

Matthew 6:7-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-6/matthew-67-8/>

Jesus teaches His disciples to pray to their Father who loves and understands them, not like the Gentiles who utter meaningless repetitions in order to manipulate their gods to get what they want.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:30.

Jesus continues teaching about prayer. He now turns from speaking about the hypocritical prayers of the self-righteous Jews on the street corners who want to be admired by men. He next addresses the *meaningless* and repetitive prayers of *the Gentiles*. The term *Gentiles* was a phrase used by Jews to apply to non-Jews. The *Gentiles* in Jesus's vicinity included Romans, Greeks, Syrians, and Samaritans, among many others. Jesus refers to pagan rituals the Jews had likely seen, and admonishes His disciples not to emulate them either.

Following the same pattern, Jesus begins by saying what *not to do when you are praying*. He says *do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do*. *The Gentiles*, or non-Jewish peoples, knew there was a God. They knew from both the moral code implanted within them (Romans 1:18-19; 2:14-15) and from the created order showcasing His invisible attributes and eternal power (Romans 1:20). But even though the *Gentiles* knew there was a God, they did not know the one true God (Acts 17:22-28). They did not know the God who had revealed Himself to the Jews, and entered into fellowship with them through the Law of Moses.

The particular groups of *Gentiles* that would have had the most interaction with the Jews in Jesus's lifetime were the Romans and the Greeks. Greece had conquered Judea under Alexander the Great three and a half centuries earlier. When they later tried to replace Jewish culture with Greek polytheism, it caused an uprising among the Jews led by the Maccabees. After the Maccabean Revolt there was a brief period of Jewish independence before the Roman occupation began, approximately ninety years before Jesus said these words. Rome reintroduced Greek polytheism but was more pragmatic than Alexander the Great's successors. Neither did Rome outlaw Jewish culture (for the time being).

The Gentiles' prayers were not directed to a personal Father God. The pantheon of Greco-Roman gods and goddesses were immortal super-humans with super strengths and powers, and super weaknesses and flaws. They were believed to have incredible but limited powers to influence human affairs. They could destroy a man or prosper him. Which depended on how pious (or flattering) that man was toward that particular god (as opposed to that god's rival deities). But mostly the gods ignored a man's prayers because they were too concerned with their own schemes and intrigues.

Because it was hard to get their attention, *the Gentiles* spammed their gods with prayers full of *meaningless repetition*. They mindlessly put in their requests to this or that god in the hope that one of them would by chance listen to their prayers and *that they will be heard for their many*

words. One might get the picture that *when the Gentiles* prayed they were senselessly talking to themselves, but even they were not really listening to the *many words* they were saying. There was no apparent familial relationship, but rather a transaction. Jesus contrasts this with God's relationship as His disciples' heavenly *Father*.

Jesus tells His disciples, *so do not be like* these Gentiles who pray with *meaningless repetition*. He assures them, *your Father knows what you need before you ask Him*. They can pray knowing they have a personal relationship. God is their *Father*. God is not a preoccupied schemer trying to angle his way to the divine throne, or engaged in a jealous spat with another god (as the Greek and Roman gods were depicted). He is the Creator. He is the undisputed and eternal King. The Jews understood this. But Jesus wants them to approach this Creator God as *your Father* who loves you, who has a vested interest in you. Jesus wants His disciples to pray to their *Father* believing in His benevolence and His attentive concern for them. Their *Father* already *knows what they need before they even ask Him*. That is because God is watchful, caring, and loving.

Jesus assures His disciples that *when they are praying* they are to talk to God as they would their *Father* who knows their needs and understands them and *not as the Gentiles do* who pray *meaningless repetitions* with *many words* without certainty of relationship.

Biblical Text

And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.