

Pray for the Applause of God

When you pray, don't pray to be seen.

MATTHEW 6:5

Written by Bill Perkins

My first public prayer wasn't to God.

It was to a girl.

In eighth grade a small student prayer group
met at a local church.

When I heard a girl I liked attended,

I went with a friend.

I'd never prayed aloud,

so I borrowed a prayer book

and memorized a few lines,

hoping she'd be impressed.

And I was impressed. How could I not be?

"Our most benevolent heavenly Father,

we thy humble servants

approach your exalted throne."

I spoke with bravado.

Chin lifted.

Voice projected.

I glanced up mid prayer

to see if she noticed.

Not sure she did,

but my friend did.

He shook his head as if to say,

"What are you doing."

Jesus spoke directly into my experience:

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,

for they love to pray standing in the synagogues

and on the street corners to be seen by others.

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full."

I wasn't praying.
I was performing.
My words were aimed horizontally,
not vertically.
I wanted attention,
not communion.

That's what Jesus condemned—
actors on a religious stage,
crafting prayers for the crowd,
not for God.

Their reward?
Here. On earth.
Not in heaven.

Jesus taught us to
pray for the quiet approval
of the One who sees our heart.

You may not know this about Jesus:
He wasn't condemning public prayer itself.
He prayed publicly at Lazarus's grave,
lifting His eyes and speaking aloud
so the crowd would believe. Jn 11:41–42.
Public prayer is holy when its motive is to minister,
not perform.

Praying privately protects our heart,
and Jesus assures us of a public reward. Matt. 6:6

It's an interesting promise:
the hypocrites received an immediate reward
from their audience,
and we will receive a delayed public reward
from ours—God Himself.

This was Jesus' hidden life.
He withdrew from crowds. Mk 1:35
He went up the mountain. Lk 6:12
He prayed in Gethsemane
apart from the disciples. Matt 26:36–39
He listened for the Father's voice,
not the crowd's reaction.

This is where prayer becomes real—
not polished words,
not formal phrases,
but speaking plainly
to the Father who
sees
and knows
and loves us.

Honest.

Alive.

The life of Jesus in me.