

How NOT to Pray

I want to offer up six things we must stay away from when we seek to pray. Now, to be clear, this list is not complete as there are certainly other things that could be added. For now, we will stick to these six.

1. Be surrounded by distractions
 - a. We must remain focused on prayer. What I mean by this is we must do all we can to clear away any distractions or things that will try and steal our attention. We see Jesus practice this in Mark 1:35, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying.” Jesus made sure that when He went to spend time praying He would be alone and not surrounded by things that could distract Him.
2. Say familiar phrases and words that we have heard others pray just to make it through the prayer
 - a. We must engage both our mind and our heart when we pray. If all our prayers consist of are the phrases and words of others we ourselves have not truly prayed. The risk here is that we won't even understand what we have just said. I myself have been guilty of being asked to pray or volunteered to pray and found myself saying certain words or phrases that sound good and smart but I did not really even know what they meant. We cannot sincerely pray if our prayer is full of words and phrases that are outside of our knowledge.
 - i. Lawn mower illustration: Think of it like mowing your lawn. You may have mowed your lawn a hundred times and have the route down so well that you could do it in your sleep. So let's say that one day you went out to mow and started your mower up and began driving it around in the same route as always and you finish your route and look at your yard and see that not a single blade of grass looks like it's been cut. You may ask yourself, “What happened? I started the mower and drove it in the same route as I always do and yet it seems to have been ineffective, what went wrong? Is the mower broken?”. You then start to look the mower over and as you do that you realize that you never engaged the blades and so even though the mower was running and you went over your entire yard it didn't do any good because you forgot to engage the key part of the mower. Our prayers can sometimes happen this way too if we do not engage both our mind AND heart. We must not just use our mind to offer up empty words, we also need our hearts to offer up real and sincere words to our God
3. Pray to someone other than God
 - a. We don't pray to Mary
 - b. We don't pray to the Apostles

- c. We don't pray to our loved ones
 - d. We pray to God alone by the Spirit based on the blood of Christ according to the will of the Father
4. Pray however you want
- a. We do not get to decide what activities qualify as prayer. People sometimes think or say that they talk with God by walking in nature, or making music, or making art, or endless other things. What prayer is, is not determined by us but is determined and defined by the One to Whom we pray. Prayer is coming to God and communicating on His terms and not ours.
5. Pray as a performance
- a. Jesus called out the hypocrites for this directly. They made sure that when they prayed they would be seen and heard by all those around by standing on the street corners and in the synagogues and making a spectacle out of it. Jesus also said that in doing that they have already received their reward which was the praise of men. Jesus instead says that we should go into a private place to pray because the Father who sees in secret will reward us. The point of prayer is not to be seen and viewed as a superior Christian it is instead to come before God with your praise, needs, and thanksgivings.
6. Focus on yourself
- a. If our prayers consist of only words like "I, me, my, myself, mine, etc." we are not praying how Jesus taught us to pray. Our prayers need to be viewed through the lens of the church. Jesus in the Lord's Prayer does not use a singular pronoun at all, instead He uses plural ones like "Our, us, and we". This does not mean that we cannot use "I, me, my, etc." it just means that they should not be the dominant words. Paul in Ephesians 6:18 commands us to "Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession **for all the saints.**" We are to pray for and with all the saints and we cannot do that if we focus only on ourselves.