

Home Group Supplemental Material

The Secret of Successful Prayer – Matthew 6:5-8

Please note that these questions are provided simply as a resource to supplement the preparation by Home Groups. Please feel free to add your own questions and miss any of these out.

I suggest that before you start, you ask if there are any general questions about the passage and/or the sermon that people would like to discuss and/or get clarification on. For example, do people understand what I said and do they agree with it!

If necessary please remind your group at a suitable point that nothing in these four verses in Matthew is about not praying. In fact Jesus clearly says “when” you pray not if. There’s no ‘if’ about praying!

- There’s no prohibition on praying in public – praying aloud in church, or at Praise and Prayer, in Home Groups and at other meetings is just fine! In fact please do it more!
- This is not about not standing to pray – in fact this was the usual posture for Jews in Jesus’ day
- This is not about not praying regularly – the discipline of regular prayer is good
- This is not about not being persistent in prayer
- This is not about never saying the same words twice. Jesus himself prayed saying the same words more than once (Matt 26:44) – it’s things like the empty reciting of memorised prayers that is being criticised here.

I have deliberately made this material slightly shorter/ lighter than usual. I would like you to consider using any extra time that you have at the end for an extended time of prayer and/or fellowship since this will be the last Home Group meeting before Christmas (unless you have organised an additional get together!).

Suggested questions for discussion

1. Start by having a general discussion on prayer using some questions as: What is prayer? Does it actually achieve anything? How easy do people find prayer? What are the blocks to successful prayer?

Share experiences of prayer with each other. It would be particularly good to hear from people who have had ‘real’ answers to prayer.

2. *“The truth is that very few people really are atheists when it comes to prayer. In practice most people pray at least some of the time.”*

Do you agree with this statement? If not, why not? If you do, why do you think that prayer is so universal?

3. Read Matthew 6:5-8 slowly and carefully.

In verse 5 Jesus criticises those who pray from the wrong motives. He specifically identifies those in his day who prayed in order to get public recognition from others. In verse v7 Jesus criticises those who pray in order to try to manipulate God.

Why do you think that Jesus was so opposed to people who prayed in this way?
Discuss some of the wrong ways we pray today.

4. Presumably we pray because we think that our prayers will have some effect. Why do we think our prayers will be heard? What is the basis for our belief that praying makes a difference?
5. The way we talk to God reveals the type of relationship we have with him. The passage suggests that there are two types of relationship that we can have with God: a **business** relationship or a **family** relationship.

“The business relationship is one that is based on transactions or bartering. It’s a conditional one that involves goods and services. ‘I’ll do this if you’ll do that.’ On the other hand the family relationship is one that’s based on a commitment to each other because of who we are.”

Explore the differences between the two types of relationships. After you have done this, you might want to ask people to stop for a moment and reflect privately on which relationship they personally have with God. Does it need to change?

6. As Christians we should have a family relationship with God. We are his adopted sons and daughters. This is why we can call him “Our Father”.

Why and how does having family relationship with God change everything? Why is it the key to having a successful prayer life?

7. The main thrust of Matthew 6:5-8 is about the need to have a right relationship with God. However, just ahead of Jesus giving us his model prayer in verses 9 to 13, in verse 6 Jesus gives some really practical advice on private prayer. He says: *“when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen.”*

Discuss the potential advantages to our prayer lives of following this practical advice.