

# DENAIR FRIENDS CHURCH

## Devotions with Matt

MAY 28, 2020

### THE RIGHT KIND OF PRAYER

Is there a bad way to pray? A wrong way? Jesus says there is right before He teaches us all how to pray in Matthew 6. He points out the hypocrites that love to pray on street corners to be seen by others as an example of a bad way to pray. To pray in such a manner is to try to get the focus on themselves, rather than to focus on God to whom they are praying. So, yes there are bad ways to pray.

A man was once overheard praying on a busy street in London some years ago, "O Lord" he prayed, "Thou knowest I have more estates in the city of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in the county of Essex. I beseech Thee, O Lord, to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fire and earthquake. And, as I have mortgages in both counties, I beg thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on those counties. As for the rest of the counties, Thou mayest deal with them as thou are pleased." That's a type of hypocritical prayer Jesus warns us about.

I am not a big fan of the word hypocrite. It is thrown around a lot and the label placed on people without knowing someone's true reasoning for doing what they are doing. Christians have been called hypocrites simply for not being perfect.

Although there have been hypocritical Christians, of which I am sure I have been one, we understand that no one is perfect and will make mistakes. So when Jesus uses the word 'hypocrite' here, I have to pause and wonder exactly what He means.

What Jesus is talking about is not so much the location of our prayers, but the direction of our heart in prayer. He's not so much talking about the words we use in prayer, but where our words are aimed. He is not worried about the content of our prayers, but our intent in them. For Jesus, when we try to manipulate God in prayer, try to influence Him into doing our bidding by the many words we recite, or try to make a good reputation for ourselves in front of others are all wrong ways of praying. But that is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to being hypocritical.

The Greatest Commandments summed up are to love God and love others.

That is our purpose, or mission and our focus as Christians. We are to live those two Commandments out in our lives. All truth and holiness comes out of seeking God and desiring to love Him, and in doing so we seek to love our neighbors. We long to obey God and do no harm to others. We are to desire, promote and seek the good of others in order to truly love them. Therefore, when we put ourselves first and foremost, and don't seek and pray for the good of others, we are being hypocritical. We break the Commandments and fail in our calling and purpose as Christians.

Ouch!

There are many reasons to go to God in prayer. Many of those reasons can put ourselves at the center and



still be good. Phillip Yancey said, "Most of my struggles in the Christian life circle around the same two themes: Why God doesn't act the way I want God to act, and why I don't act the way God wants me to act.

Prayer is the precise point where those two themes converge." In other words we pray to know the will of God and to be able to do the will of God in our lives. That is the best way of putting ourselves at the center of prayer. We want God's ways to become our ways.

What is God's will for our lives? To love Him and love others. That is at the heart of prayer. To pray without those two things in view are all the wrong ways to pray. Without love for God and others we simply become a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. And what is the reward for praying with the intent of loving God and others? We learn to love God deeper and others more! There is nothing hypocritical about that.

Let me end this with a prayer from Flannery O'Connor. "Dear God, I cannot love Thee the way I want to. You are the slim crescent of the moon that I see and my self is the earth's shadow that keeps me from seeing all of the moon . . . what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self-shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow that is nothing. I do not know you God because I am in the way." May that become our prayer today.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

In Christ,  
Matt