

How to Lead a Public Prayer

The most important thing to remember in offering any prayer is to always *pray sincerely from your heart*. Before the model prayer that Jesus prayed in Matthew 6, he taught the following:

Matthew 6:5-8

⁵“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

In Luke 18:1-14, Jesus provides two parables about prayer: The parable of the persistent widow and the prayer of the Pharisee and the tax collector. From the first parable we learn that if an ungodly and uncaring judge will listen to persistent pleas, how much more will our loving God eagerly hear and respond to our prayers. From the second parable, we learn that arrogance has no place in prayer. God hears the humble and contrite.

We will leave a more comprehensive study of prayer to your personal study. But from these passages, the following are some things to remember as you lead public prayer.

- Remember that God is the one to whom you are speaking.
- Don't feel like you need to use religious phrases or clichés in your prayer.
- Remember God is eager to listen and hear your prayer.
- Be humble in your language and tone.

A public prayer is somewhat different than a private prayer, in that you are leading the thoughts of an entire group of people. This leads us to some additional guidelines.

- Speak up. Use the microphone properly. Being heard does not mean you are not humble.
- Think ahead of time about what is on the heart of the audience. Are they excited about some event? Are they hurting because of loss? *What do they need to hear?*
- What can be shared publicly, and what is more private that is not appropriate for a public prayer?
- Organize your thoughts.

This last point is important. Praying sincerely from your heart does not mean that you must “wing it” and ad lib your way through the prayer. The more organized your prayer is, the easier it will be for the audience to follow the thoughts that you are expressing from your heart. The better they follow your thoughts, expressed from your heart, the more your hearts are collectively tuned together.

Based on the model prayer Jesus offered in Matthew 6, you may want to consider the following general sections in your prayer.

- Praise and thanksgiving
- Requests
- Confession
- Appeal for the future

Thinking about what is on your heart, and the hearts of your audience, begin to add to this outline, perhaps like the following.

- Praise and thanksgiving
 - What has amazed you about God this week?
 - For what is your audience grateful to God?
 - How has God answered prayer for this group?
 - For what is this group thankful?
- Requests
 - Who is hurting in a way that your audience knows and is concerned about?
 - What does the group need physically and spiritually?
- Confession
 - What weaknesses or struggles does your group have in common? Materialism, lack of trust in God, lack of focus on kingdom matters, and a heart for more committed giving are areas where we all sometimes struggle. *Note: Public prayer is not the time to call out private struggles.*
 - How do you and the group want God to respond?
- Appeal for the future
 - In what ways does the group need God to interact with them in the coming week?
 - How does the group need to be shaped by God?
 - What challenges lie ahead?

Thinking about these questions and the structure, you should be able to develop some notes to guide you as you pray. If you expect that you will be nervous in front of the group, go ahead and write out your prayer. Choose your words from your heart and express your thoughts in meaningful ways. Again, do not worry about religious phrases or fancy words. *Pray from your heart.*

If this is one of your first times to offer public prayer, find a quiet room and practice saying your prayer at home. If you do write out your prayer, practice reading it without sounding like you are just reading. Is your spoken tone sincere?

When you have led your public prayer, know this: God heard every word if it was from your heart. And if your thoughts were focused on speaking with the hearts and concerns of your audience, they will appreciate your prayer. God will bless you and them.