



The Sermon on The Mount  
Bible Study Session 15a  
Matthew 6:5-6



Study By  
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Greek NT

5 Καὶ ὅταν προσεύχησθε, οὐκ ἔσεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταί· ὅτι φιλοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν ἐστῶτες προσεύχεσθαι, ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσι τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν. 6 σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχη, εἰσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖόν σου καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ· καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.

La Biblia  
de las Américas

5 Y cuando oréis, no seáis como los hipócritas; porque a ellos les gusta ponerse en pie y orar en las sinagogas y en las esquinas de las calles, para ser vistos por los hombres. En verdad os digo que ya han recibido su recompensa. 6 Pero tú, cuando ores, entra en tu aposento, y cuando hayas cerrado la puerta, ora a tu Padre que está en secreto, y tu Padre, que ve en lo secreto, te recompensará.

NRSV

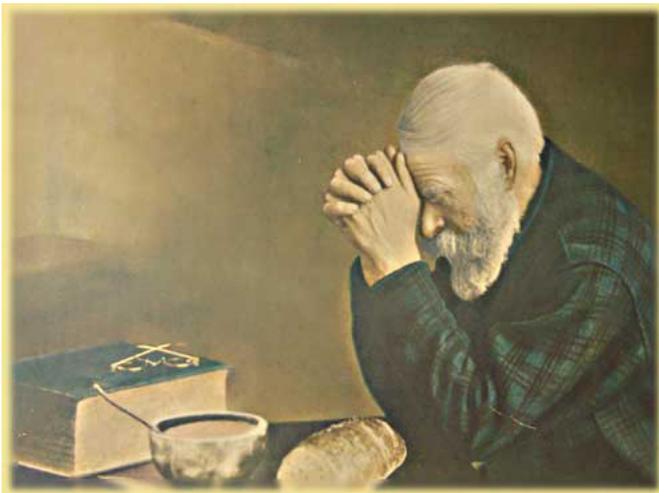
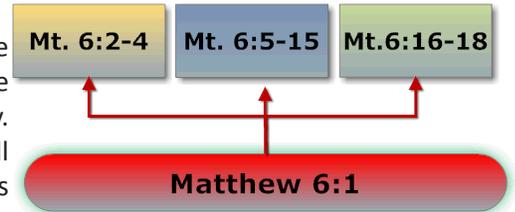
5 And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

NLT

5 And now about prayer. When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I assure you, that is all the reward they will ever get. 6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father secretly. Then your Father, who knows all secrets, will reward you.

The Outline of the Text:

The focus on prayer in vv. 5-15 comes as the second topic on piety in the section in 6:1-18. But its importance is not only this section but in the entire sermon is signaled by the 'doubling' of emphasis on prayer, vv. 5-6 and vv. 7-15.<sup>1</sup> The first subunit, vv. 5-6, reflects the uniform structure found in all three pericopes, vv. 2-4, 5-15, 16-18, but the second subunit, vv. 7-15, follows the structure only generally while maintaining distinctive structural features that set it apart from the others. Matthew evidently incorporated material from a different source here than for the other materials, and chose to pretty much leave the material in its original form, rather than modify it to better fit the literary pattern of the remaining material in the Sermon. Vv. 7-15 do represent Q material, while vv. 5-6 are M material. For the past four or five centuries commentators, beginning with the Reformer Martin Luther in the 1500s, have seen



this 'doubling' effect as suggesting that prayer is the central foundation of Christian discipleship as set forth in the Sermon. Everything in the first part of the Sermon -- 5:1-6:4 -- leads up to prayer; and everything afterwards -- 6:16-7:29 -- flows out of prayer. The outline of the Sermon at the end of this study reflects this understanding. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus without communicating with the Heavenly Father through a deepening prayer life! The vitality of the Christian life depends on prayer.

In the same pattern as vv. 2-4 and vv. 16-18, these verses begin with the negative model of the hypocrites (v. 5; #s 69-70 below), and then the positive model of how Jesus wants His disciples to pray follows (v. 6; #s 71-73). Again the theological premise of false and proper piety is evaluated in terms of eschatological reward by the Heavenly Father. False piety in prayer gains no blessing

<sup>1</sup>Because of this doubling effect in vv. 5-15, we will consider the material in two separate studies in order to do better justice to the richness of material found in these verses.

from God, while proper piety in prayer brings God's blessing in final judgment. This structure builds off the foundation in 6:1. The block diagram of these verses will visually illustrate this thought structure and make it easier to see how this unit corresponds to the standard literary pattern in 6:1-18.

6:5  
And  
whenever you pray  
69 **do not be**  
like the hypocrites  
because they love  
in the synagogues  
and  
on the street corners  
to stand  
while praying  
so that they may be seen by men;  
70 **truly I tell you,**  
they have received their reward.

6:6  
But  
you when you pray  
71 **go**  
into your closet,  
and  
having shut the door  
72 **pray to your Father**  
who is in the secret place;  
and  
73 **your Father ... will reward you.**  
who sees in the secret place

## I. How not to pray, v. 5

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

Καὶ ὅταν προσεύχησθε, οὐκ ἔσεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταί· ὅτι φιλοῦσιν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς γωνίαις τῶν πλατειῶν ἐστῶτες προσεύχεσθαι, ὅπως φανῶσιν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις· ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἀπέχουσι τὸν μισθὸν αὐτῶν.

### **What is prayer?** ὅταν προσεύχησθε

The concept of prayer in the ancient world was multi-faceted to say the least.

**Prayer in the Gentile world.** Prayer was virtually always expressed audibly and not silently. The view of prayer typically was that it was essential for getting the gods to do what one desired. Substantial repetition of phrases etc. was an important part of the praying, as 6:7 will allude to. The line of distinction between prayer and magic in ancient paganism was blurred to the point of not being distinguishable

**Prayer in the ancient Jewish world.** By the time of Jesus, prayer among the Jewish people had evolved from the concepts found in the Old Testament into more ritualized, institutionalized patterns of praying. Among religious Jews today, prayer is both individual and especially corporate. It follows prescribed written prayers found in the *Siddur*, the traditional Jewish prayer book.

**Prayer in early Christianity.** The teaching of the apostles elsewhere in the New Testament beyond the four gospels that contain the teaching of Jesus on prayer is fairly extensive. The vocabulary of prayer language in the New Testament includes numerous terms related to prayer.<sup>2</sup> But the texts using these terms provide only a partial understanding of prayer in the New Testament. Unquestionably, Jesus' own teaching and example served as the foundation for early Christian understanding of prayer. The discussion of prayer in the writings of the apostle Paul is particularly important as well. The NT teaching contrasts with the OT at several points: 1) fewer recorded prayers than in the OT; 2) more instruction on how to pray than in the OT; 3) more emphasis upon intercessory prayer in the NT.

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<sup>2</sup>“The NT uses a variety of terms with reference to prayer (proseúchomai, “pray”; déomai, “ask/seek”; eucharistéō, “give thanks”; krázō, “cry”).” [Samuel E. Balentine, “Prayer,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 1077]. Also see the online article, “Prayer,” by Dennis L. Okhoim in the *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

**What was wrong with the Pharisees' praying?** οὐκ ἔσεσθε ὡς οἱ ὑποκριταί.<sup>3</sup>

Prayer offered publicly in the synagogues is quite easy to understand. To moderns, prayer offered 'on the street corners' may seem strange, unless one has familiarity with the Israeli, Jewish, and Moslem practice of prayers offered three times daily. In ancient Judaism, devout Jews were expected to stop all activities at mid-morning, noon, and mid-afternoon to offer a prayer to God. These were taken from the Psalms as a part of the daily prayers set forth in the *Amidah*. The self-serving motive for praying is where the wrongness of the Pharisees' praying was found, not in the location and posture of their praying.



## II. How to pray properly, v. 6

But whenever 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.

σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχῃ, εἰσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖόν σου καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ· καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.

The contrast here is between Christian praying and the praying of the first century Pharisees. This contrast focuses mainly on motive and manner, rather than on content. The distinctively Christian content comes in the second layer on prayer in vv. 7-15.

**How often should we pray?** σὺ δὲ ὅταν προσεύχῃ

The indefinite reference here deliberately rejects the ancient Jewish tradition of three set times daily for one to pray.

**Where should we pray?** εἰσελθε εἰς τὸ ταμεῖόν σου

At first glance, Jesus seems to be advocating against the public praying in the synagogue and on the street corner with the specification of location for prayer here.<sup>4</sup> The obvious hyperbolic language here dramatically stresses the importance of prayer being focused on God and not on impressing people.

**Why should we pray?** καὶ κλείσας τὴν θύραν σου πρόσευξαι τῷ πατρὶ σου τῷ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ· καὶ ὁ πατήρ σου ὁ βλέπων ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ ἀποδώσει σοι.

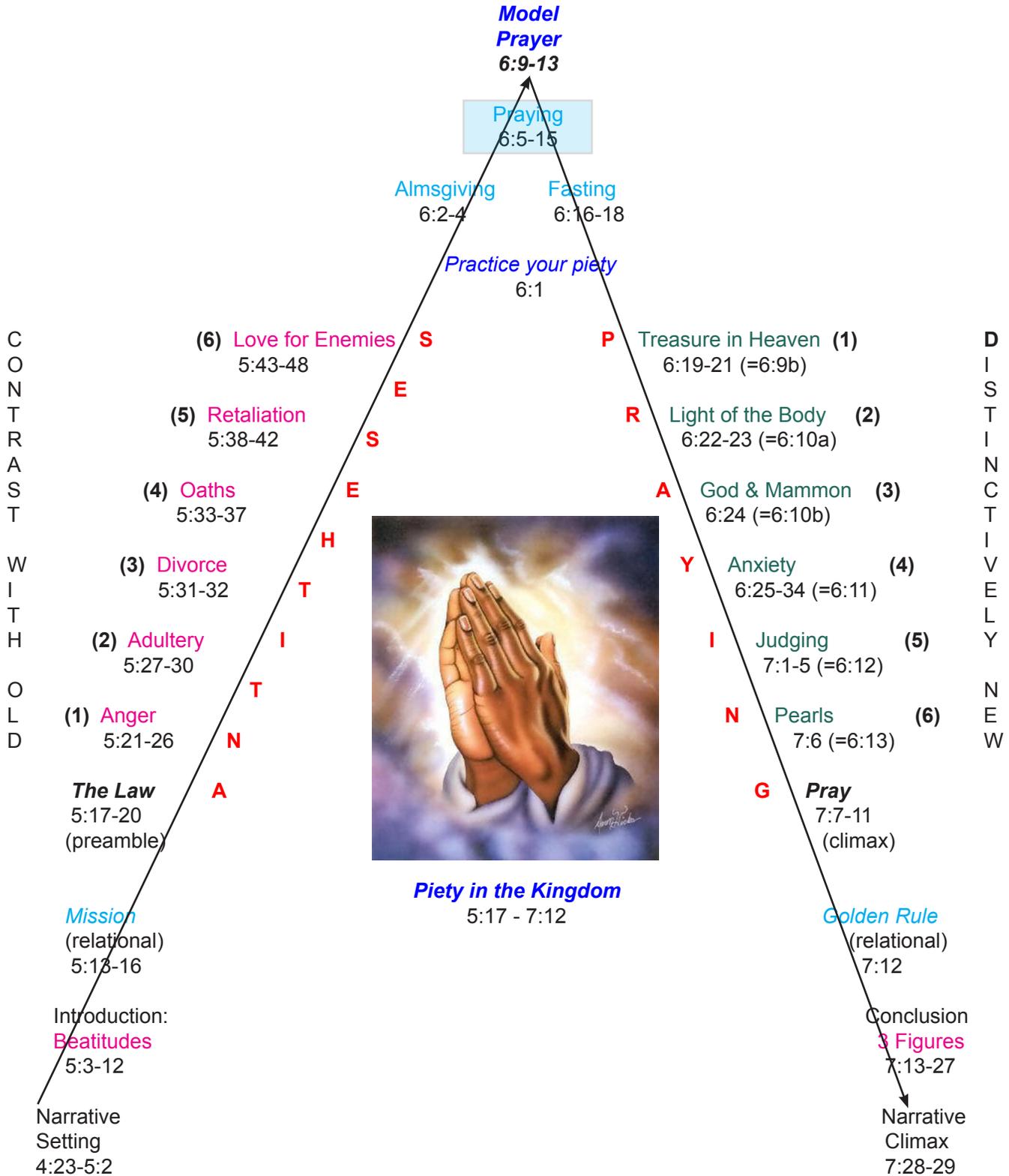
The eschatological thrust of this commendation is present with an emphasis upon God acknowledging proper praying in eschatological judgment. Both statements here and in verse four reverse the negative assessment of improper piety in verse one, μισθὸν οὐκ ἔχετε παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ ὑμῶν τῷ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς ("for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven").

The eschatological nature of the pronouncement here shifts the understanding away from the idea that God's reward is granting me what I request in prayer. Far more important is the point that when we stand before God in final judgment He will acknowledge that we have prayed to Him correctly and in a way that has pleased Him.

<sup>3</sup>For an example of a Pharisee's prayer see Luke 18:9-14, NRSV: 9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 *The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, "God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.*" 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted." The Greek phrase πρὸς ἑαυτὸν in verse 11 has a double meaning that the NRSV fails to capture. Positioned between the participle 'standing' and the verb 'prayed' it carries both the meaning 'standing by himself' and 'prayed to himself.' By separating himself off from other worshippers he ended up talking to himself, rather than to God in his prayers. His arrogance in prayer invalidated his praying completely.

<sup>4</sup>"The command to go into one's innermost room and lock the door and then pray is clearly hyperbolic (cf. 6:3). Even if there were no sessions of public prayer at Khirbet Qumran (a disputed issue; see Wacholder, pp. 88, 253, n. 333), in Mt 6:5-6 public prayer is not being banned (cf. Mt 11:25; Mk 6:41; Lk 11:1; Jn 11:41-2), only its vainglorious use; otherwise temple cult and synagogue service would here be abolished. The point is this: prayer is for God alone; it requires no human audience. The soul in prayer must be turned only towards God. One who went into the inner room only making sure beforehand that others knew where he was to be and what he was to do would be no better off than one who prayed for show on the street corners (cf. Chrysostom, *Hom. on Mt. 19:3*)." [W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 584]

**The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount**  
**Matthew 4:23-7:29**



**Source:** Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.