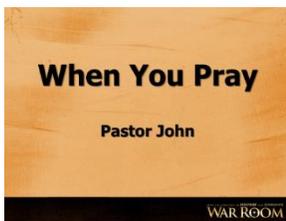


## **When You Pray**

January 8, 2017

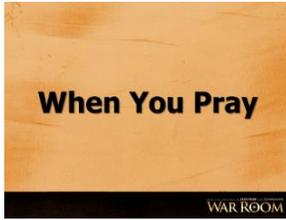
### **Matthew 6:5-8:**

*<sup>5</sup> When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward. <sup>6</sup> When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you. <sup>7</sup> When you pray, don't talk on and on as people do who don't know God. They think God likes to hear long prayers. <sup>8</sup> Don't be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask.*



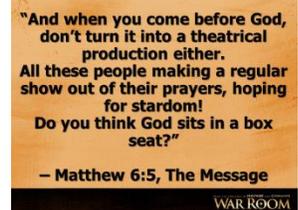
In our passage for today, we find Jesus instructing the disciples concerning prayer. Jesus and prayer are commonly found together in the Bible. Jesus teaches often on the subject of prayer and Jesus himself often spends time in prayer. This passage from Matthew 6 will be one we look at over the course of the next four weeks as we focus in on when, where, who, and how we pray. We will conclude this series based on the movie, War Room, by looking at the power of prayer. It is my hope and prayer that you can join us each Sunday as we seek to grow in our prayer life and to grow in our faith. Let us pray.





This week we will focus on 'When You Pray'. To begin, this first week we will concentrate on the first verse from our passage. I want to read verse five again, but this time from the Message translation, "*And when you come before God,*

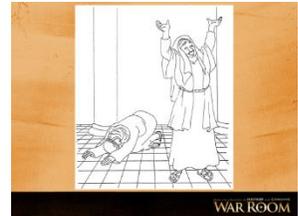
*don't turn it into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?"*

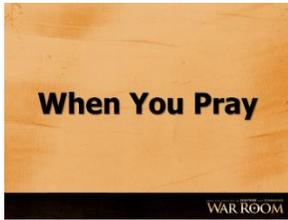


This passage reminds me of when Jesus taught about prayer in Luke 18. In this teaching, He uses the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax collector as examples of how to pray and how not to pray. The Pharisee prayed, "*God, I thank you that I am not greedy,*

*dishonest, and unfaithful in marriage like other people. And I am really glad that I am not like that tax collector over there.*" Can you see this prayer as a theatrical production? Can you imagine the Pharisee clearing his throat and peering around to make sure all eyes are on him? Can you see him pointing across the

room at the tax collector as he prays? We may snicker under our breath and may even shake our heads in condemnation as we read this verse. But our reality is that sometimes we too pray these types of prayers. We compare ourselves to others in our prayers, trying to see ourselves in the best light. This is obviously NOT the way we should pray. To contrast this, and to illustrate how we should pray, Jesus uses the prayer of the tax collector. Hear the prayer of the tax collector, "*God, have pity on me! I am such a sinner.*" It is a prayer full of honesty and humility. It is a prayer focused on his relationship with God.





We develop our own relationship with God primarily through the study of the Word and through the daily practice of prayer. It is through these connections to God that we each grow to understand God and our relationship with God.

Through the Word, God is revealed to us. As we read the scriptures, the Holy Spirit also works in us to help us understand and apply the Word to our lives. Through this process, we grow and we mature in our faith. As we spend time in prayer, we talk to God. If we allow Him space, God will talk or maybe whisper to us. Prayer is our communication with God. Prayer should be like any other conversation we have. We should talk and we should also listen.

In the Bible, we are told many times that God knows our needs before we ever put words to our prayers. God knows our prayers before we voice them. We are also told that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as well. In Romans eight we are told that the Spirit constantly prays for us before the throne of God. Perhaps all of this then leads us to the question: why should we pray? To answer this



question, I think the words "I love you" illustrate well why we should pray. Because I have been there myself, I now speak on behalf of all the husbands and children. Take a moment and think back to the reaction you got the last time your wife

or mother said "I love you" and you did not say it back. Can you recall that reaction? It was definitely a learning moment. Even though God knows our needs and knows our prayers before we ever put them into words, God still desires for us to come to Him in prayer. Like the tax collector, it is an act of humility and honesty when we bring our joys and our concerns to God. Your

wife or your mother may know that you love her, but it sure makes a difference to her when you say “I love you”.



Just as there is a positive response from our wife or mother when we say those three little words, we also gain a benefit when we come to God in prayer. While we are not promised that God will always answer our prayers how we want them answered, we are promised that God will answer. In Jeremiah 29, reading verses eleven through thirteen, hear the promises of God:

*<sup>11</sup> I will bless you with a future filled with hope—a future of success, not of suffering. <sup>12</sup> You will turn back to me and ask for help, and I will answer your prayers. <sup>13</sup> You will worship me with all your heart, and I will be with you.*

The promise is that God will answer and that God will be with us. The promise is that God will bless us with a future filled with hope. We know that there will be trials, but the promise is that God will be with us through the trials. God is faithful. In response, we will come to worship God with all of our heart. When we understand these promises and when we live into these promises, our natural response is to worship God with all of our heart. Part of our worship is communicating with God through our prayers.



In the movie, *War Room*, Miss Clara lives into these promises. Throughout the course of the movie Elizabeth, the wife, also learns to trust into the promises of God. God is faithful to

answer their prayers. During a scene from the film, we see Miss Clara's response to God's faithfulness. To set the scene, Elizabeth and Tony's marriage was in trouble. Tony knows God exists but does not live according to God's ways. Life is all about Tony. Elizabeth wants to honor her covenant and desperately wants to make their marriage work. With help and guidance from Miss Clara, Elizabeth has been praying faithfully for her husband Tony. Finally, God answers her prayers for Tony. She calls Miss Clara to share this news that God is at work in Tony's life and that Tony has sought forgiveness from God and from Elizabeth. This clip is Miss Clara's response. Please turn your attention to the screens. [Play video.]



When Elizabeth felt like she was at the end of her rope, she was willing to consider turning to God. She was willing to listen and learn from Miss Clara. And isn't this the case for us too? When we are struggling and get to the point when we feel like we can do anything more on our own, then we turn to God. But God calls us to come to Him in prayer all of the time, not just when we are in a time of need.

Elizabeth and Miss Clara were praying for God to restore the love in the marriage. They were praying for God to turn Tony's heart back to God. They were praying for things that would bring honor and glory to God. They were offering prayers that were honest and humble. God was faithful and God answered their prayers. God will answer our prayers. So when should we pray?

I believe we should pray whenever we need God to be active in our lives or in our world. We should pray when we need God to change or transform us or our world. We should pray when we need guidance or direction or when a major decision looms large in our life. Like Elizabeth and Miss Clara, we need to pray to God whenever we need God in our lives. By the way, that is all the time. Like them, we need to pray prayers that are honest and humble. To do so, we must be in a right relationship with God.

To be able to pray from the right place and with the right motives, we should first pray for God to be the Lord of our lives. We should pray for a spirit that hears the voice of God in our prayer time and in our daily lives. We should pray for a willingness to be obedient to the voice of God. We should pray for hearts that are willing to submit to the will of God. We should pray for courage to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. We should pray for God to be the Lord of our lives. Romans 10:9 says, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* When we pray from this perspective, we will pray for things that honor God and that bring glory to God.

**If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.  
- Romans 10:9**

WAR ROOM

### **When You Pray**

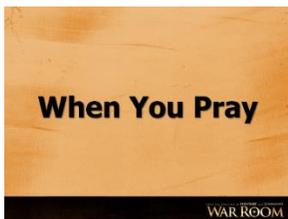
WAR ROOM

When we pray, we generally pray for two reasons. Some of our prayers are prayers for general well-being and for God's presence in our lives and in our world. We pray for safe travels, for the health of our family and friends, for upcoming events and

decisions, for God's direction and guidance in our lives. Part of our general prayers should also be for our government and our leaders. There is much need for prayers for our leaders and for our nation, state, community, and neighborhood. Our nation is certainly in need of direction, healing, and a return to God. In Second Chronicles 7, verses fourteen and fifteen, we read, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* God desires to be the Lord of our lives and the Lord of our nation. When we pray humbly from the place of a pure heart, God is faithful, God will respond.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.  
- 2 Chronicles 7: 14-15

WAR ROOM



The second reason we pray is for specific things, most often our needs. We pray for the healing of a friend or relative, we pray that God will bring us that job we interviewed for, we pray for financial relief when things are suddenly very tight, we pray for a good surgery and a quick recovery, we pray for someone to win their battle with addiction. To bring God the desires of our hearts, to call upon God in our times of need – these are sincere prayers. They are prayers that God wants to hear. But these prayers are the prayers that can be prayed for the wrong reasons or from the wrong place in our hearts. Yes, that new job could lead us to honor God and to have a platform to share Christ with others. Yes, God may answer that prayer. But our prayer for that job could be so that we make more money so that we can buy a bigger house so we are better than the Jones. God will probably not answer that prayer.

Verse five from our passage today reads, "*When you pray, don't be like those show-offs who love to stand up and pray in the meeting places and on the street corners. They do this just to look good. I can assure you that they already have their reward.*" God does not desire our lip service. God does not desire that we pray just for the sake of praying. God does not want us to pray for things that are contrary to God or to God's will. God does not want us to pray just to be seen praying. In these cases, our prayers are for show; our prayers are little more than empty words. We have gotten our reward.

Now praying, believe it or not, is pretty popular in the world. In his recent research, George Barna has discovered that 33% of adults in our country have not attended a Christian church in the last year. Even worse, 89% have not attended a Sunday School class in the last year. Two 'bad' statistics. But, but, but. But, Barna found that 81% claim to have prayed within the last week.

Jesus knew that people would pray. But He also knew people would not know how to pray or why they should pray or maybe to whom they should pray. Jesus knew that prayer must not be hit and miss, but must be consistent. He knew the power of prayer. Whenever Jesus had endured a trial or had experienced a rough patch, He did not take a vacation. He did not take a break. Jesus prayed. Jesus knew He could find strength, support, encouragement, peace, comfort, reassurance, and hope in prayer. We can too.

When should we pray? Always and often. Our role model, Jesus, enjoyed the fruits of prayer in His life. We too can experience these fruits. How? Pray!

We must each recognize that God Himself has invited us to sincerely pray, that God gives us important reasons to pray, and that God will provide proof that prayer works. In addition, God draws us closer through prayer. It is through a humble and devoted prayer life that we connect to God. So let us pray...

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) When you pray, what are you most often in prayer for?
- 2) What other areas or people or topics are you feeling led to pray for?
- 3) When have you experienced a closer connection to God through your prayer life or through the answers to your prayers?
- 4) Can you establish a place, time, and location to pray daily? In the weeks ahead, how will this become a daily habit for you?