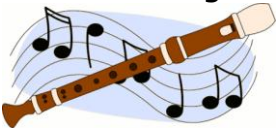


You're So Vain

by

Mary Kane

When I was growing up our house was almost always full of music. My mother was a wonderful musician. Some of my earliest memories are of my mom singing to me. One of my favorite songs was a novelty song from the 40's. To my three-year-old ears the song seemed to be about horses and lambs. It wasn't until many years later that I learned that what sounded like nonsense syllables to me were really words. I still enjoy singing this funny song every now and then when the mood strikes me. On a more serious note, Jesus had something to say about nonsense words concerning prayer. Let's meditate on what He said in the Book of Matthew.



Please read Matthew 6:7-13.

Earlier in this chapter Jesus warns us about not praying like the hypocrites. In verse 7 we are told not to pray like the:

What characterizes the prayers of the heathen?

Why do they think their prayers will be effective?

The Greek word for *vain repetitions* is *battologeo* which translates to repeat the same things over and over, to use many idle words, to babble, to prate. "Some suppose the word derived from Battus, a king of Cyrene, who is said to have stuttered; others from Battus, an author of tedious and wordy poems" (BLB).

Since the heathen do not believe in the Sovereign Lord, perhaps they feel that their prayers will somehow manipulate their circumstances; as if a favorable outcome concerning a situation is directly related to the amount of energy spent in prayer. This sounds like witchcraft to me.

I hear some of my students engage in this type of prayer when I am handing back tests; they will say over and over again, "Please let me get an A, please let me get an A. This type of prayer always bothers me, and I correct my students when I observe this behavior. And I stand guilty as charged, for I have engaged in this same type of prayer myself (usually the circumstance involves a red light I wish to be green when I am late for work).

Verse 8 gives us a very good reason why we do not need to engage in *vain repetitions*.

Please read this verse again and write the reason in the space provided.

Pagan peoples had no assurance that their gods could hear them. They often went through very long and painful ceremonies, hoping to attract the attention of their gods (see 1 Kings 18). We, as Christians, don't have to repeatedly engage in long painful demonstrations trying to attract God's attention; according to this verse He already knows what we need before we even ask Him. Although our Heavenly Father does not need us to tell Him our prayer request, He still instructs us to pray to Him. God honors our continued obedience to prayer.

Matthew Henry wrote that the heathen "thought he [God] needed many words to make him understand what was said to him, or to bring him to comply with their requests; as if he were weak and ignorant, and hard to be entreated." God wants us to pray to Him because He longs for us to be in a personal relationship with Him. If God didn't want us to pray, if He was going to just take care of our needs before we even knew we needed something, there would be no need for Matthew 6: 9-13! Our God is so loving and caring. He already knows our needs, but He still wants His children to talk to Him. What a privilege we have—conversation with our Heavenly Father! How freeing it was for me to discover that I do not need to have faith in my ability to pray; my faith is placed in my God's ability to hear and answer my prayers!

Please read over verses 9-13 again, looking for key issues or elements that Jesus said we should pray each day. I did the first verse for you:

Verse 9: Each day I should praise God for His holiness and the goodness of His name.

Verse 10:

Verse 11:

Verse 12:

Verse 13:

I've had trouble understanding verse 13 in the past. At times I've wondered why I would need to pray to God not to lead me into temptation when the book of James promises that no one is tempted by God. I went on a search and found an answer to my question. The Greek word for *temptations* in this text transliterates *peirasmos* which means, "adversity, affliction, trouble: sent by God and serving to test or prove one's character, faith, holiness." *Peirasmos* also means "the trial of man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, constancy, testing." God does not lead his people to *temptation* but He will allow us to be tested.

Verses 12 and 13, "Having prayed that the guilt of sin may be removed, we pray, as it is fit, that we may never return again to folly, that we may not be tempted to it. It is not as if God tempted any to sin; but, "Lord, do not let Satan loose upon us; chain up that *roaring lion*, for he is subtle and spiteful; Lord, do not leave us to ourselves for we are very weak; Lord, do not *lay stumbling-blocks* and snares before us, nor put us into circumstances that may be *an occasion of falling*" (*BLB Matthew Henry*). I have often prayed for God to give me strength not to fall during a time of testing. Jesus knew how much we'd need to bring this type of petition before God, so he modeled it for us.

Take a few moments to look over your answers to the key issues above. Use this list to help you pray to your Heavenly Father right now.

And in all things we pray the prayer that never fails Dear Father, "Thy will be done." Amen.

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