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**The Incentive For Prayer**

1. **INTRO**
   1. Studies show that although Americans are becoming less religious, about 90% of Americans pray everyday[[1]](#footnote-1).
   2. About half of Americans report that they pray several times a day.
2. **BODY**
   1. Today I’d like for us to consider our incentive for prayer form a very familiar and instructive passage from the SOTM -- Mat 6:5-13:

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6 But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”*

* 1. If we were going to unpack this whole passage, here’s how I would probably approach it: We are to:
     + 1. **Pray Sincerely**: (v.5) The hypocrites desired to only appear sincere.
       2. **Pray Secretly**: (v.6) Find a quiet, alone place to regularly connect with God.
       3. **Pray Specifically**: (vs. 9-13) using the “The Lord’s Prayer” as a template.
  2. As we consider our incentive for prayer today I would like to focus on vs. 7-8: *“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles [KJV: heathen, NIV: pagans] do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*” –Matthew 6:7-8
  3. While prayer is a universal practice, Jesus is saying in this section there are only two primary incentives for prayer: 1) There is a Gentile way to pray; or 2) There is a Christian way to pray. Today let’s consider the difference? [[2]](#footnote-2)
     1. We tend to think of a gentile as an irreligious person, but that’s not necessarily the case. The vast majority of people on planet earth pray, so Jesus is not talking about people who don’t pray – He’s talking about people who pray a lot!
        1. *“heap up empty phrases”* = mechanically repeated phrases
        2. *“many words”* = much speaking (literally)
     2. What Jesus is saying is that the real dividing line is not between people who DON’T pray and people who DO pray – **the dividing line is between religious people and Christian people** (e.g., the elder brother in Lk 15; there are two ways to miss God: rebellion and religion).
        1. Religious people (Gentiles) think they will be heard because of their mechanistic phrases and their many words.
        2. Christians have a growing trust and understanding in a loving Father and a growing realization that He knows our needs and passionately desires to meet those needs (v. 8).
  4. Let’s consider the true incentive for prayer:
     1. Vs. 7-8 identify two different ways to go to God.
     2. **Let’s use the illustration of living in a home** -- there are two basic arrangements: 1) Tenant-Landlord relationship or a 2) Family relationship.
        1. One is basically a business relationship and the other is a family relationship.
           1. The incentive for a business relationship is what I HAVE FOR you, while the incentive for a family relationship is who I AM TO you. The incentive for one is based on performance; the incentive for the other is a commitment.
           2. One is based on a mechanical set of goods and services – a basic business relationship (Frank – should not be friends with tenants [friendly, but not friends]).
           3. Ultimately, one is a conditional relationship – respect the property and pay the rent; the other is moving toward an unconditional relationship. It’s doing vs. being. [This can be a problem at work too – supervisor vs. friend]
        2. Now, let’s consider a family relationship – or, more specifically a child-parent relationship:
           1. In a business relationship the incentive is performance – if you perform you’ll be accepted.
           2. In the child-parent relationship it’s the opposite – you are accepted, therefore you perform. (Get it?)
           3. Two completely different paradigms, two completely different ways of doing things.
  5. What Jesus is saying here in Matthew 6 is that we can either approach God from a business perspective or a child-parent perspective.
     1. We will either “heap up empty phrases” (NIV: babbling) and use *many words* (the idea behind the use of the word *many* is anxiety, which Jesus addresses in the last 10 verses of the chapter).
     2. Or we will rest in the Fatherhood of God.
  6. Here’s how you will know whether or not you are a Christian: It’s what we do when our prayers seemingly go unanswered – we will either be angry (distant or hard-hearted) or anxious.
     + - 1. Angry because we believe that we’ve been faithful – we’ve been “paying the rent” and we deserve answered prayer.
         2. Anxious because we haven’t been faithful and therefore God probably doesn’t accept me – and we feel guilty, like we’re not measuring up.
         3. In either of these cases we prove we are a tenant and not a child.
       1. A religious person says, “God come into my life and be my landlord – I’ll do my part and you do yours.” A Christian is someone who says, “God come into my life and be my Father – I am not worthy of Your favor, but Jesus’ work on the cross grants me access.”
       2. Are you a tenant or a child in God’s house?
  7. Jesus does not start the Lord’s Prayer by saying “Our King,” although He is; or, “Our Creator,” although He is; or even, “Our Friend,” although He is; Jesus is saying that the key to intimacy with God through prayer is seeing God and approaching God as loving Father. Those two words will control everything else about our relationship with God.
     1. Our understanding of what it means to be an adopted child of God is the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.
        1. *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God*” --John 1:12
        2. To become a Christian means that we are adopted into the family of God. If we don’t understand this we don’t know what it means to be a Christian (Calvinism vs. Arminian theology; Arminians cannot obtain assurance of salvation because there is a belief that our salvation can be revoked.)
     2. Adoption is not the result of the child’s efforts, but that of the parent. Also, adoption is not a change in nature or behavior – it is a change in legal status. It’s a change of commitment.
        1. *“Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are”* --John 17:11b
        2. As Christians the Father becomes as committed to us as He is to His own Son.
        3. Do you understand that? If it sounds too easy it shows you are still a tenant.
        4. The main difference between a Gentile and a Christian is that the Gentile has a business relationship with God and the Christian has a child-parent relationship with God.
  8. The key to all prayer is starting with the doctrine of adoption.
     1. We must saturate ourselves with the idea that we have been legally adopted – by God’s act, not your act. If you are a Christian God is as committed to you as He is to His own natural Son.
     2. When Jesus begins with the phrase “Our Father” it means that is the basis of ALL our dealings with God. It is the fire that fuels confident access to God.
     3. *“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* --Hebrews 4:16

1. **CONCLUSION**
   1. A homeless man living on the streets of a city in Bolivia fled from the police who were bringing him news of a $6-million inheritance. Tomas Martinez, 67, apparently thought the police were about to arrest him for his alcohol and drug habits. The man disappeared without a trace, and was never found. [[3]](#footnote-3)
   2. Many times, like Mr. Martinez, we allow fear, shame, anger, anxiety, etc. to dictate our relationship with God – instead of receiving the inheritance that God has planned for each one of us.
   3. While Gentiles can never pray like Christians, Christians often times fall into the trap of praying like Gentiles. If you find yourself in a business, or performance based relationship with God, pray for Romans 8:16-17 to happen in your life…
   4. *“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”* --Romans 8:16-17

1. Study: Brandeis University, Americans pray just to get through the day, by Jennifer Harper (contact): 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Adapted from a sermon outline by Tim Keller. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://edant.clarin.com/diario/2000/07/23/s-04201.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-3)