

# ON PRIVATE PRAYER

## MATTHEW 6

**Key concept** – vs. 1

*“practicing righteousness before people ...”*

Why?

Clear implication?

Benefit?

\_\_\_\_\_ by earth

\_\_\_\_\_ by heaven

**3 examples** of “practicing righteousness before people ...”

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Hypocrites** love to pray \_\_\_\_\_.

**Humble believers** are commanded to pray \_\_\_\_\_.

Result?

*We are often taught, that the seeming goodness and piety of hypocrites is not of a lasting and persevering nature. It is so with respect to their practice of the duty of prayer in particular, and especially of secret prayer. They can omit this duty, and their omission of it not be taken notice of by others, who know what profession they have made. So that a regard to their own reputation doth not oblige them still to practice it. If others saw how they neglect it, it would exceedingly shock their charity towards them. But their neglect doth not fall under their observation; at least not under the observation of many. Therefore they may omit this duty, and still have the credit of being converted persons.*

*Men of this character can come to a neglect of secret prayer by degrees without very much shocking their peace. For though indeed for a converted person to live in a great measure without secret prayer, is very wide of the notion they once had of a true convert; yet they find means by degrees to alter their notions, and to bring their principles to suit with their inclinations; and at length they come to that, in their notions of things, that a man may be a convert, and yet live very much in neglect of this duty. In time, they can bring all things to suit well together, an hope of heaven, and an indulgence of sloth in gratifying carnal appetites, and living in a great measure a prayerless life. They cannot indeed suddenly make these things agree; it must be a work of time; and length of time will effect it. By degrees they find out ways to guard and defend their consciences against those powerful enemies; so that those enemies, and a quiet, secure conscience, can at length dwell pretty well together.*

Whereas it is asserted in the doctrine, that it is the manner of hypocrites, after a while, in a great measure to leave off this duty; I would observe to you,

1. That it is not intended but that they may commonly continue to the end of life in yielding an external attendance on open prayer, or prayer with others. They may commonly be present at public prayers in the congregation, and also at family prayer. This, in such places of light as this is, men commonly do before ever they are so much as awakened. Many vicious persons, who make no pretense to serious religion, commonly attend public prayers in the congregation; and also more private prayers, in the families in which they live, unless it be when carnal designs interfere, or when their youthful pleasures and diversions, and their vain company call them; and then they make no conscience of attending family prayer. Otherwise they may continue to attend upon prayer as long as they live, and yet may truly be said not to call upon God. For such prayer, in the manner of it, is not their own. They are present only for the sake of their credit, or in compliance with others. They may be present at these prayers, and yet have no proper prayer of their own. Many of those concerning whom it maybe said, as in Job xv. 4, That they cast off fear and restrain prayer before God, are yet frequently present at family and public prayer.

2. But they in a great measure leave off the practice of secret prayer. They come to this pass by degrees. At first they begin to be careless about it, under some particular temptations. Because they have been out in young company, or have been taken up very much with worldly business, they omit it once: After that they more easily omit it again. Thus it presently becomes a frequent thing with them to omit it and after a while, it comes to that pass, that they seldom attend it. Perhaps they attend it on Sabbath days, and sometimes on other days. But they have ceased to make it a constant practice daily to retire to worship God alone, and to seek his face in secret places. They sometimes do a little to quiet conscience, and just to keep alive their old hope; because it would be shocking to them, even after all their subtle dealing with their consciences to call themselves converts, and yet totally to live without prayer. Yet the practice of secret prayer they have in a great measure left off.

- **Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer** by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

### More specifically ...

Don't pray \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ prayers

Note: **The Lord's Prayer** is NOT meant to be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_!

Instead, it is a \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ we pray ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) and \_\_\_\_\_ we pray for ( \_\_\_\_\_ ).

A prayer for his \_\_\_\_\_

## 20 Reasons to Engage in Private Prayer

adapted from *The Privy Key of Heaven* by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

1. The most eminent \_\_\_\_\_ engaged in private prayer.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ engaged in secret prayer.
3. Secret prayer distinguishes \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Secret prayer lets us \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves before God.
5. Secret duties shall have open \_\_\_\_\_.
6. God most \_\_\_\_\_ himself in secret.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ is the only time for private prayer.
8. Private prayer has prevailing \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Private prayer is the most \_\_\_\_\_ of duties.
10. Secret prayer tends to root out \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Secret prayer \_\_\_\_\_ Christ.
12. Only \_\_\_\_\_ share God's secrets.
13. Private prayer is the Christian's \_\_\_\_\_ in trouble.
14. God is \_\_\_\_\_.
15. If we neglect private prayer, God will not hear our \_\_\_\_\_ prayers.
16. The \_\_\_\_\_ call for private prayer.
17. Those \_\_\_\_\_ should engage in secret prayer.
18. God has put a special mark of favor, honor, and observation, upon those who have prayed in secret.
19. \_\_\_\_\_ hates secret prayer.
20. The Lord's secret ones \_\_\_\_\_ engage in secret prayer.

*Consider, that you alone are the Lord's secret ones, his hidden ones; and therefore if you do not apply yourselves to private prayer, and to your secret retirements, that you may enjoy God in a corner—none will. It is only God's hidden ones, his secret ones—who are spirited, principled, and prepared to wait on God in secret: Exod 19:5, "Then shall you be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people."*

*The Hebrew word signifies God's special jewels, God's proper ones, or God's secret ones—that he keeps in store for himself, and for his own special service and use. Princes lock up with their own hands in secret their most precious and costly jewels; and so does God his: Psalm 135:4, "For the Lord has chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure," or for his secret gem. Psalm 83:3, "They have taken crafty counsel against your people, and consulted against your hidden ones," or your secret ones; so called partly because God hides them in the secret of his tabernacle, Psalm 31:20, and partly because God sets as high a value upon them as men do upon their hidden treasure, their secret treasure; yes, he makes more reckoning of them than he does of all the world besides!*

*And so the world shall know, when God shall arise to revenge the wrongs and injuries that has been done to his secret ones. Neither are there any on earth who know so much of the secrets of his love, of the secrets of his counsels, of the secrets of his purposes, of the secrets of his heart—as his secret ones do. Neither are there any in all the world, who are under those secret influences, those secret assistances, those secret blessings, those secret anointings of the Spirit—as his secret ones are under. And therefore, no wonder if God calls them again, and again, and again, his secret ones.*

**Conclusion:** From Jonathan Edwards

***I conclude my discourse with two directions in order to constancy and perseverance in this duty.***

**1. Watch against the beginnings of a neglect of this duty.** *Persons who have for a time practiced this duty, and afterwards neglect it, commonly leave it off by degrees. While their convictions and religious affections last, they are very constant in their closets, and no worldly business, or company, or diversion hinders them. But as their convictions and affections begin to die away, they begin to find excuses to neglect it sometimes. They are now so hurried; they have now such and such things to attend to; or there are now such inconveniences in the way, that they persuade themselves they may very excusably omit it for this time. Afterwards it pretty frequently so happens, that they have something to hinder, something which they call a just excuse. After a while, a less thing becomes a sufficient excuse than was allowed to be such at first. Thus the person by degrees contracts more and more of an habit of neglecting prayer, and becomes more and more indisposed to it. And even when he doth perform it, it is in such a poor, dull, heartless, miserable manner, that he says to himself, he might as well not do it at all, as do it so. Thus he makes his own dullness and indisposition an excuse for wholly neglecting it, or at least for living in a great measure in the neglect of it. After this manner do Satan and men's own corruptions inveigle them to their ruin.*

*Therefore beware of the first beginnings of a neglect: Watch against temptations to it: Take heed how you begin to allow of excuses. Be watchful to keep up the duty in the height of it; let it not so much as begin to sink. For when you give way, though it be but little, it is like giving way to an enemy in the field of battle; the first beginning of a retreat greatly encourages the enemy, and weakens the retreating soldiers.*

**2. Let me direct you to forsake all such practices as you find by experience do indispose you to the duty of secret prayer.** *Examine the things in which you have allowed yourselves, and inquire whether they have had this effect. You are able to look over your past behavior, and may doubtless, on an impartial consideration, make a judgment of the practices and courses in which you have allowed yourselves.*

*Particularly let young people examine their manner of company keeping, and the round of diversions in which, with their companions, they have allowed themselves. I only desire that you would ask at the mouth of your own consciences what has been the effect of these things with respect to your attendance on the duty of secret prayer. Have you not found that such practices have tended to the neglect of this duty? Have you not found that after them you have been more indisposed to it, and less conscientious and careful to attend it? Yea have they not from, time to time, actually been the means of your neglecting it?*

*If you cannot deny that this is really the case, then, if you seek the good of your souls, forsake these practices. Whatever you may plead for them, as that there is no hurt in them, or that there is a time for all things, and the like; yet if you find this hurt in the consequence of them, it is time for you to forsake them. And if you value heaven more than a little worldly diversion; if you set an higher price on eternal glory than on a dance or a song, you will forsake them.*

*If these things be lawful in themselves, yet if your experience show, that they are attended with such a consequence as I have now mentioned, that is enough. It is lawful in itself for you to enjoy your right hand and your right eye: But if, by experience, you find they cause you to offend, it is time for you to cut off the one, and pluck out the other, as you would rather go to heaven without them than go to hell with them, into that place of torment where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*