

# **The Vain Repetitions of the Spiritually Immature**

**By David Lee Burris**

Prayer becomes more  
*meaningful*  
when it becomes less

**MECHANICAL**

(1) **Not to be seen and heard of men.** The hypocrites liked to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners to be seen of men. Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt. 6:5).

(2) **Not for fleshly lust.** James said, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. 4:3).

(3) Not self-exaltation. "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). This attitude leads one to trust himself. This self-righteous person flatteringly induces himself to set aside God's commandments for his own. He then looks contemptuously upon anyone who refuses to accept his "self-willed religion." Is there any greater sin than the sin of presumptuously forming our own will in matters of religion and binding that "human will" upon others?

**Humble obedience to God is very fundamental to being a Christian.** This requires submission, committing oneself to God for guidance. "Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth. Command and I will obey." Samuel told Saul, "Hath the Lord so great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23).

David said, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression" (Psalm 19:13). Self-exaltation, self-righteousness has no place in the plan of God for man's salvation. James said, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). Self-exaltation is opposed to what Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . they that mourn . . . the meek" (Matthew 5:3, 4, 5). The proud, self-centered and self-righteous man must be taught humility, faith and obedience (James 4:6-10), 13-17; Colossians 2:23).

**Prayer must be offered in harmony with God's will.** This is understandable, since one must be a doer of God's commandments to pray acceptably (1 Jn. 3:22; Jas. 5:16; 1 Jn. 3:7, 10; Psa. 119:172). Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matthew 6:10). For one to say this is a quibble to evade God's failure to answer, seems to reflect upon the very first recognition of God's own prerogative to act within the realm of His own will. To say that God must respond in agreement to any person's prayer is to subjugate God to man rather than man to God. When a child requests a favor of this father, he does not demand. His father complies with the request as he deems wise. Cannot we allow our Heavenly Father at least this right? He knows what is best and will give it. Our faith in Him bids us to accept that and desirously pray, "Thy will be done, and not mine."

(4) **Not just a set form nor fixed expression.** A study of Matthew's and Luke's account of Jesus teaching His disciples to pray will prove this (Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:2-4). **Jesus did not give a set form but rather taught His disciples the "manner" in which to pray.** I repeat, it is an example of prayer. The Lord's prayer is recorded in John 17. Other occasions of Jesus praying are given, but this prayer is offered for all. It is indeed the prayer that should touch our hearts and move us to strive to become instrumental in bringing about its answer. It should also impress upon us the need of prayer. "Lord, teach us how to pray."

(5) **Not much speaking (multitude of words).** **"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 6:7).** This seems to be a weakness among us. It also hinders some from leading in prayer. They say, "I cannot pray as well as some others." This means, "I do not have the proper and dignified words." Remember, one is not heard for his "much speaking." This suggests that we need to be taught how to pray. – *Internet Sourcing*

## This Is Not Merely A Roman Catholic Criticism

### **DEAR ROMAN CATHOLIC**

**Praying the rosery is blasphemy against the Lord Jesus, for it exalts Mary. Our prayers and reverance are to be to the Lord and no one else.**

**The rosery is not biblical.**

**This practice is vain repetition.**

**PRAYING THE ROSARY  
IS BLASPHEMY**



The complete ROSARY involves repeating the Hail Mary 53 times. Jesus said, "When ye pray, use not VAIN REPETITIONS, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their MUCH SPEAKING" (Matt. 6:7). The Egyptians hung an image of Horus from their rosary. Their rosary formula was "a protection upon earth, and it will secure for the deceased the affection of men, gods, and the Spirit-souls which are perfect. Moreover, it acteth as a spell in Khert-Neter, but it must be recited by thee on behalf of the Osiris Ra, regularly and continually MILLIONS of times" (Book of the Dead, 567).



# The Catholic Apology Itself Is Without Substance

## “VAIN REPETITION”

- “As the heathens do” - Jesus was referring to “empty” or “vain” vocal prayer as practiced by the pagans, “who feared to omit from their prayer the name of one god or the mention of one request.”
- The key word here is “vain” or “empty,” not repetition. Pagans then believed that their gods had human-like traits, that they were fickle and petty and had to be impressed with their incessant vocal prayers. It wasn’t “repetition” that Jesus did not want, it was praying to false gods and praying without sincerity.

Saturday, July 7, 12



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# **It Is A Serious Problem Across Religious Faiths**

## **Barnes' Notes on the Bible**

**Use not vain repetitions** - The original word here is supposed to be derived from the name of a Greek poet, who made long and weary verses, declaring by many forms and endless repetitions the same sentiment. Hence, it means to repeat a thing often; to say the same thing in different words, or to repeat the same words, as though God did not hear at first. An example of this we have in [1 Kings 18:26](#); "They called on Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us!" It may serve to illustrate this passage, and to show how true is the description here of prevailing modes of prayer, to refer to the forms and modes of devotion still practiced in Palestine by the Muslims. Dr. Thomson ("The Land and the Book") gives the following description of what actually occurs: "See those men on that elevated terrace. One has spread his cloak, other their Persian rugs toward the south. They are Muslims, preparing to say prayers - rather perform them, in this most public place, and in the midst of all this noise and confusion.

"Let us stop and watch the ceremony as it goes on. That man next us raises his open hands until the thumbs touch the ears, exclaiming aloud, "Allah-hu-akbar" - 'God is great.' After uttering mentally a few short petitions, the hands are brought down and folded Together near the girdle, while he recites the first chapter of the Koran, and two or three other brief passages from the same book. And now he bends forward, rests his hands upon his knees, and repeats three times a formula of praise to 'God most great.' Then, standing erect, he cries "Allah-hu-akbar," as at the beginning. Then see him drop upon his knees, and bend forward until his nose and forehead touch the ground directly between his expanded hands. This he repeats three times, muttering all the while the same short formulas of prayer and praise. The next move will bring him to his knees, and then, settling back upon his heels, he will mumble over various small petitions, with sundry grunts and exclamations, according to taste and habit. He has now gone through one regular Rek'ah; and, standing up as at the first, and on exactly the same spot, he will perform a second, and even a third, if specially devout, with precisely the same genuflections.

"They are obliged to repeat some expressions thirty times, others many hundred times. Would that these remarks did not apply to nominal Christians in this land as well as to Muslims!"

The heathen do - The original word is that which is commonly translated "Gentile." The world was divided into two parts, the Jews and the Gentiles; that is, in the original, the "nations," the nations destitute of the true religion. Christ does not fix the length of our prayers. He says that we should not repeat the same thing, as though God did not hear; and it is not improbable that he intended to condemn the practice of long prayers. His own supplications were remarkably short.

# Benson Commentary

**Matthew 6:7-8.** *When ye pray, use not vain repetitions* — A multiplicity of words without meaning, or uttered without seriousness, reverence for God, sincerity, or faith. The original word, βαττολογησητε, is derived from βαττος, a *stutterer*, or *foolish talker*, and λογος, *speech*. The former word was the name of a certain prince of the Cyrenæans, who was a stammerer, and also of a babbling foolish poet, who frequently repeated the same things, and whose rhapsodies were full of tautologies. Our interpretation of the words, *Use not vain repetitions*, Dr. Campbell thinks is too confined, and does not include all that is meant to be signified by our Lord's expression, which, he says, comprehends "every thing, in words, that may justly be called vain, idle, or foolish." The word πολυλογια, *much speaking*, applied to the same fault in the latter part of the verse, is a further elucidation of its meaning. *As the heathen do* — When invoking their false gods: *for they think they shall be heard* — In the prayers which they address to them; *for their much speaking* — Thus we find the priests of Baal crying from morning till noon, *O Baal, hear us*. Hence it appears, partly at least, what the repetitions were which Christ forbade his disciples to use in their prayers, namely, such as proceeded from an opinion that they should be heard for their much speaking, after the manner of the heathen. This opinion, implying a denial of the power, or the knowledge, or the goodness of God, is highly injurious to him; and therefore repetitions in prayer, flowing from it, are highly culpable, as also is the repeating of any words without meaning them, or the expressing in words any petitions or thanksgivings which do not proceed from the heart. Therefore, we should be extremely careful, in all our prayers, to mean what we say, and to desire what we ask, from the very bottom of our hearts. The vain and heathenish repetitions which we are here warned against, are very common, and a principal cause why so many who profess religion are a disgrace to it. Indeed, all the words in the world, however well-chosen and uttered in prayer, are not equivalent to one holy desire; and the very best prayers are but vain repetitions, if they are not the language of the heart. But let it be observed, on the other hand, that repetitions proceeding from a deep sense of our wants, and a vehement desire of divine grace, and the spiritual blessings flowing therefrom, or connected therewith, are by no means prohibited here by the Lord Jesus, otherwise indeed he would condemn his own practice, **Matthew 26:39-44.** *For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him* — We do not pray to inform God of our wants. Omniscient as he is, he cannot be informed of anything which he knew not before: and he is always willing to relieve them. The chief thing wanting is, a fit disposition on our part to receive his grace and blessing. Consequently, one great office of prayer is to produce such a disposition in us; to exercise our dependance on God; to increase our desire of the things we ask for; to make us so sensible of our wants, that we may never cease wrestling till we have prevailed for the blessing.



Protestants Especially  
Have An Ironic Tendency  
to Make Vain Repetition  
Of the Instructive Model  
Prayer That Immediately  
Proceeds After Jesus'  
Admonition Against Any  
Vain Repetition!

(From *Forerunner Commentary*)

### **[Matthew 6:9-13](#)**

Memorizing the Lord's Prayer—which is a bit of a misnomer; it should be "The Disciples' Prayer" or "The Model Prayer"—is a wonderful thing to do. Parents should make it their aim to teach it to their children. But unlike many in nominal Christianity, we need to go further and teach our children that the prayer is not one to be mindlessly repeated but a guideline for our personal, private prayers to "our Father in heaven." It maps out the general attitude and subjects of prayer that we should take to heart and cut deeply into our memories.

**It is a wonder that so few who frequently use [Matthew 6:9-13](#) both publically and privately know what Jesus says—no, *commands*—in the immediately preceding verses:**

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. ([Matthew 6:5-8](#))

**Christ plainly says that public prayers made expressly to be seen by others is hypocritical, and prayers that are repeated vainly (meaning "carelessly," "uselessly," or "thoughtlessly") are heathen! Obviously, this does not mean that He forbids public prayer; there are many examples of proper public prayer in Scripture (see, for example, [I Kings 8:22-53](#); [Ezra 9:6-15](#); [Nehemiah 9:5-38](#); [John 17:1-26](#); etc.). Public prayer is a necessary part of opening and closing religious services. What Jesus denounces is making a show of praying to enhance one's reputation as a "religious" or "righteous" person, as well as repetitious, canned prayers and overlong, tedious prayers.**



Overall, Jesus warns us against two mistakes when praying: making them about us and making them meaningless. Doing either (or both) will ruin their effectiveness and actually work at cross-purposes to spiritual growth. When we pray, we need to remember that it is a formal conversation with the divine Governor of the Universe. We have not entered His court for our own gratification and glory. We certainly do not want to bore Him by endlessly repeating the same five words or giving Him the expanded *War and Peace* version of our pitiful lives. To the contrary, we are before Him to praise Him, to thank Him, to beseech Him for help both for others and ourselves, and to praise and thank Him. I repeat myself for emphasis.

What would we think of a friend who came to the front door each morning, and upon opening it to admit him, we heard him say the exact same thing that he had said the past 532 straight mornings, droning on for half an hour without coming up for air? We might love him as a friend, but we would surely think he was a bit strange and wasting our time with his endless repetitions. We would soon tune out his robotic, one-sided conversation.

We are blessed that God is far more patient and understanding with us than we would be to such a bore. He listens to our petitions whether we are eloquent or mind-numbingly incoherent (see [Romans 8:26](#)). **Yet, notice that Jesus tells the disciples—us—that the Father knows what we need before we ask Him.** We are not springing anything on Him that He has not already figured out.

So there is no need for us to meander, be vague, or employ some kind of rhetorical device that is "guaranteed" to convince Him that He has to intervene right away. There is no need to try to impress Him with our knowledge or persuasiveness or righteousness. He wants us to be ourselves and to speak with Him as family members do—with, of course, the proper reverence for who He is.

What is most important—what He is looking for—is a "poor and . . . contrite spirit, and [one] who trembles at My word" ([Isaiah 66:2](#)). If the attitude is humble, focused on God's will and His plan for us, He will hear and respond. More importantly, we will be drawing closer to Him and taking on aspects of His character that are so essential to Christian life and the Kingdom of God.

**Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

# VAIN REPETITION

by Edgewood Church of Christ

*“And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Matthew 6:7).*

In ancient culture, prayers were something of a public spectacle. People wanted others to hear what they had to say to the “gods.” Archaeologists recently found one such prayer inscribed in a public place: “I conjure you up, holy beings and holy names; join in aiding this spell, and bind, enchant, thwart, strike, overturn, conspire against, destroy, kill, break Eucherius the charioteer, and all his horses tomorrow in the circus at Rome...” The ancients apparently believed that such prayers, publicly uttered and inscribed, brought them nearer to happiness and fulfillment.

Even in Judaism there was a strong emphasis on public prayer. Remember the story of the Pharisee who prayed in public (Luke 18:10-14)? The Pharisee essentially read a list of his religious credentials before God and men as he sought to justify himself. Jesus made it clear that such prayers do not justify a single soul.

And today, prayers can become something of a public spectacle if we are not careful. In our day, “interfaith prayers” for political reasons are all the rage. Even in many churches, it sometimes seems as if those who are praying never get around to addressing God, but are instead preach mini-sermons to their brethren! Some seem to desire to pray, but in reality just want to be heard for their much speaking (Matt 6:7).

*Spiritual disaster can result when we fail to grasp the real purpose and power of prayer!*

Jesus thought differently than most about prayer. A Man of deep prayer Himself, the Lord taught His disciples the power of a heartfelt petition before God. And more than that, Jesus taught that the vain repetitions of His day were not effective in reaching God’s ears!

Now, God **will** listen to repetition. Repetition is not, in and of itself, a bad thing. Hannah repeated her petition (1 Samuel 1:12), and Jesus repeated Himself on more than one occasion (Matt 26:36-42). The emphasis of Matthew 6:7 is on the word **vain**. Jesus said it is possible for Christians to pray lengthy prayers that never get higher than the ceiling. What we need more than flowery words is a pure and sincere heart.

Avoiding vain repetition in our prayers takes time, effort, and dedication. Think of it this way: ***by praying as we ought, we're fostering a deeper, more meaningful relationship with our Creator.*** He alone is our audience, and He alone determines whether what we have said is from the heart and according to His will. Too many people think that their spirituality can be gauged by public opinion. Too few really concern themselves with what God thinks about their prayer life.

Vain repetitions are an easy trap to fall into. When prayer becomes routine, our words may well become routine. The warning of Jesus, "do not be like them" should cause us to pause and consider what we are in fact doing when we pray. Some think that prayer is like ordering room service. Others think prayers can gain them political advantages. Still more people vainly utter lengthy prayers without thinking of what they are saying. What about you? Are you praying fervently in all righteousness (James 5:16)? Are you praying like Jesus?

— ***John Baker***

# God Isn't Deaf

**The solution is to always remember that prayer, public or private, is a means by which Christians approach the throne of God.**

Two young boys were spending the night at their grandparents. At bedtime, the two boys knelt beside their beds to say their prayers when the youngest one began praying at the top of his lungs. "I pray for a new bicycle. I pray for a new play station." His older brother leaned over and nudged him saying, "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf." To which the little brother replied, "No, but Grandma is!"

Men who lead prayer in our public assemblies need to pray to God, not to the audience. Jesus said, "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have received their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee. And in praying use not **vain repetitions**, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:5-8).

There is a real temptation, when leading public prayer, to pray to people rather than to God. We have all heard public prayers that preached a sermon. Another temptation is to make long prayers. **The effort to extend a prayer will cause one to repeat the same things over and over.** I believe Jesus referred to this as vain repetitions.

The solution is to always remember that prayer, public or private, is a means by which Christians approach the throne of God. The nature of prayer is not for preaching lessons. It makes me wonder if men who lead public prayers haven't forgotten that it is God who answers prayer not other men. I fear we are like the boy in our little story. We think if we are to get what we want, it must come from the people who hear us. God and God alone can grant our petitions provided they are within the scope of his will. We do need to pray from the heart to God, not from the street corners to be heard by men. – *Glen Young*



## Meaningless Repetition @ Church of Christ Articles

We've all seen it. Sometimes when a person is nearing their physical death, there are several fairly predictable things that will happen. Their speech often gets quieter and somewhat more difficult to understand; there is no life, excitement, or enthusiasm left in their voices; and they might even sometimes mumble the same phrases and/or semi-sentences over, and over, and over again – often without much conscious thought as to those phrases' meaning or the impact they might have on those whom they love who might hear them – simply because these oft-used phrases are so familiar to them & their repetitive but thoughtless familiarity brings some false sense or semblance of security. But sadly, similar can be said to be true in the spiritual world at times as well.



Let your prayers not be empty, but meaningful thought at the Lord's feet.

We are all probably pretty familiar with the fact that in the “sermon on the mount” Jesus said, “***And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words***” (Matthew 6:7). The Greek word here translated for the “***vain repetitions***” which the Son of God said we are not to use in prayer if we want our prayers to possess the power to truly reach our heavenly Father's ears, only occurs once in the entire New Testament, and means “to repeat the same things over and over,”

or “to use many idle words.” Our Lord and Savior’s instruction is translated in other versions as, “***don’t heap up empty phrases***” (ESV); “***do not use meaningless repetition***” (NASV); and “***use not vain repetitions***” (KJV). Jesus then went on to give a very precise, word-efficient but also effective example of what humble, sincere, and heart-felt prayer should be like. Incredibly, and in complete contradiction to the very instruction of Jesus in uttering it, some religious groups today will still thoughtlessly, ignorantly, and automatically repeat the same, surface, automatic and meaningless words and phrases in prayer, over and over... and over again. For most of us, probably the “Hail Mary’s” of corrupt Catholicism come to mind as the inevitable crescendo of this complete contradiction of divinely-inspired and delivered instruction.

But let us consider our Lord and Savior’s teaching from a slightly different angle and application when it comes to praying with “***meaningless repetition,***” or, with repeating the same things over and over and over. Who says it all has to be at the same time? **When one seeks to lead the Lord’s saints into the very awesome presence & throne room of the grace of almighty God (Revelation 5), and utters pretty much the exact, word for word, mechanical and memorized, automated and uninspiring words and prayer phrases that they have every time they’ve led prayer for the past weeks, months, years and/or decades in order to just simply “do their duty” by leading a prayer someone assigned them to, doesn’t that, too, fall under the “don’t use ***meaningless repetition***” instruction of our Lord and Savior? Shouldn’t we, instead, be leading grateful, thoughtful, meaningful and insightful, significant and heart-felt, specific and humble, reverent and exuberant, ‘new every morning like the Lord’s tender mercies’ (Lamentations 3: :22-24) prayer?**

I mean, how does it make us humanly feel when we receive some automated, mechanical, repetitiously & mass-produced message from someone? Like the company or contingent contacting us

loves us deeply and has some great personal love, respect, gratitude or loyalty for our benevolent efforts on their behalf? Hardly! What about when the bored to tears cashier at the local grocery store counter voices the obligatory “Did you find everything okay?” or, “How are you tonight?” when you know down deep inside that they’re only mouthing those words and saying those sentences because they have to, and that they really could not care less whether you did or did not “find everything,” and what you may or may not be struggling with. They’re just “putting in their time.”

And after all God has done for us, He certainly deserves far better than that in all of our communication with Him! We are to pray constantly and continually (1<sup>st</sup> Thess. 5:17; Luke 6:12; Acts 2:42), in order that we might lose heart (Luke 18:1). We are to pray for our enemies and so that we don’t fall into temptation (Luke 6:28; 22:40-46). We are to pray with the proper spirit & understanding (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:15). We are to pray for others personally and specifically, bringing them up before the throne of God for their individual strengthening (Romans 15:30). Prayer is serious! And it should be taken thus!

Let us always be a grateful people who challenge ourselves to give God our absolute best in all things, just as He gave Heaven’s best to secure our eternal salvation. Brothers, let us never settle for taking the lead in leading God’s people in prayer into His very & most awesome and awe-inspiring presence, with anything less than our absolutely most heartfelt, humble, sincere, and well-thought out and prepared prayers and petitions. While it’s true that long, lengthy, hypocritical and pride-filled prayers just to impress people are not honored by God whatsoever (Matthew 23:14), neither are those prayers which feature the always same, automated, mechanical and mumbled “meaningless repetition.”

**Let us remember that those often indicate dying bodies – whether physical or spiritual!**

# VAIN REPETITIONS OF UNANSWERED PRAYER

## APOLOGETICS PRESS: MUST ACCORD TO GOD'S WILL

It is inexcusable for a person to attack the Bible's position on prayer, but then to avoid many of the paramount concepts associated with the Bible's teaching on the subject. You can know that any person who pulls verses out of context about prayer, and does not turn to primary passages, such as Matthew 6:9-15, is either unaware that such passages are in the Bible, or is intentionally being intellectually dishonest. If you really want to know what Jesus taught on prayer, you simply must consider **all** that He taught about prayer, not just the few scattered verses skeptics want to rip from their contexts.

In Jesus' instructions to His disciples regarding prayer, He explained that they should include in their prayers the idea that God's will should be done (Matthew 6:10). The apostle John, who would have been well-aware of Jesus' teaching on prayer, stated: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything **according to His will**, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15, emp. added). Notice that if we do not include verse 14 of 1 John 5, we could make the passage say, "whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." Yet to do that would be to leave off the important qualifying statement that the request should be in accordance with God's will, and should be offered from a heart that is humble enough to accept God's will



— even if that means that the request is denied. When the skeptic pulls snippets of verses from the gospel accounts concerning prayer, he or she is guilty of leaving off just such important qualifying information.

When we consider the idea of praying “according to God’s will,” we can see how important this qualifier is. No requests will be granted that attempt to violate or circumvent God’s ultimate will. For instance, suppose a person were to pray: “God, please save my mother even though she doesn’t believe in Jesus Christ and refuses to repent of her sins, please let her go to heaven anyway, in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Would God grant that petition? The Bible is clear that He certainly would not, because to do so would be to violate His ultimate will that salvation is through the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

Furthermore, certain events and actions in this physical world are required for God to accomplish His will on this Earth. For instance, if one of Jesus’ apostles had asked God to spare the life of Jesus and not let Him die on the cross, that request would not have been in accord with God’s ultimate will and would not have been answered in the affirmative. Mark 8:33 provides an excellent example of this when Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting His own death. Jesus responded to Peter, saying: “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” Whereas Peter most likely thought his actions were in accord with God’s will, they were not. To further illustrate, the many events in the life of the Old Testament character Joseph may have seemed unfair at the time. No doubt Joseph prayed to be freed from slavery or to be released from jail. But at the end of Joseph’s life, we see that God’s will was to make him a great leader in Egypt and to save the Jewish nation through him. Joseph recognized this, and said to his brothers who had sold him into Egypt: “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph’s slavery and incarceration were the vehicles by which God brought Joseph to power, accomplishing His will.

# Why Do Jews Pray Three Times a Day?

By Yehuda Shurpin



## Question:

**Everyone who has been to synagogue knows that we Jews recite the Amidah (silent prayer) three times every day. Why do we all say the same thing, and why do we do it at those specific times? When did it all start?**

## Reply:

**The Talmud offers two (apparently divergent) origins of the thrice-daily prayer regimen:<sup>1</sup>**

**a)The three prayers were actually instituted by our forefathers. Abraham instituted the morning (Shacharit) prayer; Isaac first prayed the afternoon (Minchah) service; and Jacob was the first to say the evening (Maariv) prayers.**

b) The rabbis timed the daily prayers to correspond with the two daily Temple sacrifices, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and the burning of the limbs of the afternoon offering, which would go on through the night. This explains why on days like Shabbat, when additional sacrifices were offered, we have an additional (Musaf) prayer.

The [Talmud](#) then goes on to say that both are true. Although the patriarchs established praying at these three times of the day, their conduct wouldn't necessarily obligate us to do so. It was only later that the rabbis formalized the three daily prayers as standard practice, and timed them to correspond to the daily sacrifices.

### **The Rabbis Formalize the [Three Daily Prayers](#)**

As mentioned, there was not always formal prayer in Judaism. Until the time of Ezra, each person would pray according to his ability and eloquence. A person who was so inclined would offer many lengthy prayers and requests, and one who was less articulate would pray less. Some would pray once daily; others, several times.

After the destruction of the First Temple and towards the end of Babylonian Exile, the Jews were dispersed in Persia, Greece and other lands. The Jewish children born in these foreign countries spoke a peculiar mix of Hebrew and other languages, and were unable to express themselves coherently in any one language. In the words of Nehemiah: "Their children spoke half in Ashdodite, and did not know how to speak the Jewish language. Rather, [they would speak] according to the language of various other peoples."<sup>2</sup>

**This greatly hampered their ability to pray to God in unadulterated Hebrew. When Nehemiah's co-leader Ezra and his court saw this, they formalized the eighteen blessings of the [Amidah](#), which is the heart of daily prayer service. (The formalized Amidah leaves room for one to express personal requests and prayers.)**

**At that time, they determined that this formula of standard prayer be said thrice daily, corresponding to the Temple sacrifices.**

**In truth, even in the centuries between the patriarchs and Ezra, some people prayed three times a day. For example, King David declared, "Evening, morning and noontime, I speak and moan, and He hearkened to my voice."<sup>3</sup> Concerning Daniel, the verse states, "Daniel . . . came to his house, where there were open windows in his upper chamber, opposite Jerusalem, and three times a day he kneeled and prayed and offered thanks before his God, just as he had done prior to this."<sup>4</sup>**

**Thus, Ezra, together with the Men of the Great Assembly, instituted and formalized the prayer routine that had already been practiced by a select few.<sup>5</sup>**

**Concerning prayer, the Torah states, "And serve Him with all your heart."**

**<sup>6</sup> The sages explain: "What is the service of the heart? This is prayer."<sup>7</sup> Thus, while the words and order are extremely important, don't lose sight of the fact that the most important ingredient in prayer is the part that comes from your heart.**



# Why Jesus Prayed Three Times



## **Not my will but Thine be done: Why did Jesus pray three times?**

Matthew 26:39-44 states,

"He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

"Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak."

"Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

So, He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words."

Why did Jesus pray three times? Didn't GOD hear him the first time? Didn't Jesus have faith enough to trust Yehovah? Was he trying to persuade his father?

No. It was none of these things which prompted Jesus to repeat his prayer. I don't believe so. Rather, he needed to work through the pain, and praying allowed him to do that until he was satisfied, at peace with the inevitable that was to come.

### ***How many times do we need to pray?***

When we earnestly seek the Father's will, He gives us the heart and He gives us the words. Prayer is asking, pleading, praising, praying; prayer is coming to that place of peace, that place where "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven" is completed within us. That can require repeating.

It is not for Yehovah that we repeat, but for ourselves. We can take comfort that, even in the darkest hour, Jesus came through. But he, the Son of GOD and the Son of Man, had to work through -beyond temptation and fear -GOD the Father's Will. He knew it, acknowledged it, believed it, accepted it from the start. But he still had to work a way through it.

Bless each of us as we work through the difficult times. Paul said we are to pray without ceasing.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. – *Larus Press*

**Three Times Is Our Numerically  
Approved Example To Petition:**

**King David – Psalm 55: 17/2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12: 16**

**Apostle Paul – 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12: 8**

**Our Lord & Savior – Matthew 26: 39**

