

HOW MANY WORDS?

When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Matthew 6:7

How many words make a complete prayer? Does God prefer long prayers or short ones? If we use Jesus as our example, we find several answers. When Jesus prayed a mealtime prayer before feeding the five thousand, he probably spoke a short prayer of 20 words or so. On the cross, his prayers were only a few words. We also know that at times Jesus went off to quiet places and prayed all night. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed so long that the disciples fell asleep waiting for him to finish. The length of Jesus' prayers depended on the situation.

Martin Luther wrote, "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer." Could we manage to pray three hours every day?

Think about how long we talk with our friends or families. Sometimes we have lots to say and sometimes very little. Sometimes we share details and sometimes just a word or two. The same is true when we talk with our Father in heaven. There may be times when we have a lot to say, and other times we utter only a few words. When Peter tried walking on the water and began to sink, he got a short prayer out in a hurry, and it was quite to the point, "Lord, save me!" (Matt. 14:30). When Miriam became ill with leprosy, Moses prayed a four-word prayer, "Please, God, heal her!" (Num. 12:13).

The length of our prayers makes little difference to the Lord. The angels aren't standing at heaven's doorway counting our every word. Someone once said, "True prayer is measured by weight, not by length. A single groan before God may have more fullness of prayer in it than a fine oration of great length." Jesus said that we should not be like some who feel that they will be heard because they use a lot of words. What is important is that our hearts are in our prayers and that we are earnestly communicating with God. If we come to the Lord with our thanks, our needs, and our praises, God will listen regardless of the length of our prayers. God just wants us to talk to him.

Recall a moment in your life when your prayer was brief and to the point.