

Introduction

According to a 2016 article published by the Huffington Post, 87% percent of Americans have prayed, specifically for someone else healing.¹ The article goes on to suggest that prayer isn't just something that poor, uneducated people do, but that as the percentage would suggest, most Americans have at least a perception of spirituality as a good thing and one of the ways that it manifests itself is through prayer for healing.

If the majority of Americans pray. You, your co-workers, neighbors, boss, political opponents, all pray - are we doing it properly? Today we are going to look at three ideas. How to pray like a pagan, and what I want you to ask yourself is have you been praying, maybe unknowingly, more like a pagan than a Christian. Second, we will look at how to pray like a Christian - were there is a very specic difference, a special sauce, to the idea of prayer that is unique from all other world religions. And finally, we will look for a few minutes, what it means to pray with a childlike faith.

How To Pray Like A Pagan: Verses 5-8

Last week we looked extensively at the warning Jesus has for those who practice their spirituality for in public for the benefit of being seen. They have their reward! Public praise or admiration. Rather, Jesus says pray in secret. This is where our idea of morning devotions is rooted. Jesus personal practice throughout the Gospel accounts was private prayer. Remember Jesus going into the desert to prepare himself for ministry (Matthew 4), Luke 5:16 says, “**But he (Jesus) would withdraw to desolate places and pray.**” It is especially appropriate to remember this week of all weeks, Jesus going to the garden of Gethsemane to ask God if there is any other way... (Matthew 26:36-46)

But the phrase that catches our eye is this visual of pagans “heaping up empty phrases”. Now I believe it would be a mistake, as I have often heard, for someone to jump to bagging on the Catholic tradition of liturgical prayer as what Jesus is talking about here. Obviously, there is no Pope, no Vatican, and no popemobile in the 1st century. In fact, the suggestion that the Catholic practice of prayer is someone similar to pagan prayer is so far off base that it really underscores how little we understand both of the liturgical practice (done rightly) and the historical practice of prayer in EVERY culture throughout history.

So what is Jesus talking about. In contemporary Rome, the “Gentiles” believe that prayer was a process of exact recipe - that worship and prayer specifically had to be conducted through a

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https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/healing-prayer-most-americans-pray-for-healing_us_571e4e52e4b0d912d5ff42dc

process where if not done correctly, or the proper words not said in an exact sequence, entire festivals would have to be restarted to get it right. Let's begin by looking at a type of pagan prayer that has been fairly influential in Western society.

How many of you have read Homer's Iliad? Prayer is an important part of the Greek epic. Homer relies on prayer for the "gods" action. A character named Phoenix (in book IV - lines 497-501) says, "*Even gods give in though they're mightier and mightier than you - yes, even they can be moved by prayer and incense, libations, and burned offerings when men have transgressed and committed wrongs.*"

For a quick refresher, here's how Homeric prayer works:

"Formal Greek prayer in the epic poems...is ritualized and consists of four basic stages: cleansing, prayer, sacrifice and libation. Acts and gestures form part of the homeric prayer as much as words do. The characters wash their hands, purifying themselves in the context of catharsis. They attain an appropriate posture, lift their arms. They address their gods directly, praise the divine admitting the omnipotence of the Olympians and thus the cosmic hierarchy. They remind the gods of the already established relationship between the supplicant and the divine in an effort to deem themselves worthy of their god's attention. The characters are now ready to verbally announce their noble wish to be granted and proceed to offer mostly in form of a sacrifice an act of submission."²

Do you see the recipe baked into this explanation. Cleansing, prayer, sacrifice and libation. You want you some good apple pie. Here's how you make it ancient Greek style.

Let's look briefly at how this plays out in the first book of Homer's Iliad. (See Book I: 33-42 (request) and 497-501 (answer)).

Now Tim Keller points out the uniquely transaction nature of this type of prayer. Do you see how there is an exchange here? The priest reminds the god of his personal devotion and past sacrifices and begs that the god intervene in his present need, specifically the return of his daughter. And the god, recognizing the truth of the priest's devotion, complies. It is a transaction. Keller compares this transaction as similar to what is expected between a tenant and a landlord. A business relationship. Goods and services are exchanged.

How to Pray Like a Christian: (The Special Sauce: Father!)

And here is the hinge-point. Here is what makes the apple pie so good. Here's what the difference is between pagan's who heap up empty phrases, trying to convince gods of their worth. The biggest difference between pagan prayer and Christian prayer. The Christian prays

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeric_Prayer

not to a god who owes him some favor because of his past good deeds or promised future sacrifices, but to someone he calls Father.³

Verse 8: Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray like this, “Our Father....”

Romans 9:15 says it this way, **“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”**

My kids don't pay rent! Our relationship is not transactional. Our relationship is a family-based relationship. My kids call me Dad, Daddy! There is a healthy expectation that I will care for my kids regardless of their actions, their successes, their failures, their needs, their emotional state, their physical abilities, their desires, etc. And the reverse is true too, my kids don't love me or accept me because I'm good to them, or because I feed them, they don't obey because I pay them an allowance (which I don't). They are my kids because I'm their dad and their my kids. We're stuck with each other.

And isn't it great that verse 8 reminds us that like any good Dad, our FATHER “knows what you need before you ask him.”

Have you ever had this experience as a child. Where you wanted something, maybe a Christmas gift. I remember when I got my first BB-gun. I didn't even know I wanted a BB-gun, but when I woke up on that cold Christmas morning with a BB-gun under the Christmas tree how I celebrated and found great pleasure in such a wonderful gift. And now as a dad I relish Christmas and birthdays were I try to figure out how to best bless my kids.

How To Pray Like A Child : (9-14)

Part of the beauty of The Lord's prayer is its simplicity. It isn't long. It isn't flashy. It is something we teach our children at young ages. Just a couple of observations.

Hallowed be your Name: In the classic western Big Jake, John Wayne's character, an estranged father Jake returns and his oldest son calls him “Daddy” in the most obviously mocking voice imaginable. We come to Our Father with reverence due his Divine stature.

Your Kingdom Come, your will be done. Don't pray anxiously. Kids understand that their parents are protecting them, caring for them, and setting properly goals and boundaries in their life. There is no need to life anxiously (which we will study in just a few weeks starting in verse

³ Tim Keller - The Basis of Our Prayer “Our Father” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqxXABgRhVo>

25). God's kingdom is coming, he's got it all under control. Just because we don't see our parents paycheck, doesn't mean that they aren't getting paid.

Give us this day our daily bread - The Message translates verse 11, "Keep us alive with three square meals." But sometimes, kids do have anxious thoughts, like crazy stuff like how are we going to eat, how are we going to retire, my job is not very fulfilling, are my own children going to grow up to productive adults. But we are told to pray simply, Father - give us three square meals a day and that will be enough..."

Forgive our debts, as we forgive those who sin against us. - When I would get into fights with my siblings as a kid, my Mom had this saying that used to drive me crazy. She would sit down with me, after separating the angry kids, ask what happened and whenever I tried to put the blame on my brothers, she would say that I could only tell her the parts that I could control. In other words, what did you do wrong! I WAS PROVOKED!!! But the basis of that simple parental message is right here. We ought to forgive because we have been forgiven and allow God to deal with justice (turn the other cheek - 5:39).

Lead Us Not into Temptation / Deliver us from Evil: There is nothing worse than a spoiled brat. Kids that ask their parents for inappropriate gifts. Mom / dad can I have an Xbox, can I have a iphone, can i have a car, can I have a 401K, can I have a prosperous and growing church that is locally recognized within the community as a CITY ON A HILL, can I have a retirement home on Payette Lake?