

When Others See You Pray

OK, I get it. I don't like it, but I get it. Some people don't believe in prayer, and they don't want to hear it. So, to appease our easily offended culture, some cities and school systems have banned prayers at public events. It's not like the pray-ers are forcing others to pray along. Does it really offend you to stand silently for a moment? People of faith have to put up with your behavior; surely you can show a little respect and, oh, I don't know, JUST STAND THERE SILENTLY.

So, to those easily offended, would it be OK if I prayed by myself? Or prayed *silently*?

In some circles, apparently not. In England last year, a woman was standing on the sidewalk. By all appearances, it looked like she was just standing there. But she was also praying. Silently. In her head.

How do we know she was praying? The police asked her—right before arresting her.

Now that I have you enraged, there is more to the story, but her arrest still smacks of being ridiculously wrong.

The woman, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, was standing on the sidewalk across the street from an abortion clinic, the BPAS Robert Clinic in Kings Norton, Birmingham. She was standing in a “censorship zone,” a buffer zone where people are not allowed to engage in behavior directed toward the abortion clinic. Even supporters of the clinic are not allowed to congregate there. The behavior prohibited includes “graphic, verbal or written means, prayer or counseling.”

Isabel was not offering a graphic, verbal, or written prayer. She was praying in her head. Actually, she told police, “I might be praying in my head.” *Might* be.

I believe in the efficacy and power of prayer. God can answer any prayer from anywhere. That means Isabel's prayers would have been heard just as well had she prayed in the privacy of her home. So, why didn't she?

Consider what Daniel did when all forms of prayer but one were temporarily outlawed. In Daniel 6, the government leaders were jealous of Daniel and sought to get him removed. They did this by prohibiting any prayer except to the king. With the law in place, Daniel could have kept praying by simply praying in his home

with the windows closed. Just sitting in a chair and praying silently. But that was not Daniel's practice.

“When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before” (Dan. 6:10).

Daniel broke the law and ended up with a free overnight stay in a lion's den. This is one of the most familiar stories from the Old Testament, a story of God's miraculous rescue and vindication of Daniel's righteous behavior. But the question remains: why didn't Daniel change the way he prayed so he wouldn't get arrested?

Daniel wasn't afraid to be seen praying. And neither should we.

Prayer is not so much about changing God's mind as it is of aligning ourselves with God's glory and purposes. Prayer helps us see things from God's perspective. The power of prayer is not in the prayer itself; the power is in the One to whom we are praying!

Posture in prayer is important. Many of us were taught to pray with heads bowed and eyes closed, shutting everything out so we can focus on God. Daniel got down on his knees, a position of humility and submission to God. I can't answer for Isabel Vaughan-Spruce, but I think standing outside the abortion clinic was putting herself in a position to focus on the lives of unborn children and go to God on their behalf.

We don't pray in order to be seen by others. Jesus clearly warned against the spiritual pride associated with praying “to be seen by people” (Matt. 6:5-8), but it's OK if others happen to see us pray.

- Your prayer is a testimony that you need God and that you look to Him for help and guidance.
- Your prayer is a testimony of your conviction that God hears and responds.
- Your prayer is an encouragement to others to humble themselves before God and seek His help.

Your prayers—your conversations with God—matter. Don't be afraid to utter a prayer in public. It may not land you in a lion's den, but God will use the prayer offered in humility to impact those around you.