

Last week we discussed **Matthew 6:1-4** – “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” What does this mean to you?

Matthew 6:5-7 – “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”

What do you think Jesus is telling us here?

Karl Barth (1886 – 1968) was a Swiss Reformed theologian and father of neo-orthodoxy. Barth is best known for his commentary The Epistle to the Romans, his involvement in the Confessing Church, including his authorship of the Barmen Declaration, and especially his unfinished multi-volume theological summa the Church Dogmatics.

Neo-orthodoxy (or crisis/dialectical theology) - a 20th-century Protestant movement that emerged after WWI as a reaction against 19th-century liberal theology. Led by Karl Barth, it emphasized God's transcendence, radical human sinfulness, and revelation through Jesus Christ, rather than human reason or progress.

Barth says; “It is not permissible to consider prayer as a good work to be done, as a pious, nice, and pretty duty to be performed.” What is Barth saying here about prayer? How should we consider prayer?

“Prayer as a human act cannot be a gossiping, a series of phrases or mumblings....Prayer must be an act of affection;”

How is prayer often used in our church and our society? What is missing in prayer if it is just a “series of phrases or mumblings”?

“All prayers offered solely by the lips are not only superfluous, but they are also displeasing to God;”

Why would prayers of verbal words or chanting be “displeasing to God”?

Daniel M. Doriani (1953 -) is a Presbyterian pastor and New Testament professor. He is a professor of theology at Covenant Theological Seminary and founder of the Center for Faith & Work, St. Louis, and a member of the Council of The Gospel Coalition.

Doriani says; “Some people think that God is too busy or indifferent to hear every prayer.”

Have you ever thought of God as being too big, too busy, to care about your needs/wants? Are there people you know that think this?

“The problem in prayer is not that God is too busy for us, but that we feel too busy for him. God does not remove himself from us; we remove ourselves from him.” Do you ever find yourself rushing through your prayers because you have things to do?

“Some Christians think that their fervor, their sincerity, or their technique may gain them God’s ear. Some think, “If I rise early in the morning and pray on my knees, in the cold, without coffee, then God will hear me.” What is Doriani saying here?

If we think there are techniques to being heard by God and getting our prayers answered, what does that tell us about our relationship with God?

“True prayer seeks to commune with God, not to extract benefits from him.” What should our motive be to be in prayer with God?

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907 – 1972) was a Jewish rabbi, scholar, activist, and philosopher. He is one of the leading Jewish theologians and Jewish philosophers of the 20th century.

“Now, how do our people pray? They recite the prayer book as if it were last week’s newspaper.” What is Heschel saying about prayer today?

“It is intonation that lends grace to what we say.” What does sincere intonation reflect in our prayers? What does lack of it reflect?

Intonation – the rise and fall of the voice when speaking

Psalms 115:17 – “The dead praise not the Lord.” What does this mean to you?

Amy Carmichael (1867 – 1951) was an Irish Christian missionary in India who opened an orphanage and founded a mission in Dohnavur. She served in India for 55 years and wrote 35 books about her work as a missionary.

“To pray in a hurry means nothing. To live in a hurry means to do much but effect little.” What is Carmichael saying here? Why?

Psalms 145:5 – “They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.”

Why does God want us to meditate?

Meditation is a practice for training awareness, focus, and emotional balance by observing thoughts without judgment, rather than turning them off. It reduces stress, improves mental clarity, and strengthens brain areas associated with focus. Key techniques include focusing on breath, mantras, or body sensations while sitting comfortably for a few minutes daily.

What is the difference between secular meditation and Godly meditation?

Mother Teresa (1910 – 1997) was the founder of the Missionaries of Charity and Catholic saint.

“In the silence of the heart, God speaks and you have to listen. Then in the fullness of your heart, because it is full of God, full of love, full of compassion, full of faith, your mouth will speak.” How does prayer and meditation help us and affect us?