

The Elements of Worship: Prayer

Isaiah 56:7 & Matthew 6:9-13

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

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Introduction: Consider this true story from the life of D. L. Moody. What is the proper place & length of prayer in a worship service? Is prayer really a part of worship? Note Isaiah 56:7 where the Lord is speaking about Jews & Gentiles worshipping together in the Millennial Kingdom. *“Even them (Gentiles) will I bring to My holy mountain, & make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings & their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”* This verse was later quoted by Christ as He drove the merchants & money-changers out of the Temple as recorded in Matthew 21:13. Thus Christ Himself emphasized the role of prayer as an essential part of worship in the Temple. From this we conclude that public prayer is an expression of public worship. We have seen previously the need of preparation for worship (making it a priority) as well as the need of praise in worship (congregational singing & special music). If public prayer is essential to the worship service, how do we make it effective to God’s glory? Consider the only place in the Bible where the Lord identifies a specific pattern of prayer for God’s people. Matthew 6:9-13, often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer” (though perhaps better to be called “The Disciples’ Prayer”), is given by the Lord in His Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5, 6, & 7). Its brevity reminds us that prayer in worship need not be lengthy to be effective (note the caution in verses 7-8). Follow along as I read these verses. Let us see how our prayer during worship gives glory to God.

I. Follow the pattern for prayer:

[Also recorded in Luke 11:1 in answer to their request, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Luke 11:1-4). It is not “teach us a prayer.” Consider also in verse 2, *“When ye (plural) pray, (you, plural) say...”*]

A. Express your devotion to God (Matthew 6:9-10) >

1. Commit yourself to **honor** Him (:9, *“Hallowed be Thy name”*):

- It means to treat God as holy, set apart, sanctified (cf. I Peter 3:15).
- It means to glorify God – He must be the object of our prayer.

Summary: Contrast this with the world’s view & treatment of God & His name.

2. Commit yourself to **obey** Him (:10, *“Thy will be done...”*):

- There will be complete submission to God in heaven – see Psalm 103:20.
- There is to be comparable submission to God on earth (Christ is our King).

Summary: “This prayer is actually a request that God’s grace would enable the individuals offering the prayer to honor & obey the Lord right now” (Reimers).

B. Express your dependence on God (Matthew 6:11-13) >

[Devotion comes first – cf. ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, & Supplications.)]

1. Seek His help for your **physical** needs (:11):

- God is glorified when we acknowledge our dependence upon Him.
- God is concerned about our physical needs; those that are “daily” & definite (“bread”).

Summary: “Satisfaction with whatever God provides demonstrates both trust in His care & submission to His will” (Reimers).

2. Seek His help for your **spiritual** needs (:12-13):

- Our past sins are represented as a debt that we cannot pay – our only hope is to be forgiven (cf. song – “He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay...”) Note: Our forgiveness is the basis for us forgiving others – see :14-15. If we are unwilling to forgive others, there is no “fellowship” forgiveness for us.

- b. Our future represents a challenge ahead – victory depends on God’s grace. “*Lead us not into temptation*” acknowledges “that temptations are already lurking every day & asks that the Lord would deliver us from them” (Reimers). This does not mean that God puts them there (cf. James 1:13), but that He gives us victory over temptation. **Caution:** Be careful of praying for God to “bless” your predetermined plans (such as: a wrong relationship or when seeking the “approval” of a pastor rather than seeking his advice).

II. Follow the **leader** in prayer (see Matthew 18:19-20):

- A. Note the possible options for the congregation being led in prayer >
1. You can just listen (yet this seems too passive for actual worship).
 2. You can pray your own prayer (yet this is not actual corporate worship).
- B. Note the probable option for the congregation being led in prayer >
1. **Carefully** follow along & pray his prayer along with him.
 2. **Consistently** agree in prayer (“*agree*” – meaning harmony or mutual consent; from which we get our word “symphony”).
 3. **Consciously** pray in assent to what is being prayed (see Acts 4:23-31).

Summary: “Each one must pray the same prayer silently that the leader prays audibly. This requires deliberate, earnest, even strenuous, effort from all...Christ promises that God will answer that prayer” (Reimers).

Caution: This is not a “blank check” that we can ask & get anything we want. Biblical prayer is that which submits to God’s will & seeks for God’s glory (honor).

Illustration: Group prayer is special. Consider a citizen who presents a petition to the Governor with 100 signatures. All those who have signed the petition are standing outside the door. In the midst of the group stands the governor’s son. The favorable response of the governor to the petition is greatly enhanced. “Perhaps that portrays the value of public prayer: not only many people petitioning God together, but God’s Son standing among them” (Reimers).

Conclusion: How do you respond to this element of worship? Do your prayers offered publicly (& privately) follow the Biblical pattern? The “Lord’s Prayer” is set forth as a pattern (“*after this manner*”), not something to be repeated verbatim (as if He said, “with these words”). [To repeat such a prayer does not violate any Biblical principles, but it does not fit the context, or fulfill Christ’s intent.] Are your prayers an expression of your devotion to God? Are you committing yourself to honor & obey Him? Do the prayers that you offer express your dependence upon God? God delights to hear & answer the prayers of those who acknowledge their dependence upon Him for both their physical & spiritual needs. Such a prayer of devotion & dependence will be properly balanced, in its priorities & proportions. We focus on the Lord & His honor before seeking our petitions.

How do you respond in worship when someone leads in prayer? Are you following along carefully, agreeing & assenting to the prayer being offered? It requires effort & concentration, but it is rewarded by God. May God help us to take seriously this third element of worship.

Our worship thus far consists of preparation, praise, & prayer. We will examine presentation & preaching in the weeks to come. How does your worship compare today?