

Prayer Pointers for Public Leading

This lesson on prayer has to do less with our own *private prayers* (cf. Matt.6:6), and is more focused on our *public prayer* (cf. 1Tim.2:1-2,8) as a part of our worship to God. As such, we'll not be spending a lot of time with the five different Greek words describing various types of *prayer*. Neither will we be going point by point through the *disciple's* or *model prayer* as taught by Jesus in Matt.6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. Instead, what we will do is give some basic considerations of what public prayer **is** and **isn't**. *This lesson is designed and presented to help us do a better job of this important aspect of our worship- not to "pick on" anyone.

Pointers for Leading Public Prayer- Understanding what Public Prayer **Is** and **Isn't**.

Prayer **is**:

-the expression of the heart's desire, Rom.10:1. It should be the natural outreach of communication that is based on relationship. That is, we communicate to our *heavenly Father* our praise, gratitude, and petitions. As such, it should manifest ***intimacy, Matt.6:9; fellowship, 1John 1:5-9; and covenant relationship, Heb.8:10-12.*** Through prayer, we *pour out our hearts* to the One who loves us more than any other, desires nothing but the best for us, and has promised to hear and grant our petitions.

So, leading "public prayer" should take these things into consideration. But leading public prayer is also- and very importantly, a matter of knowing and conveying "*the heart's desire*" of **those for whom you speak**. You are speaking (leading) **for them to God- not leading them for God** through "prayer." As such...

Prayer **is not**:

-the pulpit. Leading public prayer is not an opportunity to "preach to" those for whom you speak. Such efforts are surely focused in the wrong direction. If you feel the congregation needs teaching or rebuking on a particular point, talk to the Elders about it, or an opportunity to teach a class or present a lesson. Don't use the leading of a public prayer to rebuke or admonish- remember you are talking *to God for the congregation*, not talking *to the congregation for God* (or yourself).

Also, and along the same lines, while referring to scriptures generally or specifically can be appropriately used in prayer, it always seems somewhat odd to quote scripture back to God who gave it. Care should be taken when so doing. If we're really talking to God, that's one thing, but sometimes we're "preaching" to someone in the audience when this occurs. There are better times and methods to get a point across than hijacking a public prayer to do so.

-the spotlight. Leading public prayer is not an opportunity for one to "shine" in the spotlight. Thus, it is not an opportunity for one to show how intelligent, eloquent, or righteous they are, or how well they've done on the "Enrich Your Word Power" tests in the Reader's Digest, cf. **Matt.6:1,5**. Please remember you're **leading prayer** for others to God. If those being led are confused by extravagantly complicated sentence structures and words they can't understand, you're not "leading" prayer for them at all, you're just "showing off"! Lead a prayer that as many as possible can a "Amen" (which means "so be it"). If this "Amen" doesn't occur, then perhaps those for whom you spoke: (1) couldn't understand

what you said; (2) they didn't agree with what you said; or (3) didn't have the desires of their hearts expressed. In any case, **you** may have actually prayed to God, but **they** were not led in prayer by you! Brief sidebar to the congregation: If the prayer leader does express your heart's desire in words that you understood and with which you agreed, let him and God know so by saying a hearty "Amen!"

Prayer is:

-from the collective emotion. It should be that which fills the collective hearts of those being led- whether joy, pain, thanksgiving, praise, or petition, **Eph.3:13-21**; **Luke 18:1-8**.

Prayer is not:

-from the memory. From the passages just noted- especially Luke 18:1-8, it is apparent that praying for the same thing(s) repetitively is not wrong. But, just reciting a number of flowery "spiritual-sounding" phrases strung together is not prayer either. Sometimes in leading public prayer, we get nervous and fall back on reciting "prayerful" phrases that we've heard others use, or have used repetitively ourselves because we think we have to say something, **cf. Matt.6:7**. It's *meaningless* part of *repetitions* that make them wrong! And please, understand that there is nothing wrong with pauses, even long ones, in leading public prayer to collect your thoughts before proceeding. In fact, it even helps to focus the attention of those being led! Likewise, there is nothing that says a public prayer has to be a certain length. Prayers, like sermons (at least so I'm told!), can be so long as to lose the interest/attention of those being led! Prayers that convey to God the thoughts and desires in the hearts of those being led are sufficiently long whatever their length when sincere. If those to being led in prayer know, when your name is announced as the one leading the prayer, what phrases will be included in the prayer, you've probably fallen into the trap of "*vain (or meaningless) repetitions.*"

Prayer is:

-to be with recognized dependence, Luke 18:13-14. While Paul teaches that there should be *confidence* and *boldness* enabled through Christ who is our access to the Father, **cf. Eph.3:12**, we should remember three things: (1) **to Whom** we are praying- the Creator of all we see and know and beyond; (2) **for whom** we are praying, both *objectively* 1Tim.2:1-2, and *subjectively* (those for whom we speak); and (3) **who we are** in praying- God's weak and unprofitable servant who is unworthy of His grace and mercy, Luke 17:10. Therefore,

Prayer is not:

-in self-righteousness, or arrogance, Luke 18:9-12. We can be *confident and bold* (as Paul suggested to the Ephesians) in our approach to God, without being *self-righteous* or *arrogant* in our tone, or the content of our prayer. Our *confidence* is in Christ, not ourselves! This should be distinguishable in our attitudes through the words we choose to address the Father.

Other Considerations / Final Pointers: speak loudly enough to be heard by all; speak clearly enough to be understood by all; and, speak sincerely from the hearts of all to be "amened" by all. Then, "pray for us!"