

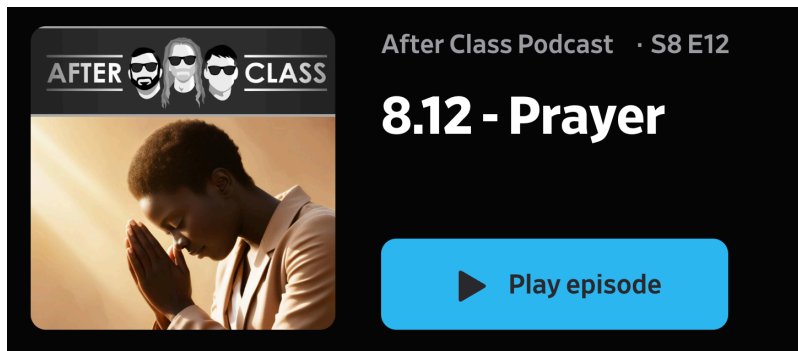
QTC566. Is repetitive prayer inauthentic? 10 April 2025

"Is repetitive prayer inauthentic?" | Malcolm Cox | Quiet Time Coaching Episode 566

Introduction

Welcome to today's episode, where we're exploring the often-debated topic of repetitive prayer. Is it just empty words, or can there be genuine value in praying the same things again and again? Is regular, repetitive prayer inauthentic?

I heard this issue being debated on a podcast I like called "After class".



Our Key Text

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.” ([Matthew 6.7 NRSV](#))

Does this verse rule out repetitive prayer of the kind practised in many Christian streams?

The Harry Potter Falacy

It seems fair to warn against treating prayer like a "Harry Potter spell", where getting the exact wording right is seen as a way to manipulate God, similar to pagan practices. The story of the Sons of Sceva (Acts 19.13-18) illustrates this misguided attitude. We cannot bully God into giving us what we want through mere gibberish or meaningless noise. The probability of an answer isn't linked to the number of words we use, as [Ecclesiastes 5.2](#) reminds us.

Furthermore, attempting to impress either men (Matt 6.5), or God is fruitless. It's crucial to regularly stop oneself now and again and check whether I really mean what I say.

Regular Relationship

However, there may be a more nuanced perspective. What about regular prayer like that practiced in a monastery and many Christian traditions? Is that inauthentic? Perhaps not. What if we see it in the same way I approach my regular phone calls to my father. We speak every other day or so at around 5 PM. The regularity is not inauthentic, but a way of affirming our relationship.

Repetition and regularity can be a meaningful act of connection. Repetition is not the problem (see Jesus in Gethsemane Matthew 26.44), nor prayer shaped by a framework (Matthew 6.9-13), nor persistence (Luke 18.1-8), but mechanical and empty-hearted prayer is the issue. We see that Jesus himself used repetition in prayer, notably in Gethsemane. Jesus prayed many hours in Gethsemane and overnight on more than one occasion. It's unlikely he used only a few words!. This suggests that lengthy and potentially repetitive prayer was part of Jesus' practice.

It's all about the heart

The key distinction, therefore, lies in the heart behind the prayer. Many Gentile prayers focused on the specific words, rather than the heart. The danger lies in our prayers becoming mechanical and empty hearted. Sincerity transforms repetition from a vain attempt at manipulation into a genuine expression of our relationship with God. Regular checking of our motives becomes essential. Are we truly meaning what we say, or are we just going through the motions?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I suggest that repetitive prayer is not inherently wrong. In fact, it can be a valuable way to affirm our connection with God, much like regular communication strengthens human relationships. The crucial element is sincerity. We must guard against treating prayer as a magical formula or a means to impress. Instead, let our prayers, whether said once or many times, be a true reflection of our hearts and a genuine engagement with the divine.

Share your thoughts, insights, or questions with me and the other listeners. And if you haven't yet, grab a free copy of my eBook on spiritual disciplines, *"How God Grows His People,"* at www.malcolmcox.org by signing up for my newsletter.

Take care, and God bless, Malcolm

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