this way nowadays not many of us are going to make our way down into the centre down in the centre of Livingston and find a prominent spot and pray a loud voice or kneel down or whatever we're just not going to do that that is not that would not get us any street cred in Livingston today however let's think about what's behind this at that time you see the hypocrites as Jesus calls them the Pharisees among others were making a public show of praying they were having this pretend prayer in public and really they weren't talking to God but they were trying to make an impression on their neighbours and friends and people in the town they were thinking others are going to see me people are going to see me they're going to see what

[8 : 12] I'm doing they're going to see what a fine person I am how religious I am and my position in this community will be enhanced by my public prayers again wouldn't work today it wouldn't help me at all in Livingston but the lesson about prayer is still the same it is don't pray with your mind on the effect you're having on others don't pray with your mind on the effect you're having on others or to impress others you see sin the devil follows us in everything we do even in our prayers we can be praying and we can be thinking about something else and the devil comes on he whispers into our ears even when we pray and so instead of thinking about

God instead of concentrating on God and really speaking with him we're concentrating on ourselves or on others and so the effect is it's a false prayer and this can apply even when we're on our own at home even in our bedrooms at home when you shut the door as Jesus said we begin to pray and we find ourselves thinking about something else or we find ourselves thinking well how good I am to spend this time praying I'm sure God has impressed with me that I'm praying I'm sure the other folk at church don't pray as much as I do so instead of praying we're thinking about ourselves and about what we're doing instead of thinking about God public prayer in church or in the prayer meeting should take us right into the presence of

God and this is a real challenge to ministers or those who pray in public because I'm not to pray to impress but to speak with God it's true when we pray in public we're leading the assembly in prayer we have to bear that in mind and we want to do that but we're not aiming for wonderfully composed beautiful prayers which everyone's going to admire so we get praise from folk we're speaking with God if I'm seeking praise as my reward then if I get praise I'll have received all of my reward and the poor heartbroken person hardly able to put two words together but who has cried out to God in agony will reach God in a way that my well crafted prayer will not we don't pray to impress other people so all of us in prayer can find ourselves thinking about ourselves or comparing ourselves with others but you know the fact that the stammering words of a heartbroken person reaches the throne of God this is an encouragement to us encouragement to those of us who are shy about praying in a prayer meeting we can't think what to say but we're praying to our heavenly father it doesn't matter if we stumble over our words our prayers may count more than in heaven's eyes than a long fluent prayer which is other people's opinion in mind so here we have an encouragement to pray when we meet together in the prayer meeting

I'll give you another reason why it's good to pray in a prayer meeting it's because it encourages other people you know if we go to a prayer meeting we're together and only one or two people pray and all the rest is silent that's kind of discouraging but if everybody pray if everybody's willing to pray even a few words then we encourage one another so when if you're thinking about oh I can't think what to pray don't need me to pray then just remember your praying encourages everybody else who's there but the lesson here is we're not praying to others we're praying to God so the first don't of Jesus was don't pray to impress others the second one's found in verse seven where Jesus said and when you pray do not heap up empty phrases as the

Gentiles do for they think they'll be heard for their many words thinking that the longer the prayer the more chance of God hearing now this is the belief of many non-Christian religions when Megan showed us her pictures from the country she was in last year that the Buddhist prayer wheels where you put your prayers in a wheel and then you spin it and the more often it spins the more times your prayers are thought to go to whatever deity the Buddhists are believing in but not so says Jesus not so now this isn't a tendency which many of us are prone to I think again today if we pray at all we probably pray briefly but again here there's a principle a principle behind this that prayer is a

personal contact between me and God between you and God between a father and his children and it's not a mechanical process it's a relationship it isn't

[14 : 50] I must pray a hundred times and God will hear me no it's not that it isn't if I do such and such a thing God will automatically reply to me not that nor is it kind of magic if I say the right words God will be bound to answer if I get the formula right God will be bound to answer it's none of these things it's not mechanical it's not a mechanical process it's a relationship with our heavenly father a relationship with our heavenly father and we can at times get a bit mechanical in our prayers we can rush through a form of prayer without much thought and where our hearts are not involved there may be words there may be even time spent but there is nothing that God is listening to we wouldn't like our children to come to us like that would we when there is small asking us for something but not really wanting to talk to us not really wanting to spend time with us just running in and saying give me this and running out again that's not how children deal with their parents not how we would like to be dealt with when our children come we are to pray to our

God our father as children to a father to a father so things not to do not to pray to impress others to be thinking about myself and others not to pray long prayers thinking we're going to persuade God that way not to be preoccupied with methodology in prayer three things not to do but then Jesus gives some marks of true prayer and the first thing he does he does in verse six he says when you pray go into your room shut the door pray to your father in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you shut yourself in with God now first thing I would say is this isn't a prohibition of prayer meetings I've already mentioned prayer meetings and the early church always met together to pray prayer meetings were a fundamental part of the book of

Acts when you read it when you read it and Jesus said if two or three of you agree or two of you agree on earth about anything they ask it will be done for them and where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them and in Acts 4 24 we read of the early church at a difficult time Peter had come and told them about the threats that were made against them and what do we read when they heard it they lifted up their voices together they were in prayer together you see and they said sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in it and then there was the prayer and when they had prayed the place in which they were gathered together was shaken you see prayer meetings are a very important part in church's life a challenge for us here in Livingston free is the prayer meeting an important part in our life here is it answer that one answer that one but even in the prayer meeting you see we have to shut ourselves in with God beware of thinking about the effect we're making on other people focusing on God praying to him and not praying to him press you can do this in a prayer meeting you can do it on a bus you can do it on a busy street you can do it when you're sitting in the doctor's waiting room no one need know you're praying because we aren't showing our prayers we're fixing our eyes upon Jesus shut yourself in with God fix your mind on him second thing Jesus said is I've called it realization be aware of what you're doing again it's in verse 6 where Jesus said your father who sees in secret pray to your father in secret and in verse 9 he says pray to our father in heaven right so remember what you're doing right when we sit in prayer or when we kneel in prayer we're coming into the presence of the king of kings we ought to be remembering that we ought to be thinking I'm entering the audience chamber of the king of heaven the great creator the almighty eternal God the one who's a consuming fire the one who is all powerful and is all holy I'm coming into his presence now because we've got access there through what Jesus has done we're coming to a king great petitions we can bring for his grace and power as such none can ever ask too much coming right remember what we're doing remember what we're doing remember that God is the great giver and when we come to God in prayer we're admitting our weakness we're coming to the all powerful God and we're showing that we can't do anything on our own without him we can do nothing Jesus said without me you can do nothing Paul said his strength is made perfect in our weakness so when we come and we bow in prayer before God we're showing our weakness and we're looking to him to show us strength and he loves to show us strength he's a powerful

[21 : 24] God and he knows what we need before we ask him your father knows what you need before you ask him Jesus says he knows what we need and so just the same way as when your child comes to you maybe needing new clothes if you're a responsible parent you know he needs the new clothes you know he's getting too small for that jumper so you know it and the father cares for his child the mother cares for her child knows all about the child anticipates the child's needs even before you ask so is God to all who are in Christ Jesus and we're coming to that God in prayer

that all powerful one who keeps the stars in their orbits and who's interested in your prayers in my prayers isn't that amazing isn't that just amazing so we come realising what we're doing but we come also in confidence your father knows verse 8 what you need before you ask him confidence because our heavenly father knows what we need confidence because we have the assurance that God really is our heavenly father father if we aren't sure if we're not sure we're

Christians this morning if he's a distant unknown God and we aren't sure whether he's our saviour or not then we'll not be able to pray with confidence but when we do know that he's our saviour then we pray with confidence the confidence of a child to its father and we approach him in confidence because when we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins so we know that with our heavenly father there is forgiveness we approach him with confidence because we know that he delights to bless us as he cares for the birds and the flowers so he cares for us we approach him with confidence because we know he is much more ready to give than we are to ask we know he's concerned about our welfare we know that he hears us confidence because

God knows all our needs before we ask him so we come in confidence but sometimes people ask if God already knows what we need and if God is sovereign why do we need to pray why bother to pray well first of all because Jesus has told us to pray God has told us to pray Jesus didn't say if you pray he said when you pray right because a Christian is going to pray and on a Christian who doesn't pray is impossible right it's impossible so Jesus has told us to pray and he's taught us to pray there's one reason secondly because of that relationship between us and God prayer is us communicating with our heavenly father and him communicating with us it's not just asking for things it's worship it's praise spending time in his presence it's that personal relationship with God and it's also showing

God how much we need him and confessing our need before him so he can show his power God has promised to hear and answer prayer Jesus said some things we don't have because we don't ask so there's another reason for prayer some things we don't have because we don't ask so we approach with confidence because our father in heaven who has purchased our ultimate good which is our salvation in Jesus through the death of Jesus how much more will he not hear us in all our lesser needs how much we miss because we do not pray as we should the old hymn writer said oh what peace we often forfeit oh what needless pain we bear all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer how's your praying how's your private praying is it what it should be we can all progress here

I need to progress here I'm sure we all can progress here may God teach us to pray and make us a people of prayer so remember not to pray to impress others not to pray long prayers thinking we're going to persuade God that way not to be preoccupied with methodology but to shut ourselves in with God to fix our mind on God to remember we're coming into the presence of the King of Heaven our Heavenly Father that personal contact with God coming in confidence because our Heavenly Father is more willing to bless than we are to ask may God make us a people who pray let's pray Almighty God our Heavenly Father how we thank you that you are our

[27 : 27] Father and how we thank you that you look on us as your children and you are more willing to bless than we are to ask and how you love to hear us come to you in prayer Lord make us people who pray forgive us Lord that we don't pray as we ought teach us to pray give us hearts to pray Father and make us as a congregation as a church make us a praying people that your name may be honoured and glorified among us for we ask it Lord in Jesus name Amen let's praise God again as we sing from Psalm 34 which is on page 40 page 40 of the psalm book

Psalm 34 and we're going to sing verses 1 to 9 at all times I will bless the Lord I praise him with my voice because I glory in the Lord let troubled souls rejoice Psalm 34 verses 1 to 9 and we'll phrase■ng to 10 to 10 verses 1 one by gesundikum wine